

THE ADANA MASSACRE AND THE ARMENIAN-AMERICANS

Knarik Avakian

Institute of History of the NAS RA

*On the Occasion of the 110th
Memorable Anniversary of the
Adana Massacre of Armenians in 1909.*

The Armenians left for the United States for personal, educational, economic, political, cultural, religious and other reasons. Initially it was a temporary movement of emigrants (mainly single youth, students, tradesmen, craftsmen, peasants, workers) due to educational and economic reasons, turning into a mass deportation, involving all layers of society, sex and age, deprived of the prospect of economic, political, cultural and religious life, because of the periodic massacres of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire - the Hamidian (1894-1896) and the Adana (1909) massacres and, finally, the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923), covering the entire Armenian populated regions of the empire, including Cilicia.¹

So, if in 1834-1894 the number of the Armenians emigrated to the United States is considered to be 4,000, then just in the period of 1891-1895, the figure of the emigrated was 5,500, which made up 40% of the total number of emigrants from that country (11,000 people). Between 1895 and 1898, the number of the Armenian refugees increased sharply to more than 10,000 people, making up the overwhelming majority (15,913) of those, who left "Asian Turkey".² So that, if there were 15,000-20,000 Armenians in the United States, in 1900, and even 25,000 according to some estimates,³ judging from the annual figures of emigrated Armenians, the number of Armenians in the United States in 1909 should have been 40,000-45,000.

The Young Turks, having come to power in the Ottoman Empire with European interference on July 11 (24), 1908, proclaimed a Constitutional order, promising "Freedom, Justice, Brotherhood, Equality" to all people living there regardless of their nationality and religion. They had publicly informed the Christian elements of their plans that, "Any nationalist movement, should be considered anti-Turkish; thus, any element seeking to obtain separate rights to its existence should not be tolerated; they will enjoy equal rights under Turkish law as Ottoman citizens."⁴

On the other hand, the Armenian party personalities saw on the walls of the Ittihadist clubs another slogan and plan, calling to revive the Turkish nationalism. There was written: "It is obligatory to pray five times a day, and those who sin, will be rebuked and severely punished. All legal fasting shall be kept indefinitely. Those, who fail in

¹ Avakian 2000: 42.

² Malcom 1919: 64, 66, 76; Mirak 1983: 289.

³ Malcom 1919: 65; Antreassian 1981: 255; Mankouni 1926: 585.

⁴ Jizmejian 1930: 141.

religious rituals, cannot be members of our party. Every Muslim should do his best for the Holy Flag of Islam to be always victorious. This country is the land of the Ottomans, and every race and language we consider as Ottoman; there is no other nationality, but that of Ottoman. ...Amen.”⁵

A number of refugee revolutionaries from abroad⁶, including the US and Europe, entered the country thanks to the change of power the Young Turks had made, under the cover of Western democracy and supposing self-affirmation of Turkish-Islamism. Among them there were both famous and little-known figures of the Armenian political-revolutionary parties (Social-Democratic Hnchakyan Party - SDHP, Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutyun - ARFD). Their open and active involvement in the country's political life, as well as the careless and reckless calls they repeatedly made, was impossible to be of no consequence for the Turks, who were preaching Pan-Islamic and Pan-nationalistic ideology with the coming of the Ittihadists to power.⁷

On the day of the proclamation of the Constitution by the Young Turks, in 1908, the Turks carried out a bloody attack on the Armenians in the village of Incirlik, Adana, which should have awakened and given an idea to some of the Armenian revolutionary figures about the “savage and unconstitutional psychology of Turkish elders and mob.”⁸

With the rise of Turkish fanaticism and the terrifying anticipant situation of the Armenians, the prelate of the Diocese of Adana, Bishop Moushegh Serobian (1904-1909), being deeply aware that the guarantee of peaceful development of the country and peaceful coexistence between different nations are constitutional, called for solidarity on October 25, 1908 and turned to his flock with an official Pastoral (Kondak - in Arm.). The Turkish version of Kondak was read in all churches of the diocese, and the Armenian version was published in the “Azg” (“Nation” – in Arm.) magazine (1908, No. 32).⁹

Contrary to the calls and instructions for solidarity among the Christians and Muslims, Armenians and Turks, that the Adana's Armenian prelate made, and instead of sowing a conscious atmosphere of long-awaited peace and peaceful coexistence between the various nationalities in Adana vilayet and its environs, “the Turkish fanaticism against the Armenian people was being preached by officials, starting from *mutassarif*¹⁰ to the last official.” And the Turkish mullahs, going from vilayet to vilayet, ended their sermons in mosques with the following words: ““Kyavurlar elan tirlar, soglarlar, onların paşın ezmetikke piz myslümanlar arat olaymaz” (Kiavurs are snakes, we Muslims have no rest until their heads are squeezed).¹¹ The complaints of the innocent Armenians, who were subjected to armed attacks by a Turkish mob without

⁵ Jizmejjan 1930: 146-147; Kitour 1962: 351.

⁶ History of S. D. Hnchakian Pary 1962: 315.

⁷ Jizmejjan 1930: 144, 145.

⁸ Moushegh, Bishop 1909: 21-22.

⁹ Idem: 29.

¹⁰ Mutassarif - Administrative authority of a certain region (in Turkish).

¹¹ Idem: 29, 31.

cause, were disregarded and ignored by the police, the governorate and other relevant institutions.¹²

Pro-European Cilicia, with its peaceful, prosperous and progressive Armenian population, which had achieved economic, commercial and cultural advancements, had long been in the center of the attention of the Ottoman Empire, especially as the oppressed Armenians in the provinces were gradually moving to those areas, in particular to Adana, in search of employment and prosperity. As the basis for this move the Turkish leadership wanted to see political context, instead of economic: "...The Adana Prelate is working to move Armenians from the inner provinces of Anatolia to Adana for some political purposes; that is, to cause a revolt by multiplying the number of Armenian population there"¹³ and to proclaim the independent kingdom of Cilicia. That is why "... the blow to Adana would have been a deadly blow to the heart of Cilicia",¹⁴ and thus "... the Cilician Armenians have been destroyed and so many prosperous and flourishing centers turned into ashes and cemeteries."¹⁵

As a prelude to the Adana massacre, on March 30, 1909, the Ittihadists in Constantinople brutally suppressed the anti-constitutional rally and militant rebellion of the fanatic Islam and overthrew Sultan Hamid, taking full control over the country in March 31 with a *coup d'état*.¹⁶ And already two days later, less than a year before the Young Turk Constitution was adopted, on St. Easter weekend, April 1-3 (13-16), 1909, the Ittihadists organized the first massacre of Adana Armenians by the state program and leadership of the Union and Progress Committee, through the Adana Governor Jevad Bey, the Adviser of Internal Affairs Adil Bey and the Military Commander Mustafa Remzi Pasha,¹⁷ in collaboration with the Turkish riots. As a result, the bloodthirsty mob attacked the Armenians for three days long, massacring the unarmed and defenseless people without exclusion, destroying, robbing and burning their stores and homes.¹⁸

The defenseless Armenian population fled their homes and took refuge in the Armenian churches, schools, as well as in some foreign religious and educational institutions, including the American Girls' College (Directress: Ms. Elizabeth Webb), the house of the head of the American missionary affairs in Adana District, since the 1900s, and elsewhere, the officials of which sheltered and protected Armenians.

Ten days later, in April 12-14 (25-27), the second massacre of Adana Armenians took place, which was carried out by a furious mob in collaboration with the "Freedom Army," arrived from Salonika.¹⁹

¹² Idem: 29-30, 34, 44-46.

¹³ Idem: 11.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Idem: 9.

¹⁶ Yeghiayan 1970: 228. Jizmejian 1930: 141.

¹⁷ Moushegh, Bishop 1909: 58.

¹⁸ Jizmejian 1930: 173, 174.

¹⁹ Simonyan 2009: 220; Yeghiayan 1970: 246; Moushegh, Bishop 1909: 4.

If the reason for the first massacre was the pretext of the Ittihadists for the alleged Armenian “rebellion” in Adana, then the cause for the second massacre under the military command were “the Armenians, who took the flag of rebellion also in Cilicia.”²⁰

According to an eyewitness, “...without any cause or excitement, the Armenian people, quietly sitting in their homes, were passed through steel and fire; and the nation suffered greater casualties in the second massacre, during the military men attacked, than when it was on the first time, during the massacres by the Muslim mob.”²¹ Along with the thousands of Armenian martyrs, destroyed and thoroughly burned buildings, national churches, schools, many foreigners have also lost their lives; their institutions have been destroyed and set on fire.²²

As final to all this, Reshad was appointed as the new Sultan instead of Sultan Abdul Hamid, who have reigned for 33 years. A few days later, Adana’s bloodthirsty governor Adil Bey was ousted and replaced by Papan Zade Mustafa Zehni Pasha.²³

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) of the USA has sent financial aid to its party members in response to the events in Constantinople and Adana. This was stated in a letter to the Central Committee of America, on April 26, 1909, from Geneva: “The recent incidents have forced us to provide enough money for arming the people, and demands have been made from several places, from Constantinople and Smyrna, and a large sum of money has been shipped immediately.”²⁴

And still on May 25, 1909, the ARF Western Bureau in Geneva called on the American Central Committee to work with the American and European public opinion, the press, the government circles in favor of the Armenians, as the Turkish constitutional government spares no effort to throw all responsibility on the Armenians in order to justify the guilty.²⁵

More than 30.000 Armenians were killed in the massacre in Adana and surrounding areas,²⁶ and thousands of miserable Armenians who survived and mostly fled to the gardens of Adana, were in need of shelter, food, and healing.

Along with the English, American, German and other foreign organizations, as well as Armenian philanthropic organizations, the Armenians in the USA have also showed their immediate assistance to Adana.²⁷

Donations were made in various Armenian populated cities of the USA in favor of the orphans and thousands of needy people in Cilicia by Armenian churches (Apostolic,

²⁰ Yeghiayan 1970: 247.

²¹ Idem: 249.

²² Idem: 249-250.

²³ Idem: 251, 252, 258.

²⁴ Tonapetian 1993: 646, 648.

²⁵ Idem: 656, 657.

²⁶ Teodik Arshakouhi 1910: 211.

²⁷ Yeghiayan 1970: 250, 255.

Evangelical),²⁸ national parties (ARF, SDHP, Reformed Hnchakian),²⁹ organizations, unions, clubs, as well as individuals (on the occasion of weddings, funerals and other family events) and it was shipped to the National Patriarchate of Constantinople or the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions as well as used for that purpose.³⁰

The Armenians in the USA were mostly informed about the scale of the Adana massacre through the community and local media, as well as the eyewitnesses, party figures and so on.

Thus, if, before the Adana Massacre, the Armenian periodicals, published in the USA, were running worrying articles about the internal political situation in the Ottoman Empire and the gradual escalation of inter-ethnic relations, then almost all of the issues, published after the Adana massacre, provided columns for Cilician bloodthirsty events to unite the Armenian-Americans around the care of their Homeland, suffering compatriots and their needs, as well as introduced the details to the Armenian community through the direct writings of the American missionaries and eyewitnesses, through the analytical articles cover the cruel reality, that often seemed even exaggerated and unlikely to Armenians living under the American liberal democracy.

In early 1906, the newly established Adana Educational Society, based in Watertown, has collected 885 dollars for its needs, in three years. During the days of the massacre, the Society, raising the money to 1,000 dollars, sent the amount directly to its compatriots through the President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Poghos Noubar. The Evangelical Section of the Adana Educational Society has also brought its share by sending about 300 dollars.³¹

However, the "Aragads" weekly, based in New York, later reported in the editorial of "Our Orphans of Cilicia" (1911), that although orphanages in Turkey were opened with the help of Armenian or foreign donors, it was only in Adana that a boys' orphanage was operated for 500 people. Then the newspaper described the unhappy plight of the Armenian children in Turkish orphanages and the inevitability of being turkified, as well as reproached the Armenians for failing to free the Armenian children, the survivors of the Adana massacre, from the "care" of the Turks, who massacred their parents.³²

The Armenians in North America raised 14,101 dollars just in five months (April 24 - August 8, 1909).³³ In all, the Armenians in the USA has sent 60,000 dollars to the

²⁸ Kochnak, 1909, July 10, No. 28, p. 649.

²⁹ Byuzandion, 1909, August 5-18, No. 3.897.

³⁰ Kochnak, 1909, May 1, No. 18, p. 405.

³¹ Bulletin of the Educational Union of Adana 1929: 7, 9.

³² Simonyan 2009: 328, 329.

³³ Tonapetian 1993: 676.

Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople.³⁴

The massacre of Armenians in Adana was also witnessed mainly by the American missionaries, who were acting among the Christians and who reached out to the sufferers, at the same time informing the Western powers about the extent of the disaster.

The correspondents of foreign news agencies, operating in the Ottoman Empire, have regularly published detailed topography and statistics, informational telegram-messages, as well as a number of articles in the US and foreign press. The said materials were not always unbiased and impartial.

The American missionary Herbert Adams Gibbons was at the Adana government house during the first days of the massacre. He traveled to find out the truth and to instruct the Governor, Jevad Bey, and Military Commander, Ferik Pasha, that a group of soldiers could prevent the growing bloodshed. But it was all in vain. Just at the government house, where the Turkish authorities shielded him from the furious riot, Herbert Gibbons witnessed the development of incidents and the unbelievable savageness of Muslims, about which he directly testified by sending messages to relevant American and Western institutions as well. At the same time he published a number of articles in the "Times" daily.³⁵

Although the proclamation of the Constitution by the Young Turks did not stop the flow of Armenians to the United States, nevertheless, responding to the call – "Back to the Country!" of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) party, which cherished hopes for the Young Turk Constitution of 1908, hundreds of American-resident Armenians returned back, selling their possessions, yet others were preparing to come back with their saved money. Thus, between 1908 and 1914, 4,500 Armenians returned to their birthplace. Most of them were non-traders and elderly. The young people generally did not encourage the return.³⁶

If the Ottoman Empire did not officially recognize the right of its subjects to emigrate until 1908, and thus impeded not only individual Armenian emigrants, but also their families' subsequent entry into the United States, then with the coming of the Young Turks to power in 1909, when the travel restrictions and high payments for permits ("Tezkere" – in Turk.) were abolished, the Armenians, having been distrustful of the Young Turk "democracy," and taking advantage of the opportunities offered, continued to leave for the foreign countries, now with the whole families and kinsfolk. Those, who had emigrated from the Ottoman Empire before 1908, were mainly peasants and inexperienced workers, but in this case these were skilled craftsmen, students and professionals, who left the country for economic reasons. Young women were also leaving, mainly for marriage. Few were going to reunite with their families.

The horrific massacres committed by the Young Turks in Adana, in 1909,

³⁴ Simonyan 2009: 322.

³⁵ Terzian 1912: 130, 131, 133-134, 135, 138-139.

³⁶ Mirak 1981: 140.

undermined the hopes of the Armenians for their “democratic” authorities, pushing them to unknown horizons. Although the massacres had taken place in Cilicia, Armenians were leaving almost all the Armenian-populated areas of the empire, as the threat of being in the same situation at any given time was too great. Having witnessed the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia and their miserable condition, the American missionaries (Ms. Web and others) were gathering beautiful Armenian orphans, sending their data to the United States with the intention of finding parents for them and then moving them there.³⁷ And missionary Reverend Macallum was offering the organization, which provided medical, material and other assistance to the survivors of the massacre, to allocate the whole money for transferring the miraculously survivors to the United States, Canada or Brazil, because it was clear that “the next massacre was only a matter of time.”³⁸

Hakob Papikyan, a member of the Ittihad Committee on investigating the massacre of the Armenians, also predicted the emigration from his country in an interview with a correspondent of the “Tasviri Efkâr” daily, when he was asked: “How would the injured people provide livelihood for themselves?” “There is no livelihood so far,” he replied, “Most Armenians are preparing to emigrate to America and elsewhere...”³⁹

Thus, about 3,108 Armenians emigrated to the United States from June 30, 1908 to June 30, 1909. This figure does not differ much from that of the preceding year, but was significantly higher than the average outflow of Armenians before the Young Turks came to power.⁴⁰

The total number of Armenians, emigrated to the United States after the bloody Adana outbreaks in 1909, has increased significantly, reaching 5,508. At the same time, both the youth and the few, who had returned to their Homeland with high hopes for the land, were leaving the country.⁴¹

The mass outflow following the Adana massacre, both from Ottoman Empire, as well as from Cilicia, has prompted some national and media figures, that the only way to save the Armenians of Cilicia is to make them completely emigrate to a secure foreign country, particularly to the United States. This idea was first voiced by some western people during the Hamidian massacres of 1894-1896.⁴²

And though the Armenian Church, party and national figures have consistently and collectively opposed the idea of voluntary deprivation of Fatherland, nevertheless, the tragic developments showed that the consistent interest and organized great conspiracy (the Hamidian massacres in 1894-1896 and those of Adana in 1909) by the particular

³⁷ Teodik Arshakouhi 1910: 93.

³⁸ Mirak 1983: 55.

³⁹ Simonyan 2009: 299.

⁴⁰ Avakian 2000: 30-31.

⁴¹ Ibid.: 31, 45.

⁴² Simonyan 2009: 212, 213.

world structures regarding historical Armenian territories would eventually result the widespread massacre of Christian native, the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 by the Young Turks*, who came to power in the Ottoman Empire through the Western countries and with the false “democratic” slogans.

In the case of Adana, for example, foreigners were settled in Cilicia instead of the massacred and expelled Armenians, including “300 Jewish families, who were to trade and farm.”⁴³

Thus, due to historical fate, the Armenians, who emigrated to the United States, along with many Armenians living abroad, cherished the hope of repatriation – “Back to the Country!” That is why at the crucial moments for their country the Armenians abroad were always with their people. At the beginning of the last century, in 1909, the American Armenians also, responding to their compatriots’ misery and deprived situation in the aftermath of the Adana massacre, have materially and morally supported them, initiating, at the same time, a pro-Armenian movement within the US and in the American public and government circles by the intra-communal, religious, public, political and all other possible means.

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* “Most of the Ittihad leaders were Masons.” – Simonyan 2009: 218 (Footnote).

⁴³ Simonyan 2009: 215.

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