

## THE COVERAGE OF SITUATION OF WESTERN ARMENIANS AND CILICIAN ARMENIAN'S MASSACRE IN 1909 IN THE PAGES OF EGYPTIAN ARMENIAN PERIODICAL "ARSHALOUYS"\*

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### **Abstract**

The administrative, economic, educational and military reforms carried out by the Wali of Egypt Muhammad Ali made Egypt a strong and stable state, laying a solid foundation for its development. The reforms of Muhammad Ali also had a positive impact on the Egyptian Armenian community. By the end of the 19th century, Armenian cultural life in Egypt had become more active, the number of schools had increased, new cultural and educational unions and organizations had appeared, and new periodicals were being published. At the beginning of the 20th century, Armenians occupied a prominent place in the Egyptian society. Armenians had churches, schools, cafes, and various Armenian newspapers were published in Egypt. Additionally, Armenians were the most prominent distributors of tobacco - there were many Armenian kiosks in various markets around the country. Around town, one could often meet an Armenian shoemaker, pharmacist, baker, doctor, teacher, tailor, etc.

**Keywords:** "Arshalouys", Egyptian Armenian periodical, Western Armenians, Armenian massacres, regime, Cilicia.

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the 20th century, Egypt was considered one of the largest cultural centers of the Armenians, where many prominent Western Armenian intellectuals came together and played an invaluable role in the development of the Egyptian Armenian press. The *Arshalouys* national, literary and political periodical edited by Armenian intellectual Yeghishe Torosyan was published in Cairo in 1899 [22:57]. In the first period (1899-1905) *Arshalouys* was a three-day newspaper, in the second period (1908-1914) - a weekly newspaper, and from 1905-1907 it was not published [18:321]. The purpose of this article is to analyze the political viewpoints and topics discussed in *Arshalouys* and to evaluate the role of the Egyptian-Armenian newspaper in the history of the Egyptian Armenian press and in Armenian socio-political thought in general.

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### **The main sections and purpose of Arshalouys**

*Arshalouys* was an independent newspaper and did not belong to any Armenian political party [21:703]. The periodical was staffed by H. Shatryan, H. Shamlyan, A. Gasparyan, G. Balasanyan and others. The newspaper had national, local news, foreign news, women from the world, letterbox and other sections [19:348]. Articles on the situation of the Western Armenians and massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia in 1909 were published in the national news and letterbox sections.

Despite its long existence, the Egyptian Armenian periodical has not left a big mark in the history of Armenian social and political thought. The main goal of *Arshalouys* was the liberation of Armenia, like other Egyptian Armenian periodicals of the early 20th century. However, unlike the famous Egyptian Armenian periodical "Pyunik" of the early 20th century, which saw the liberation of Armenia only as the outcome of an armed struggle, armed self-defense in the pages of *Arshalouys*, if not rejected at all, was considered as a last resort. The Egyptian Armenian periodical had high hopes for the Young Turk authorities, so it offered peaceful methods of struggle. The periodical sought to draw the attention of Egyptian Armenians to national issues. In addition, the purpose of the magazine was to promote the improvement of the political, economic, spiritual and social life of the Armenian nation. In its publications, it criticized the Ottoman dictatorship and exposed the Hamidian dictatorship.

The Egyptian Armenian periodical criticized the working style of the Armenian national parties, and blamed the Armenian authorities and party leaders for the unhappiness of the Armenian people, who instead of building industrial and educational institutions in the country, wasted huge sums on various senseless actions. Moreover, they became more cruel, unjust dictators than the Turkish pashas, or the Persian khans [12:1].

The periodical pays a great deal of attention to educators involved in the educational development of the nation. Being busy with various household chores, mothers are unable to devote much time to raising their daughters. In this case, the role of the educator is greatly enhanced. The periodical notes that educating girls does not mean just giving girls foreign manners and teaching them several European languages. It is priority to instill self-awareness, dignity, and inspire the idea of will, strength and longevity. This sentiment is summarized thusly: "In a word, a mother, a woman, who with her unwavering description can overcome the difficulties of life [13:1]". At the same time, the periodical regrets that there are very few such educators in the Armenian society.

At the same time, being a literary periodical, *Arshalouys* gave place to works of art, the main theme of which was also the liberation of the Homeland. In addition, *Arshalouys* introduced the Egyptian-Armenian reader to Eastern Armenian cultural life and published works dedicated to the life and activities of various Armenian writers, touching on the theme of the homeland.

### **The coverage of the situation of Western Armenians**

The Egyptian Armenian periodical was concerned about the situation of the Armenians of Western Armenia and tried to communicate to the Egyptian Armenians, concisely, the plight of the Western Armenians in 1899-1914. Alongside European newspapers, the Egyptian Armenian periodical reports some information about Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Kurdish clashes in Western Armenia at the end of 1899. *Arshalouys* periodical reports that on November 9 in 1899 an Armenian group of 120 people from the territory of the Russian Empire entered the Alashkert plain and fought with Turkish troops and Kurdish detachments near the village of Astur. Inflicting heavy casualties on the Turks and Kurds and leaving 15 dead and 2 captives, the Armenian group managed to return to the territory of the Russian Empire. After this incident, the governors of Bitlis, Mush and Van ordered the Hamidiye regiments to be more ruthless towards the Armenian population. Citing the British newspaper “Tan” the periodical reports that the situation of the Armenians was terrible, the bread supply was almost exhausted, and there would be a famine soon, as the Ottoman authorities forbided the organization of donations to the Armenians, fearing that the money could be used for other purposes. Although in the beginning of December the Patriarchate of Constantinople sent 150 gold for the needs of the Western Armenians of the Erzurum, Van, Bitlis and Kharberd vilayets, but it was “a drop of water in the bottomless ocean [2:2-3]”. It should be noted that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the situation of the Armenian peasantry was deteriorating due to the heavy tax policy pursued by the Ottoman authorities and Kurdish bandit attacks. There were many state taxes in Western Armenia. Taxes were collected with all severity, and the taxation process often ended with confiscation of property and crops.

In early November of 1899 bloody Armenian-Kurdish clashes took place also in the city of Erzurum, which was witnessed by the German traveler T. Belck who wrote about it a telegram to the “Frankfurter Zeitung” newspaper. The German traveler informs that the Armenians were attackers who were armed with Russian weapons, and that 50 casualties were registered on both sides. Peace has been established only with the help of the Turkish regular army. The German telegram ends with words of praise for the governor of Erzurum, whose efforts ended the clashes. The Berlin correspondent of London’s “Daily Chronicle” newspaper, conveying this information to the newspaper’s editorial office on November 16, added that he received the impression from Belck’s telegram that the governor of Erzurum had asked him to spread information about the attacks of those Western Armenians in the European press. In connection with this telegram, both the correspondent of the London newspaper and the editorial office of *Arshalouys* agreed that “there will be a great bloodshed and that Turkish officials will try to keep it a secret [1:2-3]”.

In the letter box section, the Egyptian Armenian periodical regularly published various telegrams addressed to the editorial office from the city of Arabkir in Western Armenia. In the article “Letter from Arabkir” *Arshalouys* publishes the

letter of the elder of Arabkir Sargis Gralyan about the situation in Arabkir. Located in the valleys of the mountains, the urban population was in constant need of help from outside. In 1905, due to drought, the harvest was reduced, wheat stocks were sharply reduced, and a famine began, which left the population in misery. The author of the letter considers the main reason for the misery of the population of Arabkir to be the frequent repressions by the authorities in the early 20th century, which led to the exodus of the wealthy and prosperous class of the region. The cessation of trade was an equally important factor in the plight of the Armenian population of Arabkir [3:2-3]. In addition to the difficult socio-economic situation in Arabkir, cases of forced Islamization were increasing. In connection with this issue, the Egyptian Armenian periodical publishes the telegram of the Prelate of Arabkir, Archimandrite Meruzhan Ashkharhuni, regarding Islamization published in the "Arevelq" newspaper on March 2 in 1909. In the telegram, Archimandrite Meruzhan Ashkharhuni reports that the wife of Hambardzum Papazyan, a resident of the village of Shpik in Arabkir, was kidnapped by the Turks and forced to convert to Islam. The Archimandrite asks for urgent steps to protect the rights of Armenian women [4:3].

After the Armenian massacre in Cilicia, the situation gradually deteriorated in Western Armenia as well which did not escape from attention of the Egyptian Armenian periodical. In the article "The State of Armenia" the periodical presents a telegram of the vicarage of the Vicar General of Van Sarachyan sent to the National Patriarchate of Constantinople on the general insecure situation in Van and Bitlis. In particular, the bishop reports that a Kurdish thug Mehmet and his gang besieged the village of Reyes Oval for about six hours on October 16 in 1912, and at the same time two Armenians were killed in the village of Kvas, and this situation is universal [16:2]. Another article reports that Musa and Gassim beys in Baghesh became more restrained, traveling in the province became extremely dangerous, and thugs killed an Armenian on the road to the village of Khaltik in mid-November in 1912 [17:2].

### **The description of the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia in 1909**

The most covered topic of the second period of the Egyptian Armenian periodical is the coverage of the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia in 1909. In the publications on the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia, the periodical presents the telegrams of the caring leader of Adana, Bishop Mushegh, sent to the National Patriarchate of Constantinople. In the telegrams, he relays information about the victims and the migrants. On April 7, 1909 the Catholicos of Cilicia Sahak telegraphed to the National Patriarchate that the city of Adana was under siege, the civilian population was sheltered in monasteries, and if immediate measures were not taken, the physical existence of the entire Armenian population could be called into question. In their turn, on April 7, the "Reorganized Hunchakians" of Adana send a telegram to the Center of Constantinople, where they urged the provision of self-defense

means to Adana along with bread supplies. The death toll as of April 7 was more than 1,000, a quarter of which were Muslims [5:3-4], the number of refugees reached 27,000 [10:3]. It is difficult to present the exact number of victims of the Armenian massacres in Cilicia, as the Young Turk authorities often hide the corpses, but it is still accepted as 30,000-40,000 people [20:204-205].

After the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia, the Egyptian Armenian community was not left out of the care of the needs of the Armenian immigrants. A fundraising committee was formed in Alexandria, which organized a fundraiser among Egyptian Armenians and transferred the money raised to the AGBU to meet the needs of Armenian refugees in Cilicia [6:3].

In the aftermath of these events, several commissions of inquiry were set up by the Ottoman authorities, the activities of which became a real plague for the Armenians. The tribunal of military officers sent to Adana began to distort reality from the very beginning, blaming the victims for the massacres. The Egyptian Armenian periodical covers the coverage of some verdicts published by the military court. On May 9, the Egyptian Armenian periodical was telegraphed from Adana that a military tribunal was conducting a rigorous investigation, in which 149 Muslims and 113 non-Muslims were arrested, and the looted property was returned to its rightful owners [8:2], 412 Muslims and 124 non-Muslims were imprisoned in Mersin and Kozan [10:3]. In another issue, the periodical states that by the verdict of the military court on May 28, 1909, 9 Muslims and 6 non-Muslims were executed [9:1], and Adana leader Bishop Mushegh Serobyán was sentenced to 101 years in prison by the Adana military court for inciting Armenian massacres [12:3].

In the publications on the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia, the Egyptian Armenian periodical paid a lot of attention to covering the causes of the massacre, revealing and exposing the organizers. In the article “The Adana massacre and press” the periodical presents the translation of the report published in the Paris newspaper “Journal” on April 23. The French newspaper accuses Armenians of inciting the Adana massacre, “who exhausted the patience of the Turks because of their extreme demands and their narrow-minded nature [7:2]”. The Adana correspondent of the newspaper notes that the Armenian theaters in Cilicia performed plays whose heroes drove the Turks out of Asia Minor, openly spread hate against Turks in schools, and prepared students for an impending uprising [7:2]. Referring to the telegrams of the caring leader of Adana Bishop Mushegh the periodical criticizes the Ottoman authorities' unfounded arguments justifying the Armenian massacres, during which a revolutionary movement was formed among the Armenians, in which the Armenians wanted to restore the Armenian kingdom. Such conversations preceded the massacres [14:1]. To study the causes of the Armenian massacres in Cilicia, it is necessary to analyze Armenian-Turkish relations. The restoration of the constitution as a result of the coup in 1908 caused discontent among the Turkish-Kurdish population, as Christians were to have equal rights. One of the reasons for the massacre was religion, which was used by the enemies of the con-

stitution to seize the opportunity to turn Muslims against Christians. Among the reasons for the massacres was the return of a part of the Armenian peasantry who migrated from Cilicia during the Hamidian massacres, which caused great dissatisfaction among the Turks and the Kurds. The Adana-based "Itidal" newspaper, which provoked anti-Armenian sentiments with its articles, played a malicious role in the Cilician massacres. It is true that the governor of Adana stopped the publication of "Itidal" newspaper by the order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but, as the Egyptian Armenian periodical notes, that order was preceded by the termination of the publication of two Armenian newspapers [10:3]. However, the main goal of the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia in 1909 was to completely evict and expel the Armenians from Cilicia in a monstrous ploy to "ensure the integrity of the Ottoman Empire" and state policy. Examining the details of the massacre and the official European bulletins, it becomes clear to *Arshalouys* that Abdul Hamid II and the constitutional government both took part in the massacre. Referring to the Constantinople-based press, the Armenian Egyptian newspaper reports that after studying the verdicts in Adana, one gets the impression that Armenians and Turks were equally involved in organizing the Adana uprising [9:1]. The periodical mainly blames the Sultan's regime for organizing the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia, noting that living under centuries of dictatorship and accustomed to blood-thirsty morals, the Young Turks could not transform in one year and build a full-fledged constitutional country where justice would prevail. The Egyptian Armenian periodical hopes that soon the old morals will disappear, and the new constitutional authorities will be able to build a new quality state, where different nations can live side by side in harmony. At the same time, the periodical does not share the calls of Armenian national figures to prepare for self-defense, noting that this step will not improve the situation of Armenians. The author of the article emphasizes that when the Armenians of Cilicia did not wage an armed struggle in the late 19th century, no Armenian massacres would take place. Later, after taking up arms, the massacres multiplied, stating that "This is a fact that no one can deny [11:1-2]". In fact, the Egyptian Armenian periodical was enthusiastic about the promises of the Young Turks after the overthrow of the Hamidian dictatorship in 1908-1909 and believed that the Young Turks would build a new country where justice would prevail. The periodical saw the improvement of the situation of the Armenians of Western Armenia, the solution of the Armenian question with the democratization of the Turkish constitutional monarchy, and therefore offered peaceful methods of struggle, considering armed struggle to be extreme. However, in the publications in 1910-1914, the periodical finally changes its attitude towards the constitutional authorities and it is convinced that the latter are the descendants of the Hamidian regime and they have a sense of Turkish supremacy over foreigners, which can lead to newly organized massacres. In particular, the article "The State of Turkey" states that it was naive to think that after 30 years of Hamidian dictatorship, rapid peace and calm would be established in the Ottoman Empire. Enthusiasm for the

implementation of the Constitution was gradually declining. The new authorities were gradually giving up their promises (press, free expression) and “If this process continues unabated, there is no doubt that the greedy steps of the Ottoman government will gradually lead to the old regime... [15:2]”.

Although in the pages of *Arshalouys* the flow of information about the situation of the Armenians of Western Armenia from 1899-1914 and the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia in 1909 was not very regular due to material difficulties and various restrictions imposed on the media by the Ottoman authorities, however, by studying the materials published in the periodical, it is possible to form a certain idea on the policy of persecution of Armenians by the Turkish authorities from 1899-1914.

Thus, we can prove that the main goal of *Arshalouys* was the liberation of Armenia and promotion of the improvement of the political, economic, spiritual and social life of the Armenian nation. In its publications, *Arshalouys* criticized the Ottoman dictatorship and exposed the Hamidian dictatorship. The Egyptian Armenian periodical was concerned about the situation of the Armenians in Western Armenia and tried to concisely communicate to the Egyptian-Armenians the difficult situation in Western Armenia in 1899-1914 and covered the causes of the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia in 1909, exposing the organizers. It is true that they blamed the Hamidian regime for the massacre from the start. The periodical finally changed its attitude towards the Young Turks, concluding firmly that the latter are the descendants of the Hamidian regime. In addition, *Arshalouys*, being a literary periodical, introduced the Egyptian Armenian reader to Eastern Armenian cultural life and published works dedicated to the life and activities of various writers, touching on the theme of the homeland.

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**ԱՐԵՎՄՏԱԿԱՅՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԴՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԵՎ 1909 Թ. ԿԻԼԻԿԻԱԿԱՅՈՒԹՅԱՆ  
ՎՈՏՈՐԱԾԻ ՎԵՐԱԲԵՐՅԱԼ ԱՆԴՐԱԴԱՐՁԵՐ  
ԵԳԻՊՏԱԿԱՅ «ԱՐՇԱԼՈՅՍ» ՊԱՐԲԵՐԱԿԱՆԻ ԷՋԵՐՈՒՄ**

*Մյասնիկ Եսոյան*

**Քանալի քառեր՝** «Արշալոյս», եգիպտահայ պարբերական, արևմտահայություն, հայկական կոտորածներ, վարչակարգ, Կիլիկիա:

20-րդ դարասկզբի եգիպտահայ նշանավոր պարբերականներից է «Արշալոյս» ազգային, գրական և քաղաքական լրագիրը: Պարբերականի հիմնական նպատակը Հայաստանի ազատագրումն է եղել: «Արշալոյսը» ձգտել է նպաստել հայ ազգի քաղաքական, տնտեսական, հոգևոր և հասարակական կյանքի բարելավմանը: Այն իր հրապարակումներում քննադատել է օսմանյան բռնապետությունը, մերկացրել համիդյան բռնակալությունը: Եգիպտահայ պարբերականին մտահոգել է արևմտահայության կացությունն ու փորձել է իր հրապարակումներով, թեկուզև կցկտուր, եգիպտահայությանը հաղորդակից դարձնել 1899-1914 թթ. արևմտահայության ծանր դրությանը, 1909 թ. կիլիկիահայության կոտորածի պատճառների լուսաբանմանն ու կազմակերպիչների մերկացմանը: Ճիշտ է, սկզբնական շրջանում կոտորածի իրականացման գործում մեղադրում է համիդյան վարչակարգին և լիափոխ է, որ սահմանադրական իշխանությունները էականորեն տարբերվում են համիդյան վարչակարգից, կկատարեն իրենց նախահեղափոխական խոստումներն ու արդարադատություն կհաստատվի Օսմանյան կայսրության տարածքում, սակայն 1910-1914 թթ. հրապարակումներում պարբերականը վերջնականապես փոխում է իր վերաբերմունքը երիտթուրքերի

նկատմամբ և համոզվում, որ վերջիններս համիոյան վարչակարգի հետնորդներն են: Բացի այդ, «Արշալոյսը», լինելով գրական պարբերական, եգիպտահայ ընթերցողին ծանոթացրել է արևելահայ մշակութային կյանքին, տպագրել տարբեր գրողների կյանքին ու գործունեությանը նվիրված, Հայրենիքի թեման շոշափող գեղարվեստական ստեղծագործություններ:

Թեև եգիպտահայ «Արշալոյս» պարբերականի էջերում 1899-1914 թթ. արևմտահայության դրության ու 1909 թ. կիլիկիահայության կոտորածի վերաբերյալ լրատվության հոսքն այնքան էլ կանոնավոր չէր՝ պայմանավորված նյութական դժվարությունների ու օսմանյան իշխանությունների կողմից լրատվության դեմ կիրառվող զանազան արգելքների հետ, այնուամենայնիվ, ուսումնասիրելով պարբերականի հրապարակած նյութերը, կարելի է որոշակի պատկերացում կազմել 1899-1914 թթ. թուրքական իշխանությունների հայահալած քաղաքականության վերաբերյալ: