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A PIECE OF UNKNOWN HISTORY: THE ARMENIANS IN MOROCCO

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Introduction

The presence of Armenians in Western and Central North Africa – the **nowadays' states of Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco** – is very old¹, although their number has always been few in that region.

The current article is focused on one of them – Morocco, where the Armenians had a relatively organized community life in the 1920–1950s.

The main source for this paper has been the Diaspora Armenian press that has rarely published correspondences from Moroccan Armenians about their community. The factual information, contained in those letters, though scarce, provides some insights on the life of a handful of Armenians scattered in that part of the African continent in the 20th century.

We are not aware of any information in the Moroccan archives, concerning **the Armenians. Supposedly, after the country's declaration** of independence in 1956, the documents on different communities and individuals should have been transferred to the colonizing states (in this case – France and Spain). Information about the Armenian community that survived the colonial period of the country, should have been among others. Of course, it would be valuable to compare the

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¹ According to the Roman historian Gaius Sallustius Crispus (86–35 c. BC), the Armenians along with Persians and Medes took part in the Jugurthine War (112–106 BC) between the Roman Republic and King Jugurtha of Numidia – a kingdom in the north of Africa, and part of them remained there and participated in the formation of the Moor people (see Caius Crispus Sallustius 1726, 86).

data of non-Armenian sources with the Armenian ones, which are not available now. However, our intention is to make the first step towards documenting the history of the Armenian presence in Morocco.

So far the most complete writing about the Armenians in Morocco has been a **short article by Zohrab Ghasabyan, included in “Armenian Diaspora” Encyclopedia**².

We cannot indicate the exact year when the first Armenian appeared in Morocco, yet the country probably was first mentioned in an Armenian chronicle of the 17th century, ascribed to **Anonymous from Livorno**: “1577 – the kings of Portugal for many times, with many armies attacked the Arabs that were close to them and called Morocco and Fesa and made many wars.”³ By “Arabs” the Armenian chronicler meant Arab-speaking countries, while Fesa is the Moroccan city of Fez (Fes).

First Visitors and Refugees

The first groups of Armenians started to settle in Morocco in the 1910s, when the country was a French and Spanish protectorate (from 1912 till the Independence). The first Armenians in Morocco were builders, traders and the military. They were particularly attracted by the largest Moroccan city, Casablanca, on the Atlantic Coast.

A private letter sent from Rabat to Constantinople in 1913 testifies that there was an Armenian soldier from Adana in the French army fighting a great battle against the Zayanese tribe near the Meknes city in Morocco. This soldier survived the Adana massacres of 1909 and enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. The commander ordered him to defend the only watersource, and the Moroccans wanted to seize that source by all means, mercilessly attacking the Armenian soldier. The latter defended the source at the cost of his life and was killed. The French buried him with honor, and General Dalbier stated that the defeat of the Moroccans that day was due to the courage of the Armenian soldier⁴.

The name of this perished Armenian hero is unknown, but the history saved the names of two other Armenian military men of the French army serving in Morocco. Captain Nahabed Nahabedian (died in 1942) is known to have

² See **Ղասաբյան** 2003, 391.

³ **Մանր ժամանակագրություններ** 1956, 247:

⁴ «Հորիզոն», 9.11.1913, (re-published from “Buzandion” newspaper of Constantinople).

participated in all French colonial wars, including in Morocco, Sahara, later in Indochina since 1905⁵. In 1914, Stepan Baghdasarian (1888–1941), a native of Karadagh – the then province of Persia, served as a physician in the French army in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. He studied at the University of Montpellier, lived in the United States, and in 1925 repatriated to Soviet Armenia⁶.

The same aforementioned letter from 1913 mentioned that in Casablanca there were about 20 Greeks, three or four Syrians and three Armenians from the representatives of the Eastern nations⁷. Several Armenians participated in the **construction of Casablanca's buildings, but were mainly engaged in the trade of coffee and groceries and lived a prosperous life**⁸. The proof of their good economic situation might be the fact, that in 1918, the Armenian National Union of Paris received a letter from an Armenian living in Morocco with the signatures of 12 fellow compatriots, all of them coffee makers originally from Kemakh, expressing willingness to make donation to the Armenian Cause and enclosed 500 francs for the Armenians in need⁹.

Soon the Armenian survivors of the Armenian Genocide, reached Morocco. Khachik Hovhannes Pouloukian (born 1906) from Amasia and Haroutiun Malian (born 1904) from Adana, found shelter in Sefrou, Morocco. On May 18, 1920, they wrote a letter to the Armenian National Delegation in Paris, asking to provide passports to them. In a letter from May 25 to the same delegation, they reported that six Armenians, either orphans or teenagers, were being housed on **the “Military Floor” in Sefrou, so they asked to provide them visas too for returning to homeland**¹⁰.

On October 18, 1922, Nshan Vartanian from Feriville, Tunisia, former chairman of the Ramkavar Azatakan Party Club in Izmir, wrote a letter to the Armenian national figure Gabriel Noradounghian, stating that after the burning of Izmir, about 200 Armenians arrived in Morocco by a steamship. They all left Izmir on September 20. They were placed in three military bases, in two of which the life

⁵ See «Արարս», 28.02.1942.

⁶ Ստեփանեան 1973, 179:

⁷ «Հորիզոն», 9.11.1913.

⁸ See «Ճակատամարտ», 28.04.1922, 28.04.

⁹ See «Երիտասարդ Հայաստան», 18.05.1918.

¹⁰ See National Archive of Armenia, file 430, list 1, act 853.

was tolerable, in one of them – almost like that in the army¹¹. One of those Armenians, Armenak Karanfilian, in his letter from October 28, 1922, testified to the fact that there were 189 Armenians still left in the Sidi Abdallah settlement. Most of those Armenians left for Marseilles by boat; fortunately no one was in a miserable state¹².

In the 1920s many Armenian community activists, were trying to find solution for accommodating the Armenian refugees, dispersed mainly in the Middle East and Greece, to proper locations throughout the world, suggesting Latin America, Australia, Madagascar... In 1924 in a secret conference in Constantinople, some local Armenian figures suggested also Morocco as an option, motivating the religious freedom in there¹³. Although this idea did not find supporters, settling of some Armenians in Morocco continued.

The Armenians, who appeared in Morocco after the First World War were mainly Western Armenian refugees (from Kemakh, Constantinople, Caesaria, Rodosto¹⁴), while for the Eastern Armenians Morocco was hardly a country of transfer. For instance, after the Bolshevik coup, the well-to-do family of the Shabanians (Chabanian) from Batumi fled first to Morocco and then to France¹⁵. Since 1917, Armenak (Armando) Arafelian, explorer and soldier of fortune from Baku, began to travel around the world. In 1934 he went from France to Northern Africa, where he joined the French and Spanish Foreign Legions and was captivated by Abd al-Karimi (1882–1963), the leader of the liberation struggle against Spain. Then Arafelian passed to St. Thomas and Spanish Guinea, later – to the American continent. He had intentions to publish his travel material in Spanish in South America¹⁶.

In a correspondence of 1922, the names of two Armenian bookshop owners from Casablanca, Krikorisian and Chakerian, as well as the young immigrant Donigian originally from Samsun and living in Mazagan (nowadays El-Jadida) were mentioned¹⁷.

¹¹ See NAA, f. 430, l. 1, a. 856.

¹² NAA, f. 430, l. 1, a. 856.

¹³ «Լուսարձակ», 23.07.1924, see also **Մարտունի** 1924, 44–45.

¹⁴ See **Ղասաբյան** 2003, 391

¹⁵ See Mavian 2016, 80.

¹⁶ «Արաս», 02.08.1934.

¹⁷ «Ճակատամարտ», 28.04.1922.

Community building efforts

In 1932, the total number of Armenians in Morocco was 100–150. They were scattered in the main cities (Casablanca, Rabat, Fes, Meknes, Mazagan, Mogador, etc.). Most of them were engaged in coffee-making and grocery trade¹⁸. A report sent from Morocco to the “Abaka” (Future) Armenian newspaper in Paris in 1934 stated that there were about 50 Armenians in Casablanca, and most of the men were married to non-Armenian women. In general, they were originally from Izmit, Kemakh, Constantinople, Marzovan and Samsun. The children of Armenian families were forced to attend foreign schools; only one family was able to send their children to Mekhitarian School in Sevres, France. The Armenians owned their small businesses, selling mostly coffee and old clothes. There was a doctor, a dentist and people of different occupations (textile shop owner, garage owner, barber, yogurt maker, commissioner): among them there were no workers. There was a branch of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. The locals sympathized with the Armenians and had friendly relations with them¹⁹.

In the autumn of 1935, the Central Armenian National Committee of the South of France sent Father Yeghishe Mkhitarian, Vice-Prelate, pastor of the National Board of Marseilles, to Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia for a 47-day fundraising campaign²⁰. He provided the following information about the Armenians in Morocco: 23 Armenian families lived in Casablanca – traders and people of different occupations (two barbers, two doctors, one dentist, and one mechanist). A European-style carpet shop was operated by an Armenian. Father Yeghishe convened a general meeting in this city on September 24, during which the Casablanca Armenians raised 2020 francs. Nine Armenian merchants, shopkeepers and craftsmen living in Rabat raised 1,050 francs. Four Armenian families and one bachelor lived in the city of Mazagan (among them H. Sarkavakian, originally from Edirne, owned a large iron and brick factory); they raised 300 francs. Two Armenian families from Caesarea living in Safi donated 300 francs, and one Armenian family living in Mogador (currently *Essaouira*) donated 100 francs. The number of Armenian families in Marrakesh was four; two were originally from Artsakh, one from Izmir, the other one – from Baberd. They

¹⁸ «Յուսաբեր», 02.08.1932.

¹⁹ See «Արեւելք», 22.12.1934,

²⁰ See «Ալիք», 19.01.1936. See also «Յուսաբեր», 10.01.1936.

donated 170 francs. Two Armenian families who lived in Fez, gave 300 francs. There were two Armenian bachelors and only one Armenian family in Meknes, who donated 650 francs. Thus, out of the 49 Armenian families living in Morocco, the French-Armenian clergyman collected a total of 5,000 francs. Priest Yeghishe formed the Council of Moroccan Armenian community (center in Casablanca)²¹.

We could not find any other information about the Armenians in Morocco in the late 1930s and during the Second World War. According to Zohrab Ghasabyan, some Armenian families settled in Morocco after the War²². In 1949, the Central Armenian National Administration of Southern France, responding to the request of the Armenians of Morocco, sent Father Mesrop Avedisian to Morocco for a pastoral visit²³. Father Mesrop conducted a liturgy in the Greek Church of Casablanca, after which an Armenian community assembly was held presided by him. The new Board of Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) in Morocco was elected with the following members: Countess Araxia Patrimonio (honorary president), Jean Miran (Mihranian, had been the president of the Union since 1945), Tsavag Artinian, Berj Varjabedian (an engineer), M. Shakarian, Yervant Karabilikian and Azad Surmenian (members), Mrs. Baltayan and Melikov (with a consultative voice). As the community had not seen an Armenian priest for more than 15 years, the priest performed 12 baptisms²⁴. The following year, the annual general assembly of the Armenian community of Casablanca was **convened at Yervant Karabilikian's villa named "Arax,"** and Kourken Salibian joined the above-mentioned board members²⁵.

In 1951, the national avenger Soghomon Tehlirian (1896–1960), the assassinator of the organizer of the Armenian Genocide – Talaat Pasha, moved from socialist Yugoslavia to Morocco along with his wife and two sons. They settled and lived in Casablanca until 1957. One day in 1952, the small local community had the honor of meeting Tehlirian publicly. **Refusing a hero's status, but meeting** to the pleas of Casablanca Armenians, Tehlirian has only once publicly spoken about **the assassination of Talaat Pasha and his trial in Berlin. This period of Tehlirian's**

²¹ See «Հայրենիք», 08.01.1936. The same one see «Յառաջ», 20.01.1936.

²² See Ղասաբյան 2003, 391.

²³ See «Յառաջ», 17.02.1953:

²⁴ See «Զայն Փարիզի», 04.02.1949. See also «Հայրենիք», 05.03.1949, «Զարթոնք», 08.06.1950.

²⁵ See «Յառաջ», 17.02.1950.

biography remained unknown until the memoirs of Berjouhi Surmenian, a former resident of Casablanca, were published. The manuscript of this publication was passed to Seda Grigorian, who lived in Morocco in the period of 1990–1992²⁶.

Araxi Varoujan (1892–1967), the widow of the Genocide victim poet Daniel Varoujan (1884–1915), lived in Casablanca for decades with her second husband, Jirair Apigian. The latter was engaged in cloths wholesale trade along with his brother. In 1956 Varoujan family members sent a letter to the Armenian press on **the occasion of the publication of the French translation of Varujan’s poem “The Concubine,” stating that they still had** copies of the book and were ready to provide them for free to anyone wishing to have²⁷.

According to a correspondence from 1954, the number of Armenians in Morocco was 200; 60 in Casablanca and 13 in Rabat. They came from the Middle East, France and America. They all were in a good economic situation and enjoyed the sympathy and trust of the authorities and local people. Some of them had their own workshops or shops with offices, others followed different other fields: there was a dentist, a doctor, an engineer, and a pharmacist. There were two Armenian yogurt producers in Rabat. They did not hold any national event, though they had **an intention to build a “national house.” Sometimes they supported the French-Armenian schools – Mekhitarian in Sevres and Tebrozassère in Raincy**²⁸.

In 1955 French-Armenian writer Shavarsh Nartouni met an Armenian originally from Amasia in Rabat, who had founded an orange orchard near the city²⁹. Another Armenian writer who visited Rabat, Vardges Petrosyan, also met **Armenians there: “I remember, in Rabat city, Morocco, an Armenian man showed me a piece of mortar torn from a wall in Zvartnots that he was keeping in a crystal vase.**³⁰” **“I am in Africa, in the city of Rabat of Morocco, where I met one of the four local Armenians in a café, making yogurt and crooning an Armenian melody under his breath.**³¹”

In 1956, the correspondent of “Armenia” reported that the Armenian community of Morocco consisted of about 80 families (circa 400 people),

²⁶ See «Դրոշակ», 2004, թ. 4, 75–79.

²⁷ «Յառաջ», 30.05.1956.

²⁸ See «Յառաջ», 15.05.1954.

²⁹ See «Յառաջ», 17.04.1955.

³⁰ Պետրոսյան 1984, 23:

³¹ Պետրոսյան 1984, 57:

merchants and craftsmen (tailors, shoemakers), who had warm relations with the locals. 15 Armenian families lived in Rabat; seven in Mazagan; six in Meknes, four in Safi and Fes and two in Mogador. In the same year the annual general assembly of Moroccan Armenians was held on April 2, convened in Casablanca³². It was opened by Kourken Salibian, while Jirair Apigian was elected as chairman. Vahan Hampardzoumian made a report, listing the modest work done during the previous year. This small community supported the Beirut Armenian Seminary, the French Red Cross resort, and other public events, while B. Bergamali, a longtime community member, bequeathed his fortune estimated some million dollars to the AGBU. (By the way, Zareh Bergamali, whose name is enlisted among the importers of Casablanca³³, **probably was B. Bergamali's son**). Berj Varjabedian **reported on the administration's financial activities. Considering the activity of the board satisfactory, the Assembly re-elected the board, whose members were Kourken Salibian, Vahan Hampardzoumian, Yervant Karabilikian, Berj Varjabedian from Casablanca and Herair Serabian from Rabat. They also read the letter of B. Atamian from the USA, who was one of the heirs of Smyrna-born Takvor Ananian, who had died in Rabat without any care, and relevant orders were carried out³⁴.**

On April 27, 1956, the annual general meeting of the Armenian community of Morocco, chaired by Garo Sarian, was held in Casablanca with the participation of **about 30 people. Vahan Hampardzoumian reported on Armenians' number in Morocco: 24 families (62 persons) in Casablanca, four families (8 persons) in Rabat, two families (3 persons) in Mazagan, two families (6 persons) in Safi, two families (4 persons) in Marrakesh, two families (3 persons) in Gazba-Taala, one family (2 persons) in Fez, one family (2 persons) in Meknes, in total - 38 families (90 persons), with three more families (10 persons).** Thus, the exact number of Moroccan Armenians is 40 families (100 persons). 12 Armenians moved from Morocco to the USA, Canada and Yugoslavia. They were mostly engaged in trade, there were also officials and craftsmen. During five years this community has voluntarily donated about 700 thousand francs to pan-Armenian events. The community has given two benefactors – Avedis Chakerian and B. Bergamali, who, as already mentioned, posthumously bequeathed their houses and wealth to the AGBU. On the same day, a requiem service was held at the Cathedral of

³² See «Հայաստանի կոչնակ», 27.10.1956, 929.

³³ See France 1953, 132.

³⁴ See «Յարուզ», 26.04.1956.

Casablanca on the initiative of Father Krikor Khacherian for the victims of the **Armenian Genocide, with Archimandrite's explanations in French** about the significance of the commemoration day³⁵.

In May 1958, the Armenians of Casablanca hosted the American-Armenian public figure George Mardigian and the American-Armenian journalist and correspondent for Arab newspapers Levon Keshishian with their wives. A reception was held at the Mahraba Hotel, during which the active members of the community spoke: Vahan Hampardzoumian, Jirair Apigian, Yervant Karabilikian, K. Baltayan, Mrs. Haroutiunian, Azad Surmenian, Garo Sarian, Berj Varjabedian and Herair Serapian³⁶. Levon Keshishian (1917–1984), being the correspondent of Moroccan Radio and TV for some years, from time to time also contributed to the Armenian press with correspondences about the Armenians of Morocco.

In 1959 the number of the Armenians in Morocco was the same – almost 100. To the names already mentioned the names of Haigaz Asadourian, Jirair Surmenian and V. Torosian can be added. As there was no law on citizenship in Morocco, that gained its independence in 1956, the Armenians were not considered Moroccans³⁷, the authorities recognized the local Armenians as an independent community³⁸.

On March 30, 1959, Jean Ballard (1893–1973), a French writer and the **founding editor of “Les Cahier du Sud” revue was hosted in Morocco. Taking the opportunity, local Armenians organized a tea party in his honor, as “Les Cahier du Sud” repeatedly published samples of Armenian poetry translated by the French writer and translator Luc-André Marcel. Members of the Moroccan Armenian community – Sarian, Apigian, Hambardzoumian, Karabilikian, Araxi Varoujan, made speeches. Mr. and Mrs. Ballards spoke about their acquaintance with the Armenians and Armenian poetry. Ten Armenians subscribed “Les Cahier du Sud,” while on behalf of Armenians in Morocco one-year subscription of the magazine was provided to the Armenian schools in Beirut, Raincy, Tehran, Montevideo, and Paris**³⁹.

³⁵ See «Յառաջ», 06.05.1958.

³⁶ See «Յառաջ», 29.05.1959.

³⁷ See «Ազդակ», 22.09.1959.

³⁸ See **Ղասաբյան** 2003, 391.

³⁹ See «Յառաջ», 08.04.1959.

In the same year, in the Cathedral of Casablanca the victims of the Armenian Genocide were commemorated again. Archimandrite Krikor Khacherian conducted a liturgy in the Catholic style and preached in Armenian and French. The French consul of the city and many Frenchmen were present⁴⁰. The solemn liturgy and requiem service was repeated next year, on May 1, 1960, initiated again by Archimandrite Khacherian⁴¹.

After the declaration of independence of the North African countries, the USSR actively cooperated with the newly independent states, regularly sending also Armenian specialists and art professionals.

Who was Who among Moroccan Armenians

Avedis Chakerian, a bookseller living in Casablanca since the early 1920s, has been a national philanthropist and the chairman of the board of the Armenian community. His bookstore was situated in the busiest street of the city. Chakerian died in 1941, in Casablanca, bequeathing most of his property to the Armenian Seminary in Beirut⁴².

Azad Surmenian, one of first Armenians settled in Casablanca, an owner of a trading company, has established links with the USA⁴³. He owned a factory of rubber boots, and his brother – a factory of plastic items and toys⁴⁴. **Azad Surmenian's widow**, Berjouhi Surmenian remained in Casablanca and was still alive in 2002. Both their son Jirair Surmenian (1925–2017) and the grandson Enoch Surmenian were born in Casablanca. Jirair owned the Sukaf Café in the city, while Enoch studied at the Lycée Lyautey of Casablanca. Enoch later moved to France and settled in Neuilly-sur-Seine.

Countess Araxia Patrimonio (nee Esmerian, born in 1896) was the President of the French Red Cross in Morocco. In Casablanca, **she ran the “Patrimonio nee Esmerian Marguerite Africaine Immobilières” real estate company**. A wife of a Spanish count, Araxia Patrimonio died in Casablanca.

⁴⁰ See «Յառաջ», 16.05.1959.

⁴¹ See «Յառաջ», 04.05.1960.

⁴² See «Հայաստանի կրչնակ», 09.08.1941, էջ 787.

⁴³ See Visiting buyers and officials, “International Commerce,” vol. 76, 1970, p. 48.

⁴⁴ See **Ղաաարբան** 2003, 391.

Writer Diran Alexanian, born in Atabazar, Ottoman Empire, after the Smyrna fire left with his parents for Greece, then Morocco. His most memorable writing is **the book “Rainbow on the Seas” in Greek. Alexanian died in 1968**, in Casablanca⁴⁵.

One of the active figures of Casablanca Armenian community was Krikor Harutiunian, a native of Yerznka, who settled in Algeria, in 1914 and then moved to Morocco, where he was engaged in coffee and grocery trade and managed a hotel in Casablanca. He dealt with the problems of Armenian immigrants, educational and religious issues. In 1969 he wrote a letter to Yerevan, to the Committee on Cultural Relations with the Diaspora, expressing a wish to repatriate⁴⁶.

Artist, jeweler, sculptor, expert of antiquities, trader in precious stones Vahan Markarian (born 1888, Constantinople) lived in Casablanca, in 1933–1969. In 1962–1964 he had personal exhibitions; in 1969 he returned to Istanbul⁴⁷.

Kourken Salibian was born in 1912 in Adana, Turkey. His family went to Beirut circa 1919 and in 1935 he moved to Casablanca. Salibian owned **“Oceanways Trading Corporation” and “Al Maghreb Trading Corporation,”** importing bales of used clothing, U.S. Army surplus. He married Agnes Artinian from Beirut in 1946. They had three children, the first one, Ara Salibian, was born in Beirut, the others – in Casablanca. The Salibians moved to New York at the end of the 1950s, but had an apartment in Casablanca until the early 1970s. One of **Salibian’s children** is the American writer Cathy Salibian (born 1954), according to whom her family adhered to Armenian traditions⁴⁸.

Lawyer and writer Vahan Hampardzoumian (1896, Govdun village of Sebastia, Ottoman Empire – 1964, Casablanca), who had lost his entire family during the Armenian Genocide, worked in France, being an active public figure and writer in Armenian periodicals. In 1939 he left for Algeria to defend the interests of one of his compatriots. Because of the war he stayed in Algeria, where he married a French woman and had a daughter, Mireille Hampardzoumian, who later lived in France. After the establishment of peace, Vahan settled in Casablanca, where he established his legal office. Hambardzoumian died there and

⁴⁵ «Մասիս», 22.09.1968.

⁴⁶ See NAA, f. 875, l. 4, a. 360, p. 2–4.

⁴⁷ See about him «Արեւիկա», 25.09.1965.

⁴⁸ Email correspondence with Cathy Salibian (14.05.2020, 20.08.2020).

was buried in El Hank Cemetery of Casablanca⁴⁹. Vahan Hampardzoumian might have been the correspondent of “Haraj”, Armenian daily of Paris, appearing under the pen-name Vahan⁵⁰ from Morocco.

Among the Moroccan Armenians the names of the physician Arto Helvejian and the dentist G. Kabakdjian are also mentioned⁵¹.

Roger Karoutchi, now a well-known French politician, the French Ambassador to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, was born in Casablanca, in 1951, into the family of a Moroccan-Jewish father and **Armenian mother. He strongly opposes Turkey’s membership** to the Council of Europe and often speaks out on the Armenian Genocide.

Llatie Amor Sarkissian, a Paris-based writer, was born in Tangier, in 1954 to an Armenian mother and Spanish-Moroccan father (Amor). Her mother, Seda Sarkissian Utudjian (1917, Yerevan – 1957, Paris, buried in Tangier), was the daughter of Armenak Sarkissian from Georgia (died in Cairo) and Arax Utudjian (1892, Constantinople – 1992, Casablanca). Llatie Amor Sarkissian lived in Casablanca until 1989, where she worked at the Omar Khayyam Bookstore, organizing literary and artistic events. She left Morocco in 1989 and often went back to see her children and grandchildren. In 2015, the **novel “Armenian Sonata”** by Llatie Amor Sarkissian and Franck Perrussel was published in French. It **includes the life of Llatie’s grandmother Arax, as well as the letters written from Morocco by Arax to her granddaughter**. The authors also presented the book in Moroccan cities⁵².

Syrian-Armenian physician Toros Toranian, who attended a conference of Arab physicians in the Tunisian capital in 1979, testified that there he met Dr. Tourian, a resident of Casablanca. The latter admitted that on the African coast he earned money, but unfortunately he lost his essence⁵³. These words prove the widespread assimilation and alienation to which the small Armenian communities of North Africa have been subjected...

⁴⁹ See **Համբարձումեան** 2000, 7: In September 2000 I met Mireille Swensson-Hampardzoumian in Yerevan and had a conversation about the Armenians in Morocco.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, **Յառաջ**, 24.02.1956.

⁵¹ See **Ղաաարբյան** 2003, 391.

⁵² About the book see Sabrina El-Faiz, Culture Le vécu d’une Arménienne au Maroc, «L’Economiste», 2015, May 27.

⁵³ See **Թորանեան** 2004, 47:

In 1950, Armen Zarian – an Armenian architect from Italy, won the International Award for the design of a 251-storey residential Moroccino district to be built in Tangier. Zarian lived in Morocco from 1950–1954 with his German wife, Maria Gawronski-Zarian: their daughter, teacher and poet Sirvard Zarian (now living in Canada) was born in 1952 in Tangier. Armen Zarian worked at architect **Messina’s workshop** as a studio manager, supervised the construction of Moroccino district and at the same time he won the prize for interior design and furnishings of the Tangier Parliament.

According to a statistic of 1984, 200 Armenians lived in Morocco⁵⁴. Most Morocco-born Armenians moved to France, as did Casablanca-born Louis Karabilikian, who studied at the Jules Ferry School in 1939–1950 and City Technical High School in 1950–1954, as well as Jules Asadurian, who was born in Casablanca and currently lives in Cannes, France.

From time to time Armenians from various countries, particularly from France, come to live and work in the Kingdom of Morocco on temporary basis. As Finland-based artist Aramayis Avetisyan testified, at the exhibition of Finnish artists in Casablanca he was approached by an EU representative in Morocco, who spoke fluent Western Armenian, then recited poems by Armenian poets Siamanto and Varoujan. Then another person joined their conversation and introduced himself as a French-Armenian⁵⁵. In 2005, French-Armenian ex-judoka Roger Hairabedian (born 1955) moved to Marrakech and established the “Es Saadi” casino there. He is considered as “the godfather of Moroccan poker” and won the championship of poker competition in Morocco, in 2012⁵⁶.

It is also important to note that diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Kingdom of Morocco were established in June, 1992. From 1994 to 2009 the ambassadors of the Republic of Armenia in Egypt are also accredited for Morocco. Since 2004 Karen Minasyan is the Honorary consul of Morocco in Armenia, while Ms. Mina Tounsi is the Ambassador of Morocco in Armenia since 2013 (residence in Kiev). In 2015 the Armenian-Moroccan Business Forum was held on April 7–9, in Yerevan⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ See NAA, f. 875, l. 13, a. 13, p. 4–5.

⁵⁵ See «Ազգ», 21.09.2007.

⁵⁶ See A new victory for Roger Hairabedian, “Morocco News,” 2012, July 20.

⁵⁷ See <https://www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/ma>

According to Ghasabyan, in 2003 there were 25–30 Armenians in the Kingdom of Morocco⁵⁸ – there are not any details about them.

Today, the only Armenian-related **site in Morocco is the Rue d’Arménie (Street of Armenia)** in Casablanca.

Conclusion

As a conclusion we can note that the presence of the Armenians in Morocco was similar to those of other Western and Central countries of North Africa during their colonial period – occasional, non-significant and dispersed all around the country, although with continuous efforts of unifying and organizing national life. The Armenian presence in Morocco lasted mainly six decades (the 1910–1960s), and the number of Armenians never exceeded 400 people. As in all North African countries, the Armenians appeared in those countries as a result of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1922 and were mainly humble, hard-working traders and craftsmen, enjoying the sympathy and trust of the colonial authorities and local people. And likewise in the neighboring countries, **after Morocco’s independence declaration, the Armenians gradually left the country, moving to Europe and Americas.**

Because of small number it did not have the model of typical Armenian communities with its usual infrastructures (a school, a church, etc.), although it had a special Community Council and a branch of AGBU. They were connected to the Armenian church in France and commemorated the victims of the Armenian Genocide.

What is most appreciable about this small community is that its members, being self-sufficient, have always given a helping hand to compatriots in different countries – the fact that during five years the Moroccan Armenians voluntarily donated about 700 thousand francs to pan-Armenian events, deserves the highest estimation.

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⁵⁸ See **Ղասաբյան** 2003, 391.

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ԲԱԽԶԻՆՅԱՆ Ա.

Ամփոփում

Քանայի բաներ՝ հայեր, Մարոկկո, Հյուսիսային Աֆրիկա, Կասաբլանկա, հովվական այց, Սողոմոն Թեհլիրյան, Վահան Համբարձումյան:

Մարոկկոյում հայերի ներկայությունը հար և նման է Հյուսիսային Աֆրիկայի արևմտյան և կենտրոնական երկրների գաղութային շրջանում եղած գաղթօջախների պատմությանը՝ պատահաբար այդ շրջանում հայտնված և ամբողջ երկրով մեկ ցրված ընտանիքներ և անհատներ՝ միաժամանակ ազգային կյանքի համախմբման և կազմակերպման շարունակական ջանքերով:

Հայերի ներկայությունը Մարոկկոյում տևել է վեց տասնամյակից մի փոքր ավելի (1910–1960-ականներ), նրանց թիվը երբեք չի գերազանցել 400-ը: Ինչպես Հյուսիսային Աֆրիկայի բոլոր երկրներում, հայերը Մարոկկոյում հայտնվել են գլխավորապես 1915–1922 թվականներին Օսմանյան կայսրությունում Հայոց ցեղասպանության հետևանքով: Գաղթականների մեծամասնությունը բնակվել է Կասաբլանկայում, քիչ թվով նաև՝ Ֆես, Ռաբաթ և այլ բնակավայրերում: Մարոկկոյում անկախության հռչակումից հետո հայերն աստիճանաբար հեռացել են՝ տեղափոխվելով Եվրոպա և Ամերիկա:

Փոքրաթիվ լինելու պատճառով մարոկկահայ համայնքը չի ունեցել դպրոց և եկեղեցի, թեև գործել են հատուկ համայնքային խորհուրդ և ՀԲԸՄ մասնաճյուղ: Նրանք կապված են եղել մասնավորապես Ֆրանսիայի հայ եկեղեցու հետ:

Մարոկկաբնակ հայերի մեջ աչքի ընկնող անուններ են Կասաբլանկայի գրախանութի տեր Ավետիս Չաքրոյանը, Բ. Բերգամալին, որն իր միլիոնները կտակել է ՀԲԸՄ-ին, իրավաբան Վահան Համբարձումյանը, Մարոկկոյում ֆրանսիական Կարմիր խաչի ղեկավար կոմսուի Արաքսիա Պատրիմոնիոն (Էսմերյան): Որոշ ժամանակ այստեղ է բնակվել նաև Սողոմոն Թեհլիրյանը:

Այսօր Մարոկկոյում հայերի ներկայության միակ հետքը Կասաբլանկայի Հայաստան փողոցն է (rue d'Armenie):

ЧАСТИЦА НЕИЗВЕСТНОЙ ИСТОРИИ: АРМЯНЕ В МАРОККО

БАХЧИНЯН А.

Резюме

Ключевые слова: армяне, Марокко, Северная Африка, Касабланка, пастырский визит, Согомон Тейлирян, Ваан Амбарцумян.

Присутствие армян в Марокко напоминает историю армянских поселений в колониальном регионе западной и центральной части Северной Африки.

Армяне жили в Марокко на протяжении полувека (1910–1960-е годы), но их число никогда не превышало 400 человек. Как и во всех странах Северной Африки, армяне появились в Марокко в основном в результате геноцида, осуществленного в Османской империи в 1915–1922 годах. Большинство из них жили в портовом городе Касабланка, гораздо меньше армян обосновалось в Фесе, Рабате и других городах. После провозглашения независимости в Марокко армянское население постепенно стало покидать страну, переезжая в Европу и Америку.

В силу малочисленности армянская марокканская община не имела характерных для колоний инфраструктур (школы, церкви), однако здесь были основаны совет общины и филиал Армянского всеобщего благотворительного союза. Армянская община Марокко поддерживала отношения с армянской церковью во Франции.

Известными марокканскими армянами были владелец крупнейшего книжного магазина в Касабланке Аветис Чакирян, Б. Бергамали, завещавший свои миллионы Армянскому всеобщему благотворительному союзу, адвокат Ваан Амбарцумян, глава французского Красного креста в Марокко графиня Араксия Патримонио (Эсмерян), Согомон Тейлирян.

На сегодняшний день на присутствие армян в Марокко указывает улица Армении (rue d'Armenie) в Касабланке.