

FROM THE HISTORY OF THE KARS OBLAST' (1878-1918)

Melkonyan A. A.
Academician of NAS RA

Historically a part of the province of Ayrarat in Great Armenia, *gavar* of Vanand had been captured by the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century and was made a part of a large military-governorship known as the *eyalet* of Kars¹. During the 19th century, the Kars region - the historic *gavar* of Vanand-along with other Western Armenian districts, became an important factor in Russian foreign policy. When the Russian Empire expanded into the Caucasus, the conquest of Kars and the adjoining *pashalik* of Akhaltskh² (Akhaltsoikh) to the northeast became an immediate objective as a way to consolidate imperial power in the region. In the treaty concluding the Russian-Turkish war of 1828-29, Akhaltskha and neighboring Akhalkalak (in Javakhk) were ceded to the Russian Empire. Kars, on the other hand, although captured on June 23, 1828 (old style, Julian calendar)³, was ceded to the Ottoman Empire because of certain circumstances and over the objections of the Russian commander-in-chief, Count Ivan Paskevich. Russia captured Kars for the second time in 1855 during the Crimean War. That operation ensured the Russian victory on the Caucasus front, but this time Kars was ceded to the sultan in exchange for the withdrawal from the Crimea of the armed forces of the Ottoman Empire's British and French allies.

The question of annexing Kars and other districts in Western Armenia again arose in the next Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78. The Russian generals of Armenian origin, Mikhail Loris-Melikov, Hovhannes (Ivan) Lazarev, Arshak Ter-Ghukasov, Behbut Shelkovnikov, and Hakob Alkhazov, played a major role in the campaign. At the beginning of the war, the Russian forces commanded by General Loris-Melikov liberated Kaghzvan (Kaghisman) and Ardahan (Ardagan), which had long threatened the security of Akhaltskha and Akhalkalak. Initially Russian military administrations were set up in these garrison towns the area of Ardahan was divided into three military sub-districts known as *okrugs*; Ardahan, Childer, and Potskhov⁴. After capturing Bayazet (Kogovit) and Alashkert in the spring and registering a decisive victory at Dahar on June 9, 1877, the Russian forces besieged the strategic fortress-city of Kars, which soon surrendered to General Lazarev. The next year in February 1878, the Turkish army also surrendered the great fortress of Karin-Erzrum in the heart of Upper Armenia (Bardzr Hayk) without fight.

¹ See: Melkonyan A.A., *The Kars Oblast', 1878-1918, Establishment of Russian Rule*. – see in: *Armenian Kars and Ani*, Edited by R. G. Hovannisian, California, 2011, pp. 223-241.

² Historically a part of the province of Gugark of Great Armenia (Հակոբյան Թ.Խ., Մելիք-Բախշյան Ստ.Տ., Բարսեղյան Հ.Խ., Հայաստանի և հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան, Երևան, 1986, էջ 108).

³ Most dates in this chapter until 1918 are given according to the Julian calendar, which in the 19th century and early 20th century was in use in both the Russian and Ottoman empires and was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the West.

⁴ Российский государственный военно-исторический архив, ф. 485, д. 1250, л. 39, cited hereafter as РГВИА.

By provisions of the Russo-Turkish Treaty of San Stefano in February 1878, the districts of Bayazet, Alashkert (Vagharshakert), Kars, Ardahan, and Batum were ceded to the Russian Empire. Although Bayazet and Alashkert had to be ceded to the Ottoman Empire and the Russian army was required to withdraw from Karin-Erzurum as the result of the subsequent European-imposed Treaty of Berlin in July 1878, Kars (including Olti and Kaghzvan), Ardahan (including Artvin), and Batum were retained by Russia⁵. The said territories were of great importance also from the point of view of control of the trade routes from Europe and Russia to Persia and other Asian countries.

The formation of the administrative structure of the province of Kars (Russian: *oblast'*; Armenian: *marz*) began shortly after the outbreak of the war. A civil administration for the county (*okrug*) of Ardahan was first set up on May 20, 1877 and gradually began to replace the temporary military board. The Kars *oblast'* was formed with three *okrugs*, which increased to five after the victorious battle of Alaja on June 11, 1877 and the liberation from Ottoman rule of the fortress of Kars itself⁶. By statutes adopted on the latter date, a military governorship was established for the province of Kars as a whole. Aside from the governor general, there were to be county governors, staff officers, and other personnel who were to administer the area according to the military and civil regulations that were issued.

By the "Regulations for the Administration of the Kars Oblast'," dated December 27, 1878, the province was attached to the *Кавказский Военный Округ* (Caucasian Military District) and placed under the supreme military command of the Caucasus army for both military and administrative affairs⁷. In civil matters, the rights and duties of the military governor general as well as the county governors were to be fixed by the supreme commander-in-chief⁸. This meant that, despite the initial steps to introduce a civil governance system in the Oblast', the Russian Empire, as a military-autocratic system, preferred military governance, especially in newly-annexed territories. In fact, the provincial governor general was accorded only limited domestic administrative-economic powers.

Administratively, the Kars Oblast' was divided into the following units: the provincial center of Kars; the counties of Kars, Ardahan, Zarishat, Shoragial (Shuragial), Kaghisman (Kaghzvan), Olti, and Potskhov; and the two police districts or *pristavs* of Childer and Khorasan⁹. As it happened, Armenian historical traditional divisions were maintained in significant measure, forming the basis of the administrative boundaries, just as they had in the 16th century when the Ottoman rulers formed the Kars *eyalet*¹⁰. The

⁵ For the Russian-Turkish border according to the Treaty of Berlin, see: Русско-турецкая граница в Малой Азии по Берлинскому трактату 1878 года: Известия Кавказского Отдела Имперского Российского Географического Общества, т. 7:1, Тифлис, 1881, с. 148-53, cited hereafter as ИКО ИРГО.

⁶ Central State Archives of the Republic of Georgia, fund 558, file 13, p. 1. See also the Russian-language newspaper *Карс*, N 34, 1890.

⁷ Հայաստանի Հանրապետության պատմության կենտրոնական պետական արխիվ, ֆ. 49/113, ց. 1, գ. 186, թ. 7, cited hereafter as ՀՀ ՊԿՊԱ; А.М. Погосян, Карсская область в составе России, Ереван, 1983, с. 63.

⁸ *Карс*, N 38, 1890.

⁹ ՀՀ ՊԿՊԱ, ֆ. 49/113, ց. 1, գ. 186, թ. 8; *Карс*, N 38, 1890.

¹⁰ Հ.Մուրադյան, Կարսի մարզի վարչաժողովրդագրական նկարագիրը XIX դարի առաջին երեսունամյակին, Երևան, 2006, էջ 122.

Kars okrug conformed largely to the Vanand gavar of historic Great Armenia as well as the western part (the right bank of the Akhurian River) of Ashotsk and Shirak; the Ardahan okrug corresponded with the Gugark gavar; Kaghzvan, with Arsharunik-and Olti, with Vokaghe or Ukhtik in the region of Tayk¹¹.

The military governor general had two assistants: one for judicial affairs and the other for military affairs. Attached to the president of the court was a military inspectorate (*kontora*) and a special committee for military-civilian affairs. The administration of the provincial center at Kars itself was placed under officials of a police administration. The towns of Ardahan, Olti, and Kaghzvan were granted no self-government and remained directly dependent on Kars. The nomadic Kurds, who had been free of any administrative control under Turkish dominion, were now expected to submit to the respective okrug governors.

In 1881, a new administrative division was implemented, as several of the counties were enlarged and the province was consolidated into four okrugs: Kars, Ardahan, Kaghisman, and Olti.¹² The okrugs were divided into fourteen sub-districts (*участки*) with 148 village clusters. In January 1892, there were five towns in the Oblast': Kars, Kaghzvan, Ardahan, Olti, and Sarikamish, and 791 villages.¹³ The Kars okrug, which covered almost the entire Kars River basin, was the most important of the four because of the size of its population and its economic role. The Kaghzvan okrug, which extended along both sides of the Arax River in the region of historic Eraskhadzor and along the lower current of the Akhurian River, also had a strategic military-economic position. The Ardahan okrug occupied the northern part of the Oblast', while Olti in the sparsely-populated northwest was the smallest of the four counties.

Okrug	Uchastok	Administrative Center	Number of Villages,	Area in square versts
			1902	
I. Kars	I.Kars	Kars	51	
	2. Shoragial	Kizil-Chakhchakh	56	
	3. Zarishat	Grenaderskoe	58	
	4. Aghbaba	Amasia	36	
	5.Soghanlugh Soghanlung sSSogSoghanlugh	Sarikamish	56	
		Total	257	5,094

¹¹ For a somewhat detailed report on the Armenian settlements of the Kars region shortly after their annexation to the Russian Empire in 1878, see: Ա.Ադամյան, Մի տեղեկագիր Կարսի մարզի վերաբերյալ, - Բանբեր Հայաստանի արխիվների, 1970, N 2, էջ 90-123.

¹² ИКО ИРГО, т. 7:1, с. 175-176.

¹³ Кавказский календарь на 1894, Тифлис, с. 122.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, no further significant administrative reorganization occurred. There was a remarkable increase in the number of village communes because of the rapid growth of population and brisk economic activity. According to the official almanac,

Кавказский календарь (Caucasian Calendar), the composition for the year 1902 was as follows¹⁴:

2. Kaghisman	1. Kaghisman	Kaghisman	45	
	2. Nakhjevan	Tekor	63	
	3. Khorasan	Karakurt	34	
		Total	142	3,843
3. Ardahan	1. Ardahan	Ardahan	79	
	2. Giyole	Hokam	72	
	3. Childer	Zurzuna	44	
	4. Potskhov	Damaklie	61	
		Total	256	4,925
4. Olti	1. Olti	Olti	98	
	2. Tavusker	Olor	49	
		Total	147	2,621
		Grand total	802	16,483= 18,760 sq. km. = 7,243 sq. miles ¹⁵

Parallel with the administrative changes in the Kars Oblast' under Russian dominion, major ethnic changes also occurred. In the months following the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-29, 12,300 families or 74,000 people resettled from Western Armenia to Shirak and Talin in Russian territory. Of these families, 2,500 were from Kars and neighboring areas¹⁶. Most of the former Armenian settlements in the provinces of Karin-Erzrum and Kars were repopulated by Kurds, Karapapakhs, and other Muslim elements. The ethnic mosaic of this area became even more mixed, although Armenians still maintained a numerical superiority over any other single group.

The provisions of the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 that ceded to the Ottoman sultan the

¹⁴ Кавказский календарь на 1904, с. 43-44; А.М.Погосян, Карсская область, с.65-66.

¹⁵ The total area of the Kars oblast' was 16,869 square versts (19,200 sq. kilometers/7,412 sq. miles) according to Հայկական Սովետական Հանրագիտարան, հ. 5, Երևան, 1979, էջ 346:

¹⁶ Աշոտ Մելքոնյան, Էրզրում (պատմա-ժողովրդագրական ուսումնասիրություն), Երևան, 1994, էջ 144. Until the great resettlement, of the 850 families in the city of Kars, 600 were Armenian. See: Ա.Մելքոնյան, "Կարս", in: Հայկական Հարց. Հանրագիտարան, Երևան, 1996, էջ 178:

districts of Erzurum, Basen, Alashkert, and Bayazet prompted masses of Armenians to head for territory within the Russian Empire. According to archival records, approximately 2,000 families wanted to move¹⁷. This time, however, the Tsarist authorities did not encourage the immigration of the Western Armenians to Transcaucasia and the Kars Oblast', since they intended to populate the newly-acquired territories with Russian elements, namely Cossacks and religious sectarians. Thus, further emigration of the Armenians was prohibited. Russian military commanders of Armenian origin, such as General Lazarev, supported this policy and took strict measures to prevent Armenian emigration from the city and plain of Erzurum¹⁸. Despite these restrictions, a great number of Armenians managed to cross over the new Russian-Turkish frontier in the summer and autumn of 1878 and settle in the Kars Oblast'. At the same time, there was an influx of Armenians coming from the east - from other parts of Eastern Armenia and Transcaucasia.

As a result of the new Russian administrative system as well as the influx of Christian elements, there was significant Muslim emigration. According to Article 27 of the Russian-Turkish Treaty of San Stefano in February 1878, those inhabitants in territories being ceded to Russia were granted the right to sell their properties and emigrate within a period of three years¹⁹. In fact, a remarkable number of Muslims, having lost their former privileged status under Ottoman rule, left the Kars Oblast'²⁰. The Russian authorities, wary of the hostile attitude of the Muslim population, encouraged this movement. Even before the treaty, on January 28, 1878, the governor general required that the head of each emigrating family sign a written pledge never to return to the Oblast'.²¹ The authorities also did their best to hinder the sale of properties by the departing Muslims.

The stringent demographic policies of the Russian court contributed to the mass migration of some 65,000 Muslims from the Oblast' between August 26, 1878 and July 15, 1880. Of this number, 11,000 left the city of Kars and settled to the west of the new international boundary, especially in the former Armenian villages of the province (*vilayet*) of Erzurum²². The emigration of Turks, Kurds, and Turkmens continued thereafter and by August 1, 1881 reached nearly 83,000 persons²³.

Even after this large-scale migration which created demographic vacuums in several areas, the Russian authorities did not officially permit the resettlement of Armenians. Nonetheless, as seen from Russian military reports, numerous Western Armenians, fearful of Turkish vengeance, illegally crossed the border and settled in the Oblast'. The first of these were 350 families from Alashkert, followed by some 6,000 persons from

¹⁷ Մաշտոցի անվան Մատենադարան, Կաթողիկոսական դիվան, թղթ, 231, վավ. 116, թ. 3; ՀՀ ՊԿՊԱ, ֆ. 558, ց. 1, գ. 18, թ. 11-12:

¹⁸ Фирд (Թիֆլիս), N 1 (1879), էջ 162-81:

¹⁹ Кавказ (Тифлис), N 21 (1879). А.М.Погосян, Карсская область, с.121.

²⁰ А.М.Погосян, Карсская область, с.121.

²¹ ՀՀ ՊԿՊԱ, ֆ. 49/113, ց. 1, գ. 506, թ. 58-60.

²² А.Ф.Степанов, "Заметки о Карсской области", ИКО ИРГО, т. 7:1, с. 182.

²³ ՀՀ ՊԿՊԱ, ֆ. 49/113, ց. 1, գ. 506, թ. 63; А.М.Погосян, Карсская область, с.125.

Karin-Erzrum and Basen²⁴. Nikolai Shavrov has concluded that the tsarist preference of Russian over Armenian colonists was to consolidate the Russian presence in the strategic border region²⁵. Only in the early 1880s was semi-official permission granted for 4,000 to 6,000 Armenian families' to be settled on the abandoned lands²⁶. For example, the entire village of *Chiflik* in Akhalkalak (in Javakhk), which had been made into a Russian military garrison, moved and settled in the village of Mazra, near the city of Kars²⁷.

Population statistics for the Oblast' are often contradictory, and even some of the official sources seem unreliable. Even before the Kars Oblast was created in 1878, however, Armenians made up the largest single element, especially in the counties of Kars and Kaghzvan. After the area was made a part of the Russian Empire and witnessed an influx of Russians, Armenians, Greeks, Persians, Yezidis, Germans, Estonians, and others-in all about twenty ethnic groups the Armenians still constituted a plurality, as new Armenian settlers continued to cross the border from the Ottoman Empire. During the Hamidian massacres of 1894-96, between 30,000 and 50,000 fugitives escaped to Russian territory, with more than 20,000 of these settling in the Kars Oblast'.²⁸ By 1897, the number of Armenians in the province reached about 73,000, which was more than a quarter of the population, and this growth continued into the 20th century, when the Caucasian railway was extended to the city of Kars. The immigration of Western Armenians was the direct result of economic and political persecution by the sultan's regime, whereas the immigration of people from the Caucasus region was linked with Tsarist resettlement policies and land hunger of the peasantry²⁹.

After the Armenians, Turks made up the second ethnic group. There were many Turkified Armenians (whose forefathers had been forcibly Islamicized in the 16th and 17th centuries) throughout the Olti and Ardahan okrugs. In the most heavily-populated counties of the province, Kars and Kaghzvan, the Turks were far fewer in comparison with the Armenians. The figures of 73,000 Armenians and 44.0 Turks in the province according to the 1897 census had grown to 101.0 Armenians and 67,000 Turks in 1910.³⁰ According to another source, the number of Turks was 80,000 on the eve of World War I³¹.

The Kurds numbered just over 52,000 in 1910 and 60,000 in 1914. The Yezidis arrived in the Oblast' from Western Armenian districts starting in the early 1880s and settled mainly in the Nakhjevan district of the Kaghzvan okrug. According to data of 1893, there were 2,500 Yezidis in the Oblast'. The 53,000 Karapapakhs were concentrated in

²⁴ Փոլնը (Կոստանդնուպոլիս), N 1316, Jan. 27, 1878.

²⁵ Н.Шавров, Русские пути в Закавказье, Санкт-Петербург, 1883), с. 25.

²⁶ ՀՀ ՊԿՊԱ, ֆ. 113, ց. 1, գ. 506, թ. 73.

²⁷ Ibid., ֆ. 56, ց. 1, գ. 7615, թ. 4.

²⁸ РГВИА, ф. 12, сп. 13, д. 634, л. 39; Братская помощь пострадавшим в Турции армянам, 2-е изд., М., 1898, с. xix; Ա.Հակոբյան, Կարսի մարզ: Գյուղացիության պատմության ուրվագծեր: 1878-1917, Երևան, 2000, էջ 30.

²⁹ Հակոբյան Ա., Կարսի մարզ, էջ 26-32:

³⁰ А.М.Погосян, Карсская область, с.126; cf. Ա.Մելքոնյան, Կարսի մարզ, - Հայկական Հարց. Հանրագիտարան, էջ. 180.

³¹ ИКО ИРГО, т. 7:1, с. 175-76, 182.

the Aghbaba and Shoragial districts³². The Greeks, most of them Turkish-speakers and master craftsmen who had emigrated from the Trebizond (Trapezunt) vilayet and Tsalka after 1878, lived in the southwestern sector of the Oblast', their numbers reaching 40,000 in 1906 and almost 59,000 in 1914³³. The Turkmens, who numbered 16,000 in 1910, were Shiite Muslims and sworn enemies of the Sunni Turks and Kurds. Of the other elements in the Oblast', there were 466 Assyrians, 429 Ossetians, and smaller numbers of Lezgins, Gypsies, Estonians, and Germans. In the 1890s, German newcomers from Alexandrafeld in the Borchalu *uezd* (county) and Marinsfeld in the Signakh *uezd* of the Tiflis *guberniia* (province) founded the village of Petrovka, 5 kilometers west of Kars³⁴."

On January 1, 1892, the population of the county or *okrug* of Kars was 200,868, excluding the military and temporary residents. By religion, the picture was as follows: Apostolic Armenians, 43,246; Orthodox Russians, 29,434 (this figure may in fact include the Russian soldiers on duty there); Russian sectarians, 11,340; Sunni Muslims (Turks, Kurds, Karapapakhs, Lezgins, Cherkez, and others), 90,025³⁵; Shia Muslims, 12,790; Yezidis, 2,386; and the remainder, Catholics (mainly Armenians), Protestants, and other minor groups³⁶. The majority of the population was rural. In fact, only the town of Kars itself was urban, but by the beginning of the twentieth century there were also urban dwellers at Sarikamish and the county seats at Kaghisman, Ardahan, and Olti³⁷.

As the result of the Tsarist demographic policies, the number of Russian settlers, who were given the fertile black-soil areas of the Oblast', grew rapidly. By 1882, there were 7,957 Russian settlers in the province, of whom 7,448 were sectarians³⁸. In 1896, their number reached nearly 13,000 in twenty-six villages³⁹, and 18,000 in 1910. Most were sectarian Molokans (thirteen villages) and Dukhabors (six villages) who had moved to the Caucasus from the Saratov, Tambov, and Ekaterinoslav gubernias during the 1830s and 1840s. In addition, there was a small number of Seventh Day Adventists. The Russian Orthodox lived in the city of Kars and in the villages of Mikhailovka, Orgav, Khorosh, and Grenaderskoe⁴⁰.

At the beginning of 1910, the total population of the Kars Oblast', including 23,000 soldiers, was 372,672. In 1913, the number, not including the armed forces, was 382,745, of whom 112,469 (30 percent) were Armenian, the figure increasing slightly to 114,938 in 1914. The average density of the population was 24.8 people per square verst (1 square

³² Хелмицкий П.Л. , Карсская область: Военно-статистический и географический обзор, Тифлис, ч. 1, 1892, с. 28.

³³ Погосян А.М., Карсская область, с.126; Ա.Հակոբյան, Կարսի մարզ, էջ 28.

³⁴ Кавказский календарь на 1894, с. 121-122.

³⁵ The total for the Sunni Muslims is underestimated.

³⁶ Ibid., с. 121.

³⁷ In 1882, only 729 families were residing in the town of Kars, 634 in Kaghzvan, 134 in Ardahan, and 87 in Olti. See Kars, no. 7 (1883).

³⁸ Сборник материалов для описания местностей и племен Кавказа, N 3, Тифлис, 1883, с. 342.

³⁹ Հակոբյան Ա., Կարսի մարզ, էջ 29:

⁴⁰ Карс, 1891, N 291; Погосян А.М., Карсская область, с.122.

verst = 1.138 square kilometers/.44 square miles): 34.7 in the Kars okrug; 21 in Kaghzvan; 19.1 in Ardahan; and 15.3 in Olti⁴¹.

"Temporary residents" made up a large segment of the population. Coming from different places, they settled in the villages deserted by the Muslims. In 1886, because of the near exhaustion of the land-fund, the allocation of land was terminated, with exceptions made for Russian settlers. Hence, as a rule, most such temporary residents, primarily Western Armenian refugees or sojourners in search of a job, were left out of official statistics. This means that the above-cited figures are incomplete as the temporary Armenian residents are not included. After the Hamidian massacres of the 1890s, the number of temporary residents grew rapidly. In 1897, there were 22,619 such persons; in 1900, 32 705; and in 1915, 55,814⁴². In 1901, for example, there were 1,340 such temporary resident families in the city of Kars alone. Most of the refugees were unable to find a permanent home because of tsarist policies. A petition in the archives of the Armenian Catholicosate, addressed to the Viceroy (*Наместник*) for the Caucasus in Tiflis, relates the harrowing experiences of the refugees who had escaped the massacres. The petition complained that the hope of the newcomers to settle in the abandoned Muslim villages had been dashed, as they "are still not allowed by the government to live there"⁴³.

In his memoirs, Ruben Ter-Minasian, who was well aware of the situation in Kars, wrote that the land was distributed among immigrating Russians, Molokans, Greeks, Ossetians, Circassians (Cherkez), and others, while Armenians, having fled from Western Armenia in 1894-96, were left without land and were regarded by Russian authorities as an undesirable element. They eked out a bare existence in Basen, Takht, and Kars, thanks only to the assistance of the local Armenians⁴⁴. Such discrimination became all the more pronounced in the late 19th century and early 20th century under the Governor General of the Caucasus (formerly called Viceroy) Prince Grigorii Golitsyn, who even attempted to force the refugees to return to their former homes in Western Armenia where massacres ravaged.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Developments

Despite the prejudicial Russian policies, Russian rule on the whole had a positive effect on the province and its Armenian population. During forty years of Russian dominion, the Oblast' regained much of its Armenian ethnic character and experienced marked economic advances. Since the late 19th century, there have been extensive statistical data, analytical materials, and studies by Russian, Armenian, and Georgian scholars on the economic life of the Kars Oblast'. In the Soviet period, the most thorough

⁴¹ Кавказский календарь на 1915, с. 236-37: Ա.Հակոբյան, Կարսի մարզ, էջ 25:

⁴² Հակոբյան Ա., Կարսի մարզ, էջ 31-32:

⁴³ Մաշտոցի անվան Մատենադարան, Կաթողիկոսական դիվան, թղթ, 231, վավ.116, թ. 6ա. See also Հակոբյան Ա., Կարսի մարզ, էջ. 30-31.

⁴⁴ Ռուբեն [Տեր-Մինասյան], Հայ հեղափոխական հիշատակները, հ. 1, Լոս-Անջելես, 1952, Թեհրան, 1982, էջ 47:

study of the province was prepared by Artashes Poghosyan, and, in the post- Soviet period, by Ararat Hakobyan⁴⁵. Only a brief sketch, therefore, is included here⁴⁶.

Both in the past and during the period of Russian rule, the Kars Oblast' retained its agrarian character, especially with the cultivation of various kinds of grain. Because of low productivity, however, only 100,000 of the available 400,0 dessiatins (1 dessiatin = 10,900 square meters/2.7 acres) were sown, and the wheat, barley, and other grains failed to meet even local needs. There was nonetheless a positive shift as time went on. In 1885, 272,000 poods (1 pood = 16.4 kilograms/36.1 pounds) of wheat and 267,000 of barley were harvested, whereas in 1891, these figures had increased to 1.8 million poods of wheat and 1.4 million poods of barley⁴⁷. Nearly half of the land under cultivation lay within the Kars okrug. There was also some increase in the province of vegetable gardens, vineyards, beekeeping for honey, and wineries (Olti and Kaghzvan).

Trade remained largely in the hands of businessmen from Akhalkalak and Alexandropol (properly, Alexandrapol). Only after 1899, when the Tiflis-Alexandropol-Kars railway opened was there a significant development of local trade and agriculture-related factory production of cheese, preserves and foodstuffs, beer, and pottery. Salt processing took place in Nakhjevan, Olti, and especially Koghbi, where the Janpoladian family introduced British mining machinery and was able to raise production to 546,000 poods in 1904 and 651,000 poods in 1910⁴⁸.

During the period of Russian rule, there were notable advances in the spheres of health services and cultural life. Thanks to the wholesome climate, particularly in the Kars okrug, disease and death indicators were placed at 2 percent of the population, far below the average for the Russian Empire. That indicator was also conditioned by the relatively advanced medical system. In 1885, there were thirty-four doctors in the province, ten of them in the city of Kars, as well as two medical clinics. Although these numbers were insufficient to meet the needs of the entire population, this was considered quite satisfactory for the times⁴⁹.

Progress was also registered in the educational system, which had been neglected under Turkish rule when illiteracy prevailed in the region, with only one municipal school and a few parochial schools. Now, new schools were opened, starting in November 1880 with a two-year boys' school in Kars, to which was added a third grade in 1883 and, taken together with the preparatory grades, offered a full seven-year Russian curriculum. The school, for which a two-storey building (with a library) was constructed, enrolled about 200 students. In 1887, a girls' school, too, opened with some 270 pupils. Since these schools were under the auspices of the state, instruction was in the Russian language

⁴⁵ See Погосян А.М., Карсская область в составе России and Ա.Հաղորդան, Շարիֆ մարզ.

⁴⁶ See: Melkonyan A.A., op. cit., pp. 223-241.

⁴⁷ Кавказский календарь 1891, с. 229, и на 1894, с. 123.

⁴⁸ Балякин О.С., Из истории формирования рабочего класса на строительстве дорог в Восточной Армении, "Լրագիր հաս. գիտ.", 1975, N 3, с. 89.

⁴⁹ Кавказский календарь на 1891, с. 235.

even though most of the students were Armenian. At the turn of the 20th century, however, a growing number of Armenian parents transferred their children from Russian to Armenian schools, especially as a reaction and resistance to the Tsarist attempt to confiscate the properties of the Armenian Apostolic Church. In each of the county centers, Kaghzvan, Ardahan, and Olti, two-year normal schools were opened, but none with more than 75 pupils. Most of the children continued to attend their village parochial schools, wherever these existed, even though the quality of education was quite low⁵⁰.

After the Russian annexation of the Kars Oblast', a separate diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church was established there, but the request of the Holy See at Echmiadzin to make the medieval Armenian Church of the Holy Apostles the diocesan headquarters was denied; instead, the sanctuary was reconsecrated and used as a Russian Orthodox church. As a result, first the cathedral of Ani and then the monastery of Horomos was made the ecclesiastical center of the diocese, but the Armenian clergymen faced serious difficulties because of the semi-ruined condition of both churches.

In the realm of cultural developments, the publication of the Russian-language newspaper *Kars* was welcomed, inasmuch it made it possible for Armenian intellectuals to contribute articles of local and national interest. Especially significant was the initiation in 1892 of archeological excavation of the medieval Armenian capital city of Ani. The first stage, 1892-93, was followed by the expeditions led by Nikolai Man' from 1904 to 1917. The renowned Armenologists Toros Toromanian and Hovsep Orbeli were Marr's steady companions. At various times Marr also worked with Nikoghayos (Nicolas) Adontz, Nikoghayos Buniatian, Ashkharhbek Kalantar, Grigor Ghapantsian, David Kipshidze, Nikolai Tokarskii, and photographer Artashes Vruyr. Much of the collected information was published in annual reports titled *Anvo shark* (Ani Series) and *Անւոյ հնութիւններ* (Ani's Antiquities). The expeditions, which continued until World War I, made possible detailed studies of the Cathedral of Ani and the churches of Gagkashen, Tigran Honents, Abughamrents, Surb Prkich (Savior), Surb Arakelots (Apostles), Hovivi (Shepherd) as well as the Baron's palace, monastery of the Holy Virgins, citadel, streets, baths, and other buildings of the expansive Bagratuni capital.

In parallel expeditions, other architectural and archeological monuments on the right bank of the Akhurian River were also explored. Toros Toromanian studied the churches in the erstwhile capital of Bagaran (Surb Gevorg and Surb Tadevos/Thaddeus), Banair, Mren, and Horomos. The results of these investigations were later systematically published by Toromanian⁵¹.

⁵⁰ Кавказский календарь на 1891, с. 235; А.М.Погосян, Карсская область, с. 132-33. Cf. Հայկական Սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 5, էջ 343-44:

⁵¹ Թորոս Թորոմանյան, Աշխատությունների ժողովածու, 2 հատոր, Երևան, 1942-1948, տես՝ Նյութեր հայկական ճարտարապետության պատմության:

The Armenian Revolutionary-Liberation Movement

In the late-nineteenth century, civic-political life also revived in Kars as newly-organized Armenian political parties began to operate in the region. The Kars Oblast', with a border of some 300 kilometers (185 miles) facing Western Armenia, on the one hand, and with the Transcaucasian provinces of Erevan, Tiflis, and Batum, on the other hand, offered a favorable position to support the revolutionary-liberation movement of the oppressed Ottoman Armenian population. It was a unique area, being both Western and Eastern Armenian from the point of view of both its geographic location and the composition of its inhabitants. It was not mere coincidence that the Armenian political parties made Kars a primary staging ground for their revolutionary activities. Here in the 1880s and 1890s, the *noted fedayi* leaders Huno and Kametsi Arshak (Arshak Gavafian, later known as Keri) concentrated their bands. Huno's group operated in Tayk, crossing the frontier to engage the enemy in Tortum and Kiskim and then moving back into Olti, Artvin, Batum, and elsewhere to gather new recruits and return for new engagements in the *Erkir* (Homeland)⁵².

The Armenian liberation movement gained renewed impetus with the Sargis Kukunian's expedition in September, 1890, when about 100 partisans from the Caucasus crossed the Russian-Turkish frontier over Kars and engaged in battle with Turkish-Kurdish armed units. On their return, they were surrounded and disarmed by Russian border units. Despite this outcome, the episode electrified the inhabitants of Kars. The Armenian revolutionary leader Ruben Ter-Minasian has written: "The people of Kars were eager to see 'the Armenian army'. They saw it and touched it. And although the 'army' was arrested and exiled, the people loved what they had seen and wished for more improved and perfect military forces, and this is what they received"⁵³.

In 1893, another detachment headed by Arabo arrived in Kars. Here, it was armed and reinforced before crossing the Turkish border. The sixteen men of the unit, fighting against heavy odds, fell in the valey of Kale-Arash. The next year, the link between Kars and the *Erkir* was strengthened through Aghbiur Serob (Serob Vardanian) and Sebu of Baberd (Bayburt), who had settled in Kars. The Hnchakian Party was the first to organize at Kars. In the early 1890s, noted Hnchakian revolutionaries Jirayr and Murad (Metsn Murad-Hampardzum Boyajian), having arrived from Cilicia, invigorated the local Hnchakian organization, which collaborated rather closely with groups of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF; Dashnaksutun). At about the same time, Rostom (Stepan Zorian) organized ARF party organs in Kars, where he was supported by fedayi leaders Turbakh (Harutyun Kirakosian) and Peto (Alexander Petrosian) and others.

In the summer of 1894, during the Armenian defense of Sasun, Hrayr (Armenak Ghazarian) sent fifty of his men to Kars where the local ARF committee armed and reinforced them with new recruits and dispatched them to Sasun. National passions were

⁵² Ռուբեն, Հայ հեղափոխականի մի հիշատակարանը, էջ 112:

⁵³ Ibid., p.115.

again inflamed in Kars in the mid-1890s when thousands of Western Armenian fugitives from the Hamidian massacres sought refuge in the Armenian settlements of the province. After Turkish suppression of the defenders of Sasun, Hrayr moved to Kars in 1896 and was active there in assisting the Western Armenian fedayi groups and organizing a special central committee.⁵⁴ At the beginning of the twentieth century, other noted figures joined this committee, such as Sergei (Aram Manukian) and Hakob Chilingarian. In 1903, on the recommendation of ARF leaders Hovsep Ter-Davtian and Hamo Ohanjanian, the young activist Ruben Ter-Minasian was also sent to Kars. Later, Ruben would proudly recall that "having been given a ticket, I was first sent to Kars to become acquainted with the atmosphere there. I did that and realized that the mother of all Armenians is Kars. And if you ask me whose son I am, I won't be mistaken if I tell you that I am the son of Kars, even though I was not born here"⁵⁵. Ruben eloquently describes the role of Kars in the Western Armenian liberation struggle: "The province of Kars was a place in the revolutionary forge in which Dashnaktsakans could either be strengthened and polished or else, not enduring the extreme ideological and Spartan-type life, leave the revolutionary arena.... Kars with all its villages was full of the revolutionary spirit." Many other personalities were steeled as revolutionaries in the Kars "forge." Aram Manukian, "that man with the ailing eyes and stem face was Sergey of Kars, who later became Aram of Van [in 1915] and dictator Aram of Erevan [in 1918]"⁵⁶.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, Kars became a center for small bands transporting weapons across the border through the Olti or the Karaorgan-Basen route. After the notorious imperial decree on the confiscation of Armenian Church properties in June 1903, the backlash against Russian colonialism served as another stimulus for heightened political activity. The Dashnaktsutun strengthened and operate with cells in various areas of the Oblast'. As in other underground organizations, members of one cell did not know those of others. Subcommittees organized lectures on national issues and raised money to buy and send arms to the *Erkir*. Compared with other Armenian regions of the Caucasus, the Kars Oblast' was not so densely populated, yet thanks to the commitment of the people, the local ARF organization had 40,000 rubles in financial resources, with 80 percent of that sum being spent to purchase and transport arms across the border.⁵⁷

In 1903, the work of the rural Armenian bodies in Kars became highly organized. In most villages, three-member subcommittees were created for the purposes of acquiring ammunition, supporting refugees, furthering Armenian educational work, and so on. From the village subcommittees, a county committee was elected, which supervised activities in the rural areas and was answerable to the provincial central committee at Kars.

In the early 20th century, Kars remained connected with Western Armenia,

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 129-30.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.124.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.40, 42.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.52-53, 82.

especially in outfitting fedayi groups going to the defense of Sasun. In 1903-04, the well-known commander Torgom (Tuman Tumian) organized two expeditions. The first of these, *Mrrik* (Tempest) of thirty horsemen, was able to reach Sasun to assist in its defense, but the second was surrounded near Olti and crushed. Later, the Kars committee was given the duty to arm and dispatch to the *Erkir* a 150-man detachment of Khan (Barsegh Tirakian) and Nevruz (Onik Nevruz). In September 1913, the group crossed the Russian-Turkish frontier in the southwestern sector of the province and advanced 20 kilometers (12 miles) toward the villages of Deli Baba, Gomadzor, and Yuzveran where it encountered the regular Turkish army. In an unequal battle, most of the Armenian fighters were killed. The revolutionary forces of Kars also participated in the battle of Mosun-Korun and helped to organize expeditions of Ashot Erkat (Armenak Levonian), Kaitsak Vagharshak (Vagharshak Baghdasarian), and others.

During the years of the first Russian Revolution of 1905-07, when the Tsarist authorities incited bloody Armenian-Tatar conflicts in numerous Transcaucasian towns and villages, thanks to the sober actions of the local Armenian political leadership it became possible to avoid bloodshed in the Kars Oblast'. In this matter, a significant role was played by the Social Democratic organization, which had strong influence among the Russian armed forces. The Kars Armenians were active participants in the social movements of the time, especially in demonstrating against the Tsarist seizure of Armenian Church properties.

After the second Sasun uprising in 1904 and the Young Turk revolution in 1908, when some civil rights were initially extended to the population, the revolutionary /liberation movement weakened in Western Armenia. This was reflected in Kars as well. In the lead-up to World War I, however, the Kars Oblast' again became the focal point of a heated military-diplomatic contest. Turkish intelligence operations in the province increased after 1910, and it is evident from numerous archival documents that the Muslim population, especially the Turkic element in Aghbaba, was under orders from the Ottoman government to develop a system of espionage and disruptive actions as diversionary measures against Russia and in support of the Turkish war effort⁵⁸.

In November, 1914, when hostilities erupted between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, the Kars Oblast' became an immediate battlefield. The indecision and delays of the Russian military headquarters allowed the Turkish army to advance into the western regions of the province and massacre the local Armenian population. Only because of the Russian counterattack in the direction of Sarikamish on December 9/22 was the advance of the Third Ottoman Army under the command of Minister of War Enver Pasha halted. Keri's Fourth Armenian Volunteer Battalion actively participated in the bloody conflict that lasted until January 4/17, 1915 and cost the Turkish army 78,000 casualties out of 90,000 men. This decisive battle turned the tide on the Caucasus front entirely in favor of the Russians. Thereafter, the Kars region served as a staging ground for the Russian army's

⁵⁸ Institute of History, Armenian National Academy of Sciences, Personal Fund of Leo, fund 1, file 206, pp. 1-26.

Alashkert operation in 1915 and the Erzurum campaign in 1916.

In 1915, during the Armenian Genocide a great number of refugees from Karin-Erzrum and other Western Armenian areas sought haven in the Kars Oblast'. In early 1918, in the aftermath of the Russian revolutions of 1917 and the Russian army's disorderly abandonment of the Caucasus front. By the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 3, 1918 (Gregorian calendar), between Soviet Russia and Germany and its allies, Russia ceded all of Western Armenia as well as the entire provinces of Kars and Batum to the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, the Turkish armies attacked and captured all of the Western Armenian districts and in April occupied Kars Oblast'. But a few months later, on October 30, the Turks surrendered to the Allied Powers and by terms of the armistice were compelled to withdraw from Kars in early 1919.

The province was now rejoined with the Republic of Armenia and remained under Armenian jurisdiction until the Turkish aggression in the fall of 1920.