

SEDA OHANIAN

PhD in History

Institute of History NAS RA

dajad.seta@gmail.com

**THE PASSAGE OF VAN-VASPOURAKAN REFUGEES'
THROUGH PERSIA, MARCH – AUGUST 1918
(UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF KOSTI HAMBARDZOUMIAN AND
LEVON SHAGHOYAN)**

Key words: *Van-Vaspourakan, Levon Shaghoyan, Kosti Hambardzoumian, Retreat, Aterpatakan, Persia, Mesopotamia*

During and after the first World War, Armenians in general, Western Armenians in particular were subjected to the most brutal and inhuman persecutions. The Young Turks planned and successfully executed the deportation and mass killings of Western Armenians, driving them out of their homes in intolerable conditions where they had lived for thousands of years. The aim was clear: to exterminate the Armenian race. “... *Abdul Hamid had attempted to hold his empire together in the simplest manner that he knew, and one that his predecessors had frequently employed. The Young Turks, by contrast, were imbued with a race consciousness which was essentially of the 20th century in its ferocity, and in the fact that it excluded all other considerations. It is this that makes the use of the word ‘genocide’ perfectly applicable in the second case, even though this word was not invented until 1944*”¹.

Although the mass killings and deportations were vast and extensive, in some parts of the country the indigenous inhabitants were partly exempt from those horrible actions which was only due to their organized self-defence operations. These heroic deeds took place in various parts of Cilicia and Western Armenia, including the self-defence operations in Van-Vaspourakan province. The latter was carried out successfully under the leadership of the legendary figure Aram Manoukian.

¹ **Walker, Ch.J.**, *Armenia the Survival of a Nation*, The Garden City Press, Letchworth, Hertfordshire SG6 1JS, England 1980, pp. 236–237.

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In addition to the events which were taking place in the city centers of Van and Aygestan, some other parts of Vaspourakan were able to stand their ground and did not surrender to the Turks. Of those places *Pesandash*² stands out for its heroic battles, and as a result, more than 6000 Armenians were saved from imminent slaughter and looting, owing mainly to the bravery and self-devotion of the commander Levon Shaghoyan and his compatriots.

Being born at a lakeshore village of Kharakantz in Hayotz Dzor in 1887, Shaghoyan in his childhood was fascinated by the turbulent waves of Lake Van, watching the shores of Aghtamar island and the historical centuries-old mystical Surp Khach monastery. Levon Shaghoyan enrolled in the school on the island but dropped out in the fifth grade. This was due to a conflict between two groups within the teaching staff, each having its own collotype paper. The students, opposing the above two groups issued their own paper named “*battle*” attacking both groups, which made the matters worse, and the peaceful atmosphere of the school was shattered. Therefore, the fifth class was closed down, the students were released and sent home. Shaghoyan was one of those students³. Thus, from early age Shaghoyan proclaimed strife against injustice which he maintained throughout his whole life.

In Van the self-defence operations started on April 7, 1915 and continued up until May 4, 1915 during which, the Armenians faced thousands of Turkish regular army divisions and various Kurdish mobs. On May 5, the Armenian volunteer corps together with the Russian army entered Van. Aram Manoukian was appointed governor of Van district. However, freedom lasted very briefly, 70 days only. The Russian army had to retreat and thousands of Armenian population followed them to the Caucasus into Eastern Armenia, encountering all kinds of hardships and sustaining thousands of casualties on that perilous road before reaching comparatively peaceful temporary dwellings.

² Ա.Ղօ, «Մեծ դեպքերը Վասպուրականում», 1914–1915. – Pesandasht is a beautiful basin surrounded by four mountains, namely Artos, Karbakhlar, Dzmen and Baradotik. This basin-plain has four villages – Aregh, Kainamiran, Shidran and Kaghaziz. Although Pesandasht administratively is part of Shatakh region, it was under the jurisdiction of Rshtunik (Gavash) during the self-defence activities of this region, as it was bordering on it. Levon Shaghoyan, was the leader, heart and soul of the battle which took place in 1915 at Pesandhasht.

³ Վասպուրական, Վան-Վասպուրականի Ապրիլեան հերոսամարտի տասնեփնդամեակին առթիւ, 1915–1930, Վենետիկ, 1930, էջ 73–74:

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After a short while, however, the Russian army reoccupied almost all parts of Western Armenia, which gave a chance to some of the Armenians, who had fled their homeland and found refuge in the Caucasus, to come back and start the rebuilding operations of their destroyed villages and cities.

In the meantime, the waves of the Russian 1917 February revolution reached the remote parts of the empire⁴. In Van a temporary Armenian government was founded on March 27, which was called Qaghaqapetaran – Municipality. At the beginning of May of the same year a regional Administrative Body of eight persons was formed in which Levon Shaghoyan was an active member; he was appointed governor of Gyavash (the historical Rshtunik). A Commissariat was formed adherent to the Administrative Body, which after the Yerzenka Truce of December 5, 1917, took charge of all civil and military operations in Van-Vaspourakan.

On January 6, 1918 Van-Vaspourakan was declared a free and independent *Hayrenik*. Consequently, on January 18, the second government of Vaspourakan was formed under the name “The Council of Popular Commissars” headed by the most beloved national hero Kosti Hambarzoumian⁵.

⁴ The dual Russian revolutions and the onset of the Russian Civil War in 1917 were accompanied by the collapse of the Russian armies in the Caucasian front. As the Russian divisions abandoned their positions in the occupied eastern Ottoman provinces the horrifying specter loomed over the Armenians of having to flee those territories once again and having to face a Turkish {Ottoman} offensive that would also threaten the very existence of the Eastern Armenian population...By early April 1918, (After the last retreat of Van-Vaspourakan population – S.O.) all of the Western Armenian areas occupied by the Russians during the war had been retaken by the Turkish army. (**Hovhannisian R.G.**, “The Contest for Kars, 1914–1921”, in Mr. Hovhannisian’s ed., *Armenian Kars and Ani*, Mazda Publishers: Costa Mesa, California 2011, pp. 274–275).

⁵ Kosti Hambarzoumian was born in Shushi – Artsakh in 1882, an active member of the Armenian Revolution Federation. He was educated first in his native birthplace. At the end of 19th century and early 20th century he was in the United States of America and Persia. He was appointed as educational director in 1908, in Kapan. Hambarzoumian was actively engaged in the transit of weapons through Persia to Armenia. In 1909, he was arrested and jailed in Tbilisi and afterwards was exiled to Kharkov. In Belgium he acquired high education in agriculture. He participated in the voluntary corps of Ararat detachment and was active in the military operations regarding the liberation of Van. In 1917, when the Russian forces left the Western Provinces of Armenia, Hambarzoumian became the governor of Van district until the final retreat of Vaspourakan people, which was led by him and another dedicated active member of the ARF, namely Levon Shaghoyan.

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The influence of the Armenian second government on the ground extended and included in its borders the city of Van with its suburbs and the nearby districts, namely Van Tosp, Hayotz Dzor, Aghbak, Ardjak, Saray, Timar, Berkri, Arjesh-Aljavaz and Khosab, and those were administered by the regional authorities⁶.

At the beginning of 1918, the population of Van's Commissariat estimated 25–27 thousand, who were living in the abovementioned cities and/or villages. More heavily populated were Van-Tosp and Timar regions⁷.

The seemingly peaceful situation however, did not last long. The Russian army had retreated again and abandoned the Caucasian front. Therefore, the protection and defence of the country lay solely on the shoulders of the newly formed government.

At this time, Vaspourakan had two main perilous fronts. One was in the north, namely Arjesh, Aljavaz-Akhlat-Manazkert route and in the south from Hayotz Dzor up to Vostan heights. The western border was relatively safe as Lake Van shielded it from the enemy approaching on that side. The eastern border was open towards Persian Atrpatakan.

The military commissar Grigor Bulgharatzı entrusted the protection and defence of the southern front to his two assistants, namely Levon Shaghoyan and colonel Dikran Baghdasarian, and the northern front, namely Arjesh-Arnis to Misha Gasparian who was one of the army's 5th regiment officers. Recruitment notice was announced which resulted in the formation of two regiments comprising 2000 fighters of which 200 were cavalry. One regiment was sent to Vostan front, 800 fighters to Arnis and 200 fighters to guard Berkri-Saval route (the road to Igdir)⁸.

In March, 1918 the Turkish army launched its offensive on two fronts simultaneously, namely Arnis and Vostan. Arnis was in danger. Fierce fighting was going on, where commander Misha was severely wounded and abandoned the

⁶ **Հարությունյան Ա.**, Վասպուրականի նահանգային ինքնավար կոմիսարության (Երկրորդ կառավարության) գործունեությունը («Պատմաբանասիրական հանդես», 2012, № 3, էջ 43):

⁷ Ibid, p. 45.

⁸ **Հացագործյան Ա.**, Ազատագրված Վասպուրականի կարճատև ինքնավարությունները Առաջին համաշխարհային պատերազմին – Ականատեսի հուշեր («Բանբեր Հայաստանի արխիվների», 1969, № 1, էջ 218):

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battleground. Kosti Hambardzoumian tried to help out by firing at the enemy posts from the ships on Lake Van. But unfortunately the storm and high waves prevented Hambardzoumian to do so. Therefore, the division stationed at Arnis had no alternative but to retreat to Berkri.

At this time Vostan front was still resisting. Here the Armenian 5th regiment officers Dikran Jamharian, Gasparian and Levon Shaghoyan together with their devoted fighters were still heroically holding on. But Shaghoyan was wounded and taken to Van and afterwards to Janik⁹.

All this time, Vaspourakan authorities were hoping to get help from Yerevan, where a Western Armenian division was being formed comprising 2500 fighters, under the command of colonel Dikran Baghdasarian¹⁰. However, at this time the political situation in the Caucasus was getting dangerously complicated which was why the authorities there could not send any recruitment to help their fellow Armenians in Van. With spring approaching, the fear of getting cut off from the rest of the world was even closer.

It is noteworthy that although there was a sizeable Armenian defence effort for several weeks, the sheer strength of the Turkish forces, shortage of food and ammunition eventually compelled the Armenians of Vaspourakan to retreat and abandon their fatherland.

On March 21, the entire population of Van and the surrounding cities and villages reluctantly started their final exodus which resulted in the de-armenization of Van-Vaspourakan once and for all¹¹.

The intention of the retreating masses and their leadership was to head for Eastern Armenia through Berkri Gorge, similar to the preceding groups, that could successfully cross it. This gorge had rightfully acquired the name “*death gorge*”, for this had become the cemetery of thousands of Armenians during the first infamous retreat of July 1915.

After leaving the village Janik¹², a rumour regarding the above Gorge being taken over by the Turkish army perplexed the retreating remnants of

⁹ Idib, p. 220.

¹⁰ «Աշխատանք», Երևան, 1917, 20 դեկտեմբերի:

¹¹ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 1267, ց. 2, գ. 96, թ. 4:

¹² Janik is a village in Timar district.

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Vaspourakan population and their leadership¹³. In fact however, the gorge was still under the control of the Armenian forces led by brigade master Aslan (khmbapet Aslan), who was watching over the gorge to ascertain that the Armenians would cross it safely. Aslan and his compatriots were sent by the Armenian leadership in Yerevan to carry out the task. But after waiting for three days, there was no sight of Vaspourakan people and as there was always the risk of the advancing Turkish forces, that could encircle them at any moment, they abandoned the supervision of the gorge which after a very short time was taken over by the Turks¹⁴.

There were two views regarding the situation: one group insisted that the soldiers continue their way regardless of the impossibility of passing the Berkri Gorge and rather use the mountainous route. The second opinion was that of the military leader Levon Shaghoyan (Levon Pasha) and Kosti Hambardzoumian, who advocated to change the route and to go to Persia through Sara, Khoy and from there to Yerevan. The second opinion prevailed¹⁵.

The refugees, led by Kosti Hambardzoumian and Levon Shaghoyan headed for Sara, Kotol (Kotur) and afterwards to Salmas, Persia¹⁶. After they had entered Persia, the aim as mentioned above, was to cross Khoy, enter the Caucasus and reach Yerevan¹⁷.

The journey however, was not an easy one. At a place called Sherbek near Kotur, the retreating people were attacked by the Kurdish chieftain Simko¹⁸

¹³ The number of people who were compelled to leave Van in March, 1918 was 26183 persons as per the statistics prepared by Mesopotamia Refugee Committee dated April. 1919 at Baquba Refugee camp. However, more than 10 thousand were killed, lost and/or died of epidemics. (**Օհանեան Ս.**, Իրաքի հայ համայնքը 20-րդ դարուն, Ե., 2016, էջ 35–37).

¹⁴ Վան-Վասպուրականի ազգաբնակչության վերջին՝ 1918 թ. մարտյան զաղթը և Վանի նահանգի դատարկումը («Բանբեր Հայաստանի արխիվների», 2014, № 122, էջ 384).

¹⁵ **Ազիզեան Մ.**, Յուշապատում, Գլենդել, 1982, էջ 56–57:

¹⁶ From Kotur, Kosti Hambardzoumian wrote to the governor of Khoy, requesting permission to enter their jurisdiction in order to pass to the Caucasus. However, after waiting for two days, no reply came from the officials in Khoy so the Armenians headed for Salmas where 3000 Armenians and Assyrians joined them. (**Ա-Ղօ**, Իմ յիշողութիւնները, Ե., 2015, էջ 333):

¹⁷ The map on the last page of this paper shows the route, which the Armenians of Vaspourakan together with the Assyrians were compelled to take starting from their homeland in Western Armenia until they reached Baquba refugee camp in Iraq.

¹⁸ Simko (Smko) was the brother of Ja'afar agha who was killed by the Turkish forces on the Perisan-Turkish border. Ja'afar had terrorized the villagers and the inhabitants of the abovementioned regions on the said border.

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during which a number of civilians and fighters were killed. At the entrance of Kotur gorge, Levon Shaghoyan, who was wounded in Vostan self-defence operations and was still suffering from his wounds displayed great courage and carried out an outstanding, daring and fearless plan by rounding up the enemy from behind and catching them in cross-fire¹⁹. An eye-witness and a participant of the events describes this action by Shaghoyan as follows.- “... *He was still lying on a stretcher, carried by his soldiers. After reaching the gorge and sensing how grave the situation was, he called on his soldiers to bring his beloved horse “Jeiran” which he mounted and immediately flew up the gorge. His assistants Avo Vozmetzi, Mesrop Janoyan and the rest of the fighters followed suit as well as Kostı Hambarđoumian who also went up after him. The Kurds were shocked and in disbelief. They instantly left their posts high up the rocks which were dominating over the entire entrance of the gorge*”²⁰.

In the end, the Armenians were able to force the Kurds to flee the battle ground after which, they were able to reach Salmas on March 29.

The situation in Iranian Aderbeyjan (Aderbatakan), where Vaspourakan population were compelled to stay temporarily was as follows: in November, 1917 the Russians had once and for all abandoned and evacuated Urmiya, Haydarabad, Sharaf-khane, Khoy and Salmas leaving behind vast quantities of provisions and ammunition. This would naturally become the source of discord between all the fighting groups, including the Christians, i.e. Armenians and Assyrians²¹.

¹⁹ **Յարութինեան Բ.**, Վարագ, 1998, Քալիֆորնիա, էջ 54–55:

²⁰ **Գէորգեան Վահան**, Լեւոն (փաշա) Շաղոյեան, (Իր գործելաոճով եղաւ 20-րդ դարի Գայլ Վահանը), «Ալիք», 12 նոյեմբեր 1979, էջ 3 և 7: The author started publishing his memoirs as of October 29, 1979 up to and including November 15, 1979. After a long interval of three years, he took up writing again on October 1, 1983 continuing these priceless memoirs until April 12, 1984 which tell us about the ordeal which the people of Van had to go through during the many artificial “retreats” by the Russians which resulted in abandoning their most beloved country. Gevorgian was appointed as the head of the militia in the Armenian village of Mahlam during the months of their stay in Persia. He was also the administrative manager of H. Melkounian’s military office in addition to being the headmaster of the school in Mahlam-Salmas. After reaching the safe-haven in Baquba Refugee Camp, he was appointed as a teacher in the school of the camp, at the same time he became Levon Shaghoyan’s assistant.

²¹ **Վազգէն**, Ատրպատականի գոյամարտը, «Հայրենիք», 1930, հոկտեմբեր, Բոստոն, էջ 161:

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At first Agha Petros of the Assyrians was reluctant to share the food and ammunition with the Armenians. However, Levon Shaghoyan and Kosti Hambarzoumian met with him and the issue was settled peacefully. There seemed no other way out, since all parties realized that they i.e, Armenians and Assyrians had to work very closely so that they could protect themselves against the advancing Ottoman regiments together with the Kurdish and the Persian irregulars²².

After entering Persia, the Armenians of Van were sheltered in the Armenian villages of Salmas, namely Ghalasar, Payadjuk, Haftvan, Sanamerik and other places, which was due to the great efforts taken by the well-known public activist Samson²³. However, the refugees along with the local Armenians and Assyrians had to fight their way for five long and trying months, until they met the British forces at a place near Hamadan called Sayin Kala and were then ushered to Iraq, which had been already occupied by them (i.e., the British forces) since 1917.

The refugees stayed in Salmas for more than two months, during which they were attacked by the Turkish regular forces and various Kurdish tribes, assisted by some extremist Persians who were however pushed back by the Armenians and Assyrians. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that a fateful battle took place on Salmas plains on May 4–5, 1918 and a more extensive one on May 31 until June 5, 1918. The battle ground was fought and defended by the combined Armenian and Assyrian forces arranged as follows: on the left, the local and Vanetzi Armenians were positioned commanded by H. Melkounian, and in the middle 800 fighters were commanded by Levon Shaghoyan. On the right it was supposed that the Assyrians²⁴ representative Agha Petros (as per his promise) would provide 3000 fighters, but at the end a much more modest number of fighters appeared on the ground since on their way from Urumya they were attacked by several bandits and their number dwindled.

²² Ազիզեան Մ., op.cit., pp. 70–71.

²³ Գէորգեան Մ., Վասպուրականին Պաղտատ և Պասրայի անապատները, «Հայրենիք», Բոստոն, 1965, փետրուար, էջ 41–49:

²⁴ In Urumya and Salmas Armenian and Assyrian combined forces detachment, called Special Aterpatakan Detachment, was in action under the leadership of colonel Kuzmin. The latter was one of the few Russian officers who had not left Persia. The above detachment consisted of 300 Assyrian and one hundred Armenian firing squads.

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The battle in Salmas continued for 4–5 days. As the number of the fighting forces were incomparable, the joint forces decided to retreat and head for Urumya, where the chances were more concrete for them to meet their allies - the British army. After leaving Salmas and upon reaching Urumya, heavy cannon firing was heard from the reverse side of Urumya. It soon became clear that the Turkish army was backed up by new recruits from Mosul and that Urumya's fall was certain and imminent. To resist the enemy and protect their people, the Armenians and Assyrians reorganized their fighting forces which consisted of the following battalions:

1- Armenian battalion of Urumya, comprising 450 fighters – Commander Artashes Stepanyan with the participation of Suren and others.

2- Armenian battalion of Van, comprising 1500 fighters – Commander Levon Shaghoyan assisted by Karkartzi Murad, Samuel and Hmayak.

3- Armenian battalion of Salmas, comprising 500 fighters – Commander Hambartzoum Melkounian assisted by Vagharshak Shirvanian and Vazgen Martirosian.

4- Assyrian battalion of Salmas comprising 500 fighters – Commander Mar Shimon's brother.

5- Assyrian battalion of Urumya, comprising 1000 fighters – Commander Agha Petros and other *kashas* and *meliks* .

These forces were reorganized and were ready to face the enemy anytime²⁵.

It was at this time on June 25, 1918 that an aeroplane belonging to the British army landed safely at a nearby open field. The pilot passed on very valuable information about the English forces and gave them a message from his commander, promising to supply the joint forces with 40000 cartridges and a number of machine-guns if they were able to keep Urumya intact²⁶.

To keep Urumya safe was more than essential for these unfortunate people as their number now counted more than 75000. To move on with this huge number of sick and exhausted people under the burning sun through the desert was almost like sending them to their imminent death.

On June 26, the council of representatives of the remnants of both Armenians and Assyrians, namely Agha Petros, Agha Dawood of the Assyrians and Kosti

²⁵ Վազգէն, op. cit., «Հայրենիք», Բոստոն, 1931, դեկտեմբեր, էջ 160–164:

²⁶ Ibid.

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Hambardzoumian, Levon Shaghoyan, Samson Khan, Armenak Maqsapetian, Grigor Bulgharatzki and others decided to take concise steps within the shortest time possible to take care of both northern and southern fronts by dispatching enough military force that would pursue two points:

1. If possible, overcome the enemy forces once more and afterwards get in touch with the English forces at Sayin Kala.

2. If the first plan did not materialize, the combined forces of the Armenians and Assyrians would attack the enemy on the southern front with full force and vigour, even if it required heavy sacrifices in order to meet the English regiments farther south.

The battle on the southern front started by a strong counterattack of the above-mentioned combined Armenian and Assyrian forces along the shores of Lake Urumya. In the middle, the Armenian Forces of Van and Salmas were commanded by Levon Shaghoyan and assisted by Murad, Garegin Hatzagordzian, Mesrop and other brigade masters headed towards Haydarabad. Agha Petros with his *meliks* and *kashas* were heading towards Ushni at the back of the enemy.

On the other hand, a message was received on July 15, informing of the fall of Karimabad – “*The Turks are advancing towards Urumya, suspicious movements are noticed in Soma as well ...*”²⁷.

The moment was more than critical. The few fighters who were still in Urumya, were busy in extremely vital and important supporting operations at the rear. Therefore, the people started moving again, this time heading for Haydarabad. They walked day and night, in the dark and in daylight, soaked in mud through the harsh weather and scorching heat of July sun. The western shore of Lake Urumya which the refugees took, was a swampy, boggy plain, where the people had the misfortune to take their night rest.

Unfortunately, before reaching Hayderabad, the ever pursuing enemy's cavalry started firing at the people and the rearguards. Many were killed and left there unburied. They had to walk 70 versts,²⁸ suffering from the heat of the desert, fleeing the enemy's cannon fire. But most of all, people were suffering from shortage of water.²⁹ On July 19 they reached Miantap where a few Armenian families joined the refugees. After a night's rest in an open field, this whole mass of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Russian measure of length. 1 verst = 1.1 km (0.66 miles).

²⁹ Վահան, op. cit., «Ալիք», Թեհրան, 1983, 23 հոկտեմբերի, էջ 6:

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people took to the road again and finally, on July 21 reached Sayin Kala, where an English regiment was stationed. An eye-witness and an active participant in these unfortunate events wrote – *It is hard to believe that the Israeli people were as overjoyed when they crossed the Red sea, as we were when we finally met our so-called “allies”, namely the British forces in Sayin Kala*³⁰. The morning of this day was considered one of the brightest and happiest days of the refugees’ lives.

By this time all the battalions, both Armenian and Assyrian had been disbanded, broken up, and the fighters dissolved in thousands of the fleeing refugees, each seeking to save his own, as well as his family’s life...The refugees even started to sell their rifles, revolvers and all cartridges they had, thinking that they did not need them anymore as they had met their so-called “allies”.

On the morning of July 24 – this fateful month 400 officers, wearing English uniforms and armed with weapons, arrived where the Armenian fighters were camping. One of these English officers asked for the leader of the Armenian fighters. When Kosti Hambartzoumian came out and confirmed his identity, a number of gleaming bayonets cracked immediately in broad daylight and Kosti fell down off his horse with his shoulder cut in half...The reaction of his soldiers was instant; one of them immediately took out his revolver and fired at the enemy’s commander who fell down as well. After a short cross-firing on both sides, the enemy’s coward officers escaped and got away in the remote labyrinth alleys of the city³¹.

At this time the local Turks also started firing at the refugees. The Armenian forces got reorganized again and another turn of heroic battle took place in the open fields of Sayin Kala right in front of the “allies”, namely the English forces who were based nearby. Towards the evening, an audacious counterattack by the Armenians of Vaspourakan and Assyrians compelled the enemy forces to disperse. Thus, the refugees, after suffering many casualties, left the plains of Sayin Kala.

It is worth mentioning that there are different stories regarding the burial of one of the greatest Armenian patriotic figures of the 20th century, the most beloved Kosti Hambartzoumian, who was literally murdered by the disguised Turkish officers. The first story is that he was buried by an old lady named Piruz from Timar (Van), who told the refugees that she stayed back with Kosti till his last

³⁰ Վազգեն, op. cit., «Հայրենիք», 1932, յունուար, էջ 159-164:

³¹ Ա-Դօ, op. cit., p. 335.

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breath. His last words were “I fulfilled my duty towards my nation”. Afterwards this old lady (according to her words), had gathered sand and soil and covered his body until he was completely invisible³². However, the other story seems more logical, which is about his compatriots burying him under a tree and that his death was instant³³.

On this day the refugees suffered most and gave the heaviest casualties. In addition to the precious loss of Kosti Hambardzumian and his compatriots, 5000 of the refugees were cut off from the rest of the fleeing people, whose fate to this day is still unknown³⁴.

When Kosti Hambardzumian was treacherously and cowardly killed by the disguised Turkish military officers in Sayin Kala, Levon Shaghoyan and H. Melkonian took over the leadership of the all Armenian refugees.

On July 27, the refugees entered the town of Bijar (See the map), where they were allowed to stay only a few days. There were a number of English battalions based at the entrance of the town. It is worth mentioning that their police battalions comprised of Persian Tatars who being trained by the English officers, could easily turn against the Persian government if the latter chose to line up with the Turkish and/or German side.

After a few days of rest, the great wave of the refugees advanced towards Hamadan. After being attacked again by the pro-Turkish forces, 25 refugees were killed and a number of them wounded. When they reached Bhar plain, the English surrounded the refugees and ordered them to stay where they were. Entrance of the town was strictly prohibited. However, the Persians here expressed extraordinary kindness towards the refugees, who were placed in clean rooms and gardens. Soon an English field hospital also arrived with all hygienic equipment and medicine. All the sick and wounded refugees were taken care of by the English authorities. Furthermore, Tehran and other Armenian populated centers were still expected to render help. The first group comprising 2000 refugees were, transported by automobiles to Baghdad and/or Baquba. The rest began selling their personal belongings to be able to survive, thinking that they were safe now as the English authorities had taken over their protection.

³² Վազգէն, op. cit., p. 164.

³³ Վահան, op. cit., «Ալիք», Թեհրան, 1983, 23 հոկտեմբերի:

³⁴ Ibid.

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In the meantime, those helpless people, after five months of facing every kind of hardship, were now suffering from the scorching sun and the unhealthy winds at nights which are characteristic of Hamadan weather. Soon, typhus and dysentery cases became very severe and started reaping down the remaining refugees, who were still awaiting their transport to Baquba. The death toll was so high that there was shortage of burying hands. Hundreds were being buried in one grave.

After some time, part of the refugees were sent away to Sultanabad and Kirmanshah, whilst others were moved to Baquba.

As a conclusion, it is to be noted that Hamadan became the biggest grave of the refugees after departure from their homeland. During the eight-month battles for survival, the Armenians' losses could be considered as trivial, hardly 1200-1300 killed and wounded. Whilst only in Hamadan more than 5000 died, left uncovered and without shroud, even deprived of a personal grave³⁵.

When the refugees left Urumya, they counted 75000 Armenians and Assyrians, both from Van and Aterpatakan together with their domestic animals (sheep, cattle, etc.). By the time they reached Hamadan the above figure had dwindled substantially as they now counted 69.475 persons. However, in accordance with a statistics formed in November, the Armenians counted 15000 whilst the Assyrians numbered 35.000. The rest perished in various towns and villages along the road to Shivari, Hamadan as well as at Bhar's infamous plains.

According to a statistics prepared on August 12, 1919, by the Armenian Relief Committee of Mesopotamia, the number of the Armenian refugees who were *lucky* enough to be sheltered at Baquba refugee camp was 14109 persons. These people came from the provinces of Bitlis, Vaspourakan and Aterpatakan. They stayed at Baquba until the uprising of the Arab liberals in 1920 (known as the Iraqi Great Revolution of 1920), when the British forces had no alternative but to transfer the Armenians to another camp in Nahr Omar (North of Basra) and the Assyrians to Mosul and the surrounding villages.

³⁵ Վազգէն, Ibid. «Hayrenik», Boston, February 1932, pp. 146-150.

The Passage of Van-Vaspourakan Refugees' through Persia...



**ՎԱՆ-ՎԱՍՊՈՒՐԱԿԱՆԻ ԲՆԱԿՉՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԳԱՂԹԸ
ՊԱՐՍԿԱՍՏԱՆՈՎ 1918 Թ. ՄԱՐՏ-ՕԳՈՍՏՈՍ
ԱՄԻՍՆԵՐՈՒՆ**

ՕՀԱՆԵԱՆ Ս.

Ամփոփում

Բանալի բառեր՝ Վան-Վասպուրական, նահանջ, Լեւոն Շաղոյեան, Կոստի Համբարձումեան, Արրպատական, Պարսկաստան, Միջագետք:

1917 թուականի Ռուսական Փետրուարեան յեղափոխութենէն ետք, Վասպուրականի մէջ կը ստեղծուի զուտ հայկական ժամանակաւոր ղեկավար մարմին, որուն կը յաջորդէ Շրջանային Վարչութիւն, ապա՝ Կոմիսարիատ, որ Երզնկայի զինադադարէն (Դեկտ. 5, 1917) ետք իր ձեռքը կը վերցնէ Վանի նահանգի թէ՛ քաղաքացիական և թէ՛ զինուորական բոլոր գործողութիւնները: 1918 թ.ի Յունուար 6-ին Վանը կը յայտարարուի ազատ-անկախ հայրենիք և կը ստեղծուի Վասպուրականի երկրորդ կառավարութիւնը: Սակայն, պատերազմական գործողութիւնները կը վերսկսուին, որ կը շարունակուի մինչեւ նոյն թուականի մարտ ամիսը, երբ Վանի զինուորական մարմինը Կովկասէն օգնութիւն ստանալու ոչ մի յոյս ունենալով, հարկադրուած նահանջի հրամանը կուտայ:

Մարտ 21-ին Վանի և շրջակայ գաւառներու հազարաւոր հայ բնակչութիւնը, ղեկավարութեամբ Կոստի Համբարձումեանի և Լեւոն Շաղոյեանի կ'ուղղուին դէպի Բերկրի՝ նպատակ ունենալով համանուն կիրճէն անցնելով հասնիլ Կովկաս: Սակայն տարածաշրջանի աշխարհաքաղաքական զանազան պատճառներով չեն յաջողիր Բերկրի հասնիլ և հարկադրուած կ'անցնին Պարսկաստան, որպէսզի Խոյի ճամբով Կովկաս անցնին: Պարսկաստանի մէջ սակայն այս ժողովուրդին կը սպասէին տարատեսակ փորձութիւններ և հինգ ամիս շարունակ հերոսամարտեր մղելով և հազարաւոր զոհեր տալէն ետք վերջապէս կը յաջողին միանալ «դաշնակից» բրիտանացիներուն, որոնք կը փոխադրեն զիրենք Միջագետքի Պաքուբա վրանաքաղաքը:

МИГРАЦИЯ НАСЕЛЕНИЯ ВАНА–ВАСПУРАКАНА ЧЕРЕЗ ПЕРСИЮ В МАРТЕ – АВГУСТЕ 1918 Г.

ОГАНЯН С.

Резюме

Ключевые слова: Ван-Васпуракан, отступление, Левон Шагоян, Кости Амбарцумян, Атропатена, Персия, Месопотамия.

После Февральской революции 1917 года в Васпуракане был создан временный армянский руководящий орган, вслед за которым было сформировано Областное Управление, затем – Комиссариат. Последний, после Эрзинджанского перемирия (5 декабря, 1917), взял в свои руки вопрос организации военных действий в Ване. 6 января 1918 года Ван был объявлен независимым, и было создано второе правительство Васпуракана. Однако вскоре военные действия были возобновлены и продолжены до марта того же года, когда Ванский комиссариат, потеряв надежду на помощь с Кавказа, отдал приказ об отступлении.

21 марта тысячи армян Вана и окрестных провинций во главе с Кости Амбарцумяном и Левоном Шагояном направились в Беркри, чтобы через одноименное ущелье дойти до Кавказа. Однако в силу различных геополитических причин им не удалось дойти до Беркри, и они вынуждены были отправиться в Персию, чтобы через Хой проникнуть на Кавказ. Но после выпавших на долю ванцев тяжких испытаний и героических пятимесячных битв в Персии им наконец удалось воссоединиться с британскими союзниками, которые перевезли их в палаточный городок Пакуба на территории Месопотамии.