

ARMEN HAYRAPETYAN*

PhD in History

Director of SCAS of NAS

armenani@mail.ru

MIGRATION TO THE USA BY PEOPLE OF SHIRAK IN 1908–1914¹

Key words: First World War, Alexandropol, migrants, USA, Ghazarapat, Shirak, Riverside Cement Plant.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1890s, due to a number of external and internal reasons, an irregular migration started from the Shirak Valley to Russia, the EU and the US, which involved all segments of society and notably changed the demographic image and economic situation in the province. Unfortunately, this phenomenon was not new. The Armenians' migration en masse from Shirak started back in 1877–1878 after the Russian-Turkish war, first to the internal provinces of the Russian Empire, then to the distant USA. Within the scope of this article, we have tried to highlight the reasons for the Shirak people to leave the native province of Shirak. We have made an attempt to combine the information presented in the scholarly literature on the question and the periodical press of the time, which helped us identify the scale of the migration, as well as the situation of the migrants in the United States.

Migration to the USA by People of Shirak

America has been capturing Armenians with its “fairytale” riches since the 1850s. The first to migrate to the “New World” were the Western Armenians, and already from the beginning of the 20th century, the Armenians of the East, especially from Alexandropol and the villages of Eastern Shirak. At the same time,

* Հոդվածը ներկայացվել է 10.07.20, գրախոսվել է 10.07.20, ընդունվել է տպագրության 14.08.20:

¹ Հետազոտությունն իրականացվել է ՀՀ ԿԳՄՍՆ գիտության կոմիտեի տրամադրած ֆինանսավորմամբ 18SH-6A007 ծածկագրով գիտական թեմայի շրջանակներում:

Migration to the USA by People of Shirak in 1908–1914

if the Western Armenians were fleeing from religious and national persecution, the reason for the migration of the Eastern Armenians was mainly economic. The first migrants to rush to America were young people aged 18–35, who left their families in the hope of getting rich soon and return home².

What made some citizens of Shirak take that rather risky step? The main reason for the outflow from the native province was the pitiful economic situation in which Shirak had found itself. Once known for its lush fields and abundant springs, Shirak, which had fed tens of thousands, found itself in an extremely difficult economic situation in the early 20th century. Extreme poverty forced the debt-ridden peasant to leave his loved ones, his home and place, his farming work, and move to America. The primary problem was the scarcity of the land.

In 1840–1914 the population of Alexandropol uyezd increased about 6 times from 38,000³ to 223,344⁴, while the land fund remained the same. In 1906, according to the estimates, 57% of the uyezd's rural households owned less than 3 hectares of land, 40% owned 5–3 hectares, and only 3% owned more than 5 hectares⁵. And that was when in 1906 the population of the uyezd was 186,934⁶. In 1906–1914 the population became 36,410 (16%), whereas the amount of land remained unchanged. The village which once had only 30 households, now had 100, and the villagers with four people in the family who used to have 10 hectares of land, now faced a situation when the area of land was decreased while families grew up to 11 members. And so, people didn't know how to keep their families alive if they had to work 4 months a year and eat lying idle for 8 months"⁷.

According to the official statistics, in 1880–1914, due to land scarcity, about 40,000⁸ people abandoned the uyezd of Alexandropol. If the repeated drought and the lack of irrigation water is also considered, we think the miserable picture of the state of Shirak's farms will be complete.

The economic hardship led to a change in the attitude of the Shirak people towards the land. "The land for the peasant is no more what it used to be," writes

² **Mirak** 1983, 58.

³ ՀԱՍ, ֆոնդ 93, ցուցակ 1, գործ 82, 85, 86, 87:

⁴ Кавказский календарь на 1914 год, 1915, отд. II, 250–252.

⁵ **Зелинский** 1885, 36, 63–64.

⁶ Памятная книжка Эриванской губернии на 1908 год, 1908, отд. III, 2–3, 8–9, 22–23, 46, 100–117.

⁷ **Տէր-Մելիքիստեղէկեան** 1913, N 65, 2:

⁸ **Գաղթի խնդիրը** 1914, N 5, 2:

H. Ter-Hakobyants, “for the time being, he does not look at his land as a feeding mother, and that is why he is no longer connected with the land. On the contrary, he is ready to leave the land at the earliest opportunity and seek his livelihood in other occupations”⁹. In the uyezd with almost 80% of the rural population, the average annual income per person was only 36 rubles and 44 kopecks, while the news coming from America assured that one could earn up to 5 rubles a day: “What idiot would endure, what other Shirak resident would fall asleep!” “Mshak” asks¹⁰.

Thus, leaving the native province was nothing new. According to contemporaries, in the early 20th century, the people of Shirak could be found everywhere from Manchuria to America¹¹.

The mass exodus of the Armenians from the Shirak plain began immediately after the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878, when a large number of the Armenians from the city of Alexandropol moved permanently to the newly conquered Kars, Kaghzvan, Sarighamish, Olti, and Ardahan. By buying real estate from the leaving Muslims, they soon became the owners of stalls, shops, guesthouses, and workshops. Over the next two decades, the number of Alexandropol residents in those cities reached some 2,000 families. According to Atrpet, “in the census, these were presented as Alexandropol residents because there were difficulties in getting registered in Kars. However, at the first opportunity, everyone will change their place of registration”¹².

During the same period, 2000 families, mostly from Alexandropol and nearby villages, moved to Tbilisi (Georgia), Baku, the Transcaspian regions, and even to Siberia.

The so-called work abroad was not a new phenomenon for the Shirak people. It had increased in scales since the 1880s. From the southern villages of the Alexandropol Uyezd, they mainly moved to Yerevan and Kars with their carts. According to the “Akhurian” periodical, in 1906–1910 “there were so many of them in Yerevan that the locals were just sick and tired of the “hungry people” of Shoragyal”¹³.

⁹ **Տէր-Յակովբեանց** 1911, N 12, 1:

¹⁰ **Տէր-Մելիքիսեդէկեան** 1913, N 65, 2:

¹¹ **Գիւղ քահանա** 1913, N 9, 3:

¹² **Ատրպէտ** 1911, N 6, 1:

¹³ **Գիւղ քահանա** 1913, N 9, 3:

Migration to the USA by People of Shirak in 1908–1914

The most common form of work abroad was reaping. From June to October, hundreds of young people from Shirak could be met in different villages of Yerevan, Tbilisi (Georgia) and Elizavetpol provinces, who “went from village to village in groups, joking, lively and cheerful”¹⁴.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the development of capitalist relations and the formation of the working class opened new horizons for emigrants from Shirak: Novorossiysk, Tuapse, Gelendzhik, Sukhum, Kavkazsk, Armavir, etc. There were many, especially those who left for Baku¹⁵.

Around the same time, the flow to America began, about which the people of Shirak learned from the Dukhobors and Molokans who had been deported to the uyezd of Alexandropol. At the end of the 19th century, they migrated to Canada (Winnipeg), the USA (Los Angeles), and then sent letters of encouragement to their friends and loved ones urging them to follow suit¹⁶. The first Armenian-populated village to cross into the United States en masse was Karakala, southeast of Kars. The village, founded after the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878, was inhabited by protestant Armenians who migrated from Alexandropol and adjacent villages, and according to S. Galoyan, it was the religion that became the reason for them to migrate, because Protestantism was persecuted by the state¹⁷. The Musheghyans first migrated in 1904, then their co-villagers followed their example.

The first Armenian to cross from Alexandropol uyezd into the United States was Bagrat Harutyunyan from Ghazarapat, who, following his uncles' example, the Musheghyans, left home and found himself in Los Angeles. “This started the migration of Shirak residents to America,” writes S. Galoyan. From Ghazarapat, the “American fever” spread throughout the province. So, already in 1908–1909, migrants from Alexandropol and neighboring villages could be found in Boston, Chicago, Fresno, Philadelphia, Riverside, and elsewhere. Unfortunately, neither in the periodicals of the time, nor in the relevant funds of the National Archives of Armenia, were we able to find statistical information on the total number of

¹⁴ **Գիւլ քահանա** 1913, N 9, 3:

¹⁵ **Գիւլ քահանա** 1913, N 9, 3:

¹⁶ **Mirak** 1983, 49.

¹⁷ **Գալօեան** 1950, 65:

migrants. As S. Galoyan mentioned this was the start of the migration of Shirak residents to America¹⁸.

The number of Shirak representatives was especially large in Los Angeles. Settling in the Boyle Heights district, the first migrants were mainly engaged in retail and garbage collection (“rubbish”). The latter was the most revered occupation, the monopoly of which they snatched from the Mexicans, blacks, Irish, and Italians in a stubborn struggle. According to modern estimates, about 200 men from Shirak (100 carriages) were engaged in that field. Arranging with the owners of houses and shops, they took the collected garbage out of the city every day and burned it in the presence of a special official¹⁹.

Through their selfless work, many became rich and expanded their “business” by successfully competing with other nationals. For example, J. Aghajanyan from Alexandropol established branches of his company in Santa Ana, San Pedro, Wilmington, Santa Maria, and elsewhere.

However, the “success” of the people of Shirak in the field of garbage collection was not unequivocally accepted among the Armenians of Los Angeles. For example, the Western Armenians living in the same city, who were predominantly merchants, had a reprehensible attitude towards this newcomers’ preference, finding that “garbage collectors” were discrediting the Armenians’ name.

The outflow of people from Shirak to the United States grew in scale in 1910–1914. Even the repeated media reports of economic crises and high unemployment in the United States did not keep them from migrating. For example, the “Voice of the Province” informed its readers that in 1913, after the Democrats came to power, large business owners closed their factories en masse as a sign of protest, leaving millions of workers in poverty. Due to the economic crisis, the number of unemployed in Chicago alone reached 300,000 in February, 1914. In New York, that number was twice as high. According to the periodical, those outrageous facts should have forced the Armenians to stop the pernicious

¹⁸ Գալոյան 1950, 77:

¹⁹ At the beginning of the 20th century, starting a “rubbish” business required \$ 250–300 (about \$ 500–600), and many worked in factories for years to raise that sum of money. On the eve of World War I, that number reached \$ 1,500 (For details, see Remmius 1914, N 63, 3).

Migration to the USA by People of Shirak in 1908–1914

migration²⁰. But in vain. In 1913–1914, instead of decreasing, the number of newcomers tripled. For example, the number of people of Shirak origin in Los Angeles reached 1351²¹.

Unfamiliar with the local language and customs, a poor Shirak resident now had to do ill-paid, unattractive for an American work at the East St. Louis Steel Plant in Missouri, the construction of the St. Paul Railroad in Minnesota, the Rhode Island mines, or the Riverside plant. In other words, to work where human life was most at risk, physical strength was worn out, where unnatural death was common. Sometimes the need for bread forced the replacement of the striking workers, which caused great hostility among the locals²².

The situation was especially dire for the 300 Duzqyand residents who working at the Riverside Cement Plant, had to move bags loaded with 43 kg of cement in dusty air. For many Armenians, it was a “living death” also to work in the humid and chemical-filled air of Rhode Island's coal and paint factories.

In the face of general unemployment, Shirak residents managed to find permanent jobs, mostly through bribery, even in Los Angeles, which lacks large industrial plants. “The people of Shirak were the first to start the habit of bribing factory supervisors,” the Mshak wrote, “they gave vodka, cigars, watches, money, and in many places they were able to use 20–30 dollars to lay a table for them”²³.

By the way, the vicious phenomenon of bribery soon turned into a widespread disease, putting foreign workers against the Armenians everywhere.

The progressive intellectuals of the time opposed the outflow of young forces. Through separate articles, reports and editorials in the periodicals, they repeatedly touched upon the issue of migration from the Shirak plain, presented the difficulty of going abroad for work, tried to keep the villagers from this destructive step, covered the economic problems in the United States and tried to support the Armenians in that country. They called on the people spellbound by imaginary promises to sober up.

The press also presented the main reasons for migration: extreme poverty due to scarcity of land and the backward state of agriculture. “A villager from the uyezd of Alexandropol, even if he wants to, is unable to benefit much from

²⁰ Մի գաղթիչ Ամերիկա 1914, N 23, 1:

²¹ Remmius 1914, N 63, 3:

²² Մուշեղ եպիսկոպոս 1912, 194:

²³ Մուշեղ եպիսկոպոս 1912, 194:

agriculture,” H. Ter Hakobyan was convinced, “because he is illiterate, does not know how to cultivate land more effectively than he had inherited from the prehistoric times”²⁴.

H. Ter-Hakobyan was convinced that there was another reason besides the economic one that forced the people of Shirak to migrate, “Our peasants are slowly starting to get out of their former state of darkness (i.e stagnation),” he wrote, “and along with this slow progress, their vital needs are increasing, and the results of the exsisting patriarchal land cultivation cannot satisfy them”²⁵.

In the long run, the story of those who returned from the “New World”, about the miracles waiting for them across the ocean had a magical effect on the landless and indebted villager. Unfortunately, no one actually tried to verify the news. So even Hovhannes Tumanyan believed that a worker in the United States “swims in honey and butter”, receives a daily allowance of 28 rubles and lives in a 4–8 room apartment²⁶.

The migration of the rural population from Shirak led to serious economic problems. The villager, blinded by the vain hopes of getting rich in American gold, first sold his animals and land for 300–400 rubles, then borrowed 40% or 50% from those who could lend, hoping that he would be able to return it in 2–3 months. In fact, before reaching America, he finally destroyed his already miserable economy and fell into giant debts. And even after such deprivations, it was highly doubtful whether he would be able to reach the shores of the United States. To limit the growing rate of migration, the American authorities had opened checkpoints for migrants on the docks since 1911, in which each newcomer underwent a thorough medical examination. Prostitutes, criminals, those with a disease or physical disabilities (sick, mentally ill, blind, paralyzed) were deprived of the right to enter the country. It was also forbidden to cross the border for those who arrived in the United States by secret agreement or through emissaries. In Portland, for example, 44 Gharakilisa residents who were on their way to Chicago were barred from entering the United States because they were found to have letters written in the same handwriting to various Chicago residents. This allowed the authorities to think that everyone was going to the same person. In another case, 17 Syogutli residents were barred from entering

²⁴ **Տէր-Յակովբեան** 1910, N 75, 1–2:

²⁵ **Տէր-Յակովբեան** 1911, N 12, 2:

²⁶ **Թումանեան** 1913, N 230, 1: **Վրացեան** 1914, N 33, 2:

Migration to the USA by People of Shirak in 1908–1914

the United States because it turned out that “their fellow villagers having returned, told them how to circumvent the law and end up in the United States, and then find a job at a Riverside cement plant”²⁷.

It was also forbidden to cross the border for those whom the authorities suspected of begging. As we know, to cover their travel expenses, those who went to work abroad took money from a lender, which was enough only for reaching the United States. Most of those who received visas then continued on foot, wandering from town to town, often begging. To eliminate this phenomenon, the US authorities in 1911 forced migrant workers to travel exclusively by rail. In addition to the railway fare, they were required to permanently have at least 50 roubles in their pockets. This fact, concerning those who had gone abroad for work, was first voiced in the pages of the “Akhurian” periodical. “We came to *Charleston* with 400 people, 60 out of whom were from Shirak. The medical commission examined all of us, then decided to keep 60 of our Armenians in the steamer. We were told that they would not allow us to go ashore because we were cheap labor, we would take the job from the locals, and then in line with the new rules, in addition to the cost of the train ticket, we should have 50 rubles on us not to be counted as beggars”²⁸.

Too often, migrants were unable to reach the United States. Gevorg Mejlumyants referred to such a case, publishing the letter of 100 Shirak residents in the pages of the “Zhayr” periodical. They arrived in the German city of Bremen on January 30 and were arrested shortly after leaving the train. According to the article, the city authorities kept the Armenians in prison for a day, then informed them that the United States had closed the border for the migrants and demanded that they return to their homeland immediately²⁹.

The plight of the migrants who managed to reach the United States was unenviable. Dozens of letters from desperate migrants can be found in the pages of the periodical press, in which the latter begged for charity and travel expenses for them to be able to return to their homeland. The periodical press kept on describing the catastrophic situation in which the migrants had found themselves. “There is no work, if we work one day, the payment is enough to make the ends meet only. To find a job, we run from one city to another. We don't have the

²⁷ U.S. 1912, N 18, 2:

²⁸ *Լրատու* 1911, N 7, 4:

²⁹ *Մեջլումեանց* 1911, N 11, 1:

money to return home,” a man from Shirak wrote in the pages of the “Voice of Province” from faraway America. Another added: “We were told that you would work for 8 hours a day, I went and saw no less than 10 or 12 hours. We are not having lunch for many days, and in the mornings we have to be satisfied with tasteless coffee only”³⁰.

Trying to keep the compatriots from the disastrous step to migrate, the “Voice of the Province” also published the memories of those who returned from abroad: “I was working in a cement factory,” says one from Dyuzqand, “the work started at 8 in the morning, we rested for an hour at lunch and worked again till the evening. It was very difficult to work. We were in the cement dust all day, my mouth and nose were filled with dust, and we had to pull out the hardened pieces of cement all the time. I turned yellow and lost weight. I couldn't find another job after leaving the factory. I used to send all the money I earned to my family but they thought that I was enjoying life there and started to run into new debts”³¹.

Hoping to keep the people of Shirak from the disastrous step of migration, the press even took an unprecedented step towards the beginning of the 20th century, intruding in the private life of the peasantry, trying to explain that migration led to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. “The pain would not be so great,” wrote the “Province Voice”, “if those diseases remained only in emigrants, but it is not so”³². The young man, who returned from work abroad, was getting married quickly and sexually transmitted the disease to his wife, and through this to his children.

The disease, which became widespread at the turn of the century, simply became a scourge for the traditional rural population of Alexandropol province, endangering the existence of entire generations and leading to a serious moral and psychological crisis.

Conclusion

Summing up the brief examination of the migration processes from Eastern Shirak to the USA at the beginning of the 20th century, we came to the following conclusion: the ship with the first migrant from Shirak crossed the ocean in 1904, and already in 1910–1914 migration became large-scale. The main reason for

³⁰ Հմայք-անուշ 1914, N 9, 3:

³¹ Տէր-Միքայէլեան 1914, N 13, 2:

³² Մէջլումեան 1914, N 18, 3:

Migration to the USA by People of Shirak in 1908–1914

leaving the homeland was the poor economic situation, which forced the indebted villager to leave his family and migrate to the USA and where, being unfamiliar with the local language, laws and customs, he had to do low-paid work in steel or cement factories, on railway construction, or in mines.

The progressive intelligentsia of the time tried to keep the peasant from the destructive step of migrating, discussed in the periodicals the economic problems existing in the United States and the plight of the Armenians who moved there, and called for the sobriety of the people spellbound by imaginary promises. However, it didn't help. According to various estimates, between 1908 and 1914, about 2,500 people migrated to the United States from Alexandropol and surrounding villages. During the First World War, the outflow almost stopped. It resumed after the fall of the first republic of Armenia and continued until 1923. However, if in 1908–1914 the migrants were labor migrants who, as a rule, returned to their homeland after earning some money, in 1921–1923 the migration had very painful consequences. During World War II, young people settled in the United States and received citizenship, and after the establishment of the Soviet rule in Armenia, they did not want to return to their homeland. Instead, they made every effort to move their relatives to the United States, too.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ասրպէտ** 1911, Գաղթը, «Ախուրեան» օրաթերթ, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 6, 28 յունարի:
Գալօեան Ս. 1950, Շիրակի հայերի գաղթը դէպի Ամերիկա, Լօս Անջելէս, Կալիֆօրնիա, 77 էջ:
Գաղթի խնդիրը 1914, «Արեւ» լրագիր, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 5, 1 յունիսի:
Գիւղ քահանա 1913, Նոր հոսանք դէպի Ամերիկա, «Ախուրեան» օրաթերթ, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 9, 24 մարտի:
Թումանեան Յովհ. 1913, Մեծ տօնը և հայ ուսուցիչն ու գրողը, «Հորիզոն» օրաթերթ, Թիֆլիս, N 230, 13 հոկտեմբերի:
Լրատու 1911, «Ախուրեան» օրաթերթ, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 7, 30 յունարի:
Հայաստանի ազգային արխիվ (ՀԱԱ), ֆոնդ 93, ցուցակ 1, գործ 82, 85, 86, 87:
Հմայք-անուշ 1914, Բանտորների դրութիւնը Ամերիկայում, «Գաւառի ծայն» լրագիր, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 9, 17 յունարի:
Մէջլումեանց Գէորգ 1911, Գաղթականի յուշերից, «Ժայռ», Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 11, 12 փետրվարի:
Մէջլումեան Զ. 1914, Փոքր Պարնի գիւղ, «Գաւառի ծայն» լրագիր, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 18, 16 փետրարի:

Մի գաղթի Ամերիկա 1914, «Գաւառի ծայն» լրագիր, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 23, 6 մարտի:

Մուշեղ եպիսկոպոս 1912, Ամերիկահայ տարեցոյցը, Ա տարի, Պոստոն, 194 էջ:

Մ.Տ. 1912, Ամերիկա գնացողներին, «Արագած», Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 18, 1 մարտի, էջ 2:

Տէր-Մելիքիսեդէկեան Սարիբէգ 1913, Դէպի Ամերիկա, «Մշակ» օրաթերթ, Թիֆլիս, N 65, 24 մարտի:

Տէր-Մելիքիսեդէկեան Սարիբէգ 1913, Դէպի Ամերիկա, «Մշակ» օրաթերթ, Թիֆլիս, N 65, 24 մարտի:

Տէր-Միքայէլեան 1914, Գաղթի մասին, «Գաւառի ծայն» լրագիր, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 13, 30 յունւարի:

Տէր-Յակովբեան Յ. 1910, Ալեքսանդրապոլի գաւառի տնտեսական վիճակը, «Ժայռ», Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 75, 2 հոկտեմբերի:

Տէր-Յակովբեանց Յ. 1911, Մխալ ճանապարհ, «Ժայռ», Ալեքսանդրապոլ, N 12, 17 փետրվարի:

Վրացեան Ս. 1914, Ամերիկեան կարկանդակները. Տնտեսական կեանքն ու քաղաքական կուսակցութիւնները, «Հորիզոն» օրաթերթ, Թիֆլիս, N 33, 13 փետրւարի:

Remmies 1914, Ամերիկեան նամակներ, «Մշակ» օրաթերթ, Թիֆլիս, N 63, 23 մարտի:

Зелинский С. 1885, Экономический быт государственных крестьян в Шорагеле Александропольского уезда Эриванской губернии, «Материалы для изучения экономического быта государственных крестьян Закавказского края», Тифлис, тип. А.А. Михельсона, т. I.

Памятная книжка Эриванской губернии на 1908 год, под редакцией секретаря Эриванского губернского статистического комитета, Члена Губернского по поселянским делам присутствия В.Е. Васильева, издание Эриванского губернского статистического комитета, Эривань, 1908, отд. III.

Пространство и население губернии и областей Кавказского края к 1-му января 1914 г. (коренное и вр.-проживающее), «Кавказский календарь на 1914 год», Тифлис, Канцелярия Кавказского Наместника, 1915, отд. II.

Mirak R. 1983, Torn Between Two Lands. Armenians in America, 1890 to World War I. Cambridge.

ՇԻՐԱԿՑԻՆԵՐԻ ԳԱՂԹՆ ԱՄՆ 1908–1914 ԹԹ.

ՀԱՅՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ Ա.

Ամփոփում

Քանալի բառեր՝ Առաջին համաշխարհային պատերազմ, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, գաղթականներ, ԱՄՆ, Ղազարապատ, Շիրակ, Ռիվերսայդի ցեմենտի գործարան, աղբ:

Ըստ ԱՄՆ-ի Գաղթականական հանձնախմբի տվյալների, աշխատանքային առաջին գաղթականը Շիրակից ԱՄՆ հասավ 1904 թ., իսկ արդեն 1910–1914 թվականներին արտահոսքն ընդունեց զանգվածային մասշտաբներ: Հայրենի գավառից հեռանալու հիմնական պատճառը տնտեսական վիճակն էր, որ ստիպում էր պարտքերի մեջ թաղված մարդուն թողնել ընտանիքը և ուղևորվել Ամերիկա: «Նոր աշխարհում» տեղական լեզվին, օրենքներին ու սովորություններին անձանոթ շիրակցին ստիպված էր ցածր վարձատրությամբ կատարել ամերիկացու համար անհրապույր աշխատանք Իսթ Սենթ Լուիսի պողպատի գործարաններում, Ռոդ Այլենդի հանքերում կամ Ռիվերսայդի ցեմենտի գործարանում:

Ժամանակի առաջադեմ մտավորականությունը փորձեց կասեցնել գաղթը, պարբերական մամուլի էջերում լուսաբանեց ԱՄՆ-ում առկա տնտեսական խնդիրներն ու այնտեղ հայտնված հայության վիճակը, սթափվելու կոչ արեց երևակայական խոստումներով կախարդված ժողովրդին, սակայն, ապարդյուն: Տարբեր հաշվումներով 1908–1914 թթ. ընթացքում Ալեքսանդրապոլից ու հարակից գյուղերից ԱՄՆ գաղթեց մոտ 2500 հոգի: Առաջին աշխարհամարտի տարիներին արտահոսքը գրեթե դադարեց: Այն վերսկսվեց Հայաստանի առաջին հանրապետության անկումից հետո և շարունակվեց մինչև 1923 թ.: Ավելին՝ 1908–1914 թթ. գաղթողներն աշխատանքային գաղթականներ էին, որոնք դրամ վաստակելուց հետո, որպես կանոն, վերադառնում էին հայրենիք, իսկ 1921–1923 թթ. գաղթն ունեցավ շատ ցավալի հետևանքներ: 1914–1918 թթ. ԱՄՆ-ում մնացած երիտասարդները տեղավորվեցին և քաղաքացիություն ստացան, իսկ Հայաստանում խորհրդային կարգերի հաստատումից հետո այստեղ տեղափոխեցին նաև իրենց հարազատներին:

МИГРАЦИЯ ШИРАКЦЕВ В США В 1908–1914 ГГ.

АЙРАПЕТЯН А.

Резюме

Ключевые слова: Первая мировая война, Александрополь, мигранты, США, Казарапат, Ширак, Риверсайдский цементный завод, мусор.

По данным миграционного комитета США, первый трудовой мигрант из Ширака прибыл в Соединенные Штаты в 1904 году, а уже в 1910–1914 гг. миграция приобрела массовый характер. Основной причиной бегства из родного уезда была плачевная экономическая ситуация, которая и заставила обремененного долгами крестьянина покинуть семью и отправиться в США. В «Новом Свете» уроженец Ширака, не знавший местного языка, законов и обычаев, должен был заниматься низкооплачиваемым и не привлекающим американцев трудом на сталелитейном заводе в Восточном Сент-Луисе, в шахтах Род-Айленда или на Риверсайдском цементном заводе.

Прогрессивная интеллигенция того времени пыталась остановить миграцию. На страницах периодической печати она освещала экономические проблемы в США и положение оказавшихся там армян. По разным подсчетам, из Александрополя и окрестных деревень в 1908–1914 гг. в Соединенные Штаты мигрировало около 2500 человек.

Во время Первой мировой войны миграция практически прекратилась. С новой силой она возобновилась в 1918г. (после падения Республики Армения) и продолжалась до 1923 года. Более того, в 1908–1914 гг. эмигрантами были трудовые мигранты, которые, заработав деньги, обычно возвращались на родину, а миграция 1921–1923 гг. имела очень болезненные последствия. В годы Первой мировой войны оставшиеся в Соединенных Штатах представители молодого поколения получили гражданство, а после установления Советской власти в Армении они перевезли сюда своих родственников.