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## THE DECORATION OF THE FRONTISPIECES OF **GHEVOND ALISHAN'S TOPOGRAPHIC VOLUMES**

***Dedicated to Ghevond Alishan's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary***

*Key words:* engraving, geography of Armenia, flood, Ararat, Cilicia, Syunik, Shirak.

### *Introduction*

Alishan, in his studies concerning Armenia, has harmoniously united Armenian history, culture and geography.

Using the works of various European travelers and illustrations printed in their books that represent Armenia as well as relating the topography of descriptive letters, postcards, photographs and drawings of various places, made especially for him and sent from the homeland, Alishan, due to his aesthetic taste, was able to create collective images, representing different regions of Armenia and insert them in his topographic volumes. It should be mentioned that those images were very typical and accurately chosen, so that later they served as a basis for various poems and paintings dedicated to Armenia.

### ***Alishan's Topographic Volumes***

The first book dedicated to the geography of Armenia is "The Topography of Great Armenia" which was published in 1855. Starting from this publication, Alishan's topographic works became particularly characteristic of historical geography and were accompanied by images, illustrating the descriptions of the locals. As the title of the work suggests, it is dedicated to the topography of Great Armenia.

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### **The Decoration of the Frontispieces of Ghevond Alishan's Topographic Volumes**

With the introductory engraving of the book, Alishan tries to present the collective picture of historical Armenia with a number of typical episodes<sup>1</sup>. Geographically, Armenia is represented by the image of Mount Ararat with Noah's ark resting on it. Combining the biblical history with the Armenian landscape, he depicts a returning dove to the ark and the rainbow tied to Mount Ararat, which symbolizes God's covenant of reconciliation with the mankind. In front of Ararat the symbols of the glory of ancient Armenia rest, i.e. the royal crown, the scepter and the flags. The symbol of the crown resembles the crown depicted on the coins minted by Tigran the Great.



“The Topography of  
Great Armenia”  
1855, p 7.

In the center of the picture, on the cross placed on a pedestal, there is an acheiropoieton image of Christ, which, through King Abgar, symbolizes Armenia as the first Christian state, with the first Christian king. Leaning on the pedestal, the Muse sings the glory of ancient Armenia. Let us remember, that Alishan has referred to the Muse and the Armenian harp in his poems more than once<sup>2</sup>.

The rising khachkar (cross stone) became a dividing line between the pre-Christian and Christian periods of Armenia. Christian Armenia is symbolized by the monastery as well as the manuscript and a printed book on the Armenian carpet. And the crescent moon depicted at the top, probably, represents the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>1</sup> Ալիշան 1855, 7:

<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is not accidental, that in his poem “The Vision of Death” Charents describes Alishan as having “a huge silver harp in his hand”. Չարենց 1968, 227:

The second picture in this book we have chosen to refer to is the picture on page 70 with the caption “The View of Masis from the Fortress of Yerevan”. As suggested by the title of the picture, it fulfills the function of pointing out this geographical place. Alishan notes that various images in the book, including this one, were taken from the book written by a French traveler, architect and archaeologist Frederic Dubois de Montpare (Frédéric DuBois de Montperreux)<sup>3</sup>.



“The  
Topography of  
the Great  
Armenia” 1855,  
p 70.

This picture, placed in the section related to Ararat Valley and Yerevan, has been rewritten and transformed into a generalized image of Armenia by changing the caption in the first volume of “Historical Memories from the Armenian Homeland” (Venice, 1869) placed after the title page and before the preface.



“Historical Memories  
from the Armenian  
Homeland” 1869.

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<sup>3</sup> Ալիշան 1855, 5:

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The preface, in its turn, begins with the word “Homeland” written in a special way and in letters, which turn the mentioned engraving into a collective image of the homeland. In the upper central part of the picture we can see Mount Ararat, in the lower part, Ararat Valley with the river Araks, with poplars and with the Taber Bridge on the river with a caravan of camels stretched on the way. The latter, in its turn, symbolizes the idea that Armenia is situated on transit roads. The fortified wall seen on the left side of the picture represents historic Artashat, which is marked on the maps of trade routes.

Thus, at the beginning of this work in a completely different context Alishan by collective generalization represents the picture which is related to Ararat and to Ararat Valley. The topographical drawing as a collective image of the homeland is almost accurate. It should also be added that the generalization of this picture is not accidental, it was related to Alishan's aspiration to begin each of the four topographic volumes with a general, typical image of the region, which includes elements of the regional history, culture, and geographical and topographical sights.

Let us now try to show what information is conveyed through the examples of the frontispieces of each of the topographic volumes.

Alishan's first topographic volume is “Shirak”, which was published in 1881, after the second Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878, when the area described as Shirak came under Russian rule and the local Armenians were no longer under the risk of physical extermination. It could be seen from some parts of “Shirak” that Alishan was optimistic about the future of the region. He had certain expectations that even Ani would be rebuilt.<sup>4</sup> He described Gyumri as a living city of present times, and not as a memory of the past.<sup>5</sup> This understanding of Alishan was expressed in the opening image of the frontispiece after the title page of the book.

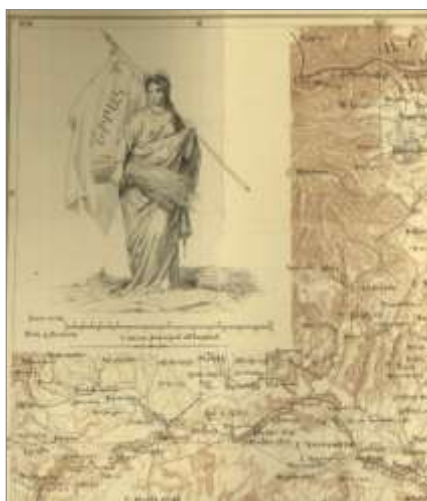
It should be noted that Alishan preferred to emphasize history more and to show the depiction of the ruins of the past, particularly in cases when he learned through demographic statistics that the Armenian population was gradually decreasing and becoming a minority in the area.

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<sup>4</sup> Ալիշան 1881, 109:

<sup>5</sup> Ալիշան 1881, 98:

Alishan has chosen a rather original way of depicting Shirak's intertwined past and present. The book opens with a map of Shirak province, in the upper left corner of which, in a form typical of the European cartography, we can see the collective image of the area. Since Shirak was famous for its grain fields, Alishan depicts the image of a woman-worker that idealizes the spirit and the time of Shirak. In one hand she holds a flag with a cross where "Shirak" is written, and in the other hand and at her feet there are crushed ears of wheat.



**"Shirak" 1881.**



**"Shirak" 1881, p 1.**

Although Shirak was one of the richest areas according to the historical monuments where Ani was also located, nevertheless the dominant in the frontispiece is not the historical scene, but the living life.

The historical monuments, half-ruined buildings and the Fortress of Ani in the background of the picture seem to serve as landscape ornaments and represent the past, while in the foreground, the people engaged in the wheat harvest, the oxen and the cart with heavy wheat ties symbolize Alishan's hopes, concerning the best future of the people of Shirak, that could be acquired by fair work and the security of their property, free from the risk of physical extermination.

The youth living a peaceful life is represented by the image of a young boy who is seen through the wheat, looking with a smile on his face at the girls that are having a rest on the grass.

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Alishan's depiction of Shirak reminds us of Khorenatsi's words about this region: "a fertile and fruitful field, behind northern mountain Aragats where a lot of water flows"<sup>6</sup>.

Just as "Shirak" begins with a map with a generalized symbol of the state in the corner, so is the generalized symbolic image of Cilicia in the upper left corner of the map at the beginning of "Sisvan" by Alishan, dedicated to Armenian Cilicia.



**"Sisvan" 1885.**

In the Armenian sources, the northeastern region of Cilician Armenia is called Mountainous Cilicia (Gah Kiliko), the south-eastern coastal region is called Cilician Plain, and the western region is called Stony Cilicia. And since the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia included prevailingly Mountainous Cilicia, even here the mountains are represented with exaggeration.

Cilicia was famous for its mountain fortresses, and Alishan presents them on the relevant pages of his topographic description through generalized drawings of images.

The central figures in the picture are the lion and the bull with a woman sitting on it. A flower chain is wound round the neck of the bull, and the woman is wearing a crown. Here Alishan referred to one of the ancient Greek myths, "The Abduction of Europa". As it is known, Europa was the daughter of Agenor, a Phoenician king. Zeus fell in love with her and disguised as a beautiful white bull

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<sup>6</sup> Մովսես Խորենացի 1981, 49:

appeared in the field where Europa and her attendants were down by the shore, picking flowers when the white bull wandered up to them. Admired by the beauty of the bull, Europa sat upon it and decorated him with the gathered flowers and the wreath. At that moment, Zeus ran to the sea and carried her all the way from Phoenicia to the island of Crete<sup>7</sup>. Referring to this story, Alishan himself writes that Zeus brings Europa to the territory of Cilicia<sup>8</sup>. Thus, he considered her one of the symbols of the pre-Armenian period of Cilicia.

Throughout the history of art, one of the favorite themes of painters had **been the story of Europa's abduction. She was mostly depicted in the sea waters**, amazed by the unexpectedness of what had happened and caught by the golden horns of Zeus. Although Alishan's engraving depicts them not swimming in the Mediterranean Sea, but in the panorama of Mountainous Cilicia, we still see Europa caught by the bull's horn. The crown of Europa tells of her royal origins.

The same picture without a woman can be seen at the beginning of the text, in which Alishan presents the collective, generalized picture of Cilicia. In the upper right corner of the picture is Mountainous Cilicia with its fortresses, and at the foot of the mountains there are cities to the left from which the Cilician Plain extends. The shores of the country are washed by the waters of the Mediterranean.



“Sisvan” 1885 p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Кун 1954, 120–122.

<sup>8</sup> Ալիշան 1885, 38:

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In the background of the picture we can see the sun setting down, which probably symbolizes the end of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia.

Here again we can see the image of the lion and the bull in the lower left corner of this picture, though, they are not typical animals of the region. But what is the reason for their appearance in these pictures? The answer to that question is found in the preface and in other pages of the book. Alishan writes about the etymology of the word Cilicia and says that it comes from the Greek word “*Khilik*”, which means the world of buffalo<sup>9</sup>. So the word Cilicia was also called the land of the buffalo. Alishan also writes that a bull was depicted on the coins minted in Tarson<sup>10</sup>.

One of the most famous kings of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia was Levon (Leo), who was called Levon II, but actually he was the first as a king. He is named Levon II, because prince Levon was so famous and loved that he was considered to be Levon I. As we know, the name Levon means a lion. Some Cilician historians write, “Levon that is called a lion”.

Alishan, referred to Greek historians who wrote about the set of Levon II from Mountainous Cilicia and his conquest of the Cilician Plain. “He came as a lion and conquered the plains of Cilicia<sup>11</sup>”. Alishan's name Ghevond coincides with the same Levon due to the possibility of Gh-L alternation in Armenian. Thus, Alishan willingly writes about the name Levon that means Lion.

As far as the image of the bull is concerned, it symbolizes the pre-Armenian period of Cilicia, while the lion is the symbol of the Armenian one. Alishan expresses this understanding in a condensed form by the painting of a sculpture where a lion holds the bull's head in its claws. The caption of the picture says: “Cilicia is Conquered”<sup>12</sup>. Alishan has placed this picture in the part of the book where, after completing his writing about the pre-Armenian period of Cilicia, he starts writing about the Rubinyans' settling in Cilicia.

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<sup>9</sup> Ալիշան 1885, 38:

<sup>10</sup> Ալիշան 1885, 39:

<sup>11</sup> Ալիշան 1885, 50:

<sup>12</sup> Ալիշան 1885, 42:





“Sisvan” 1885 p. 42.

The third of the topographic volumes is “Ayrarat”, which was published in 1890. Here, the next page after the preface shows the descent of Noah from Mount Ararat<sup>13</sup>. The whole picture shows the rising cliffs of Ararat and Noah's Ark perched on the top. The animals coming out of the ark are divided into two groups. According to the prophecy of Isaiah which says “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. / And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox” (*Isaiah 11:6–9*), all the wild and domestic animals, mammals, reptiles, lion-led descended the mountain in unison, and the liberated birds soar upwards.



“Ayrarat” 1890.

<sup>13</sup> Ալիշան 1890, 1:

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There are 7 people depicted near the animals on one of the rocks. They are the members of Noah's family: Noah's wife and his three sons with their wives.

One can see the waters that have not yet receded from the flood with human corpses in it. One of the bodies lying on the stones is torn to pieces by a vulture. Staring at this scene in astonishment, Noah is standing nearby covered by the light of God which is a sign of the reconciliation of the God with the humanity, the manifestation of which is the rainbow. A dove flies above Noah's head.

The last of the topographic volumes is “Sisakan” published in 1893. The preface in “Sisakan” (as it was in the previous volumes) is also followed by a one-page engraving, which represents the past and the present of Syunik<sup>14</sup>. According to its geography, Syunik is depicted as a mountainous region. In the preface of the book Alishan describes Syunik as mountainous with the following lines: “The heap of heaps and pyramidal hills.” Alishan emphasizes the mountainous rivers that flow down the slopes, typical of mountainous countries.



“Sisakan” 1893, p 1.

The church in the background of the picture, most probably, is Syunik monastery located in the town of Sisian in the present-day Syunik region, which was also called St. Gregory the Illuminator (later renamed St. John). According to the 13<sup>th</sup> century historian Stepanos Orbelyan, the monastery was founded by

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<sup>14</sup> Ալիշան 1893, 1:

Princess Varazdukht of Syunik<sup>15</sup>. In the last quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the church was completely reconstructed by Prince Kohazat and Bishop Joseph (670–689) with the assistance of monk Theodoros Zion<sup>16</sup>. Stepanos Orbelyan considered this monastery to be the third of the monasteries of Syunik.

It can be assumed that in the center of the picture, on a hill, Alishan depicts the patron saint of Varazdukht monastery. She is wearing luxurious clothes, jewelry, and looks very proud. The princess is pointing to the monastery she built herself, and it seems she is telling something. The princess with her church posture pointing to the church, reminds of the engraved sculptures of the beneficiaries where the church and its benefactor used to be depicted. Among those listening to her there are a few villagers and a priest. Among them a muse, playing the lyre, can be seen.

Like the Topography of Great Armenia, here too the sword, the shield, the bishop wand, the myrtle and the cap are bowed to the ground. In all these things lying on the ground, a closed manuscript with a silver cover can be seen, through which, however, roots come out and go deep into the ground. By this Alishan wants to show the centuries-old connection of the Armenian land with the Armenian culture and religion.

The old monastery and the woody nature, the faces of the past and the rural inhabitants of the time with the typical costumes symbolize the historical past of the region and the living present.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion we can state that the engravings on the frontispieces of Alishan's topographic volumes added a high artistic decoration to the pages of the book, they are not, however, only created for aesthetic purposes, but are made to demonstrate Alishan's point of view, his mentality and understanding of history, where the landscape becomes historical and acquires traces of the past.

It is not accidental that not only in these frontispieces, but also in the text exposition, the carvings that have passed through the inner world of the poet and his world view prevail over the photos, and in order to comprehend their common sense and aesthetic essence one must drink in Alishan's narration and read between the lines.

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<sup>15</sup> Օրբելյան 1986, 281:

<sup>16</sup> «Քրիստոնյա Հայաստան» հանրագիտարան 2002, 912:

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**ՂԵՎՈՆԴ ԱԼԻՇԱՆԻ ՏԵՂԱԳՐԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՏՈՐՆԵՐԻ  
ՍԿԶԲՆԱԹԵՐԹԵՐԻ ԶԵՎԱՎՈՐՈՒՄՆԵՐԸ**

ԴԵՎՐԻԿՅԱՆ Շ.

**Ամփոփում**

**Քանալի քառեր**<sup>1</sup> փորագրանկար, Հայաստանի աշխարհագրություն, ջրհեղեղ, Արարատ, Կիլիկիա, Սյունիք, Շիրակ:

Ղևոնդ Ալիշանի Հայաստանի տարբեր նահանգներին նվիրված հատորների սկզբնաթերթերը սկսվում են այդ նահանգը հավաքական ձևով ներկայացնող և ըստ իր մտահղացման ձևավորված փորագրապատկերներով: Դրանցից յուրաքանչյուրը ընթերցողի առջև գծագրում է տվյալ տարածքի հավաքական պատմությունը և մշակույթը:

1881 թ. լույս տեսած «Շիրակի» սկզբնաթերթի նկարում տեսարանը պատված է ցորենի հասկերով, իսկ հետնախորքում պատմական հուշարձաններն են, որով իրար են միանում Շիրակի պատմական անցյալը՝ անիվով ու Խորենացու հիշած ցորենի արտերով և նահանգի ժամանակի կյանքը ռուսական տիրապետության ներքո՝ կյանքի ապահովության երաշխիքներով:

Հայկական Կիլիկիային նվիրված «Սիսուանում» (1885 թ.)՝ պայմանավորված թուրքական իշխանությունների՝ հայ ժողովրդի ֆիզիկական բնաջնջման

քաղաքականությամբ, շարադրանքը ավելի մոայլ է և շեշտված պատմական ուղղվածություն ունի: Այն արտահայտվել է նաև գրքի առաջին երկու սկզբնաթերթերի նկարներում, որոնք հիմնականում անցյալն են ներկայացնում: Երկու նկարներում ուշադրություն են գրավում ցույի և առյուծի պատկերները: Յուզը Կիլիկիայի հետ կապվող հին հունական անվանումն է, իսկ առյուծը՝ լատիներեն տառադարձությամբ «ռևոնդ» կոչվելով խորհրդանշում է Կիլիկիայի հայկական պետությունը:

«Այրարատը» (1890 թ.) սկսվում է ջրհեղեղի պատկերով՝ խորհրդանշելով Հայաստանից՝ Արարատի փեշերից կյանքի նորոգման, սկսվելու գաղափարը:

Քանի որ Սյունիքը ևս Շիրակ և Այրարատ նահանգների նման գտնվում էր ռուսական իշխանության ներքո՝ զերծ ֆիզիկական գոյությանը սպառնացող վտանգից, ուստի վերջինիս նվիրված «Սիսականի» սկզբնաթերթում պատկերված է Սյունիքի պատմական հարուստ անցյալը՝ լեռնային բնապատկերով և շարունակվող կյանքը Սյունյաց նահապետների կողքին գյուղական տարազով ներկայացված բնակիչներով:

Ալիշանի տեղագրական հատորների սկզբնաթերթերի քննությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ թեև դրանք գեղարվեստական բարձր ձևավորում են ապահովում գրքին, սակայն միայն գեղագիտական նպատակով չէ, որ կատարվել են, այլ ամփոփում են Ալիշանի ասելիքը և պատմահայեցողությունը, ուր բնապատկերն անգամ պատմականանում է և անցյալի գծեր ձեռք բերում:

## ОФОРМЛЕНИЕ ПЕРВЫХ СТРАНИЦ ТОПОГРАФИЧЕСКИХ ТОМОВ ГЕВОНДА АЛИШАНА

ДЕВРИКЯН Ш.

### Резюме

**Ключевые слова:** гравюра, география Армении, потоп, Арарат, Киликия, Сюник, Ширак.

Первые страницы трудов Гевонда Алишана, посвященных разным регионам Армении, являют собой изображение гравюр, созданных по его замыслу.

### **The Decoration of the Frontispieces of Ghevond Alishan's Topographic Volumes**

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На гравюре первой страницы тома «Ширак», изданного в 1881 г., изображены исторические памятники и пшеничные поля Ширана, упоминаемые Хоренаци.

Изложение материала в томе «Сисван» (1885 г.), посвященном Армянской Киликии, в связи с проводимой турецкими властями политикой истребления армянского народа имеет подчеркнутую историческую направленность. Этот мотив присутствует и в первых двух гравюрах книги, где имеется изображение быка и льва. Бык символизирует древнегреческое название Киликии, а лев – в латинской транскрипции гевонд – является символом Армянского Киликийского государства.

Первая страница тома «Айрат» (1890 г.) оформлена гравюрой о всемирном потопе. Гравюра олицетворяет идею возрождения жизни человечества с подножья Арарата.

Поскольку Сюник так же, как Ширак и Айрат, находился под властью России, то первая страница «Сисакана» изображает богатое историческое прошлое Сюника с его горным ландшафтом, патриархов Сюника и крестьян в сельских костюмах.

Изучение первых страниц топографических трудов Алишана явствует о том, что подобное художественное оформление книги преследует не только эстетические цели, но и знакомит читателя с историческим прошлым народа.