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0009-0005-9696-4246 

DOI: 10.54503/1829-4073-2025.2.48-59

THE COVERAGE OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES OF THE FIRST REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA IN THE PAGES OF THE “CHAKATAMART” DAILY NEWSPAPER (1918–1920)

Abstract

The Armistice of Mudros, signed on October 30, 1918, provided an opportunity for Armenian intellectuals who had survived the Genocide to publish periodicals in Constantinople. Among these publications was the highly regarded daily newspaper “Chakatamart”. The newspaper addressed various issues concerning the Armenian people, including the internal and external political challenges faced by the First Republic of Armenia. One of its key areas of focus was the fundamental problems in the educational and cultural sectors. “Chakatamart” covered these topics through news reports prepared by its own correspondents, interviews, and reprints from newspapers published in Armenia. The articles were objective and impartial, while its analytical pieces stood out for their optimism and offered solutions to the problems in the fields of education and culture. The newspaper presented these issues in a positive light and generally approached the shortcomings and deficiencies in the government’s work with leniency, attributing them to the evolving circumstances of the Armenian Question. Almost every issue of the “Chakatamart” periodical included publications related to the restoration and reopening of Armenian educational institutions and cultural centers. Numerous analytical articles were devoted to the

* The article has been delivered on 18.03.2025, reviewed on 25.03.2025, accepted for publication on 29.08.2025.

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challenges faced by schools and the concerns of teachers' unions. The newspaper frequently published the opinions of Armenian cultural figures and artists, who reflected on the core issues and achievements within their respective fields. "Chakatamart" also covered the activities of theaters, museums, and libraries of the First Republic of Armenia – mainly through news reports and correspondence genres. However, analytical articles and interviews on these topics were rarely published. The paper placed special emphasis on the Armenianization policy, which aimed to support the independence of the newly established Armenian state. A large number of materials were published on topics such as: proclaiming Armenian as the official language, ensuring that state correspondence be conducted in Armenian, opening Armenian schools, and the necessity of founding a university. Articles on cultural and educational themes were typically grouped under the headings: "Kyanqy Hayastani mej", "Araratyan surhandak", "Haykakan kyank", and "Ardzaganq Hayastanen". The publication emphasized the importance of educated professionals and the development of the educational and cultural spheres based on the mother tongue and national traditions. However, its perspectives on the issues and fate of Armenian educational and cultural institutions varied between those operating within the First Republic of Armenia and those under Ottoman rule. "Chakatamart" asserted that only within the borders of an independent Armenian state could education, science, and culture flourish, whereas under Turkish rule, the authorities would oppose and prevent such progress.

Keywords: *Mudros Armistice, Armenian Question, Armenian Periodicals in Constantinople, First Republic of Armenia, "Chakatamart" Daily Newspaper, Educational and Cultural Issues, "Life in Armenia" Section.*

Introduction

Shortly after the establishment of the First Republic of Armenia, addressing the challenges in the fields of education and culture became a priority of the state policy. Through the relevant ministries of the government, various state and public institutions, as well as the adopted decisions and laws, the activities in these sectors were gradually regulated. Alongside elementary schools, secondary schools, a university, a repository of manuscripts, theaters, libraries, museums,

and other educational and cultural institutions were opened.¹ They began to operate on a public and state basis.²

In recent years, the educational and cultural life of the First Republic of Armenia has been studied quite thoroughly and seriously in our country,³ therefore, within the scope of this article, we will focus on the publications featured in the “Chakatamart” daily newspaper,⁴ published in Constantinople from 1918 to 1924, and held in high regard. These publications presented the key issues faced by the newly established independent Armenian state, particularly in the fields of education and culture, the initiatives undertaken by government officials to overcome these challenges, and the recorded success and achievements. This newspaper had correspondents and reporters in Armenia. The materials published in the pages of this periodical hold, in some respects, a primary source significance and can provide specialists with valuable information that contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the implemented programs’ development in the mentioned fields during the period under study. Moreover, this information is objective and impartial, free from any party bias or political influence on the professional activities of the correspondents.

The issues of the educational sector of the First Republic of Armenia in the pages of “Chakatamart”

During the years of its publication, the daily newspaper “Chakatamart” has emphasized the role of national education and culture in preserving identity, and educating the rising generation as real Armenians. In the years following the Armenian Genocide, nearly every issue of the newspaper included articles on the efforts to restore and reactivate Armenian educational institutions and cultural centers. There are numerous analytical articles dedicated to the discussion of problems of schools, and issues of concern to teachers’ unions. Cultural figures

¹ History of Armenia 2010, 86–98.

² Vratsyan 1924, 110–113.

³ History of Armenia, vol. 1, issue 4, 2010, 799; Hakobyan 2005, 64; Educational and Cultural Life during the Years of the First Republic of Armenia: Conference Proceedings, 2018, 279; Laws of the Parliament of the Republic of Armenia (1918–1920), 1998, 506.

⁴ The “Chakatamart” daily newspaper was published in Constantinople from 1918 to 1924. Although it was supported by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), it was not a party publication. See Hovsepyan, 2009, 194 on “Chakatamart” and the ARF periodicals of Constantinople.

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and artists have also expressed their views in the pages of this newspaper. The hard work of the editorial staff provides an opportunity to gain an idea of various issues of concern to the Western Armenian intellectual elite in 1918–1924, including educational and cultural issues and the proposed ways to solve them, as well as the work and positive experience practiced in these areas. Naturally, “Chakatamart” also addressed the development processes of various sectors of the First Republic of Armenia, among which education and culture held a prominent place.

The newspaper provided its readers with a detailed view of cultural and educational developments, particularly during 1919–1920. These materials were primarily featured in the “Life in Armenia” section. They were also published under certain headings such as “Araratian Messenger,” “Educational Life in Armenia,” “Cultural Messenger,” “Theater,” “Books,” and “A Jubilee” as well as in the “Literary Feuilleton” section posted on the final page.

Works of famous Armenian and foreign writers of the time and reviews written about many of them were published in “Chakatamart”. The newspaper’s pages featured debates on the development of Armenian literature and its connections with the literatures of neighboring peoples. It is noteworthy that the newspaper placed special emphasis on the policy of Armenianization, which was considered a factor contributing to the independence of the newly created Armenian state. There were numerous publications advocating for the declaration of Armenian as the state language, the use of the native language in official correspondence, the establishment of Armenian schools, and the founding of a university. For instance, on June 21, 1919, it was reported that the first meeting of Armenian press representatives had taken place at Yerevan City Hall, during which the Committee for Armenianization was established, and decisions related to the native language were adopted.⁵ The Armenianization Committee was supposed to contribute to the Armenianization process of institutions and establishments. The committee’s appeal, which was also published in the newspaper, was intended to serve this purpose.⁶ On July 1, 1919, the newspaper published a circular from the Armenian government announcing that Armenian would be granted the status of the official state language, and all official writing

⁵ “Chakatamart”, № 186, June 21, 1919.

⁶ “Chakatamart”, № 186, June 21, 1919.

would be conducted entirely in Armenian.⁷ It was also reported that the renowned doctor Vahan Artsruni had compiled an Armenian medical dictionary containing 12,000 words, with plans to add more words in the future.⁸

Despite the many socio-economic and geopolitical challenges facing the newly formed state, the leaders of the First Republic of Armenia approached the development of cultural and educational policies with great seriousness and paid close attention to implementing its principles and guidelines. Derived from issues of vital importance for Armenia, "Chakatamart" presented the reform and development programs launched in the fields of education and culture, the works implemented with great difficulty, and various initiatives. The materials written on educational and cultural topics were summarized under the headings "Life in Armenia," "Araratian Messenger," "Armenian Life," and "Response from Armenia." "Chakatamart" covered important events in the fields of education, culture, and art. The main reason was the almost insoluble socio-economic problems facing the newly created state, which were compounded by geopolitical circumstances and wars with neighbors, as well as the country's unpredictable future. The newspaper's publications showed that the country's leaders, plagued by food and living problems, attached importance to the role of education, art, and culture of the rising generation. In a short period, the country's leadership regulated the problems of the educational sector, put the school system in order, opened the future conservatory, public and other libraries, laid the foundations of writers' and artists' unions, a national state theater, and promoted sports unions and sports schools. This intense educational and cultural activity found its reflection in the pages of "Chakatamart." In 1919, the newspaper wrote: "Following the special editions of newspapers coming from Armenia, we see that the Armenian Ministry of Education is making decisions regarding education, literature, and art, which are encouraging for us."⁹ In one of the news, it was mentioned: "School buildings are gradually being vacated, and schools are reopening."¹⁰ From the newspaper's publications, the parliament and government's attention to educational and cultural issues was beyond doubt. The

⁷ **Manasyan** 1919, 194.

⁸ Medical Dictionary 1919, 194.

⁹ **Parsamyans** 1919, 222.

¹⁰ "Chakatamart," № 52, January 15, 1919.

role of the mother tongue was emphasized when organizing public education.¹¹ The newspaper quoted Prime Minister A. Khatissian's words: "There is hope to establish a stronger foundation for educational work in the 1919–1920 academic year."¹² For this purpose, the government was guided by the following principles in the field of public education: to make primary education universal, compulsory, and free; to promote vocational education; to nationalize church and parish schools by incorporating them into the general school system; and to establish higher education institutions as well as Sunday schools for the adult population.¹³ The periodical reported that the Ministry of Public Education and Arts of Armenia had made changes to the curricula of parish and church schools.¹⁴

According to the newspaper, the government made a historic decision to open a state university in Yerevan.¹⁵ There were several articles in the daily newspaper dedicated to the opening of the university. From these, readers learned that part of the building of Yerevan Gymnasium would be allocated to the university,¹⁶ and the decision to open this educational institution was made on May 16, 1919.¹⁷ The faculties of history and linguistics as well as law and economics were to be housed in a separate building.¹⁸ The newspaper articles revealed that the university had opened in Alexandropol on January 31, 1920, with the condition to operate in Yerevan once the obstructive circumstances were removed.¹⁹ The editorial team welcomed the opening of the university: "The opening of the university was necessary to strengthen Armenia's independence in the broadest sense."²⁰

The cultural events of the First Republic of Armenia were highlighted in the publications of "Chakatamart"

"Chakatamart" covered the activities of theaters, museums, and libraries of

¹¹ "Chakatamart," № 212, July 22, 1919.

¹² "Chakatamart," № 248, September 3, 1919.

¹³ "Chakatamart," № 269, September 27, 1919.

¹⁴ "Chakatamart," № 262, September 19, 1919.

¹⁵ "Chakatamart," № 212, July 22, 1919.

¹⁶ "Chakatamart," № 275, October 5, 1919.

¹⁷ **Zavryan** 1919, 291.

¹⁸ **Zavryan** 1919, 291.

¹⁹ "Chakatamart," № 378, February 13, 1920.

²⁰ "Chakatamart," № 378, February 13, 1920.

the First Republic of Armenia, mainly through news reports and correspondence. There were hardly any analytical articles or interviews on these topics. The newspaper reported that a private library had been established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia to collect professional literature, and open the library in the capital.²¹ The periodical published the official letter of the Minister of Public Education and Arts, Nikol Aghbalyan, addressed to the Yerevan City Administration.²² It presented a project for constructing theater buildings in cities and towns.²³ Ovi Sevumyan, an actor and director sent from Armenia with his theater troupe, personally told the Armenian community in Constantinople about the plan to establish a national state theater in Armenia.²⁴

“Chakatamart” reported on news, events, and significant initiatives in Armenia's educational and cultural sectors. The newspaper considered the government's decision to establish a Department for the Preservation of Antiquities as essential.²⁵ The periodical published an appeal of the head of that department, Ashkharhabek Lori-Melik Kalantar, that everyone, not just the government, should get involved in the preservation of ancient sites, monuments, and works of art.²⁶ The newspaper published a circular from the Ministry of Public Education and Arts,²⁷ which requested that any discovered antiquities be reported to the staff of the Department for the Preservation of Antiquities.²⁸

The Armenian leadership had a special attitude towards museums and libraries as important links connecting the past to the present. This approach was shared by the editorial staff of “Chakatamart,” which did not miss an opportunity to publish news touching these areas. Let us cite one of the correspondents as an example. The “Light of Freedom” library-reading room in Van was established in 1908 following the proclamation of constitutional order in the Ottoman Empire. Of the approximately 10,000 books collected there, some were salvaged by young people during the turmoil of the Armenian Genocide.²⁹ These books were

²¹ **Zavryan** 1919, 291.

²² **Aghbalyan** 1919, 309.

²³ **Aghbalyan** 1919, 309.

²⁴ “Chakatamart”, № 293, 02.11.1919.

²⁵ **Lori-Melik** 1919, 287.

²⁶ **Lori-Melik** 1919, 287.

²⁷ “Chakatamart”, № 302, November 13, 1919.

²⁸ “Chakatamart”, № 302, November 13, 1919.

²⁹ “Chakatamart”, № 195, July 2, 1919.

transported to Yerevan,³⁰ where, in January 1919, the library-reading room was reestablished under the same name within the ARF House.³¹ "Chakatamart" reprinted a letter from the "Ashkhatank" (meaning work) newspaper, which stated that the museums in Western Armenia (including the Ani Museum) and the antiquities preserved in monasteries were destroyed during the years of the Armenian Genocide. The letter lamented: "In the Republic, we currently have no museums or national memorial antiquities of any kind. All we possess is the ecclesiastical historical-ethnographic 'Hayrikian Museum' in Etchmiadzin."³² The author of the letter appealed to the Ministry of Public Education and Arts, requesting support for the preservation of the museum founded in Etchmiadzin in 1898 by Mkrtich Khrimian.³³

Conclusions

Summing up the results of our study, we can state that "Chakatamart" daily newspaper objectively addressed the main issues of the socio-economic and educational-cultural life of the First Republic of Armenia, viewed them in a positive light, and forgivingly approached the gaps and shortcomings observed in the work of the government, attributing them to the developments of the Armenian Question. The newspaper was confident that, under favorable geopolitical circumstances, the First Republic of Armenia would be able to overcome the difficulties in all fields, including those in education and culture. "The Battlefield" rightly emphasized the importance of having educated specialists in Armenia's economic progress. The newspaper's approaches were differentiated regarding the challenges and fate of Armenian educational and cultural institutions and establishments operating in the First Republic of Armenia and in the Ottoman reality. The editorial team believed that for the newly established Armenian state, everything in these fields had to be created and developed from scratch, whereas in the Western Armenian context, the task was to restore and preserve what had previously been established. "Chakatamart" believed that only within the borders of the homeland would education, science, and culture have the opportunity to progress and develop, while the Turkish authorities were against it and would not

³⁰ Baghruni 1919, 169.

³¹ "Chakatamart", № 278, October 9, 1919.

³² "Chakatamart", № 278, October 9, 1919.

³³ "Chakatamart", № 278, October 9, 1919.

allow this to happen. Already in 1924, “Chakatamart” was concerned about the laws and decisions adopted by the Turkish authorities that limited the right of national minorities (Armenians in particular) to receive education in their native language.³⁴ The newspaper reported that Armenian schools in Turkey were seriously endangered,³⁵ in contrast to the fact that they were treated with great care and supported by state policy in the First Republic of Armenia. It is worth noting that before 1915, more than 2,000 Armenian schools were operating in Ottoman Turkey, whereas by the early 1920s, only 47 Armenian schools remained in Constantinople. Additionally, speaking any language other than Turkish in public places was prohibited. The first Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, adopted in 1924, declared that all peoples living in the country and holding citizenship were considered Turks.³⁶ “Chakatamart” also presented the achievements of Eastern and Western Armenian figures in theater, literature, painting, and other branches of art. Through these publications, the editorial team seemed to demonstrate that despite all the catastrophes, the Armenian people had revived and were striving to hold their ground, achieving outstanding results on renowned stages and in exhibition halls worldwide.

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³⁴ “Chakatamart”, № 1684, May 21, 1924.

³⁵ “Chakatamart”, № 1705, June 14, 1924.

³⁶ History of the Republic of Turkey 2014, 83–84.

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ՄԱՐԻԱՄ ՀՈՎՍԵՓՅԱՆ

Բանասիրական գիտությունների թեկնածու

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0009-0005-9696-4246 

**ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԱՌԱՋԻՆ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ
ԿՐԹԱՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ՀԻՄՆԱԽՆԴԻՐՆԵՐԻ
ԱՆԴՐԱԴԱՐՁԸ «ՃԱԿԱՏԱՄԱՐՏ» ՕՐԱԹԵՐԹԻ ԷՋԵՐՈՒՄ
(1918–1920 ԹԹ.)**

Ամփոփում

1918 թ. հոկտեմբերի 30-ին կնքված Մուդրոսի զինադադարը հնարավորություն տվեց Յեղասպանությունից փրկված հայ մտավորականներին Կոստանդնուպոլսում հրատարակել թերթ և պարբերականներ: Դրանց թվում էր բարձր վարկանիշ ունեցող «Ճակատամարտ» օրաթերթը: Այն անդրադառնում էր հայ ժողովրդին մտահոգող տարբեր խնդիրների: Դրանցից էին Հայաստանի Առաջին հանրապետության առջև ծառացած ներքին ու արտաքին քաղաքականությանն առնչվող խնդիրները, այդ թվում՝ կրթամշակութային ոլորտում առկա հիմնահարցերը: Պարբերականը դրանք լուսաբանում էր սեփական թղթակիցների պատրաստած լուրերի, հարցազրույցների և Հայաստանում տպագրվող մամուլից արված արտատպումների միջոցով: Հրապարակումները օբյեկտիվ ու անաչառ էին, իսկ վերլուծական հոդվածները աչքի էին ընկնում իրենց լավատեսությամբ և պարունակում էին կրթության ու մշակույթի բնագավառներում եղած խնդիրների լուծման առաջարկներ: Թերթը այդ հիմնահարցերը դրական լույսի ներքո է դիտարկել և ընդհանուր առմամբ կառավարության աշխատանքում նկատվող, թերություններին ներողամտորեն է մոտեցել՝ դրանք պայմանավորելով Հայկական հարցի զարգացումներով: «Ճակատամարտը» կարևորում էր կրթված մասնագետների դերը և կրթամշակութային ոլորտի ձևավորումն ու զարգացումը՝ մայրենի լեզվի ու ազգային ավանդույթների հիմքի վրա: Օրաթերթի մոտեցումները տարբերակված էին Հայաստանի Առաջին հանրապետությունում և օսմանյան իրականության մեջ գործող հայկական կրթական ու մշակութային հաստատություն-

ների, կրթօջախների խնդիրների ու ճակատագրի առնչությամբ: «Ճակատամարտը» գտնում էր, որ կրթությունը, գիտությունը և մշակույթը առաջընթացի ու զարգացման հնարավորություն կունենային միայն հայրենի պետության սահմաններում:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Մուդրոսի զինադադար, Հայկական հարց, պոլսահայ պարբերականներ, Հայաստանի Առաջին հանրապետություն, «Ճակատամարտ» օրաթերթ, կրթամշակութային հիմնախնդիրներ, «Կյանքը Հայաստանի մեջ» բաժին: