
HISTORY

THE PREPARATORY STAGE OF THE ACTIVITY OF THE BASEL MISSIONARIES IN SHUSHI (1820-1824)

Hayk Edilyan*

Abstract

The study of the preparatory stage of the activity of the Basel missionaries in Shushi reflects the initial steps and strategic approaches of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society (BEMS) in penetrating the region through its missionaries, which formed the future basis of their missionary work. Based on Armenian and foreign-language sources, we have studied the course, stages, and content of the preparatory period for the Basel missionaries' activity in Shushi, and analyzed and evaluated their significance and importance for the missionaries' subsequent mission. The preparatory stage of missionary activity in Shushi covers the years 1820–1824, from the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society's entry into the territory of the Russian Empire until the missionaries' establishment in Shushi.

Keywords: missionary, Shushi, Russian Empire, missionary society, biblical society, Basel Committee.

Although there are some studies on the activities of the Basel missionaries in Shushi¹, which relate to their printing activities, a separate comprehensive study and analysis of their preparatory work for activity in Shushi is, nonetheless, a scientific novelty.

The role of preparing and carrying out missionary work in Shushi was assigned to the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society. Karl Friedrich Adolf Steinkopf², who was the secretary of the German Christian Society of Basel (Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft)³ from 1795–1800, played a major role in the creation of the BEMS. On September 25, 1815, he, along with Christian Friedrich Spittler⁴, founded the Basel Missionary Institute (Das Basler Missionsinstitut), whose first inspector was

* Applicant at the Institute of History of the NAS of the RA Email: haykedilyan@mail.ru

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¹ Petoyan 2019. Petoyan 2020.

² Karl Friedrich Adolf Steinkopf (1773-1859) had close contacts with various local religious organizations in Germany and Switzerland, contributed to the establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, founded the Württemberg Bible Society in 1812, and actively participated in the process of establishing the Russian Bible Society. See Detzler 2004. 270.

³ Founded on August 30, 1780. See Herrmann 2003. 131.

⁴ For information on the life and work of Christian Friedrich Spittler, see Kober 1887.

Christian Gottlieb Blumhardt. On Blumhardt's initiative, a school for the training of missionaries was opened in the same year.⁵ Starting from this period, close ties and avenues of cooperation were established between German, Swiss, Russian, and British Bible and missionary societies. These ties were expressed in the following years in the translation, publication, and dissemination of the Holy Scriptures, as well as in the implementation of missionary work.

In 1820, through the efforts of C. Blumhardt, the organization founded in 1815 was renamed, which consequently changed its primary goals. With the "Draft of Some Basic Principles of the Constitution of the Evangelical Missionary Society of Basel" (Entwurf einiger Grundzüge der Verfassung der evangelischen Missionsgesellschaft zu Basel), developed by Blumhardt, the organization was renamed the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society.⁶ This society subsequently aspired not only to train missionaries in its school but also to establish its own mission stations in other places, among which Shushi, located within the Russian Empire since the beginning of the 19th century, would later play an important role.

In the statute adopted in 1820, the second point established the purpose of the Missionary Society: "The dissemination of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the saving knowledge thereof among non-Christian peoples." The fifth point specified the shores of the Black and Mediterranean Seas⁷ as the most suitable location for their future missionary service. This area was intended to serve as a crucial center for developing activities in the territories of the Russian Empire, Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and countries in North Africa.

An important occasion for realizing this goal was the appeal made in 1819 by the Scottish Missionary Society⁸ to the Basel Missionary Society to send missionaries to the Jews scattered along the shores of the Black Sea to bring them "the Word of God's Kingdom," which was realized in July 1820.⁹ In this way, the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society established its presence in the territory of the Russian Empire. As a result, in addition to the area between the Black and Mediterranean Seas, another important region was designated for the future expansion of the Society's activities. This region encompassed the territories between the Black and Caspian Seas, which also created wide opportunities for active work among the Muslims of Russia, Persia, and Turkey. Furthermore, it was close to Georgia, where the Basel missionaries were also assigned an active role in the spiritual life of the German colonies¹⁰ established there.

⁵ O'Flynn 2017. 477.

⁶ O'Flynn 2017. 481.

⁷ Magazin für die neueste Geschichte der evangelischen Missions- und Bibelgesellschaften 1821. 477-478. (hereafter: Evangelischen Missions-Magazin).

⁸ The Edinburgh Missionary Society, founded in 1796, was renamed the Scottish Missionary Society in 1818. See O'Flynn 2017. 242.

⁹ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1820. 560.

¹⁰ For the establishment and history of the German colonies, see Chernova-Dyoke 2008.

Following their entry into the territory of the Russian Empire, the next important intention of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society was to establish and consolidate themselves in the area between the Black and Caspian Seas, specifically in the Caucasus. Preparatory work for this began in 1821, which involved establishing ties with the Russian authorities and obtaining permission for missionary work in the aforementioned regions.

On June 21, 1821, two of the four students from the Basel missionary school, August Heinrich Dittrich¹¹ and Felician Martin von Zarembo¹², as ordained missionaries, were sent to St. Petersburg by the decision of the Basel Committee to obtain permission from the Russian authorities. Following this, they were to settle in the regions of the Black and Caspian Seas to carry out missionary work, for which they had received specific instructions from C. Blumhardt.¹³

Specifically, the missionaries were tasked with spreading the Word of God in the local languages, collaborating with the British and Foreign Bible Society¹⁴ and the Russian Bible Society¹⁵ operating in Russia and its branches, and submitting reports on their activities and results within a set time frame. The missionaries were also instructed to meticulously study the languages prevalent in the region for the purpose of translating the Holy Scriptures. They were to establish schools and a printing house, where the translated Holy Scriptures and necessary educational materials would be printed for teaching in the schools.¹⁶

The subsequent issue of “The Missionary Register” in 1822, which contained information about the activities of various spiritual societies in different regions, referred to the journey of A. Dittrich and F. Zarembo to St. Petersburg and added that after obtaining permission, they were to travel to the adjacent Black Sea regions to carry out the planned mission among the Armenians.¹⁷ However, this is not included in the instructions and assignments given to the missionaries, nor is it mentioned in the issues

¹¹ August Heinrich Dittrich (1797-1855), was born in Saxony, educated in Paris and Cambridge, studying Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. See O’Flynn 2017. 483. A. Dittrich also studied classical Armenian (Grabar) in Moscow with Michael Sallantyan, a lecturer at the Lazaryan Seminary. See Ghukasyants 1886. 3.

¹² Felician Martin von Zarembo (1794-1874), born in Grodno (now in Belarus), in the northwest of Poland, into a noble family. His father was an officer in the Russian army. Zarembo received a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Dorpat University and was an official in the Russian Empire’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See Wolff 1829. 229.

¹³ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1821. 494.

¹⁴ The British and Foreign Bible Society, founded on March 7, 1804, in London. For details on the Society’s activities, see Owen 1817.

¹⁵ The Russian Bible Society, founded on January 23, 1813, in Saint Petersburg. For the history and activities of the Society, see <https://biblia.ru/AboutUs/AboutUs-GoalsAndHistory/>.

¹⁶ Acts Collected by the Caucasian Archaeographic Commission (ACAC), Vol. VI, Part 1, Doc. 632 1874. 469.

¹⁷ The Missionary Register, London, vol. 10 1822. 39.

of the magazine published in Basel that covers the activities of the Protestant Missionary and Bible Societies, which contain detailed information about the missionaries' activities during those years.

In 1836, the Basel Committee, referring to the dispatch of missionaries to Russia in 1821 in the "Evangelischen Missions-Magazin," noted that the missionaries were instructed to conduct an exploratory-reconnaissance journey to the southern regions of the Empire, where they were to carry out missionary work among the Muslims living in those territories.¹⁸

By comparing these two pieces of information, we can conclude that although the Basel Missionary Society's goal was to preach Christianity to the Muslims of the region, they had nonetheless planned from the outset to also work among the Armenians to prepare them for missionary work, which primarily entailed instilling evangelical ideas among them.

The Basel Committee intended to establish a colony in the territory of the Russian Empire as the base for its future missionary activity, an example of which already existed in the Empire—the Scottish colony of Karass¹⁹, founded in 1802. This colony was to serve as their headquarters, from which they would coordinate and expand their activities. To this end, on October 12, 1821, missionaries A. Dittrich and F. Zaremba drafted a petition to the Russian government requesting to establish a Christian colony in the aforementioned regions, which they also referred to as a "colony of pious German families." In the petition, the missionaries stated that their purpose was to conduct evangelism among Muslims and pagans through the dissemination of the Bible and other holy scriptures.

The necessity of establishing a colony, as opposed to operating as individual missionaries in the Empire, lay in the fact that a church could be established within the colony, which would have the right to baptize and accept new converts who had not been Christian before. Otherwise, as mere foreign missionaries, they would face great difficulties regarding this issue, and its realization would lead to the violation of the ecclesiastical laws operating within the Empire.²⁰ The establishment of a colony within the Empire would guarantee that the missionaries' activities were protected and secured by law.

For the prospective colony, the missionaries requested the same rights and privileges granted to Karass²¹, permission to establish educational institutions where Tatar and Persian young people could receive education, and where they would also be taught about the "Kingdom of God." Newly converted Christians could become members of the colony through baptism. In their petition, the missionaries also

¹⁸ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1836. 376.

¹⁹ For the founding of Karass by Scottish missionaries, see O'Flynn 2007. 259-268.

²⁰ Smith, Dwight 1834. 195.

²¹ For the privileges granted to Karass, see Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire (CCLRE), Vol. 29, N 22410, 960-962.

addressed the necessity of establishing a printing house for the purpose of printing and disseminating Bibles and necessary textbooks. The missionaries also aimed to obtain permission that their allocated territories, particularly concerning the organization and implementation of educational and spiritual activities there, would be subject not to the local authorities, but to the Minister of Spiritual Affairs and Public Education of the Russian Empire.²² This was due to the fact that the post of Minister in this Ministry at that time was occupied by Alexander Nikolaevich Golitsyn²³, who was also the President of the Russian Bible Society (founded in 1813) and had close ties with the Basel missionaries. The Ministry of Spiritual Affairs and Public Education was also responsible for the censorship of printed publications through its corresponding committees, with which the missionaries would later interact repeatedly, as printing and publishing occupied a significant place in their activities.

The response to the missionaries' petition to the Russian authorities was received on January 7, 1822 (№ 18), from the Minister of Internal Affairs, Viktor Pavlovich Kochubey.²⁴ The response specifically stated that the missionaries were permitted to establish a colony between the Black and Caspian Seas, where they were allowed to have a school and a printing house for the purpose of disseminating the Word of God. The printed books, however, had to comply with the censorship laws operating within the Empire. The newly established colony was to be granted the same privileges as the Scottish colony of Karass, with certain modifications, and was guaranteed all kinds of assistance from civil and military authorities. A. Dittrich and F. Zarembo were permitted to travel to the specified regions to select suitable land for their activities and to gather information about the local population.²⁵

The government informed the Chief Governor of the Caucasus, General Alexey Petrovich Yermolov²⁶, about its decision, to ensure the missionaries' safe journey, especially within the borders of Derbent, Baku, and Guba, "where perfect peace had not yet prevailed due to being newly conquered".²⁷

Having received the approval and permission of the authorities, the missionaries traveled from St. Petersburg to Astrakhan to meet with the Scottish missionaries there. The latter already had extensive experience operating as missionaries representing a separate colony in the Empire's territory, from whom the Basel missionaries could learn everything necessary and useful for their future work. In April 1822, the Basel

²² Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1822. 460-465.

²³ Golitsyn, Alexander Nikolaevich (1773-1844), Russian statesman, Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod (1803-1816), Minister of Public Education (1816-1824), President of the Russian Bible Society (1817-1824).

²⁴ Kochubey, Viktor Pavlovich (1768-1834), Russian statesman, first Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire (1802-1807 and 1819-1823), Chairman of the State Council (1827-1834).

²⁵ ACAC, Vol. VI, Part 1, Doc. 632 1874. 468.

²⁶ Yermolov, Alexey Petrovich (1777-1861), Russian military and statesman, General, Commander of the Separate Caucasian Corps, Chief Governor of the Caucasus (1816-1827).

²⁷ Ghukasyants 1886: 3.

Committee sent three more missionaries to St. Petersburg to join A. Dittrich and F. Zaremba: Rudolf Friedrich Hohenacker, Heinrich Benz, and Gottlieb Kurfes, though Kurfes died in St. Petersburg on April 29. In May 1822, the remaining four missionaries traveled from the capital to Astrakhan, where in July of the same year, missionary Jakob Johann Lang joined them as a replacement for the deceased Kurfes.²⁸

In Astrakhan, language study was given an important place in the missionaries' preparation, specifically Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Tatar, and Armenian, which generally lasted about 10 months.²⁹ While the first three languages were related to the goal of preaching among Muslims, the study of the Armenian language and the desire to learn it during their preparatory missionary stage again indicated that the missionaries certainly had a specific program related to the Christian Armenians, from the perspective of making them a part of their activities. This is also evidenced by the fact that during this preparatory period, the missionaries, being in close contact with the Russian Bible Society, had reached an agreement to receive Armenian Bibles, along with Russian, Tatar, Arabic, and Georgian Bibles, to distribute during their work.³⁰

Christof Friedrich Eppler notes that besides carrying out missionary work among Muslims, the missionaries' actions were also aimed at "revitalizing the ancient Oriental Churches, primarily the Armenian Church, whose customs and ruined spiritual life caused shame among Muslims".³¹ Eppler interprets the missionaries' steps towards the "revitalization" of the Armenian Church as a crucial means of achieving success in missionary work among Muslims.

On April 25, 1823, missionaries A. Dittrich, F. Zaremba, and H. Benz³² left Astrakhan and arrived in Tiflis on May 18, with the goal of spending some time in the seven German colonies established around Tiflis (Marienfeld and Petersdorf, New Tiflis, Alexandersdorf, Elisabeththal, Katharinenfeld) and Gandzak/Ganja (Annenfeld, Helenendorf), caring for the spiritual needs of the local population. Following this, a visit to Muslim-populated areas was planned to get a more detailed on-the-ground understanding and plan their work. According to the missionaries' reports, Armenians had lived in Georgia since time immemorial, and the number of their families at that time reached 11,000.³³ In May 1823, F. Hohenacker and J. Lang, in turn, traveled to Karass to assist the Scottish missionaries in their spiritual work.³⁴

²⁸ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1836. 378.

²⁹ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1823. 174.

³⁰ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1822. 478.

³¹ Eppler 1888. 7.

³² On July 30, missionary H. Benz died in Georgia, and he was replaced there by missionary Johann Bernhard Saltet.

³³ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1824. 466.

³⁴ The Missionary Register, vol. 12 1824. 34-35, Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1836. 379.

During their time in Tiflis, A. Dittrich and F. Zarembo met with Nerses Ashtaraketsi³⁵, from whom they received letters addressed to high-ranking clergy in all the regions they were going to visit, with the purpose of assisting the missionaries' activities.³⁶

On June 8, 1823, the missionaries received a written response (№ 1897) from A. Yermolov, who, after receiving and thoroughly studying the relevant documents for establishing a colony, informed them that the government did not have available land near the Persian border that could be provided to them for the creation of a colony. He added that, nevertheless, they could operate as missionaries in any city or village, have buildings intended for a school and a printing house, and a garden where they could grow vegetables. A. Yermolov promised to instruct local authorities to provide them with assistance, necessary protection, information about the local population, and assistance with other necessary issues.³⁷

On the same day, A. Yermolov also sent another letter (№ 126) to the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding the same issue, where he put forward a different justification for the impossibility of establishing a colony in those areas, stating that it could cause great dissatisfaction among the local Muslim population from the perspective of preaching Christianity, which could be perceived by them as pressure and directed activity by the government against their religious freedoms. He again added at the end that the missionaries would only be allowed to establish a school and a printing house in the specified areas.³⁸

Thus, the previously obtained permission for the missionaries to establish a colony was not realized. Consequently, the missionaries were deprived of all the privileges intended for colonies, particularly the right to baptize new Christians and accept them into their own community, which would have contributed to the expansion of Protestant or evangelical communities in the territory of the Russian Empire.

After spending about five months in the German colonies and carrying out spiritual activities there, missionaries A. Dittrich and F. Zarembo continued their journey and reached Shushi on October 13, 1823.³⁹ In their first reports from Shushi, the missionaries noted that its geographical position was suitable for working among the surrounding Muslims and was safe for settlement. They also reported that the houses in Shushi were quite similar to European houses, that there were five Armenian churches operating there with services conducted by 12 priests, and one mosque.⁴⁰ This was the

³⁵ Nerses Ashtaraketsi served as the Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Georgia from 1814–1828, was appointed Primate of the Armenian Diocese of New Nakhichevan and Bessarabia in 1828, and was Catholicos of All Armenians from 1843–1857.

³⁶ *Evangelischen Missions-Magazin* 1824. 472.

³⁷ ACAC, Vol. VI, Part 1, Doc. 638 1874. 472.

³⁸ ACAC, Vol. VI, Part 1, Doc. 637 1874. 472.

³⁹ For details about Shushi, see Karapetyan 2000, Ulubabyan 1994: 183–200.

⁴⁰ *Evangelischen Missions-Magazin* 1824. 473–474.

missionaries' first visit to Shushi. After inspecting and studying its location and geographical position, it was intended to become their main and central hub of activity, where they planned to build a house, establish schools, and a printing house.

Until permission for the necessary buildings was obtained, the missionaries initially settled in Shushi in the house of an Armenian merchant named Arzuman⁴¹, who, according to the missionaries, was "a friendly old man who was well-acquainted with the Holy Scriptures".⁴²

The missionaries also used their time in Shushi to visit neighboring regions. On October 23, they set out for Shamakhi and Baku, which were also considered important regions for missionary activity. During the tour, the missionaries met with both local Armenians and Muslims. In Shamakhi, where the missionaries stayed until November 6, meetings were held with Armenian priests Petros and Michael, who approved the idea of establishing a school for children from poor families in Shamakhi. The role of Shamakhi was considered important because it could provide a crucial link with the Lezgins and the mountain tribes of Dagestan.⁴³

On November 6, the missionaries traveled from Shamakhi to Baku, where they stayed until November 18, again meeting with local Armenian priests, during which the idea of establishing Armenian schools was also discussed and approved.⁴⁴ Referring to the Armenians they met during these journeys and their educational and spiritual levels, the missionaries noted the scarcity or often the absence of Armenian schools in those regions, as a result of which many Armenians were deprived of the ability to read, and the Armenians were not distinct from Muslims in their knowledge of Christianity.⁴⁵ A. Dittrich and F. Zarembo also informed Catholicos Ephrem I⁴⁶ and Nerses Ashtaraketsi about this state of affairs through letters, also informing them of their desire to open schools, but these remained unanswered.⁴⁷ Subsequently, the main justifications and rationales for the missionaries' educational and spiritual activities among Armenians always stemmed from the aforementioned circumstances, which were often expressed in other writings by the missionaries as well.

After traveling through Shushi, then Shamakhi, and Baku in October–November 1823, the missionaries first chose Shushi as their main base, which was to be the principal center for organizing and carrying out missionary work. The creation of a secondary station was planned for Shamakhi, and later, if possible, Baku. Judging by the missionaries' meetings, we can state that establishing relations, particularly with the

⁴¹ Ghukasyants 1886: 8.

⁴² *Evangelischen Missions-Magazin* 1824. 475.

⁴³ *Evangelischen Missions-Magazin* 1824. 478–479.

⁴⁴ *Evangelischen Missions-Magazin* 1824. 485.

⁴⁵ Smith, Dwight 1834. 197.

⁴⁶ Ephrem I Dzoragheghetsi, Catholicos of All Armenians (1809–1830). For the full content of the missionaries' letter to Catholicos Ephrem, see Wolff 1829. 209–212.

⁴⁷ O'Flynn 2017. 485.

Armenian clergy, was of primary importance to them. This suggests that the Armenian Church was given the primary place in their goals of involving Armenians in their activities, followed only then by the Armenian people in general.

Before the Basel Committee made a final decision on settling in Shushi, the missionaries returned temporarily to the German colonies of Gandzak on November 18. From there, on November 21, they informed General A. Yermolov of their final decision to settle in Shushi, where there was a large amount of available land for the construction of the necessary buildings. They also requested permission for some of their employees/missionaries to settle later in Shamakhi and Baku to organize missionary work there. In the letter, the missionaries also informed A. Yermolov that, based on the results of their tour, they intended to focus on the Armenians for a few years, disseminating the Word of God among them and opening schools for them. After some time, they would transition to realizing their main goal: the dissemination of the Word of God among Muslims.⁴⁸

In parallel, summarizing the results of their tours, the Basel missionaries conveyed their conclusion in the report sent to their committee, according to which they could not expect successful activity among Muslims in the initial period, noting that the Muslims were not particularly favorably disposed towards the missionaries and the religion they preached, and establishing schools among them was not yet realistic. This was in contrast to the Armenians living in the border regions of the Russian Empire, among whom “we have seen a desire to overcome their low level of education⁴⁹, a readiness to learn, and a desire to have educational institutions”.⁵⁰ This fact clearly demonstrates that in the initial phase of their activity, the missionaries intended to focus exclusively on the Armenians, explaining it in terms of the “desires” and “aspirations” expressed by the Armenians for education, which in turn was meant to contribute to effective missionary work among Muslims. According to the missionaries, this was also a vital necessity before starting work among Muslims. In this way, the missionaries’ long-term goals were also manifested: to prepare educated and faithful figures from among the Armenians who, being familiar with the daily life and character traits of the local Muslims, could provide effective service and achieve success.

Regarding the letter sent by the missionaries to A. Yermolov on November 21, 1823, in which they stated their intention to also carry out activities among the Armenians in the initial phase, Alexey Alexandrovich Velyaminov⁵¹ informed the Basel missionaries in a letter dated December 19, 1823 (№ 4033) that he had received the letter due to A. Yermolov’s absence from Georgia, and that he would also report the

⁴⁸ ACAC, Vol. VI, Part 1, Doc. 639 1874. 473. Ghukasyants 1886: 5-6.

⁴⁹ For the low level of education and widespread illiteracy among different strata of the Armenian people during the period of Persian rule, see History of Armenia 2010: 184. Yerkanian 1970: 31-45.

⁵⁰ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1824. 488-490.

⁵¹ Major General Velyaminov, Alexey Alexandrovich, served as the Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces in the Caucasus from 1816–1829. See Voennaya entsiklopediya 1911. 291.

content of the letter to Alexander I (1801-1825). He then warned that, according to the laws of the Russian Empire, the conversion of subject Christian peoples, including Armenians, to the evangelical faith was prohibited, and according to the operative law, such a right was reserved for the Greek-Russian denomination.⁵²

In response to A. Velyaminov's warning, the missionaries, in a letter dated December 22, 1823, reaffirmed their purpose, stating that their goal was to conduct missionary work among Muslims and heathens, that they were aware of the state law, and that they had no intention of re-baptizing any Christian, because "a person, regardless of their ecclesiastical affiliation, will be saved if they have dedicated their heart to God." The missionaries also added that their programs related to Armenians were limited only to establishing schools for their Christian brethren, especially the poor, where the Word of God would also be taught, wishing to develop among them the desire to possess and read the Bible, but they did not intend to re-baptize or convert any Armenian.⁵³

Before the start of their activity in Shushi, the missionaries managed to establish a legal foundation for the idea that, even without the right to re-baptize, they should carry out missionary work primarily among the Armenians. For this, they would establish schools, translate and print Armenian Bibles to be distributed among the people, while simultaneously working among Muslims and heathens.

After their first visit to Shushi and their tour of Shamakhi and Baku, missionaries A. Dittrich and F. Zarembo returned to the German colonies near Gandzak on November 18, 1823, where they stayed until January of the following year (1824). In a report submitted to the Basel Committee on February 14, 1824, the missionaries reported on their final establishment in Shushi. According to the missionaries' information, they left Gandzak on January 20, 1824, and arrived in Shushi on January 23, accompanied by two brethren, lodging again at Arzuman's house. The missionaries also reported that during this time they had managed to acquire a comfortable plot of land for the construction of a house, and were taking measures for the construction of other necessary buildings. They were also actively engaged in improving their language skills and establishing contacts with the local people.⁵⁴

In the information reported by the missionaries, we also find some issues related to the spiritual life of the local Armenians, who specifically noted that "in Karabakh there are a large number of families who were Christians but became Muslim as a result of the policies⁵⁵ pursued by the Persian Khans".⁵⁶ The missionaries' highlighting of these realities aimed to emphasize the necessity of preaching Christianity among the local

⁵² ACAC, Vol. VI, Part 1, Doc. 640 1874. 474.

⁵³ ACAC, Vol. VI, Part 1, Doc. 641 1874. 474, Ghukasyants 1886: 6-7, *Evangelischen Missions-Magazin* 1824. 491.

⁵⁴ *Evangelischen Missions-Magazin* 1824. 493-494.

⁵⁵ For the policy of religious discrimination against Armenians by Persia, see Leo 1926: 15, 32-33.

⁵⁶ *Evangelischen Missions-Magazin* 1824. 495.

Armenians. The entire activity of the missionaries established in Shushi in January 1824 was directed towards the preparation of this work, which encompassed the selection and construction of their place of residence, the study of the Armenian language, the establishment of contacts with the local Armenian clergy and various segments of the population, the founding of schools and a printing house, and the acquisition of necessary educational and spiritual literature.

Shortly after settling in Shushi, on March 9, 1824, A. Dittrich left for Basel to present an oral report to the Basel Committee regarding the activities they had carried out until that moment. To assist Zarembo, who remained in Shushi, missionary F. Hohenacker traveled from Karass to Shushi on May 23, 1824.⁵⁷ According to a written report by A. Zarembo and F. Hohenacker published in 1825, after settling in Shushi, a need arose to build a small school next to the missionaries' house for the immediate organization of teaching among the Armenians. The missionaries explained this necessity by saying that "during our meetings with many Armenians in Shushi, they drew our attention to the sad condition of their children, as they had no schools, no teachers, and no other means for education. Therefore, after buying our house, we began to think about establishing a school where young people would learn to understand their old native language and the Bible".⁵⁸ Before the school's construction, F. Zarembo was mainly engaged in visiting Muslims and establishing certain relations with them, as a result of which the Muslims offered F. Zarembo to build a house for the missionaries in their neighborhood, where there was a spacious and convenient location near the market. F. Hohenacker, for his part, provided medical services to the local people. During this period, the missionaries were also engaged in the dissemination of the Holy Scriptures in various regions through some Armenians, by means of sales and donations.⁵⁹ Simultaneously, the missionaries undertook the construction of a school in Shushi. Missionary F. Zarembo writes in his diary that the foundation of their school building was laid on June 3, 1824, and its opening took place on January 29, 1825.⁶⁰

In October 1824, A. Dittrich returned to Shushi from Basel, after which the necessity arose to establish a printing house on-site to accelerate the printing processes and print Armenian school textbooks⁶¹, which constituted an inseparable and fundamental part of their missionary activity in Shushi, and which were set to commence in earnest in 1825, immediately following the completion of the preparatory work.

Summarizing the above, and comparing and contrasting the obtained information regarding the preparatory stage of the missionaries' activity, we can conclude that the preparatory stage of the Basel missionaries' activity in Shushi is divided into four main phases:

⁵⁷ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1825. 385.

⁵⁸ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1825. 505.

⁵⁹ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1825. 404, 518.

⁶⁰ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1825. 407, 525.

⁶¹ Evangelischen Missions-Magazin 1825. 411.

1. July 1820–January 1822: This includes the establishment of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society in the territory of the Russian Empire, the dispatch of missionaries F. Zarembo and A. Dittrich to St. Petersburg, the submission of the petition to the Russian government to obtain permission to establish a colony in the Black and Caspian Sea regions, and the receipt of the response to the petition.
2. May 1822–May 1823: The preparatory period in Astrakhan, which included language study, the establishment of contacts with members of the Russian Bible Society, and the acquisition of relevant missionary experience among the Scottish missionaries and in the German colonies.
3. October 13–November 18, 1823: The missionaries' first visit to Shushi, which included familiarization with the locality and geographical position, visits to neighboring regions—specifically Shamakhi and Baku, meetings with local Armenians and Muslims, some Armenian clergy, and the selection of Shushi as the main and central hub of activity.
4. January 23–December 1824: The missionaries' final settlement in Shushi, followed by preparatory work directed towards selecting locations for and constructing the necessary buildings (the missionaries' residence, a school, a printing house), acquiring necessary educational and spiritual literature, and establishing acquaintances with various segments of the population.
5. The preparatory period spanning 1820–1824 was the important and vital foundation that would ensure the direction, development, and effectiveness of the Basel missionaries' subsequent activities in Shushi and beyond its borders.

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Translated from Russian by Gevorg Harutyunyan