

A LESSER KNOWN ARMENIAN
DEPORTATION: THE EXODUS AND RESETTLEMENT
OF THE SHADAKH, SALMASD, AND URMIA ARMENIANS AND
ASSYRIANS IN BAAQUBA, IRAQ, 1918

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A-INTRODUCTION

Of the myriad memoirs pertaining to the Armenian Genocide it is indeed circuitous to find one that doesn't dwell on the negative aspects of the huge calamity that befell the Armenian people in 1915. Levon Shahoian's memoir, *Dikrisi Apin* (On the Banks of the Tigris)¹ stand out as one of the few optimistic accounts about the subject. This might be due to the fact that Levon Shahoian did not live within Western Armenia and he and his family were relatively spared the ordeal in the Salmasd region of Persia. Or were they?

As many of you may start to speculate about how events came to be that Salmasd Armenians had to partially endure the same faith as their brethren from Shadakh (south of Van) and its environs, it becomes necessary to give the background history of the events.²

Since it is the historian's task is to solve such issues through research, it became an objective of mine to look into the history of the era to find answers to

¹ Shahoian's book was published in Beirut, 1968. The urge to write this article, came by way of my translation of Levon Shahoian's book from Armenian into English. See Levon Shahoian, *On the Banks of the Tigris*, Trans. By Garabet K Moumdjian, London: Gomidas Institute, 2012). I noticed that there were historical gaps in the narrative(s) that needed to be addressed. This process was in itself rewarding, because the outcome was a historical narrative regarding an Armenian deportation that had thus far eluded historians.

² The first three stories in Shahoian's account are about his childhood in Salmasd. The fourth story jumps into Camp life in Baaquba, modern day Iraq. This creates a gap that skews the flow of the timeline in his collection of short stories.

the question at hand. This turned out to be an arduous task, since the literature about the area and the era in question is almost nonexistent. One of the few sources that I was able to secure through the help of some Armenians whose ancestors had originated from Shadakh is a memoir written by Melik[set] Azizian,¹. Melikset was a native of the Armshad Armenian village of the Shadakh district² (currently Çatak) south of Van. Another important memoir pertaining to the era under discussion is that of Kegham Vartanian,³ who was a resident of the Shushants Armenian village of the Shadakh area. I also received some important advice from Mrs. Seta Hovannesian, a native of Baghdad, who recently submitted an MA thesis at Yerevan State University in Armenia regarding the history of the Armenian community of Iraq.⁴ It is from these meager sources that I was able to weave the background history for Levon Shahoian's book.

B-THE ARMENIANS OF SHADAKH LEAVE IN 1915 AND RETURN HOME IN 1917

The story begins with the first self-defense act of the Armenians of Van in April-May 1915. Organized by the legendary Armenian hero Aram Manougian, this hard to achieve resistance was built around the premise that if the Armenians were able to stand their position until the advancing Russian armies, and the Armenian volunteer units arrived, they would be saved from certain annihilation.

¹ **Melik[set] Azizian**, *Hushabadum* (Memoirs), (Glendale: Alco Printing, 1982). Azizian's memoirs are perhaps the sole source that I could secure regarding this little known episode about the second deportation of Armenians of Van. As such, it begs to be translated into English to be accessible to a larger readership.

² The District of Shadakh included the villages of Armshad, Dagh, Pols, Arikom, Krments, Khumar, Serget, Gajet, Hinents, Jnug, Vank, Shushants, etc.

³ **Kegham Vartanian**, *Azkayin Domar: Vasburaganen Minchev Irak* (National Registry: From Vasburagan [Van] to Iraq), (Los Angeles: Publisher and year published unknown).

⁴ This is what Ohannesian writes regarding the sources for her account: "...The information I have gathered are mainly derived from oral accounts by some of the deportees and especially Armenian fighters who participated in the skirmishes. The most important source is the document boxes belonging to Levon Shaghoian (AKA Levon Pasha [not to be confused with Levon Shahoian who was mentioned earlier as the author of *On the Banks of the Tigris*]). Levon Shaghoian assumed the leadership of the Armenian forces in Van during the second deportation of 1918 and was able to secure the safety of the deportees with some 800 Armenia soldiers, all remnants of the Armenian volunteer units, who had settled back in Van in 1917. Shaghoian was later to become the leader of the Armenian deportees at the refugee camps in Iraq (Baaquba and Nahr El Omar).

As the ensuing events show, Armenians withstood numerous advances by the Turkish army. The arrival of the Russian armies and the Armenian Volunteer units under the command of General Antranig (Toros Ozanian) saved the day.

The situation, however, was not to last, since the Russian Armies had to withdraw. This necessitated the exodus of some 200,000 Armenians into the relative safety of Yerevan province. This first exodus was marred with several skirmishes with the remnants of the Turkish army, which had a strong hold of the Pergri Gorge (currently Muradiye). In all, some 50,000 Armenian deportees lost their lives at Pergri, while the rest reached Eastern Armenia.

It is of interest to note that during this first deportation about 15,000 Armenians from Shadakh didn't take the Pergri route, but were rather diverted into Persia, where they settled in the Salmasd district for the next two years (1915-1917). Melik Azizian and Kegham Vartanian and their families were among the latter. They settled first in Aghpag, an Armenian village near the Monastery of St. Partoghomyos (Bartholomew). It was here, on Persian soil, that the Prelate of the Armenians of northern Persia, Archbishop Nerses Meik-Tangian, came to see to the needs of his flock. He directed the efforts to feed and to tend to the medical needs of the deportees from his office at the Monastery of St. Bartholomew. The reader will encounter Archbishop Melik-Tankian in one of Levon Shahoian's short stories in this book.¹

After the successful second Russian offensive in late 1916, many Armenians from Van and its environs returned home in 1917. Most of the villages of the districts of Van had been burned to the ground. The repatriating Armenians restarted their lives in the City of Van and the nearby village of Ardamed.² The repatriation didn't endure and the safety of the repatriates was once again tested several months later, since:

The dual Russian revolutions and the onset of the Russian Civil War in 1917 were accompanied by the collapse of the Russian armies on the Caucasian front. As the Russian divisions abandoned their positions in the occupied eastern Ottoman provinces the horrifying specter loomed for the Armenians of having to flee from these territories once again and having to face a Turkish [Ottoman] offensive that would also threaten the very existence of the Eastern Armenian population... By Early April [1918], all of the Western Armenian

¹ **Shahoian**, *On the Banks*, See short story (3) titled: "Our Encounter with the Spazan (Bishop, Prelate)."

² Ardamed was an Armenian village in the vicinity of Van itself. It was famous for its Apple crops.

areas occupied by the Russians during the war had been retaken by the Turkish army.¹

The rest of the history of this second deportation of the Armenians of Van is one that has not been properly treated within the annals of the History of the Armenian Genocide. Thus, it merits telling if only for the sole reason to remedy the record.

Azizian had finished writing his memoirs in 1979. It is from this source that we pick the rest of the story. As the Russian armies timidly withdrew from the front, the Armenians were once again left to their own fate in terms of defending themselves against an advancing Turkish army. This unequal fight necessitated that the remnants of the Armenian volunteer unit oversee the dual task of first fighting against the Ottomans, while at the same time to take care of the deportation of the Armenians to a safe place. Once again, the road to safety was cut by Ottoman regiments who had taken control of the strategic Pergri Gorge,² the only route through which destitute Armenians had to pass. It was in this pandemonium that Azizian writes:

It was in March of 1918 that all of us soldiers carried as much ammunition and rations from our warehouse in Vosdan and burned the rest. We walked toward Van. When we reached Ardamed we found it deserted. The people had already left. We tracked their route and reached the village of Janig that night where we were joined with our people. There were some 15,000 to 20,000³ peo-

¹ **Richard G. Hovannisian**, “The Contest for Kars, 1914-1921,” in Richard G. Hovannisian ed., *Armenian Kars and Ani*, (Mazda Publishers: Costa Mesa, California, 2011), 274-275. The Russian withdrawal was rooted in the Treaty of Brest Litovsk of 1917, according to which Lenin ceded back to the Ottoman Empire all territories that were conquered by the Russian armies through the Berlin Treaty of 1878 (Batum[i], Kars and Ardahan). This was to be altered in October of 1918, when a defeated Ottoman Empire signed the Mudros Armistice with the Allied powers.

² There is an inconsistency regarding the Pergri Gorge being taken by the Ottoman army. See below

³ See Appendix. **British document No. 36170., Office of Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, 4th December 1919, from British Lieut. Col. A. T. Wilson C.S.I., C.M.G., C.I.E., D.S.O., Acting Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia to the Secretary of State for India, London, S.W. 1.** British official H.L. Charge estimates the number of Armenians at around 14,000 of which three quarters were from Shadakh (south of Van) and the rest from Salmasd and Urmia. See also Irazeg (Informed person), “Baaqubayi Hay Pakhesdagannere,” (The Armenian Refugees in Baaquba), *Husaper*, year V, No. 5, Thursday, Cairo, April 19, 1919, 1-2. This newspaper article estimates the number of Armenians at 15,000 and the Assyrians at 30,000 to 35,000. The newspaper also estimates the number of Armenian soldiers at 850. See footnote 37 for more details from Husaper. **This British document that is printed in the Appendix was supplied by Historian Ara Sarafian, Director of the Gomidas Institute, London.**

ple and us, the soldiers. I found my mother and other family members there. At daybreak we got news that the Pergri Gorge was already occupied by the Turkish army... There were two views regarding the situation: One group insisted on the soldiers continuing the way regardless of the impossibility of passing through Pergri and rather use the mountainous route. The second opinion was that of our military leader Levon Shaghoian (AKA Levon Pasha) and Kosti Hampartsoumian, who advocated to change the route and to go to Persia through Sarra and from there to Yerevan. The second opinion prevailed.¹

In her correspondence with me, Seta Ohannesian stresses the fact that rumor regarding the Pergri Gorge being under Ottoman control was baseless. If the Van Armenians had taken that road they could then pass through to the plain of Alashgerd and hence to Kars and Yerevan:

The final retreat of the people of the province of Vasburagan had started in the last ten days of March, 1918. It was in the village of Janig that the rumor regarding the Pergri Gorge being taken over by Turkish forces had perplexed a population of some 60,000 to 70,000. In reality, however, the gorge was still under the control of Armenian forces. It was this rumor that sealed the fate of thousands of deportees who were diverted toward Persian soil and, in the process, to finally settle in the Mesopotamian desert.²

That the Pergri Gorge was not taken over by Ottoman forces is also ascertained by Kegham Vartanian. His account regarding the confusion is telling, to say the least:

We finally were able to understand what had happened. As soon as the Military Command, together with the leaders and the people, marched out of

¹ **Azizian**, *Hushabadum*, 56-57. The name Vosdan, which means orchard in Armenian, denotes the Armenian suburb of Van, which is also known as Aykesdan. It was named after the rich orchards that surrounded the houses in the district.

² **Seta Ohannesian**. One issue that has to be addressed is the numbers that Ohannesian gives. There is a discrepancy as to the number of Armenians in this second deportation; While Ohannesian estimates the number of deportees at 60,000 to 70,000, Azizian's account puts them at about 15,000 to 20,000. Solving the discrepancy meant looking at the records once again. It turns out that the numbers 15,000 to 20,000 refers to the Armenian deportees, while the bigger number of 60,000 to 70,000 refers to Armenian and Assyrian deportees combined. According to Ohannesian (Levon Shaghoian archive documents), the number of Armenians from Salmasd and Urmia who joined the Armenians from Van is around 800-1000. However, British sources (see Appendix) estimate the total number of refugees (both Armenian and Assyrian, referred to sometimes as Nestorians or Syriacs) at around 40,000. One can conclude, with some mathematical accuracy the total number to be between 40,000 to 60,000.

Janig, they hear loud artillery explosions from around Pergri. They, without determining what the bombardment was about, retreat in panic and announce to the people that Pergri is already taken and the Turkish army, which is now advancing against the Armenians in Janig. Therefore, all military volunteers and deportees should unite with us [Military Command] so that we start our march via Sarra, Godol, and then Salmasd in Persia... It was also reported that the Military Command had already spoken through telephone with our regiment commander in Pergri and had concluded from the latter's answers that Pergri was already Taken and that the speaking officer had become a captive of the Turkish army... The astonishing reality was that the bombardment sounds were from our ship on Lake Van; the same ship that was supposed to pick us and take us to Arnis or Banz. In fact, the ship did set anchor at Banz— without picking up us first—however, before the sailors disembarked from it, they committed it to fire. It was the fire that caused artillery rounds of many shapes and calibers to explode, thus creating the illusion that Pergri was taken over. In reality, small groups of Armenians had already crossed the Gorge safely... This is the reality about the rumors surrounding the Pergri Gorge. Had our leaders acted differently, the 15,000 to 20,000 Van Armenians could have been relocated to Eastern Armenia rather than having to endure the ordeal that they did in Persia and the sands of Mesopotamia...¹

It must be noted, however, that the Armenian defenses around Kars was also to come under heavy Turkish attack in the winter of 1918. However, at the time [late March to early April 1918] the city and its environs were still under the protection of Armenian forces. Had the Armenians of Van taken the route to Kars, they might as well have ended in Yerevan province. However, the fate of Kars was doomed about three weeks later:

...As it was, news of the order to surrender Kars spread rapidly, creating havoc and panic among the [Armenian] military and civilian population. Within a few hours thousands of Armenians were fleeing eastward toward Alexandropol in the province (guberniia) of Erevan. On April 25 the Turkish army marched into Kars and took possession of its network of forts and great military stockpiles.²

¹ Vartanian, *Azkayin Domar*, 80-82.

² Richard Hovannisian, *Armenia on the road to Independence*, 121-159.

The fall of Kars in itself is an issue that has to be discussed here. Contrary to the popular historical understanding that Kars was surrendered to the advancing Turkish army under the leadership of General Vehip Pasha, the truth of the matter is completely different from this popular comprehension. It so happened that the Armenian forces withdrew from Sarikamish on April 5 1918, after a 10 day incessant fight. Nevertheless, they continued to fight from their newly acquired combat positions for eleven more days, until the Armenian deportees reached Kars.

Kars had now become the meeting point of the Armenian forces retreating from Sarikamish, the second Armenian infantry unit, a reserve unit of the Armenian Army, an engineering army corp. unit, the artillery unit of the castle, some Russian and Greek volunteer brigades, etc.

According to the Russian Army Commander of the Caucasian front, General Lebendinki, The Armenian and other forces in Kars were capable of defending the city for at least one month.” The Ottoman Army, on the other hand, captured van and then Gharakilise, thus pouring into the valley of Alashgerd. It was at this juncture, on April 13, 1918, that Lasha Chkenkeli, the Georgian President of the Caucasian Republic and residing in Tiflis (Tbilisi) cabled Vehip pasha to stop the military operations. Moreover, and this is the crux of the issue regarding the “handing over” of Kars, the same Chkhenkeli ordered General Nazarpekian to pull out from Kars and start the relocation process of the population.

Nazarpekian, who at the time had no means of communicating with the Armenian National Council (Hay Azgayin Khorhurd) and having no perception regarding the political conditions and the ramifications of such an act for the future of the Armenian people, heeded to the political command of Chkenkeli and gave the order for the evacuation of Kars on April 25, 1918. The truth of the matter was that most of the Armenian fighting units and their commanders as well as the population were against such a move. They would rather fight to defend Kars. Such was the opinion of General Deyev and General Vishinski, Colonel Morelle, etc. The military Commissar of Kars, Dzamoyan wrote on April 25:

The fighters and the people, who were more than ready to defend this most formidable castle for the defense of the Caucasus, was thus obliged to leave all behind and to witness the burning of Kars from afar.¹

¹ For more information regarding the Kars affair see Murad Karapetyan, *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun Banake 1918-1920 T[vakannerun]* (The Army of the Republic of Armenia, 1918-1920), (Yerevan:

The fall of Kars would later, on May 28, 1918, necessitate a firm Armenian stance at Sartarabad, Gharakilise and Pash Aparan, against overwhelming Turkish forces for the sake of preserving a small piece of geography that would become the nexus of the Republic of Armenia of 1918-1920.

C-A NEW DEPORTATION BEGINS

Returning back to the story of the second deportation from Van and its environs, it seems that the rumor of the Pergri Gorge being controlled by Ottoman forces was swallowed by the Armenian leadership and people who had gathered at the village of Janig. It was this Armenian convoy whose fate was to be intertwined with that of the Armenians of the Salmasd and Urmia districts in Persia. According to both Azizian and Vartanian, the Armenian soldiers and people reached Salmasd at the end of March 1918. They had to stay in the area for two months, during which they had to endure several battles against the Ottoman regiments, Kurdish tribes, as well as Persian irregulars who were incessantly following them¹

The route to Salmasd was not an easy one by any means. The path that the deportees took brought them first to the village of Khno, then the district of Arjag. By walking parallel to the Lake Arjag they arrived at the town of Sarra on the Persian side of the border. Once in Sarra, Kosti Hampartsoumian wrote to the Persian governor of Khoy to permit the deportees to go through Julfa and hence to Yerevan. His letter being left unanswered, he leads the deportees toward Khoy through the historic Godol Gorge. The deportees spend their night alongside the Habashan Kurdish village. They then continue on to the village of Makhinan, where a military strategy was developed to defend the population against the Ottoman forces following in their rear. The first full fledged battle between the Armenian fighters and the forces of the Kurdish leader Simku² took place on the outskirts of Makhinan. Many fall from both sides. The leader-

Republic of Armenia Academy of Sciences "Gitutyun" Press, 1996). The information regarding the evacuation of Kars in April 1918 was taken from Karapetyan's book.

¹ Azizian, *Hushabadum*, 64. Vartanian, *Azkayin Domar*, 86-92.

² Simku was a problematic Kurdish chieftain for Armenians of Van since the early 1900s. On Ottoman intrigue, he used his forces to battle the Armenian revolutionary bands, which transported weapons into Van from Persia (Salmasd). Moreover, during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, he, in collusion with Tsarist Russian Officials from the Caucasus (Tiflis, Tbilisi), had fought against Armenian revolutionary forces in the Khoy, Salmasd, and Urmia corridor. Simku is mentioned in Russian as well as Ottoman and Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnagtsutun) Archival material, especially during the period 1907-1914.

ship discussed the possibilities of going to Khoy or to Salmasd, since the former would bring them closer to their route to Yerevan, while the latter would drive them further into Persia and towards an unknown fate. It is finally decided to go to Salmasd and to abandon going to Khoy altogether, since that would entail more skirmishes not only with Kurds, but also with advancing Ottoman regiments. The deportees reach Salmasd between April 8 and 10.¹

Besides, even Salmasd was not a safe place for the deportees, since the whole area from Salmasd to Urmia presented the risk of encounters with Kurdish and Persian bandits and even Ottoman regular army regiments. It was at about this time that General Antranig had advanced through Julfa with his volunteer regiment in an effort to take over Khoy and to unite with the Van deportees. However, himself coming under heavy attack from enemy forces, Antranig engages them while retreating back to Julfa. Antranig's maneuver was important since it attracted enemy forces towards him, while giving the deportees a chance to make it from Salmasd to Urmia with less risks than they would've otherwise encountered.²

When the Armenians of Van reached Salmasd the area had already been devastated. Azizian's account runs parallel to what Shahoian mentions in one of his short stories regarding the Kurdish-Assyrian skirmishes and the plot of the Kurdish chieftain, Simku,³ which resulted in the death of the Assyrian leader Mar Shimon (AKA Mar Shimun)⁴ and a number of his most trusted aides:

The situation in Salmasd was hopeless. The area had transformed during the past four months. Life had come to a halt there with the desertion of the Russian army units. The Armenians of the area, feeling insecure, had left the area. The Assyrians, with their leader, Mar Shimon, were the master of the situa-

¹ **Seta Ohannesian.** See footnote 6.

² Ibid.

³ Simku was one of the Kurdish chieftains who had sided with the Shah and reactionaries during the Iranian Constitutional revolution of 1909-1911. He was also under the control of the Russians. See Rosdom [Steban Zorian], *Namagani* (Letters), (Beirut: Vahe Setian Publishing, 1999).

⁴ Rosdom, *Namagani*, 46-47. In a letter to the Armenian revolutionary Federation's [ARF] Tabriz Committee, dated February 1896, Rosdom writes regarding Mar Shimon: ...We [Alik and Rosdom]. Alik's real name couldn't be ascertained] came together from Baku [to Salmasd]. He [Alik] is now a totally devoted member [of the ARF]. He is being sent to mar Shimon...We were unable to inform you about this beforehand because of the difficulty of communicating with you. We hope that you have no objection regarding Alik's mission...I can say that aside from his central mission, which is to agitate Assyrians to rebel, he will see to it that we [the ARF] can have a safe haven in northwestern Iran, where we can train our fighters from Vasburagan, as well as import arms and ammunition into the Ottoman empire...

tion. There was also the Kurdish chieftain, Simku, with his band of fighters and had positioned himself against Mar Shimon and his forces...Simku, in an effort to gain the upper hand in the region, had invited Mar Shimon and his lieutenants to a feast in his town of Koynashahr for the purpose of negotiating regarding the political and military situation of the Salmasd area. Simku kills Mar Shimon and the Meliks accompanying him. Mar Shimon's brother, Agha Davud had in turn attacked Simku's village, the fortress at Chara, and burned it to the ground.¹

It is interesting that Shahoian, who at the time is eleven years old, mentions nothing about the devastation and of the area and the ordeal of the Armenians in Salmasd. In his boyish memory he described the Mar Shimon debacle as follows:

Before the deportations, when we were still in our village, a certain Kurdish chieftain named Simku, incited by the Persian Khan, concocted a devious plan to kill Mar Shimon, the religious leader of the Assyrian community in Salmasd, by inviting the elderly clergy to a feast at his Keoshk [palace]. Many tell Mar Shimon not to attend the feast. However, the daredevil Mar Shimon, surrounded by a group of his equally powerful and heroic body-guards [actually Meliks of other Assyrian tribes confederated with mar Shimon's tribe], accepted the chieftain's invitation. After the feast, and while helping Mar Shimon get on his carriage, the chieftain fires his pistol at the back of the clergyman and kills him then and there. Simku's people fire on the body-guards and kill them too. It was a perfect massacre...²

At the end of their two months sojourn in Salmasd, the Armenians of Van and Salmasd take the road to Urmia. The route is not safe and battles between the Armenian defenders, under the leadership of Levon Shaghoian and Kosti Hampartsoumian, and the Ottomans and their cohorts continue unabated. The caravans finally reach Urmia at the end of May, 1918.³

¹ Azizian, *Hushabadum*, 64-65.

² Shahoian has narrated the whole episode with the simple phrase of "Before the deportations..." See Shahoian, *On the Banks*, short story (10) titled: "The Long Deportation Route...and My Donkey." Keoshk is the Abode of a Kurdish tribal chief, usually bigger than the rest of the houses in the village.

³ Azizian, *Hushabadum*, 70-71; Vartanian, 92-96.

D-HOW THE HAKKARI ASSYRIANS OF OTTOMAN KURDISTAN JOINED THE REFUGEES IN URMIA

At this juncture it is prudent to bring another piece of the story so as to complete the historical paradigm associated with this “lesser known deportation”: This would be the case of the Assyrians living in Hakkari and how they were able, against many odds, to join the deportation caravans in Urmia. We pick the story from the British document cited above:

...Dealing first with the Christians of Hakkari in Turkish Kurdistan. As mentioned above these were divided into two classes:

- (1) Ashirat or Tribal Assyrians.
- (2) The Ryat [sic, raya] or subject people.

The tribal Assyrians lived in almost inaccessible fastnesses on the upper waters of the Great Zab. They were for the most part simple shepherds, armed with obsolete weapons and acknowledging no lordship other than their Patriarch Mar Shimun [sic, Shimon or Shimun] and their Meliks or chiefs.

The Turks had no direct dealings with them, but when opportunity occurred used all their influence to set the Kurdish tribes against them. The Assyrians on the other hand were always ready for reprisals against the Kurds.

Both classes were free from national aspirations and on that account escaped the Armenian massacres of 1895 and 1896. They remembered however with gratitude what the British Government had accomplished for them at the time of the Bedr Khan [sic, Bedirkhan] massacres of 1840, and in time of stress always looked to H.B.M.s Consuls in Van and Mosul for support.

In the autumn of 1913 a Russian Emissary toured the Assyrian tribal districts, distributing lavish gifts and promising modern rifles for the acceptancy [sic, acceptance] of Orthodoxy.

So for many years past these Assyrians had cherished the hope that either the English or Russians would set them free from the oppressions under which they were suffering; and it was only natural, therefore, that when War broke out their sympathies would be with the Allies as against the Turks.

Consequently in May, 1915, when the Russians advanced to Julamerk, they were persuaded to attack the Turks, as a result of overtures and promises made to them by the Russian Commander.

They naturally thought the Russians intended holding Julamerk and supporting them. Instead of this they were told a few days later that the Russians intended to withdraw. This meant their destruction. Accordingly they asked the Russian Commander for three in which to collect their people for the evacuation of their country or that at least that arms and ammunition be given them in sufficient quantity to defend themselves. The requests were refused, the Russian Force withdrew, and the Turks attacked the Assyrians in strength. After six months of severe fighting, these mountaineers, with their women and children, exhausted, destitute and without ammunition were driven from their homes into North Western Persia.

The Turks then proceeded to lay waste their country and every village was destroyed. .

Although the Assyrians regarded this act of the Russians as a breach of good faith between Allies, nevertheless they again agreed, after their arrival in Persia, to assist the Russians, who called on them for their services in that country. Two battalions of these Mountaineers were organized and placed under Russian Officers, and became an integral part of the Russian Army. Later, another battalion was formed which was under the special command of the Assyrian Patriarch. These battalions were in active service under Russian direction against the Turks and Kurds until the dissolution of the Russian Army; and during the early part of 1918 formed part of the Irregular force (still commanded however by Russian Officers) that defended the Plains of Urmieh [Urmia] and Salmas [Salmasd] and held the Turks in check on the frontier.

In fourteen distinct engagements, between March and July, 1918, they defeated every force that was brought against them, in conjunction with the Armenians. Eventually attacked simultaneously by Turks, Kurds, and Persians, the position of the Armenians and Assyrians about Urumieh [sic, Urmia] became hopeless, and the flight to the British commenced late in July.¹

E-THE MARCH TO HAMADAN

Upon reaching Urmia, The Armenian soldiers are confronted with yet another dilemma. Agha Petros [AKA Petrus], the leader of Assyrians in Urmia had taken hold of Russian military and food supplies when the Russian army left the area. At first he doesn't want to share food and ammunition with the Armenians. However, Levon Shaghoian and Kosti Hampartsoumian meet with

¹ See Appendix, British document No. 36170. See also map for route the Hakkari Assyrians took to reach Urmia.

Agha Petros and the issue is settled in a friendly manner.¹ There was no other way about it. Armenians and Assyrians were by now convinced that it was only through their extreme cooperation that it would be possible to defend themselves against the still advancing Ottoman regiments as well as marauding Kurdish and Persian irregulars. It was at this juncture too that the Ottoman Assyrians and those from northern Persia, who had gathered in Urmia, also embarked upon the difficult march to Mesopotamia.²

It was at the end of June 1918 that a British plane landed in Urmia bringing the good news that British forces had advanced to Sarin Qal'aa [Sarin Castle]. Regardless, eight days of fighting ensued between the Armenian and Assyrian forces on one side and the Ottoman forces on the other. Urmia was devastated and Armenian and Assyrian refugees embarked en route to Hamadan, where the British had promised to take charge of the refugees. The Armenian and Assyrian fighters concluded a battle of life and death in Urmia while the refugees headed to Hamadan. This battle was the last that the Ottomans waged. After exhausting their ranks the Armenian fighters headed to Hamadan to join the refugees.³

It was in Hamadan that the remaining Armenian soldiers, almost 800 in number, were incorporated into the British Army. The British instructed Armenian leaders to see to it that the refugees were transferred to Baaquba in Mesopotamia, where preparations were being made to accept them in a refugee camp that was in the final stages of construction. It was after the Armenians and Assyrians had evacuated Hamadan that the British bombarded the city, since rebel forces were gathering there in an effort to attack the British forces.⁴

F-SETTLING DOWN IN BAAQUBA

This is how Azizian describes the last leg of the arduous journey: From Hamadan we reached the town of Senna where we stayed for one and one half months in miserable conditions. Then we traveled for 8 days and reached Qasr-

¹ **Azizian**, 72-73.

² For further details regarding the ordeal of the Assyrians in Persia and their deportation and subsequent settlement in Baaquba see: H. H. Austin, *The Baqubah Refugee Camp* (Gorgias Press, New Jersey, 2006), (First Edition, London: Faith Press, 1920). H. H. Austin was the British Military officer in charge of the Baaquba Refugee Camp(s), where Armenians as well as Assyrians were settled. There were actually three separate camps named A, B, and C. Armenians inhabited Camp A, while Assyrians occupied camps B and C. The Camps became operational at the beginning of September 1918.

³ **Azizian**, *Hushabadum*, 73-74; Vartanian, 97-102.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

I Shireen in the vicinity of Kermanshah). We rested there for one day and then traveled for three days and reached the Baaquba camp, which was built on the Diyala River (a subsidiary of the Tigris). We soldiers were on one side of the river, while the people were on the other side.¹

It was while the Armenian soldiers were stationed at the opposite bank of the Diyala River that the British commander of the area forces them to sign contracts to make their incorporation into the British Army official and permanent. Levon Shaghoian and his soldiers refused to be tied up to the Army. They instead preferred to look after the refugees. Thus the Armenian fighters left the Army and joined the refugees on the other side of the river. Levon Pasha becomes the leader of the Armenians in the Baaquba and later at the Nahr El Umar refugee camps.²

Reminiscing about these events, Ruben Ter Minassian writes:

Even before the [9th General Congress, in 1919, of Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF] the Bureau [the Party's highest decision making body] attached much importance to this newly liberated region [the reference is to Mesopotamia, or what was later to become Iraq] because of the following reasons:

A-So that we can preserve the existence and the unity of our military personnel and our deported people and to be able to communicate with them;

B-So that we are able to gather the remnants of our people who were deported to the Arabian Desert;

C-So that we could, through our comrades in Mesopotamia, be informed about what was transpiring in that area to the south of Armenia and, through these comrades, to be able to establish ties with the people of these areas, especially the Yezidis³, Assyrians and the Kurds, about whom we were interested.

It was for these reasons that the Armenian Government sent Arsen Gidur⁴ there and supplied him with negligible funds. It was also for the same reason that the [ARF] Bureau was keeping a correspondence with our comrades there, especially with Levon Shaghoian. Since our reasons for this were considered very important, huge funds were needed to attain our goals. This was especially true if we were to be able to especially rescue the remnants of our peo-

¹ Ibid., 79

² Ibid., 79-80.

³ A Kurdish religious sect

⁴ At the time a member of the ARF who later joined the Social Democrat Hnchagyan Party. Gidur is renowned as the author-editor of a two volume "History of the Social Democrat Hnchagyan Party."

ple—especially the women and children who had found refuge with Arab and Kurdish tribes—from being completely lost, since we envisioned bringing those thousands of destitute Armenians back to Armenia, and, if that became an impossibility, to, at least and for the time being, gather and unite them in some places until they could be repatriated. We were able to make only very small contributions to this end. However, the stubbornness and extreme devotion of our comrades in Mesopotamia were miraculous in this regard. We have to attribute the success of these endeavors mainly to the work of Levon [Shaghoian], who became the central figure and the leader of the military personnel and Armenian deportees from Van and Persia, and he remains there in that capacity until the time of this writing [1924]. It was through Levon's [Shagoian] leadership that the deportees and the military personnel accompanying them were able to endure the perils of several attacks and the long deportation route. It was through Levon's [Shaghoian] herculean work that some eight to nine thousand Armenian deportees in Mesopotamia were able, through sea and land routes, to repatriate to Armenia. Currently, he [Levon Shaghoian] is leading the remaining 3000 Armenian refugees in Nahr Al Umar...¹

G-CONCLUSION

Of the 15,000 Armenians from Van only about 12,000 to 13,000 made it to Baaquba. The rest perished along the 1200 miles long deportation route. There were also about 7,000 Armenians from Salmasd and Urmia who reached Baaquba.²

At one end of the Armenian encampment (in Camp A) a smaller camp was constructed to house Armenian women and orphaned girls who were brought there from all over Asia Minor. According to Azizian:

At one corner of the camp there was a smaller camp for the 1500 women and orphaned girls who were brought from Mosul. These had been deported from Constantinople Bursa, Zeytun, Erzerum Bitlis, and Sivas. I had the opportunity to meet with some of them and to hear their horrifying stories...³

¹ **Ruben [Der Minassian]**, *Hay Heghapokhagani Me Hushere* (Memoirs of an Armenian Revolutionary), (Tehran: Alik Publications, 1982) vol. 7, 3rd Edition, 171-172.

² *Ibid.*, 83.

³ *Ibid.*, 85. The story of how the Armenians and Assyrians were finally settled in Baaquba camps under British control is also reported in Irazeg (nome de plume meaning "an informed person"), *Husaper*, "Baaqubayi Hay Pakhesdagannere" (The Armenian Refugees in Baaquba), Cairo, vol. V, No. 5, Thursday, April 10, 1919, 1-2. As mentioned above, the Husaper article gives the numbers

This is an interesting bit of news, since in his book Shahoian mentions that his future wife to be was one such orphan from the Chanakkale peninsula, which is also known as Gallipoli...¹

Կարապետ Գ. Մումճեան, Ավելի քիչ հայտնի հայկական արտաքսում. Շատախի, Սալմաստի և Ուրմիայի հայերի և ասորիների գաղթն ու վերաբնակեցումը Բաքուբայում, Իրաք, 1918 թ. - Հոդվածում լուսաբանվում է պատմության քիչ հայտնի հայերի տեղահանության հարցը՝ այն է, թե ինչպես 1918թ. Շատախի, Սալմաստի և Ուրմիայի հայերը և ասորիները զանգվածաբար հեռացան իրենց բնակավայրերից և հետագայում վերահաստատվեցին Իրաքում գտնվող Բաքուբա վայրում:

Վանի հայերի առաջին ինքնապաշտպանական գործողությունները սկսվել են 1915թ. ապրիլ-մայիսին, որի ժամանակ հայերը դիմադրում էին թուրքական բանակի բազմաթիվ հարձակումներին: Իրավիճակը փոխվեց, երբ ռուսական բանակը և հայկական կամավորական ջոկատները տեղ հասան: Սակայն այս իրավիճակը երկար չտևեց, քանի որ ռուսական բանակը ստիպված էր նահանջել, որի պատճառով մոտ 200.000 հայեր զանգվածաբար լքեցին իրենց բնակավայրերը և մեկնեցին Երևանի գավառ: Ճանապարհին տեղի ունեցան ընդհարումներ թուրքական բանակի հետ, որի արդյունքում մոտ 50.000 տեղահանված հայեր զրկվեցին կյանքից:

as 15,000 Armenians and 30,000 to 35,000 Assyrians. After explaining how the camps are divided into subdivisions and the number of tents in each subdivision, Husaper indicates that Vasburagan (Van) Armenians had a fighting force comprised of 850 soldiers in the “Assyrian division’s Armenian Battalion B” (Levon Shaghoian was the leader of this battalion, who had eleven Armenian officers from Van under his command), while Salmasd and Urmia Armenians had 800 fighters who with some Assyrian fighters formed the “Armenian-Assyrian Battalion C.” Battalion A was totally Assyrian comprising 1100 soldiers. Husaper concluded that even though Armenians had great hopes for Battalion B in terms of a force that would facilitate their return to Vasburagan, that hope was destroyed when the British dissolved the battalion. The Armenian civil leadership was undertaken by the Baghdad Armenian Church Prelacy, which had its representation in Baaquba (later becoming the Armenian Church Prelacy of Baaquba). American missionaries were also present and tended to the refugees’ needs.

¹ For Armenian deportees from other Areas of Anatolia being settled in Baghdad see *BOA (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi)*, 8 S. 1333 (21 June 1915), *Bâb-i Âlî Dâhiliye Nezâreti, Emniyyet-i Umûmiyye Müdüriyyeti Şifre* (Ciphred telegram from the Ministry of the Interior to the province of Mosul, regarding that the Armenians sent to the province of Mosul be settled in areas located to the west of the Baghdad railway line); *BOA, 8 S. 1333 (21 June 1915), Bâb-i Âlî, Dâhiliye Nezâreti, Emniyyet-i Umûmiyye Müdüriyyeti Şifre, Urfa ve Zor Mutasarrifliklarina* (Ciphred telegram from the Ministry of the Interior to the governors of the sanjaks of Urfa and [Deyr el] Zor, regarding the settlement of the Armenians to be sent, to the south of the Baghdad railway line).

Ռուսական բանակի նահանջի հիմքում ընկած էր 1917թ. Բրեստ-Լիտովսկի դաշնագիրը, ըստ որի Լենինը Օսմանյան կայսրությանն էր վերադարձնում բոլոր այն տարածքները/Կարս, Արդահան/, որոնք նվաճել էր ռուսական բանակը, ըստ 1878թ. Բեռլինի դաշնագրի: Սա պետք է փոխվեր 1918թ. հոկտեմբերին, երբ պարտված Օսմանյան կայսրությունը ստորագրեց Մուդրոսի զինադադար դաշնակից տերությունների հետ:

Ռուսական բանակի դուրս գալուց հետո թուրքերը հարձակվեցին ասորիների վրա: Վեց ամսվա կատաղի պայքարից հետո, այս լեռնաբլուզներն իրենց կանանց, երեխաների հետ ուժասպառ, ամեն ինչից զրկված, իրենց սներից քշվեցին դեպի Պարսկաստանի հյուսիս-արևմուտք: Հողվածում մանրամասնորեն նկարագրվում է ասորիների կրած տառապանքները Պարսկաստանում և այդ ժամանակ, և նրանց հետագա տեղահանությունն ու հաստատվելն Բաքուբայում: Նշված են նաև 15.000 հայերի և 30.000-35.000 ասորիների մասին, ովքեր բազմաթիվ տառապանքներից հետո ի վերջո գտան իրենց հանգրվանն Իրաքի Բաքուբա վայրում:

Карапет Г. Мумджян, Менее известная армянская депортация: Исход и переселение Шадакских, Салмастских и Урмийских армян и ассирийцев в Баакубе, Ирак, 1918 г. - В статье освещается вопрос малоизвестной истории депортации армян, то есть как в 1918 году. Армяне Шадаха, Самласта, Урмии, ассирийцы массово покинули свои поселения, а позже вновь обосновались в Баакубе, Ирак.

Первые самообороны армян Вана начались в 1915 году. апрель-май, в течение которых армяне сопротивлялись многочисленным атакам турецкой армии. Ситуация изменилась, когда прибыли российская армия и армянские добровольческие отряды. Однако такая ситуация длилась недолго, так как российская армия была вынуждена отступить, в результате чего около 200 000 армян массово покинули свои дома и направились в Ереванскую губернию. По пути произошли столкновения с турецкой армией, в результате которых погибло около 50 000 перемещенных армян.

Отступление русской армии было основано на 1917 году. Брест-Литовском пактом, по которому Ленин возвращал Османской империи все территории (Карс, Ардаган), которые были завоеваны российской армией, по данным 1878 г. / Батумский / Берлинский договор. Это должно было измениться в 1918 году. в октябре, когда побежденная Османская империя подписала Мудросское перемирие с союзниками.

После отхода российской армии турки напали на ассирийцев. После полугода ожесточенных боев эти горцы, измученные со своими женами и детьми, были изгнаны из родных мест на северо-запад Персии. Подробно

описаны страдания ассирийцев в Персии того времени, их последующая депортация и поселение в Бакуба. В нем также упоминаются 15 000 армян, 30 000-35 000 ассирийцев, которые после долгих страданий наконец нашли убежище в Баакубе, Ирак.

Ուղարկվել է խմբագրություն 30.05.2022թ.

Գրախոսվել է 05.06.2022թ.

Մտորագրվել է տպագրության 10.06.2022 թ.