

## THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF EGYPT (from its origins till 1922)

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The Armenians were related to Egypt from ancient times, according to Egyptologists Grafton Elliot Smith (1871-1937), Auguste Mariette (1821-1881) and others as far back as the period of the Pharaohs. In the Ptolemaic period (323-30 B.C.) the well-known record about the Armenians in Egypt, according to the Roman sources, refers to the Armenian King Artavazd II (55-34 B.C.), whom insidiously arrested the Roman general Marcus Antonius who invaded Great Armenia in 34 B.C. The captive King was taken to Alexandria, where at the time of triumph he behaved proudly, with dignity and did not ask for mercy and was thrown into prison and in 31 B.C. executed by order of Antonius and the Egyptian Ptolemaic Queen Cleopatra VII<sup>1</sup>. In 30 B.C. was established the Roman province of Egypt.



**The King of Great Armenia,  
Artavazd II (55-34 B. C.)**

In the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when Alexandria was one of the important centers of education and science, the Armenian youths Movses Khorenatsi, Eghishé and others went there with a view to continuing their education. On the other hand, Armenian high-ranking servicemen, traders, as well as people having religious-theological discord with the Armenian Apostolic Church came from Armenia to Egypt<sup>2</sup>.

Starting from the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in the initial period of Arab domination, the regiment composed of Armenians from “Greek Armenia” took part in the occupation of Egypt and the abolition of the Byzantine domination there; something, which was highly appraised by the Arab conquerors. A number of political figures of Armenian origin, like Vardan-al-Rumi<sup>3</sup>, Hassan-al-Armani and others held high state and military positions in Egypt<sup>4</sup>.

In the Fatimid period (909-1171) thanks to the tolerant policy of the Caliphs with regard to the Christians, as well as by virtue of the development of the towns, a stream of Armenians from Syria and Mesopotamia started to move to Egypt. According to Mattheos Ourhayetsi: “A great number, around thirty thousand, Armenians gathered in Egypt”<sup>5</sup>, and the Armenian community began to get organized and to flourish.

<sup>1</sup> Ալայոյան Ա., Արաբական Միացեալ Հանրապետութեան Եգիպտոսի Նահանգը եւ հայերը (Սկիզբէն մինչեւ մեր օրերը), Գահիրէ, 1960, էջ 1-5: Եգիպտոս, Հայ Սփյուռք Հանրագիտարան, Երևան, 2003, էջ 150:

<sup>2</sup> Ալայոյան Ա., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> According to the Arab legend, the market of the newly-built town of Fustat was called Al-Vardan after the name of the commander of the regiment composed of Armenians, Vardan-Al-Roumi. Թովուլյան Հ., Եգիպտոսի հայկական գաղութի պատմություն (1805-1952), Երևան, 1978, էջ 18:

<sup>4</sup> Մսրլեան Գ., Ականաւոր հայեր Եգիպտոսի մէջ, Գահիրէ, 1947, էջ 12:

<sup>5</sup> Մատթէոս Ուռհայեցի, Ժամանակագրութիւն, Վաղարշապատ, 1898, էջ 211:

In the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Armenians in Egypt, who already numbered around 30.000, played a significant role in the state, military, political, economic and cultural life of the country. Worthy of mention are the viziers of Armenian origin Badr-al-Gamali (1074-1094), who, with his regiments composed of “compatriot Armenians,” suppressed the rebellion of Seljuk-Turk, Nubian emirs and subsequently fought against the Crusaders, with his regiments composed of “Armenian soldiers”, and established “peace at the Mesir [Egyptian] House”<sup>6</sup>, his son Shahnshah Al-Afdal Ibn Badr-al-Gamali (1094-1121), as well as Al-Juyushi (1130-1131), Yanis (1132-1134), Behram-al-Armani or Vahram Pahlavouni<sup>7</sup> (1135-1137), Talai-Bin-Ruzzik (Talaee-Ibn-Razeek) (1154-1161), Ibn-Ruzzik Adil (1161-1163) and others<sup>8</sup>. Vassak Pahlavouni was even the governor of Kous, and a town was named after him, Nasek, in Attfieh. In the days of the Fatimids, the Armenians held rather important leading positions in Egypt; that is why the Egyptologist-historian Gaston Viète has defined that period as the “Armenian period”<sup>9</sup>.

The period of the Ayyubid Dynasty founded in 1171 by Saladin was disastrous for the Armenians. The latter, as loyal allies of the Fatimids, were removed from their office, and the Armenian army was disbanded, instead an army composed of Turks and Kurds was formed. In 1192, in response to the insubordination to Saladin, organized by the Armenians, the latter were cruelly massacred, their monasteries and estates were confiscated and the community was considerably reduced.

Egypt, passing under the dominion of the Mamluks in 1250, waged also a war against the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1198-1375). Following the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, the Armenian King Levon V was taken in 1375 to Egypt as a prisoner<sup>10</sup>.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Tartars enslaved thousands of Armenians from Armenia and Georgia and transferred them to Egypt, enrolling them mainly in military service, as well as in agriculture and craftsmanship. They recruited the male children of the Armenian slaves in special military camps, Islamized them, they taught them the art of war and conscripted them into the Egyptian army. In the town of Asyut, the handiwork of Armenian weavers differed from the ordinary fabrics and was called “Armenian linen”<sup>11</sup>, while in the town of Ashmouneyn, the Armenians dyed the fabrics in cochineal coloration<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Եսփիունեան Ա., op. cit., p. 14. Պատմութիւն Մատթէոսի Ուռհայեցոյ, յերուսաղէմ, 1869, էջ 253-254: Մատթէոս Ուռհայեցի, op. cit., pp. 232-233.

<sup>7</sup> Vahram Pahlavouni was Grigor Magistros' grandson and Nerses the Graceful's brother. In his book entitled “Vipassank,” Nerses the Graceful has praised the services rendered to Egypt by Vassak and Vahram Pahlavounies. Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ալպոյաճեան Ա., op. cit., pp. 26-35.

<sup>9</sup> Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, p. 18. Ալպոյաճեան Ա., op. cit., p. 19. Եսփիունեան Ա., op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Արաբական աղբյուրները Հայաստանի և հարևան երկրների մասին, թարգմ. Հակոբ Նալբանդյան, Երևան, 1965, էջ 28:

<sup>12</sup> Makrizi. Description topographique et historique de l’Egypte. Traduit par U. Bouriant. Paris, 1895, p. 410.

In 1517 Egypt fell under the dominion of the Ottoman Empire, as a result of which the acts of violence and the massacres against the Christians, including the Armenians, grew in intensity; the latter either emigrated in thousands from the country or had recourse to apostasy in order to escape persecutions<sup>13</sup>.

In the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a stream of Armenians to Egypt started anew. According to certain data, by 1615, there were in Cairo more than 200 Armenian families, who lived close to each other in the "Armenian quarter"<sup>14</sup>. Armenian jewelers, gunsmiths and other craftsmen, migrated from Constantinople, Tigranakert and Aleppo, worked in the well-known Khan-el-Khalil market of Cairo. The chief jeweler, the "ghouyumji-bashi" was an Armenian from Tigranakert named Khoja Ibrahimsha<sup>15</sup>. The Armenian traders were engaged in Khan-el-Khalil, Hinakhan and other markets in the wholesale and retail trade of various fabrics. A small number of merchants from Djughha had trade contacts with markets in India, Arabia and Ethiopia<sup>16</sup>.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenian-Egyptian community became animated thanks to the rise in the importance of Egyptian towns (Suez, Cairo, Rosette or Rashid, Damietta and later, Alexandria) in the international trade relations; these towns had become large centers of international transit trade and barter, where the European merchants made use of the services of Armenian middlemen as well<sup>17</sup>.

Numerous statesmen and military figures of the Armenian origin are mentioned in the Arabic primary sources, such as Yaghoub (Hakob), Osman Chelebi, Ali-al-Armani, Suleiman Barem Zeyloun, Mustafa Jeberdji, Nikola (Nikoghayos) and others, who have played a major role in Mamlukian Egypt<sup>18</sup>. Thus, Yaghoub (Hakob) of Armenian origin, who was sent as a mediator to Russia, in 1771, for the purpose of throwing off the Ottoman yoke succeeded in signing a useful treaty of friendship and alliance. Further, a great number of soldiers and commanders of Armenian origin were present in the Egyptian army fighting, in 1798, against the French conquerors, for example, Nikoghayos (Moallem Nikola Hay), the commander of the Egyptian fleet built by the financial means of the Armenian trader, Murad bey<sup>19</sup>.

The French invasion had an exceedingly adverse effect on the Armenian-Egyptian community; relying upon the Copts, the French nullified the privileges of the Armenian merchants. On the other hand, considering the Christians the allies of the invaders, the fanatical Muslims targeted also the Armenian-inhabited quarters for their attacks during the anti-French movements. Following the departure of the French (1801-1804), an unfavorable period for the Armenian-Egyptian community started<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> Սիմէոն դարի Լեհացոյ ուղեգրութիւն, տարեգրութիւն եւ յիշատականոց, Վիեննա, 1936, էջ 216:

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ալպոյաճեան Ա., op. cit., pp. 51-58.

<sup>19</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, p. 23. Եգիպտոս, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>20</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 23-24.

In 1805, Muhammad Ali was appointed Vice-Regent of Egypt, whose administrative and economic reforms considerably favored the social-economic and political development of the country. Under the conditions of religious tolerance, the Armenians held high positions in nearly all the spheres of the country. In 1817, around 200 skillful Armenian artisans (workers, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, etc.) came to Egypt from the Ottoman Empire<sup>21</sup>.



**Muhammad Ali, Vice-Regent of Egypt**

Following the Russian-Turkish war, in 1828-1829, favorable conditions were created for the inflow of Armenian capital to Egypt. The Armenian money-changers (saraf) and traders had fused with the state monopolies. The traders and credit-lenders, established in Cairo and Alexandria, were mainly Damascus-based and Aleppo-based Armenians bearing Arabic names (Ayvaz, Poulos, Fatalla, Hindi, Youssouf, Ilias, Sappagh, Khayyat and others)<sup>22</sup>. The Armenian money-changers had also concentrated in their hand the post of the “chief money-changer” of the country and had taken up, by contract, the exclusive right of collecting the state taxes, of

financing the industrial enterprises (of metal-processing, textile, sugar, paper, chemical materials, etc.) and of governing the customs-houses. Until 1827, the first “chief money-changer” of Egypt was Yeghiazar Petrossian and from 1828-1847 - Alexander Missakian. In 1837, the Armenian money-changers founded in Cairo the first bank of the country, which functioned until 1841. The Armenians had also been appointed for the post of supervisor of the Mint<sup>23</sup>.



**Poghos bey Youssoufian**

Armenian counselors, translators and secretaries served at the cabinet of the Egyptian Viceroy and in the various offices. The Armenian large capital-owners were entrusted with important positions, especially at the Enlightenment Council of State, as well as at the Council of European Affairs and Commerce, which was the highest organ of foreign affairs and commerce. The successive heads (nazir) of the Council of State were the Armenians - Poghos bey Youssoufian (from 1808-1844, he has directed the Egyptian Ministries of Foreign Affairs, of Commerce, of Finance, of Internal Affairs and of War)<sup>24</sup>, Yacoub Artin

<sup>21</sup> Եսփունճեան Ա., *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., *op. cit.*, 1978, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Թովուլյան Հ., Հայերը Եգիպտոսում, Հայկական Սովետական Հանրագիտարան, հ. 3, Երևան, 1977, էջ 482: Եգիպտոս, *op. cit.*, pp. 151, 152.

<sup>24</sup> Poghos bey Youssoufian has been able to secure for Muhammad Ali Egypt's lifelong Vice-Regency by inheritable rights. When Poghos bey Youssoufian passed away, a forty-day mourning was announced as a token of deep respect

bey Chrakian (from 1844-1850, he directed the Egyptian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Commerce)<sup>25</sup>, Arakel bey Noubarian<sup>26</sup> (1850-1853, he directed the Egyptian Ministry of Commerce) and Stepan bey Demirjian (from 1850-1853 and from 1855-1857 he has directed the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs)<sup>27</sup>. A great many Armenians also held the positions of heads and overseas representatives in the various departments of these Councils of State; as, for example, an Armenian named Arakel had been appointed Governor of Sudan. Khosrov Chrakian (1800-1873), Aristakes Altoun Tyurin (1804-1858)<sup>28</sup> and others distinguished themselves in leading state positions. Consequently, foreign people have named Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commerce "Palais Arménien" (Armenian Palace) and, appraising the authority of Armenian statesmen, they have asserted: "The Armenians have penetrated everywhere. ...The Armenian community is most powerful in the palace of the Viceroy"<sup>29</sup>.

Thanks to the favorable conditions created in Egypt, a large number of impoverished and necessitous Armenian families started to inflow from the Armenian-inhabited localities of the Ottoman Empire, hence, in the 40s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than 10 thousand Armenians lived in Egypt<sup>30</sup>.

Taking advantage of the Egyptian-Ottoman antagonism, the British diplomacy succeeded, in 1841, in inducing Muhammad Ali to resign, as a result of which Egypt's foreign and internal political, economic and military areas of jurisdiction were considerably reduced. Numerous statesmen of the Armenian origin (the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Commerce, Artin bey Chrakian, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stepan bey Demirjian and others) were also banished from the country, the exodus of Armenians from Egypt was intensified (after 1854, there remained in the country 3-4 thousand Armenians)<sup>31</sup>.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Egypt partly passed under British colonial supervision. In 1867, Egypt's ruler, Ismail pasha, was conferred the inheritable title of Khedive (Ruler, Prince) thanks to the effective assistance and the flexible policy of mutual cooperation with the Europeans conducted by the country's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nubar pasha Noubarian.

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toward that meritorious high-ranking state figure, who had loyally served Egypt for about 30 years. Եսփիւնեան Ա., op. cit., p. 16. Աճեմեան Լեւոն, Եգիպտահայ տարեցոյց. 1925, Ա Տարի, Աղեքսանդրիա, Տպ. Ա. Գասապեան, 1924, էջ 61: Ալպօյաճեան Ա., op. cit., pp. 65-70.

<sup>25</sup> Ալպօյաճեան Ա., op. cit., pp. 79-82.

<sup>26</sup> Nubar pasha Noubarian's brother. Եսփիւնեան Ա., op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Ալպօյաճեան Ա., op. cit., pp. 82-83, 109-118.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 101. Եսփիւնեան Ա., op. cit., p. 17. Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 28, 36. Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1977, p. 482.

<sup>29</sup> Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 28-29. Hamont, P. H. L'Egypte sous Méhémet-Ali. Vol. I, Paris, 1843, p. 425.

<sup>30</sup> Եգիպտոս, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>31</sup> Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, p. 33. Egypt, op. cit., p. 152.





**Noubar pasha Nubarian**

Noubar pasha Nubarian was appointed, in 1857, Head of the Department of Railways and Transport and, subsequently, four times nominated for the office of Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs (1866-1874, 1875-1876, 1878-1879, 1884-1888) and thrice for the office of Prime Minister (1878-1879, 1884-1889, 1894-1895), being thus the first Prime Minister of Egypt. Later, he also held the office of Minister of Justice<sup>32</sup>.

In 1876, the International (or Mixed) Courts and the House of Notables (by analogy with the Parliament) were created in Egypt thanks to the direct participation of Noubar pasha Nubarian, something which put on end to the unilateral intervention of foreign powers with regard to Egypt, and the country obtained thereby the right to independently conclude financial contracts with foreign states. Noubar pasha also spared no effort to improve the condition of the Egyptian peasantry, for which, besides other numerous titles and awards, he won the popular title of "Abu Fellah" (Father of the Peasant). The grateful Egyptian people have erected (1904) in the central park in Alexandria, as well as before the entrance of the Opera House in Cairo his imposing statues. Streets have also been named after him in Cairo and Alexandria<sup>33</sup>.



**Monument of Noubar Nubarian before the entrance of the Opera House in Cairo**



**Monument of Noubar Nubarian in the central park in Alexandria**

The construction of the Suez Canal in 1869 greatly raised Egypt's standing in world trade. Unfortunate and needy Armenian emigrants from the various localities of Western Armenia (Van, Baghesh, Moush, Sgherd, Sassoun) started to cluster in the

<sup>32</sup> Ալաջյան Ա., *op. cit.*, pp. 83-95, 97-107. Թովույան Հովհ., *op. cit.*, 1978, p. 36. Եսփունդեան Ա., *op. cit.*, p. 18. Եգիպտոս, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>33</sup> Եսփունդեան Ա., *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Egyptian ports to work as laborers. According to certain data, about 100 Armenians (65 of them from Moush) participated, in 1867, in the work of the opening of the Suez Canal<sup>34</sup>. By 1879, 8.000 Armenians lived in Egypt<sup>35</sup>.

Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenians were concentrated mainly in Cairo and Alexandria. A small number of Armenians were living also in Rosette and Damietta. After the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a number of Armenians moved also to Zagazik, Tanta, Asyut, Fayum and other inner towns of the country<sup>36</sup>.

In 1882, Egypt fell entirely under the hegemony of Great Britain and its economy passed under the supervision of British capital. Once more the inflow of the non-Mohammedan (including also of the Armenian) element and its involvement in the political and economic life of the country were encouraged. In 1891-1894, Tigran pasha d'Abro Bagratouni was Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, who realized the policy of overcoming the feudal backwardness of the country and of the reinforcement of the Egyptian army<sup>37</sup>.



Tigran d'Abro Bagratouni

The Armenians were largely involved in the tobacco industry and 90% of the manufacture of tobacco belonged to them. In Egypt, the Armenians greatly contributed also to the development of architecture, journalism, metal-processing, agriculture (Yousouf effendi El-Armani introduced for the first time tangerine from France and cultivated it over large areas of land, for which the fruit was called after him "Yousoufeffendi"—Mister Hovsep/Joseph), cloth weaving (the manufacture of headscarves was introduced to Egypt by Armenians), soap manufacture, dye-works, tailoring, shoe-making, photography and other spheres. The arts of engraving, zincography and particularly jewel-making were the Armenians' specific monopoly<sup>38</sup>, a privilege, which has been kept up to the present day.

Trade was also one of the monopolies of the Armenians. Thus, in 1882, there were in Alexandria 80, and in Cairo (according to the 1886 data) 250 trade establishments (the well-known establishments were: "Gevorg Topalian", "K. Kechian", "Bakerjian Brothers", "Stepan Iplikjian", "Gevorg Mouradian", "Sargis Manoukian and Sons"), the founders of which were mainly Armenians, who had come from Constantinople and Smyrna. There were also several Armenian-Arab societies. The Armenian traders were engaged principally in the trade of imported goods. In 1913, 74 among the Armenian trade establishments were the official representatives of European manufacturers. The chief imported items were petroleum and tobacco. The Alexander

<sup>34</sup> Սափրիչեան Տիմ., Երկամեայ պանդխտութիւն ի Հապեշտան, Երուսաղեմ, 1871, էջ 8:

<sup>35</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 37, 40. Եգիպտոս, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>36</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 40, 41. Եափունեան Ա., op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Ալպոյաճեան Ա., op. cit., pp. 95-97.

<sup>38</sup> Եափունեան Ա., op. cit., pp. 19-20. Եգիպտոս, op. cit., p. 152.

Mantashian trading society, which had its center in Alexandria, was the sole importer of the Baku petroleum in Egypt. The employees of its branches spread all over the country were Armenians. The monopoly of the import and the distribution of tobacco belonged to an Armenian from Aleppo, Khalil Hayyat.<sup>39</sup> A number of Armenians were also engaged in the commerce of handicraft goods made in the Ottoman Empire and, particularly, Western Armenia. The Armenians in Egypt were also great landowners; the Armenian Church also had its great share<sup>40</sup>.

As a consequence of the recurrent massacres and the Armenian Genocide committed in the Ottoman Empire, in 1894-1896, 1909, 1915-1923, the stream of the exiled and fugitive Armenians to Egypt grew in volume. Thus, as a result of the Hamidian massacres perpetrated in 1894-1896, more than 3.000 Armenians took refuge in Egypt, while in 1914-1918, following World War I, 12.000 Armenians fled to Egypt, among them 1.500-2.000 orphans rescued from the Armenian Genocide;<sup>41</sup> they were temporarily sheltered in the Armenian churches, schools and tents under the care of the Armenian Diocese. However, the number of the Armenian unfortunate and needy people exiled to alien countries was so large that on April 15, 1906, on the initiative of the Armenian-Egyptian public-political figure, the national benefactor Poghos Noubar (Noubar pasha Noubarian's son) the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) was founded in Cairo with a view to lending a helping hand to the fellow-countrymen.



Poghos Noubar

With the object of assisting the destitute people the Armenian Red Cross (1915, Alexandria) and the "Armenian-Egyptian Relief Body" Foundation (1915-1920) were also created. In December 1915, the French and British ships transported 4.058 Moussa Ler (Dagh) people, who had withstood the self-defensive battle of Moussa Ler, to Egypt, to the tent-camp in Port-Saïd. During the four years (till 1919) these refugees lived at the tent-camp, they earned their living by practicing their ethnic crafts (comb-making, spoon-making, rug-making, needlework, etc.), by establishing small shops and so on. At the tent-camp there were also a church, a club, a library, a hospital and the AGBU Siswan School.

Generally speaking, the Armenian-Egyptian community increased in number during the period of 1882-1917. In 1917, the Armenians in Egypt numbered 17.000. Already on the eve of World War I, numerous Armenian architects, physicians, lawyers

<sup>39</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., *op. cit.*, 1978, pp. 107-118. Գափամանեան Ա., Հայ տարրը Եգիպտոսի պետական, տնտեսական եւ առեւտրական ասպարեզներուն մէջ, «Եգիպտահայ տարեցոյց», Գահիրէ, 1914, էջ 222, 224, 224-229: Օտյան Երվանդ, Երկերի ժողովածու, հ. 4, Երևան, 1962, էջ 477: Աղազարմ Ն. Մ., Նորթեր Եգիպտոսի հայ գաղութին վրայ, Գահիրէ, 1911, էջ 72:

<sup>40</sup> Եգիպտոս, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>41</sup> Ալպոյաճեան Ա., *op. cit.*, pp. D-E.



and other specialists held high positions in the state institutions of the country.<sup>42</sup> In 1913-1914, of the 14-15 thousand workers and employees engaged in the tobacco industry around 10 thousand were working at the enterprises owned by Armenian businessmen ("Matossian Society," G. and K. Melkonians, A. and T. Kamsarakans, N. and A. Hedjetian, G. Ipekian and others), who produced nearly 75% of the output<sup>43</sup>.

After World War I and during the rise of the national-liberation movement started in Egypt, the Armenian rich class took up the cause of British interests, although the Armenian community maintained, for the most part, neutrality trying not to get involved in the political events. As a result of the proclamation of independence in Egypt, in 1922, the rights formerly granted to non-Mohammedan communities were reconsidered. The ethnic minorities were entitled to independently manage their intracommunal affairs. Under pressure of the Egyptian national capital, the Armenian manufacturers were considerably weakened and many of them departed the country. A severe blow was delivered to the tobacco industry, nevertheless the Armenians were able to maintain their monopoly in the metal-processing, the spinning and the packaging industries. The trading societies greatly reduced or totally discontinued their activities. The "A. I. Mantashev and Co." petroleum and trading company passed into the hands of the foreign capital. Of the great number of societies engaged in the wholesale and retail trade of textiles only a few were able to maintain their positions. Only 3 Armenian commercial institutions continued to get engaged in the import of automobiles and iron goods<sup>44</sup>.

Mainly as a consequence of favorable socio-religious conditions in the country the Armenian Apostolic Church established an ecclesiastical community in Egypt as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, gradually enlarging Armenian Church community in Egypt had already two parishes and two primates, and in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were more than 30 functioning churches and monasteries<sup>45</sup>. Armenian churches and monasteries were functioning in Cairo, Zoueyla, Sohak, Dura, Shinar, Alexandria, Asyut, Zagazig and elsewhere. In the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the great stream of Armenians to Egypt, the Armenian houses of worship in the country grew in number to such an extent, that according to the picturesque expression of the Arab historian and traveler, Ibn Mutassar, "the native Egyptians were fearful that they [the Armenians] would drive out the Mohammedan faith"<sup>46</sup>. Until 1311, the Armenian-Egyptian Church community was under the jurisdiction of the Cilician Catholicossate, from 1311-1839 - of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, from 1867 - of the Patriarchate of

<sup>42</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1977, p. 482. Եգիպտոս, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>43</sup> Թովուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 99-107. Գափամաճեան Ա., op. cit., pp. 179, 180, 182, 185-186. Թովուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1977, p. 482.

<sup>44</sup> Եգիպտոս, op. cit., pp. 153-154.

<sup>45</sup> Գուշակեան Թ., Եգիպտոսի հայոց հին եւ արդի եկեղեցիները եւ պատմութիւն շինութեան Ս. Գրիգոր Լուսաւորիչ նորաշէն եկեղեցւոյ Գահիրէի, Գահիրէ, 1927, էջ 10, 12-18:

<sup>46</sup> Եգիպտոս, op. cit., p. 156.

Constantinople and after the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - again of the Holy See of the Edjmiadsin Catholicosate<sup>47</sup>.

In the years of Muhammad Ali's enthronement, which were favorable for the Armenians of Egypt, the latter were organized as a community. Already in 1825, the inspectorial status of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Egypt was abolished and it was converted into a Diocese. In 1928, an Armenian seminary, a requiem-house, a hospital and a guest-house were constructed adjacent to the Armenian Apostolic Church in Cairo<sup>48</sup>.



St. Grigor the Illuminator Church in Cairo

From the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenian Catholic community was also established in Egypt; the community was officially recognized in 1831 and had churches functioning in Cairo, Heliopolis and Alexandria<sup>49</sup>. Armenian Evangelical houses of worship functioned also in the said towns. The Armenian Evangelical community in Egypt started to take form in the beginning of 1860s, but it was officially recognized as a community in 1890<sup>50</sup>.

Starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenian community had also national cemeteries adjacent to the churches in Cairo, Zagazig and Alexandria<sup>51</sup>.

The first Armenian school in Egypt, the Yeghiazarian Seminary was opened in Cairo in 1828, contiguous to the St. Astvadsadsin (Blessed Virgin) Church, where "...the first teachers were the priest and the acolyte of the same church"<sup>52</sup>. The schools functioning in the principal towns were: the Aramian National School (1845), renamed subsequently Poghos-Beyian and later Poghossian (1862), and the Haykazian School (1924) in Alexandria, while in Cairo, the Khorenian National School (1854), renamed subsequently Galoustian National School (1897), the Kedronakan Kertakan School

<sup>47</sup> Յովհաննէսեան Գ., Եգիպտոսի պատմութիւնը սկիզբէն մինչեւ մեր օրերը՝ ճոխացուած ազգ. պատմութեան դրուագներով, Գահիրէ, 1937, էջ 219: Եգիպտոս, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>48</sup> Յովհաննէսեան Գ., *op. cit.*, p. 220. Թովուլյան Հովհ., *op. cit.*, 1978, pp. 31, 71. Գարտաշեան Ա. Հ., Նիւթեր Եգիպտոսի հայոց պատմութեան համար, հ. Բ, Պատմութիւն եգիպտահայ բարերարներու եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու, Վենետիկ-Ս. Ղազար, 1986, էջ 321:

<sup>49</sup> Դաւիթեան Սերովբէ Եպիս., Պատմական տեսութիւն Եգիպտոսի Հայ Կաթողիկէ Եկեղեցւոյ, Գահիրէ, 1914, էջ 14-15: Գարտաշեան Ա. Հ., Նիւթեր Եգիպտոսի հայոց պատմութեան համար, հ. Ա, Պատմութիւն եգիպտահայ եկեղեցիներու եւ գերեզմանատուներու, Գահիրէ, 1943, էջ 252-253, 264-266: Յովհաննէսեան Գ., *op. cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>50</sup> Գարտաշեան Ա. Հ., *op. cit.*, Vol. A, 1943, pp. 282-283, 295-296, 300-301.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 26, 110, 129-130, 156-159, 254, 266-267, 297. Գուշակեան Թ., *op. cit.*, pp. 47-52, 63-65.

<sup>52</sup> Համբիկեան Յ., Եգիպտահայ գաղութին կազմաւորումը եւ վարժարաններուն պատմութիւնը, «Յուշագիրք Դ վերահանդիպումի Եգիպտահայ Ազգային Վարժարաններու շրջանավարտներու. Գալուստեան-Նուբարեան-Պողոսեան», Գալնուպ, Եգիպտոս, 11-20 Սեպտեմբեր, 1997, էջ 19:

(1897), the Tashjian School (1901, 1917), the Hamazgayin Girls' School (1905), the Manissalian School (1905), the Gapamajian School (1910), the Varzhapetian School (1921), the Massis School (1921), the Berberian School (1924), the Noubarian National School (1925), etc. Armenian schools were functioning also in Asyut, Zagazig, Heliopolis and elsewhere<sup>53</sup>. Adjacent to the schools, kindergartens were also functioning, as the Melkonian National Kindergarten (1896, Alexandria), the Galoustian National Kindergarten (1897, Cairo), etc.<sup>54</sup>. The Armenian Catholic and Evangelical denominations also had their schools, such as the Immaculate Conception Armenian Sisters' Schools (1897, Cairo and 1914, Alexandria), the Catholic Armenian School (1919, Cairo), as well as the Armenian Evangelical School (1899, Cairo), etc.<sup>55</sup>.



Galoustian National School in Cairo

A number of book-lovers', cultural, ecclesiastic, publishing, benevolent, student, sporting, art-lovers', educational and various other unions have developed an intense activity in Egypt.

The Armenian-Egyptians have made their specific contribution to the architectural, journalism, literary, fine arts, musical, theatrical, cinematographic art and other spheres, which have enriched both the Armenian and Arabic

cultures<sup>56</sup>.

The first Armenian-Egyptian periodical, the "Armaveni" ("Palm" - in Arm.) was published in Cairo, in 1865. At various times, numerous and multifarious Armenian periodicals (literary, satirical, national-political, party, scientific, children's, pedagogical, economic, social, etc.)<sup>57</sup> were published, printing-houses and publishing-houses were functioning, where the works of Armenian, Arab or foreign authors were printed<sup>58</sup>. Until World War I Cairo came in the third place in printing after Constantinople and Smyrna<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Գարտաշեան Ա. Հ., op. cit., Vol. B, 1986, p. 376. Idem, Նիւթեր Եգիպտոսի հայոց պատմութեան համար, հ. Գ, Պատմութիւն եգիպտահայ բարերարներու եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու, Վենետիկ-Ս.Ղազար, Մխիթարեան Տպարան, 1987, էջ 3-30, 187-191, 403, 408, 410, 428, 431, 471, 482, 511, 513: Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 183-190, 275-292.

<sup>54</sup> Գարտաշեան Ա. Հ., op. cit., Vol. B, 1986, p. 602. Idem, op. cit., Vol. C, 1987, pp. 124-131.

<sup>55</sup> Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, p. 184. Գարտաշեան Ա. Հ., op. cit., Vol. C, 1987, pp. 303, 320, 383:

<sup>56</sup> Եգիպտոս, op. cit., pp. 159-160, 161-162. Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 190-196, 203-211, 292-298, 301-311.

<sup>57</sup> Հայ մամուլը Եգիպտոսի մէջ, Մատենագիտական ցուցակ, կազմեց Տոքթ. Սուրէն Ն. Պալյամեան, Գահիրէ, 2005, էջ 2-3, 367-371:

<sup>58</sup> Եգիպտոս, op. cit., pp. 162-164. Թոփուլյան Հովհ., op. cit., 1978, pp. 196-203, 298-301. Հայ գիրքը Եգիպտոսի մէջ (1888-2011), Մատենագիտական ցուցակ, կազմեց Տոքթ. Սուրէն Ն. Պալյամեան, Գահիրէ, 2012, էջ IX-X:

<sup>59</sup> Յովհաննէսեան Գ., op. cit., p. 232.

Thus, the Armenian community in Egypt, particularly, during the last historical periods, has achieved remarkable successes in the diverse spheres of the state-political, social-economic and the spiritual-cultural life of the country thanks to the favorable attitude that prevailed in the country towards the Armenians.



The header of the first Armenian-Egyptian periodical  
“Armaveni”

**Translated from Armenian  
by T. H. Tsoulikian**