

## 1918 GHARAKILISA INCIDENTS AS CONTINUATION OF THE OTTOMAN GENOCIDAL POLICY

HAYRAPETYAN A.  
armenani@mail.ru

Gharakilisa incidents of 1918 have been referred to by the Armenian historiography from the perspective of May heroic battles. There have been various opinions and viewpoints on the general strategic situation existing in the region as well as individual figures; tens of memoirs, scientific monographs and documentary collections have been published. Meanwhile the study of many significant issues such as the research of the demographic and economic policy conducted here have been left out of historians' sight.

Hereby we would like to introduce the period and consequences of the Ottoman genocidal policy in the Pambak uyezd as the main subject of the research via combining newly found archival materials, scientific literature, eyewitness memoirs and periodical press releases.

The military-political situation in the Caucasian frontier of WWI changed drastically in the spring of 1918 to the detriment of the Armenian people. The Turk-Transcaucasian war which resumed on April 1 turned into the triumph of the Turkish troops.

After the fall of Kars, the Turks presented an ultimatum at the night of May 14 demanding to hand over Alexandrapol, and the next morning without waiting for the answer attacked the city and the villages in Eastern Shirak.

A few days later some Turkish troops fled from Alexandrapol to Yerevan, some of them entered Pambak and on May 28, after 4-day bloody fights occupied Gharakilisa<sup>1</sup>.

What was carried out by Turkish troops and local Muslims was the direct continuation of the Armenian Genocide only in more cruel and uncompromising ways.

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<sup>1</sup> For details of the heroic struggle in Gharakilisa see: Ղարաքիլիսայի 1918 թ. հերոսամարտը, Փաստաթղթերի և նյութերի ժողովածու, կազմ.՝ Մարության Ա., Դալլաքյան Վ., Ե., 2008: Սարդարապատ, Բաշ-Ապարան, Ղարաքիլիսա, 1918 թ. Մայիսյան հերոսամարտերը, Ե., 1998:

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The sudden fall of Alexandropol resulted in a tremendous panic, causing unorganized and chaotic migration. Tens of thousands refugees escaping from the Turkish sword fled to Echmiadzin and Pambak.

According to eyewitnesses, about 200,000 people (9,000 from Basen, 4,000 from Kaghzvan, more than 60,000 from Kars region and more than 70,000 from Alexandropol and Eastern Shirak villages) had gathered in the region of Pambak on the eve of the Turkish invasion. This was a huge mass occupying the area of about 40 miles (42.5 km)<sup>2</sup> from Galtaghchi to Greater Gharakilisa.

The guard troops of the 11<sup>th</sup> Turkish division entered Gharakilisa in the evening of May 28. On the eve of Gharakilisa invasion, people of blockaded Gharakilisa sent a delegation of 6 people to Arjut asking the Turkish commander Jemal Javid bey “to accept Gharakilisa’s subordination and protect people from being violated”.

Reassuring the delegates, he stated that no Armenian would be injured and that special measures would be taken to restore the normal life in Gharakilisa and help the refugees<sup>3</sup>.

At the same night the massacre of the peaceful Armenian population began. The Turkish soldiers accompanied by the local Muslims from Saral, Arjut and Ghanjughaz villages attacked Ghishlagh. The same occurred in Gharakilisa. The Turkish soldiers with the local Muslims from Vardanlu and Hallavar killed 156 Armenians in a village district called “Verin tagh” (upper district) in one night. A place called “Aslan beg’s Hollow” became their tomb<sup>4</sup>.

Generally, in 9 vilages of Pambak district at the night of May 28 besides the western Armenians, and Armenians from Shirak and Kars, Turks killed 1269 people from Pambak (156 in Gharakilisa, 250 in Ghishlagh, 43 in Darbaz, 200 Bzovdal, 65 in Hajighara, 15 in Efendi, 350 in Hamali, 40 in Yaghubli, 150 in Parni)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> **Էջիբեկյան Հ.**, Ղարաքիլիսայի ճակատամարտը, Տեղեկագիր հասարակական գիտությունների, Ե., 1947, N 8, էջ 57: **Ղազարեան Մ.**, Դէպքերը Ղարաքիլիսայի շրջանում. տպատրոփիւններ, «Մշակ», Թիֆլիս, 1918, N 102, 2 յունիսի:

<sup>3</sup> Ղարաքիլիսայի 1918 թ. հերոսամարտը, էջ 112:

<sup>4</sup> **Խանգաղյան Խ.**, Հուշեր և տպավորություններ 1919 թ., ծանոթագրությունները և առաջաբանն ըստ Մ. Սանթոսյանի, Ե., 1998, էջ 91-92:

<sup>5</sup> NAS RA, fund 227, list 1, work 4, p. 12. fund 240, list 1, work 240, pp. 36-37.

In a few days Turks brought back the horrified survivors and killed them all in the possible worst ways<sup>6</sup>.

According to the contemporaries, the cause of the mass slaughter of the peaceful population in the above-mentioned villages was their support to the Armenian troops fighting against the Turks in those areas. According to the eyewitness M. Ghazaryan, one of the canons of the Armenian troops shooting in the direction of the Turkish positions during the last days of the heroic battles was situated in Ghishlar<sup>7</sup>.

We do not aim to explain the mass slaughter of the peaceful population of Pambak because of their participation in the fight against the Turkish troops and local Muslims. However, it should be mentioned that the population of Gharakilisa and the villages nearby refused to flee and become refugees, and this was devastating.

The homeowners forced the population not to move anywhere and not to even move the women from their villages. “No one has the right to leave the village, we will stay here and we will die here,” said Ghishlagh Village Head Avetik<sup>8</sup>.

In their memoirs, contemporaries also touch upon the issue of Armenophobia in Pambak’s Muslim population during the Ottoman domination and try to understand its reasons. The eyewitnesses Mushegh Ghazaryan and Khoren Khanzadyan, tend to explain it by punitive attack organized by the Dashnaks – Vagho, Arshak, Khzmal, Chopur Davit, Aso, Vaghinak and others on the Turkish-populated village of Vardanlu.

M. Ghazaryan writes that, “when the Turks were moving toward Pambak, the Turks from Vardanlu joined the Turkish regular troops becoming the guides of the conquerors”<sup>9</sup>.

It is difficult to say to what extent the tactics of the Dashnak group could be justified. However, one thing is obvious: by intervening Vardanlu they prevented the attack of Greater Gharakilisa, prepared by the Pambak Muslims who had managed to accumulate large amounts of arms and were almost ready to start the

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<sup>6</sup> **Խանգաղյան Խ.**, op. cit., p. 95–96:

<sup>7</sup> Ղարաքիլիսայի 1918 թ. հերոսամարտը, էջ 115:

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Մանրամասն տե՛ս **Խանգաղյան Խ.**, op. cit., p. 86: Ղարաքիլիսայի 1918 թ. հերոսամարտը, էջ 102:

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attack. The actions of the Dashnak group distracted the attention of the Turks and saved the Armenian population in Gharakilisa. Nevertheless, this could not change the situation radically, for the extreme expression of Armenophobia was spread all over, particularly in the villages of Sarali, Arjut, Ghanjughas, Hallavar, etc.

Since May 29, the mass deportation and massacre of the civilian population have been officially recognized. The entire Armenian population of the region was declared a prisoner of war, and movable and immovable property was state property. After having searched the houses and hiding places, Turks gathered men, and after three days of keeping them hungry, took them out in groups of 400–500 people, tied and drove them in different directions.

The first group of the captives was shot dead at the “Badal-Oglu Source”, the second one was shot dead in the south of Gharakilisa in the place called “Takhaghbyur pits”, the third one – near the village of Vardanlu, near the carriers’ carriages, the fourth one – in the forest of “Vanants Dzor”, the fifth one – at the slopes of the Maimex, in Mets Dzor mines and in the village of Yaghubli, near Sargis Church, and the sixth one – in the barns of the village of Hajighara<sup>10</sup>.

Javid Bey designed a genius program to exterminate the Armenians and get rid of their “criminal” label. The captives were shot dead at the heights where the attacking Turks had positioned two days before. In other words, an attempt was made not to display the massacre of the peaceful population.

Moreover, the captives were executed by approximately the same number in each position. For example, the sixth group was driven towards Hajighara because there the number of dead Armenians was insignificant<sup>11</sup>. By slaughtering, the Turks were creating an illusion of equal fighting in each position<sup>12</sup>.

According to H. Avetisyan, as a result of that massacre 4000 people from Shirak and Pambak, Armenian officers and soldiers who had been captured during the heroic battle of Gharakilisa or afterwards surrendered to the

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<sup>10</sup> Ղարաքիլիսայի 1918 թ. հերոսամարտը, էջ 120:

<sup>11</sup> The Turkish military commander Kazim Karabekir referring to the failure of the Turkish troops in Hajighara in 1919 briefly stated: «...գյուղի մոտ կանայք և գյուղացիները կացիներով զինված կոտորում էին հետ քաշվող թուրք զինվորներին»: (See Копия доклада, представленного американской делегацией, возглавляемой генералом Харбордом, относительно боевых действий 15-ого Кавказского армейского корпуса в 1918 г., Эрзерум, 1919, с. 10–11).

<sup>12</sup> **Խանզադյան Խ.**, op. cit., p. 92–93:

generosity of the winners; the defenseless Western Armenian refugees and others were shot dead<sup>13</sup>.

On May 30, Javid fulfilled the next episode of his sinister plan. In Gharakilisa, it was announced that the railroad officials and workers were forced to register and pass the work within 24 hours. Approximately 500 people believed and got registered and did not return any more. The following morning, they were divided into groups of 40–50 people, were driven in the direction of the heights of Maimekh and Altuntakt, and were forced to dig tombs, and then shot dead in front of those tombs, so that they fell down and covered the first ones. According to contemporary eyewitnesses, many foreign workers went mad witnessing this scene<sup>14</sup>.

On the seventh day of the Pambak occupation, the discipline was restored in the army, and the massacres, at least in the afternoons, ceased. Instead, night attacks were intensified. Farmers and village heads started to disappear in a “mysterious” way (the Turks demanded them to hand over the beautiful women and girls of the villages, and if they were denied they killed the locals)<sup>15</sup>.

There were a lot of cases of kidnapping and raping women. According to Khoren Khanzadyan, Turks satisfied their sexual needs to the detriment of the Armenians, violating their honour<sup>16</sup>. Many villages, according to their own villagers' confession, were subjected to “total rape”. For example, Nalband. The men were expelled from the village and the women were raped. At the same time, not only young girls, aged 8–10, were raped, but also elderly women. Following the Turks' departure, the Pambak commissions registered a number of homosexuality cases, with the participation of the Ottoman army command and medical staff (with the direct participation of the division's physician Kamil Bey)<sup>17</sup>.

Today, when a century has passed, it is impossible to find out the exact figures to show the extent of this villainous phenomenon, and this can be accounted for by the fact that the population in the rural areas, as a rule, concealed the cases of dishonesty. The Armenian women responded to this

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<sup>13</sup> Ավետիսյան Հ., Հայոց ազգային միության հաղթանակը, 1918 թվականի մայիս, Ե., 1998, էջ 115:

<sup>14</sup> NAS RA, f. 114, l. 2, w. 33, p. 52; f. 240, l. 1, w. 240, p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> NAS RA, f. 121, l. 2, w. 79, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Խանզադյան Խ., *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>17</sup> NAS RA, f. 202, l. 1, w. 1271, p. 48.

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dishonesty by self-defense in exclusive ways – through suicide and poisoning. According to M. Ghazaryan, this was done by the members of the Aghababyan family – Michael, his wife, Vardanush, his daughters, Zanazan and Horomzim (Khoren the senior priest called this daughter Hripsime)<sup>18</sup>, his son Avetis with his wife and children, from the village of Ghishlagh the Mayliyans – Astghik, Lusik and Javahir<sup>19</sup>. Siranush and Arusyak with their mother from the Tsaturyan family from Alexandropol living with the Mayilyans and Aghababyans in the same yard as well as others committed suicide in the same way taking poison<sup>20</sup>.

After the May upheavals, the corpses of the dead soon began to rot and the stay in Gharakilisa, even for the Turks, became impossible. Only in the middle of June the Turks favored to bury them in the tombs dug by the streets<sup>21</sup>, and another week later, the whole region suffered from typhus and cholera. Besides, there was a widespread famine<sup>22</sup>. In the absence of hospitals, only in July-August, more than 1,000 people died of epidemics and famine. According to contemporary witnesses, the epidemic took 378 lives in Ghishlagh, 127 in Darbaz, 286 in Hajighara, 35 in Bzoval and 48 in Yaghubli. The deaths from infectious illnesses in September reached a terrible scale. According to eyewitnesses, there were so many dead that their corpses remained in living houses and streets for many days, polluting air and water<sup>23</sup>.

The Ottoman Empire, having been defeated in WWI, withdrew its troops from Pambak in October<sup>24</sup>. After the Turks had left the district (former area of Greater Gharakilisa) according to the RA Ministerial council decision, it was taken from the Alexandropol uyezd and being unified with Dilijan and Karvansara districts became part of the newly-formed Dilijan region<sup>25</sup>. A special commission

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<sup>18</sup> **Խանզադյան Խ.**, op. cit., p. 94–95.

<sup>19</sup> Ղարաքիլիսայի 1918 թ. հերոսամարտը, էջ 121–122:

<sup>20</sup> **Իրազեկ Յ.**, Մօտիկ անցեալից, պատմական դէպքեր եւ ասպրումներ, 1917–1922, Պէլրոպ, 1956, էջ 31:

<sup>21</sup> Ղարաքիլիսայի 1918 թ. հերոսամարտը, էջ 126:

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 134.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 135.

<sup>24</sup> Ղարաքիլիսէի յանձնումը, «Մշակ», Թիֆլիս, 1918, N 20, 18 հոկտեմբերի:

<sup>25</sup> NAS RA, f. 203, l. 1, w. 4, p. 20.

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**Hayrapetyan A.**

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was sent there in order to estimate the material and physical damage caused by Turks<sup>26</sup>.

In the final report presented by the Commission to the Special bureau which had been formed in Tiflis headed by H. Tumanyan it was proved that the mass killings and exterminations carried out by regular Turkish troops and local Muslims were the result of the state-level Turkish genocidal physical extermination policy, designed and organized in advance, conducted against the Armenians (the population of Pambak district, 17 villages except for Hamzachimian which hadn't been captured were exterminated, and in 9 villages the slaughter was of large-scale dimensions).

In order to clarify the scale of the Turkish genocidal policy the committee members plied from place to place, compiled lists of the victims and captured but couldn't collect complete statistical data, that's to say they had to compile the lists having based on the memories of local population, they gathered the inhabitants of villages and compiled the lists according to the victims' names and surnames.

In this connection, a question arises: "How was the estimation process carried out in the villages of Ghishlagh, Darbaz, Bzovdal, Hajighara, Efendi, Hamali, Yaghubli, and Parni where 80% of the population was killed and whole families were extirpated?"

As a result, the lists missed out hundreds of surnames, the registration of the refugees and western Armenians (subjected to extermination in case of identification) were carried out with shortcomings, and in addition to the above-mentioned, there were no publicised information and data on a lot of villages. In the final report of the commission group it was mentioned that in general thousands of people were shot dead in the places near Gharakilisa but, unfortunately, no exact number of the victims could be presented. It should be assumed that the number varies from 3000 to 7000 apart from the killed 1470 locals. From the 886 captured and driven towards Erzurum only 95 managed to return<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> A. Ter-Harutyunyan and A. Shahbazyan as members of the commission were to estimate the scale of the caused material damage, and D. Gavrilov was to file the rape and murder cases (More detailed in NAS RA, f. 202, l. 1, w. 1271, p. 45–49).

<sup>27</sup> NAS RA, f. 202, l. 1, w. 1271, p. 47.

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No substantial success was achieved in the collection of accurate statistical information by the Akexandrapol municipal administration commission headed by Aram Virabyan that was sent to Great Gharakilisa in October – December in 1918.

In his memories, the first foreign minister and the Prime Minister of the first Armenian Republic Al. Khatisyan estimated about 7000 Armenian victims (including those who were captured during the days of the heroic battles)<sup>28</sup>. In his telegram sent to the Council of Armenia on October 23, 1918, Dro too estimated about 7000 Armenian victims<sup>29</sup>.

However, now, after a century, taking into consideration the above-presented facts it is impossible to agree with the accepted viewpoint existing in the Armenian historiography, according to which, as a result of those genocidal actions only 7000 people were killed.

Summing up the brief examination of the events taken place in Gharakilisa in 1918, we can conclude, that the Ottoman occupation hit hard the ethnic image of the population in 9 out of 28 villages of the district where mass slaughter and massacres were committed. Thousands of western Armenians, Armenians from Kars, Shirak, Alexandrapol were killed in Gharakilisa and nearby forests, the kidnapping, rape and forced Islamization of women reached an extremely large scale due to the genocidal scheme of the Turks<sup>30</sup>.

## **ՂԱՐԱՔԻԼԻՍԱՅԻ 1918 Թ. ԴԵՊՔԵՐՆ ԻԲՐԵՎ ՕՍՄԱՆՅԱՆ ՑԵՂԱՍՊԱՆԱԿԱՆ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՇԱՐՈՒՆԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ**

ՀԱՅՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ Ա.

### **Ամփոփում**

1918 թ. մայիսի վերջին տիրելով Մեծ Ղարաքիլիսային, թուրքական կանոնավոր զորքերը՝ տեղական մահմեդականների աջակցությամբ, իրագործեցին

<sup>28</sup> **Խատիսեան Ալ.**, Հայաստանի Հանրապետության ծագումն ու զարգացումը, Պէյրոս, 1968, էջ 80:

<sup>29</sup> NAS RA, f. 198, l. 1, w. 16, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> «Ետազոտությունն իրականացվել է ՀՀ ԿԳՆ Գիտության պետական կոմիտեի ֆինանսավորմամբ՝ 18SH-6A007 ծածկագրով գիտական թեմայի շրջանակներում»:

արևելահայության ֆիզիկական բնաջնջման քաղաքականություն: Տեղամասի 17 հայկական գյուղերում կազմակերպվեց խաղաղ ազգաբնակչության կոտորած, ևս 9-ում այն կրեց զանգվածային բնույթ: Ղարաքիլիսային հարակից անտառներում թուրքական կանոնավոր զորքերի կողմից կոտորվեցին հազարավոր արևմտահայեր, կարսեցիներ, շիրակցիներ ու ալեքսանդրապոլցիներ:

Օսմանյան տիրապետության ամիսներին ահռելի չափերի հասան կանանց առևանգման, բռնաբարության ու բռնի մահմեդականացման դեպքերը: Օսմանյան ցեղասպանական քաղաքականության հետևանքները ճշգրտելու համար այստեղ գործուղված հանձնախմբերի ոչ բավարար իրազեկության հետևանքով այսօր՝ այդ իրադարձություններից մեկ դար անց, թուրքական ոճրագործության ստույգ չափերը պարզելն անհնար է:

## **КАРАКЛИССКИЕ СОБЫТИЯ 1918 Г. КАК ПРОДОЛЖЕНИЕ ОСМАНСКОЙ ГЕНОЦИДАЛЬНОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ**

**АЙРАПЕТЯН А.**

### **Резюме**

К концу мая 1918 года турецкие регулярные войска, захватив район Большой Караклис, с помощью местного мусульманского населения приступили к уничтожению восточных армян: были убиты мирные жители 17-ти деревень, а в 9-и деревнях убийства носили массовый характер.

Тысячи западных армян – беженцев из Карса, Ширака и Александрополя также были уничтожены турецкими войсками в окрестных лесах Караклиса. Ужасающих масштабов достигли случаи насилия, похищения и принудительной исламизации женщин.

К сожалению, в силу недостаточно компетентной работы комиссий по раскрытию этих преступлений на сегодняшний день сложно выявить реальные масштабы содеянного турками.