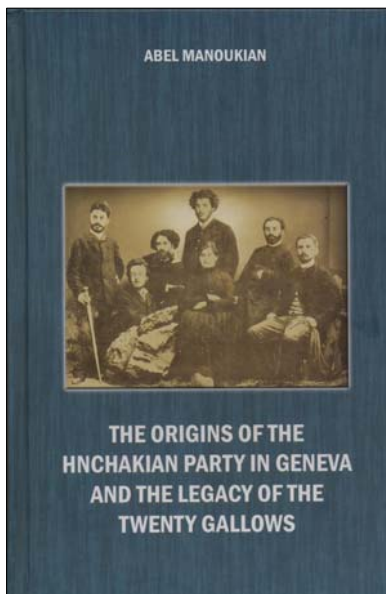


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### BOOK REVIEWS

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**ABEL MANOUKIAN**

**THE ORIGINS OF THE HNCCHAKIAN  
PARTY IN GENEVA AND THE  
LEGACY OF THE TWENTY  
GALLOWES**

*“Zangak” publishing house, Yerevan, 2019, 192  
pages*

**A VALUABLE RESEARCH ON THE  
FORMATION OF THE HNCCHAKIAN PARTY  
AND ON THE LEGACY OF THE TWENTY  
GALLOWES**

The new valuable book "The Origins of the Hnchakian Party in Geneva and the Legacy of the Twenty Gallows" written by Dr. Abel Manoukian, Professor at the University of Fribourg is presented to the attention of the historiographical society.<sup>1</sup> The book is the result of a long-term scientific study and research of the author, and no doubt, is a completely new piece on the history of the Social Democrat Hnchakian Party (SDHP).

The book consists of three main parts. The first part refers to the formation of the Hnchakian party in Geneva, the second part of the book includes the references of the Swiss press to the Armenian Genocide: starting from the massacres of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the solidarity of the Swiss population with

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<sup>1</sup> Manoukian Abel, The Origins of the Hnchakian Party in Geneva and the Legacy of the Twenty Gallows, “Zangak” publishing house, Yerevan, 2019, 192 pages.

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the Armenians (1894–1897) and concluding with the verdict and execution of the Hnchakian Twenty Gallows in 1915, and finally in the third part the discussion of the Hnchakian leaders' verdict in the German Imperial press and in the German diplomatic correspondence is presented.

It's well known, that over the past decades numerous studies have been conducted in Armenia and the Diaspora, memoirs and documents have been published on the formation, ideology and activities of the Social Democrat Hnchakian Party. The authors of those works are both party figures and professional historians. In the historiographic literature created on the Armenian national parties, and in this case, in particular on the Hnchakian Party, the staff of the Institute of History of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences has a great contribution. Those studies (by Ashot Hovhannisyan, Mkrtich Nersisyan, Gegham Hovhannisyan and others) have been started during the Soviet times and continue to date.

While studying the history of the Hnchakian Party, in addition to historiography, considerable work has also been done by the Armenian public and political mind. Nevertheless, as in any other historical issue, many unknown pages of the history of this party await their researchers, and each generation of historians will contribute to the history of the Armenian political thought, including the study of the Hnchakian Party.

We have viewed the current book by Dr. Manoukian from the above-mentioned standpoint. Accordingly, in the current review we have tried to answer the question of what the scientific value of this book is. Before responding to the question, it is necessary to observe the sources closely. We are absolutely sure that the main value of this new book is derived from the sources used by the author.

The documents kept in the Swiss archives have never been used yet in writings annotating the Hnchakian Party. This is the main important feature of Dr. Manoukian's study. He has thoroughly studied the documents and the Swiss press materials kept in the Swiss Federal Archives (SFA), the Geneva State Archives (Archives d'Etat de Genève), the Geneva University Archives (Archives de l'Université de Genève) and the Swiss National Library in Bern (Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek). They refer to the founders of the party in Geneva, in particular, Avetis Nazarbekian, Maro Vardanian-Nazarbekian, Gabriel Kafianz, Rouben Khan-Azat and others. The said archival materials include mainly

registrations relating to obtaining residence in Switzerland, police reports, secret letters, indictments, appeals to the government by the founders of the Hnchakian Party, student registrations at the University of Geneva, verdicts issued on behalf of the Geneva authorities, relations with the Russian deportees, and later, grave criminal charges on behalf of the Swiss government, articles and reports published in the local media. All this sheds light on the founders of the Hnchakian Party, their activities and the times they lived in. It is astonishing to learn that the Swiss police were secretly following the activities of the Armenian revolutionary figures in order to guarantee the security of the citizens and partly meet with the petitions of the Ottoman Turkish and Russian Tsarist authorities, thus making up confidential reports on those occasions. In other words, it looks like the founders of the Hnchakian Party continuously were at the center of attention of the Swiss police, which sent information not only to the relevant bodies of the Canton of Geneva, but also to the Federal Department of Justice and the Police in Bern.

Thus, Gabriel Kafiantz, one of the notable representatives of the group of founders of the Hnchakian Party was expelled from the Canton of Geneva as per verdict no. 3811, issued on April 21, 1887. According to the verdict, G. Kafiantz had to leave Geneva 15 days before May 8. Indeed, a letter of the State Counselor in charge of the Justice and Police Department of Geneva, which was sent on May 12, 1888 to the Federal Department of Justice and Police in Bern testifies that G. Kafiantz had already left Geneva for Leipzig on April 27, 1887. We learn additionally from the memoirs of his trusted friend Khan-Azat that G. Kafiantz had left Geneva for Leipzig to study pedagogy and he wasn't in Geneva in the late summer of 1887. However, a number of documents and letters confirm the fact that Kafiantz did not abide by this ruling and travelled to Geneva seeking refuge at the Nazarbekians' home. He was certainly in Geneva in August of 1887 when the Revolutionary Organization was founded and probably went back to Leipzig at the end of the summer of 1887 (page 36 of the book).

On March 6, 1889, two revolutionary colleagues, Jacques Brynstein and Alexandre Dembsky decided to experiment with a bomb they had manufactured in the forest known as Peterstobel near Zurich. Unfortunately, the bomb exploded in the hands of its makers, killing one of them and gravely wounding the other. Together with Polish and Russian colleagues, Kafiantz was among the first to arrive on the scene and the authorities interpreted his presence there as

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participation in criminal activities. Tsarist Russia, Imperial Germany and Austria pointed the accusing finger at the Swiss government, claiming that Switzerland had become a haven for revolutionaries and terrorists of various stripes. As a consequence of these developments, the Swiss government had to take some measures, namely on May 7, 1889, when it issued deportation orders for 13 “terrorists”, i.e. revolutionaries, the 6<sup>th</sup> among them being Gabriel Kafiantz (pp.47-48). Later, in 1892, Gabriel Kafiantz twice appealed to the Swiss authorities with a request to give him permission to return to Geneva, or to enter the territory of Switzerland, but he was denied entry. Moreover, the secret service followed him, prepared a detailed report which has been used in A. Manoukian’s book.

It’s noteworthy to emphasize that the author of the book has even found out that Avetis and Maro Nazarbekians got married and registered their marriage on Wednesday, April 18, 1888. The wedding certificate was naturally co-signed by an officer of the municipality, by the couple themselves and, additionally, by two witnesses, as prescribed by local statutes regarding civil marriages. One of the witnesses was Christophe (Christapor) Ohaniantz (Ohanian), one of the founding members of the Hnchakian Party, and the other was Eugène Vasadzé. The photocopy of the Nazarbekians' marriage certificate is also presented in the book (p.26). The announcement of this marriage was published in the Journal de Genève, No. 93, April 19, 1888 (see the photocopy on p. 24).

Emphasis should be laid on the fact that Dr. Manoukian has scrupulously observed the above-mentioned examples, studied the Swiss archives, and combined the data obtained with the results of the memoirs, the press, and the existing historical research.

In the second chapter of the book, the author writes about the massacres of the Armenians committed by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the solidarity of the Swiss population with the Armenians during 1894-1897. It is worth noting that in 1895–1896, when the Hamidian massacres were raging particularly fiercely in Sassoun, Zeytoun, Constantinople, Akn and its surroundings, the “Conference of Swiss Aid Committee for the Armenians” in support of the Armenians organized a large-scale campaign of solidarity with the Armenian people and collected 430.000 signatures of Swiss citizens in support of this initiative. On March 4, 1897, a delegation presented the President of the Swiss Confederation, Adolf Deucher, with a truly historic petition on behalf of the

signatories. The petition described the persecution and violence experienced by the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire, the merciless slaughter of hundreds of thousands of children, women, men and the elderly, and the total destruction of many towns and villages inhabited by the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. It also expressed the will of the Swiss people for their government to appeal to the major world powers to intervene directly and make a pressure on the Ottoman authorities to end the violence against the Christian Armenian population. The details on this sensitive subject can be found in one of the significant books on the Armenian Genocide and Swiss humanitarian contribution based on the Swiss archival sources, that has been written by Dr. Abel Manoukian and titled “Bearing Witness to Humanity: Switzerland’s Humanitarian Contribution during the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire, 1894-1923” (Munster Press, 2018, 605 pages).

Then, in the following few subchapters of the book, a brief reference is made to the Swiss state policy towards the press, the almost complete absence of censorship, by which the multiplicity of periodicals (including socialist press) can be explained. In his research the author of the current book has focused on those socialist periodicals which have directly reported on the momentous political events of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Ottoman Empire, foremost among them being the situation of the Western Armenians, such as the massacres of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the Young Turks’ opposition movement, the revolution in the Ottoman Empire carried out by them in 1908, the massacres of the Armenians of Adana, in 1909, the Armenian Genocide of 1915, and more specifically the event of the Twenty Gallows. It is shown how each of those issues was addressed by the Swiss press.

In his book Dr. Manoukian points out the obvious fact that Swiss press welcomed the revolution of the Young Turks, the failure of the Hamidian attempt of a coup in 1909, assessing it as a victory of progressive forces, however condemns the massacres of Armenians in Adana in 1909. The Swiss press reflected the heroic achievement of the Young Turks positively, and lauded their readiness to use the forces at their disposal. The loyal warlike forces for defending the revolution were also praised.

In the subchapter titled “The Adana Massacre of 1909” (pp. 84-88) A. Manoukian draws attention to the fact that the periodical “*Volksrecht*” expressed a sort of moral solidarity with the Young Turks without realizing that they were no

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less bloodthirsty than Abdul Hamid II was, and that, in their wrathful nature, by executing the monstrous blueprint for a genocide, they would surpass all of the preceding sultans, who, in their wildest dreams, could not even imagine such a crime perpetrated against humanity.

On September 7, 1913, the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Social Democrat Hnchakian Party was held in Constanta, Romania. Delegates from various Hnchakian centres had to face the issues and challenges of the times, adopt an orientation regarding the question of Armenian self-rule, and outline the plans of action for the future. A special committee headed by Stepan Sapah-Giulian and Varazdat (Gr. Anparchian) adopted a secret resolution to assassinate some Young Turk leaders, specifically two members of the triumvirate - Enver and Talaat. Unfortunately, the whole plan failed, with obvious tragic consequences: on June 14, 1915, the Ottoman military tribunal sentenced 22 prominent Hnchakian leaders to death. Two of the leaders, Stepan Sapah-Giulian and Varazdat, were sentenced in absentia as they were abroad. The death sentence was carried out on Tuesday, June 15, at Sultan Bayazit Square in Constantinople. Twenty Hnchak figures were hanged. This horrific event received a wide coverage in the press of the European countries and particularly in the Swiss press, which had a neutral position during the First World War.

One of the key parts of Dr. Manoukian's book is dedicated to this tragic event. Detailed reference to the death sentences of Hnchakian figures in 1915, as well as the condemnation of the Ottoman policy in that context, the massacres and deportations of the Armenian population on the territory of the Ottoman Empire were illustrated in the Swiss press such as "*La Sentinelle*", "*Berner Tagwacht*", and "*Volksrecht*". The author of the articles on Twenty Gallows in the last two newspapers was the well-known figure of the social democrats Arshak Zourabov, who was then in Europe. He had surely followed the proceedings of the military tribunal in the Twenty Gallows affair and its tragic outcome. He could not but protest and express his revulsion at what was going on, hence his article, which enjoyed broad and positive reception in the Swiss and Italian socialist press. The author's manuscript being unavailable, it is now impossible to be certain about the original title he submitted. We might therefore surmise that the author used more than one title when sending various copies to various newspapers; another possibility is to assume that the editors of the newspapers considered it proper for them to provide titles in accordance with the contents of the article. It seems that

the subtitle “The Execution of Twenty Turkish Comrades” might have been a general title supplied by the author, yet considering the diversity of the readers of various newspapers – say, German-speaking Bern and Zurich versus French-speaking parts of Switzerland, and since the article in “*Volksrecht*” is surely a reprint in *Berner Tagwacht*, different titles were added to avoid giving readers the impression of reprint or repetition. The article of Arshak Zourabov on the Hnchakian Twenty Gallows is a brilliant example of journalism at its best. It includes an in-depth analysis of the political situation in Ottoman Turkey, in which context A. Zourabov attributes the crime of the execution of the twenty comrades to the persecution unleashed against social democrats in Russia. Also, A. Zourabov mentions the Hnchak newspaper “*Kayts*” very appreciatively, attaching a lengthy letter to the publication. Dr. Manoukian in his book thoroughly examines the content of the article “Facing Fresh Graves” by A. Zourabov, which refers to the formation of the Hnchakian party, newspaper “*Kayts*” and its editor Gegham Vanikian, with whom he obviously enjoyed a positive relationship, the Hnchakians’ plans to liberate the Armenian people from the Ottoman domination, the Young Turks’ policy of persecuting and slaughtering the Armenians, and Germany’s responsibility in that issue.

In the following subchapter of the current book Dr. A. Manoukian describes that “*Volksrecht*” in its issue of January 5, 1916, returned to a detailed coverage of the Hnchakian Twenty Gallows in an article entitled “A Cry for Help from Armenia”. The title definitely came from the editors, since the article itself was, in fact, the text of a letter addressed to the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in print: it was composed by the Georgian students studying in Geneva. The occasion for writing the letter was the systematic obliteration of an entire nation, namely the Armenian people, in the Turkish Empire. The signatories considered it their noble and moral duty to protest against this phenomenon. They therefore, called on the social democrats in Germany to intercede with the German government with a view to putting an end to the evil that was victimizing the Armenian people.

The final chapter of the book is dedicated to the verdict of the Hnchakian Twenty Gallows in the ecclesiastical-religious press of cultural-Protestantism in Germany and, also in the Imperial German diplomatic correspondence. Dr. Manoukian draws attention to the fact that on July 29, 1915, around one month after the sad event of the Twenty Gallows, a religious-ecclesiastical periodical “*Die*

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*Christliche Welt* published the article titled “Armenien im Weltkrieg” (Armenia in World War), and its author was the noted armenophile Ewald Stier, a defender of the rights of the Armenian people since 1896. The article referred not only to the verdict of the Hnchakian leaders, but also to the arrest and the annihilation of the Armenian politicians and intellectuals, and to the large-scale massacres and deportations being carried out in Turkey against the local Armenian population. I would like to highlight how E. Stier cites a stern warning issued by the allies France, England and Russia addressed to the Young Turk government and published in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*. It stated, that “Turkey is committing a crime against humanity and civilization” and that the Sublime Porte was being put on notice, that the Turkish government, “all of its members and their officials, who are accomplices in the execution of such massacres, would be held accountable personally” (pp. 144-145).

It is noteworthy, that the political significance of the tragic event of the Hnchakian Twenty Gallows at Sultan Bayazit Square on June 15, 1915 did not escape the attention of Hans, Baron von Wangenheim, German Ambassador to Turkey (1912-1915), who dispatched two reports on this matter to the Imperial Chancellor of Germany Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg. In an effort to supply more details about the events, Wangenheim attached as an appendix to his report, a piece published in Constantinople, in the French edition of the newspaper “*Lloyd Ottoman*”, entitled “Executions”.

Dr. Manoukian concludes his book with the subchapter on the verdict of the Ottoman military tribunal from June 14, 1915 on 22 prominent Hnchakian leaders sentenced to death, and with the second report of Ambassador Wangenheim, which was sent to Berlin.

It should be emphasized that, in addition to the research done by Dr. Abel Manoukian, the illustrations and English translations from the French and German original periodical materials and unique documents published in the book are of important and significant resource value. They give the reader an opportunity to draw independent conclusions on events and phenomena.

This book is definitely a new word and an important contribution to the field of the research history of the Social Democrat Hnchakian Party. We are absolutely confident that “The Origin of the Hnchakian Party in Geneva and the Legacy of the Twenty Gallows” by Dr. Abel Manoukian for many decades will be a useful book for the historians interested in founding circumstances of the party



and for the individuals seeking information on the Armenian political life and Hnchakian figures. Also, this book may be of no less interest to the Swiss scientific and public circles, as on the one hand the influence of the environment in Switzerland on the Armenian political thought has been revealed, and on the other hand it is an inalienable part of the history of that country.

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