

## ԳՐԱԽՈՍԱԿԱՆՆԵՐ BOOK REVIEWS

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**ՌՈՒԲԵՆ ՄԻՐՉԱԽԱՆՅԱՆ  
ԿՐԹԱՄՇԱԿՈՒՅԹԱՅԻՆ  
ԿՅԱՆՔԸ ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՅԻՆ  
ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆՈՒՄ 1920-1932 ԹԹ.  
Երևան, 2018, «Տիգրան Մեծ» հրատ., 188 էջ**

**RUBEN MIRZAKHANYAN  
“EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL LIFE IN SOVIET ARMENIA  
BETWEEN 1920 AND 1932”**

*Yerevan, 2018, Tigran Mets Publishing House, 188 pp.*

The first decade of the establishment of Soviet power in Armenia is one of the most difficult and contradictory, yet axial phases of the formation and development of Soviet culture. In the Soviet period under the absolute authority of Communist ideology it was almost impossible to avoid biased comments on the historical events and happenings of the past and to produce objective researches instead. Only after the collapse of the USSR, the historical science gained the liberty to shift the scope of observations from the political domain to the field of science. Hence, a series of viewpoints were set forth on a variety of fundamental issues; new archived sources were put in circulation which enabled to commence new and methodologically revised researches on the major issues

of the history of Soviet Armenia. From this point of view, the present volume ***"Educational and Cultural Life in Soviet Armenia between 1920 and 1932"*** (Tigran Mets Publishing House, Yerevan, 2018, 188 pp.), authored by Doctor of History, Professor Ruben Mirzakhanyan, deserves praise. Introducing the very first steps taken in the fields of education and culture in Armenia in the given period of development, the author manages to submit every single aspect and sphere of the educational and cultural life of the country to a multifaceted and exhaustive analysis. Ruben Mirzakhanyan's critical approach to the events and reality that were meant to contribute to the rise of the cultural life of that period, at the same time, produces unique-styled observations and conclusions.

The volume consists of five chapters. The first chapter – *First Steps of Formation of the Educational and Cultural Life of Soviet Armenia (between December 1920 and February 1921)* – contains a combined-methodology-based analysis of the historical situation and the peculiarities that emerged as an existential framework during the first years after the establishment of Soviet regime in Armenia. This basis serves as a background for observing the new ideological activities adopted by the Revolutionary Committee of Armenia aimed at conveying the new inner political tendencies. The chapter comprises a detailed compilation of the first decrees published by the Revolutionary Committee on the educational and cultural life issues of Armenia, stating that, though the respective orders would be issued as legal, normative acts, they would eventually, result in some positive outcomes. Among other legal acts, singling out the genuinely significant decree "On restructuring Yerevan University", issued on December 17, 1920, by the Commissar of Enlightenment A. Hovhannisyan, Ruben Mirzakhanyan, quite righteously states that the reinstated University was in fact the successor of its precursor. The decision to establish a university in Armenia was made on May 16, 1919, with a solemn inauguration celebrated on January 31, 1920, in Gyumri. Back then, the University had a single department – subdivided into faculties of History and Philology in 1920, the University moved to Yerevan (see page 16).

The second chapter of the research titled *"Educational System of Armenia between 1921 and 1932"* gives a comprehensive account on the steps taken for the development of the scientific and educational life of Soviet Armenia of that period. The author particularises the eradication of illiteracy, the peculiarities of the implementation of compulsory primary-school and seven-year-long

secondary educational schemes, as well as the organisational and enhancement procedures of higher and vocational educations. Within the context given, the author, quite justly, claims that the period of administration by Alexander Miasnikian – though short-lasting – did lay both the economic and cultural bases of Soviet Armenia. At the same time, Ruben Mirzakhanyan states that the aforementioned patriotic statesman couldn't but follow the trajectory predefined by the top Bolshevik policymakers and did not suffer from the cosmopolitanism of the former Revolutionary Committee activists who had ended up ignoring the interests of their people (see page 28). The author assumes that, irrespective of the communist ideological pressure in educational centres, the lack of schooling traditions in Soviet Armenia, the educational-enlightenment system of the country did mark an apparent increase. The achievements gained in public education were visible, in particular, in terms of establishing a free-of-charge educational system and prolific organisational efforts in the creation of the school system.

The section *“Establishment and Development of Cultural Institutions in Armenia between 1921 and 1932”* is an inclusive reference to the history of establishment and development of cultural-enlightenment centres and institutions. What deserves particular attention is the analysis of the process of establishment of the network of reading halls – “reading huts”, as they were commonly termed – and their contribution: these reading areas, aiming at the respective propaganda objectives, promoted the ubiquitous dissemination of the ideas of communism and creation of the socialist society through boosted cognitive-vision skills and broadened world outlook.

It is commendable that, while elucidating and analysing the issues connected with the establishment of cultural and enlightenment centres, the author pays particular attention to the roots and the very first period of local film production. Cinema production, as a cultural and enlightenment institution, was meant to foster the enlightenment socially, providing the necessary channel of propaganda for Bolshevik socialist ideology. The author, quite reasonably, infers that Alexander Miasnikian had an invaluable input in the establishment of cultural-enlightenment centres, as well as in getting together a considerable group of talented representatives of different branches of art in their Motherland (see page 76). It is irrevocable to state that in Soviet Armenia, in the

period discussed, the development of national literature, art and other branches of culture was tangibly supported by the State.

After quite attention-grabbing observations and correspondingly drawn conclusions, the author highlights,

"In contrast to all the current perspectives, according to which the authorities of Soviet Armenia were mainly anti-national, we can produce a considerable amount of facts as counterarguments testifying that even under the circumstances of the Soviet ideological yoke, the local authorities did their best to rescue everything of national value or pertinent to the world heritage." (see page 66)

The fourth chapter of the book – *"Literary and Artistic Life in Soviet Armenia between 1921 and 1932"* – sheds light on the characteristics of the period of formation of Soviet Armenia's literary fiction offering quite comprehensive and profound analysis alongside with relevant historical-critical review of the ways the literary and artistic life of the country developed in. Ruben Mirzakhanyan also offers a detailed reference to the activities, characteristics and content of the literary clusters that emerged in the period mentioned above. The author uncovers the peculiarities of the activities of some famous literary clusters, in particular, of the "Group of the Three" comprising Ye. Charents, G. Abov, and A. Vshtuni. The researcher makes a special reference to the resonant "Declaration of the Three" published by the group on June 14, 1922, as well as to the major issues raised in it and the rigorous critical reviews on it, introducing the issues against the background of the back-then recurrent logic and explorations of the literary and artistic thought of the time which, in fact, inspired the views of the declaration. Revealing the malicious atmosphere inside the cluster, the ideological discrepancies and the reasons for the shortly upcoming split of the group, the author states that the rejection of the past adopted by the members of this group – people of different talent degrees and capacities – could not ensure a long-lasting collaboration. Moreover, their denying posture was not embraced by many.

The author makes use of a vast deposit of facts and examples to claim that the primary objective of the representatives of Armenian literature of the first half of the 1920s was to create and vastly promote the so-called proletariat literature evoking the fact that, in that period, the concept of "Soviet Armenian Literature" was not formed yet.

The section “*Fine Arts and Architecture in Soviet Armenia between 1921 and 1932*” covers the details of the mainstream movements in the development of Soviet Armenian music art, fine arts and architecture inferring that, by the year 1932, the theoretical explorations, within the variety of the ways of development of Armenian fine arts, had already resulted in the formation of the methodology of Socialist Realism. It might be claimed that this happened due to the final victory of Stalin in the struggle for power. Further on, the directions of the development of not only the economy but also other spheres of life, including culture, were straightforwardly dictated from above. Nevertheless, the researcher quite reasonably concludes that, despite the priority of the propaganda of the Soviet socialist society establishment instated among the educational and cultural institutions, the world and national values were not neglected(see page 178).

The unique documented photographic pieces of evidence, provided in the volume to illustrate the educational and cultural life of Armenia in the subject-matter period, are worthy of particular attention as some of the photos are published for the first time.

Summarising, we can state that “***Educational and Cultural Life in Soviet Armenia between 1920 and 1932***” by Ruben Mirzakhanyan is a valuable input in the Armenian historiography, particularly, in the domain of researches on the cultural life of Armenia.

**ARMAN MARTIROSYAN**

*PhD, Associate Professor*

arman.martirosyan.81@mail.ru