

---

# BOOK REVIEWS

---

**GEGHAM HOVHANNISYAN, Arpiar Arpiaryan:  
Socio-Political Views and Activities, Yerevan, Institute of History of NAS RA,  
2019, 265 pages.**

In the series of books “Arch. Mesrob Ashjian” the Institute of History of NAS RA has published the research work “Arpiar Arpiaryan: Socio-political Views And Activities” by G. Hovhannisyanyan, which is dedicated to the life and activity of Arpiar Arpiaryan (1851-1908), a publicist, a prominent figure of the Armenian liberation movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He was one of those brilliant figures of Armenian intelligentsia, who had a profound impact not only on literary, but also on social and political spheres. A. Arpiaryan belonged to the generation of prominent figures of the time like Kh. Abovyan, M. Nalbandyan, Raffi, M. Khrimyan and others who made their mark on Armenian social and political life. Thus, it is not accidental that a number of researchers have referred to his activities, have covered different areas of A. Arpiaryan’s work, and G. Hovhannisyanyan’s work under discussion is a unique summary of A. Arpiaryan’s social and political activity.

The peer-reviewed study consists of 4 chapters, a conclusion, a list of sources and literature, English and Russian summaries and an appendix.

In the two sub-chapters of the first chapter G. Hovhannisyanyan covers the socio-economic condition of Western Armenia in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the second one is dedicated to A. Arpiaryan’s educational and cultural activity.

A. Arpiaryan started his enlightenment activity in 1864, when he was studying at the Translators’ College of Constantinople, and in April 1876, together with his supporters he founded the “Araratian Association”, with Mkrtich Portugalyan being elected chairman, and A. Arpiaryan - secretary. The association aimed to promote national self-awareness especially among Armenians from provinces, and then among the urban population through the spread of education. The ultimate goal of this was to introduce and implement the idea of self-defense among Western Armenians harassed under Ottoman rule. Among other issues, he considered it important to educate Armenian women and girls.

The 1878 Congress of Berlin caused deep disappointment among Armenians, however, a part of Armenian intelligentsia was not dispirited, and continued the propaganda of enlightenment and liberation ideas, which was carried out through articles and materials published in the newspaper “Arevk”. Another such channel was “Mshak”, which published A. Arpiaryan’s publicistic articles as well.

One of the goals of the newspaper “Arevk” was to strengthen ties with Eastern Armenians. Thus, in April 1884, the newspaper’s administrative council sent A. Arpiaryan to the Caucasus on a business trip under the pretext of Catholicos elections. In May, A. Arpiaryan was elected Deputy of the National Assembly of Constantinople as a representative of Baghesh. Unfortunately, some members of the administrative

council of “Arevelk” did not like A. Arpiaryan’s articles against national conservatives, therefore A. Arpiaryan had to transfer to the editorial office of the newspaper “Masis”<sup>1</sup>.

A. Arpiaryan was convinced that the city should train intellectuals who would settle in the provinces and contribute to a certain increase in the educational level of the rural population, which would be the guarantee for preparing people for the liberation movement. The idea of establishing a school in Van, the center of the most Armenian-populated state, was supported by M. Portugalyan and Khrimyan Hayrik: this would contribute not only to the development of education in Vaspurakan, but also in all Western Armenia. The “Central College” of Van became that institution, but the Ottoman authorities considered it dangerous and closed it in 1885, and M. Portugalyan had to leave.

A. Arpiaryan was one of the advocates of the spread of Modern Armenian (Ashkharhabar), but he did not deny the need for Classical Armenian (Grabar). He considered that it should be taught in higher education institutions.

In the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish rulers ensured that national minorities, including Armenians, did not receive education in the most demanded spheres, such as law and medicine. It was forbidden to teach Armenian children with textbooks received from Russia.

A. Arpiaryan realized that new teaching methods should be introduced in Armenian schools, and patriotic teachers should be highly esteemed, regardless of the subjects they taught. Like the great figures of the time, A. Arpiaryan was also convinced that education was one of the important guarantees of the liberation struggle, and that the Armenian Apostolic Church contributed to the preservation of national self-awareness.

In 1890 A. Arpiaryan was arrested along with a number of activists for participating in the Gum-Gapu demonstration. He was released from prison only at the beginning of 1891.

In 1894-1896, during the Hamidian massacres A. Arpiaryan preferred to go abroad. He founded and edited the magazine “Nor Kyanq” in London, the magazine “Hay Handes” in Venice, and in Cairo he edited the periodical “Shirak” and the newspaper “Lusaber” published thrice a week<sup>2</sup>.

Hygiene education of Armenians occupied an important place in A. Arpiaryan’s public activity. In his articles he covered various health issues. For these and other purposes he especially used the daily newspaper “Hairenik” where he assumed the position of editor in January, 1891. By the way, in 1892, for the first time in the history of Armenian society A. Arpiaryan mentioned the name of the young deacon Soghomon (Komitas), musician and folklore specialist in that daily newspaper<sup>3</sup>.

Throughout his whole conscious activity A. Arpiaryan tried to achieve national

<sup>1</sup> In the 1880s “Arevelk” was described by some as “inaccessible to common people and a counselor of the noble classes”. See L. G. Muradyan, Arpiar Arpiaryan as critic and literary historian, *Lraber hasarakakan gitutyunneri*, 1990/2, p.30.

<sup>2</sup> A. Arpiaryan, *Works* (compiled by S.G.Sahakyan, preface by H.Margaryan), Yerevan, 1987, p. VI (in Arm.).

<sup>3</sup> L. G. Muradyan, *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

unity, to put an end to endless disagreements and hostilities. In his works “The Price of a Dream”, “A Joke”, “The Convict” etc. A. Arpiaryan preached solidarity and unity, called for social justice.

A. Arpiaryan clearly saw the deprivation and stratification of Western Armenians, but he was against class conflict, since the Armenians, whether rich and poor, were under the excruciating Ottoman rule.

In Chapter II of the monograph, “Arpiar Arpiaryan’s public views and activities”, G. Hovhannisyanyan mentions A. Arpiaryan’s assessment of the unique role of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which allowed to preserve the national self-awareness. At the same time A. Arpiaryan criticized the clergy who were ignorant and greedy. The intellectual did not fail to notice the various individuals who carried out missionary work, who “go and engage with people, interfere in many matters concerning their material life, and by that win their hearts” (p. 67). It should be noted that the Catholic and Protestant preachers were backed by European and then also by American governments, whose diplomatic missions forced the Ottoman authorities to grant privileges to missionaries and not to interfere in their activities.

The national bodies, especially the National Assembly of Constantinople played an exceptional role in the issue of national preservation of Western Armenians. A. Arpiaryan constantly called to put an end to internal splits, to unite secular and spiritual forces. Being elected deputy of the National Assembly in May, 1894, he raised a number of issues in his speeches that would give an opportunity to unify the Western Armenians. A. Arpiaryan severely criticized the conservative deputies of the National Assembly, who were trying to find a common ground with the government and with Sultan Abdul Hamid II. A. Arpiaryan was convinced that the National Assembly should deal with practical issues, the first of which was the Armenian reforms, for the realization of which it was necessary to develop a well-thought-out national policy.

It can be assumed that for the solution of the above-mentioned issue A. Arpiaryan considered the election of Mkrtych Khrimyan, “the great exiled clergyman” (p. 88) as Catholicos, very important.

In Chapter III of the research, “Arpiar Arpiaryan and the Problem of Liberation of Western Armenians”, G. Hovhannisyanyan analyzes A. Arpiaryan’s articles published in “Mshak” and comes to the conclusion that after the Congress of Berlin the oppression of Western Armenians intensified even more. Such a policy was aimed at forcing the Western Armenians to either leave their homeland or to nullify any anti-government, i.e. national-liberation aspiration. As A. Arpiaryan mentioned: “Day by day the question of improvements makes more regress than progress” (p. 100).

One of the evidences of that is the Ottoman press, which was full of anti-Armenian articles, praising and encouraging the Kurdish tribal chiefs and provoking them against Armenians. In addition to this there was the Ottoman censorship. In its turn, the government began to populate Armenian provinces with Muslims with the aim of reducing the number of Armenians.

As a result of the unrestraint of the Ottoman authorities, Nerses Varzhapetyan, Patriarch of Constantinople, resigned. However, fearing the intervention of European powers, Sultan Abdul Hamid II refused to accept his resignation.

It is self-evident that the European powers, mainly Great Britain, put pressure on the Sultan solely for their own interests. A part of Western Armenians had vain hopes that the Christian states would protect them, but their further actions proved the opposite. In his articles A. Arpiaryan especially demonstrated the evident pro-Turkish policy of Great Britain, but he placed his hopes in Russia. He considered that the Russian rule was more preferable than the Ottoman rule, comparing the situation of Armenians living under the rule of the two empires.

Referring to the first Russian revolution, A. Arpiaryan considered that Western Armenians should not take part in acts against autocracy, as it would only harm them. In his articles, he called to be realistic and to stay away from anti-government actions, since it would give the authorities the pretext to take steps against Armenians (pp. 122-123). As mentioned by G. Hovhannisyan: "... although the first Russian revolution had a noticeable influence on Arpiaryan's ideological turnabout, it cannot be conditioned only by the factor of revolution" (p. 128).

Analyzing the current situation, A. Arpiaryan came to the conclusion that Armenians could achieve their freedom only on their own. In fact, he preferred the path of armed struggle, citing as a vivid example the heroic struggle of Zeytun, as a result of which "Zeytun got its autonomy; the strong mountains, a few guns and a little blood were much more effective than congresses, countless protests and government interventions" (p. 130).

He was convinced that victory could be achieved only through a popular uprising, but at the same time he realized that a considerable part of Western Armenians had no experience of struggle and no action plan. Armenian Hajduk groups acting separately would not be able to achieve the liberation of Western Armenians. At the same time, he considered the tactics of individual terrorism wrong, referring to the assassination attempt on Abdul Hamid II on July 21, 1905. He wrote the following: "The problem is not with the person, but with the situation, with a fundamental change" (p. 140).

A. Arpiaryan agreed with Hambardzum Boyadjian (Metsn Murad), a prominent figure in the liberation movement and a member of the Hunchakian party, who called on his party members to unite with the ARF for the sake of national goals (pp. 143-144). As mentioned by G. Hovhannisyan: "In the person of Murad, Arpiaryan saw the individual who, "deserved to get the vote of the nation because of his morality" and who could become the organizer and leader of a new popular movement" (p. 144).

According to A. Arpiaryan, it was necessary to put an end to the confrontations of the national parties, the Hunchakian and ARF, which was beneficial only to the Ottoman and Russian authorities. Unfortunately, it was impossible not only to unite the two parties, but also to stop the deep conflicts between them. It should be noted that during the mentioned period the Hunchakians were experiencing a deep crisis. During the fifth

congress held in September, 1905, A. Nazarbek, R. Khanazat and others left the party. A similar event took place at the reorganized Hunchakian congress held in July, 1906.

A. Arpiaryan believed that the most united and unified party was the ARF, and the Hunchakians should join the ARF, and not the other way around (p. 148). At the same time, he called on the national parties to develop a joint self-defense program, since the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Russia were escalating day by day, which could turn into a large-scale war. A. Arpiaryan thought that the Turks would definitely use the occasion of the war to finally exact retribution on Armenians (p. 149).

A. Arpiaryan considered it important to cooperate with the ethnic minorities living under Ottoman rule, e.g. the Greeks and the Kurds. It is self-evident that the Ottoman authorities found excuses to drive a wedge between the three peoples.

In our opinion, cooperation between Armenians and Greeks was somehow possible but not with Kurds. Eventually, the same point of view was expressed by A. Arpiaryan. He wrote: "An alliance always presupposes equality between allies, and Muslims willingly assume the unbearable burden of taxes, rather than a mitigation, the price of which would be equality with Christians" (pp. 152-153). Only one thing is surprising, why did the prominent intellectual miss the issue of cooperation with the Assyrians?

In his research G. Hovhannisyan presents A. Arpiaryan's considerations on cooperation with the Young Turks. In 1896 he personally took part in the negotiations with the Young Turks in Paris. No cooperation agreement was signed between the two parties, since the Young Turks demanded that reforms be renounced. As mentioned by G. Hovhannisyan, after meeting with Ahmed Rza Bey, one of the leaders of the Young Turks in 1907, A. Arpiaryan came to the conclusion that they were more dangerous and could bring greater evils to the Armenians than Abdul Hamid II (p. 156).

In Chapter IV of the monograph G. Hovhannisyan covers A. Arpiaryan's party activity. In 1895 he became a member of the Hunchakian Party, which further increased the influence of that political organization. A. Arpiaryan first of all opposed the idea of socialism enshrined in the Hunchakians' program, finding that "first we must liberate Armenia from Ottoman yoke, then after we at least have a free Armenia similar to the state of Bulgaria<sup>4</sup>, we can think about socialism" (p. 158). Besides, there was a dispute concerning the council members of the Hunchakian organization in Constantinople. A. Arpiaryan and his friends did not want to be just financial supporters; they wanted to take an active part in the internal affairs of the party and to have a role in management (p. 159).

Faithful to the political line he had adopted A. Arpiaryan tried to persuade the Hunchakians in Trabzon that it was expedient to remove the provision on socialism from the party program, but he did not succeed.

Probably in order to increase his influence in the party and to gain more authority, A. Arpiaryan came to Yerevan and offered R. Khanazat a program adventurous by its

---

<sup>4</sup> From 1878 to 1908, Bulgaria was a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire.

nature, the goal of which was the capture of Constantinople. It is self-evident that this could lead to catastrophic consequences for Armenians (p. 160). A. Arpiaryan's relations with the party became tense again.

Soon disagreements arose with the ARF as well. A. Arpiaryan criticized the ARF for threatening the sultan, to which other issues were added. The situation became so tense that on December 25, 1895 the ARF attempted to assassinate him, but only wounded him.

The dissatisfaction with the party leadership was growing in the Hunchakian party. Information was spread among the party members that A. Arpiaryan was a traitor, an extortionist, etc. (p. 165). According to G. Hovhannisyan, all this was used by the ARF committee of Constantinople to slander and neutralize A. Arpiaryan (p. 166). And since it became dangerous to stay in the Ottoman Empire, he went abroad and founded the newspaper "Mart" (1897) and the biweekly magazine "Nor Kyanq" (1898).

At the beginning of 1896, prominent members of the Hunchakian party in London opposed the strategic actions proposed by Avetis and Maro Nazarbekyans, which provoked the Turks and led to new massacres (p. 167). One of the reasons for the radical disagreement was the problem of socialism. A. Arpiaryan believed that "the idea of socialism should be abandoned, which... enfeebles the national forces, artificially separates and damages the liberation struggle..." (p. 169). In fact, the party gradually split into two branches, which finally became a reality in London.

In September, 1896 a general parliamentary assembly of the Hunchakian party was convened in London where A. Arpiaryan, M. Tamatyan, L. Mkrtchyan and others raised the above-mentioned issues, but the Nazarbekyan couple and their supporters continued to defend the adopted strategy; thus, a number of prominent figures were expelled from the party (p. 174).

The politicians opposing the Nazarbekyans' actions established a new central administration. At the second parliamentary assembly held in Alexandria on October 9-11, 1898, the newly formed party was called the Reorganized Party and decided to focus exclusively on the liberation of Western Armenians (p. 175).

The official newspapers of the Reorganized were the "Mart" newspaper and "Nor Kyanq" magazine, the editor of which was A. Arpiaryan. The Reorganized established their branches in the USA, Cilicia, Bulgaria, Constantinople, etc. At the same time, steps were taken to join the ARF, which, however, did not happen, since the ARF demanded that A. Arpiaryan be expelled from the party, based on the false information that A. Arpiaryan was a traitor (pp. 178-179).

The ARF started a struggle against A. Arpiaryan, and in the 1899 appendix to "Droshak" he was even "declared a traitor and a spy for the Turkish police" (p. 180). This misinformation was refuted by prominent figures of the time, including Arshak Chopanyan, Yervand Otyan, Vahan Tekeyan and others (pp. 189, 200). Unfortunately, the above-mentioned accusations became the reason for A. Arpiaryan to leave the party on January 15, 1901, but he continued his ideological struggle against his opponents.

As a result of all this the second assassination attempt was made against A. Arpiaryan on February 15, 1903, but he was only injured. In his testimony to the Italian police, he stated that “the assassination attempt against him was probably fabricated by Abdul Hamid” (p. 210).

In 1905 A. Arpiaryan settled in Cairo and assumed the position of editor of the newspaper “Lusaber”. Unfortunately, as a result of the assassination attempt against him on February 12, 1908 A. Arpiaryan was killed, and his funeral took place on January 14. The murderer was arrested and called himself Petros Hyusnyan, but it turned out that his real name was Hovsep Alipunaryan, he was from New York. The investigation revealed that he did not even know A. Arpiaryan. He was only informed that A. Arpiaryan was a traitor. He had received the assignment from Alexan Arzuyan, from the editor of the newspaper “Azat Bem” Leon Larents and from the director of the same newspaper Zareh Gochyan (pp. 219-220). As M. Portugalyan described it, this political murder was nothing but “buttering the Turks’ bread” (p. 220).

According to the testimony of the author of the research, one of the main organizers of the murder was L. Larents, one of A. Arpiaryan’s former party friends (p. 221).

It should be mentioned that G. Hovhannisyan carried out a large-scale research work, which summarizes the publicistic, social and party activities of A. Arpiaryan, one of the prominent figures of the Armenian national liberation movement.

We have a number of considerations related to G. Hovhannisyan’s research.

1. The term “political parties” is used, which in our opinion is not correct.
2. The work does not have a list of personal names and place names.
3. It is not specified whether A. Arpiaryan’s murder was organized by individuals or the party.
3. The research by H. Avakian, “The Murder of Arpiar Arpiarian”, Cairo, 2018, was not used.

**RUBEN SAYAKYAN**

Doctor in History, Institute of History, NAS RA.

***Translated from the Armenian by Syuzanna Chraghyan***