

ԲԱՆԻԵՐ ՀԱՅԱԳԻՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ
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**THE NEW ACHIEVEMENT OF THE ARMENIAN PRESS
HISTORIANS**

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For more than two centuries, the Armenian periodical press has investigated and summed up the decisive periods of our people's past, thus becoming their chronicler. It was high time to turn the history of that press into a consolidated research text, which is highly important for evaluating that same press especially in our days.

In 2006, the first volume of “The History of the Armenian Periodical Press” (XVIII–XIX centuries) was published in Cairo owing to the joint efforts of the Armenian press historians. The most popular periodicals of the mentioned period of the Armenian journalism have been studied and valued through the method of historical investigation.

The authors of this difficult but very grateful work have recorded the next significant achievement with the initiative of the Department of History of Public and Political Thought of the Armenian Periodical Press, Institute of History NAS RA (Head of Department – Corresponding Member of NAS RA, Albert Kharatyan): recently publishing the second volume of “The History of the Armenian Periodical Press” (1900–1922).

Despite the short period of about twenty years, the beginning of XX century has a special place in the history of Armenian press with the abundance of published periodicals (1017). In this case, one of the most important issues, that the authors are faced with was the task of making a clear structural division. We think that the authors have arrived at right solution: the Eastern Armenian

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periodicals, as well as the Western ones and the press institutions of colonies and political parties are grouped under a joint section. The book is concluded with the chapter “The Press of the First Republic of Armenia”, which becomes a logical end for summing up the Armenian press activity in the first decades of XX century.

The next issue was to present the periodicals according to their importance and significance, in terms of which there was also a need for a pre-developed approach. Therefore, the editors of the book (A. Kharatyan, L. Gevorgyan) throw a glance at the matter mentioned in the preface: “This volume includes the most important periodicals published in the Eastern and Western Armenian cultural centers, as well as in colonies and in the Diaspora. The publications of short duration that seemed to have no lasting public significance are characterized with the purpose of giving possible expanded ideas about the Armenian reader’s intellectual needs of the given environment”¹. The remarkable nuance that justifies the intended purpose is the last observation, in particular: one can get an idea about the life, activities and intellectual-spiritual needs of different communities of the Armenian people particularly when facts are being examined within the distance of about one hundred years? The answer is one: only in the press, even if the periodicals of a non-primary role are considered.

As in the first volume, in the second one likewise the principles of historical-philological investigation and evaluation have been studied. This method is perhaps the most suitable one in terms of presenting the extensive material to the reader, as the researcher has an opportunity to do both general observations and introduce specific descriptions at the same time carrying out the analysis in as needed. The picture will become clearer if we mention that more than 90 periodicals are presented in the book one by one, and several dozens - under general headlines (“the Eastern Armenian Satirical Press”, “Children and Youth Press”, “the Armenian Press of Artsakh”, “The Press of the First Republic of Armenia”, etc.).

The chapters of the work present characterizations and analyses of the material which gives the reader an opportunity to have an idea of the general content and thematic directions of the Armenian periodicals. The most highlighted

¹ “The History of the Armenian Periodical Press” 1900–1920, Yerevan, NAS RA, Institute of History, 2017, p. 5.

areas of journalistic activities, the social-political and cultural orientations they had, also introduced. Thus, before the specific periodicals are touched upon, the activity stages of the Western Armenian press in the first decades of the last century are singled out in the second chapter under the headline of “The Western Armenian Press, 1900–1914” (A. Kharatyan). On this basis, the main working directions of the periodicals are clearly outlined. It is particularly mentioned that in 1900–1908 “before the Hamidian regime collapsed, the Armenian press and publicism were deprived of national and social subjects due to the extreme pressures”². At the second stage, when the Young Turks were in power, “it was particularly the satirical press that flourished together with the new periodicals with national and social content”³, and in 1912–1914, when the issue on the reforms in Western Armenia was reactivated through the initiatives of the European powers, the press was talking over the catastrophic situation of the population in provinces more often.

These general characteristics of the positions that the press institutions were holding on the political and social life give an opportunity to deeply investigate the thematic sections and headlines of this or that periodical, to discover the article writers, the problems they discuss, etc. This principle of interrelation of the general sector and that of the private, one which is characteristic of the method of historical-philological investigation, has come up with a successful combination in relevant parts of the book.

In the preface, the editors mention that most parts of the periodicals presented in the volume are being studied for the first time. Reference is particularly made to the last three chapters. The periodicals of Egyptian-Armenian, French-Armenian, Bulgarian-Armenian, Iranian-Armenian and American-Armenian press of that period are detailed in the third chapter (“The Press of the Armenian Colonies”). These facts have so far been unknown to the present-day reader. Valuable are also the Egyptian-Armenian press bodies described under the thematic headlines (social-political periodicals, pedagogical and literary periodicals, satirical periodicals).

An extensive place is provided for the press of the political parties, which did wide-ranging activities at the beginning of XX century (Chapter four). The origin

² Ibid, p. 214.

³ Ibid, p. 216.

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of the national party press was also studied separately in the first volume. The press entered a qualitatively new stage at the beginning of XX century and greatly predetermined the feature of the Western and Eastern Armenian press, which was conditioned by the stormy political events taking place at the beginning of the century.

Unfortunately, in the Soviet times, under the conditions of ideological monopoly, the historians of the Armenian press were focused on the Bolshevik periodicals, exaggerating their role and leaving the press organs of other parties in the shade. Nowadays, there is no need for such discrimination. Therefore, in the second volume an attempt is made on the same level and in terms of ideological and thematic presentation to characterize the periodicals, acting at the beginning of the century and belonging to different parties. And if, for example, a number of newspapers and magazines of Dashnaks (members of Armenian Revolutionary Federation Party), Hinchakists and Ramkavars were more or less familiar to the Armenian reader, than the press bodies of the Social-Democratic Armenian organization (“Specifics”) were known only to highly professional specialists. Therefore, the first attempts that have been made in the book to elucidate the political positions of the mentioned parties as well as the characterization and analysis of some periodicals of “the Specifics” about the Armenians’ life in the early XX century are welcome.

We would also like to specially emphasize a consideration related to the party press. Two periodicals of Dashnaks are touched upon in particular; these are “Horizon” and “Azatamart”, which, as dailies, played an enormous role in the 1910s when organizing the social and political thought of the Armenian people in the Eastern and Western parts of Armenia, thoroughly elucidating the spiritual-cultural life of the nation. With their broad-minded activities, these newspapers were freed from the narrow party circles from the beginning, acquiring a nationwide importance and a large audience of readers. Unfortunately, they are not presented under a separate title in the volume because of belonging to Dashnaktsutyun, which are the cases of “Mshak” and “Murch”. Making an exception in this case would be appropriate.

The volume concludes with the chapter of “The History of the Armenian Periodical Press”. Though its larger version was published in 2005 as a separate

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brochure (in both cases the author is A. Hakobyan⁴), this unfairly forgotten period is presented for the first time in the panorama of the Armenian press.

It has already been mentioned above that the publication of this large-scale work (as well as the previous volume) required painstaking work, patience perseverance and will of the devotee to carry it out, to overcome the difficult task of investigating hundreds of periodicals, and these were provided by the joint efforts of the Armenian press historians, deserving great respect. With a clear understanding of what to do, the authors have tried to remain in the boundaries of scientific objectivity, working in line with the demands of new times. With all this, the well-known Armenian periodicals of more than two hundred years are still waiting for future investigators. The newspapers, journals and magazines, having enormous information and high-level of analytic publicism in presenting the life of the Armenian people, should become the matter of not only historical-philological, but also civilizational-cultural, sociological, political-scientific and psychological study. Such investigations will open up new vistas for understanding and estimating our past.

The publication of the two volumes of “The History of the Armenian Periodical Press” is already an important investment in this field.

⁴ See Hakobyan A., *The History of Periodical Press of the Republic of Armenia (1918–1920)*, Yerevan, Author’s edition, 2005.