

# THE ARMENIAN PRELACY OF ALEPPO (Mid 1920s--late 20<sup>th</sup> Century)

Simon Payaslian  
payas@bu.edu

This paper offers a survey of the history of the Armenian Prelacy of Aleppo from the tenure of Archbishop Ardavazt Surmeyan in the mid-1920s to the end of the tenure of Archbishop Suren Kataroyan in 2004. It is hoped that this brief study will contribute to what little literature exists in the English language on the Prelacy of Aleppo. Although this paper does not discuss the current civil war, it is worth noting that the magnitude of the physical destruction has rendered the future of the Armenian community and the prelacy highly unpredictable. In the post-World War I period the prelacy served as the principal agency for the organization of the survivors of the genocide, and throughout the interwar period and after World War II, it had to confront a number of political challenges within the community itself and within the broader context of Arab nationalism, European colonialism, and Cold War rivalries. The prelacy maintained good relations with its host society and the Syrian government, regardless of the character of the latter, and enjoyed a politically favorable environment beginning in the early 1970s.

## A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For centuries, the prelacy served within the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of Cilicia at Sis. During the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1198-1375), the monarchy maintained close ties with the community in Aleppo, although at times relations between the prelacy and Sis were less than amicable, as certain clerics in Aleppo and its vicinity sought to establish an independent catholicosal seat. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the prelacy served as a rival catholicosal seat to the Catholicosate, a rivalry in the main centering on the prelacy's more favorable attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> The "native" Armenian population (Arman al-Qadim or Old Armenians) constituted a well-established community of artisans and merchants. Their leaders for centuries had built and administered the local community institutions and churches. Following the Ottoman *millet* system, the prelacy served as both the religious and administrative center for the Armenian community. According to a population census conducted at the initiative of the Supreme Archimandrite Garabed Garabedian in the early 1900s, the native Armenians in Aleppo numbered 3906 and immigrants 853.<sup>2</sup> The

community witnessed its first modern influx of Armenians during the Hamidian massacres of 1894-96 as many fled their homeland and settled in Aleppo.<sup>3</sup>

The influx of thousands of refugees during the Armenian Genocide placed the prelacy at the center of an unprecedented crisis. After the cessation of World War I, the prelacy served as the representative of the refugees in need of shelter and various forms of services. In the turbulent environment of the postwar Middle East, beginning in early 1919 the Allied Powers repatriated many Armenian refugees to Cilicia, but they eventually opted for cooperation with Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk). The French signed the Treaty of Ankara on October 20, 1921, and thereafter adopted an accommodative policy toward Turkey. In 1939, the French granted the region of Iskenderun to Turkey.

Catholicos Sahag II Khabayan of the Great House of Cilicia, having been exiled by the Young Turk regime, arrived in Aleppo on December 1, 1921, and briefly entertained the idea of establishing the Catholicosate in the ancient city. However, considering the unstable political situation in Aleppo and Damascus, he decided in 1930 to move the catholicosal seat to Antelias.<sup>4</sup> In 1929, Catholicos Sahag appointed Bishop Papken Giuleserian as Coadjutor, and the latter's ordination and consecration as Catholicos, the first since the genocide, took place in Aleppo on April 26, 1931.

Beginning in the early 1930s, the authorities in Syria demanded the demolition of the refugee camps, and the prelacy was instrumental in the relocation of Armenians from the camps to the cities.<sup>5</sup> The community in Aleppo commenced the task of building anew its educational and cultural institutions in efforts to fill the void created by the destruction and confiscation of the numerous institutions in the homeland. In that process, the Prelacy of Aleppo, and specifically the prelate, played a central role in guiding the future course of the community.

From 1432, when Archbishop Hovhannes (or Hovagim) Periatsi (Halebtsi) became prelate, to the present, a total of 62 prelates have served the Prelacy of Aleppo.<sup>6</sup> Since the mid-1920s, six prelates have held that office (see Table 1). The period from 1925 to 1956 represented the first, formative stage of the community. It saw the expanding role of the prelacy under the Prelates Archbishop Ardavazt Surmeyan and Bishop Zareh Payaslian as new churches were built and schools and various cultural institutions were established. The second phase, from 1956 to 1977, witnessed a continuation of construction as well as renovation of old churches under Archbishop Ghevont Chebeyan and Bishop Datev Sarkisian. During the third stage, from 1977 to 2004, under the leadership of Archbishop Suren Kataroyan, further construction of

cultural and educational institutions enhanced community life in an environment of political stability.

**Table 1. Prelates of the Armenian Prelacy of Aleppo, 1925-Present**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year / Tenure</i>
Ardavazt Surmeyan	1925 - 1940
Zareh Payaslian	1940 - 1956
Ghevont Chebeyan	1956 - 1967
Datev Sarkisian	1968 - 1977
Suren Kataroyan	1977 - 2004
Shahan Sarkisian	2004 - pres.

Sources: Demirdjian, "Kavazanakirk," *Hasg*, July-Aug. 1975, pp. 294-301; Sept.-Dec. 1975, pp. 363-368; Jan.-March 1978, pp. 31-42; April-June 1978, pp. 187-193; July-Dec. 1978, pp. 382-386; Jan.-Dec. 1979, pp. 84-94.

In the fourth and final phase, stretching from 2004 to the present, which this paper does not examine, the Armenian community and the prelacy have fallen victim to the civil war raging across Syria since 2011. Prelate Archbishop Shahan Sarkisian continues to lead the community with exceptional service and remarkable calm amidst the destruction and chaos wrought by the civil war. Indeed, it has been the unenviable task of the prelates serving in Aleppo to confront the challenges of various crises in Syrian politics caused by internal struggles for power and by international conflicts.

Syria experienced chronic political turbulence after World War I as Syrians struggled for national self-determination, and the situation did not stabilize even after the country gained independence in April 1946, as various individuals and groups vied for power through military coups and counter-coups. It was not until the emergence of Hafiz al-Asad as president of Syria in 1970 that the country gained a certain degree of stability. Despite the numerous challenges in such a turbulent environment, the prelacy continually demonstrated its ability to navigate through political difficulties, in each phase strengthening its relations with the Syrian government and society.

#### THE PRELACY OF ALEPPO IN A TRANSFORMATIVE ERA, 1925-56

The formative years witnessed a reformulation of the position and status of the prelacy within both the postwar Armenian community and the larger Syrian society. The arrival of thousands of survivors of the genocide placed unprecedented administrative responsibilities on the prelacy in a substantially augmented community. By 1932, Armenian

adherents to the Prelacy of Aleppo alone numbered more than 55,000.<sup>7</sup>

Further, the prelacy also became the political center of the community in its relations with the British and French mandatory authorities until the French withdrawal in 1946. Accordingly, the widening scope of its administrative responsibilities also enhanced its visibility and prestige.

### ***Archbishop Ardavazt Surmeyan, 1925-40***

Archbishop Ardavazt Surmeyan (1889-1951) served as Prelate of Aleppo for 15 years (1925-40). He was elected prelate on March 3, 1925, and consecrated a bishop in 1929 and archbishop in 1933.<sup>8</sup> It would be an understatement to note that he served under conditions of extreme hardship during a severely turbulent period. The Armenian community of orphans and refugees was in the process of recovering from the genocidal deportations, and to Surmeyan fell the unenviable task of providing leadership and giving shape and voice to the community. Assignment to such a post at a time of severe crises and chaos must have tormented him, a person who paid meticulous attention to and insisted on adherence to rules and regulations. A prolific author with a profound appreciation for history and collective memory, the prelacy under his leadership endeavored to build educational and cultural institutions and to transform refugees and orphans into productive members of the community.

Archbishop Surmeyan's tenure as Prelate of Aleppo coincided with efforts by the Catholicosate under the leadership of Catholicos Sahag II Khabayan to determine the status and administrative jurisdiction of each diocese, as necessitated by the radically altered situation in the Middle East. The Catholicosate initiated the process for greater administrative integration and standardization, a process that was begun by the first Council of Bishops held in April 1931 in Aleppo<sup>9</sup> and culminated in the "institutionalization" of the Catholicosate of Cilicia in its new environment. Upon an examination of the future needs of the Armenian communities, the Episcopal Council decided to combine the communities of Antioch, Iskenderun, and Suedia with the diocese of Latakia and to rename it the Diocese of Antioch. The council further decided to assign several parishes (for example, Hama, Homs) to the Diocese of Damascus.<sup>10</sup> The Franco-Turkish agreement in 1939, which granted the region of Iskenderun to Turkey, required further administrative readjustments, including the dissolution of the Prelacy of Antioch-Latakia and the integration of the entire region, including Kesab, into the jurisdiction of the Prelacy of Aleppo.<sup>11</sup>

The delineation of the diocesan administrative boundaries occurred in a period of construction and community development. Under the

leadership of Archbishop Surmeyan, several churches and educational and cultural organizations were established. The Armenian refugee camps were demolished in the 1930s, and Armenians moved to small “Armenian quarters,” as in Nor Kiugh (or Meydan). Prior to the elimination of the camps, however, the Surp Khach (Holy Cross) Church was built in Suleymanieh in 1923, the first church erected under the auspices of the Prelacy of Aleppo after the genocide.<sup>12</sup> In late 1932, the prelacy oversaw the construction of the Surp Krikor Lusavorich (Saint Gregory the Illuminator) Church in Nor Kiugh<sup>13</sup> and the Surp Hagop Church in 1934. In addition to the construction projects in Aleppo, other regions also benefited from the prelacy’s initiatives - for example, the Surp Hagop Church built in Ras ul-Ain in 1930 and the Surp Khach (Holy Cross) Church in Tel Abyad in 1932.<sup>14</sup>

The Srpots Karasnits Mangants (Holy Forty Martyrs) Church at the old Salibeh (Christian) quarter in Aleppo holds a special place in the hearts and minds of the Armenian community. The prelacy organized a number of celebratory events in November 1932 for the three hundredth anniversary of the reconstruction of the Srpots Karasnits Mangants Church. In 1935, the prelacy celebrated the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Armenian alphabet, and the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the renovation (in 1535) of the Surp Asdvadzadzin (Holy Mother of God) Church located in the same church complex as the Karasnits Mangants Church.<sup>15</sup>

While Armenian communities across Syria were in the process of cultural and structural development, conflicts between the Armenian political parties, on the one hand, and various factional divisions, on the other hand, created insurmountable difficulties for the prelacy. Some Armenians expressed concern regarding the debilitating competition between the political parties and the indifference various institutions exhibited to community needs. While Aleppo also became mired in such conflicts, the tensions in Damascus eventually required intervention by the Catholicosate, and Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I twice visited Damascus in 1932 for conferences with community leaders and government officials.<sup>16</sup> Although the situation in Damascus was formally beyond the jurisdiction of the Prelacy of Aleppo, the ramifications of the inter-party conflicts were obvious. Papken I urged cooperation and improvements in the administration of community organizations. He advised Armenians to refrain from engagement in Syrian politics. The primary focus of community activities, he maintained, should be confined to the effective management of the churches, schools, and community services. Papken I also met with the Syrian President Muhammad Ali al-Abed and Prime

Minister Taj al-Din al-Hasani to convey the blessings of Catholicos Sahag II.<sup>17</sup> An article titled “Hiur Yenk” (We Are Guests) in *Hasg* stated that Armenians in Syria and Lebanon, having arrived as refugees, were guests in these two countries. While they were to be encouraged to participate in the economic and cultural life of their respective countries, judicious circumspection required avoidance of participation in politics, as Armenians harbored no political aspirations in either country.<sup>18</sup>

The prelacy and the Armenian leadership in Syria effectively represented the Armenian community in Damascus and cultivated close ties with the host communities. As a result, the prelacy gained the respect of Arab political leaders and foreign governments. When on July 7, 1935, Karen Jeppe passed away at the age of 59, the prelacy requested, and immediately received, permission from the Danish Consul in Aleppo to organize the funeral arrangements and to perform the funeral services as an expression of gratitude for her decades of service to the Armenian communities first in Urfa and then in Aleppo. Karen Jeppe was buried at the Armenian cemetery.<sup>19</sup>

During the next several years, the Prelacy of Aleppo was confronted by one of the most serious challenges in the twentieth century. As the Syrian nationalist movement gained momentum, the prelacy came under pressure to side either with Arab independence or French colonial rule. The mutual confidence developed between the Armenian and Arab leadership proved particularly critical at this time. While many (perhaps most) Armenians, especially the survivors of the forced exodus as a result of the French-Kemalist collusion in the aftermath of World War I, sympathized with the Syrian independence movement, others advocated alliance with the French. In the meantime, the Franco-Turkish agreement signed on June 23, 1939, transferred the *sanjak* or county of Alexandretta (Iskenderun) to Turkey, further antagonizing Armenians toward French policy. This agreement generated a new wave of refugees as the Armenian inhabitants of the region, totaling approximately 27,000, migrated to Aleppo and Beirut. Many of them eventually settled in Anjar, Lebanon, a community setup by the French mandatory authorities as compensation. The refugees required enormous resources from the Prelacy of Aleppo,<sup>20</sup> and Surmeyan responded to the crisis with great skill as organizer and administrator.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, one of the most remarkable characteristics of Archbishop Surmeyan was his extraordinarily prolific career as author and compiler. He penned numerous books and articles, most prominently his three-volume *Badmutiun Halebi Hayots*, history of the Armenian community in Aleppo.<sup>22</sup> He contributed articles to *Hasg* on specific aspects of the

Armenian Church - for example, on the historical significance of a chalice and a cross at the Srpts Karasnits Mangants Church in Aleppo. The article on the cross underscored the contributions jewelers have made to the development of religious church ornaments and accessories.<sup>23</sup>

Archbishop Surmeyan also harbored aspirations to succeed Catholicos Sahag II, who passed away on November 8, 1939. In his stead, however, Archbishop Bedros Sarajian was elected Catholicos, and Archbishop Surmeyan, in an acrimonious response, submitted his resignation on March 3, 1940.<sup>24</sup> The consecration of Bedros I as Catholicos of Cilicia took place on June 2, 1940, but he died shortly thereafter (September 28, 1940).<sup>25</sup> Archbishop Ardavazt subsequently served as Prelate of France and Belgium. In the meantime, on July 9, 1940, Vartabed Zareh Payaslian was appointed as *locum tenens* and subsequently as Prelate of Aleppo.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Bishop Zareh Payaslian, 1940-56***

Zareh vartabed had gained administrative and leadership experience in Syria prior to his election as Prelate of Aleppo in 1943. In 1939, the Catholicosate had dispatched him to different communities (Tartus, Tripoli) to administer refugees from Alexandretta in the aftermath of the French-Turkish agreement. He was granted the rank of Supreme Archimandrite (Dzayrakuyn Vartabed) on September 20, 1942.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1940s, the Armenian community of Aleppo had grown in numbers and had established several schools, churches, and social and cultural organizations. A report in *Hasg* estimated that in 1944, Armenians in Aleppo totaled about 72,000, 60,000 of whom were adherents to the Apostolic Church, 9000 to the Catholic Armenian Church, and 3000 to the Protestant Evangelical Church. The total number of students in Armenian private (“national”) schools affiliated with the Prelacy of Aleppo that academic year was nearly 5000. The report expressed concern regarding the poor health of the students, caused largely by insufficient resources and the absence of an environment conducive to growth and education. Armenian schools lacked sufficient teachers and textbooks. It was essential, the report concluded, for the community to establish a secondary school up to the twelfth grade.<sup>28</sup>

The Armenian community had developed in spite of the socioeconomic and political difficulties surrounding it, although it was clear that certain issues could potentially threaten its stability and security. World War II had intensified the highly explosive admixture of Arab/Syrian nationalism and French colonialism, as noted above.<sup>29</sup> As recently as 1920, the French military, under the command of General Henri Gouraud in Beirut, had occupied Damascus to assert control over the land. Syrians had opposed

the imposition of the French Mandate and demanded its termination at the earliest opportunity.<sup>30</sup> The protracted clash between Syrian nationalism and French colonialism culminated in Syrian independence in April 1946.

Many Armenians in the community, led by the prelacy, supported Syrian independence. They harbored profound resentment toward the French. In the previous world war, the French had done little to assist the Armenian people who were struggling for their very survival, and adding insult to injury, the French had betrayed them in Cilicia after the war. Further, as recently as 1939, the French government had granted Iskenderun to Turkey, thus giving occasion to another round of migration and exile. While some Armenians insisted on alliance with the French, the declining colonial power had lost all credibility. Loyalty to Syrian national aspirations and to the government in power became one of the guiding principles for the Armenian community. Shukri al-Quwatli, president of the first independent government, praised the Armenian leadership,<sup>31</sup> and (through Prince Mustafa al-Shihabi, Governor of Aleppo)<sup>32</sup> awarded Prelate Zareh the prestigious “Syrian Order of Merit of the First Degree” on September 23, 1946.<sup>33</sup> During the Quwatli years (1946-49), the government granted *de facto* autonomy to the Armenian community. New neighborhoods replaced the old shanty towns, as upper and middle classes emerged in the Armenian community and were integrated into the Syrian economy. A number of Armenians also gained seats in the Syrian parliament.<sup>34</sup>

Dzayrakuyn Vartabed Zareh was consecrated bishop on February 16, 1947.<sup>35</sup> Also in 1947, along with Hrach Papazian, Minas Tololyan and other community leaders, Bishop Payaslian established the Karen Jeppe Jemaran (Academy), named after the famed Danish missionary. The Prelacy of Aleppo also established several Sunday Schools, as in the Haigazian school adjacent to the Karasnits Mangants Church.<sup>36</sup>

From the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, the Armenian community enjoyed a period of rapid development and enormous cultural productivity. The emerging cultural and educational institutions, the proliferation of publications, and the strengthening of the church as an institution actively promoting community development, represented a cultural revival and reflected the optimistic mood of the Armenian community in those years. The unfolding events in Syrian politics and international politics, however, soon proved such optimism illusory. As I have discussed elsewhere, chronic political instability, Syrian nationalism, Nasserist pan-Arabism, and economic difficulties, all combined and led to a confidence deficit among Armenians regarding Syria.<sup>37</sup> The period after Quwatli’s presidency was marked by leadership instability and repeated

coups.<sup>38</sup> In the meantime, the military banned all political parties, and in 1955, President Adib al-Shisheكلي issued Order #175, declaring all non-Arab languages as foreign languages and therefore banned from being taught in schools. Bishop Zareh travelled to Damascus several times and eventually convinced the government to modify Order #175 to permit the teaching of Armenian.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the difficulties experienced with the changing circumstances in Syrian politics, a major challenge appeared on the scene after World War II in the form of Armenian repatriation (*nerkaght*) to Soviet Armenia. Armenians had, albeit in relatively smaller numbers, migrated from the diaspora to Soviet Armenia prior to WWII. In the post-WWII repatriation movement from 1946 to 1948, nearly 100,000 Armenians from the Middle East and other parts of the world migrated to Soviet Armenia.<sup>40</sup> This phase of repatriation occurred in the postwar environment of optimism regarding the Soviet Union, which, along with the Western powers, had defeated Nazism. Soviet Armenia, according to Soviet propaganda, offered the safety and prosperity of the homeland. In addition, Joseph Stalin briefly placed the question of the Turkish occupied Armenian territories of Kars and Ardahan on the international agenda, thereby enjoying the confidence and loyalty of many diasporan Armenians. Also, Catholicos Karekin of Cilicia led a delegation to Soviet Armenia and presided over the election of the Catholicos of All Armenians, Kevork VI Chorekchyan, at Echmiadzin in June 1945, further signifying efforts, by certain segments of the diasporan communities, to cultivate close ties with Soviet Armenia despite Stalin's tyrannical rule.

Initially many Armenians and organizations, including the Dashnaksutiun, supported repatriation, but the emerging Cold War ideological rivalries and interventions by Syrian political leaders soon caused divisions between those favorably disposed toward repatriation, because in principle they supported Soviet Armenia, and those (particularly supporters of the Dashnaksutiun) who opposed the Soviet regime. Catholicos Karekin I of Cilicia supported the Soviet repatriation program, but the Dashnaksutiun had shifted its position by the time he visited Aleppo in March 1946.<sup>41</sup>

The Prelacy of Aleppo, and Bishop Payaslian personally, vehemently opposed the repatriation policy largely because of its ramifications for the security of the Armenian community. According to official documents of the Prelacy of Aleppo, Syrian government officials expressed concerns regarding the repatriation scheme. The mass emigration of Armenians would disrupt production and market operations and would create legal difficulties concerning dual citizenship, with enormous ramifications for a

government in the process of consolidating sovereignty and state-building soon after independence. During a conference with Papazian, Armenian Deputy in the Syrian parliament, Syrian Prime Minister Saadallah Jabri expressed his hope that Armenians would remain in Syria and continue to contribute to its economic development. Jabri added that the Syrian government would not prevent their departure against their will, as it would not prevent the emigration of those who wished to depart to other countries. However, Jabri made it known in no uncertain terms that the Syrian government would reject the principle of dual citizenship. It was his duty, he averred, to defend the interests of his fatherland. He could not permit his country to fall prey to foreign diplomatic intrigues. Jabri advised Papazian to instruct those wishing to leave Syria to liquidate their assets and leave within a month; otherwise, his government refused to tolerate communities with dual loyalties.<sup>42</sup>

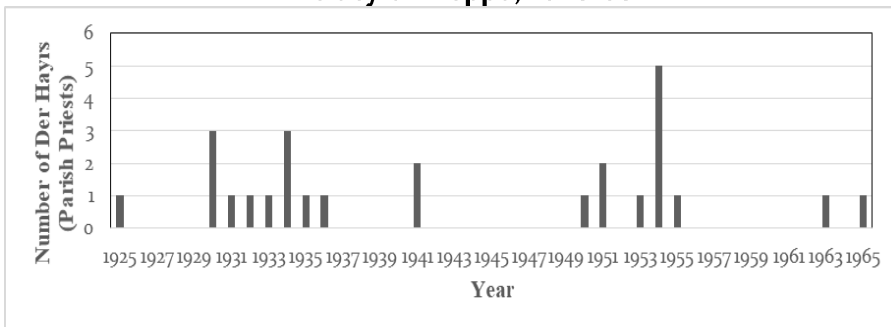
The policy pursued by the Prelacy of Aleppo clashed with the position adopted by the Catholicosate at Antelias regarding the Soviet repatriation scheme. In a circular dated June 29, 1946, Catholicos Karekin I of Cilicia instructed the Prelacy of Aleppo not to interfere in the repatriation process, as it was a bilateral matter for the governments involved.<sup>43</sup> The divergence between the position taken by Catholicos Karekin I and the sobering advice offered by Jabri in Damascus would have necessitated further discussions on the matter. Yet, the message from Jabri reaffirmed the prelacy's opposition to the repatriation. And contrary to Catholicos Karekin I's assumption that the repatriation affair would remain exclusively a matter of Syrian-Soviet bilateral ties, the Syrian government routinely consulted with the Prelacy of Aleppo.<sup>44</sup> Considering the potential political difficulties the mass emigration posed for Armenians remaining behind, the prelacy decided to act decisively against repatriation.

Good relations between the Syrian government and the prelacy notwithstanding, Armenians continued to live with a deep sense of political, economic, and physical insecurity, a fact that proved detrimental to community development. A *Hasg* article published in 1944 captured a significant aspect of the problem. It reported that while initially the seminary of the Catholicosate of Cilicia intended to prepare celibate priests, married parish priests (*Der Hayr*), and educators, beginning in 1935 it was compelled to modify its curriculum in favor of exclusively training celibate priests. Those graduating from the seminary, the report stated, were driven to look elsewhere for better employment opportunities rather than become parish priests. The community showed little respect toward its teachers and parish priests, *Hasg* noted, and offered even less financial support to improve their lot. Therefore, the report concluded,

financial, social, political, and cultural factors undermined the seminary's full potential.<sup>45</sup>

For nearly a decade throughout the 1940s, hardly any parish priests (Der Hayrs)<sup>46</sup> were ordained. The challenge to fill in vacancies must have been daunting, considering the fact that in the 1930s and 1940s, 12 parish priests who had served in Aleppo and the regions of Latakia and Jezire passed away (5 in the 1930s, and 7 in the 1940s).<sup>47</sup> The increase in the number of priests in training in the first half of the 1950s indicated a vast improvement in the ability of the Prelacy of Aleppo to attract members of the community to serve the church (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Number of Der Hayrs (Parish Priests) Ordained for the Prelacy of Aleppo, 1925-65**



Source: Husig Setragian, *Vark Kahanayits Perio Temi, 1850-2005*, Aleppo, Hayots Perio Tem, 2005; *Hasg*, various years.

In Antelias, Catholicos Karekin I Hovsepien passed away on June 21, 1952,<sup>48</sup> and the Catholicos throne remained vacant until September 1956. Bishop Payaslian was elected as the next Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia on February 20, 1956, and consecrated at the Cathedral of Surp Krikor Lusavorich at Antelias on September 2, 1956.<sup>49</sup> Archbishop Ghevont Chebeyan succeeded him as Prelate of Aleppo.

Conditions in churches and schools and the community in general were improving when the political situation in Syria, already unstable because of the recurring coups and counter-coups, further deteriorated. The rise of Nasserism in the 1950s, the United Arab Republic (UAR), which briefly (1958-61) joined Egypt and Syria, and the intensification of Arab nationalism resulted in deleterious consequences for the Armenian community. Pan-Arabists and Syrian nationalists grew more intolerable toward ethno-religious minorities and viewed the Armenians as agents for Western influences.<sup>50</sup> Political persecution and economic policies of nationalization led to the mass emigration of upper- and middle-class

Armenians and substantially weakened the community.<sup>51</sup> Archbishop Chebeyan's tenure witnessed a period of transition of sorts in the Armenian community, most emphatically the decline of the community in numbers and manpower if not in energy and constructive spirit.

### **Archbishop Ghevont Chebeyan, 1956–67**

Prior to his election as Prelate of Aleppo, Archbishop Ghevont Chebeyan had served in Cyprus first as *locum tenens* (1946-52) and subsequently as Prelate of Cyprus (1952-56).<sup>52</sup> During the turbulent period of the catholicosal election in 1956, he maintained his unwavering support for the Catholicosate of Cilicia and for the election of Bishop Zareh as Catholicos.<sup>53</sup> Archbishop Chebeyan was elected Prelate of Aleppo on October 26, 1956, and served for eleven years until December 1967.

Archbishop Chebeyan's tenure was a period of construction and renovation of churches and educational institutions. In June 1958, during their visit in Aleppo, George and Nazenig Mardigian donated \$10,000 toward the construction of the Mardigian Hall.<sup>54</sup> In 1958, the Surp Stepanos church in the village of Aramo, about 17 miles from the Mediterranean Sea, was renovated,<sup>55</sup> and on August 16, 1959, in celebration of the Transfiguration, Armenians from across Syria journeyed on the annual pilgrimage to Aramo and Kesab. Three sacred places are located in Aramo: Surp Stepanos (built at the center of the village in 1314), Surp Asdvadzadzin, and Surp Kevork. Further, on August 9, 1959, Archbishop Chebeyan presided over ground-breaking ceremonies for the renovation of the chapel in Ghnemiyeh, a small mountainous town,<sup>56</sup> and he presided over its consecration on July 31, 1960.<sup>57</sup> Shortly thereafter, on September 4, 1960, he also presided over ground-breaking ceremonies for Surp Asdvadzadzin Church in Karaduran, nearly two decades after a massive mudslide had destroyed the church in January 1942.<sup>58</sup> Archbishop Chebeyan's crowning contribution to the list of renovations was his donation of 8,000 Lebanese pounds for the renovation of the main or high altar of the Karasnits Mangants Church in memory of his parents, Antranig and Satenig Chebeyan. Archbishop Chebeyan consecrated the newly constructed altar on Easter Day, January 6, 1966.<sup>59</sup>

In efforts to improve relations between the Catholicosate of Cilicia and the Mother See of the Armenian Church at Echmiadzin (in former Soviet Armenia), on August 29, 1964, Archbishop Chebeyan traveled to Echmiadzin to meet with the Catholicos of All Armenians, Vazken I Baljian. He celebrated Holy Mass at Echmiadzin and offered his sermon at the Saint Sarkis Church in Yerevan. On his return journey, he visited

Pope Paul VI in Rome on September 13, 1964, and met with Catholicos Khoren I Paroyan at Bikfaya to apprise him of his conferences at Echmiadzin and Rome.<sup>60</sup>

As Prelate of Aleppo, Archbishop Chebeyan on several occasions visited Damascus for conferences with the heads of the Syrian government. On February 25, 1958, he along with representatives of the Armenian community in Syria, paid an official visit on behalf of Catholicos Zareh I to congratulate Gamal Abdel Nasser and Shukri al-Quwatli in Damascus for the formation of the United Arab Republic. Subsequently, Catholicos Zareh visited Damascus on March 8, 1959, to meet with President Nasser.<sup>61</sup> After the collapse of the UAR, a delegation representing Catholicos Zareh I and led by Archbishops Chebeyan and Paroyan visited Damascus on October 18, 1961, to congratulate the new government; they met with the post-UAR Prime Minister Ma'mun al-Kuzbari and Chief of Staff Abd al-Karim Zahr al-Din.<sup>62</sup> Upon the formation of a new government in Damascus, Archbishops Chebeyan and Paroyan, on October 10 and 12, 1962, led a delegation representing Catholicos Zareh I to the Syrian capital to congratulate President Nazim al-Qudsi and Prime Minister Khalid al-Azm on behalf of the Armenian communities in Syria and Lebanon. On October 10, 1963, Archbishop Chebeyan accompanied a large entourage headed by Catholicos Khoren I on his first visit to Damascus as Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, to meet with President Amin al-Hafiz, Prime Minister Salah al-Din al-Bitar, and Minister of Interior Dr. Nur al-Din al-Atasi.<sup>63</sup>

Maintaining such relations with the leadership in Damascus, regardless of the person and the party in power, required diplomatic agility within a strictly confined political space. That the Prelacy of Aleppo successfully accomplished the task was a testament to the leadership skills of the prelate and his advisors and administrators. For example, while political rhetoric by the leaders of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan against Israel led to the intensification of Syrian nationalism and Arab nationalism in general, and tensions escalated into war, Armenian fears of a new round of persecutions, as experienced in the 1950s, did not materialize.

In July 1966, Archbishop Chebeyan visited the Armenian communities in Iran and celebrated Mass at the Surp Thade (Saint Thaddeus) Monastery near the historic town of Maku and at the Surp Asdvadzadzin Church in Isfahan. In December 1967, for personal reasons, he resigned as Prelate of Aleppo; he was subsequently elected Prelate of Isfahan in June 1968.<sup>64</sup> Upon retirement, Archbishop Chebeyan devoted his energies to writing on theology, church rituals, and social issues.<sup>65</sup> In honor of his 50 years of service to the Armenian Church, Archbishop Kataroyan invited

him to Aleppo in December 1987. The community had organized several events in his honor. He celebrated Mass at the Srpts Karasnits Mangants Church, his first at that church since his resignation in December 1967.<sup>66</sup> After Archbishop Chebeyan's resignation as Prelate of Aleppo, Reverend Archpriest Adom Kehiayan served as *locum tenens* until July 6, 1968, when Vartabed Datev Sarkisian was elected to succeed Chebeyan.<sup>67</sup>

#### THE ARMENIAN PRELACY FROM 1968 TO 2004

##### ***Prelate Datev Sarkisian, 1968-77***

Vartabed Datev Sarkisian (later Archbishop) was the first prelate born in Aleppo since the genocide.<sup>68</sup> In May 1972, Catholicos Khoren I granted him the rank of Supreme Archimandrite (Dzayrakuyn Vartabed), and in June 1974, he was ordained bishop.<sup>69</sup> During his tenure from 1968 to 1977, the Armenian community continued to enjoy political stability, particularly after the rise of Hafiz al-Asad to power in 1970. Bishop Sarkisian re-energized the community and sought to attract the Armenian youth to the church. While he continued a number of traditions inherited from his predecessors, he also introduced several innovations that contributed to a spiritual revival across the community. As one such traditional practice, soon after his appointment, Bishop Datev toured the Armenian communities in different parts of Syria. In October 1971, he visited the Surp Hagop Church in Qamishli, followed by visits to the churches in Hasiche (Hasake), Ras ul-Ain, and so forth.<sup>70</sup>

Several new construction and renovation projects were launched under Prelate Datev's auspices, including the new prelacy building across the street from the Karasnits Mangants Church, as was the renovation of the Surp Krikor Lusavorich Church in Nor Kiugh. Also during his tenure, construction commenced on the Surp Asdvadzadzin Church in the Suleimaniyeh-Villaner quarter, and Catholicos Khoren I participated in the ground-blessing ceremony in 1972. However, construction was not completed until 1982, and its consecration took place in 1983 under the auspices of his successor, Archbishop Suren Kataroyan. Catholicos Karekin II Sarkisian of Cilicia (later Catholicos of All Armenians at Echmiadzin) presided over the ceremonies. In the meantime, the former Surp Asdvadzadzin Church, which was located within the complex of the Karasnits Mangants Church, was converted into the Zarehian Museum.<sup>71</sup>

In addition to the construction and renovation of churches, educational institutions also benefited from Prelate Sarkisian's leadership. At his initiative, the prelacy secured \$25,000 from the Gulbenkian Foundation in 1971 for the addition of a third floor at the Karen Jeppe Jemaran<sup>72</sup> and an additional \$15,000 in 1973, also from the Gulbenkian Foundation, for the

construction of a new building at the Grtasirats school in Aleppo.<sup>73</sup> The Sahagian and Mesrobian schools also received financial support for their various building needs.<sup>74</sup> These construction projects and related pressing needs in the management of properties eventually necessitated the creation of a more effective and efficient administration of prelacy properties. Accordingly, the prelacy established the Properties Management Board to oversee the existing properties within its jurisdiction and for future projects.<sup>75</sup>

An innovation the prelacy introduced in 1969 was radio broadcasting of the Holy Mass. The introduction of radio broadcasting vastly improved the propagation of the church's teachings and the cultivation of a sense of communion across geographically distant communities. Radio broadcasting connected thousands of Armenians to the church, who otherwise could not attend church services.<sup>76</sup> Its adoption also signified the ability of the Armenian Church to embrace modernization and telecommunications technology, a particularly important symbolic act for purposes of attracting young Armenians to the church.

Datev vartabed came to the prelacy with a singular mission to attract young Armenians to the church and to reinvigorate community-church relations. Appointed prelate at the age of 27, he was perfectly suited for the task of striking a balance between the preservation of religious and cultural traditions and values, on the one hand, and the injection of certain elements of modernization into church practices, on the other hand. Public responses to this advance in modernization of church-community relations were positive (as far as could be ascertained without public opinion surveys), and the innovation enhanced the prelacy's image as an institution keeping pace with modernization and technological advances.<sup>77</sup>

In efforts to reinforce community-church relations, the prelacy also organized, beginning in November 1969, a series of public lectures by the clergy on Christianity and religion. For example, the Reverend Archpriest Adom Kehiayan gave a talk on the Armenianization of Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries. In a similar vein, in efforts to maintain close ties with the Catholic and Evangelical Armenian church denominations, the prelate organized inter-denominational "Prayer Weeks," the first of which took place at the Srspots Karasnits Mangants Church, followed by prayers at the Catholic Holy Trinity Church. On January 1, 1970, as part of the New Year celebrations, the Evangelical Emmanuel Church invited Prelate Sarkisian to participate in church services.<sup>78</sup>

During the tenure of Bishop Datev there was a vast improvement in relations between the Armenian community and the Syrian government

under Hafiz al-Asad, who after an intense power struggle gained control first within the Ba'ath party in November 1970 and finally as president in February 1971. On January 6, 1971, Hafiz al-Asad visited Aleppo, and Prelate Datev Sarkisian, Oshagan Choloyan apegha (monk), and representatives of the Armenian community in Aleppo greeted him at the airport. Prelate Sarkisian also attended a dinner in honor of Asad at the Nadi Halab (Club d'Alep).<sup>79</sup>

Subsequent visits by the Catholicoses of Cilicia to Damascus and Aleppo further demonstrated the strength of relations between the Armenian community and the Syrian government under Asad. On March 23, 1971, Catholicos Khoren I visited Damascus to congratulate the newly-elected president. A large crowd of Armenians, in nearly 150 automobiles and from different parts of Syria, led by Prelate Datev, greeted the Catholicos at the Lebanese-Syrian border.<sup>80</sup>

Nothing could serve better as a symbol of the strengthening ties between the Armenian community and the Asad government than Catholicos Khoren I's visit to Aleppo in December 1972, the first by a Catholicos of Cilicia since Catholicos Karekin Hovsepants visited the community in 1947. Despite the good relations cultivated by the Prelacy of Aleppo and community leaders with the Syrian government, no Catholicos was permitted to visit Aleppo for at least two reasons. First, it was essential for the leadership within the Syrian government to demonstrate that Damascus, not Aleppo, had become the center of the Syrian political system. Second, Aleppo was home to the largest Armenian community in Syria, and Syrian nationalist regimes felt that granting permission for a Catholicosal visit with his flock could antagonize the government's nationalist constituencies. The latter might consider such an accommodationist policy toward an ethno-religious minority as undermining the regime's efforts toward state-building and nation-building. Further, it could potentially set a precedent for various demands by other minorities. No previous government, particularly the military generals, had been willing to take such a step. In contrast, Asad made a point of cultivating ties with ethno-religious minorities. The Asad government's grant of permission for Catholicos Khoren to visit Aleppo epitomized the president's support for the Armenian community.

Armenian community leaders headed by Datev vartabed greeted Catholicos Khoren I at the village of al-Dabusieh on the Lebanese-Syrian border. A long overdue visit to Aleppo by a Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia had been finally realized. During his visit, Catholicos Khoren toured the Nor Kiugh neighborhoods, Karen Jeppe Jemaran and other schools, the Surp Kevork Church, and the grounds of Surp Asdvadzadzin

Church, which was in the process of construction. He also visited Latakia briefly and upon his return to Aleppo he continued to visit various religious, community, and educational institutions.<sup>81</sup> Nothing proved more emotional for Catholicos Khoren during this tour than his visit, on December 6, 1972, to the Karen Jeppe Jemaran to pay homage to Catholicos Zareh I, whose bust rested in the garden of the famed school. With thousands attending the ceremony, Catholicos Khoren wished to say a prayer but could not as burning tears streamed down his face.<sup>82</sup> Catholicos Khoren also visited Dr. Harutiun Der Ghazarian at his home. The Catholicos honored the illustrious doctor with the medal of “Cilician Prince” (Giligian Ishkhan).<sup>83</sup> Born in Marash in 1882, Dr. Der Ghazarian had developed a keen interest in the history of Cilicia and its forts and monasteries.<sup>84</sup> He established his medical practice in Aleppo, where he resided until his death in April 1975. In addition to his medical practice, Dr. Der Ghazarian was an active participant in community affairs in Marash and Aleppo and became one of the most respected individuals in Aleppo among Armenians and non-Armenians alike.<sup>85</sup> Catholicos Khoren departed Aleppo on December 11, 1972, and visited Damascus for an official conference with President Asad before returning to Antelias.<sup>86</sup>

The Armenian community also benefited from economic development under Asad, although his authoritarian rule allowed little room for political liberalization. Pragmatic in his approach to foreign and domestic policy, Asad encouraged new joint ventures with western companies (such as the Spanish-Syrian tractor company in Aleppo and the Dutch-US-German oil consortium to develop the oil fields near Der Zor), and in so doing promoted the nation’s products (e.g., cotton) beyond their traditional markets. The profits from agricultural production, oil, tourism, and commerce via ports, land, and airports contributed to an annual 10 percent increase in GDP in the 1970s.

Soon, however, Syria was plagued with unprecedented levels of inequality. While individuals and groups closely affiliated with state-supported commercial sectors registered enormous financial and political benefits from Asad’s policies, the close-knit patron-client networks excluded most segments of the population. Asad’s authoritarian rule also prevented the public from meaningful participation in the political system. Thus, while the Armenian community as a whole benefitted from its ties with the Asad regime, at the individual level many Armenians remained mired in economic difficulties and low living standards. These problems caused Armenians to leave Syria in growing numbers, and emigration ineluctably weakened the community in many respects, but particularly in leadership and manpower.

Prelate Datev resigned in mid-1977. From 1985 to 1995, he served as Prelate of the Western Prelacy of the United States. Archbishop Suren

Kataroyan, who was also born in Aleppo, succeeded him as Prelate of Aleppo; he was elected as prelate on October 10, 1977, and served until 2004.<sup>87</sup>

### ***Prelate Archbishop Suren Kataroyan, 1977-2004***

Archbishop Suren Kataroyan arrived in Aleppo on September 10, 1977, to assume his post as prelate, and was consecrated bishop on October 29, 1977. Upon arrival, he toured the Armenian communities in different parts of Syria - in December 1977, he visited, among other communities, Der Zor, Qamishli, Latakia, and Rakka, visits that he repeated for the duration of his tenure.<sup>88</sup>

Archbishop Kataroyan's tenure may be characterized as a period of renovation. These included structural renovations inside the Karasnits Mangants Church in 1985 and 1995, and in the Surp Krikor Lusavorich Church from 1984 to 1987.<sup>89</sup> In 1992, the Surp Asdvadzadzin Church in Kesab was renovated; in 1996, the Surp Khach Church in Tel Abyad;<sup>90</sup> and during the years 2002-03, the Surp Hagop Church of Ras ul-Ain. Another renovation project was the extensive renovation of the Surp Asdvadzadzin Church in Latakia in 1996. The prelacy also oversaw renovation and restoration projects of the religious icons in churches, such as the altars of the religious icons at the Surp Kevork Church from 1986 to 1990 and the invaluable paintings in the Karasnits Mangants Church from 1993 to 1996. Further, a number of publications appeared under the auspices of the prelacy, including the prelacy's official organ *Oshagan*, which was later renamed *Kantsasar* and published as a weekly newspaper.<sup>91</sup>

Archbishop Kataroyan placed a premium on improving the financial situation of the Armenian schools and Sunday schools within its jurisdiction. The Properties Management Board at a meeting in 1977 decided to examine two major projects: 1) to conduct an inventory of the properties held by the prelacy and to purchase new land from the proceeds of investments; and 2) to build new buildings in areas that potentially could prove lucrative as investments. It was expected that increases in income would contribute to more balanced finances for the Armenian schools under the auspices of the prelacy.<sup>92</sup>

No other project, however, could generate as much community support as the construction of the Armenian Genocide Memorial and the Surp Nahadagats (Holy Martyrs) Church in Der Zor. The consecration of the church by Catholicos Karekin II of Cilicia took place in May 1991. A decade later, on April 24, 2002, Catholicos Aram I declared the genocide memorial complex a sacred place of pilgrimage for Armenians.<sup>93</sup> The

construction of this genocide memorial and the church in Der Zor represented the apogee of the memorialization of the colossal crime against the Armenian people and against humanity. The memorial represented the physical and spiritual destruction of a nation, whose dead members remained buried in the desert sand.

Archbishop Kataroyan emphasized the need for continuous cultural revival, particularly as it pertained to the role of the younger generation in community life and in the church. Accordingly, he continued his predecessor's efforts to attract young people to the church. In April 2002, a three-day conference organized under the auspices of the prelacy brought together about one hundred youth. The conference, entitled "the Armenian Church and Armenian Youth," took place during genocide commemorative events in Der Zor. *Hasg* reports that the youth conference was organized primarily to hear the views of the young on such issues as morality, modernity, technology, and the church. The participants headed by Archbishop Kataroyan also visited Margade, about an hour's drive from Der Zor. In his sermon, Prelate Kataroyan stressed the urgent need to cultivate closer relations between the Armenian church and the younger generations in order to maintain community life.<sup>94</sup>

During the same week, the prelacy organized, for the first time since the Armenian Genocide, a meeting with representatives of 14 local Arab *ashirets* or tribes. The prelacy awarded each tribal community a commemorative plaque expressing the Armenian community's gratitude for their humanitarian courage to save numerous Armenians from death and starvation across the Der Zor region. According to *Hasg*, in attendance were more than 1,000 Arabs and Armenians, as well as Ambassador Levon Sarkisian of the Republic of Armenia, Consul Armen Melkonian in Aleppo, and other dignitaries. Speaking on behalf of the Armenian nation, Archbishop Kataroyan stressed the deep gratitude felt by Armenians toward the people of Syria. Through their close relations, he noted, Syria and Armenia would promote justice and humanitarian values.<sup>95</sup>

The prelacy also participated in conferences and educational programs under the auspices of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), established in 1974. Since the early 1990s, MECC programs in Damascus and Aleppo included conferences, workshops, and lectures to increase public awareness of pressing social and economic issues such as refugees, access to water, food security, spiritual and psychological services, and related social and development programs. In April 2002, the prelacy participated in a series of educational and training sessions held in Aleppo on a variety of religious themes and social services, including services for

people with disabilities.<sup>96</sup>

After the re-establishment of the Republic of Armenia in 1991, the Prelacy of Aleppo cultivated close ties with the government in Yerevan. In reaction to the earthquake in Soviet Armenia in December 1988, the prelacy led community efforts to dispatch relief aid. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the prelacy facilitated the establishment of the Consulate of the Republic of Armenia in Aleppo, in addition to the embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Damascus (opened on May 28, 1993).<sup>97</sup>

Beginning in the late 1970s, cultural organizations (such as Hamazkayin) and publishing houses spurred cultural activities in the arts and theater (e.g., performances by Hamazkayin's Zvartnots Choir and the Sardarabad dance group), particularly encouraged by the ties re-established with their compatriots in Lebanon after the civil war.

In October 2002, Catholicos Aram I visited Aleppo to preside over the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the ordination of Archbishop Kataroyan into priesthood and the 25th anniversary jubilee of his tenure as Prelate of Aleppo. While in Aleppo, Catholicos Aram commended the local Armenian community organizations, particularly the educational institutions, for their activities to preserve Armenian culture and identity. He also praised the community leaders for their continued good relations with the Syrian government, for their various contributions to Syria, and for their promotion of Islamic-Christian relations.<sup>98</sup>

Such amicable relations between the Asad government and the Armenian community, however, could not serve as a panacea to a number of fundamental problems for Armenians in Syria both as individuals and as a community. Compulsory military service had been a particularly vexing challenge for families. In addition, in the 1980s and 1990s, economic difficulties generated social-economic inequalities across various segments of society (in the mid-1990s, Syria's per capita income totaled \$2,300).<sup>99</sup> Further, the recurring clashes between the Muslim Brotherhood and government forces, as seen in Hama in February 1982, heightened the sense of physical insecurity. The combination of these economic and security problems conspired against the well-being of Armenians and led many to leave the country.

## CONCLUSION

The Arab spring, beginning in 2010, gave rise to expectations that the authoritarian regimes across the Arab world would surrender their offices and power to democratically oriented political leaders and civil society groups. As events have demonstrated, however, such hopes proved far removed from realities on the ground. Currently, the Armenian community in Syria is

experiencing a most devastating crisis. The Prelacy of Aleppo once again finds itself, as several times during the past century, amidst a major political crisis. As discussed in this paper, the prelacy for years has weathered political crises in various forms. Unlike the earlier crises, however, the current civil war has resulted in unprecedented levels of physical destruction of lives and institutions. Certainly, none could have prepared it for the current catastrophe. Nevertheless, the prelacy continues to serve as the central institution for the community in addressing the crisis. That the prelacy has for years weathered such crises is a testament to its successful leadership. The successive prelates since Archbishop Surmeyan have grappled with various difficulties confronting the community, on the one hand, and in community's relations with (at times, rapidly) changing forces in power in Damascus. Since March 2011, Archbishop Shahan Sarkisian has had the most difficult task of serving a community amidst a civil war that threatens to undo the decades of laborious construction of the Armenian community since the genocide.

#### ENDNOTES

---

- <sup>1</sup> Avedis K. Sanjian, *The Armenian Communities in Syria under Ottoman Dominion*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 230; Dzayrakuyn Vartabed (Supreme Archimandrite) Vartan Demirdjian, "Kavazanagirk Perio Hayots Temi Arachnortneru" [Chronicle of the Prelates of the Armenian Diocese of Peria," *Hasg*, Nov.-Dec. 1974, pp. 457-460.
- <sup>2</sup> Ardavazt Surmeyan, *Badmutiun Halebi Hayots* [History of Armenians of Aleppo], vol. 3, Paris, Araxes Press, 1950, p. 894; Demirdjian, "Kavazanakirk," *Hasg*, July-Aug. 1975, p. 296.
- <sup>3</sup> Surmeyan, pp. 884, 888; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Aug. 1975, p. 294.
- <sup>4</sup> *Hasg*, March-April 1941, pp. 48-50; Puzant Yeghiayan, *Jamanagagits Badmutiun Gatoghigosutian Hayots Giligio, 1914-1972* [Contemporary History of the Catholicosate of Cilician Armenians, 1914-1972], Antelias, Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1975, pp. 552-553; Simon Payaslian, "The Institutionalization of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias," in *Armenian Cilicia*, Richard G. Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian (eds.), Mazda Publishers, 2008, pp. 557-592.
- <sup>5</sup> Yeghiayan, pp. 261-264.
- <sup>6</sup> Surmeyan; see also Demirdjian, "Kavazanakirk," which appears in serialized form in *Hasg* from Nov.-Dec. 1974, pp. 457-460 to Jan.-Dec. 1979, pp. 84-94.
- <sup>7</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Aug. 1975, p. 301.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Hasg*, March-April 1941, pp. 48-50; Yeghiayan, pp. 552-553; Payaslian, "Institutionalization," pp. 557-592. At the urging of Catholicos Sahag II Khabayan, this Council also elected Papken I Giuleserian as Coadjutor Catholicos. Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Aug. 1975, p. 301.

- 
- <sup>10</sup> *Hasg*, March 1932, p. 14-15, 17; April 1932, pp. 19-20; Sept.-Oct. 1933, p. 44-45.
- <sup>11</sup> *Hasg*, November-December 1939, p. 175; Hagop Cholakian, *Kesab, Vol. 1*, Aleppo, Hamazkayin, 1995, pp. 144, 549n55.
- <sup>12</sup> "Armenian Churches of Perio Tem and Regions," Periotem.com.
- <sup>13</sup> *Hasg*, Dec. 1932, p. 53.
- <sup>14</sup> "Perio Tem, Shrchanner" [Prelacy of Peria, Regions], Periotem.com.
- <sup>15</sup> *Hasg*, Dec. 1932, p. 52-53; April 1935, p. 45; May-June 1935, pp. 54-55.
- <sup>16</sup> *Hasg*, Dec. 1933, p. 67; March 1932, p. 14. For details of his visit, see *Hasg*, April 1932, p. 20-22. Catholicos Sahag visited Aleppo and other towns between Friday, April 15, and Tuesday, May 19, 1932 (*Hasg*, April 1932, pp. 23-24).
- <sup>17</sup> *Hasg*, Oct. 1934, p. 81; June-Aug. 1936, p. 81, on Catholicos Papken I's statement in Damascus in June 1936.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; *Hasg*, June-Aug. 1936, p. 81; "Hiur Yenk" ("We Are Guests"), *Hasg*, Nov.-Dec. 1936, p. 154.
- <sup>19</sup> *Hasg*, July-Sept. 1935, p. 91. On Karen Jeppe, see Hagop Cholakian, *Karen Yeppe: Hay Koghkotayin Yev Veradznuntin Hed* (Karen Jeppe: Along the Armenian Golgotha and Rebirth), Aleppo, Arevelk Press, 2001.
- <sup>20</sup> Payaslian, "Institutionalization," pp. 557-592.
- <sup>21</sup> *Hasg*, Sept.-Dec. 1975, p. 363.
- <sup>22</sup> Surmeyan.
- <sup>23</sup> *Hasg*, Oct. 1935, p. 107; June-Aug. 1936, pp. 61-63. See also Surmeyan's article in *Hasg*, June 1937, pp. 74-75.
- <sup>24</sup> Archbishop Ardavazt's resignation was formally confirmed on July 13, 1940.
- <sup>25</sup> Payaslian, "Institutionalization," pp. 495-496.
- <sup>26</sup> Yeghiayan, p. 526.
- <sup>27</sup> *Hasg*, Jan.-Feb. 1947, p. 40.
- <sup>28</sup> *Hasg*, May-July 1944, pp. 76-80, 100.
- <sup>29</sup> C. Ernest Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1973.
- <sup>30</sup> Zeine N. Zeine, *The Struggle for Arab Independence: Western Diplomacy and the Rise and Fall of Faisal's Kingdom in Syria*, Beirut, Khayat Press, 1960, pp. 182-187, 219.
- <sup>31</sup> *Hasg*, Feb.-April 1963, pp. 63-66, a special issue dedicated to the memory of Catholicos Zareh I.
- <sup>32</sup> An article in *Hasg* incorrectly mentions Emir Mustafa al-Nahabi (*Hasg*, Sept.-Dec. 1975, p. 368). Emir Mustafa al-Shihabi (1893-1968) was an Arab nationalist who was highly critical of European imperialism and opposed the Young Turk regime in Constantinople which, in 1916, had executed his brother, Aref al-Shihabi, an Arab nationalist leader. Amin Lutfi al-Hafiz, another Arab nationalist, was hanged, on Ahmed Jemal Pasha's order, at the Marjeh Square in Damascus in 1916. Mustafa al-Shihabi had served as governor of Aleppo from 1936 to 1939 under President al-Atasi, and as minister of finance in the cabinets of Prime Minister Jamil al-Ulshi and Prime Minister Ata al-Ayubi in 1943. Shihabi was appointed governor of Aleppo for a second term in 1946 under Quwatli (Sami

- 
- Moubayed, *Steel & Silk: Men and Women who Shaped Syria, 1900-2000*, Seattle, WA, Cune, 2006, s.v. "al-Shihabi, Mustapha," pp. 120-121; s.v. "al-Hafiz, Amin Lutfi," pp. 375-376).
- <sup>33</sup> *Hasg*, May 1946, p. 158; Sept.-Oct. 1946, pp. 305-306. See also *Aztag* (Arabic), March 24, 2011, [www.aztagarabic.com/archives/1917](http://www.aztagarabic.com/archives/1917).
- <sup>34</sup> Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria: Ethno-Cultural Diversity and the State in the Aftermath of a Refugee Crisis*, New York, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2008, pp. 61-62.
- <sup>35</sup> Bishop Zareh was consecrated along with Khoren Paroyan (later Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia), Ghevont Chebeyan, and Terenig Poladian. Catholicos Karekin I presided over their ordination, which took place in Aleppo (*Hasg*, Jan.-Feb. 1947, p. 40; Garo Kevorkian, ed., *Amenun Darekirke, 1964*, Beirut, Kevorkian, 1964, pp. 167-183; on the Prelacy of Aleppo, see pp. 170-171. Catholicos Karekin I visited Aleppo again in March 1947 (*Hasg*, April 1947, pp. 103-105).
- <sup>36</sup> *Hasg*, Nov.-Dec. 1945, pp. 224-225.
- <sup>37</sup> Simon Payaslian, "Diasporan Subalternities: The Armenian Community in Syria," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 16:1/2, 2007 [2012], pp. 92-132; Simon Payaslian, "The Armenian Community in Syria: The End of an Ethno-Religious Community?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Washington, DC. Nov. 22-25, 2014.
- <sup>38</sup> Gordon H. Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military, 1945-1958*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1964.
- <sup>39</sup> *Hasg*, Feb.-April 1963, pp. 71-72.
- <sup>40</sup> *Hasg*, Aug.-Oct. 1945, pp. 168; Ronald Grigor Suny, "Soviet Armenia," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 2: *Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1997, p. 367; Hamlet Sarkisian, "1946-1948 Hayrenatartsutyun Ashkharhagrutyune yev Joghovetagrutyune," in the proceedings of 1946-1948 TT. *Hayrenatartsutyune yev Tera Tasere: Hayrenatartsutyun Himnakhentirn Aysor Hamahaygagan Kidajoghov* ["the 1946-1948 Repatriation and its Lessons: The Issue of Repatriation Today" Pan-Armenian Conference Collection of Papers], Yerevan, Limush Publications, 2009, pp. 48-59.
- <sup>41</sup> *Hasg*, April 1946, pp. 119-124; a list of organizations that met with Karekin I appears on p. 121. The first ship, *Transylvania*, with 1800 repatriating Armenians, left Beirut's port on Sunday, June 23, 1946 (*Hasg*, June 1946, pp. 170-171).
- <sup>42</sup> The Prelacy of Aleppo, Perio Temi Kaghakagan Joghov, minutes of meeting, 52<sup>nd</sup> session., vol. 59, June 6, 1946, in Cholakian, *Kesab*, p. 322n11.
- <sup>43</sup> The Prelacy of Aleppo, Yergamia Deghegagir Azkayin Varchutian Kaghakagan Joghovo, vol. 59, July 19, 1944-Aug. 30, 1946, p. 21, in Cholakian, p. 323n11.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22, in Cholakian, *Kesab*, pp. 323-324, note 11.
- <sup>45</sup> *Hasg*, March-April 1944, pp. 58-61.
- <sup>46</sup> In the Armenian Church hierarchy, *Der Hayrs* are married parish priests.
- <sup>47</sup> Husik Setragian, *Vark Kahanayits: Perio Temi, 1850-2005*, Aleppo, Hayots Perio Tem, 2005.

- 
- <sup>48</sup> *Hasg*, July-Sept. 1952, p. 202. See the special issue of *Hasg*, July-Sept. 1952, devoted to Catholicos Karekin I Hovsepian.
- <sup>49</sup> Yeghiayan, pp. 663-683.
- <sup>50</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Ebb and Flow of the Armenian Minority in the Arab Middle East," *Middle East Journal* 28.1, 1974, p. 27.
- <sup>51</sup> R. Hrair Dekmejian, "The Armenians: History, Consciousness and the Middle Eastern Dispersion," *Middle East Review* 9, Fall 1976, pp. 28-29.
- <sup>52</sup> *Hasg*, Sept.-Oct. 1946, p. 303; Nov. 1946, pp. 330-332; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-March 1978, p. 32.
- <sup>53</sup> *Hasg*, Nov. 1987, p. 478.
- <sup>54</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-March 1978, p. 37.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- <sup>56</sup> *Hasg*, Aug.-Sept. 1959, pp. 374-375.
- <sup>57</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-March 1978, pp. 35, 36.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 37.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42; *Hasg*, Feb. 1966, p. 28. Archbishop Chebeyan made a similar donation to the Surp Krikor Lusavorich Church in Zahle (*Hasg*, Nov. 1987, p. 477).
- <sup>60</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-March 1978, p. 40.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34; *Hasg* 28.3, March 1959, pp. 124-126.
- <sup>62</sup> *Hasg*, Nov.-Dec. 1961, p. 476. See also the congratulatory note (dated Dec. 14, 1961) sent by Catholicos Zareh I to President al-Qudsi, who, for his part, thanked the Catholicos for his good wishes in a letter dated Dec. 18, 1961 (*Hasg*, Nov.-Dec. 1961, p. 476).
- <sup>63</sup> *Hasg* 31.9-10, Sept.-Oct. 1962, pp. 386-387; 32.10-12, Oct.-Dec. 1963, pp. 614-617; Demirdjian, *Hasg* 47.1-3, Jan.-March 1978, p. 39; Garo Kevorkian, ed., *Amenun Darekirke, 1964*, p. 598.
- <sup>64</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, April-June 1978, pp. 187, 190; June-July 1968, p. 285.
- <sup>65</sup> For example, on Penitence, *Hasg* 56.1, Jan. 1987, pp. 8-14; on Communion, *Hasg*, Feb. 1987, pp. 55-63; on marriage and weddings, *Hasg*, April 1987, pp. 167-172.
- <sup>66</sup> *Hasg*, Dec. 1987, pp. 533-534.
- <sup>67</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, April-June 1978, p. 191.
- <sup>68</sup> *Hasg*, May 1969, pp. 203-204.
- <sup>69</sup> *Hasg*, Jan.-Feb. 1970, p. 76-77; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Dec. 1978, pp. 382-385.
- <sup>70</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Dec. 1978, p. 384.
- <sup>71</sup> *Hasg*, April-June 1978, p. 192.
- <sup>72</sup> *Hasg*, Jan.-Feb. 1972, p. 76; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Dec. 1978, p. 384.
- <sup>73</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-Dec. 1979, p. 87.
- <sup>74</sup> *Hasg*, Jan.-Feb. 1970, pp. 76-77; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Dec. 1978, p. 384.
- <sup>75</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, April-June 1978, p. 192.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, *Hasg*, July-Dec. 1978, p. 382; Jan.-Feb. 1970, pp. 76-77.
- <sup>77</sup> *Hasg*, Jan.-Feb. 1970, pp. 76-77; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Dec. 1978, p. 382.
- <sup>78</sup> *Hasg*, Jan.-Feb. 1970, p. 76-77; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Dec. 1978, pp. 382-385.
- <sup>79</sup> *Hasg*, Feb.-March 1971, p. 113.

- 
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 101-108; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, July-Dec. 1978, p. 383.
- <sup>81</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-Dec. 1979, pp. 84-85.
- <sup>82</sup> Matig Eblighatian, "Menavor Gisantrin" (The Solitary Bust), *Aztag*, April 20, 2013.
- <sup>83</sup> *Hasg*, Jan.-Feb. 1973, p. 41.
- <sup>84</sup> Harutiun Der Ghazarian, *Haigagan Giligia: Deghakrutiun* [Armenian Cilicia: Topographical Survey], Antelias, Catholicosate of Cilicia Press, 1966, p. vii; Krikor H. Kalusdian, comp. and ed., *Marash Gam Kermanig Yev Heros Zeitun* (Marash or Germanica and Heroic Zeitun), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York, Compatriotic Union of Marash, 1934, Long Island City, NY, Union of Marash Armenians, 1988, pp. 938-939.
- <sup>85</sup> *Hasg*, July-Aug. 1975, pp. 311-314.
- <sup>86</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-Dec. 1979, p. 86.
- <sup>87</sup> *Hasg*, Jan.-Feb. 1977, pp. 267-272; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-Dec. 1979, pp. 89-90.
- <sup>88</sup> *Hasg*, July-Dec. 1978, pp. 523-524; Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-Dec. 1979, pp. 91-93.
- <sup>89</sup> "Perio Tem, Shrchanner" (Prelacy of Peria, Regions), Periotem.com.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid. A second consecration of the Surp Khach Church took place in 1975 after renovations in 1974.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>92</sup> Demirdjian, *Hasg*, Jan.-Dec. 1979, p. 92.
- <sup>93</sup> "Perio Tem, Shrchanner" (Prelacy of Peria, Regions), Periotem.com.
- <sup>94</sup> *Hasg*, April 2002, pp. 346-352.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 361-364.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 380.
- <sup>97</sup> Periotem.com.
- <sup>98</sup> *Hasg*, Oct. 2002, pp. 857-859.
- <sup>99</sup> Volker Perthes, "The Syrian Economy in the 1980s," *Middle East Journal* 46.1, Winter 1992; *World Almanac*, 1994.

---

**Հալէպի Առաջնորդարանը (1920ականներէն Ի. Դարավերջ)**  
(Ամփոփում)

Սիմոն Փայասլեան  
payas@bu.edu

Հեղինակը Հալէպի Ազգային Առաջնորդարանին պատմութիւնը հակիրճ վերաքաղելէ ետք, կը կեդրոնանայ Ա. Համաշխարհայինէն մինչեւ ներկայ հանգրուանի առաջնորդարանին պատմութեան վրայ, մեկնելով իրաքանչիւր առաջնորդի վարած քաղաքականութենէն ու գործունէութենէն:

Սկզբնապէս հիմնուած Սալիպէի Հայ Առաքելական Ս. Քառասնից Մանկանց եղեղեցոյ շրջափակին մէջ, առաջնորդարանը 1970ին տեղափոխուեցաւ մօտակայ նոր շէնք մը, եւ ցարդ հոն կը մնայ:

Հայոց Յեղասպանութիւնը շրջադարձային եղաւ առաջնորդարանի պատմութեան մէջ, երբ հազարաւոր գաղթականներու հոսքը՝ զայն մատնեց աննախադէպ տագնապներու: Առաջնորդարանը գործեց որպէս պաշտօնական կեդրոն՝ գաղթակայաններու վարման եւ նպաստներու մատուցման, նաեւ՝ կրթական, հոգեւոր, մշակութային վերաշինութեան, միջավայրին հետ բարուօք յարաբերութեանց զարգացման: Առաջնորդարանը, ամբողջ երկրին նման, դիմագրաւեց բազմաթիւ մարտահրաւերներ՝ սուրիական քաղաքականութեան եւ միջազգային յարաբերութիւններու ծիրին մէջ:

Հակառակ դժուարութիւններուն, առաջնորդարանը տասնամեակներով ունեցաւ կայուն վիճակ եւ աճեցաւ: Մասնակցելով համայնքի բոլոր աշխուժութիւններուն, առաջնորդարանը սերտ կապեր պահպանեց համայնքի բոլոր դասակարգերուն եւ հանրային ծառայողներուն հետ: Ան վերջին տարիներուն բազում հրատարակութիւններ իրագործեց:

1990ականներու կէսերէն, համայնքը իր կենսունակութիւնը վերագտնելու գործընթացին մէջ էր, սակայն պատերազմը եկաւ Յեղասպանութենէն ետք համայնքը կերտելու եւ անոր ինքնութիւնը տարազելու տասնամեակներու ճիգը հարցականի տակ դնել: