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ԳԻՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ ԱԿԱԴԵՄԻԱ
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

ԵՐԵՎԱՆԻ ՊԵՏԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆ
YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

ՀԵՐԱՅԻ ՏՈՒՐՅԱԿ ԱՐԴԻ ՎԻՃԱԿԸ
ԵՎ ՉԱՐԳԼՕՄԱԿ ՀԵՌԱԿԱՐՄԵՐԸ
ARMENIAN STUDIES TODAY
AND DEVELOPMENT
PERSPECTIVES

Միջազգային համաժողով
Երևան, 15-20 սեպտեմբերի, 2003 թ.
International Congress
Yerevan, September 15-20, 2003



Ձեկուցումների ժողովածու
Collection of papers



ARMENIAN STUDIES IN GERMANY - BEYOND PHILOLOGY

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Armenian studies by Germans or in Germany can be read as the history of a changing German perception of Armenia and its inhabitants. In comparison to recent times, Armenia took a distinctive place in the imagination of educated Germans since the 19th century. It was then perceived as the homeland of ancient and enigmatic cultures. The expansion of the Russian Empire into the Caucasus and Transcaucasus brought certain stability to these regions and allowed, for the first time, comprehensive studies of the geography, geology and archaeology of the Armenian Highlands, in both its Russian and Ottoman Turkish sectors.

Among the numerous European travellers and researchers of the 19th and early 20th centuries were Germans such as Friedrich Parrot, Heinrich Kiepert, Waldemar Belck, Karl-Friedrich Lehmann-Haupt and Friedrich-Eberhard Schulz. The Turkish part of Armenia attracted in particular archaeologists and researchers of ancient languages. For them, the legend of Ara the Beautiful and Shamiram became a key motif. Carl Ritter (1779-1859), the initiator of historical geography, assumed that the Assyrian queen Semiramis had erected the ancient fortifications, channels and steles of the Armenian Highlands.

That Urartu possessed a culture and language on its own right was at first ignored, for the discoveries in the centres of the Assyrian empire - Ninive, Dur-Sharrukin-Kalkhu - paled the findings in Armenia into insignificance. This changed, after Walter von Siemens obtained the copper mines of Kedabek in the ancient Armenian province of Artsakh in 1864 and after his brother Werner von Siemens commissioned Waldemar Belck (1862-1932) as engineer. Belck started to excavate the numerous pre-historic necropolis of the area. After he finished his work as engineer at Kedabek, Belck set out for his first journey to the plains of Ararat and Van, the centre of the Urartean Empire, in 1891. The prominent Berlin physician and pathologist Rudolf Virchow introduced Belck to the historian Professor Karl-Friedrich Lehmann-Haupt (1861-1938) who taught ancient history at the universities of Berlin, Liverpool and Constantinople. Lehmann-Haupt was an expert of cuneiform writings. He and Belck were the first who understood the importance of the Urartean culture as a so far underestimated and forgotten culture.¹

Travellers to Armenia in those days became witnesses of the increasing oppression and persecution of the Armenians under Turkish rule. A journey to Turkish Armenia, planned by Lehmann-Haupt and Belck for the year 1893 had to be postponed until May 1898, because the province of Van had been struck by the persecutions of

Armenians in years before. Lehmann-Haupt published his impressions in three volumes („Armenien einst und jetzt“ - “Armenia past and present“, Berlin, Leipzig 1910-1931), in which he appears not only as a remarkable scholar, but also as an attentive and empathizing observer of the events at the turn of the 19th to 20th century.

European scholars risked their lives for a copy of cuneiform scripts, and Germans were no exceptions. From 1827 until 1829 Professor Friedrich Eduard Schulz had copied, with the assistance of two Armenians, numerous cuneiform writings in Turkish Armenia and surveyed Urartean cliff chambers, when he was killed during an attack by Kurds in the Ottoman-Iranian border area. Only a few years later and nearly at the same spot on the 2,981 meter high pass of Kelishin with its legendary stele the German scholar R. Rosch found his death, together with 38 companions. When it became known in 1893, that the stele of Kelishin was covered by bi-lingual cuneiform writings in Assyrian and Urartean, Waldemar Belck was tempted to reach this revealing and rewarding monument in a single-handed effort. But near the head of the pass he, too, was attacked by Kurdish shooters and escaped them only with difficulties. Two days later, Lehmann-Haupt was able to reach the stele, but as a result of heavy storms and lack of time his copies remained inexact. In the same year of 1898 Lehmann-Haupt scarcely escaped another attack by Kurds on the second highest mountain of the Armenian Highlands, Sipan. Under the backdrop of the journey of the German emperor Wilhelm II, this attack had an explosive effect, and the Ottoman sultan Abdül Hamid II felt obliged to pay a compensation of 60,000 German gold marks.²

The intensified studies and travels of the 19th century, but also the Russian-Ottoman war of 1877/78 led to improved maps. The most important German contribution to the cartography of the Armenian Highland was paid by the Berlin scholar and traveller Heinrich Kiepert (1818-1899). His particular achievement is the substantial combination of the different disciplines of his time, in order to reconstruct the cultural landscapes of ancient times as precisely as possible.³ Although Armenia did not belong to Kiepert's main areas of interest, and although he presumably did not enter the country during his travels to Asia Minor in 1841, 1870 and 1886, he certainly was acquainted with Armenia since 1839 through the materials by the Prussian general staff officers von Moltke, von Vincke-Olbendorf and Fischer. Most of Kiepert's maps on Armenia are executed on small scales, for he was interested in the illustration of coherent geographical areas, as shown, for example in his “map of the countries of the Caucasus and the neighbouring Turkish and Persian provinces Armenia, Kurdistan and Azerbaijan” (1854). Exceptional, therefore is Kiepert's large scale “Special Map of Turkish Armenia”(1877), which is based on maps of the Caucasian general staff. A particularly important contribution to the cartography of Armenia is Kiepert's map “The Surroundings of the Lake of Van”(1:500.000) which was drawn with the assistance of the Armenian student Nerses Sargsjan. Together with the historian Theodor Mommsen, Eduard Sachau und Waldemar Belck, Kiepert also contributed to the scholarly debate about the localization of the city of Tigranakert.

A late successor of these early achievements of mapping the Armenian Highland is the doctoral dissertation (1987) of Gerayer Koutcharian on the “Armenian homeland under the impact of historic-political developments since the Berlin Congress of 1878”. This study, together with six maps drawn by the author was published in 1989 at the Berlin publishing house Dietrich Reimer, which had already printed the cartographic work of Carl Ritter and Heinrich Kiepert.

As a subject of public German interest Armenia and the Armenians disappeared towards the end of the 1920s, and the Nazi rule completely terminated the scholarly interest. It nearly terminated the existence of Armenians in Germany, too. For a certain period the Nazi rulers and racist ideologists misunderstood the Armenians as a Semite nation, and German armenophiles did their best to convince the decision makers that Armenia was the cradle of the so-called "Arians". After the Second World War both the German public and German scholars tried to come to terms with Germany's criminal past. From the 1980s onwards, the research on genocide included other cases of genocidal crimes, such as the genocide committed during WW2 on the travelling people, the Sinti and Roma of Germany, and those countries occupied by Germany. Several centres emerged at German universities which serve the case study of the Jewish and other genocides of the Second World War and later. But the genocide committed by the Young Turkish regime against 1.5 million Ottoman citizens of Armenian nationality during 1915 and 1916 did not attract much interest. Surprisingly, there is no comprehensive contribution of the German historic science to answer the question of German involvement in the Armenian genocide, nor are there German monographs on the Armenian genocide on an academic level. More surprisingly, there are no comparative studies on the genocide of the Armenians and the genocide of the Greeks in Asia Minor during 1912 and 1922, committed by two subsequent Turkish regimes; there is also no academic study on the genocidal crimes committed on hundreds of thousands of Aramaic speaking Christians in 1915. As a consequence, the dimension of the crimes committed by the Young Turks and Kemalists during and after the First World War is not clearly understood.

Recently, there are at least four centres of genocide research attached to universities, namely the Technical University of Berlin, the University of Potsdam, the University of Bremen and the Ruhr University at Bochum. The Centre for the Research of Anti-Semitism⁴ in Berlin that is led by the German historian Prof. Wolfgang Benz focuses on the Shoah although a junior scholar is writing her doctoral thesis on a subject related to the Armenian genocide. The German-Jewish historian Prof. Dr. Hans Julius Schoeps is head of the Moses Mendelsohn Centre for European-Jewish studies⁵ of the University of Potsdam⁶. Prof. Dr. Dr. Gunnar Heinsohn who is a member of the international Association of Genocide scholars and author of the Encyclopaedia of Genocide⁷, which contains information on the Armenian genocide as well, leads the Rafael Lemkin Institute for Research on Xenophobia and Genocide⁸ at Bremen. An Armenian scholar, Dr. Mihran Dabag, leads the Institute for Research on the Diaspora and Genocide in Bochum. Out of 43 publications mentioned on this Institute's website⁹ as projects nine are related to the genocide of Armenians. Since 1999, the Institute also edits the bi-annual Journal on Genocide Research.

Related to genocide research are biographical studies, which explore and explain the lives of prominent German armenophiles and witnesses of the genocide, such as Dr. Johannes Lepsius¹⁰ or Dr. Armin T. Wegner about whom three doctoral dissertations have been published¹¹. In recent times, the critical publications by Wolfgang Gust and Prof. Tamcke led to a critical re-evaluation of Lepsius and Wegner respectively.

Of outstanding importance are the Johannes Lepsius Archives, founded in 1981 and led by Prof. Dr. Hermann Goltz in Halle. With the financial support of the Volkswagen Foundation these archives have been continuously researched and published in a microfiche edition. Attached to the University of Halle-Wittenberg and also led by H. Goltz is the MESROP Centre. This institution, which was founded in

1998, intends among other aims to introduce Armenian culture to the German public. An exhibition of the treasury of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia at Halle in the year 2000 under the patronage of presidents Robert Kocharian and Dr. Johannes Rau served this aim, as well as an international conference on armenology in the same year.¹²

Armenian "cultural presence", as exhibitions on Armenian culture and archaeology have been convincingly called by the Armenian scholar Dr. Claude Mutafian are indeed an excellent way to introduce Armenian issues to a larger public or audience. Since 1995, there had been three remarkable exhibitions of this kind, including the above-mentioned exhibition at Halle. The first one, "Armenia - 5000 years of arts and culture" was displayed in the Museum of Bochum in 1995.¹³ The second exhibition (Berlin, April 2000; Bonn, October 2001), organised by Meliné Pehlivanian displayed Armenian illuminated manuscripts and Armenia-related books of the State Library of Berlin whose history is closely linked with the development of Armenian studies in Germany.¹⁴

Whereas classical Armenian studies take in philology, history, cultural sciences and theology, contemporary Armenian studies include social and political sciences. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, the development of national democratic movements and ethnic conflicts attracted the interest of respective scholars. In particular the conflict in and about Nagorno Karabakh received the attention of many scholars. Researchers of area studies approach Armenia and Karabakh from different points of view, either as case studies of Eastern European, Post-Soviet (Post-Socialist) or transition studies, or as a part of Near Eastern research¹⁵. The mass exodus from Armenia and by Armenians from other post-Socialist states received even more attention. Only recently, German scholars and the German public have realized that Germany is a popular destination for many migrants. Research on migration and integration of migrants certainly has a future, and some universities such as Osnabrück and Münster have understood this challenge and reacted correspondingly. Since most Armenians have no chance to enter EU-states as migrants looking for jobs or careers, most of Armenian newcomers apply for political asylum. German state authorities and administrative courts, but also German and international NGOs specialising on refugee relief therefore depend on reliable country profiles and comprehensive, actual information on the political, social and economical situation in Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. They expect this information to be provided by scholars and academic institutions, which are considered to be an independent source.

Armenian studies in Germany, of course, are not limited to German scholars. Since the second half of the 19th century German universities and in particular those of Leipzig and Berlin attracted young Armenians from both parts of the historic Armenian homeland. Despite his frustrating experience at the Berlin Congress in 1878, the later catholicos Mkrtich Khrimian recommended Germany as a place of learning and study for Armenians. Their favourite subjects were and are philology, theology and history, for those are the subjects, where a native speaker of Armenian has a natural advantage. Until today, the language barrier is the main obstacle for non-Armenians, and it is deplorable, that non-Armenian scholars, in particular in social and political sciences are often unable to study Armenian scientific literature and sources. It is therefore good to see that Germany is once again attracting Armenian students and scholars, and it is even more gratifying that at some universities such as Berlin, Halle-Wittenberg, Göttingen and Bochum Armenian scholars hold academic posts, although there is no Armenian yet in the rank of a professor. In the one case known to me when a very capable and qualified Armenian applied for such a poster, he

was rejected for being "oriental", which is a rather racist reason for the rejection of an application.

Armenian studies, however, are not limited to universities or state libraries. The journalist and author Wolfgang Gust, who published a monograph on the Armenian genocide, and his wife Sigrid Gust are editors of an online-edition of German diplomatic correspondence on the Armenian genocide. It is a revised and extended edition of those 444 documents, which Johannes Lepsius published in 1919 under the title "Germany and Armenia". Genocide scholars and historians, who long since felt uneasy with the "bluebook" character of this partial edition can now study these documents, which are otherwise kept in the Political Archives of the German Foreign Office in their German original and English translation under <http://www.armenocide.de>.

The Centre for Information and Documentation on Armenia, founded in 1985 by Dr. Gerayer Koutcharian and myself, is another example of an independent, non-profit institution of Armenian studies. One of its main purposes is to serve scholars, publishers and journalists with reliable information on the history, culture and recent situation of Armenia and the Armenian people. An important and may-be unique achievement is the constantly extended collection of pictorial documents on the persecution of Armenians since 1878, in particular during 1915 and 1916, which had been used by many producers of documentary films in Germany and abroad, or by print media in order to illustrate publications on Armenia, in particular the genocide. Closely linked to the constant extension of this photograph collection is our research of the origin of alleged or genuine photographs on the Armenian genocide. For this purpose, we study and compare early publications of photographs on the First World War or earlier events in the Ottoman Empire. First results of this work had been published in 1992 in the "Armenian Review".¹⁶ The reliability of our work made us consultants for other institutions such as the Holocaust Memorial Museum of New York and photograph agencies as the Hulton Getty picture archives. The Centre's photograph exhibition on the genocide of the Armenians¹⁷ had been displayed since 1999 in Heidelberg, Cologne, Frankfurt/Main, London and Brussels. The Centre co-operates with the Museum and Institute on the Armenian Genocide (National Academy of the Republic of Armenia). Both institutions plan to publish an album with pictorial documents on the persecution and annihilation of Armenians on the occasion of the 90th anniversary.

Let me finish with some information about library collections. The attention which was given to the learning and studies of oriental languages and oriental cultures in the Prussian, later German capital Berlin made so-called orientalia an emphasis of the Churfürstlichen Bibliothek¹⁸ since its foundation in 1661. These were handwritings and prints from oriental countries. Travelling German scholars and ambassadors also obtained Armenian prints and manuscripts. As early as 1888 the Royal Library in Berlin possessed more than 95 Armenian manuscripts, today there are 119.¹⁹ The oldest manuscript of the Berlin collection was written in Vaspurakan in the year 1336.

The State Library of Berlin also possesses more than 150 early Armenian prints of the period from 1512 until 1800. Show-pieces of the Berlin collection of early Armenian prints are a "Gregorian calendar" (Tomar grigoryan), which had been commissioned by the Pope, and translated and printed in 1584 by Armenians in Rome in order to convince the Armenian Apostolic Church to accept the more modern system of the Gregorian calendar; furthermore a collection of hymns (Sharakanots) of 1661, printed in the Amsterdam printing-house of bishop Voskan Yerevantsi, and a liturgical collection (Haymavurk) of beautiful wood engravings in the Armenian style,

printed in 1730 in Constantinople. The richly decorated and illuminated three volumes of a Chashots girk (Lectioarium), printed in 1686 in Venice are internationally considered to be one of the most beautiful Armenian early prints in general. The Berlin State Library is particularly rich in early Armenian newspapers and journals; in all, it has 80 titles of the period from 1850 until 1920. Currently, the library collects the major publications on Armenia and Armenians in German, English and French. 23 Armenian journals and newspapers printed in Armenia and the diaspora are regularly kept in the Berlin State Library.

There is a traditionally close link between the management of this library and German armenology, for previous directors had been scholars of Armenian philology themselves and contributed to Armenian studies. In particular, these were the linguists Mathurin Veyssi re de La Croze (1661-1739) and Professor Karl Richard Lepsius, father of Dr. Johannes Lepsius and Director General of the Royal Library during 1873 and 1884. The prominent theologian Professor Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) was Director General during 1905 and 1921. Today, the above mentioned Melin  Pehlivanian, who is of Armenian origin, is responsible for all matters of Armenian interest and Armenian studies.

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