

Armenian Cilicia

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UCLA ARMENIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE SERIES
Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces, 7

MAZDA PUBLISHERS, Inc. ♦ Costa Mesa, California ♦ 2008

Grigor Zohrap's (Krikor Zohrab) caveat, written two years after the Hamidian massacres of 1894-96, brings into focus the concern of Western Armenian literati for Armenian survival and perseverance. The act of mourning can be cathartic, relieving tensions and channeling the maddening torrent of imagery and emotions. In order to survive a traumatic collective experience and go on with life, however, the nation must be able to confront and comprehend the calamity, then leave it behind and take the path of revival. Was the Armenian nation given that chance? Did history offer the circumstances for healing? The story of the Cilician Armenian tragedy provides the answer.

Armenians had repeatedly experienced persecution under Ottoman rule, but the magnitude of the Hamidian massacres was beyond anything they could anticipate. Nevertheless, the aftermath was still livable, and the Armenian people was able to recuperate. The massacres were portrayed in prose and poetry, the sufferings immortalized, yet in many cases glimmers of hope for a brighter future colored the morbid scenes of blood and death. In the wake of the massacres, Siamanto would forecast a bright

We should not lose our tenacity and falter in the face of life's calamities. We should confront them openly. . . . Our people need to sing and laugh in order to achieve mental and spiritual health without which progress is impossible.¹

Rubina Peroomian

THE TEARS AND LAUGHTER
OF CILICIAN ARMENIA:
LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF DESTRUCTION
AND REVIVAL, 1909-1918

daybreak.² Daniel Varuzhan (Taniel Varoujan) would hear the footsteps of the coming dawn.³ Optimism was slowly percolating. The retaliatory actions of revolutionary groups against Turkish and Kurdish oppressors inspired pride and worked toward restoring the national integrity and self-esteem that had been destroyed in the widespread submission and helpless surrender to the enemy's sword. While supplications to the Sublime Porte for amelioration of the Armenian situation and appeals to the European Powers for intervention were met with disdain and indifference, armed self-defense against repression was gaining momentum. Siamanto's credo, "Justice must be created and freedom fiercely seized," was becoming an increasingly popular response to repression.⁴ The heroic resistance of the Cilician Armenian stronghold of Zeitun during the 1895 massacres was an example to follow.

In such an atmosphere, the Young Turk revolution of 1908 and the restoration of the constitution in the Ottoman Empire was a blessing for Armenians and was received with much optimism and enthusiasm. Armenians hoped for the coming of a new era in which, as the Young Turks promised, Ottoman citizens of all races and creeds would receive equal treatment and would live as "brothers in this land of liberty." The massacre of Armenians in Cilicia less than a year after the revolution came as a shock to undermine the hope for peaceful coexistence.

Drawing evidence from the literary representations of life in Cilicia—or rather life and death in Cilicia—from the massacres of 1909 to the Genocide of 1915, this essay concentrates on the tears and laughter of the Cilician Armenians, that is, the destruction of the people, the ruin of their homeland, and, paradoxically, their struggle to survive and rebuild. In these literary representations, the individuality of the author is fused with the destiny of the victims, that is, these representations closely and truly

² See "Arshaloysnere" [The Dawns], a poem in the series "Diutsaznoren" [Heroically], in Siamanto, *Amboghchakan erker* [Complete Works] (Antelias: Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1989), pp. 30-31.

³ See "Jarde (1895-96)" [The Carnage (1895-96)], in Daniel Varuzhan, *Banas-teghtsakan erker* [Poetic Works] (Antelias: Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1986), pp. 141-49.

⁴ See "Dareru vrezhe" [The Revenge of Centuries], a poem in the series "Hay-ordiner" [Sons of Armenians], in Siamanto, *Amboghchakan erker*, pp. 41-42.

