


The Coverage of National Issues in the Pages of Egyptian-Armenian "Azat Bem" Periodical

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Համազգային խնդիրների լուսաբանումը եգիպտահայ «Ազատ Բեմ» պարբերականի էջերում

Եսոյան Մյասնիկ Ա.

պ. գ. թ., դոցենտ, Միջազգային հարաբերությունների ամբիոն, Հայաստանի Եվրոպական համալսարան,
ավագ գիտաշխատող, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ պատմության ինստիտուտ (Երևան, ՀՀ)

Ամփոփագիր. «Ազատ բեմ» ազգային, գրական և քաղաքական պարբերականը հետամուտ է եղել հայ ազգի սոցիալ-տնտեսական, հասարակական, քաղաքական և մշակութային կյանքի առաջընթացին, դատապարտել է Օսմանյան կայսրության հայահալած քաղաքականությունը: Եգիպտահայ պարբերականին մշտապես մտահոգել է Արևմտյան Հայաստանում տիրող իրադրությունը, ուստի պարբերաբար իր հրապարակումներով փորձել է ընթերցողին ներկայացնել արևմտահայության ծանր իրավիճակը: Ծաբաթաթերթը մեծ տեղ է հատկացրել արևմտահայ ազատագրական պայքարի լուսաբանմանը 1904-1907 թթ, նպաստել է Արևմտյան Հայաստանի գաղթականների ու չքավորների համար հանգանակությունների կազմակերպմանը: Բացի այդ, եգիպտահայ շաբաթաթերթն իր էջերում քննադատության է ենթարկել եգիպտահայության շրջանում տիրող բարբեր, մեծահարուստներին՝ հայ ազգի կենսական կարիքների ու խնդիրների հանդեպ ցուցաբերած անտարբերություն համար, ինչպես նաև լուսաբանել է 1903-1907 թթ. եգիպտահայ համայնքում տեղի ունեցած կարևոր իրադարձությունները, Ալեքսանդրիայի սահմանադրական պայքարը, թաղական խորհրդի գործունեությունը: «Ազատ բեմ» անդրադարձ է կատարել նաև 20-րդ դարասկզբին արևելահայության՝ հայ եկեղեցու գույքի բռնագրավման մասին 1903 հունիսի 12-ին ստորագրված օրենքը չեղարկելու համար մղած պայքարի լուսաբանմանը, ինչպես նաև մեկնաբանել է 1905-1906 թթ. հայ-թաթարական կռիվների ընթացքն ու ներկայացրել դրանց հետևանքները:

Հանգուցաբառեր և բառակապակցություններ՝ պարբերական, «Ազատ բեմ», շաբաթաթերթ, արևմտահայություն, եգիպտահայ համայնք, հայ-թաթարական կռիվներ, հանգանակություն, օսմանյան իշխանություններ, քրդեր, հարկահանություն

Иллюстрация национальных проблем на страницах египетско-армянского периодического издания «Азат Бем»

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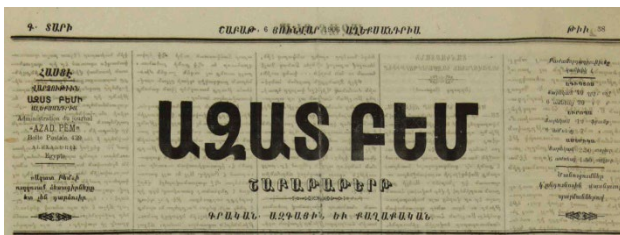
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Аннотация. Национальный литературно-политический еженедельник «Азат Бем» следил за развитием социально-экономической, социальной, политической и культурной жизни армянского народа, осуждал политику преследований Османской империи. Египетско-армянское издание всегда интересовалось положением в Западной Армении и Киликии, поэтому оно регулярно пыталось представить своим читателям тяжелое положение армян Западной Армении. Кроме того, египетско-армянский еженедельник критиковал нравы египтян-армян, богачей за их равнодушие к насущным нуждам и проблемам армянского народа. «Азат Бем» освещал важные события, происходившие в армянской общине Египта в 1903-1907 годы, конституционная борьба Александрии, деятельность окружного совета. «Азат Бем» также коснулся освещения борьбы восточных армян в начале XX века за отмену подписанного 12 июня 1903 года закона о конфискации имущества Армянской церкви, а также прокомментировал ход армяно-татарских войн 1905-1906 гг.

Ключевые слова и словосочетания: издание, «Азат Бем», еженедельная газета, Западные армяне, египетско-армянская община, армяно-татарские войны, сбор средств, османские власти, курды, налогообложение

Introduction

In 1903 in order to cover the important social and political events that took place in Egyptian Armenian life, Eastern Armenian and Western Armenian reality at the beginning of the 20th century Western Armenian writer-satirist Ervand Otyan published the national, literary and political periodical "Azat Bem" in Alexandria [47, p. 33]. In 1906-1907 "Azat Bem" was published by the Reorganized Hnchakians, who moved it to Cairo and turned it into a three days publishing newspaper [44, p. 324]. The Egyptian-Armenian periodical was staffed by M. Peilleryan, A. Chopanyan, A. Msrlyan, Avon and others with different code names such as Sarordi, Shahan, Armenius, Amatuni, Usartsi and others.



The periodical had a national democratic direction, followed the progress of the socio-economic, social, political and cultural life of the Armenian nation [46, p. 26]. The newspaper severely criticized condemned the Armenian persecution policy of the Ottoman Empire, commented on the consequences of the Russian-Japanese war, the course of the first Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution and other issues [45, p. 354]. Like the Egyptian-Armenian periodicals "Pyunik", "New Or", "Arshalouys", "Joghovurd", "Partez", "Arev", "Azat Bem" also covered the social, economic and political bleak situation of Western Armenians. If "Joghovurd" and "Partez" periodicals were satisfied with only providing information about the plight of Western Armenians, "Azat Bem" like "Pyunik", "Nor Or" and "Arshalouys" periodicals strongly criticized the Armenian persecution policy of the Ottoman authorities.

The coverage of the situation of Egyptian Armenians

Among the local national issues, Azat Bem mainly referred to the problems of the Armenian General Benevolent Union in Cairo /ACBU/, the National School, the British occupation of Egypt, the diplomatic and economic presence, the national awakening of Egypt, emphasizing that the Egyptian Armenian community should be aware about present and future existence of its second homeland. The periodical expressed its satisfaction that along with other structures dealing with the problems of

Armenian emigrants, AGBU was created. In addition, it devoted a lot of attention to the coverage of the constitutional struggle of Alexandria, the activities of the district council. It is known that only after the reaffirmation of the Ottoman constitution in 1908 the parliamentary elections in Alexandria end with the victory of the constitutionalists [45, p. 347].

"Azat Bem" criticized the customs prevailing among the Egyptian Armenians, the wealthy class for their illegal actions and indifference shown to the vital needs and problems of the Armenian nation, and this despite the fact that a significant part of the Egyptian Armenians witnessed the massacres in 1895-1896. "How great will be our surprise and joy when honorable exceptions are revealed" [2, p. 1]. Among such exceptions was the Egyptian-Armenian Grigor Teli, who provided 10,000 gold coins to organize the study of 30 Egyptian-Armenian students in Europe. In addition, the Egyptian-Armenian philanthropist donated 200 gold for the construction of the National College in Cairo. In turn Tigran Abroyan, an outstanding Egyptian-Armenian social and political figure, in his will made on April 24, bequeathed 200 gold to the Armenian poor in Cairo and 50,000 francs to the Egyptian-Armenian community to buy a plot of land near the national lands and provide the proceeds to the National Presbytery in Cairo [15, p. 1-2]. The periodical hoped that the example of the above-mentioned philanthropists would be contagious, and the rich people of the Armenian nation would wake up from the long national stupor [2, p. 1].

Yervand Otyan repeatedly criticized the activities of the Presbytery, considering it a body of bribery and hypocrisy. On January 20, 1905, Egyptian-Armenian Sargis Papazyan was killed in the office of priest Mambre Vardanyan, the deputy of the Presbytery of Cairo. After the death of Hovsep Ayvazyan, the deputy of the Armenian Presbytery of Egypt Mambre Vardanyan, did not have much authority among Egyptian Armenians, and using this opportunity the periodical called on the Egyptian Armenians to stand up and expel the deputy from the Presbytery [27, p. 2]. Finally on February 4, 1905, the National Provincial Political Assembly accepted Mambre Vardanyan's resignation from the leadership position due to "ill health" [28, p. 4]. On May 8, 1905, the provincial general meeting of Cairo elected the Mkrtich Aghavnuni as the leader of the Egyptian-Armenian community [17, p. 2].

One of the most common problems among Egyptian Armenians was alienation. About 80 percent of Egyptian Armenians were infected with alienation and preferred to create a family with foreigners, because it was very attractive from a

material point of view [25, p. 3]. The community structures, the Presbytery, had their share of guilt regarding the alienation of Egyptian Armenians. According to the news reached the newspaper at the end of 1905 during his visit to Galstyan College, the leader of the Egyptian-Armenian community seeing the Armenian history textbook, urged the director to give priority to subjects more important than the national history course. A few days later, the editor of the "Azat Bem" periodical, after meeting Mkrtich Aghavnuni, became convinced of the authenticity of the news [26, p. 3].

The Egyptian-Armenian periodical was concerned about the situation in the educational institutions of the Egyptian-Armenian community. The goal of primary education in every developed country is to produce a generation with a healthy body and a national profile. According to "Azat Bem", the problem of creating this description was neglected in Armenian educational programs, there were no appropriate teachers and textbooks. Although there have been drawn up many educational programmes, this issue seemed to be neglected in all programmes. The main part of the educational programs of the Armenian educational institutions in Egypt was the translation of the French educational programs, the same also applied to a part of the textbooks. The periodical called for creating new programs and textbooks, giving priority to the issue of preparing a generation with a national profile [16, p. 1].

"Azat Bem" paid great attention to the coverage of important cultural events that took place in the Egyptian-Armenian community in 1903-1907 [29, p. 2]. On June 2, 1904, the solemn opening of the Tigran-Yerkat Union took place in Alexandria, which was attended by around 4,000 representatives of the Egyptian-Armenian community. The weekly newspaper presented in detail the opening ceremony, the speeches and the names of the people who donated money for the construction of the square [5, p. 3]. On June 4, 1904 the unveiling of the statue of Nubar Nubaryan took place, which was attended by members of the Egyptian government, foreign consuls, representatives of the Egyptian Armenian community and ordinary Egyptians. The weekly newspaper described the solemn ceremony in detail, commented on the officials' speeches, noting that Nubar Nubaryan enjoyed great fame among Egyptians [5, p. 3-4].

Reflection of the Western Armenian Liberation Struggle

Initially, the weekly newspaper mainly focused on coverage of local issues, but since the third year, it has tried to keep national issues in the center of attention, to show a critical attitude to many selfish undertakings of a patriotic nature. The weekly

devoted a great deal of space to the coverage of the Western Armenian liberation struggle in 1904-1907, contributed to the organization of fundraisers for the emigrants and poor people of Western Armenia, and introduced Egyptian Armenians to national issues. The Sasun uprising in 1904 which was the last massive outburst of Armenian armed struggle in Western Armenia was of great importance during the liberation struggle in 1904-1907. The Egyptian-Armenian periodical informed that during the uprising on April-May, 5000 Armenians were killed in Sasun, 50 villages were destroyed [4, p. 4]. According to the private sources in Constantinople, the newspaper stated that contrary to the claims of the Ottoman authorities, a large number of unarmed and innocent people were killed in Sasun [6, p. 3-4].

Due to the massacres taking place in Western Armenia on May 2 1904, the Egyptian-Armenian community organized a protest in the hall of the Variete Theater in Cairo, which was attended by about 2,000 Egyptian intellectuals. After fiery speeches, it was decided to inform England, France, Italy and the USA about the Armenian massacres and ask them to intervene and stop the massacres [1, p. 1].

Reprinting the information from British "Tan" newspaper, the periodical informed that the Ottoman government on July 2, 1904, decided to grant amnesty to the captured citizens of Sasun, to rebuild 547 burnt houses, to allow the emigrants to return to their places of residence. Contrary to the announcement of amnesty, the Kurds continued to incite disputes in the Mush field [7, p. 3]. In June-August the appeals of the consuls of the European countries forced the Ottoman authorities to allow some of the emigrants to return to their homes. British vice-consul in Van Turrell, who visited Sasun twice during the summer, reported in a July 31 bulletin that the data published by Armenian sources about the casualties were exaggerated, because before the Ottoman troops entered Sasun, most of the population had already left. English Vice-Consul Turrell putted the number of Armenian casualties at around 900, while England's Vice-Consul in Mush Heathcote reported around 4,000 casualties. Turrell claimed that Armenian Hayduks burned villages in order to stir up European public opinion. After studying the circumstances of the massacre near Mush, Turrell came to the conclusion that the massacre was the revenge of the Turks for the killing of 17 Turkish soldiers in Kuraghu village on July 29 [14, p. 2]. In May-July 1904, the situation worsened in Baghesh vilayet and Mush field as well. The Ottoman authorities provoked Armenian-Kurdish clashes, during which many Armenian villages were destroyed [3, p. 2]. Taking the news from "Armenia" newspaper, "Azat Bem"

reported that on July 9 the Kurds burned down the Armenian market in Baghesh and looted the goods of Armenian merchants [10, p. 2-3]. On July 26 Kurdish chieftain Salo and his gang attacked the villages of Ichkilise and Kumlupuchak robbing and killing many Armenians. Other Kurdish terrorist groups destroyed the villages of Chupun and Karapazar, set fire to the Armenian shops in the city of Mush [8, p. 4].

The periodical has repeatedly asserted that it is the duty of Armenian journalism to regularly remind the Armenian society of its responsibilities towards the motherland, orphaned and orphaned brothers and sisters. In this regard, the Egyptian-Armenian community was quite active. In the middle of 1904, a fundraiser was organized for the benefit of Taron victims and refugees. The Armenian press of Egypt, including "Azat Bem", regularly called to participate in the fundraiser [11, p. 3]. A fundraiser was also organized in Ethiopia to support Taron's starving people. The collected 1324 francs were handed over to the representative of England in Addis Ababa Harenkton, who also participated in the collection by donating 110 talers [12, p. 2]. In October 1904, a check of 10,000 francs collected by the Egyptian Armenians of Alexandria was handed over to the French consul in Alexandria to be distributed to the Armenian refugees of Mush and Sasun. Most of the money was given by the Armenians of Alexandria, the Armenians of Cairo showed passivity in this matter. The periodical called on the Armenian community of Cairo to follow the example of the Armenians of Alexandria [13, p. 3].

One of the important episodes of the Western Armenian liberation struggle at the beginning of the 20th century was the Yeldiz assassination attempt, which aimed to execute the bloodthirsty sultan. On July 21 1905, the Sultan was miraculously saved after a bomb explosion inside the walls of Yeldiz. Despite being saved, Abdul Hamid 2nd was awaited by difficult mental experiences. After the Sultan's assassination attempt, atrocities and arrests became a common phenomenon for Armenians [24, p. 3]. In February 1906, the Ottoman authorities arrested and imprisoned in the central prison of Aleppo the wealthy Armenians of Marash, Hazarapetyan and Bilechikchyan, 7 residents of Zeytun. The Egyptian-Armenian weekly stated that the above-mentioned persons were imprisoned because they were Armenians. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Turkish authorities regularly carried out arrests among the Armenians of Cilicia, trying to keep the Armenians of Cilicia under their control, particularly the people of Zeytun [30, p. 3].

In March 1906, a difficult situation was arisen for the Armenians in Sasun, Van and Mush. The Kurds continued to destroy and loot the Armenian

villages, the government continued to collect heavy taxes by force [35, p. 2]. Many Armenian villages were depopulated and inhabited by Kurds. The weekly newspaper explained the Kurdish atrocities and the resettlement policy implemented by Ottoman authorities with the absence of visits of foreign consuls to Armenian provinces. In the beginning of 1906 only the French consul visited the Armenian emigrants to distribute money [33, p. 3].

After the Sultan's assassination attempt, tax collection intensified in Western Armenia. Regular Ottoman troops and Kurdish guerrilla groups conducted searches under various pretexts and confiscated the crops of the villagers [37, p. 2]. In order to eliminate the Armenian element, the Ottoman authorities created an artificial famine in the provinces of Western Armenia, carrying out heavy taxation, and also regularly arrested the Western Armenians. The Egyptian-Armenian periodical noted with irony that how can there be hunger in the Mush field, which was considered a storehouse of wheat? Customs enforcement was carried out by the most brutal means. Not having the necessary money to pay the taxes, the peasant borrowed money from the local Kurdish beggars at a high interest rate. Arrests played a major role in Armenian politics. In 1907 about quarter of the youth of the Mush field was imprisoned. Armenian prisoners were subjected to various tortures by the Turkish police, they were kept in dark basements without sunlight or fresh air [42, p. 2]. In addition to heavy tax collection, the cases of forced Islamization were increasing day by day in the villages of Western Armenia. In particular, in February 1907, the residents of Bagarij village in Erzurum, having no other option under the pressure of the Kurds, were going to convert to religion, and only Erzurum's vicar priest Ter Nerses Vahanyan managed to reconcile the Armenians and Kurds of the above-mentioned village, thereby preventing the forced Islamization of the Armenian villagers [41, p. 2].

Unlike other Egyptian-Armenian periodicals, "Azat Bem" was not only satisfied with providing information about Western Armenians, but also condemned the anti-Armenian policy of the Ottoman Empire, printed accusatory words against the diplomatic games of Western European countries, and proposed measures for the Armenian people to get out of the miserable socio-economic and political situation. If the famous Egyptian-Armenian periodical "Pyunik" of the beginning of the 20th century saw the liberation of Armenia only in the case of an armed struggle, and in the pages of "Arshalouys" armed self-defense, if it was not denied at all, was considered the last resort and peaceful methods of struggle were proposed, then

"Azat Bem" considered the idea of solidarity and cooperation of Armenian national political parties to be of primary importance and saw the salvation of the nation in unity.

Reference to the situation of Eastern Armenians

Devoting a lot of space to the coverage of the liberation struggle of the Western Armenians in 1904-1907, "Azat Bem" sought to keep in the spotlight the coverage of the Eastern Armenians' struggle to cancel the law on the confiscation of the property of the Armenian Church signed on June 12 1903. The Egyptian-Armenian periodical presented in detail the telegrams [9, p. 3] sent by Catholicos of All Armenians Mkrtych Khrimyan to the Tsar of Russian empire. Finally, after two years of struggle on August 1, 1905, the Russian emperor canceled the law he had signed, and confiscated lands, property and money were returned to the Armenian Church, and Armenian schools were reopened [21, p. 2].

"Azat Bem" also commented on the course of the first Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution. Yervand Otyan predicted the revitalization of revolutionary movements in Russia and the liberation of subject peoples, including Armenians, with the defeat of tsarism. In order to divide the revolutionary forces, the Russian authorities began to incite ethnic conflicts between the peoples of the multinational empire. In the Transcaucasus, the fanatical Caucasian Tatars were raised against the Armenians. The inter-ethnic conflict began in Baku, when the Tatars attacked the Armenians of Baku city at the instigation of the local authorities, during which hundreds of people were killed. The Egyptian-Armenian weekly newspaper widely covered the course of the Armenian-Tatar fighting and, referring to various Armenian and European newspapers, reported information about the victims of the Eastern Armenians of the fighting in each issue. Taking news from the French-language "Reform" periodical published in Egypt, the Egyptian-Armenian weekly informed that on February 20-23, 1905, armed Muslims attacked unarmed Armenians and looted Armenian shops and houses in Baku. Armenians turned to the nearest police station for help, but the police did nothing. The periodical rightly stated that the Armenian-Tatar conflicts were provoked by the Russian authorities, so that the wave of the revolution started in the Russian Empire in 1905 to be suppressed in the Caucasus [31, p. 4].

However, the massacres were not limited to Baku. Clashes moved to Yerevan and Gandzak provinces, bloody battles took place in Nakhichevan province, Artsakh and generally in places where the Armenian and Tatar population lived side by side.

At the end of May, clashes took place in Nakhichevan, during which 22 Armenians and two Muslims were arrested, dozens of people were injured, and many factories were looted. Muslims stole livestock of Armenian villagers from different villages. "The poverty of Armenians is indescribable [18:2]" the newspaper noted with regret. Referring to "Mshak" newspaper, the periodical informed that in mid-May Rakhim Khan, one of the grandees of Nakhijevan city, and other influential Turks convinced the local Armenians to open the shops. On the same day, May 12, the Turks robbed the Armenian shops and killed all the Armenians in the market. Among them Karapet Adamyan, A. Khalatyan was burned alive [19, p. 2]. In the middle of July, new battles took place in Nakhichevan, during which the villages of Ulis, Norashen, Khulunhan, Ushi were destroyed, Armenians suffered great human and material losses. Turks raped women in Chakrakh settlement, 37 men beheaded themselves in front of their wives and children [20, p. 2-3]. At the beginning of September 1905 Muslims burned oil wells and factories belonging to Armenians in Baku. In the province of Elizavetpol, the Tatars went around the villages with carts full of weapons and separated the local Muslims to kill their fellow Armenians [23, p. 4]. The weekly noticed that the Russian authorities were reaping the fruits of their short-sighted policy [22, p. 4]. At the end of the summer 1905, the conflict spread to the villages along the Baku-Elizavetpol railway and the Shushi-Elizavetpol highway. Muslim and Armenian elites acted with unspeakable brutality. The fire was further fueled by a number of Kurdish and nomadic tribes that attacked Armenian villages. Referring to the Gandzak correspondent of "Nor Dar", the weekly newspaper informed that on November 21, 1905, Turks kidnapped 24 Armenians from Gallar station. After receiving a ransom of 800 rubles, the captives were released except for two women. In captivity, Armenian women were persuaded to convert to Islam. The Egyptian-Armenian periodical noted that if the Armenians had captured a Turk, they would not have convinced him to become a Christian and would have released him [32, p. 4].

The Armenian-Tatar clashes ended in late September in 1906 when the Russian Revolution was in decline and there was no longer a need to destabilize the region. During the inter-ethnic fighting 1905-1906, Eastern Armenians suffered significant human and material losses, especially in Baku and Gandzak provinces, and emigration began. In order to find security and peace during the autumn 1906, both the wealthy and the poor of Shushi and the villages of the province began to migrate to safer places. The Egyptian-Armenian

periodical complained that emigration was a sad feature of Armenian history. Difficult situations could be overcome through the will power of endurance, while the Armenian lacked these qualities. "Armenians know a way, an easy way, to resort to hospitality [34, p. 3]"

The Egyptian-Armenian community was not left out in providing assistance to Eastern Armenians who suffered during the Armenian-Tatar clashes. In February-March 1907 10,699 drushes were collected for the fundraiser organized by the Egyptian-Armenian community for the benefit of Armenians in the Caucasus [40, p. 2]. For the benefit of Caucasian Armenians, a fundraiser was also organized in distant Sudan [43, p. 2]. On January 19, 1907, a gathering was organized at the house of Armenian Grigor Ishkhanyan in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, which was attended by almost the entire Armenian community of Khartoum. During the collection held after the meeting, 3130 drushes were collected [38, p. 2] and by May another 5,650 drushes were collected [36, p. 2].

The funds allocated by various charity companies and benefit commissions, local authorities were not enough to alleviate the socio-economic situation in the regions affected by the fighting. In this regard, the weekly noticed that the Russian authorities should allocate a lot of money to overcome the difficult socio-economic situation [39, p. 2].

Parallel to the significant human and material losses suffered during the Armenian-Tatar clashes, Eastern Armenians gained serious combat experience. The degree of confidence of the Armenians in their own strength increased, and the idea of the unity of the two parts of the Armenian people became dominant.

Conclusion

The national, literary and political periodical "Azat Bem" followed the progress of the socio-economic, social, political and cultural life of the Armenian nation, condemned the persecuting policy of the Ottoman Empire. The Egyptian-Armenian periodical has always been concerned about the situation in Western Armenia, so it regularly tried to present the difficult situation of Western Armenians to the reader through its publications. The weekly devoted a great deal of space to the coverage of the Western Armenian liberation struggle in 1904-1907, and contributed to the organization of funds for the emigrants and poor people of Western Armenia. In addition, the Egyptian-Armenian weekly criticized the customs of the Egyptian-Armenians, the wealthy for their indifference to the vital needs and problems of the Armenian nation, covered the important events that took place in the Egyptian Armenian community, the constitutional struggle of

Alexandria, the activities of the district council. "Azat Bem" also referred to the coverage of the Eastern Armenian struggle to cancel the law on confiscation of the property of the Armenian Church at the beginning of the 20th century, and also commented on the course of the Armenian-Tatar clashes in 1905-1906 and presented their consequences.

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