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THE MOST IMPORTANT NINETEENTH-CENTURY ARMENIAN ATLAS

Ատլաս կամ աշխարհացոյց տախտակք Ի պէտս ազգային դպրոցաց [Atlas or World Map for the National Schools]. Յօրինեաց եւ ծրագրեաց Հ. Աստուածատուր Վ. Աւագեան Ի Մխիթարեան Ուխտէն [Devised and Created by Astvatsatur V. Avakian of the Mekhitarist Monastery].

Author

Աստուածատուր Վ. Աւագեան [AVAKIAN, Astvatsatur V.].

Publication date

1860

Publisher

Pashtpan S. Astvacacni and B. Tpagrovatian for the Mekhitarist Monastery,

Publication place

Vienna,

Physical description

Quarto (275 by 205 mm): 2ff. half title and title, 21 double-page lithograph maps in blue with black letter punch text and original hand colour in outline, half title and title, and a few early maps with spotting, bound, half maroon cloth over brown marbled paper boards, rubbed.

Dimensions

Notes

One of the great milestones of Armenian language cartography, being the first Armenian school atlas and the second ever Armenian world atlas. It also contains one of the earliest maps to depict a proposed independent state of 'Armenia' cleaved out of the Ottoman Empire, a politically incendiary notion and powerful rhetorical device of the 'Armenian National Awakening'.

The atlas was made by by Astvatsatur V. Avakian, a monk at the Mekhitarist Monastery in Vienna, one of the world's most important Armenian Catholic missions, and printed by the monastery's press. The Mekhitarist Order of Vienna was an organization of the Armenian Catholic Church, that in the 1770s split off from the eponymous order based in Venice. Its mandate was education, and vast resources were expended on writing, drafting and translating religious, literary and scientific texts for the intellectual betterment of Armenian children and adults, both in Ottoman Empire and throughout the large Armenian global diaspora. Avakian himself had also been responsible for two books in Armenian, 'Exploring Natural History' (1854) and 'The Story of the Stuart Kings of Scotland and Queen Mary Stuart' (1861).

The monastery assembled one of the finest Armenian libraries in the world, and since 1812 operated a printing press in Vienna to issue its own works. The breadth and quality of the press's production contributed to the development and preservation of Armenian culture worldwide. The present atlas was one of the most technically sophisticated works ever published there, and was intended to educate Armenian high school students on world geography. It came on the heels of the first ever Armenian world atlas, which was issued in by the rival Venetian Mekhitarist Order in 1849. While the large folio Venetian atlas was far grander, it included only ten maps, and it would be many decades until any other Armenian atlas was produced with more maps than contained here.

21 beautifully-rendered maps make up the atlas with depictions of continents, countries and larger regions, but curiously lacking a world map. Several of the maps are the earliest, or amongst the earliest, Armenian language maps of the places depicted. Cartographically, the maps in the atlas are not based on original surveys, but neither are they direct copies of other European maps. Rather they seem to be adapted from them, with Avakian influenced by the popular German school atlases of Stieler, Sydow and Perthes. They are rendered in an artistic style and made by an extraordinary printing technique that shows the strong influence, if not the direct involvement, of the brilliantly original Vienna cartographer Franz Raffelsperger.

The Maps

1. ԵՒՐՈՊԱ. [Europe].
2. ԱՍԻԱ. [Asia].
3. ԱՓՐԻԿԷ. [Africa].
4. ՀՅՈՒՄԻՍԱՅԻՆ ԱՄԵՐԻԿԱ. [North America].
5. ՀԱՐԱԿԱՅԻՆ ԱՄԵՐԻԿԱ. [South America].
6. ԱՒՍՏՐԱԼԻԱ. [Australia].
7. ՖՈՐԹՈՒԿԱԼ ԵՆ ՍՊԱՆԻԱ. [Portugal and Spain].
8. ԳԱՂԴԻԱ. [France].
9. ԱՆԳԴԻԱ. [England].
10. ԻՏԱԼԻԱ. [Italy].
11. ԳԵՐՄԱՆԻԱ. [Germany].
12. ԱՒՍՏՐԻԱԿԱՆ ՊԵՏՈՒԹԻՒՆ [Austrian Empire].
13. ԲՐՈՒՍԻԱ. [Prussia].
14. ԲԵՂԳԻԱ, ՀՈԼԼԱՆԴԱ... [Belgium, Holland and the Northwestern German States].
15. ՌՈՒՍԻԱ ԵՒՐՈՊԱՅ. [Russia in Europe].
16. ՅՈՒՆԱՍՏԱՆ ԵՆ ՅՈՒՆԱԿԱՆ ԿՔ. [Greece and the Greek Islands].

17. ՕՍՄԱՆԵԱՆ ՊԵՏՈՒԹԻՒՆ ԵՒՐՈՊԻԱՅ. [Ottoman Empire in Europe].

18. ՕՍՄԱՆԵԱՆ ՊԵՏՈՒԹԻՒՆ ԱՍԻԱՅ. [Ottoman Empire in Asia].

This important map depicts the populous part of the Ottoman Empire in Asia, namely Anatolia, the Levant and Iraq, and embraces almost all of the territories of the Armenian ancestral homeland. The last independent Armenian state, the Kingdom of Cilicia, fell to the Ottomans in 1375, and from then on the Armenians lived under foreign rulers. In the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire. Many Armenians in rural Eastern Anatolia lived in poverty and had difficult relations with their Turkish and Kurdish neighbours. Conversely, many of the Armenian communities in the cities, especially in places such as Istanbul, Smyrna (Izmir), Beirut and Aleppo, were prosperous and relatively well-integrated into broader society.

Indeed, during the Tanzimat Era (1839-75), Armenians were accorded full legal rights and were soon serving at the highest levels of the Ottoman government. Ironically, during the same period, the regime of Sultan Abdul Hamid II presided over the 'Hamidian Massacres' of 1894-96, during which hundreds of thousands of Armenians were murdered in Eastern Anatolia. Then during World War I, the Young Turk regime turned on the Empire's Armenian communities, enacting the Armenian Genocide (1915-23), which resulted in the deaths of one and a half million Armenians. The survivors fled abroad, greatly increasing the size of the Armenian diaspora, while virtually no Armenians were left in their traditional homeland. While the First Republic of Armenia (1918-20) briefly saw the revival of first independent Armenian state in almost 550 years, at the end of the chaos that followed the war, only the Yerevan region was left to the Armenians, forming the Armenian SSR in 1920, a part of the Soviet Union.

19. ՀԱՅՊԱՏԱՆ. [Armenia].

This is the most important map in the atlas, as it is one of the very first maps to depict a proposed future Armenian state, superimposed over a current-day map of Eastern Anatolia and northwestern Persia. In creating the map, Avakian was clearly inspired by the 'Armenian National Awakening', the mid-nineteenth century movement that sought self-determination for the Armenian people.

The Awakening called for Armenians to be given full civil rights throughout the Ottoman Empire, while Armenians living in areas of a majority Armenian population, such as in Eastern Anatolia, were to be accorded local self-government within the Empire. Some Armenians, however, particularly those in the European diaspora, called for the complete secession of the Armenian Highlands of Eastern Anatolia from the Ottoman Empire, so as to create the first independent Armenian nation in almost 500 years. Such zeal led to the rise of Armenian militant groups that violently fought the Ottoman state with the view towards obtaining their ultimate objective.

The present map also assumes such a radical stance, clearly showing 'Armenia' as a distinct political entity, carved out of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Anatolia and the extreme northwestern corner of Persia. This 'country' features the printed name ՀԱՅՊԱՏԱՆ ('Armenia'), running across the area, while the 'national' boundaries are demarcated in pink manuscript. The country, roughly centred upon the city of Erzurum, extends down to take in Lake Van and eastwards to western slopes of Mount Ararat, the biblically famous volcanic massif that is the Armenian national symbol.

'Armenia' is shown here to take in all of the Ottoman Eyalet, or province, of Erzurum and part of the Eyalet of Van. Curiously, the map does not show 'Armenia' to include any of the traditionally Armenian territory then held by Russia, perhaps in deference to Russia's support for the Armenian cause. Covering the heartland of ancient Armenia, including many areas that then had a majority Armenian population, the map is a powerful device advocating an independent Armenia.

20. ՊԱՐՍԿԱՍՏԱՆ, ԱՖԴԱՆԻՍՏԱՆ ԵՆ ՊԵՆՈՒՉԻՍՏԱՆ. [Iran, Afghanistan and Belochistan].

21. ՀՆԴԿԱՍՏԱՆ. [India].

Exceptionally rare: we have been able to trace only two institutional examples of the present second edition of Avakian's atlas, the first being issued three years prior and of similar rarity. These are held by the Fundamental Scientific Library at the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (Yerevan) and the Charents Museum of Literature and Arts (Yerevan). Moreover, we cannot trace any sales records for either edition of the atlas.

Bibliography

National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (Yerevan) – Fundamental Scientific Library: AIV/19; Johannes DÖRFLINGER and Helga HÜHNEL, *Atlantes Austriaci*:

Österreichische Atlanten, 1. Band: 1561-1918 (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1995), Mech / Awa A 2 (pp. 703-4).

Provenance

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