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## АМЕРИКАНСКАЯ ГУМАНИТАРНАЯ ИНТЕРВЕНЦИЯ ВО ВРЕМЯ АРМЯНСКОГО КРИЗИСА В КОНЦЕ XIX – НАЧАЛЕ XX ВВ.

Статья посвящена истории американских гуманитарных организаций на этапе становления их деятельности, что является малоизученной проблемой отечественной историографии. В центре внимания находится их деятельность в связи с армянским кризисом в Османской империи. Преследования и массовые погромы армян, начавшиеся в 1894 г., вызвали широкий гуманитарный отклик в США. Благодаря средствам массовой информации движение в поддержку пострадавших приобрело общенациональные масштабы. Каждая новая вспышка кризиса (в 1909, 1912 и 1915 гг.) вызывала большой общественный резонанс в США. Три организации осуществляли гуманитарные операции в связи с армянским кризисом: Американский Красный Крест, «Помощь Ближнему Востоку» и «Американская Администрация Помощи». Все они работали в тесном сотрудничестве с правительством США, что является отличительной чертой американской гуманитарной деятельности. Наиболее плодотворным периодом их деятельности был 1915-1930 гг., когда американцы успешно реализовали

краткосрочные программы спасения в чрезвычайной ситуации, хотя программы строительства мирной жизни в послевоенной Армении достигли весьма скромных результатов из-за недостатка финансирования. В целом, кампания в поддержку армян знаменовала поворотный момент в истории американской благотворительности. Начавшись как спасательная операция скромных масштабов, она превратилась в первое в американской истории общенациональное благотворительное движение. Оно было беспрецедентным по степени вовлеченности средств массовой информации и участию известных личностей. Были собраны рекордные для истории американской благотворительности пожертвования. В то же время негативным аспектом кампании в помощь армянскому населению являлось патерналистское отношение американских благотворителей к спасаемым, убежденность в своей цивилизаторской миссии.

**Ключевые слова:** Армянский кризис, США, гуманитарная помощь, Американский Красный Крест, «Помощь Ближнему Востоку», «Американская Администрация Помощи».

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## AMERICAN HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION DURING THE ARMENIAN CRISIS IN THE LATE XIX – EARLY XX CENTURIES

The paper deals with the early history of American humanitarian organizations, which represents an understudied research area in Russian historiography. The paper features the activities of American humanitarian organizations in response to the Armenian crisis in the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian massacres, which started in 1894, aroused a mass humanitarian movement. Due to the broad use of mass media the movement became nationwide in its scope and achieved astounding financial success in terms of fundraising. Each outbreak of Armenian crisis (in 1909, 1912 and 1915) aroused mass public response in the USA. Three organizations were involved in relief work: the American Red Cross, the Near East Relief, and American Relief Administration. They were closely connected with the White House and the federal government. This was a characteristic of American humanitarianism. The most fruitful period of their activities was between 1915 and

1930, during which Americans successfully implemented short-term programs of humanitarian emergency, although medium-term programs of rehabilitation achieved small results due to financial obstacles. The conclusion is made that the Armenian campaign was a watershed in the history of American humanitarianism. Started as a small-scale relief operation, it turned into the first broad national appeal of its kind. It was unprecedented in its use of the media and support from celebrity spokespeople as well as volume of donations from American public, political and business elite. The negative aspect of the campaign was paternalistic attitudes. The confidence in their civilizing mission permeated humanitarian organizations' work with Armenians. Program to modernize the Armenians was essentially a project to „americanize“ them.

**Key words:** Armenian crisis, the USA, humanitarianism, the American Red Cross, the Near East Relief, and American Relief Administration.

For many years, the history of NGOs in general and humanitarian organizations in particular has been a subject of a sustained scholarly interest. Nevertheless, the history of early humanitarian organizations seems to represent an understudied research area. Traditional narratives surrounding their emergence are characterized by an overly positivistic and uncritical understanding of their activities and the sets of ideas they were founded upon. One of the reasons for that is the fact that historians often rely on biographers or papers of

members of the organizations in question, whose bias often prevent a thorough and critical historical analysis.

Historians have recently started engaging more thoroughly with the origins of NGO “precursors” with the objective of critically re-examining the early histories of international humanitarianism. Scholars such as S. Miglio, A.M. Wilson and D. Rodogno are good representatives of this trend through their work on the origins of the Red Cross and the Near East Foundation (Near East Relief) [14; 23; 12; 21].

As for Russian historiography, the early history of international humanitarianism has not been studied thoroughly yet. This paper is an attempt to analyze the relief work of American humanitarian organizations in Armenian crisis in the late XIX – early XX centuries. The focus is on three American organizations which operated in the territory of the Ottoman empire and modern South Caucasus: the American Red Cross (ARC), the Near East Relief (NER) and American Relief Administration (ARA). Their documents on field operations are scattered about a number of US archives. For instance, the papers of the Caucasus branch of the American Red Cross are kept in three different archives. American researchers have just started processing them, systematizing and preparing for publications [18].

The Near East aroused interest of Americans in the mid-1890s because of Armenian question. Armenian massacres in the Ottoman empire, which started in 1894, generated great sympathy and nationwide humanitarian movement in the USA. It is important to note that the 1890-s became a watershed decade for American international humanitarianism. Till then, humanitarian catastrophes in foreign countries attracted relatively limited attention of Americans. Sufferings of victims of natural disasters, political or religious persecutions in distant countries did not produce considerable humanitarian response in the USA. Americans made little effort to assist or intervene during the Greek struggle for independence in the 1820-s, or the great Irish famine of the 1840-s, or "Bulgarian Horrors" – Ottoman massacres of Bulgarians in 1876. Admittedly, this does not refer to Americans alone. As modern researcher Margaret L. Anderson justly points out, the difficulty to mobilize support to address "distant suffering" is a universal difficulty: "Our common humanity does not, in practice, compel action" [1, p.82]. International response towards Armenian massacres in Ottoman empire at the beginning of the tragedy is an illustration of such an attitude. British Prime Minister Salisbury, for example, who put a lot of effort to persuade the Great Powers to exert pressure on the Sultan, wrote that he did not believe that, outside England, "from Archangel to Cadiz there is a soul who cares whether the Armenians are exterminated or not" [5, p.120 – 121].

Eventually, Armenia's advocates succeeded in generating broad public backing. In Switzerland, Britain and the USA a mass movement was mobilized behind the Armenian cause.

In the United States the first people to direct their attention to "Turkish outrages" were Protestant missionaries. Americans had a long history of missionary activity in the Near East. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had been working in the Ottoman empire since 1819. By 1894, when Armenian massacres started, 112 churches, 15 mission stations and 268 outstations operated there, with 150 missionaries

employed by the ABCFM. With over 4 million dollars in property holdings, the American missionary presence in the region was much greater than that of any other European power [23, p.30]. Missionaries and their supporters helped to shape public opinion about violence in the Ottoman Empire. The most significant form of influence was information about the events. The ABCFM released missionary letters from Turkey, providing vivid, on-the-scene accounts to newspapers. The letters also circulated in many other printed forms like books, bulletins or pamphlets. Two important messages were formed. The first was religious nature of the conflict. The persecution of Christians in the Ottoman Empire was described as "the worst, the most cruel, the most barbarous religious persecution the world has ever seen" [23, p.33]. The other message was that Armenians deserved American sympathy for their long-standing devotion to Christ: Armenian monarchy was the first to adopt Christianity as its official religion in 301 AD. Missionaries reminded their fellow countrymen that Noah's ark had once rested atop Mount Ararat, that the Garden of Eden had once bloomed in Anatolia. The conclusion was to take action to rescue "innocent Christians" from "fanatical Muslims" [7, p.114 – 115].

Protestant missionaries were joined by other groups of Armenian advocates: Armenian immigrants in the USA, former abolitionists, woman suffragists, some others. These groups interpreted the events in secular terms. They believed that they defended "Christian civilization" from a "barbarous" other. This conviction helped sustain a nationwide humanitarian movement. At the same time, support for Armenia contributed to American self-understanding as a nation whose unique mission is to defend civilization itself [6].

In November 1895 the National Armenian Relief Committee (NARC) was established with its headquarters in New York City. It was presided over by Supreme Court Justice David J. Brewer, himself the son of missionaries. The NARC launched a major fundraising campaign on behalf of "Our Persecuted Fellow-Christians".

Both religious and secular Armenian advocates united their effort. They raised money for relief, published calls for aid, organized mass meetings and petitions to the Congress. Although the USA suffered severe economic depression at that time, 600 000 dollars had been raised for Armenian cause in 1897 [23, p.38].

However, material relief could not be delivered to suffering Armenian population as missionaries in Constantinople faced serious obstacles. The Turkish authorities restricted their movements around the empire as well as their financial transactions through Ottoman banks [2, p.95]. Their last resort for Armenian advocates was Red Cross as Turkey was one of the signature powers for the Red Cross Treaty of Geneva (1864), therefore, it had given its adherence to the concept of the international

organization [8, p.4]. The ABCFM and the National Armenian Relief Committee turned to the American National Red Cross for help. Its president Clara Barton wrote later in her memoirs: "The necessity for immediate action was urgent; human beings were starving and could not be reached... We had to open a door hitherto closed against the world" [3, p.276]. By that time the American Red Cross had gained valuable experience working with victims of natural disasters and wars both at home and abroad.

In February 1896 Barton and a small group of her colleagues arrived in Constantinople. Five relief expeditions were launched from Barton's headquarters. They provided sufferers, the majority of whom were farmers, with farming implements and material (plows, hoes, spades, seed-corn, wheat, sickles, scythes, etc.) and thus enabled them to feed themselves. They also provided for them cattle and other animals. The financial resources delivered by the Red Cross were spent on restoration of destroyed houses and construction of new ones. Medical relief was provided for the sick. Doctors managed to prevent the spread of contagious diseases (small pox, typhus, and dysentery). Taking into account the appalling conditions under which they had to work the doctors performed a heroic feat [10; 11; 22].

For a nine-month stay in Turkey (February-August 1896) the Red Cross accomplished a lot. Financially, 116 000 dollars were spent on relief of the sufferers [9]. It was a relatively small sum comparing with the money expended through Anglo-American missionaries. The difference is that missionaries' finances were used largely with the purpose "to save the hungry from starvation", whereas the relief through the Red Cross was devoted to "the putting of the poor sufferers on their feet again", and thus helping them to help themselves [3, p.317]. Reports on relief expedition of Clara Barton, the financial secretary and field agents were published in 1896 and are kept in the Library of Congress along with other papers relating to the expedition [20]. Some documents about the expedition are collected in C. Barton's book about the history of the American Red Cross [3].

The missionaries and the American Red Cross undoubtedly carried out a heroic service. However, relief workers could reach limited number of sufferers through the five Red Cross expeditions and scattered mission stations.

Americans did not lose interest in Armenian question later on, in the early XX-th century. Each new outbreak of the crisis – in 1909, 1912 and 1915 – captured attention of American public and provoked wide humanitarian response. The American press gave wide coverage of Armenian tragedy [19]. Although the modes of mass media at that time were rather limited as compared to today's channels of communication, the widespread use of print media (newspapers and religious journals, national

magazines and trade papers, posters) kept audience informed about the situation in the Near East and humanitarian relief in the region [13]. James L. Barton, the co-founder of American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, wrote that he was unaware of any weekly or monthly periodical that had not published one or more special articles upon some "phase of the work in the Near East." [4, p.389].

The newspapers were major contributors to the dissemination of information. Editors, cartoonists, columnists with their persuasive commentaries were effective in rallying support. After the First World War, when the censorship barrier fell, the American press got access to overseas photographs. Also, doors opened for moving picture companies to capture the situation in the Near East. Many of the photographs and "moving pictures" taken of orphaned children and the starving helped mobilize favorable American opinion.

The New York Times published hundreds of photographs and overseas reports on the situation in the Near East. The coverage was highly emotional, news items were illustrated by photographs of atrocities and devastation in Armenian villages. The paper urged the American Government to intervene and the public to donate to relief funds. The New York Times interpreted Armenian crisis in secular terms. "A fundamental concept of civil and social justice stands as a foundation of modern civilization, – wrote J. Greelman, the paper's special reporter in the Near East. – A deliberate massacre of Christians is an affront to civilization, not to be forgotten or forgiven" [6].

Newspaper coverage in the United States raised national awareness of the plight overseas.

A new phase of American humanitarianism in the Armenian question started in 1915, in response to another outbreak of Armenian crisis. The new phase was marked by involvement of the American Government and governmental agencies in relief work. In 1915 a group of influential men with political and ideological ties to the Woodrow Wilson administration founded the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. The new organization was the brainchild of James L. Barton, a missionary, and philanthropist Cleveland H. Dodge [18]. James L. Barton was the foreign secretary of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions in Constantinople. Cleveland H. Dodge, originally from a family of missionaries, devoted his life to philanthropy. Dodge was also a Princeton classmate of Woodrow Wilson. Barton and Dodge organized a multi-million-dollar relief campaign. They raised millions of dollars through public rallies, church collections, and assistance from other charitable organizations and foundations. The raised funds were delivered through the American Embassy in Constantinople and distributed through missionaries and consuls.

In 1918-1919 Woodrow Wilson granted his support to the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. He encouraged the federal government to donate relief supplies to Committee and this remained unchanged under President Harding's administration. Wilson also urged Americans to donate money in his open letters to the US public.

In 1919 the US Congress incorporated the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief and officially approved the Committee's efforts to organize food, medicine and refugee administration in the Near East. As the scope of the Committee broadened, it changed its name and became the Near East Relief committee (NER). Another favorable factor was the fact that Wilson was the president of the American Red Cross (ARC), which also helped to strengthen links between the American humanitarianism and the Government. The organizations were closely connected to the White House and the federal government, more specifically to the State Department. This was a characteristic of American humanitarian organizations [12, p.3].

Americans arrived in the South Caucasus after the end of World War I. The relief work in the region was taken over by Caucasus Branch of NER. The region was devastated by war, massacre, disease and starvation. The situation was aggravated by the influx of Armenian refugees from Turkey into Russian Armenia. According to expert evaluation, the scope of humanitarian catastrophe was so large that private donations from individuals could not resolve the crisis. An appeal was made to Herbert Hoover, president of the American Relief Administration (ARA), and to President Woodrow Wilson.

The collaboration of the three humanitarian organizations: the Near East Relief (NER), the American Red Cross (ARC) and the American Relief Administration (ARA) – with the federal government turned out fruitful. For a short period of time (January 1919 – July 1920) considerable funds were raised. 0,5 million dollars were raised by the American Red Cross while NER raised 10 million dollars. The Congress provided 50 000 tons of food supplies valued at 10 million dollars. Between January 1919 and July 1920, the total relief disbursed in Armenia and the Caucasus was valued at 28 785 426 million dollars [12, p.11].

One of main objectives for humanitarian organizations was to take care of children. The NER and the ARA cooperated with the European Children's Fund (ECF). The ECF asked Commonwealth Fund to assist in the feeding program of Armenian children. The British agreed to appropriate \$750 000 to the ECF for the purchase and transportation of food. The project was planned for a short period of three months (December 1919 – February 1920). After that, Americans hoped, the situation would improve and they could turn from relief work to rehabilitation.

The humanitarian organizations used modern scientific approach to their field operations. They thoroughly surveyed the region where aid was

supposed to be distributed and based their decisions how to allocate the resources on the results of the surveys. The territory was divided into 8 districts of Batoum, Borjom, Baku, Tiflis, Karaklis, Alexandropol, Kars and Erivan. The boundaries of the districts did not correspond to the administrative boundaries. The reports on relief operations do not indicate whether non-Armenian population was among recipients of feeding programs as NER statistics contains data relating to Armenians alone: their numbers, categories of the needy, their living conditions.

Modern scientific approach was also used in implementation of feeding program targeted at orphans. The relief workers strictly followed a caloric diet or daily menu of three full meals per day. The diet was balanced in accordance to the medical instructions and prepared under the supervision of specialists.

NER's top priority was children, particularly orphans. According to annual NER report of 1922 to the US Congress, 25 000 orphans were recipients of relief programs. Totally, between 1915 and 1930, NER took care of 132 000 orphans [18]. NER set up cocoa kitchens and soup kitchens for children. In February 1920, NER was operating a total of 47 soup kitchens in which 46 707 children were being fed [12, p.17]. NER opened milk stations for nursing mothers, newly born children and pregnant women.

NER documents imply that Armenian children were given priority over all other children. The reports are lacking information about the conditions of non-Armenian children or how many non-Armenian ones needed to be fed.

In refugee camps people were provided with tea or cocoa and bread in the morning and evening in addition to the noon meal. However, adult refugees were required to do some work in return. They repaired roads, built houses and did other manual jobs. This was not an exceptional requirement since humanitarian organizations based their work upon a popular Western concept of self-help, according to which idle recipients of charity could turn into "self-pitying parasites" and socially dangerous people.

NER also provided medical assistance. Hospitals for children, destitute inhabitants and refugees were opened. In all of the NER orphanages there were small infirmaries, which treated mild cases for a short period of time. Medical relief was extended to both children and adults through the NER free dispensaries or clinics. Patients were fed and clothed.

By 1925 an emergency phase of relief work was over. Many parents removed their children from the orphanages. In the districts of Alexandropol, Kars, and Erivan very few children were now seen on the streets. The number of children at hospitals went down. The effect of the feeding programs was already evident from a medical standpoint. As for programs for adult refugees, they were discontinued after 1924 due to a lack of funds. Under these circumstances



NER made decision to go from short-term programs of relief phase (food, clothing, provisional shelter and medical aid), to medium-term programs of rehabilitation phase. The purpose was to repair, rebuild and modernize Armenian society. The focus was supposed to be on health, education, economy and nation building.

However, NER faced financial obstacles at this stage of its work. It turned out that fundraising for medium-term programs was much more difficult than raising money for humanitarian emergency. Barclay Acheson, the NER leader in the interwar period, bitterly admitted in his report how difficult it was to persuade Americans to support constructive work: "Take the refugees out of those squalid camps and put them into pleasant villages, and the melodramatic tragedy that the public loved would be gone. Empty those barracks-like orphanages and place the children with simple, kindly, but crudely primitive foster-parents, and the satisfaction that both an individual and a nation derive from playing God disappears" [12, p.16].

To conclude, American humanitarian organizations must be credited for their heroic effort to alleviate the suffering of the Armenian people in the Ottoman empire and on its ruins in the aftermath of WWI. Started as a small-scale relief operation raising donations from the American public, the humanitarian campaign turned into the first broad national appeal of its kind. It was unprecedented in its use of the media and support from celebrity spokespeople. Nearly 1 000 men and women served overseas and thousands more volunteered throughout the United States.

The results were extraordinary: between 1915 and 1930, NER raised 117 million dollars, equivalent to 1,25 billion dollars today, to help Armenians. Hundreds of orphanages, hospitals and food distributions centers were opened, the lives of over one million refugees, including 132 000 orphans, were saved [14, p.20].

However, having said that, it is necessary to point out some negative aspects, namely paternalistic attitudes which permeated humanitarian organizations' work. The leadership of NER, ARC and ARA never suggested involvement of the sufferers in decision-making processes surrounding their own aid. In the case of the NER, the missionaries were to serve as moral and religious teachers, and technical

and political experts. The peoples they provided aid to were to play the role of the grateful pupil-recipients and nothing more. The NER experts believed in their own cultural superiority. Their "civilizing" perspective is visible in their reports and memoirs. As one NER article explained: "Having now saved them, it is up to us to make their lives for them. It is up to us to teach them how to take their places in the world and how to be good citizens" [21, p.60].

Another good example is attitude of Henry Morgenthau, the USA ambassador to the Ottoman empire from 1913 through 1916. He is known as the most vocal political figure who drew attention of American public, political and business elite to the Armenian Genocide by his publications [15; 16]. Yet, H. Morgenthau expressed his confidence in backwardness of Armenian people. "The Armenians are wholly unprepared to govern themselves or to protect themselves against their neighbors... What the Armenian state requires is a kind of receivership and we should take it over in trust and manage it until it is time to turn it over when it is governmentally solvent and on a going basis," he wrote in 1919 [17].

The confidence in their civilizing mission permeated humanitarian organizations' work with Armenians, especially at its rehabilitation phase. NER's program to modernize the Armenians was essentially a project to „Americanize" them. The motive for focusing programs on Armenian children was not compassion alone. According to James L. Barton and other NER board members, the time was now to help Armenians break free from the past and there was no better way to accomplish this than through educating Armenian children, especially orphans. Barton explained the need for "American-trained children who can be utilized as a mighty leaven to permeate society" [21, p.60]. Americanized Armenian children would alter the future course of politics and culture in the region. In other words, NER articulated an American exceptionalism in which American relief workers were transmitting to the next generation of Armenians the progressive, democratic ideals that made the United States a moral leader.

Although educational programs were not carried out on a large scale due to the lack of financial resources, their ambition was obviously paternalistic.

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