

THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES

VOLUME II

Foreign Dominion to Statehood:
The Fifteenth Century
to the Twentieth Century

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Relations between Armenians and Persians in the Erivan khansate soured after the Treaty of Gulistan, and several important Armenian leaders promoted a pro-Russian orientation. In 1814 the influential clergyman Nerses Ashtaraketsi left Echmiadzin to become archbishop of Tiflis, and there he engaged in agitation against the Persians. In 1822, Catholicos Eprem moved to Karabagh, already under Russian suzerainty. When a second Russo-Persian War (1826-1828) broke out, Nerses urged young Armenians to join the Russian military campaign against Persia and free their countrymen and homeland. Armenian volunteer brigades were formed. On October 1, 1827, Russian and Armenian forces under the overall command of General Ivan Paskervich took the fortress of Erivan, and on February 10, 1828, the Treaty of Turkmenchai ceded Erivan and Nakhichevan to the Russians. The border between Russia and Persia was established on the Araxes River, approximately where it has remained to the present time.

When the Treaty of Adrianople ended the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, Russian conquests were supplemented by the Black Sea port of Poti and the towns of Akhaltskh and Akhaltsikh, but several regions in which Armenians lived (Kars, Ardahan, Bayazit, and Erzerum) were given up to the Turks. With the fighting over and the Russian hold over Transcaucasia secure, tens of thousands of Armenians living on the Turkish and Persian sides of the new border migrated into Russian territory, while Muslims left for Turkey and Persia. Before 1828 there had been approximately 87,000 Muslims and 20,000 Armenians in Erivan khansate. After the migrations the number of Armenians reached 65,000 and the number of Muslims fell to just over 50,000, including about 10,000 Kurds. The city of Erivan still had a Muslim majority. Of its 11,400 citizens, more than 7,000 were Muslims and less than 4,000 were Armenians. Only later in the century, after population transfers following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, would the Armenians form a dominant majority in Erivan province, and not until the early twentieth century would Armenians constitute a majority in the provincial capital. Nevertheless, the most important result of the Russian conquest of Transcaucasia and the subsequent migrations was the formation of a compact Armenian majority on a small part of their historic homeland. It was to be here, in Eastern Armenia, that the future republics of Armenia—the independent Republic of Armenia (1918-1920), the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (1920-1991), and the “restored” Republic of Armenia (1991 to the present)—would be established.