The Population of Persian Armenia
Prior to and Immediately Following
its Annexation to the Russian Empire: 1826-1832

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Throughout history the control of Armenia, located on the crossroads of Europe and Asia, was deemed indispensable by the surrounding empires. The centuries of invasions and warfare eventually resulted in the loss of Armenian independence in the eleventh century and the beginning of the foreign domination of the Armenian homeland. Thereafter successive Mongol and Turkic dynasties fought over the control of the Armenian plateau. From the sixteenth century until the peace treaty of 1639, the land of Ararat was a center of conflict between the Turkish Ottoman and Persian Safavid Empires. Following that treaty the Turks took control of the major portion of Armenia, where they installed their own governors (Pāshās) and provincial boundaries (Pāshālīks, subdivided into Sanjaks); while the Safavids were left with the small easternmost section of historic Armenia, which they organized into the administrative unit of the Beg-lerbegi of Chūkhūr Sa'ad. The Arpāchāy (Soviet: Akhurian) River became the "boundary" between the two empires; lands west of the river were soon known as Western or Turkish Armenia, while the territories east of Arpāchāy assumed the title of Eastern or Persian Armenia. During the eighteenth century Persian Armenia was composed of the provincial boundaries or Khānates (subdivided into Mahals) of Erevan and Nakhichevan (to
which the region of Ordubad was added in the nineteenth century), while the remaining fringes of historic Armenia were included in the Khanates of Ganja, Karabagh, and the Kingdom of Georgia. The eighteenth century also witnessed the arrival of a new force in the region, that of Russia, which after a century of diplomatic and military efforts succeeded in annexing the entire Caucasian region and became the new ruler of Persian Armenia—soon renamed Russian or Transcaucasian Armenia.

Persian Armenia was the last territory to be conquered by the Russians during the Russo-Persian Wars of 1804-1813 and 1826-1828. Immediately following the Treaty of Torkmanchay (1828), the Russians began to set up their administrative apparatus in the region. Although the Persian government, in response to article III of that treaty, had submitted their tax records to the victors, these represented families and tax quotas (būnīche) and thus were not an accurate count of the number of people residing in Eastern Armenia. The Russian state felt it necessary to obtain more information on this newly-acquired region; hence Ivan Shopen (Chopin) was commissioned to compile a thorough statistical account of the area which had become the administrative division of the Armenianskia Oblast' ("The Armenian Province"). Shopen arrived in Erevan in 1829 and headed the survey team which gathered the Kameral'noe Opisanie ("Administrative Census") for the new government centered in the city of Erevan. Based on interviews with the population, as well as the Persian documents, the Kameral'noe Opisanie of 1829-1832 is thus the only accurate source for any statistical or ethnographical data on Persian Armenia before and immediately after the Russian conquest.
The population of Persian Armenia in the nineteenth century consisted of Muslims and Christians. The Armenians, who will be discussed shortly, formed the Christian population.

The Muslims

The Muslims were themselves divided into Persian, Turks, and Kurds, each of whom played a distinct role in the life of the region. The Persians, the elite of the land, formed a part of the settled population. The Turkic groups were composed of settled, semi-settled, and nomadic branches; while the Kurds led a traditional nomadic existence.

According to the Kameral'noe Opisanie, the settled and semi-settled Muslim population numbered more than 74,000 persons. This figure, however, does not account for those settled and semi-settled members of the Muslim community who left the area after the Persian defeat. Taking advantage of articles XII, XIII, and XV of the Torkmānchāy Treaty, members of the Persian ruling hierarchy and the officer corps, most of whom resided in the administrative centers, almost in toto left Persian Armenia for Persia proper. Furthermore a number of Persian and Turkic soldiers must have perished in the Second Russo-Persian War. It is estimated that close to twenty thousand Muslims left Eastern Armenia or were killed in the conflict.

It can be deduced, therefore, that the settled and semi-settled Persian and Turkic population of Persian Armenia, prior to the Russian conquest, approached some 93,000 persons. On the number of Kurds, the Russian figures list over 10,000 inhabitants of various tribes, but add, however, that some 15,000 had emigrated following the Russian appearance, making the total pre-war Kurdish population over 25,000 persons. The entire Muslim
population of Persian Armenia before the Russian annexation was, therefore, roughly over 117,000 people, of whom some 35,000 were not present after the Russian arrival.

Over half of the settled Muslims formed the main sector of the agricultural base of the province, while the remaining settled Muslims functioned as administrators and military personnel. Scattered in their small villages, the settled Muslims consisted primarily of the Turkic groups of Bayāt, Kangarlu, Aq-Qoyunlu, Qara-Qoyunlu, Ayrumlu, Qājār, and the Turkified Kazakhs, who, together with other Turkish-speaking and Mongol nomads, had settled during the westward movement and had become identified as peasants.

A large portion of the total population of Eastern Armenia was engaged in some sort of a nomadic way of life and utilized more than half the territory of Eastern Armenia for that purpose. All the Kurds, approximately 35,000 of the Turkish groups, and an insignificant number of Armenians practiced some sort of nomadism. Three kinds of nomads lived together in Persian Armenia: Semi-settled nomads, who depended upon agriculture and followed seasonal local migrations limited to thirty miles or less; settled peasants, who seasonally grazed their flocks on mountain pastures in the daytime and generally returned to their villages in the evening; and nomads with distinct summer and winter camps. The first two groups practiced vertical nomadism, following the sprouting spring grass up the mountains as the snow receded and back to their villages with the approach of winter or evening. In both cases, a substantial number of their tribe or village remained behind to produce the necessary crops
for the survival of the clan. These nomads, who formed the remaining sector of the total agricultural base, thus practiced a type of nomadism which resembled that of transhumance in the Tyrol. Some of these semi-settled people had branches which had retained their true nomadic way of life. Probably, those nomads who could no longer maintain the minimum number of animals in their flocks and who were impoverished by natural disasters, were forced to a semi-settled or agricultural life.

Many of these semi-settled villages were given in tenure to or were controlled by tribal chiefs; thus the semi-settled population, on the whole, retained some of its tribal structure and allegiances.

All the Kurds and some of the Turkic tribes on the other hand, were nomads with distinct summer (yeylāq) and winter (qeshlāq) abodes. Their grazing lands and their migration routes and territories were considered as the private domain of the large nomadic confederations, whose numerical strength and politico-economic connections, enabled them to manipulate the smaller clans. They wintered either in villages of a settled branch of their own clan, or in settlements near their winter grazing areas, where they would exchange wool, cheese, butter, and meat for underground shelters and fodder. The basic structure of these nomadic tribes was the clan. Divided into herding units generally consisting of five to ten tents, and averaging 5.5 people per family, these groups united into larger units during their annual migration and in time of war. The large number of nomads in the region was not only important for the economic wealth which they supplied (animal produce and handi-
crafts), but also for the cavalry forces they provided to the khans. The political structure of these confederations lay in a system identified by one author as Turkish. This system was structurally the most developed and followed the essential inequality among tribes. Although each tribe had its own chief, one tribe, whose leader became the head of the entire confederation, dominated. As long as that chief demonstrated the capability of protecting the interest of the entire confederation, he was obeyed and his clan received a priority in all important matters. Obviously rivalry among the members of the major clans, combined with the constant ebb and flow of power, could be, and was, used to the best advantage of the central administration. The Turkish and Kurdish nomads had their own separate clans and territories which they considered their private property. In fact, Persian Armenia was distinctly divided into regions belonging to one or the other. There was generally little contact between the two nomadic peoples and in some cases the traditional hostility among the Kurds against the Turks broke into bloody feuds.

The Turkic nomads firmly controlled the marginal grazing lands in the north and central areas of Eastern Armenia extending all the way to the south; while the Kurds dominated the eastern and western regions. The Turks, on the whole, were organized into slightly larger tribal groups and confederations than the Kurds. The Կարապապակ (Black Hats) with close to 5000, the Kangarlu with 6500, and the Ayrumlu with 3000 nomads each were the largest groups. Following them were the six confederations each with approximately 1000 members.
These were the Büyük-chobānkara, the Sa'otlu(Sa'otli), Seyyedlu-Akhsakhlu (Seidli), the Moghanlu (Muganli), and the two Qājār tribes of Shāhdelu and Sadaraklu.

The Ḵarāpāpāḵkh shared the control of the grazing lands of Vedi-basar with the Shi'i Kurds of the Ḵarāchōrli and Melli tribes. However the Turks fully controlled the mahals of Zangī-basar and the strategic northern mahals of Talin, Aparan, Darachichak, Seyyedli-Akhsakhli, and the central mahal of Ḵerk-bulāgh. The Qājārs resided in Vedi-basar near the Vedi-sufla and Sadarak settlements, and the Moghanlu stayed in Kārbī-basar. The Ayrumlu were located in Talin; the Seyyedlu-Akhsakhlu prevailed in the mahal named after them; the Büyük-chobānkara claimed rights to Ḵerk-bulāgh and Aparan but shared Zangī-basar with the Karāpāpāḵkh. The Sarashlu inhabited the northern region of Gökchāy mahal (on the northern slopes of the Aghmaghan mountains); the plain of Ahrija; and Darachichak. The Kerim-beglu, the Qafarlu(Ḵafarlu), the Gödaklu, and the Jam-melli concentrated in the Gökchāy Mahal, west of the lake, while the Sa'adlu were entrusted with their traditional homes in the pastures of Sa'otlu Mahal. The Kangarlu Confederation controlled all of Nakhichevan and reached into Sharur Mahal. They were comprised of the Pechenegs, Yurchis, Ḵizilli, Sarbanlar, Khal-khali, Pir-Hasanli, Ṣalāhi, Aqa-begli, Homā, Chaghatai, Karabeglu, Ḵara-Khan, Hajilar, Jemshidli, Biliji, Ḵizil-qeshlaqi, Kurdlar, Kara-dolahi, Shabanli, Ḵara-Ḵešarlu, Ṭarajali, 'Ali-abkarlu, Didavarlu, Bōlgarlu, Kurd-Mahmudli, 'Alianli, Ziyatlu, Bargushatlu, Panahlu, Beg-delu, 'Ali-khanlu, Sufilu, Arabsaglu, and Gölfar.

In general this confederation had the remnant of the Mongol tribes and some Kurdish groups mixed with the Turkic peoples. In
Ordubad the nomads of the Kilid group were the only pastoralists but their origin remains unknown; with some claiming that they were Christians who were forcibly converted into Islam and had adopted the nomadic way of life. Overall all the crucial borders of Persian Armenia were delegated to the chiefs of the above leading tribes who inhabited the area.23

The Kurds were themselves divided by religious affiliation into three groups; the Sunni, the Shi'i, and the Yezidis.24 The most powerful confederations were Sunni. These consisted of the three major groups of the Zilan (which included the Asni tribe) which dwarfed the remaining clans with its 10,000 members; the Jal'ali (having the Mesr-kendli, Ushaghli, Sakendli, Khalikhanli, Bilkhikhanli and others) with over 2000 persons and the Biryuki with 1500 nomads. Together with these were two smaller groups, the Radikanli, and a branch of the Karachörli. Various smaller tribes, ranging in size from eight to seventy-two families roamed independently.25

The mahals of Surmalu and Garni-basar were the main population centers of the Sunni Kurds. The Jal'ali summered in Surmalu and wintered in Garni-basar. The Zilan summered and wintered along the Aghri-dâgh chain in Surmalu and Darakend-Parchenis. The Biryuki summered in Gökçay Mahal on the northern slopes of Ahrija in Gözal-dara and Qaranleh and wintered in Sharur. The entire confederation of Zilan and most of the Jal'ali emigrated to the Ottoman Empire following the Russian conquest.26 In general the Surmalu Mahal suffered the greatest loss of nomads due to emigration.
The Shi'i Kurds were united into two major and three minor confederations. They were located almost exclusively in the Gökchay Mahal. The major group was the Karachörli of almost 3500 people who were composed from the following clans: Hasanli, Külkhanli, Shademanli, Sheilanli, Tahmasbli, Hajisamli, Sultani, 'Alianli, Bargushat, Bab'ali, Gülukchi, Galuji, Farukhanli, Qolikhanli, and Bozli. The members of this confederation wintered in the settlements of 'Ali-mehmet qeshlaqi, Vedi-sufla, and Chatkaran in Gökchay and Vedi-basar Mahals; and summered in the mountains of Garni-basar and Gökchay districts. The second largest group was that of the Mellî Kurds, around 2000 persons, who shared the grazing grounds of the Karachörli. The three smaller tribes were the 'Ali-khanli, Kölani, and the Piusan, who summered and wintered in the Gökchay region. The final group of Kurds, the Yezidis, were recorded by Shopen as having 67 families. According to him, the total Kurdish population, after a few years of Russian rule (1836), was reduced to some 850 families (around 5000 people).

There were also a group of nomads who did not belong to any specific clan, the gypsies. Three main bands of "Christian" Sunni and Shi'i gypsies moved around Eastern Armenia; the Mitrub, (Sunni) who wintered in the village of Kajeparakh in Zangi-basar, the Karachi band (Shi'i), who wintered in the settlement of Kesh-tak in Sharur Mahal, and the Bosha (Arm. "gypsy") who identified with Christianity and who lived in the suburbs of Erevan under the protection of the Armenian quarters. The above gypsies, totalling some 100 families, functioned as blacksmiths, veterinarians, entertainers, magicians, apothecaries, and jacks-of-all-trades. They travelled seasonally among the Kurds and Turks serving as a unique and valuable supplement to nomadic society.
The Composition, Location, and Migration Pattern of the Nomads in Eastern Armenia During the First Quarter of the Nineteenth Century
The Armenians

Eastern Armenia, until the mid-fourteenth century, had an Armenian majority. Despite devastations, particularly during the wars between the Byzantines and the Seljuqs in the eleventh century, small Armenian principalities maintained some political independence and their Christian faith. In fact it was only after the numerous campaigns of Timur, at the close of the fourteenth century, that the area became permanently settled by Turkic tribes, and Islam became the dominant faith. For the remaining Armenians in the region this was the beginning of the direct foreign rule.

By the nineteenth century the Armenian population of Chukhur-Sa'ad was so tired of the despotic rule of the local khans that they periodically fled to Kara-Kilisa, in the Pambak region, seeking Russian protection. The appointment of Hosein Qoli Khan Qajar t the governorship of Erevan in 1807 and the benevolent policies of 'Abbâs Mirzâ, the heir-apparent reversed the exodus and encouraged new settlements in the region.

The figures in the Kameral'noe Opisanie for the number of Armenians in Persian Armenia present a minor problem. The totals there include the many thousands of Armenians who emigrated from Persia and the Ottoman Empire into Russian Armenia following the Russo-Persian and Russo-Turkish Wars (1826-1829). By listing the newly-arrived immigrants in separate columns, however, the survey fortunately makes it possible to correct the discrepancy and to accurately count the number of Armenians during Persian rule by deducting the newcomers from the total. This is further facilitated by the fact that no major dislocation of the Armenian population occurred during the war.
# The Population of Eastern Armenia Before and After the Russian Conquest

## Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Armenians</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Estimated Total</th>
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<td>Khanate of Erevan</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Persian elite/army</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,000</td>
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<td>Turko-tatars (settled and semi-settled)</td>
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<td>12,539</td>
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<td>10,683</td>
<td>14,596</td>
<td>23,222</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kurds</td>
<td>5,223</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25,237</td>
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<td>Armenians</td>
<td>3,498</td>
<td>10,450</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persian elite/army</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Turko-tatars and Kurds (settled, semi-settled, and nomadic)</td>
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<td>8,105</td>
<td>11,968</td>
<td>17,138</td>
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<td>Armenians</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td>1,934</td>
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<td>Muslims</td>
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<td>143,000</td>
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<td>1832</td>
<td>Armianskaia Oblast' (Kameral'noe Opisanie 1829-1832)</td>
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<td>Muslims in Erevan Region</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>31,201</td>
<td>86,786</td>
<td>118,017</td>
<td>164,450</td>
</tr>
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</table>

## Note

As can be observed prior to the Russian conquest, the Armenian formed some 20% of the population while the Muslims approached 80% of the total inhabitants. Following the Russian annexation with the arrival of over 57,000 Armenian immigrants from Persia and the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian total formed 50% or half the residents of Eastern Armenia.
A number of Armenian historians, however, quoting the post 1830 figures, estimate the number of Armenians in Persian times to have been between 30 to 50 percent of the total population. In reality (as can be seen in the chart), the Armenians barely formed 20 percent of the population of Persian Armenia, while the Muslim Population exceeded 80 percent. In any case the Armenian population at no time prior to the Russian takeover formed a majority in Eastern Armenia. In fact although the Kameral'noe Opisanie indicates the existence of an Armenian majority in few mahals, this is only after the emigration of over 35,000 Muslims from the territory; thus there is no evidence of it being so during the Persian administration. Karbi-basar Mahal, with the Armenian ecclesiastical center of Üch-Kilisa(Etchmiadzin), seems to have been the only district where there might have been an Armenian majority. By 1832, however, with the departure of many Muslims and the arrival of some 57000 Armenians, the Christian population rose considerably and numerically matched the Muslims. But it was only after the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1855-1856 and 1877-1878, which brought more Armenains from the Ottoman Empire, and the eventual emigration of more Muslims, that the Armenians established a solid majority in the region. Even then, and up to the twentieth century, the city of Erevan had a Muslim majority.

The main center of the Armenian population was the city of Erevan and Nakhichevan and the central mahals of the Khanate of Erevan. A small number of Armenians lived as semi-settled villagers who depended upon agriculture but also followed
limited local nomadism. No Armenians engaged in large-scale nomadic movements, but preferred to either engage in a totally settled agricultural life or practice the many professions in the region. The Armenians lived in their own villages and in the city they had their own quarters (Shahri and Tapa-bashi in Erevan). Disregarding some exclusive professions (wine making for example) the artisans were not on the whole divided along religious lines. Both Armenians and Muslims practiced the various professions, but the Armenians although much less numerically, dominated almost all the professions in Eastern Armenia. In fact outside the cities they almost formed a monopoly of the majority of professions. The Mahals of Karbibasar, Kerkbulagh, Surmalu, and Sardarabad were the main Armenian centers and they generally lived close to each other and to their religious center. They were assessed the same taxes, had the same number of animals (corresponding to the size of their community), and the same responsibilities to their landlords.

Following the Russian conquest of Persian Armenia the ethnic makeup of the region shifted and, for the first time in over four centuries, the Armenian population, once again, began to achieve a majority in one part of its historic homeland. Although the Russians, did not live up to their promise of Armenian self-rule, Eastern Armenia slowly began to acquire a national character. In fact, in the Twentieth century, after the near-annihilation of the Armenians in Turkish or Western Armenia, the concentration of the Armenians in Russian Armenia, made the eventual renascence of the Armenian nation possible. The Armenian Republic (1918-1920) and later, the Soviet Socialist Armenian Republic (1920-present) would not have been a reality without the Russian (Christian) takeover of Persian Armenia.
notes

1. For a complete text of the treaty see J. C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record, 1535-1914, I (Princeton, 1956), pp. 96-102.

2. The survey was later updated (to 1836) and included in a lengthy volume published in St. Petersburg (1852) entitled: Istoricheskii pamiatnik sostojaniiia Armianskoi oblasti v epokhu eia prisoedineniia k Rossiiskoi imperii. The entire Kameral'noe Opisanie of 1829-1832 is translated into English in the forthcoming volume "Eastern Armenia on the Eve of the Russian Conquest" by this author. The notes referred here will follow the tables in that volume; all references to the survey will be identified with the abbreviation K.O.; while the text of Shopen will be marked as Shopen.

3. Since the Armenians were basically the only Christian group in the region, the terms Armenian and Christian will be used interchangeably. Georgians, Jews, Circassians, a few Russians, and small groups of various other Caucasian peoples lived in the territory but their numbers were not of any statistical significance (less than one percent).

4. The term Persian covers those who were in the ruling hierarchy and not necessarily the ethnic composition of the group. The men of the pen were generally of Persian origin, while the men of the sword were Turkic chiefs as was the Qajar dynasty. This ruling elite of Persians and Turks was a minority among the Muslims of Persian Armenia.

5. For more details on the Turks see W. Barthold, "Turks" in the Encyclopaedia of Islam (Leyden, 1936), pp. 900-908.

6. For more details on the Kurds in this region see T. F. Aristova, "Kurdy" in the Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 24 (Moscow, 1953), pp. 91-92.

7. K.O. Table A

8. The full text of these articles are in Hurewitz, op. cit., I, pp. 99-100.

9. See table in text.

10. Ibid.

11. K.O. Table B

12. K.O. Table C

13. See table in text.

14. Armenians and semi-settled Muslims also formed a sector of the agricultural base but were not as numerous as this group.

15. The Karapapakh for example were Turkified Kazakhs; while the Ayrumlu were part of the Rumlu tribe who had settled in the region after the fall of the Sultanate of Iconium. The Rumlu Confederation was composed of the Ayrumlu, Seidli-Akhsakhli, Sa'adlu, among others. They were part of the Shah-sevan who went into Persia with the Safavids but a
portion of the tribes remained in Armenia. For more details on the tribes see M.J. Shukur, Nażarî be tārîkh-e Azarbâijân (Tehran, 1970), pp. 16, 244.


17. F. Barth, Nomads of South Persia (Boston, 1961), p. 13, quotes a figure of less than a hundred animals, while T. R. Stauffer, "The Economics of Nomadism," The Middle East Journal XIX (1965), 291, suggests a figure of forty.


22. For a detailed study on the various aspects of nomadism see J. Berque, et. al., Nomades et Vagabonds (Paris, 1975).


24. The name of a Kurdish tribe which had a peculiar religious belief; a mixture of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and ancient characteristics such as angel-worship. For more details on the Yezidis see H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramer, Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam (Leiden, 1961), pp. 641-645; for a colorful account of the Yezidis in Eastern Armenia see A. von Haxthausen, Transcaucasia (London, 1854), pp. 253-263.

25. K.O. Table D


27. Ibid., p. 529.

28. Ibid., P. 541.

29. Mitrup/mitrub means musician, acrobat, or clown.

30. For more details on these gypsies see V. Papazian, "Hay boshanner," Azgakrakan handes (2, 1898), 203-275.


33. For example, at the start of the nineteenth century some two hundred Armenian families under the leadership of their secular chiefs, Abraham and Gabriel, fled the area of Erevan and sought Russian protection in the Pambak region, A. P. Berzhe, et.al. Akty sobrannye Kavkazkoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Komissieiì II (Tiflis, 1868), p. 605.

35. K. O. Table E.


37. See table in text.

38. K. O. Table E and F.


41. K. O. Table G

42. K. O. Tables H, J, K.


