

The Restoration of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia After Exile*

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The Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia played an important role in the life of the Armenians of Cilicia. The history of the Catholicosate is divided into two historical periods: “Cilician” and “Diasporian”. This article focuses on the “Diasporian” period of one of the Hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Church in the 1920s–1930s. The historiography of Armenia has never given serious attention to the investigation of the History of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, particularly with respect to the issue of the forced exile of the Catholicosate and the process of its diasporization in the 1920s–1930s. This article focuses on those issues, analyzing the process of diasporization of the Cilician See, its reconstruction under the new circumstances, and its establishment in Antelias (Lebanon). Not all refugees or migrants create a diaspora community, in fact, the most likely result of both voluntary and forced dispersions is assimilation into the host country’s culture. From the analytical perspective of Diaspora Studies, refugees or migrants transform their dispersion into a diaspora only when they insist on sustaining a community and maintaining a national identity. Theorists of modern Diaspora Studies suggest several factors under which dispersed people become an organized diaspora. For this, the role of national institutions is very important, for instance, spiritual-religious organizations. Thus, it is a very acute problem to understand the process of diasporization of a Church organization and its role in the reconstruction of Armenian communities. Different kinds of forced or voluntary migrations are still very common and active in the modern world. Thus, the case discussed in the present article could be useful for understanding many similar processes and historical examples. This research is based on archival documents (including those from the National Archive of Armenia and archival documents of the Catholicosate of Cilicia), the official journal of the Holy See of Cilicia, and existing studies connected to the subject. The analysis of these sources utilizes a comparative-historical methodology. Analyzing the collected data and using the mentioned research

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method the following problems are discussed and summarized in the article: the forced migration of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia and the process of the reconstruction of it under new circumstances; Antelias as a new spiritual and religious center of the Diaspora after the Armenian Genocide; the role of the Cilician See in the process of the diasporization of Armenian refugees in Syria-Lebanon; the activities of the Catholicosate in their attempts to preserve the national identity of Armenian communities in the Near East after the Genocide.

Keywords: Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, Armenian Apostolic Church, Cilicia, Antelias, Armenian diaspora, Armenian genocide, forced migration

Католикосат Великого дома Киликийского играл важную роль в жизни армян Киликии. Историография Армении никогда не уделяла серьезного внимания изучению насильственного переселения католикосата и процесса «диаспоризации» Киликийского престола в 1920–1930-х гг. В статье анализируется данный процесс, рассматриваются его реконструкция в новых условиях и становление в Антилиасе (Ливан). Не все беженцы, мигранты и национальные группы объединяются в диаспоральные сообщества, наиболее вероятным результатом как добровольного, так и вынужденного их расселения является ассимиляция с культурой принимающей страны. Группы беженцев или мигрантов превращаются в диаспору, когда они стремятся к сохранению национальной и культурной идентичности. В статье выделяются несколько факторов, при которых рассеянные группы людей становятся организованной диаспорой. Отмечено, что очень важной при этом оказывается роль национальных институтов, в частности, духовно-религиозных организаций. Актуальной проблемой является и понимание процесса диаспоризации церковной организации и ее роли в восстановлении армянских общин. Основой исследования послужили архивные источники (из Национального архива Армении и архивные документы Католикосата Киликийского), документальные материалы (официальный журнал святого престола Киликии), а также исследования и нарративы, связанные с этой темой. На основе анализа собранных данных обсуждаются следующие проблемы: вынужденная миграция католикосата Великого дома Киликийского и процесс его восстановления в новых условиях; Антилиас как новый духовный и религиозный центр в диаспоре после геноцида армян; роль Киликийского престола в процессе диаспоризации армянских беженцев в Сирии и Ливане; деятельность католикосата по сохранению национальной идентичности армянских общин на Ближнем Востоке после геноцида.

Ключевые слова: Католикосат Великого дома Киликийского, Армянская апостольская церковь, Киликия, Антилиас, армянская диаспора, геноцид армян, вынужденная миграция

Due to historical circumstances, the Armenian Church carries out its activities in “every continent apart from Antarctica” [Cowe, p. 430]. The activity of the Armenian Church outside its homeland became even more important, especially after the Armenian Genocide, when Western Armenia, which was part of the Ottoman Empire, was completely emptied of Armenians. During the First World War (1914–1918), one and a half million Armenians were massacred by the Turks [Hovhannisian; Zayas; Kevorkian]. After the genocide, as a result of forced deportations, hundreds of thousands of Armenians also left their homeland, taking refuge in many near and far countries. By the end of 1925, the mass movement of Armenians “had already stopped for the most part” [Չորսիսյան, էջ 65]. Based on the survivors from among these deported Armenians, between the 1920s and 1930s a post-genocide Armenian Diaspora was gradually formed.

The Armenians of Cilicia, which is located northeast of the Mediterranean Sea, were also massacred and deported. Armenians settled in Cilicia in the first century BC, and in the eleventh–fourteenth centuries an Armenian statehood was established in the territory of Cilicia [Chahin, p. 242–259].

Almost every religion in Late Antiquity appeared in both their native lands and among diasporic centers. The Armenian Apostolic Church also had a similar structure, containing several Hierarchical Sees and many dioceses beyond Armenia’s borders.

In 1375 the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia was destroyed. Cilicia became a battleground for Seljuks, Mamluks and other invaders. In the meantime, Armenia enjoyed a relatively peaceful time. The deteriorating situation in Cilicia on the one hand, and the growing cultural and religious awakening in Armenia on the other, led the clergy of Armenia to elect a Catholicos in Etchmiadzin. The latter was the original seat of the Catholicosate, but it had ceased to function as a Catholicossal See after 485. Thus, in 1441, a new Catholicos was elected in Etchmiadzin – Kirakos Virapetsi. At the same time Krikor Moussabegiants (1439–1446) was the Catholicos in Cilicia. Thus, The Catholicosate of Cilicia emerged as an autonomous entity in 1441 in Sis, Cilicia [Բարկեն Ա. Այուլխսերյան, էջ 15; Kouymjian, p. 3–10].

Henceforth, there were two Catholicosates: the Catholicosate of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin and the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in Sis. Both Catholicosates have their own jurisdiction and recognize each other’s status [Aram, p. 75]. The Catholicosate of Cilicia ranks second in the Hierarchical Structure of the Armenian Apostolic Church after the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin [The Catholicosate of Cilicia, p. 14–34]. The Armenian Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople followed them [Ormanian, p. 69–74; Atiya, p. 354]. The Catholicos of Cilicia is equal in rank but recognizes the primacy of honor of the Catholicos of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin. The heads of both Sees are consecrated by the same rite of the Church and enjoy the same privileges of the Catholicos, namely, the consecration of bishops and blessing of Holy Chrism [Tchilingirian, 2004, p. 149–152; Tchilingirian, 2008, p. 22–23].

Throughout history, the Armenian Church has not been merely a religious organization; it has had many roles, especially in the Diaspora. Thus, it is impossible to disagree with the following opinion of Khachig Tololyan: “The Church has not one role, but several. It acquired these conflicting roles gradually, in a process that began long before the genocide committed by the Young Turks during the First World War created the contemporary Diaspora. Much earlier, the Church had already ceased to be just one Armenian institution among many, charged with a specific spiritual mission that it could articulate, pursue, and accomplish” [Tololyan, p. 55].

After the signing of the French-Turkish agreement in Ankara on 20 October 1921, Cilicia was handed over to Turkey [Hale, p. 37]. The Armenians of Cilicia left their home for the second time to avoid further persecution, this time ordered by Kemalist Turkey [Tachjian]. According to some estimates, more than 300,000 Cilician Armenians were massacred.

The Armenian Genocide had a devastating impact as well as on the Armenian Church [Payaslian]. Miraculously, however, the Church was able to survive.

The Catholicosate in Sis was robbed and ruined by the Turks. Catholicos Sahak II followed his flock into exile. For the first time in its almost five hundred years existence, the head of Catholicosate of Cilicia left his historical seat in Sis and the Cathedral of St Sophia.

Usually, after forced emigration, those who find themselves in a foreign environment face two choices: to assimilate into a host society and lose their national identity or become a Diaspora and integrate into a host country, while maintaining their own identity. After their forced deportation, the Armenians were similarly faced with this decision.

Likewise, the Catholicosate of Cilicia might have either ceased to exist or tried to reorganize under new conditions, becoming not only a new spiritual-religious center for deported Armenians but focusing its own efforts on restoring the sense of community and preserving the national identity of refugees. In the end, the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia chose the second way and succeeded.

The forced migration of Armenians: From Homland to Diaspora

Before the Genocide, the Armenians of Cilicia and surrounding areas were under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. It had 30 dioceses at that time. The religious and educational life of Armenians of Cilicia were under the control of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. There were about 400 thousand Armenians under the jurisdiction of the Cilician See before the massacres [Թաթոնյան, էջ 158–179]. At the end of November 1921, the last Catholicos of Cilicia, Sahak 2nd Khapayan (1902–1939), along with his clergy and thousands of Armenians left Cilicia. The refugee Armenians settled in many countries, but primarily Syria and Lebanon. These countries were under the administration of the French mandate authorities. Statistical data on the numbers of the Armenians who settled

in these countries in that period is available: According to Sahak II, about 77,000 Armenians settled in Syria and Lebanon in 1922 [ՀԱԱ. Փոնդ 430. ցուցակ 1. գործ. 1416. էջ. 13]. According to another archival document, the number of Armenians reached 111,500 in [date], of which the number of local Armenians (who lived there before the Genocide) was about 25,000 [ՀԱԱ. Փոնդ 430. ցուցակ 1. գործ. 1416. էջ. 20]. In 1923, the report prepared by the Armenian National delegation, which was acting in Europe, mentioned the number of Armenian migrants was 87,750 [ՀԱԱ. Փոնդ 430. ցուցակ 1. գործ. 1416. էջ. 53]. Another source claims that in 1924 there were 131,700 Armenians in Syria, Lebanon, and Cyprus [Եղիայեան, էջ 282]. S. Tat, a professor at the American University of Beirut, gives the number of Armenians in Syria and Lebanon as 144,570, of whom 36,220 were considered natives [Վարժապետյան, էջ 34–35]. In 1940, according to the statistics of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, its four dioceses had a total population of 131,787 Armenians [Հասկ, 1941, մայիս-հունիս, էջ 80], and 148,907 by 1943 [Հասկ, 1944, մայիս-հունիս, էջ 100]. It is worth mentioning that not all Armenians who had migrated to Syria and Lebanon settled there. Some of them subsequently moved on to other countries. It should be noted, however, that the Catholicosate of Cilicia registered only those Armenians who were under its jurisdiction. Armenian Catholics and Protestants were not included in these data. In the 1920s–1930s, the number of Catholic and Protestant Armenians in the territories of Syria and Lebanon were about 20–30 thousand [Վարժապետյան, էջ 24]. Thus, in this period the number of Armenians under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus fluctuated at around 150 thousand.

After leaving Cilicia, Sahak Catholicos arrived in Aleppo on 1 December 1921 [Եղիայեան, էջ 209–210]. The Catholicosate of Cilicia had lost all the dioceses except the Diocese of Aleppo. A new period began for the Catholicosate of Cilicia. The Catholicosate did not have any regular seat for about nine years. The Catholicos either visited Aleppo and Beirut, or sometimes Damascus and Nicosia. This period of “wandering” was the most difficult for the Cilician See.

Even in that situation, Sahak Khapayan did not lose hope. He did his best to strengthen the position of the Catholicosate and to become the main center for the restoration of the community life of the exiled Armenians. In May 1923, the first blessing of the Holy Chrism was performed by Catholicos Sahak in Aleppo [Dadoyan, p. 52]. It was an important event in terms of the restoration of the spiritual-religious life of the exiled Armenians. The Catholicosate was doing everything to change its so-called “guest status”. Soon these efforts would bring important results. In order to legalize his status, in March 1924, Catholicos Sahak secured official recognition as the spiritual head of the Armenians in Syria and Lebanon by the French Mandate authorities [Ibid., p. 53].

The next important problem was the issue of the citizenship of Armenian refugees. By the proclamations of 30 August 1924 and

19 January 1925, the French High Commissioner granted the right of citizenship to deported Armenians [Եղիսյեան, էջ 297–298]. Thus, in fact, the right to lead the administrative affairs of the national life of Armenians in Syria and Lebanon was officially given to the Catholicosate of Cilicia by French Mandate authorities. That decision played a huge role in strengthening the position of the Catholicosate.

The “Will” of the Catholicos of Cilicia Sahak II. Efforts to preserve the Catholicosate

After its deportation, the See of Cilicia had lost almost all former dioceses and the number of clergies had also decreased significantly [Բնիքունյան, էջ 463]. In this context, many circles predicted the end of the existence of the Catholicosate of Cilicia.

The Armenian Church is a national church, so the question of the further existence of one of her Hierarchical Sees could not be decided by the clergymen of that See only. Therefore, it was necessary to understand whether the Armenians wanted to maintain the existence of the Cilician See and determine whether they were ready to contribute to its restoration. On 29 February 1928, Catholicos Sahak II published his famous “Will” [Շահիսյան, 1999, էջ 325–330]. That “Will” was a signal of alarm to all Armenians and, at the same time, an invitation to open a dialogue on the future of the Catholicosate of Cilicia.

“The Armenian Church is in danger both in the East and in the West” [Ibid., p. 325], Sahak Catholicos emphasized in his “Will”. In reality, the two Catholicosates of the Armenian Church were in a dire situation in the 1920s. “In the West”, the Catholicosate of Cilicia was in exile and with a vague future. “In the East”— in Soviet Armenia, the Catholicosate of All Armenians was targeted by the anti-church and anti-religious policy of the Soviet authorities. The latter carried that policy out in two directions. First, they tried to weaken religious organizations. To this end, unprecedented persecutions and violence against religious organizations and clergy broke out. Second, the Soviet authorities aimed to spread atheism among the people. It should have been pursued by “The League of Militant Godless”, which was established in 1925. An Armenian “Society of the Godless” was subsequently established in 1928. The motto of that organization was “The fight against religion is the fight for the culture” [Հովհաննիսյան, 2014, էջ 100–107].

In that challenging context, Catholicos Sahak tried to save the Cilician See. In his “Will” he reflected on the future status and role of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. He sent his “Will” to the heads of all dioceses, as well as to Armenian newspapers, representatives of the intelligentsia, and various national figures. Soon the representatives of the various circles of the Armenian diaspora responded to the “Will”. Expressed views and opinions differed and were often contradictory. However, the majority was in favor of maintaining the Catholicosate and invited Catholicos Sahak to elect someone from among the clergymen as his Coadjutor-Catholicos as a first step [ՀԱԱ. ֆոնդ 398. ցուցակ 1. գործ. 10. էջ. 91–92]. The Mother

See was also in favor of the further existence of the Catholicosate of Cilicia and channeled its efforts towards this goal.

Thus, most Armenians decided that it was necessary to preserve the Cilician See. It would continue to occupy its place in the Hierarchical system of the Armenian Church but would immediately operate under new conditions, with new problems and challenges ahead. The Holy See of Cilicia was to become a new spiritual-religious center for the Armenians of the Diaspora. The restoration of the Cilician See was not only a religious issue, but it also had political significance in the process of the formation of the Armenian Diaspora.

To achieve all this, the following three important tasks needed to be solved:

1. The acquisition new dioceses.
2. Determine the next successor of the throne of the Cilician See.
3. Find a new permanent residence for the Catholicosate.

The further existence of the Catholicosate of Cilicia under the new circumstances, in general, depended on resolving these problems.

The process of acquiring new dioceses and the strengthening of the Catholicosate

The problem of acquiring new dioceses was an urgent issue. Catholicos Sahak started the process of acquiring new dioceses from the beginning of the 1920s. After a concerted effort, the Diocese of Cyprus became the first reconstructed diocese of the Catholicosate in the mid-1920s [Հովհաննիսյան, 2021, էջ 93–130].

The next task was the resolution of the issue surrounding the status of the Armenian dioceses in Syria and Lebanon. The problem was that the Armenian Church dioceses in the territory of Syria and Lebanon belonged to the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. After the deportation of the Armenians of Cilicia to those territories, a special situation emerged. Most of those Armenians had previously been under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. In the new conditions, the latter wanted to continue maintaining their previous status. Actually, somewhat dual spiritual-religious power was created in Syria and Lebanon. On the one hand, those territories were under the administrative rule of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, on the other hand, the majority of the Armenians settled in those regions were under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. The problem could have been solved if the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem had transferred those dioceses to the Catholicosate of Cilicia.

Sahak Catholicos took the first steps towards resolving the situation in the middle 1920s. His desire to transfer the Jerusalem dioceses to his subordination shows that he had already lost some hope of returning to Cilicia. The further existence of the See of Cilicia is largely connected with the transfer of those dioceses to the Catholicosate. Finally, on 26 March 1929, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem decided to transfer the diocese to the Catholicosate of Cilicia [Երուսաղեմապատկան թեմերի փոխանցումը,

էջ 28–32]. This whole process took place with the consent of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. Thus, the Mother See was completely in favor of the reconstruction of the Catholicosate of Cilicia and sought to support that process [Ծիրինյան, 2002, էջ 54, 60].

Afterwards, five further dioceses were established under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of Cilicia: Aleppo, Beirut, Damascus, Laodicea (Latakia) and Cyprus. About 150 thousand Armenians were included in those dioceses. The transfer of these dioceses, in fact, came to legitimize the de facto situation that had arisen in Syria-Lebanon after the settlement of exiled Armenians. That significantly strengthened the position of the Catholicosate and, in fact, offered a strong guarantee of her further existence among the Diaspora.

The next important issue for Sahak Catholicos, who was about 80 years old, was the solution to the problem of his successor. He was well aware that the election of a new Catholicos after his death could become a serious ordeal. Therefore, the Catholicos decided to elect a Coadjutor-Catholicos during his lifetime. On 26 April 1931, one of the prominent clergymen of the Armenian Church Bishop Babken Kyuleseryan was enthroned as a Coadjutor-Catholicos [Բարկեն Ա. Կյուլեսերյան, էջ 1002]. Unfortunately, the Coadjutor-Catholicos Babken I passed away in 1936, after five years of intensive and fruitful activities [Հասկ, 1936, հունիս-օգոստոս, էջ 105–108]. The Episcopal Assembly of the Catholicosate of Cilicia convened in July 1936 and elected Archbishop Petros Sarajyan, Primate of the Armenians in Cyprus, as the Vicar General of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. The Catholicos Sahak died in 1939. In 1940, Archbishop Petros Sarajyan was elected a new Catholicos of Cilician See. Unfortunately, the new Catholicos reigned for only a few months.

Thus, the institution/tradition of the election of the Head of the Catholicosate was restored in the new Diaspora reality, which was a very important task for the further existence of the Catholicosate.

The establishment of the Catholicosate in Antelias: A new spiritual-religious center

For almost 10 years Catholicos Sahak did not have a regular seat. After wandering for many years, the Catholicosate of Cilicia relocated to Antelias, not far from Beirut, in 1930. A new period began for the See of Cilicia. This period is recognized as the “Diasporian” period, which continues to the present day. Antelias gradually transformed not only as the seat of the Catholicosate, but also to the important spiritual center for the Armenians of Diaspora.

It is well-known that the former orphanages operating under the auspices of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East were located in those buildings in Antelias. Following the demolition of those orphanages, the Near East Relief decided that these constructions were to be handed over for free to the Catholicosate of Cilicia, via a symbolic American lease of just \$1 [Բարկեն Ա. Կյուլեսերյան, էջ 1005–1010].

On April 7, 1930, a lease agreement was signed between the General Secretary of the American Relief Society, B. Achison, and the Catholicos of Cilicia, Sahak 2nd, by which the property was given for five years to the Catholicosate, which as a tenant, “should use the estate as a school for the preparation of clergy and teachers” [Եղիպյեան, էջ 332]. The newly opened Drevevank (Seminary) of Antelias, in a sense, would be a unique educational institution in the Armenian Church, because, as a result of the First World War and other subsequent political events, the Gevorkian Theological Seminary of Etchmiadzin, Armash Seminary, Seminary of Sis¹, as well as dozens of Armenian schools ceased functioning.

After that, in September 1930, Catholicos Sahak appealed to the Lebanese President asking for an official privilege for the functioning of the newly opened Armenian educational institution. Soon, the necessary formal authorization was obtained, which was also confirmed by the French High Commissariat. After these legal arrangements, there seemed to be no further obstacles to impede the opening of Dprevank. The church and the school in the Diaspora are two wings of the nation. The role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Diaspora, as an essential organization, is crucial [Tololyan, p. 55–66]. The role of school and education is none the less crucial for the preservation of Armenian identity. “The Armenian school with all its shortcomings and limitations will remain a real value for our nation... The only institution that insures us against the threat of allegation is our Armenian school” [Հասկ, 1939, մայիս, էջ 77] writes “Hask” – the official periodical of Antelias.

Dprevank was “an institution with double purpose” where their primary aims were: “1. Prepare priests for the Armenian Church; 2. Train teachers for Armenian Colleges” [Հասկ, 1932, հունվար, էջ 15]. The opening of Dprevank took place on 12 October 1930, on Holy Translators’ Day. A few months later, the building of the former pottery of the orphanage, where the opening ceremony was held, was anointed as a church by the name of the Holy Translators [Բարկեն Ա. Կյուլետերյան, էջ 1007]. The educational program of Dprevank had a distinctive feature, or, in other words, basic principle: it demanded from its graduate alumni to be instructed and trained in accordance with the “*life for the sake of the National Service* as much as possible” [Հասկ, 1932, փետրվար, էջ 36]. That principle makes it clear that graduates of Dprevank should be ready for national service both in the spiritual and the secular spheres. In other words, the school had set a goal of preparing active community figures, who were in great demand by the Diaspora communities. And the graduates of Dprevank were called to replace, first of all, the elder generation of national-community figures.

In 1935, the first students graduated from Dprevank [ՀԱԱ. ֆոնդ 409. ցուցակ 1. գործ. 4483. էջ. 1]. This was the first “academic harvest”, the

¹ In that period, only the theological seminary of Armenian Patriarchate Jerusalem continued to function among such schools, which released only clergymen.

need for which was strongly felt by the Armenian communities. In the course of time, Dprevank acquired a “pan-colonial character”. The need for the establishment of the school was evident after many years, as graduates of this institution went on to find themselves in responsible positions not only in educational institutions, but also in different community structures. Thus, the influence of Dprevank graduates goes far beyond the Armenian colonies of Syria and Lebanon, spreading various Armenian communities around the world from the Middle East to America.

Eventually, besides a seminary, a printing house, large cathedral, and administrative buildings were built, enhancing the mission and function of the Catholicosate. The newly established Printing House continued to play an important role in the activities of the seminary and the Catholicosate in general. Here, essential textbooks and monographs were published for educational institutions, which were acting under the supervision of Antelias.

In 1931, the official journal of Catholicosate was established, under the name of “Hask” (Ear of Corn). Besides news connected with the activities of Cilician See, it started to publish a number of religious, educational and historical publications. In May 1931, the first episcopal ordination took place in Antelias and in May 1936 five graduates of the Seminary received the order of deacon [Հասկ, 1936, հոնվար-փետրվար, էջ 28]. In March 1936, the first blessing of the Holy Chrism was performed by Coadjutor-Catholicos Babken Kyuleseryan in Antelias [Մեռննօրհնէք, էջ 1], for only the second time since leaving Cilicia.

All this shows that the Catholicosate, adapting to the new conditions, was gradually restoring and fulfilling its spiritual-religious functions. However, the purchase of buildings in the orphanage remained an urgent issue, as they were temporarily given to the Catholicosate. Finally, by the donation of Simon and Mathilde Kayekjyan, the estates of Antiles were purchased in May 1937 [Հասկ, 1937, մայիս, էջ 53–60]. This finally completed the process of establishing the Catholicosate in Antelias. Henceforth, the Armenian Diaspora had a new spiritual-religious center, which, in addition to its spiritual functions, would play a significant role in the reorganization of the Armenian communities of the Diaspora, particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and the preservation of the national identity of the Diaspora. In the following years, many new structures and buildings were planned and completed: A Chapel in memory of the one and a half million Armenian martyrs, a residence for the Catholicos, a new Seminary building, and the Mother Cathedral named after St. Lusavorich were constructed one after the other [Հասկ, 1940, մարտ, էջ 48].

The Catholicosate of Cilicia, after its establishment in Antelias, tried, as wrote the “Hask” journal, “To unite the life and organization of the Armenian people in the Diaspora around the Church” [Հասկ, 1944, օգոստոս-սեպտեմբեր, էջ 113]. Thus, after settling in Antelias a new era opened in the history of the the Catholicosate. In this “Diasporian” period the Cilician See as a religious entity also obtained some characters of the Pan-Armenian Diaspora organization.

The establishment of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias (Lebanon), and its subsequent activity among the Armenian Diaspora, is a classic example of the migration and transformation of a religious organization. Study of this case allows us to understand the restoration and diasporization process of this church institution. It means we can observe an interesting process of how the religious organization from a local, regional entity became a diasporic organization. The Cilician See not only overcame all the challenges it faced after exile and did not cease to exist, rather it also acquired a pan-Armenian, diasporic character. As a result of that process, the Holy See of Cilicia was not only restored in the new Diasporic environment, but also played a huge role in the reconstruction of Armenian communities in the Diaspora, especially in Syria and Lebanon.

Thus, a renaissance emerged in the history of the Catholicosate with the organization of dioceses and communities. In the course of time, and in response to the growing needs of the Armenian communities and changing realities, the scope of the Church's activities and service was broadened. The Cilician See had to adopt new priorities, which had to fit with the new realities facing the Diaspora. The Catholicosate of Cilicia was not only a spiritual-religious organization as it used to be in its former homeland. In Antelias the Cilician See transformed and obtained some features of the Diaspora organization. Soon, it became the core of the reconstruction of Armenian communities in Syria, Lebanon, and Cyprus. As a result of those efforts, exiled Armenians integrated within their host societies, reconstructed the Armenian communities of those countries and became the leading communities of the whole Armenian Diaspora [Migliorino; Boudjikianian; Messerlian].

Following the Genocide in the 1920s, the main focus of the Cilician See were its efforts to ensure the survival of Armenian refugees and itself. However, this was soon changed into prioritizing activities aimed at community-building and the preservation of national identity among the Diaspora. The Catholicoses Sahak II, Babken I, and Petros I revitalized the mission of the Holy See of Cilicia among the Diaspora in the 1920–1930s. Since then, the new “Diaspora Era” began for the Catholicosate of Cilicia, which continues to play a very important role in the life of many Armenians today.

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