

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CRISIS AND (DIS)ORDER:  
ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE HAMIDIAN REGIME IN THE  
OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1887-1896

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TOYGUN ALTINTAŞ

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**Note on Transcription and Dates**

For the romanization of Armenian, I have used the American Library Association – Library of Congress (ALA-LC) style. For transliterations from Ottoman Turkish, I follow modern Turkish orthography. For Armenian names that only appear in Ottoman Turkish sources, Turkish orthography was used. The dates are given in the Gregorian calendar.



## **INTRODUCTION: THE OTTOMAN STATE AND OTTOMAN ARMENIANS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

This dissertation seeks to examine and explore two interconnected processes through close analyses of successive and connected episodes of crisis and reconfiguration of social and political order. First, it focuses on the early expansion of the Armenian revolutionary movement in the Ottoman Empire in the decade before the Hamidian massacres of 1895-7.<sup>1</sup> Armenian revolutionary parties were formed in the late 1880s and early 1890s in an effort to promote Armenian self-defense against the aggression of Ottoman officials and pastoralist Kurdish depredations, and the long-term goal of establishing an autonomous or independent administration. The Hnch'akian Revolutionary Party/Social Democratic Hnch'akian Party (*Hnch'akian Heghapokhakan Kusaktsut'iwn/Sotsial Demokrat Hnch'akian Kusaktsut'iwn*) was founded by six Russian Armenians in Geneva in 1887. The name of the party was a direct reference to the exilic and influential political journal (*Kolokol*) of the famed Russian populist-socialist Alexander Herzen. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsut'iwn*) was formed and formalized in successive stages in the early 1890s. Over the course of the next two decades, the party went through several reorganizations during which its political center(s) shifted between Geneva, Tbilisi, Istanbul, and Erzurum.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the ascendant Armenian revolutionary party during the period in question was the Hnch'ak Party, the dissertation refers to the Armenian revolutionary movement as opposed to a specific party. This choice is based on the relative insignificance of exilic party affiliations and politics for the subjects and objects of Armenian revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire, particularly during this period. For example, many revolutionaries such as Armenag Ghazarian, who joined Hnch'ak bands in Sasun in the 1890s, and contributed to the organ of the Hnch'ak Party, fought under the banner of the ARF after the Hnch'ak organization suffered a blow during the Hamidian massacres. It is not suggested that party affiliation did not matter at all; it did for the procurement of arms and resources. Nonetheless, the dissertation's position is that the imagination and practice of a general alternative and oppositional Armenian political venue had precedence over hardened ideological commitments to party programs in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The growth of the Armenian revolutionary movement was contemporaneous with the popularization of radical opposition in the globe. During the period from 1870 to 1920, there was a marked surge in the organization of revolutionary societies and political violence in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the Russian Empire, colonial India, and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Revolutionaries adopted the use of symbolic violence against government officials as part of their program to mobilize the impoverished and disempowered masses, whom they claimed to represent and sought to uplift.<sup>3</sup> As the Armenian revolutionary movement grew, it would seek and form partnerships and alliances with both other revolutionaries, whose primary opponent was the Hamidian regime, and others who cooperated with them out of a principle of ideological solidarity.<sup>4</sup> Officials throughout Europe, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman

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<sup>2</sup> For the popularization of the “propaganda by the deed” see Marie Fleming, “Propaganda by the Deed: Terrorism and Anarchist Theory in late nineteenth century Europe,” *Terrorism*, 1:4 (1980) 1-22

<sup>3</sup> Richard Jensen, “The International Campaign against Anarchist Terrorism, 1880-1930s” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21.1 (2009): 89-109; For terrorism in Russia during this period see Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Anna Geifman, *Death Orders: the Vanguard of Modern Terrorism in Revolutionary Russia* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2010); Yulia Uryadova. “Bandits, Terrorists, and Revolutionaries: The Breakdown of Civil Authority in the Imperial Ferghana Valley, 1905-1914.” Ph.D., University of Arkansas, 2012; For the establishment of radical networks in the major port-cities of the Eastern Mediterranean during this period see Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); For the growth of the Anarchist movement in France see John M. Merriman, *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-De-Siecle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> The Hnch’aks, for example, joined the Oriental Federation, which was composed of Macedonian, Creatan and Greek revolutionaries. Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties in the Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963); In the early twentieth century, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation oversaw the establishment of a military academy for its cadres in Bulgaria with the cooperation of Bulgarian revolutionaries. Varak Ketsemanian, “Straddling Two Empires: Cross-Revolutionary Fertilization and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation’s Military Academy in 1906-07,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 4.2 (2017): 339-363; Bülent Yıldırım, *Bulgaristan’daki Ermeni Komitelerinin Osmanlı Devleti Aleyhine Faaliyetleri (1890-1918)* [The anti-Ottoman activities of the Armenian Committees in Bulgaria] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2013); In 1905, a Belgian anarchist assisted members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation for an assassination attempt against sultan Abdülhamid II. The sultan survived the attack. Houssine Alloul, Edhem Eldem, Henk de Smaele (eds.) *To Kill a Sultan: A Transnational History of the Attempt on Abdülhamid II (1905)* (Palgrave, 2018); Over the years, Armenian revolutionary activity would extend to the Qajar and Russian Empires. For a study of the role of the ARF during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, see Hourii Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911: The Love for Freedom Has No Fatherland*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001)

Empire organized international conferences in the hopes of preventing the popularization of armed struggle among and cooperation between political dissidents and radicals.<sup>5</sup>

There are several works that focus on the formation and popularization of the Armenian revolutionary parties in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The monographs of Louis Nalbandian and Anahide Ter Minassian are important resources for the history of Armenian revolutionary parties, particularly the evolution of their ideological program, their blends of nationalism and socialism as well as intra and inter party politics.<sup>6</sup> Ronald Suny's *Looking Toward Ararat* sheds light on the formative stages of the parties in the Russian Empire, their ideological connections with Russian populist-socialists, and their involvement in radical politics in the Russian Empire.<sup>7</sup> Gerard Libaridian's works on the revolutionary parties focus on their ideological innovations and contributions to Armenian politics.<sup>8</sup> Garabet Moumdjian's chapter on the politics of Ottoman Armenians during the reign of Abdülhamid II focuses on the contacts and clashes between the leading cadres of the revolutionary parties, the Armenian Apostolic patriarch, and the Palace.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Jensen. "Daggers, Rifles and Dynamite: Anarchist Terrorism in Nineteenth Century Europe." *Terrorism & Political Violence*, 16.1 (2004): 116-53; For a discussion of the specific Ottoman engagement with global anti-Anarchism, see İlkay Yılmaz, *Serseri, Anarşist ve Fesadın Peşinde: II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Güvenlik Politikaları Ekseninde Mürur Tezkereleri, Pasaportlar ve Otel Kayıtları* [In Pursuit of the Vagabond, Anarchist, and Malice: Travel Permits, Passports, and Hotel Records in the Light of Security Policies during the reign of Abdülhamid II] (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2014) 98-126

<sup>6</sup> Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*. Anahide Ter Minassian, *Nationalism and socialism in the Armenian revolutionary movement (1887-1912)* (Cambridge: Zoryan Institute, 1984)

<sup>7</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in modern history* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993)

<sup>8</sup> Gerard Libaridian. "What was Revolutionary About Armenian Revolutionary Parties in the Ottoman Empire?" in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the end of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Suny, Ronald G., Göçek, Fatma M., Neimark, Norman M. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 82-112. Gerard Libaridian, "The ideology of Armenian liberation. The development of Armenian political thought before the revolutionary movement (1639-1885)," PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1987

<sup>9</sup> Garabet K. Moumdjian, "From Millet-i Sadıka to Millet-i Asiya: Abdülhamid II and the Armenians 1876-1909," in *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, eds. Peter Sluglett and Hakan Yavuz (Utah: University of Utah Press, 2011) 302-350

While recognizing the significance of the ideological orientations of the revolutionaries, this dissertation shifts the focus to their local organizations and engagements with Armenian communities, government officials, and local notables in two different regions of the Ottoman Empire. In Central Anatolia, revolutionaries with contacts to the Hnch'ak Central Committee in Athens sought to establish a hierarchical structure of administrative committees, which would oversee the collection of financial resources through intimidation and directed brigandage, undermine the authority and standing of Armenian elites it deemed treasonous through assassinations, and seek to expand the general membership and popularity of the party. Revolutionary leaders also roamed the Central Anatolian countryside to encourage peasants to resist overtaxation at the hands of government officials. In the Muş plain and the neighboring region of Sasun, revolutionaries sought to win the allegiance of the peasantry by assisting them in their conflicts over resources with their Kurdish lords, and redirect extant martial practices of confrontation against government officials and soldiers. In both cases, the form of the revolutionary movement and the practices it utilized were shaped by the supporters and opponents of the revolutionaries within the Ottoman Empire.

The dissertation also argues that the revolutionary movement transformed the local political organization of Ottoman Armenian communities, the institutional politics of which had previously revolved around the Apostolic Armenian Patriarchate and the Armenian National Assembly.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the creation of an alternative venue of political organization, the Armenian revolutionary movement actively sought to undermine the authority and prestige of unsympathetic Armenian notables, whose political and social

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<sup>10</sup> Although from a later period and a different geography (Van in Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan, Kars in Russian Armenia) ARF member Rouben Der Minasian's memoirs contain important elements of revolutionary organization such as the collection of taxes from villages, establishment of revolutionary tribunals to convict suspected informants, and the challenges of propaganda in the countryside. The memoirs are laden with nostalgia and sometimes exaggerate the popularity and strength of both the ARF and individual revolutionaries. Rouben Der Minasian, *Armenian Freedom Fighters: The Memoirs of Rouben Der Minasian*, tr. James G. Mandalian (Boston: Hairenik, 1963)

standing was intricately connected to the aforementioned institutions as well as the Ottoman government. Finally, the revolutionary movement propagated a culture of truculence and confrontation, especially among the peasantry and the urban poor against abusive government officials and Kurdish pastoralist overlords. The revolutionaries sought to reshape the boundaries of the Armenian nation and realize their claims to control over Ottoman Armenia (and parts of Central Anatolia) in the form of an independent country (for the Hnch'ak Party) or autonomous administration (The ARF).

The second focus of the dissertation is on the contemporaneous evolution of the Hamidian regime, and its practices of minoritization and marginalization.<sup>11</sup> Sultan Abdülhamid II prorogued the Ottoman constitution and closed the parliament at the height of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8, and set out to organize an autocratic regime, which reestablished control over the governance of the Empire to the detriment of the Sublime Porte. The Hamidian regime also reemphasized the Islamic character of the Ottoman state and the importance of the primacy of its Sunni Muslim population in ethno-confessional hierarchies for its preservation. The Hamidian regime also oversaw significant advances in the expansion of the infrastructure of elementary schools and the formalization of the *nizamiye* court system.

The academic literature in the past several decades has focused on the infrastructural and institutional impact of Hamidian modernization. This was partly a reaction to the representation of sultan Abdülhamid II as a simple reactionary, who opposed all aspects of

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<sup>11</sup> Barış Ünlü's *Türklük Sözleşmesi* [The Turkishness Contract] is a recent attempt to conceptualize the dominant regime of ethnicity in state and society from nineteenth-century Ottoman practices to the present. The author does so within the framework of a social contract in the mould of Charles Mills's work *The Racial Contract*. Ünlü provides a literature review of the historiography on Hamidian modernization and posits that a Muslimness contract was negotiated between the regime and Muslim notables in the period the dissertation examines. While his conceptual intervention is certainly important, his reliance on secondary literature obscures the active involvement of the Hamidian regime in the making of ethno-confessional hierarchies. Barış Ünlü, *Türklük Sözleşmesi: Oluşumu, İşleyişi, Krizi* (İstanbul: Dipnot, 2018); Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997)

modernization by his political opponents.<sup>12</sup> François Georgeon’s expansive biography provides a detailed overview of the life and government of sultan Abdülhamid II.<sup>13</sup> Engin Akarlı’s doctoral dissertation examines the making and challenges of Hamidian fiscal and foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> Selim Deringil’s monograph studies Hamidian politics of ideological legitimation on both the domestic and international fronts.<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Fortna’s book traces educational reform during the Hamidian period, when the network of elementary schools was expanded to an unprecedented degree.<sup>16</sup> Avi Rubin’s study of the *nizamiye* courts traces the evolution of the Ottoman legal system from the Tanzimat through the Hamidian period.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the growth of the academic literature on the modernization of the Ottoman state under Abdülhamid II, the regime’s “nationalities” policies in general and Armenian policy in particular have received comparably little attention.<sup>18</sup> Janet Klein and Stephan

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of this shift see Benjamin C. Fortna, “The Reign of Abdülhamid II,” in *Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Reşat Kasaba, (Cambridge University Press, 2009) 39-40

<sup>13</sup> François Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II: Le sultan calife 1876-1909* (Paris: Fayard, 2003)

<sup>14</sup> Engin Deniz Akarlı, “The Problems of External Pressures, Power Struggles, and Budgetary Deficits in Ottoman Politics under Abdulhamid II (1876-1909): Origins and Solutions,” PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1976.

<sup>15</sup> Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998)

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) For an earlier work on educational reform during the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire see Selçuk Akşin Somel, *Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline*. (Leiden: Brill, 2001)

<sup>17</sup> Avi Rubin, *Ottoman Nizamiye court: law and modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Avi Rubin, “From Legal Representation to Advocacy: Attorneys and Clients in the Ottoman Nizamiye Courts,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 44 (2012): 111–127

<sup>18</sup> Recent works, which have focused on the politics of nationalities during the late Ottoman period, have approached the topic from the viewpoint of the non-Muslim communities. For an enlightening study of Ottoman Jews’ understanding and practice of Ottoman citizenship in the last decades of the Empire, see Julia Philips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and imperial citizenship in the modern era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For the shifting politics of Ottomanism during the Hamidian and Second Constitutional periods among the Ottoman Greek community, see Sia Anagnostopoulou “The ‘Nation’ of the *Rum* Sings of Its Sultan: The Many Faces of Ottomanism,” in *Economy and Society on Both Shores of the Aegean*, eds. Lorans Tanatar Baruh and Vangelis Kechriotis, (Athens: Alpha Bank Historical Archives, 2010) 79-105; I should also add that studies have not been limited to the realm of the political relationship between non-Muslim communities and the state. Cultural and linguistic ties between non-Muslim communities and Turcophone Muslim intellectuals have also been examined by scholars. For some notable examples see Orit Bashkin, “‘Religious Hatred Shall Disapper From the Land’ – Iraqi Jews as Ottoman Subjects,” *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4.3 (2010): 305-323; Murat Cankara, “Rethinking Ottoman

Astourian touch upon the topic in their respective studies of the establishment of Hamidiye regiments and the impact of land tenure in the evolution of the “Armenian Question”. Klein emphasizes the security concerns of the Hamidian regime vis-à-vis Russia in their decision to arm prominent pastoralist tribes in Ottoman Kurdistan/Armenia. From this perspective, the deterioration of the conditions of provincial Armenians is an indirect (but foreseeable) aspect of the Hamidian regime’s priorities in the Ottoman East.<sup>19</sup> Astourian, on the other hand, assigns a more active role to the state in the changing conditions of Armenians, and particularly the increasing frequency by which Armenian land was being confiscated by Kurdish pastoralists in the east and refugees from the Caucasus in Cilicia.<sup>20</sup> While Astourian’s emphasis on the role of the government is apt, he is less attuned to the changes within the Ottoman state over the nineteenth century, and claims that Turkish and Kurdish elites sabotaged the Tanzimat reforms from their inception. What had, in fact, made the Hamidian shift more discernible and disturbing for provincial Armenians was that it was not a matter of gradual deterioration, but a fundamental shift: the Hamidian regime actively sought to dismantle whatever measure of protection the Tanzimat had managed to establish in the previous decades. Much of the rest of the academic literature on Hamidian policy towards the Armenians focuses on the Hamidian massacres of 1895-7.<sup>21</sup> The Hamidian massacres were a

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Cross-Cultural Encounters: Turks and the Armenian Alphabet,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 51.1 (2015) 1-16; Johann Strauss, “The Millets and the Ottoman Language: The Contribution of Ottoman Greeks to Ottoman Letters (19th -20th Centuries),” *Die Welt des Islam* ,25.2 (1995) 189-249; Masayuki Ueno, “One Script, Two Languages: Garabed Panosian and his Armeno-Turkish Newspapers in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 52.4 (2016) 605-622; For important studies on inter-confessional relations and the politics of Ottomanism after the 1908 Revolution, see Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2014); Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010)

<sup>19</sup> Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Stephan H. Astourian, “The Silence of the Land: Agrarian Relations, Ethnicity, and Power,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the end of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Suny, Ronald G., Göçek, Fatma M., Neimark, Norman M. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 55-81

<sup>21</sup> For one of the first academic studies on the topic, see Robert Melson “A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894-1896,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 24.3 (1982) 481-

series of pogroms and massacres, which resulted in the deaths, mass conversions, and the flight of tens of thousands of Ottoman Armenians in different parts of the Empire.<sup>22</sup> Most of these studies investigate the extent to which the Palace was involved in the organization and execution of the massacres and pogroms, and argue that its involvement was indirect, and mostly reactive to the growing popularity of the Armenian revolutionary movement.<sup>23</sup>

This dissertation argues that the Hamidian regime sought to first systematically undo the integration of Ottoman Armenians into the governance of the Empire, which had been attempted with the Tanzimat. This was followed by the Palace's concerted efforts to marginalize Ottoman Armenians and reduce them to imperial pariahs, whose rights to the preservation of life, property, and honor were precarious. For example, the Palace aggressively enforced the application of discriminatory judicial practices throughout the Empire; while egregious Muslim offenders against Armenians were acquitted in high-profile cases, hundreds of Armenians were interrogated, imprisoned and tortured under trumped-up

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509; For a recent study of the construction of the Hamidian fictions about the massacres, see Edip Gölbaşı, "The Official Conceptualization of the anti-Armenian Riots of 1895-1897," in *Études arméniennes contemporaines*, 10 (2018); For another overview of the massacres that implies the indirect responsibility of the Hamidian regime, see Selim Deringil, "Abdülhamid Döneminde Ermeni Meselesi," [The Armenian Question during the period of Abdülhamid] in *1915: Siyaset, Tehcir, Soykırım*, eds. Fikret Adanır and Oktay Özel (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2015)

<sup>22</sup> For the wave of Armenian mass conversions to Islam and the Hamidian regime's response after the massacres, see Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 197-238; Selim Deringil, "The Armenian Question is Finally Closed': Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895-1897," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51.2 (200) 344-371

<sup>23</sup> A notable exception is Edhem Eldem's study of the anti-Armenian pogrom in Istanbul in 1896, which began after the ARF take over of the Ottoman Bank. Eldem implies that there is considerable evidence which suggests that the government played a role in the organization of the anti-Armenian violence. Edhem Eldem, "26 Ağustos 1896 "Banka Vakası" ve 1896 "Ermeni Olayları," [The Bank Incident of 26 August 1896 and the 1896 Armenian Events] in *İmparatorluğun Çöküş Döneminde Osmanlı Ermenileri: Bilimsel Sorumluluk ve Demokrasi Sorunları: 23-25 Eylül 2005*, ed. Fahri Aral, (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011); For the memoirs of an ARF member, who participated in the raid and discusses his recollection of it at some length see Armen Garo, *Osmanlı Bankası: Armen Garo'nun Anıları*, ed. Atilla Tuygan. (İstanbul: Belge, 2009); For a similar interpretation of the Istanbul pogrom as well as the anti-Armenian violence of October 1895 in the city see Florian Riedler, "The City as a Stage for a Violent Spectacle: The Massacres of Armenians in Istanbul in 1895-96," in *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition from Empire to Nation State*, eds. Ulrike Freitag, Nelide Fuccaro, Claudia Ghrawi and Nora Lafi, (New York: Bergahn, 2015) 164-178



charges of sedition. The definition of sedition was expanded to the extent that some provincial government officials made a lucrative business of detaining and releasing Armenian notables in exchange for bribes. Furthermore, the extension of governmental patronage to pastoralist Kurdish tribes was not limited to the official institution of the Hamidiye regiments. Rather, civilian and military officials established unofficial networks of patronage and engaged in temporary arrangements with smaller Kurdish pastoralists. By offering rewards and withholding privileges, the Hamidian regime attempted to dismantle traditional arrangements where pastoralist Kurds held a contractual responsibility to protect their Armenian clients (even if such arrangements were inherently unequal). Finally, the regime dispatched the full might of its armies to collectively punish thousands of Armenian peasants in Sasun in 1894, which was a mountainous area where a band of revolutionaries had established themselves. The massacre was conceived as a powerful lesson to terrorize and cow Ottoman Armenians in to subservience and sever their connections with foreign diplomats. None of these were “smooth” processes, and the regime faced domestic, bureaucratic, and international opposition frequently. When the Palace doubted a government official’s dedication to the implementation of such anti-Armenian measures, it did not hesitate to intimidate or dismiss them.

The dissertation further argues that the Hamidian regime’s anti-Armenian policies were not reactive to but contemporaneous with the development of the Armenian revolutionary movement. Discriminatory judicial practices and the incorporation of Kurdish pastoralists as irregular paramilitaries into official and unofficial administrative and military networks predated the first major Armenian revolutionary activities in the Empire. Neither was Hamidian anti-Armenianism a “response” to the increasing ethnicization of the land question between Kurds and Armenians in the Ottoman East. As chapters two and three indicate, the aforementioned measures were taken almost simultaneously in the Central

Anatolian provinces of Sivas and Ankara as well, where overtaxation and abuse the hands of government officials were the major Armenian grievances.

In fact, it was not just the revolutionary parties, but also Ottoman Armenians and their communal institutions such as the Apostolic Patriarchate and the National Assembly that were viewed as potential sources of sedition and trouble by the government. An unsigned memorandum, which was submitted to the sultan in early 1893, is particularly noteworthy to illustrate this point. Educated Ottoman Armenians were cast as potential turncoats, who were only dissimulating their genuine desires for independence with superficial expressions of loyalty and servitude to the sultan. The author (who must have been a close aide-de-camp or confidante of the sultan) bemoaned the experience and acumen Ottoman Armenians had accumulated during the Tanzimat through their participation in provincial councils, the Council of State, and other official posts. Armenian government officials were especially dangerous, because they could expose any “secret” measures, the government could design. Similarly, the proliferation of Armenian schools in the countryside, where Armenian children learned about the kings of ancient Armenia, and the values of national unity, progress, and liberty, was inimical to Ottoman authority. Therefore, it was not just the seditious committees, which had been established in cities like Athens, Bucharest, Marseilles and Paris, which had initiated the Armenian revolutionary movement, but rather the relative freedom with which Ottoman Armenians were able to occupy official posts and establish their own educational institutions. While the first set of policy recommendations dealt with punitive measures to diminish the influence of the revolutionaries, the much longer second part focused on systematic steps to be taken in order to dismantle Armenian institutions. Among the recommendations were the attribution of collective responsibility to Armenian priests and notables for any seditious occurrence within their locale, the appointment of Muslim inspectors in the guise of teaching Turkish to monitor the curricula of Armenian schools, the

expansion of the gendarmerie and the police in regions with Armenian communities, and the exclusion of Armenian notables from provincial councils (because the Armenians had grown more knowledgeable in government affairs than their Muslim counterparts and prevented the execution of “immediate measures”). The author of the memorandum added that Ottoman Greeks could be included in such councils instead to preclude European objections about the exclusion of Christians from the administration.<sup>24</sup>

If the memorandum was not entirely prescriptive – we do not know to what extent the memorandum itself served as a blueprint for Hamidian measures against Armenians; some similar measures to the recommendations were carried out, while others were not – it was still descriptive of prevalent attitudes towards Armenians within the Palace.<sup>25</sup> There were two major reasons for the Palace’s designation of Ottoman Armenians as a criminal and seditious element. First, the Armenian National Assembly’s choice to officially engage foreign diplomats as a corporate entity to seek administrative reform and/or autonomy during the negotiations after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8 drew the ire of many within the Ottoman ruling establishment. The inclusion of an article on Armenian reform in the Treaty of Berlin was, thus a curse and a blessing for Ottoman Armenians. While it afforded them the privilege of seeking aid from foreign diplomats (particularly Great Britain), it also gave rise to the view within the Palace and the Porte that Ottoman Armenians and “reform” were structurally aligned with Great Power interests to the detriment of the Empire. Second, the Hamidian regime attempted to establish itself as the protector of all Sunni Muslims within the Empire in

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<sup>24</sup> Y. PRK. AZJ. 26/94, Undated and unsigned memorandum to sultan Abdülhamid II. Textual evidence points to its compilation at some point in early 1893, before the commencement of the Ankara trial.

<sup>25</sup> For example, the author of the memorandum recommended the conscription of Armenian young men in labor battalions in order to counter-balance the heavy toll of conscription on the Muslim population of Anatolia. In order to strengthen his argument, he recounted the conversation between the Ottoman delegation and Otto von Bismarck at the Congress of Berlin. Bismarck warned the Ottoman delegation that the Eastern Question would solve itself as a result of the demographic shift in favor of Ottoman non-Muslims unless mass conscription was extended to them. Nevertheless, mass conscription of non-Muslims in the Empire was not attempted until the Second Constitutional Period.

thought and in practice. Discriminatory judicial practices, particularly when Armenians were involved, were meant to show domestic and international observers that the Palace prioritized the primacy of Sunni Muslims above all.

Like the contemporaneity of the formation and popularization of the Armenian revolutionary movement with global waves of radical opposition, Hamidian anti-Armenianism with its violent overtones took place within the global context of racial and ethnic hierarchicalization. In the Russian Empire, the autocracy's liberal overtures towards Russian Jews gave way to a much more exclusionary set of policies with popular support in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the American South witnessed the systematic dismantling of the Reconstruction regime with race riots, segregationist legislature, and widespread practice of lynching of African-Americans which Ida B. Wells had famously termed the "Southern Horrors".<sup>27</sup> Just as the definitive opening of the Tanzimat to Ottoman non-Muslim communities had taken place during a period of global emancipatory projects such as the liberation of serfs in Russia or the abolition of chattel slavery, and the attempted integration of Black people into state and federal governments in the United States,<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For example, a number of quotas were established to limit the entry of Jewish students to Russian universities in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For a detailed study of the ebb and flow of Jewish integration and minoritization in the Russian Empire, see Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); For a collection of informative chapters on the waves of anti-Jewish pogroms in late imperial Russia, see *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish violence in modern Russian history*, eds. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, (New York; Cambridge University Press, 1992); For a synthesis of the causes of anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia, see Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, "Pogroms in Russia: Explanations, Comparisons, Suggestions," *Jewish Social Studies* 11.1 (2004) 16-24; For an analysis of the emotive aspects of the pogroms see Stefan Wiese, "'Spit Back with Bullets!' Emotions in Russia's Jewish Pogroms, 1881-1905," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 39.4 (2013) 472-501

<sup>27</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Southern horrors and other writings: the anti-lynching campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1996); For a general history of lynching in the United States after the demise of the Reconstruction, see Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); For a local history of racist violence against blacks that is not limited to lynching, but includes race riots, pogroms and killing-by-police in Kansas after the Civil War, see Brent M. S. Campney, *This Is Not Dixie: Racist Violence in Kansas, 1861-1927* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015)

<sup>28</sup> For an authoritative history of the Reconstruction see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1998); For an incisive and unique classic on the role of southern Blacks during the American Civil War and the making of the

Hamidian anti-Armenianism was made in the global context of racial and ethnic hierarchicalization, which was spearheaded by governments.<sup>29</sup>

The rest of the introduction will provide a historical overview of the Tanzimat, reform within the communal administration of Ottoman Armenians, and the internationalization of the “Armenian Question,” as they relate to the central queries of the dissertation. A section on conceptual categories and a discussion of the primary sources utilized in the dissertation will conclude the introduction.

### **The Tanzimat and Its Institutions**

The nineteenth century marked successive waves of administrative and ideological transformations in the Ottoman Empire. Starting with the reign of Selim III (r. 1789-1807), Ottoman sultans and governing elites focused their efforts in the formation and survival of extensive administrative, fiscal, policing, military and educational institutions. The overarching goal of this reforming impetus was the strengthening of the Ottoman state vis-à-vis its European and Russian counterparts. The Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 had resulted in the humiliating defeat of the Ottoman armies by the ascendant Russian Empire. The subsequent treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) forced the Ottoman Empire to cede Crimea to the Russian Empire. More importantly, the war exposed the comparative weakness of the Ottoman military and state against its European and Russian counterparts.<sup>30</sup> The Ottoman ruling elite and intellectuals found themselves in a set of political and economic crises.<sup>31</sup> The

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Reconstruction see W. E. B. Dubois, *The Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)

<sup>29</sup> I should stress here that I do not mean that Ottoman officials or Armenian leaders were “borrowing” from or “imitating” global trends. On the contrary, I argue that changes in the Ottoman Empire were taking place not in response to but as part of global waves of emancipation and (re)subjugation.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed diplomatic history of the creation of the “Eastern Question” in this period, see M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1966) xi-xiv, 1-27; For a work that focuses on the period under study in this dissertation see William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*. (New York: Knopf, 1951)

<sup>31</sup> For an innovative work of intellectual and biographical history that explores this time period through the prism of the career and literary corpus of Ahmed Vasıf, see Ethan L. Menchinger, *The*

Ottoman dynasty and governing elites' concern with impending European encroachments were well-founded; the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, one of the greatest early modern polities of Central and Eastern Europe, had been wiped off the map through the concerted efforts of its neighbors in the second half of the eighteenth century in three waves of partitions. It was clear from the beginning of the drive for reform in the Ottoman Empire that the process would be intricately enmeshed with the reformulation of the empire's relationship with Russia and the Great Powers of Europe.

During the reigns of Selim III (r. 1789-1807) and Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839), the reforming initiatives involved a small number of statesmen and local notables from Rumelia and Anatolia under the sultans' strict control. Both rulers attempted to extend the hold of the imperial center on the provinces primarily in the matters of taxation and conscription. Furthermore, they attempted to create modern armies with regular drill and strict discipline.<sup>32</sup> On both matters, the sultans faced immense social and political opposition; many local strongmen were reluctant to relinquish their prerogatives over resource extraction, and the Janissary Corps, which had transformed into a corporate military institution with extensive urban networks of patronage among craftsmen, opposed the creation of a new military body that would endanger its primacy.<sup>33</sup> Selim III was dethroned as the opposing socio-political coalition, which opposed the institutions of his new order (*Nizam-ı Cedid*) and the small

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*First of the Modern Ottomans: The Intellectual History of Ahmed Vasıf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

<sup>32</sup> For a comprehensive account of the reforms undertaken during the reign of Selim III, see Stanford Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III (1789-1807)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); For a general history of Ottoman military reform and wars with foreign powers during the reigns of Selim III and Mahmud II, see Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged* (London: Pearson, 2007) 188-398; For the social implications of the gradual enforcement of mass conscription in the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Mahmud II, see Gültekin Yıldız, *Neferin Adı Yok: Zorunlu Askerliğe Geçiş Sürecinde Osmanlı Devleti'nde Siyaset, Ordu ve Toplum, 1826-1839* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2009)

<sup>33</sup> A treatise by Ebubekir Efendi of the early nineteenth century defended the Janissary opponents of Selim III, who toppled him as warriors of the faith (*gazi*), while Ubeydullah Kuşmani designated them as rebels, who dealt a blow to the strengthening of the Ottoman state. Ubeydullah Kuşmani and Ebubekir Efendi, *Asiler ve Gaziler: Kabakçı Mustafa Risalesi*, ed. Aysel Danacı, (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2007)

clique of statesmen they enriched. The dethronement of Selim III was followed by a tumultuous year of struggle for the throne between his followers and their opponents and resulted in the enthronement of Mahmud II to the throne.<sup>34</sup>

The reign of Mahmud II witnessed the modernization of the military, the expansion of the conscription pool, and the training of a new cadre of administrative and military personnel under the instruction of western educators from France and Prussia in newly-founded educational institutions. Mahmud II also abolished the Janissary Corps, which had led the opposition to his uncle's reform initiatives.<sup>35</sup> He dispatched his newly-formed armies to remove some of the local notables of Anatolia and Rumelia and enforce direct control and administration of the central provinces of the Empire. He maintained a firm grip of the reform process and did not hesitate to dispossess and execute statesmen and bureaucrats, whose loyalties or capabilities he found wanting.<sup>36</sup> Finally, his reign marked the further incorporation of the question of Ottoman reform into Great Power politics. Mahmud II's military confrontation first with Greek rebels during the Greek War of Independence, and later his powerful governor Mehmed Ali Paşa in Egypt, were only settled with European intervention.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ali Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016)

<sup>35</sup> For a summary of the reforms during the reign of Mahmud II, see İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005) 33-58 and Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) pp. 56-71

<sup>36</sup> Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," *Die Welt des Islams*, 34.2 (1994) 180

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, *The Eastern Question*, 53-109; For a short social and intellectual background of the Greek War of Independence, see Richard Clogg, "Aspects of the Movement for Greek Independence," in *The Struggle for Greek Independence: Essays to mark the 150th anniversary of the Greek War of Independence*, ed. Richard Clogg (London: MacMillan Press, 1973); For primary documents from the period which provide insight about the attitudes of different groups within the Ottoman Greek community towards the Greek War of Independence, see *The Movement for Greek Independence, 1770-1821: A Collection of Documents*, ed. Richard Clogg, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976); For the incorporation of Ottoman power relations into Great Power politics in the example of Ali Paşa of Ioanina before and during the Greek War of Independence, see Katherine Fleming. *The Muslim Bonaparte: Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali Pasha's Greece*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

Although the reigns of Selim III and Mahmud II placed the question of reform at the center of Ottoman policy in the early nineteenth century, its institutional, ideological or organizational orientations were not “settled” definitively at any point in the process. In other words, the shape and direction of reform was highly contingent upon immediate domestic and international considerations sustained by competing factions in the ruling elite in the imperial center. Moreover, the reforming monarch developed multifaceted public images, aspects of which could be emphasized according to context and audience. Mahmud II, for example, is widely recognized as the harbinger of the more regularized and “equal” ethno-confessional regime of the Tanzimat with his oft-cited statement to the effect that he did not differentiate between any of his subjects regardless of their religious affiliations.<sup>38</sup> It was, however, the same Mahmud II, who encouraged the construction of his image as the Islamic renewer of the faith (*müceddid*), and portrayed his victory over the Janissaries as religious conquest, crowned in his commissioning of the *Nusretiye* mosque in Istanbul. Moreover, he turned over some the confiscated holdings of the Bektâşi sufi order, which had been affiliated with the Janissary Corps, to the Nakşibendi-Müceddidi order, which professed strict obedience to the sultan and the dynasty.<sup>39</sup>

A similar dynamic was in place in the institutional development of the pinnacle of Ottoman governance. During the reigns of Selim III and Mahmud II, various efforts had been made to create consultative councils and assemblies for the exercise of legislative and executive power on a regularized basis in the imperial centers.<sup>40</sup> Both sultans, but especially

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<sup>38</sup> Yunus İnce, “II. Mahmud Devri Reformların Tebaa Tarafından Algılanışı,” [The Reception of the Reforms of the Mahmud II-era by the subjects of the Empire] *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 32.2 (2017) 429-30

<sup>39</sup> Butrus Abu-Manneh, “Between Heterodox and Sunni Orthodox Islam: The Bektâşi Order in the Nineteenth Century and Its Opponents,” *Turkish Historical Review*, 8 (2017). I agree less with the author’s dichotomy of heterodox (Bektâşi) vs. orthodox (Nakşibendi-Müceddidi) Islam than I do with the importance of the relationships between these orders’ leading figures with the reforming sultans Selim III and Mahmud II.

<sup>40</sup> Stanford Shaw, “The Central Legislative Councils in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Reform Movement before 1876,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1.1 (1970) 51-84



Mahmud II, however, were well known for their absolutist streaks, which caused fear and resentment among the high-ranking statesmen of the Ottoman administration. On more than one occasion, the fall from grace and office of high ranking Ottoman statesmen resulted in their hasty dispossession and execution. The leading statesmen of the time, who had witnessed the dispossession and execution of their predecessors at the behest of Mahmud II, pressured his successor Abdülmecid I to guarantee peaceful and stable appointments and demotions from high office shortly after his enthronement.<sup>41</sup> The following year, the famous Gülhane Rescript was proclaimed, heralding the advent of the Auspicious Reforms (*Tanzimât-ı Hayriye*).

The Gülhane Rescript guaranteed universal protection of life, property and honor for all Ottoman subjects. Moreover, it promised an overhaul of Ottoman taxation practices in order to increase state revenue and minimize the exploitation of the peasantry at the hands of tax farmers and tax collectors. Finally, the rescript promised the reorganization of conscription practices, which had decimated the peasant populations around the imperial capital and western and central Anatolia.<sup>42</sup> What set the Gülhane Rescript apart from previous imperial declarations of reform and reorganization was the sultan's willingness to enter an implicitly contractual arrangement, whereby he swore an oath to uphold the principles laid out in the document.

The Tanzimat (traditionally dated from 1839 to 1876) period oversaw an ambitious and interconnected set of administrative, legislative, military, and fiscal reforms in the Ottoman Empire. An important aspect of many of the reform initiatives was their incremental character in geographical and chronological terms. In other words, different aspects of the Tanzimat reached different parts of the Empire at different times over the course of the

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<sup>41</sup> Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," *Die Welt Des Islams*, 34.2 (1994) 173-203

<sup>42</sup> For a transliteration of the original rescript see *Tanzimat: Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, eds. Halil İncılık, Mehmet Seyitdanlıoğlu, (İstanbul: Phoenix, 2006) 1-3

nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the implementation of the Tanzimat reforms was highly contingent upon both local and imperial dynamics. Despite the autocratic tendencies of the Tanzimat grandees, who directed the central process, considerations of local opposition and efficiency continued to shape and reshape Tanzimat reforms for decades.

In the field of administrative and bureaucratic reform, one of the most important changes was the formation of legislative and consultative assemblies based on a classed principle of representation at both the local and imperial levels. Another aspect of this institutional development was an attempt to regularize and standardize the exercise of legislative and executive authority in the Empire. Finally, the reforms were aimed at the centralization of authority at the Sublime Porte. The centralizing function of these administrative-bureaucratic reforms was to be twofold: on the one hand, it would formalize and further encourage the integration and participation of local notabilities into the official administration of the empire. On the other hand, it would extend the influence of the Porte's prerogatives over provincial administration through the regularized incorporation of local councils into an imperial institutional framework.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Among the first places some of the Tanzimat measures were implemented were Edirne, Hüdavendigâr, Ankara, Aydın, İzmir, Konya and Sivas. Musa Çadırcı, "Tanzimat'ın Uygulanması ve Karşılaşılan Güçlükler (1840-1856)," [The Application of the Tanzimat and the Attendant Difficulties] in *Tanzimat: Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*.

<sup>44</sup> For administrative reforms in the imperial center see Ali Akyıldız, *Tanzimat Dönemi Osmanlı Merkez Teşkilâtında Reform (1836-1856)* [Reform in the Ottoman Central Administration during the Tanzimat Period] (İstanbul: Eren, 1993); For administrative reforms in the provinces see Jun Akiba, "The Local Councils as the Origin of the Parliamentary System in the Ottoman Empire," in *Development of Parliamentarism in the Modern Islamic World*, ed. Tsugitaka Sato, (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 2009) 176-204; For an overview of provincial reform in Anatolia during the Tanzimat see Musa Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Döneminde Anadolu Kentlerinin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Yapıları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1991); For an example of provincial administrative reforms of the Tanzimat see Elizabeth Thompson. "Ottoman Political Reform in the Provinces: The Damascus Advisory Council in 1844-45." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25.3 (1993): 457-475; For a case study focusing on the importance of the participation of local notables in realizing Tanzimat reforms see John K. Bragg, *Ottoman Notables and Participatory Politics: Tanzimat Reform in Tokat, 1839-1876* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Also see Carter Findley "The Evolution of the System of Provincial Administration as Viewed from the Center." in *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period. Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, ed. David Kushner, (Leiden: Brill, 1986) 3-29.

On the imperial level, the reforms oversaw the creation of executive and legislative-judicial councils in Istanbul. The Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Hass*) was created in order to regularize executive policy-making and improve interdepartmental cooperation between the newly-formed and expanding ministries. The High Council for Judicial Ordinances (*Meclis-i Vala-ı Ahkam-ı Adliye*), on the other hand, served simultaneously as a legislative council and judicial body for the trial of high-ranking statesmen in the early years of the Tanzimat. Members of both councils were appointed and confirmed by the sultan and the grand vizier. Despite intermittent institutional reorganizations (the High Council, for example, was separated into two bodies in 1854, only to be reunited in 1861), both councils displayed considerable staying power throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> In 1868, the Council of State (*Şura-ı Devlet*) was created in order to separate the judicial and legislative functions of the High Council for Judicial Ordinances. The Council of State was also perceptibly more representational than the other higher bodies of imperial administration in that the appointees came from a pool of candidates nominated by “local councils, guild and *millet* leaders, and others, as well as by the Council of Ministers”.<sup>46</sup>

On the provincial level, administrative councils were introduced in the 1840s. These councils were tasked with the administration and supervision of local affairs and were aimed to play an intermediary role between the central government and local residents, who were ideally represented by their notables in the councils. Initially, the councils were to be staffed by public tax collectors (*muhassıl*), the Islamic judge (*kadı*), jurispudent (*müftü*), Muslim and Christian notables as well as the religious leader of the dominant non-Muslim community. The councils were created for larger administrative level ranging from the *vilayet* (province) to the *kaza* (sub-district). They were to be led by the highest-ranking official appointed by the

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<sup>45</sup> Jun Akiba, “The Local Councils” in *Development of Parliamentarism*; Stanford Shaw “The Central Legislative Councils,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1.1 (1970)

<sup>46</sup> Stanford Shaw, “The Central Legislative Councils,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 76

central government in the administrative district (governor-general, sub-district governor, etc.)<sup>47</sup> Before the establishment of the *nizamiye* courts, and an overhaul of the entire judicial system, these provincial councils were also tasked with hearing criminal cases. Like the councils at the imperial level, provincial councils were subjected to intermittent reorganizations throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, by 1871, they had been established in recognizable hierarchical and regularized structures throughout the Empire.<sup>48</sup>

Another ambitious initiative of the Tanzimat was the establishment of a larger and more autonomous provincial bureaucratic administration, which would only be answerable to the Sublime Porte. The grandees of the Tanzimat from the Porte worked tirelessly to minimize the influence of the Palace over government throughout their careers. Mehmed Emin Âli Paşa (d. 1869) and Keçecizade Fu'ad Paşa (d.1871) were particularly adamant about withholding administrative prerogatives from sultans Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz. In addition to minimizing dynastic control of imperial administration, measures were proposed to limit the power of local notables, who had the potential to impede provincial reform. As part of these efforts, the Porte assigned regular salaries to public officials, and forbade the collection of customary service fees from subjects. This would increase the autonomy of public officials vis-à-vis local notables, because their livelihood would not depend on the conditional generosity of local bigwigs, but the Porte. It would also reinforce their accountability to the Porte, as their income and prospects for professional advancement would be attached to the bureaucratic superiors. Finally, it would disincentivize the collection of service fees from a wider segment of the population by the public official, which was a potential source of

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<sup>47</sup> Halil İnalçık, "Tanzimat'ın Uygulanması ve Sosyal Tepkileri" in *Tanzimat: Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*

<sup>48</sup> Jun Akiba, "The Local Councils," in *Development of Parliamentarism*, 184

discontentment with the central government.<sup>49</sup> Like many of the Tanzimat reforms, the attempts to eliminate alternative sources of revenue and influence for public officials proved notoriously difficult. Officials from governor-generals to judges were not above accepting what had now become bribes in order to expedite Ottoman subjects' wishes and requests.

Taxation was another major field of reorganization and reform for the Tanzimat regime. One of the most significant promises of the Gülhane Rescript was the adoption of a just and equitable system of tax collection, which would not exploit the peasantry. At the onset of the Tanzimat, tax-farming was designated as the source of both the subjects' discontentment and relatively diminishing state revenues. Tax-farming (*iltizam*) in the Ottoman Empire had been a long-standing practice of auctioning the right to the collection of tithes, customs and duties on specific goods, and many other sources of revenue in exchange for lump sum payments to the imperial treasury.<sup>50</sup> In its stead, the early Tanzimat regime sought to enforce direct taxation by means of the appointment of public tax collectors (*muhassıl*) and remove the tax-farmer and his moneylender-partner from the process of taxation. The new system met with considerable opposition and did not cause the expected increase in state revenue. The public tax collectors failed to collect the same amount of taxes

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<sup>49</sup> Halil İncalçık, "Tanzimat'ın Uygulanması," in *Tanzimat: Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 127-129

<sup>50</sup> There is a large literature on the history of tax-farming in the Ottoman Empire, which became increasingly prevalent in the early modern period. For some notable studies, see Linda Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560-1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); For an overview of the rise of the notables, who thrived under the new land and tax regimes, see Bruce McGowan, "The Age of the Ayans, 1699–1812," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914*, eds. Halil İncalçık and Donald Quataert, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 637–758; For the connection between changes in the military and fiscal arrangements and institutions in the Ottoman Empire in the early modern period with relation to tax-farming see Halil İncalçık, "Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1700," in *Studies in Ottoman Social and Economic History* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985); For a study of the life-term tax farm as an institutional component of the Ottoman administration in the eighteenth century see Ariel Salzmann, "Measures of Empire: Tax Farmers and the Ottoman Ancien Regime, 1695-1807," Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1995; For a summary and discussion of the literature on Ottoman tax-farming and its significance, see Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 228-236

without the attendant networks of collection and extraction that the tax-farmers utilized. As a result, tax-farming was reinstated in the Empire after a few years.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the Tanzimat regime continued its attempts at curbing the influence of tax-farmers and their financier-partners by decreasing the size of the tax-farms, which were auctioned.<sup>52</sup>

The Tanzimat reforms regarding taxation were not limited to the question of collection and extraction. As part of enforcing a more equitable system of taxation, the early Tanzimat regime abolished a number of customary and *ad hoc* taxes except the sheep tax (*ağnam*), the agricultural tithes (*öşür*), and the tax imposed on non-Muslims (*cizye*). After the Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermanı*) of 1856, the latter would be reframed as a military exemption tax (*bedel-i askeri*). The polite fiction was that non-Muslims were required to pay such taxes, because they were not conscripted into the military, while the Muslim subjects of the Empire were. In addition to the aforementioned taxes, a new tax called *temettu* was introduced on business profits for merchants and artisans. During the reign of sultan Abdülhamid II, the *temettu* was expanded to include salaries and wages, became an income tax. Over time, the abolished customary fees made a comeback in the form of a wide range of stamp taxes on manufactured goods.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the rhetoric of a just and equitable taxation system, the Tanzimat regime suffered from chronic budgetary deficits. As a result, over the course of the 1840s, 50s and 60s, new taxes and monopolies were introduced to meet the growing expenses of the expanding state. However, the scope of these reforms extended beyond the realm of fiscal reorganization. The Land Code of 1858, for example, introduced the registration of arable land as private property in large parts of the Empire. In addition, it facilitated the transfer and

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<sup>51</sup> Halil İnalçık, "Tanzimat'ın Uygulanması," in *Tanzimat: Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, pp.139-140

<sup>52</sup> Nadir Özbek, *İmparatorluğun Bedeli: Osmanlı'da Vergi, Siyaset ve Toplumsal Adalet (1839-1908)* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 2015) 88

<sup>53</sup> Stanford Shaw, "The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 6.4 (1975): 421-459

sale of land, and furthered its commodification. Although the reform was portrayed as an attempt to strengthen the socio-economic status of small-scale agricultural producers under a heavier tax regime by providing them with legal ownership of the land, in many places it was utilized by urban and rural notables to collect title deeds from impoverished farmers, who urgently needed cash and seed in order to survive.<sup>54</sup> Attached to these land tenure stipulations was a new land tax, which was imposed on individuals whose names were on the title deeds.<sup>55</sup> The Tanzimat regime also established efficient and profitable tax regimes on the sale and manufacturing of commercial crops and minerals such as tobacco and salt. These profitable tax regimes would be expanded within the next few decades and combined and turned over to European investors as part of the Public Debt Administration after the declaration of Ottoman bankruptcy in 1881.<sup>56</sup>

In order to minimize resistance to the aforementioned overhaul of regimes of taxation and land tenure as well as provincial administration, the Tanzimat regime sought the removal of the upper echelon of local notables and administrators of Rumelia, Anatolia, and Kurdistan. The newly created armies of conscripts were dispatched to various regions of the empire in a pattern of internal conquest. Although the state's assault on local notables began during the reign of Mahmud II, the Tanzimat regime expanded the sultan's program. The princes of

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<sup>54</sup> For a detailed and strictly legalistic analysis of the Land Code see Ömer Lütü Barkan, "23 Şevval 1274 (1858) Tarihli Arazi Kanunnamei Humayunu," [The Imperial Land Code dated 23 Şevval 1274 (1858)] in *Tanzimat*, (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1940); For a general study of the code within the context of fiscal and financial reform, see Kemal Karpat, "The Land Regime, Social Structure, and Modernization in the Ottoman Empire" in *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 69-90; Martin van Bruinessen claims that the enactment of the Land Code in Ottoman Kurdistan resulted in the collection of land in a relatively small number of landlords in the plains, while in the mountains large holdings were rare. Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and the State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (Utrecht: Rijksuniversiteit, 1978), 231-232; For a recent analysis of the Land Code as the legal affirmation and extension of extant relations of power related to land tenure see Atilla Aytekin, "Agrarian Relations, Property, and Law: An Analysis of the Land Code of 1858 in the Ottoman Empire." *Middle Eastern Studies* 45 (2009): 935-951

<sup>55</sup> Stanford Shaw, "The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 427-428

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 447

Kurdistan (most famously the Bedirhanis) were defeated and exiled to different parts of the Empire, while the pastoralist tribes of Cilicia, who held sway over a large portion of the Cilician highlands and plains, were forcibly settled, and their elites exiled.<sup>57</sup> Although the Tanzimat regime succeeded in the removal of powerful local notables, it was less successful in their replacement by a potent and regularized regime of taxation and conscription, which would ensure its authority.

The Tanzimat regime also established an empire-wide gendarmerie with a wide range of duties and responsibilities. Nadir Özbek claims that “during the Tanzimat period, the first act of an Ottoman governor, before introducing administrative reform, was to establish a gendarmerie regiment or company in that province.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, by the beginning of the reign of sultan Abdülhamid II, the Ottoman gendarmerie boasted one gendarme to one thousand inhabitants, a high rate compared to its European counterparts. Nevertheless, chronic problems of underpayment, lack of regular and standard conduct as well as the frequent employment of irregular forces in policing duties undermined the strength and legitimacy of the gendarmerie. For many peasants in the Empire, the gendarmes were first and foremost violent tax collectors, who harassed and overtaxed them. In some cases, local strongmen received lump sum payments from provincial governments to use their private retinues to enforce public order and collect taxes.<sup>59</sup> Abuse was rampant throughout the Empire.

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<sup>57</sup> A notable component of these waves of military expeditions against these regional lords was their connection to international pressures as well. In the case of Cilicia, the nomads had waylaid and killed an American missionary, who was recently expelled by an Armenian community near Haçin. In the case of Kurdistan, the Bedirhanids and their followers massacred and enslaved hundreds of Assyrians after their victory over their competitors in their bid for dominance in the region. For Ottoman policies of forced settlement in Cilicia see Meltem Toksöz, *Nomads, Migrants, and Cotton in the Eastern Mediterranean: the making of the Adana-Mersin region, 1850-1908* (Boston: Brill, 2010) 66-73; For a more detailed history of the process of the expansion of the Ottoman state, see Andrew Gordon Gould, *Pashas and Brigands: Ottoman Provincial Reform and Its Impact on the Nomadic Tribes of Southern Anatolia, 1840-1885* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973); For the rise and fall of the Bedirhanid princes of Ottoman Kurdistan, see Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, 56-58.

<sup>58</sup> Nadir Özbek, “Policing the Countryside: Gendarmes of the Late Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire (1876-1908),” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 40.1 (2008) 48-49

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 52



From the very early years of its implementation, the Tanzimat generated considerable social opposition in the provinces. This was particularly true in cases where the subjects' expectations about security of life, property, and honor were disappointed. For example, in Niş (in modern-day Serbia), the local peasantry mobilized to demand the revocation of a number of taxes and duties on the production of wine and *rakija*, which threatened their livelihoods as many were working in those industries. As the resistance grew, the governor of Niş and the Christian and Muslim notables of the city commissioned the creation of a coalition of imperial troops and irregulars. The mixed army killed many of the peasants and looted their property, while survivors fled the region. The Sublime Porte authorized an investigation to determine the cause of the revolt and the subsequent violence. It was determined that corrupt taxation practices had fueled the disorder, and the Porte ordered the adoption of a series of measures such as the return of looted property and the release of peasants, who were imprisoned by the irregular troops.<sup>60</sup> Another example was the tax resistance in Of. In the Of district of Trebizond, Muslim peasants refused to pay the unreasonable amount of taxes demanded by the tax-farmer, who had the district governor's support. The village headmen were forced to promise to pay their taxes by the latter, who used his gendarmes to enforce the payment of the exorbitant taxes. In the end, the peasants organized a petitioning campaign, which resulted in the trial of the tax-farmer and the district governor for their abuse of the peasants.<sup>61</sup>

The Tanzimat also generated opposition among intellectual and bureaucratic circles. The most famous oppositional group from this period was the Young Ottomans. Although they were divided in political ideology and profession, Namık Kemal, İbrahim Şinasi, Ali Suavi, and others were united in their hostility to the authoritarian hold of Âli and Fuad Paşas

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<sup>60</sup> Halil İnalçık, "Tanzimat'ın Uygulanması," in *Tanzimat: Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 142-144

<sup>61</sup> Nadir Özbek, "İmparatorluğun Bedeli," 108-112

to the reins of government. They suggested the establishment of a deliberative and constitutional model of government based on Islamic precedents. They also objected to what they viewed as subservience to the Great Powers in foreign policy, and mindless imitation of western cultural practices in the circles of government. Some members of the group were reconciled with the government after the deaths of Âli and Fuad Paşas, while others continued their oppositional activities until the proclamation of the First Ottoman Constitution.<sup>62</sup>

Regardless of its internal contradictions and inconsistencies, the Tanzimat regime sought to establish a regularized and centralized web of institutions, which would take over the governance of the entire Empire. Its ambitious program was often beset by local and central opposition, forcing reversions to the very practices it had been proclaimed to abolish such as tax-farming. On the other hand, many of its institutional and structural innovations, such as provincial administrative councils and the gendarmerie, proved resilient and continued to expand and evolve during the Hamidian period. There is also evidence that the newly-formed institutions and the attendant judicial and administrative practices were utilized by Ottoman subjects.<sup>63</sup> The “successes” and “failures” of the Tanzimat were highly contingent on a variety of domestic and international factors. The isolation of the Palace and its removal from the day-to-day governance of the Empire, for example, was contingent on which statesmen held sway over the Porte. When Mehmed Emin Âli Paşa died, sultan Abdülaziz, whose prerogatives had been curbed under the dual leadership of the Âli and Fuad Paşas in the 1850s and 1860s, took advantage of the opportunity to appoint Mahmud Nedim Paşa to the grand vizierate. Mahmud Nedim Paşa was an ardent opponent of the shifting of real and symbolic power away from the Palace to the Porte. Butrus Abu Manneh argues that it was his

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<sup>62</sup> Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); Nazan Çiçek, *The Young Ottomans: Turkish Critics of the Eastern Question in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010)

<sup>63</sup> For a very insightful case study in the Balkans, see Milen Petrov, “Everyday Forms of Compliance: Subaltern Commentaries on Ottoman Reform, 1864-1868,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46 (2004): 730-759

“anti-Tanzimat” views, which earned him imperial favor and the position of grand vizier. During his brief tenure in the position, Mahmud Nedim Paşa attempted to isolate and purge former clients of Âli and Fuad Paşas in important government posts and replace them with his own. In the end, Mahmud Nedim Paşa failed in his efforts, and was promptly dismissed when his opponents prevailed. Nevertheless, his anti-Tanzimat proclivities and networks would earn him the position of Minister of the Interior after sultan Abdülhamid II prorogued the first Ottoman constitution and parliament, a position he held until his death in 1883.<sup>64</sup>

### **The *Millets*, Ottoman Armenians, Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan**

If regularized centralization under the direction of the Sublime Porte was one of the two foundational pillars of the Tanzimat, the other would be the emancipation of the non-Muslim communities of the Empire. By emancipation, I point to the attempts at the gradual eradication of official and unofficial barriers to the inclusion of members of non-Muslim communities in the governance of the Empire. Prior to the Tanzimat, the Porte and the Palace had developed semi-institutionalized links with both the clerical and non-clerical elites of non-Muslim communities, such as the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate.<sup>65</sup> They had assigned specific official and unofficial roles for representatives of the elites of these communities. In the case of the Greek Orthodox community, the Ottoman state recognized and reinforced the authority of the Phanariot elite, whose commercial and

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<sup>64</sup> Butrus Abu-Manneh, “The Sultan and the Bureaucracy: The Anti-Tanzimat Concepts of Grand Vizier Mahmud Nedim Paşa,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 22.3 (1990): 257-274

<sup>65</sup> Benjamin Braude has convincingly argued that the early modern Ottoman ethno-confessional regime did not, however, 1) originate from “foundational” contracts between Ottoman monarchs and leaders of the non-Muslim communities 2) amount to a *millet* “system,” with regularized conduct, duties and responsibilities. Benjamin Braude, “Foundation Myths of the *Millet* System,” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, eds. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, vol.1, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982) 69-90; In the case of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Kevork Bardakjian has shown that the concept of a superior Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate in the clerical hierarchy was a relatively late development contrary to nineteenth-century fictions of Mehmed II conferring the privilege to the Apostolic archbishop of Constantinople in 1461. Kevork B. Bardakjian, “The Rise of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople,” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, 91-103

clerical networks had afforded them considerable influence in the administration of the Patriarchate.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the Ottoman state conferred the royal titles of the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia to favored members of the Phanariot elite. Finally, the influential positions of the Chief Dragoman and the Dragoman of the Navy were reserved for two other members of the Phanariot elite. Thus, the Phanariots played a vital role not only in the administration of the Greek Orthodox community and the Danubian Principalities, but Ottoman diplomacy at large.<sup>67</sup>

The Armenian Apostolic analog to the Phanariot elite was the *amira*. The *amiras* were influential communal leader in a variety profession, who owed their elite status to their wealth and intricate connections with the centers of Ottoman political power. Many of the *amira* households specialized in commerce and were engaged in money-lending with politically powerful households of the imperial center including that of Mustafa Reşid Paşa and the dynasty itself. Such *amiras* provided debts for down payments for tax-farms and political positions for powerful Ottoman politicians. Their fates were closely linked to the household they were attached to, and some of them faced drastic dispossession, torture, and exile after the fall of the government grandee they were attached to. Moneylending was not the only *amira* profession, however, and other *amira* families such as the Dadians and Balian produced purveyors, architects and industrialists. These elites also held considerable influence over the administration of the community through their patronage of the Apostolic Patriarchate. Before the nineteenth century, *amiras* and clergymen got together in assemblies

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<sup>66</sup> The Phanariot elite were named after the district of Phanar on the Golden Horn, where the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate was located. The high-ranking Phanariots typically lived in this district.

<sup>67</sup> For an overview of the rise and evolution of the Phanariot elite over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Christine M. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) 5-37

to elect patriarchs, who presided over the educational and civil administration of the community with little regularized checks on his prerogatives.<sup>68</sup>

As was mentioned at the beginning of this section, the Tanzimat impetus for regularization and centralization was coupled with a drive for the gradual emancipation of the non-Muslim communities. This aspect of the Tanzimat was partially implicit in the Gülhane Rescript, which guaranteed the safety of life, honor, and property of all Ottoman subjects regardless of their ethno-confessional affiliation. Nevertheless, there was no concerted effort to regulate and integrate the communal administrations of the non-Muslim communities of the Empire until the 1850s. During that decade, two imperial edicts proclaimed the “legal equality” and “religious privileges” of non-Muslim communities as corporate entities under Ottoman rule. The first was issued at the onset of the Crimean War, and the second (and the more famous Islahat Rescript) was proclaimed at its conclusion and integrated into the subsequent Treaty of Paris in 1856.<sup>69</sup> It should be emphasized that the imperial proclamations did not prescribe the uplifting of non-Muslims’ status on an individual basis. Rather, a corporate institution such as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate or the Jewish Chief Rabbinate would mediate between the communities and the Ottoman state. Like many of the Tanzimat reforms, changes in the legal status of Ottoman non-Muslims were considered both matters of imperial reorganization and international politics. Masayuki Ueno aptly argues that the decision was partly motivated by the Ottoman statesmen’s desire to “circumscribe the trans-regional influence of religious (and sometimes political) authority from outside the territory... by ‘localizing’ non-dominant religious groups.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Hagop Barsoumian, *The Armenian Amira Class of Istanbul* (Yerevan: American University of Armenia, 2007), Hagop Barsoumian, “The Dual role of the Armenian *Amira* Class within the Ottoman Government and the Armenian *Millet*, 1750-1850) in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*

<sup>69</sup> Masayuki Ueno, “Religious in Form, Political in Content? Privileges of Ottoman Non-Muslims in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 59 (2016): 408-441

<sup>70</sup> Masayuki Ueno, “Privileges of Ottoman Non-Muslims in the Nineteenth Century,” 411

The Tanzimat regime's efforts to codify and integrate the civic administrations of the non-Muslim communities of the empire were legitimated by the fiction that they were merely affirmations of monarchical privileges bestowed upon the religious leaders of the communities by Mehmed II. Nevertheless, many political grandees and Muslim subjects of the Empire viewed the decree and its implications of civic equality between Muslims and non-Muslims with suspicion and unease. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, who was the author of the Ottoman civil code (*Mecelle*) and a prominent statesman of the nineteenth century, states that many high-ranking government officials were worried about the dismantling of the ethno-confessional hierarchies that had maintained the privileged status of Muslims as the ruling nation (*millet-i hakime*).<sup>71</sup> Muslim discontent with the Tanzimat's promise for equality between Muslims and non-Muslims was not limited to government officials. In the early days of the Tanzimat, the murder of an imam shortly after the proclamation of the Gülhane Rescript provided an opportunity for the governor's opponents to ramp up fears of an impending Christian uprising. Tensions were heightened, as both Muslims and Christians bought arms in preparation for a potential ethno-confessional conflict.<sup>72</sup> However, the most (in)famous example of organized Muslim discontent was the Martyrs' Organization (*Fedaîler Cemiyeti*), which was uncovered in 1859. A group of military officers, Islamic clerics, and Naqshbandi leaders formed an organization in preparation for the replacement of sultan Abdülmecid with his brother Abdülaziz and the exile of Âli and Fuad Paşas. Although the plotters claimed that their chief objective was merely the correct application of *şeriat*, it might

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<sup>71</sup> Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir (1-12)*, ed. Cavid Baysun (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1991) 67-72. Even Mustafa Reşid Paşa, who was widely recognized as the author of the earlier Gülhane Rescript, reported his reservations about giving non-Muslim communities religious as well as political rights, eradicating the distinction between the ruling nation (*millet-i hakime*) and the subject nations (*millet-i mahkume*) and having the commitment ratified in an international treaty. *Tezâkir*, 76-82; For a study of Ahmed Cevdet Paşa's career see Richard Chambers, "The Education of a Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Âlim: Ahmed Cevdet Paşa," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 4 (1973): 440-464

<sup>72</sup> Cengiz Kırılı, *Yolsuzluğun İcadı: 1840 ceza kanunu, iktidar ve bürokrasi* [The Invention of Corruption: The penal code of 1840, power and bureaucracy] (İstanbul: Verita, 2015) 24-29

be surmised that they were reacting to the Tanzimat regime's incorporation into the Concert of Europe, and the declarations of legal equality between Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>73</sup> The conspirators were captured before they were able to organize the insurrection. The main conspirators were exiled to various parts of the Empire, although they were allowed to return to the capital after sultan Abdülaziz ascended to the throne in 1861.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the considerable aforementioned social and political opposition, the Tanzimat regime pushed ahead with its plans for the regularization of the administration of non-Muslim communities as well as their relationship with the Ottoman state. Furthermore, the ranks of the Ottoman bureaucracy, particularly the Foreign Ministry, were opened to non-Muslims.<sup>75</sup> Imperial orders were sent out to the religious representatives of the non-Muslim communities to submit their recommendations for the codification of the new framework of state-community relations. Between 1862 and 1865, the Ottoman state ratified what it called the new "regulations" (*nizamname*) of communal administration and organization for the Apostolic Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish communities of the Empire.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Another event that caused considerable discontent among Muslim public opinion in the Empire was the Tanzimat regime's reaction to the civil war on Mount Lebanon, and the massacre of Christians in Damascus in 1860. In response to international pressure, the Porte punished high-ranking government officials for their complicity in the anti-Christian pogrom and agreed to the appointment of a Christian district governor to Mount Lebanon. For an analysis of the crisis on the local, imperial, and international scales, see Engin Akarlı, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 21-33; For the making and impact of sectarian politics in the light of the civil war and the settlement after it, see Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000)

<sup>74</sup> Florian Riedler, *Opposition and Legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire: Conspiracies and Political Cultures*, Routledge: New York, 2011, 12-25; Burak Onaran, *Détrôner le sultan: Deux conjurations à l'époque des réformes ottomanes: Kuleli (1859) et Meslek (1867)* (Paris: Peeters, 2013) 91-254.

<sup>75</sup> For an overview of the mixed results of this effort see Carter V. Findley "The Acid Test of Ottomanism: The Acceptance of Non-Muslims in the Late Ottoman Bureaucracy," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*

<sup>76</sup> Aylin Koçunyan, "Long Live Sultan Abdülaziz, Long Live the Nation, Long Live the Constitution..." in *Constitutionalism, Legitimacy and Power*, eds. Kelly L. Grotke and Markus J. Prutsch, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 189; For the similarities and differences between Ottoman models of formalizing ethno-confessional administrations and others in Europe, see Aylin Koçunyan, "The Millet System and the Challenge of Other Confessional Models, 1856-1865," *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2017): 59-85

For Ottoman Armenians (especially those of the imperial center), however, the 1863 text was much more than mere administrative regulations. It was a national constitution, which was the culmination of a decades-long process of intra-communal organizational reforms, negotiations and struggles as well as bargaining with state authorities. Early efforts at regularizing the administration of the Armenian community and reforming it in the mould of a more representational organization were contemporaneous with the first wave of Tanzimat reforms. The presence of laymen in the administration of the community increased after the Gülhane Rescript. As a result, the traditional *amira* dominance came under increasing scrutiny in the first half of the nineteenth century. For example, the struggle over the control of the Armenian college in Üsküdar between an artisan-led coalition and the banker *amiras* transcended the Armenian community and became an imperial matter, when the artisans started petitioning the Ottoman government. The Porte initially sided with the *amiras* and imprisoned some of the petitioners. In response, the artisans organized a large demonstration in front of the Sublime Porte to demand the release of the prisoners and the recognition of their demands. Although the prisoners were immediately released, the government stalled the artisans and ordered the closure of the school until the matter was settled. The banker *amiras* prevailed in the end thanks to their connection with high-ranking government officials. A mixed council under the domination of *amiras* would oversee the administration of the school.<sup>77</sup>

The efforts by artisans and other laymen, who were outside the traditional networks of power and patronage of the communal administration of the Armenian *millet*, to insert themselves into the politics of the community were contemporaneous with broader cultural developments. Armenian students from Istanbul<sup>78</sup> and the provinces attended modern

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<sup>77</sup> Vartan Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System in the Ottoman Empire: 1839-1863, A Study of Its Historical Development* (Istanbul: [n.s.], 1988)

<sup>78</sup> Vartan Artinian identifies them as “Young Armenians” due to some of the similarities of their cultural-political project to the Young Ottomans.



educational institutions in western Europe or recently-opened schools in the Ottoman Empire through the patronage of the *amiras* and other Armenian notables. This push for modern education within the Armenian community was bolstered by transnational Catholic and Protestant missions, who financed the opening of new schools in the Empire and the education of promising students in universities in western Europe.<sup>79</sup> The 1840s and 1850s also marked the birth of Armenian popular journalism and a widespread translation movement of contemporary French and German literature in to Armenian. The program of the educational Ararat Society, which was founded by Armenian students in Paris in June 1849, encapsulated the motivations behind these developments: “Happiness of a nation is contingent upon the education of its children... In order to provide such education, the four walls of a building are not sufficient... We need cultural and educational societies to prepare qualified teachers, to publish books and periodicals, to promote reading, and justly reward authors, editors, and translators”.<sup>80</sup>

The cultural and organizational reforms within the Ottoman Armenian community gained pace in the late 1840s and early 1850s, in some cases mirroring the institutional expansion of the Tanzimat regime. In 1847, the civil and clerical assemblies were separated; in 1853 an educational council was created in the mould of the Ottoman Academy, and an economic council was formed in 1856 under the aegis of the Apostolic Patriarchate.<sup>81</sup> After the proclamation of the Islahat Rescript, the aforementioned Armenian intelligentsia started to work towards the drafting of a national constitution. These included Krikor Otian, Serviçen

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<sup>79</sup> Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System*, 60-63. For an integrated history of Protestant missions in the Ottoman East, and their relationship with the state, Armenian and Alevi communities, see Hans-Lukas Kieser, *İskalanmış Barış: Doğu Vilayetleri'nde Misyonerlik, Etnik Kimlik ve Devlet 1839-1938*, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005) [Der verpasste Friede: Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei]

<sup>80</sup> Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System*, pg. 65; For a detailed study of the evolution of Armenian educational institutions in the Ottoman Empire after Tanzimat, see Pamela Young, “Knowledge, Nation and the Curriculum: Ottoman Armenian Education (1853-1915),” PhD. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2001

<sup>81</sup> Artinian, *The Armenian Constiitutional System*, 71

Efendi, Nahabed Rusinian, Nigoghos Balian, and Karapet Utujian. It is important to note that these key figures in the drafting of the constitutions were not only educated in Paris, but they also had strong connections with Ottoman governance and bureaucracy. Otian, for example, was a famous jurist and close associate of key figures of the Tanzimat such as Midhat Paşa.<sup>82</sup> The ratification of the constitution by the Sublime Porte took several drafts and years, before the two sides could reach an agreement. The constitution was proclaimed in 1863 with great pomp and ceremony, and mixed reactions from Armenian elites and clergymen alike.<sup>83</sup>

The Armenian national constitution was truly a turning point in the organization and administration of the community. It was a watershed in the institutional recognition of Armenian administrative and religious bodies by the Ottoman government.<sup>84</sup> It established a set of mutual rights and responsibilities between the Armenian nation and Armenian individuals based on a combined logic of communal social welfare and (skewed) representational politics. It oversaw the establishment of a national assembly, which would consist of twenty ecclesiastical deputies (to be elected by high-ranking clergymen of the Patriarchate), forty lay deputies from the provinces, and eighty lay deputies from the imperial center.<sup>85</sup> In this way, the national constitution represented a shift towards the territorialization of the Armenian nation. Although the deputies from the provinces were underrepresented in the national assembly in order to ensure the primacy of the deputies from the imperial center in parliamentary deliberations, it signified the incorporation of the notion of a place called Armenia as a focus of policy and affect into the communal administration.

Before turning to the implications of the territorialization of the Armenian nation in the imperial center, it is necessary to touch upon the social and political conditions of

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<sup>82</sup> Koçunyan, “Long Live Sultan Abdülaziz,” pg. 197

<sup>83</sup> Koçunyan, “Long Live Sultan Abdülaziz,” pp.199-200

<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of the deliberate ambiguity with which the Ottoman government dealt with Greek communal institutions, see Ayşe Ozil, *Orthodox Christians in the Late Ottoman Empire: A Study of Communal Relations in Anatolia* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 121-123

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 199

provincial Armenians in the middle of the nineteenth century. Armenian craftsmen, manufacturers, merchants, and contractors constituted a significant portion of urban populations. The Tanzimat was a boon for many Armenian notables, who were able to enter the Ottoman administration through provincial councils and courts, and expand their influence over their communities as power brokers between the state and the Armenian community.<sup>86</sup> The majority of provincial Armenians in Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan, however, were peasants.<sup>87</sup> And the conditions of their relationship to the land they sowed and the lords they paid tribute to changed significantly in the first half of the nineteenth century.

As was mentioned earlier, one of the defining features of Mahmud II and the Tanzimat's centralization campaigns was the removal of local potentates. In western and central Anatolia, this took the form of military expeditions against or negotiated settlements with powerful *ayan* families. In Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan, the Tanzimat state organized military expeditions against the princely dynasties of Kurdish emirates. The princely emirs had presided over a hierarchical rural society of pastoralist Kurdish tribes, nontribal Kurdish and Christian peasants. During the 1840s, the leaders of the Kurdish dynasties were defeated in battle by the Ottoman government and exiled to other parts of the Empire. Although the initial aim of the Ottoman government was to exert direct control over the region through the expansion of the Tanzimat institutions and tax regime into the region, the effective outcome of the removal of the Kurdish princes was the devolution of Kurdish tribal organization.<sup>88</sup> In other words, many of the junior tribes and confederations of the region started vying for

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<sup>86</sup> For a detailed study the impact and exercise of Tanzimat in Erzurum on this matter, see Yaşar Tolga Cora, "Transforming Erzurum/Karin: The Social and Economic history of a Multi-Ethnic Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2016

<sup>87</sup> Research is scarce on the internal hierarchies of the Ottoman Armenian peasantry.

<sup>88</sup> It was not for lack of effort that the Ottoman state failed to expand its authority in Kurdistan. Nilay Özak-Gündoğan argues that the Tanzimat institutions were extended to Palu, for example. Furthermore, the Ottoman government sought to partition the hereditary lands of the notables. Nilay Özak-Gündoğan, "The Making of the Modern Ottoman State in the Kurdish Periphery: The Politics of Land and Taxation, 1840–1870," Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 2011

power and influence in more violent and extortionate ways in the absence of the princes' authority and mediation.<sup>89</sup>

Richard Tapper, who studied the history of the Shahsevan tribal confederation in Iran, suggests that the tribe is “best viewed as – and best matches indigenous concepts for – a state of mind, a construction of reality, a model for action, a mode of social organization essentially opposed to that of the centralized state”.<sup>90</sup> The dissertation follows Tapper's definition of the tribe as an organizational unit in *relation* and *action* over definitions of tribes that emphasize ideologies of kinship.<sup>91</sup> However, in the case of Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan, it should be emphasized that the tribe is not only determined and circumscribed by its relationship with the centralized state, but also other nontribal social forces such as peasant communities and religious orders.<sup>92</sup>

The tribal Kurds were at the higher end of the socio-cultural hierarchy of the countryside. The majority were transhumant pastoralists with stable wintering grounds (where some built houses and villages) and summer pastures, where they lived under the tent and tended to their large flocks.<sup>93</sup> Some pastoralists wintered in the villages of their Christian clients causing a considerable strain on their resources.<sup>94</sup> The question of the communal usage of the pastures and meadows also resulted in conflict within and between tribes. However, the communities, which bore the brunt of pastoralist extortion and violence, were nontribal

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<sup>89</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and the State*, 228-229. While I agree with van Bruinessen's assertion about the socio-political conditions of Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan after the Tanzimat, I find the evidence about the relative stability of the pre-Tanzimat era somewhat inconclusive.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran: A Political and Social History of the Shahsevan*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>91</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen's observations regarding the presence of a “free-floating” class of pastoralists, who attach themselves to different tribes and develop attendant fictive kinships in accordance with their economic and military fortunes is also apt here. Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and the State*, 49-52

<sup>92</sup> Perhaps the most significant distinction was between tribal Kurds, who were superior, and nontribal Kurds, whose socio-economic conditions and social status did not differ much from the Christian peasants. Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006) 27

<sup>93</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and the State*, 24

<sup>94</sup> Stephan Astourian, “Silence of the Land,” 60-61

Kurdish and Christian peasants. Pastoralist Kurdish tribes collected tribute from their peasant clients in return for protecting them against the attacks of rival tribes. The peasants were treated in a similar manner to serfs, and “owned” like oxen. Pastoralist tribal lords traded peasant communities and household with the land they worked on between themselves in various arrangements.<sup>95</sup> In the 1860s, the British consul in Diyarbekir reported that Christian peasants in Botan were called *zêrkirî* (bought with gold). In the second half of the nineteenth century, many tribal lords relinquished their obligations to protect their clients in return for their tribute and engaged in widespread raiding and looting to amass wealth quickly.

As the situation worsened in Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan and the dominant conceptions of the Armenian nation were changing in the capital, some Armenian leaders turned their attention to the provinces. One of the most important guides and interlocutors of this shift was Mgrdich Khrimian. Khrimian was a prominent cleric, who had served in Surp Karapet Monastery of Muş and Varag Monastery in Van. He pushed for the alleviation of the social and economic grievances of provincial Armenians, whom he considered the backbone of the Armenian nation. The Patriarchate had been forwarding complaints from provincial Armenians regarding overtaxation, corruption of government officials and the depredations of pastoralist Kurds to the Sublime Porte in the form of official reports (*takrir*) since the late 1840s.<sup>96</sup> Khrimian was successful in turning the condition of provincial Armenians into one of the most urgent priorities of the Armenian national assembly as well. After his election to the position of patriarch in 1869, Khrimian met with Âli Paşa at the Porte to discuss the implementation of new measures to help provincial Armenians. Although the Tanzimat grandee expressed some interest in addressing the complaints, he died shortly thereafter.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and the State*, 61

<sup>96</sup> Masayuki Ueno, “‘For the Fatherland and the State’: Armenians Negotiate the Tanzimat Reforms,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45.1 (2013): 96

<sup>97</sup> Gerard J. Libaridian, “Nation and Fatherland in Nineteenth Century Armenian Political Thought,” *Armenian Review*, (36, 1983): 79-83; Lillian Etmekjian, “The Armenian National Assembly of Turkey and Reform,” *Armenian Review*, 29 (1976): 38

In addition to the shifts in the imperial center, the Tanzimat and reform within Armenian communal administration had a profound effect on dynamics of power and administration in the provinces. Not only did Armenian notables in the provinces gain access to provincial councils and courts, but they were able to bolster their status as communal leaders. As Tolga Cora convincingly shows in his dissertation, the success of the interdependent Tanzimat and Armenian national reforms relied on the cooperation of provincial notables.<sup>98</sup> In one notable case, the Bitlis representative of the Armenian Patriarchate petitioned the governor of Erzurum, the Patriarch, and several notables of Erzurum in 1869. The petitioner requested the intervention of the Porte to put a stop to pastoralist Kurdish attacks against churches, and the kidnapping of girls and women. The governor authorized an investigation, which would be led by an Armenian and a Muslim notable. The investigators traveled to the troubled region near St. Hohan Monastery in Muş, where they oversaw the trial of the suspects. In addition to the return of stolen property to the monastery and other victims of the violence, the investigative team had the suspects arrested and detained to the surprise of local communities. The activities of the investigative mission extended into the summer when they cooperated with the newly appointed district governor to secure the arrest and exile of Kurdish notables and tribesmen, who had been involved in the attacks against the Armenians.<sup>99</sup>

Notwithstanding the symbolic significance of the success of the investigative-punitive mission to address Armenian complaints in the Muş countryside, provincial Armenians

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<sup>98</sup> Cora's contribution to the literature on the ideology and practice of reform in the Ottoman Empire in general and the Ottoman Armenian community in Erzurum in particular, is invaluable in this regard. Yaşar Tolga Cora, "Transforming Karin/Erzurum: The Social and Economic History of an Ottoman city in the nineteenth century," PhD Dissertation, 2016, University of Chicago

<sup>99</sup> Cora, "Transforming Karin/Erzurum," 320-6. This case also serves as a significant piece of counter-evidence for Stepan Astourian's claim that Turkish and Kurdish elites "sabotaged the [Tanzimat] reforms"ş Stephan Astourian, "The Silence of the Land," in *A Question of Genocide*, 63. While some officials did sabotage the Tanzimat reforms, Cora's work proves that other Ottoman officials cooperated with Armenian notables to punish offending pastoralist Kurds, when they thought it suited their interests.

continued to report similar instances throughout Ottoman Kurdistan/Armenia. In 1870, the Armenian national assembly elected a ten-person committee, consisting of leading reformers and intellectuals such as Karapet Utujian (the editor of the prominent daily *Masis*) to prepare a comprehensive report of provincial Armenian grievances and complaints. The complaints were organized under four headings. The first part addressed the practices by which Armenians were frequently overtaxed. The second part dealt with abuses by government officials, which included arbitrary confiscation of Armenian property, unreasonable corvée up to twenty days a month in some locales, and extortion at the hands of the gendarmes. The third part focused on the failures of the new *Nizamiye* courts, where some non-Muslims were still not allowed to testify despite the professed equality of all Ottoman subjects before the law. The last section explained the violent oppression and dispossession of Armenian peasants at the hands of pastoralist Kurds and Muslim refugees from the Caucasus.<sup>100</sup> In other words, the Tanzimat, with its promises for order and equality, had not fulfilled its mission with regard to provincial Armenian communities.

Unlike the previous *takrirs* of the Patriarchate, the committee members attached a set of recommendations to the report. These included the recruitment of gendarmes from provincial Armenian communities in order to minimize abuses, and the settlement of pastoralist Kurdish tribes in order to stop their raiding and extortion of Armenian peasants. The report was submitted to the Porte in 1872. However, the Porte did not take any discernible action at the imperial level to address the growing concerns of the Armenian peasantry.<sup>101</sup> Khrimian's activism regarding the condition of provincial Armenians also drew the ire of his political opponents in the imperial capital, and in 1873 he resigned from the patriarchate.<sup>102</sup> Mahmud Nedim Paşa's short, but hostile grand vizierate and the rebellions in

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<sup>100</sup> Etmekjian, "The Armenian National Assembly of Turkey," 40-43

<sup>101</sup> Ueno, "For the Fatherland and the State," 103

<sup>102</sup> Libaridian, "Nation and Fatherland," 82-3

Herzegovina and Bulgaria occupied the agendas of the ruling statesmen until 1876. When the Midhat Paşa-led constitutionalist camp secured the enthronement of sultan Abdülhamid II through a palace coup and announced the ratification of the Ottoman constitution in 1876, Armenian deputies carried the issue to the newly opened parliament. In the end, however, the Porte and the nascent Hamidian regime showed little interest in addressing Armenian concerns, even after reports of Kurdish atrocities reached the parliament at the height of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8.<sup>103</sup>

Like the Tanzimat, reform within the administration of the Ottoman Armenian community established divergent dynamics and outcomes for different classes. The opening of the Armenian national assembly and the creation of a network of semi-representational councils of notables and clergymen in the provinces signified the unprecedented expansion and institutionalization of Armenian communal administration. Although the Armenian constitution technically limited the assembly's legitimate field of activity to "religious and communal matters", Armenian politicians and notables engaged in various types of bargaining to expand the boundaries of that category and achieve their goals in realizing substantial change in the provinces. In the imperial center and the provinces, some successfully influenced government policy and cooperated with government officials.<sup>104</sup>

Hans-Lukas Kieser argues that institutional development within the Ottoman state and Armenian communal administration as well as the expansion of the educational and cultural institutions of the Protestant missions had a remarkably positive effect on provincial Armenians, who resided in towns and cities. Sunni Kurds, according to him, were the

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<sup>103</sup> Etmekjian, "The Armenian National Assembly of Turkey," 48-50

<sup>104</sup> The participation of non-Muslim notables in provincial governance was not unique to the Armenian community. For a comparable example during the Tanzimat in the Balkans see Alexander Vezenkov, "In the Service of the Sultan, in the Service of the Revolution: Local Bulgarian Notables in the 1870s," *In Conflicting Loyalties in the Balkans: The Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire and Nation-Building*, eds. Hannes Grandits, Nathalie Clayer, and Robert Pichler, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011) 135–154



comparative losers in this arrangement, not only because their superior position in the imperial ethno-confessional hierarchy was eroding, but also because the Tanzimat regime failed to make good on its promises of the spread of the benefits of its modernization to its Muslim subjects in the East.<sup>105</sup>

Nevertheless, the Armenian national assembly and the reformers failed in convincing the Porte to address Armenian grievances related to two chronic problems of the Ottoman peasantry. The first was the extortionate and arbitrary collection of taxes by tax-farmers and the gendarmes, often accompanied by episodes of indiscriminate violence. The second was specific to Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan, where pastoralist tribesmen culled their own tribute from the peasants and raided and looted Armenian villages and monasteries. In addition to these problems, the Armenian peasantry faced every-day practices of discrimination from government officials, who cared little for the Tanzimat's promises of civic equality and treated the Armenians as an underclass.

### **The “Armenian Question” and the Hamidian Regime**

Sultan Abdülhamid II was enthroned after a series of coup d'états which propelled the pro-Tanzimat Midhat Paşa and his allies to prominent positions of power. Midhat Paşa and his allies believed that the proclamation of a constitutional government and the formation of a parliament would assuage European demands about Ottoman governmental reform in favor of Balkan Christians at the height of the rebellions in Herzegovina and Bulgaria.<sup>106</sup> Great Power politics and the outrage at the Ottoman armies' indiscriminate and collective punishment of the peasant populations in the areas, where Bulgarian rebels had organized their first attacks,

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<sup>105</sup> Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Iskalanmış Barış*, 147-148

<sup>106</sup> For a history of the First Ottoman Constitution see Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period, a Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963); For an examination of Armenian members of parliament during this period see Elke Hartmann, “‘The Loyal Nation’ and Its Deputies. Armenians in the First Ottoman Parliament,” in *The First Ottoman Experiment in Democracy*, Christoph Herzog, Sharif Malek (eds) (Würzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2010)

however, precluded any improvement on European views of the Ottoman government.<sup>107</sup> In the absence of British support for Ottoman territorial integrity, the Russian Empire declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1877.

The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8 was a major turning point in the politics of Ottoman reform and Armenian communal administration. With the notable exception of the garrison of Plevne, Ottoman armies were swiftly broken and defeated on both the Caucasian and Balkan fronts, and the Russian forces advanced to the outskirts of the imperial capital. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims in what would become Bulgaria fled before the Russian armies or were killed. When the Ottoman and Russian delegations met in San Stefano (modern-day Yeşilköy) in 1878, the Porte was in a very precarious position.<sup>108</sup> It had suffered a total military defeat and was entirely at the mercy of the Russian command in the absence of European intervention to stop the conflict. The war also resulted in a mass exodus of Muslim refugees from the Empire's Balkan holdings.<sup>109</sup> The Russians forced a heavy settlement on the Ottoman government; the majority of the Empire's holdings in the Balkans (modern-day Macedonia, northern Greece, and Bulgaria) were to be ceded to the newly-formed principality of Bulgaria. The new principality would acknowledge Ottoman suzerainty but would in fact be a separate state. The other Great Powers deemed Russian gains too disproportionate to maintain the balance of power and called for an international congress to review the post-war

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<sup>107</sup> For a history of the diplomatic crisis surrounding the rebellions and the subsequent wars see Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 352-356

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 357-260

<sup>109</sup> The Ottoman Empire had received an influx of Muslim refugees from the Russian Empire in the immediate aftermath of the Crimean War. For a history of the war from the Ottoman perspective see Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War, 1853-1856* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); For the emigration of Caucasian Muslims to the Ottoman Empire see Alan Fisher, "Emigration of Muslims from the Russian Empire in the Years After the Crimean War." *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 35 (1987): 356–371; For an examination of the ethnic cleansing of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire in this period, see Walter Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013); For a general look at the expulsion of Muslims from former Ottoman territories in the nineteenth century, see Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995)

settlement. The resulting Treaty of Berlin restored Macedonia to Ottoman rule, placed a portion of Eastern Rumelia (*Rumeli-i Şarki*) under the joint rule of the principality of Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, and divided parts of Ottoman Albania between Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro.<sup>110</sup>

During the negotiations, the precarity of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire motivated leaders of other communities in the Empire to engage the involved European and Russian parties as well. For example, Albanian politicians, a few of whom had also served in the first Ottoman parliament, formed the League of Prizren to lobby against the division and cession of Ottoman Albania to Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro. Furthermore, the League expressed its commitment to the creation of a united autonomous Albanian province in the Ottoman Empire, where the language of government and education would be Albanian. While the Ottoman government initially viewed the League as a potential ally against European demands and the expansion of Russian and Austria-Hungarian influence in the region, circumstances changed within the next few years. A local warlord in Gusinje killed the Ottoman military officer and his retinue, who attempted to announce the cession of the region to Montenegro. Moreover, Albanian demands about autonomy became more serious with attempts to create a separate Albanian army. The Ottoman government dispatched an army under the leadership of Derviş Paşa, who would later become one of the closest military confidantes of sultan Abdülhamid II and broke the newly-formed Prizren army. Leaders of the League were exiled and imprisoned in other parts of the Empire to prevent its resurgence.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Fikret Adanır, “Ermeni Meselesi’nin Doğuşu,” [The Birth of the Armenian Question] in *1915: Siyaset, Tehcir, Soykırım*, [1915: Politics, Deportation, Genocide] eds. Fikret Adanır and Oktay Özel, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2015)

<sup>111</sup> Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) 31-108; Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 220-7; Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 363-366; For a general overview of Hamidian attempts to secure greater loyalty to Ottoman rule in Albania and to suppress the popularization of Albanian nationalism, see George W. Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006) 72-139

A powerful Kurdish notable near Hakkari also attempted to change the political status quo near the Ottoman-Iranian borderlands in 1880-1. Sheikh Ubeidullah Nehri, who was a popular and powerful Naqshbandi leader, organized a series of expeditions against Urumieh and its surroundings in northwestern Iran, ostensibly to protect his Sunni brethren against Qajar oppression. Sheikh Ubeidullah's popularity and military expeditions unnerved Ottoman, Qajar and Russian governments alike. While sectarian solidarity and mobilization were certainly key components of his campaign, government officials were unable to determine the extent of his political ambitions. He was invited to Istanbul as an imperial guest of honor, where he was placed under house arrest to put an end to his ambitions. Nevertheless, he escaped and traveled back to his native Hakkari to plan another expedition. He was finally defeated by an Ottoman military unit dispatched to capture him. He was exiled and died a few years later.<sup>112</sup>

Sheikh Ubeidullah and the Albanian leaders of the League of Prizren were not the only people, who attempted to influence the post-war settlement in their favor. Nerses Varjabedian approached the Russian delegation with the complaints and expectations of the Ottoman Armenian community that an autonomous administration with high-ranking Christian officials would be established in Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan. Article 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano stipulated that Russian armies would continue to occupy the Ottoman Empire until the necessary reforms were put in place to ensure the safety of life and property for Armenians. When the Great Powers convened in Berlin in the summer to revisit the stipulations of the Treaty of San Stefano, the Armenian National Assembly sent a delegation under the leadership of Mgrdich Khrimian. The Armenian Patriarchate provided the representatives of the Great Powers with demographic reports, which overstated the percentage of Armenians to

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<sup>112</sup> For a detailed study of the whole affair with the use of British, Ottoman, and Qajar primary sources, see Sabri Ateş, "In the Name of the Caliph and the Nation: The Sheikh Ubeidullah Rebellion of 1880-81," *Iranian Studies*, 47.5 (2014): 735-798

the total population in the Ottoman East.<sup>113</sup> As demographic majority or plurality was increasingly considered one of the foundational bases for national sovereignty, the Armenian delegation attempted to strengthen its case for political autonomy.

The Congress of Berlin and the subsequent treaty was a disappointment from the perspective of the Armenian delegation, as the Powers decided to remove the question of the implementation of reforms in Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan from Russian influence. Instead, the Great Powers would assume collective responsibility to oversee the implementation of administrative reforms in Ottoman Armenia, which would increase Armenian participation in local governance and policing. The assignment of the question of Armenian reform to the all the Great Powers meant that it would require the consensus of governments with largely competing interests in order to force the Ottoman state to realize any structural change.<sup>114</sup> Despite some efforts in the early 1880s, particularly by Great Britain, the question of Armenian reform was effectively sidelined after sultan Abdülhamid II agreed to the British annexation of Cyprus in exchange for British commitment to the territorial integrity of the Empire against Russia.<sup>115</sup> The Three Emperor's Union (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia)

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<sup>113</sup> This was primarily done by undercounting Muslim populations and excluding the pastoralists from their population estimates. For a general discussion of the politics of demographics in the late Ottoman Empire after the Treaty of Berlin, see Fuat Dündar, *Kahir Ekseriyet: Ermeni Nüfus Meselesi (1878-1923)* [The Overwhelming Majority: The Question of Armenian Demographics (1878-1923)] (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2012); Dündar has also worked on the question of demographics and ethnic engineering during the First World War. Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi: İttihat ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği, 1913-1918* [The Cipher to Modern Turkey: The Ethnic Engineering of Union and Progress] (İstanbul: İletişim, 2008)

<sup>114</sup> Great Britain sought to ensure that Russia would not be recognized as the sole protector of Ottoman Armenians and acquire more influence in the administration of the Empire. Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 36-38; For a general overview of British foreign policy with regard to Ottoman Armenians see A. Dzh. Kirakosian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question: From the 1830s to 1914*. (Princeton: Gomidas Insitute, 2003)

<sup>115</sup> Fikret Adanır, "Ermeni Meselesi'nin Doğuşu," 41. Great Britain also opened new consulates and vice-consulates in the Ottoman East during this period in order to gather more information on the condition of Ottoman Armenians and increase its influence among them.

also pushed for stasis on the Armenian question in order to maintain the balance of power and influence between the Great Powers.<sup>116</sup>

Khrimian expressed the Armenian delegation's disappointment in a speech he delivered upon his return to Istanbul. He claimed that the Bulgarians, Serbians, and the Montenegrins arrived at the negotiating table with their weapons and arms, their "iron ladles," and took their share of the *harisa* of liberty.<sup>117</sup> The Armenian delegation, however, only had their petitions and reports in order to convince the Powers of their plight. As a result, they were rebuffed, and their "paper ladles" proved useless. Khrimian implied that the Armenians had to follow the examples of Bulgarians, Serbians, and Montenegrins, and form armed organizations in order to achieve their goals. The influential priest would later deny having called for a general rebellion in retrospect.<sup>118</sup> Even if Khrimian's sermon was not supposed to be prescriptive, it certainly proved prescient: within the short span of a couple of years, provincial Armenians in the cities of Van and Erzurum organized secret societies with the aims of promoting self-defense among Armenians and their salvation. The Defense of the Fatherland (*Pashtpan Haireniats*) in Erzurum enrolled over a thousand Armenians from different professions into its ranks and provided elementary political education and paramilitary training. The society was discovered by the Ottoman authorities in 1882, which arrested several hundred of its members and put an end to the mobilization. The other organization was Black Cross (*Sev Khach*) in Van, which consisted of several hundred members, and similarly promoted self-defense among its members. The Black Cross organized a parade in Van in 1882, in celebration of the anniversary of the proclamation of

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<sup>116</sup> Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*, 37

<sup>117</sup> Harisa is a traditional Armenian wheat porridge.

<sup>118</sup> For a detailed discussion of Khrimian's sermon and his later ambivalent attitude towards it see Libaridian, "Ideology of Armenian Liberation," 160-7

the Armenian National Constitution which ended with chants in front of the homes of Khrimian and the Russian vice-consul.<sup>119</sup>

The dominant revolutionary party of the period, which the dissertation focuses on was the Hnch'ak Party. The party was founded on a program of political freedom and socialist revolutionism.<sup>120</sup> The founding members conceptualized the liberation of Ottoman Armenia as part of a general progress towards an independent Armenia encompassing Russian and Iranian regions with large Armenian populations. They rationalized their choice of Ottoman Armenia as the center of revolutionary by reference to political and demographic factors. According to them, the weak economy and military of the Ottoman state, the international recognition of the "Armenian Question" and the fact that two-thirds of the Armenian nation resided in the Ottoman Empire prioritized its liberation. The methods to bring about national liberation and social revolution included propaganda among Armenian commoners, encouragement of tax evasion and resistance, and the use of terrorism against government officials and Armenian "traitors".<sup>121</sup>

One of the first major Hnch'ak activities in the Empire took place in July 1890 at the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate during the holiday of Vartavar, originally associated with the pre-Christian goddess of water, love, and fertility, Astghik. Revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire, the leading figures of whom were Hampartsum Boyajian, Mihran Damadian and Harutiun Jangulian disrupted the religious ceremony. Jangulian read a statement, which addressed the Armenian nation and listed several demands from the Sublime Porte to address Armenian grievances about overtaxation, Kurdish pastoralist attacks, and the Armenians' exclusion from provincial governance. These demands echoed the reform proposals between

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<sup>119</sup> Libaridian, "Ideology of Armenian Liberation," 209-213

<sup>120</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 115-117

<sup>121</sup> For a reprinting of the original Hnch'ak programme, see Arsen Kitur, *Patmut'iwn S.D. Hnch'ak Kusaksut'iwn* [History of the Social Democrat Hnch'ak Party] v.1, 32-37. For a translation of the programme into Ottoman Turkish, see Y.MTV. 74/84, undated

the Ottoman Empire and the Great Powers in the early 1880s. After the speech, the revolutionaries forced the Armenian patriarch to accompany them to the Sublime Porte, where they wanted to officially submit their demands to the Ottoman government. The revolutionaries were stopped by a group of gendarmes, and a firefight ensued during which several people from both sides were killed and injured. Jangulian was captured by the authorities, while Boyajian and Damadian avoided capture.<sup>122</sup> Tahsin Paşa, who served as the Chief Secretary of the Palace after the death of his predecessor in 1894, claims that the Kumkapı Demonstration played an important role in the sultan's adoption of an unwaveringly hostile attitude towards Armenians during his reign.<sup>123</sup> Although there is evidence that Hamidian anti-Armenianism predated the demonstration as the first chapter will demonstrate, it is likely that the revolutionary demonstration in the imperial capital reaffirmed the Palace's anti-Armenian convictions.

The gradual organization of radical Armenian opposition was roughly simultaneous with the expansion of the Palace's influence over government affairs. Sultan Abdülhamid II prorogued the Ottoman constitution and closed the parliament. He ordered the exile and imprisonment of many of the leaders of the constitutionalist camp, including Midhat Paşa.<sup>124</sup> Sultan Abdülhamid II and his retinue of close advisors and aides-de-camps then started working towards the shifting of executive authority from the Porte to his newly constructed palace at Yıldız. The military defeat and the diplomatic crisis of the late 1870s also coincided with a global economic recession. The Empire had declared bankruptcy in 1876, and negotiations with European diplomats and investors resulted in the creation of the Public Debt Administration (*Düyun-ı Umumiye*). Many of the profitable monopolies under the control of

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<sup>122</sup> Arsen Kitur, *Patmut'ıwn S.D. Hnch'ak Kusaktsut'ıwn*, vol.1, (Beirut, 1962), 53-63

<sup>123</sup> Tahsin Paşa, *Sultan Abdülhamid: Tahsin Paşa'nın Yıldız Hatıraları*, [Sultan Abdülhamid: The Yıldız Memoirs of Tahsin Paşa] (İstanbul: Milliyet Matbaası, 1931) 133

<sup>124</sup> Midhat Paşa was later assassinated in exile in 1884.



the government such as those on tobacco and salt were turned over to European investors in exchange for a restructuring of the debt.<sup>125</sup>

It was during this period of subsequent diplomatic, military, and economic crises that sultan Abdülhamid II started to reshape the center of Ottoman governance. From the early years of his reign, sultan Abdülhamid II was closely involved in the administration of the Empire. The palace bureaucracy was considerably expanded and its influence grew exponentially during the course of the reign of Abdülhamid II.<sup>126</sup> To the extent that he could, he appointed veteran statesmen, who shared his views about the assertion of Palace influence on policy, to important ministries. Mahmud Nedim Paşa served as Minister of the Interior for four years before his death, and Ahmed Cevdet Paşa served as Minister of Justice for a total of six years in two tenures in the 1880s. He did not hesitate to dismiss Grand Viziers, who disagreed with his policies, or those who attempted to preserve the autonomy of the Porte in policy-making.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> For the impact of the global economic recession on the Ottoman Empire see Şevket Pamuk, “The Ottoman Empire in the ‘Great Depression’ of 1873–1896.” *The Journal of Economic History*, 44 (1984): 107–118; For a history of Ottoman economic thought with relation to changing dynamics of imperialist and nationalist politics see Deniz T. Kılınçoğlu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2015); For a comparative study of Egyptian and Ottoman bankruptcies in the late nineteenth century, see Joseph Yackley, “Bankrupt: Financial Diplomacy in the late nineteenth-century Middle East,” PhD. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2013; For a study of labor relations under the Tobacco Régie, see Can Nacar, “The Régie Monopoly and Tobacco Workers in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 34.1 (2014): 206-219; For a classical study of mass mobilization and politicization in Iran in 1891-2 in response to the granting of a concession on the collection and sale of tobacco in Iran see Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-1892* (London: F. Cass, 1966)

<sup>126</sup> For an overview of some of the changes that shifted executive power away from the Porte to the Palace, see Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 270-1; For a discussion of the three categories of imperial aides, see Tahsin Paşa, *Yıldız Hatıraları*, 23-4. Grand Vizier Ahmed Cevad Paşa, who held the position between 1891 and 1895, carried the honorary title of the Most Honorable Aide (*Yaver-i Ekrem*)

<sup>127</sup> Kamil Paşa, whose appointment was also meant to maintain good relations with Great Britain because of the statesman’s close ties with the British Embassy, was re-appointed and dismissed at the onset of the crisis surrounding the Hamidian massacres of 1895-7. Akarlı, “External Pressures,” 119-122

At the same time, he attempted to establish Yıldız as the ultimate authority for the appointment and dismissal of provincial governors, who were crucial in determining the course of the governance of the Empire. The first two decades of the reign of sultan Abdülhamid II saw the frequent shifting and dismissal of provincial governors in an attempt to “fine tune”<sup>128</sup> the execution of the orders of the Palace and discourage bureaucratic initiative on “sensitive” matters. Moreover, he attempted to expand the Palace’s control of foreign policy at the cost of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>129</sup> Last, but not the least, the sultan coordinated the promotion of one of his personal favorites and imperial brother-in-law Mehmed Zeki Paşa to the rank of field marshal. The paşa was then appointed as the commander of the Fourth Army Corps, which was garrisoned in Erzincan.<sup>130</sup> The Fourth Army was more than a field army of the Ottoman Empire; Zeki Paşa and the Fourth Army played a crucial role in the reshaping of governance and ethno-confessional relations during the Hamidian period.<sup>131</sup>

All of these measures were also taken to subdue the autonomy of the Sublime Porte, which had expanded considerably since the beginning of the Tanzimat. Hamidian policy in the construction of a ruling coalition under the absolute primacy of the sultan was not limited to appointment of “loyal” statesmen and officers to key positions. It also involved the reorientation of Ottoman modernization and centralization away from a model of ethno-confessional pluralism, where hierarchies were de-emphasized and legal equality was

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<sup>128</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Selim Deringil, who defines it as “the meticulous inculcation, indoctrination, enticing, frightening, flattering, forbidding, permitting, punishing or rewarding – all in precise doses” of the Empire’s subjects. Deringil, *Well Protected Domains*, 10

<sup>129</sup> Akarlı, “External Pressures,” 103-4

<sup>130</sup> Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, 76

<sup>131</sup> In his memoir, Hagop Mintzuri (1886-1978) recounts an encounter with an Ottoman policeman in the imperial capital, who asks him where he is from to which he responds “The Fourth Army,” meaning the vast expanse of Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan, where the Fourth Army held official military jurisdiction and unofficial influence over governance. Hagop Mintzuri, *İstanbul Anıları: 1897-1940* [Memoirs of Istanbul: 1897-1940], tr. Silva Kuyumcuyan (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2002) 55-60

professed to a model in which the majoritization of Sunni Muslims was propagated and encouraged. The Hamidian regime oversaw a series of concerted efforts to re-establish the official primacy of Sunni Muslims as the ruling nation, which had been undermined by the establishment of the freedom of religion, which technically allowed conversion from Islam to Christianity. According to Selim Deringil, “this led to fear among the Ottoman ruling classes that the religious base of state legitimation ideology was slipping from under them.”<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, the Hamidian regime worked towards the dissemination of a particular brand of Hanefi Islam, which would foster religious orthopraxy, and loyalty and affective attachment to the imperial sovereign. The Palace authorized the training of a cadre of Muslim missionaries (*da’iyan*), who were educated under the office of the chief mufti. They were then expected to occupy official positions in the provinces to spread the state-sanctioned version of Islam.<sup>133</sup> In addition to the promotion of state-sanctioned Islam among Sunni Muslims, these measures also aimed to expand the boundaries of the Sunni Muslim community, by force if necessary. Yezidis and Kızılbaş were among the many groups the Hamidian regime identified as Muslims in error to be properly remade as pious and obedient Muslims.<sup>134</sup>

Hamidian policy in this regard was finely attuned to Muslim grievances about the Tanzimat regime, some of which were described in the previous section. Kemal Karpat attributes a large role to the expanding order of the Naqshbandiyya, which in his view formed the link between “emotional” (lower-class) and “intellectual” (middle class) Islam, and promoted loyalty and obedience to the sultan.<sup>135</sup> Notwithstanding Karpat’s unclear conflation of class and expressions of Sufi piety and his blatantly apologetic portrayal of sultan

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<sup>132</sup> Deringil, *Well Protected Domains*, 91

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 76

<sup>134</sup> Edip Gölbaşı. “Turning the ‘Heretics’ into Loyal Muslim Subjects: Imperial Anxieties, the Politics of Religious Conversion and the Yezidis in the Hamidian Era,” *The Muslim World*, 103.1 (2013): 3-23

<sup>135</sup> The dynamic connections between the Naqshbandiyya and the Ottoman (and later Turkish) state remain understudied. In addition to Karpat’s positive evaluation of the order’s influence on state and society, for the order’s influence before and during the early stages of the Tanzimat, see Butrus Abu-Manneh, “Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript,”

Abdülhamid II,<sup>136</sup> his observation that the regime was attempting to mobilize and redirect reactions in Muslim public opinion about the Tanzimat regime's dismantling of traditional ethno-confessional hierarchies and compromising attitude towards the Great Powers is well taken. Throughout his reign, sultan Abdülhamid II sought to establish the Palace as the center of symbolic and practical authority and worked to solidify the superiority of Sunni Muslims as the ruling nation of the Empire. As part of this initiative the Palace also sought to coopt regional notabilities in the form of conciliatory measures such as the appointment of such notables to official posts at the top of the imperial hierarchy, the establishment of the Tribal School (*Aşiret Mektebi*) in Istanbul for the acculturation/assimilation of the youth of the tribal notability of Albania, Kurdistan, Greater Syria and Iraq, and the arming and organization of powerful Kurdish pastoralist tribes into the Hamidiye regiments.<sup>137</sup>

### **Events and Structures**

The dissertation explores two interrelated processes through studies of several successive events and episodes. It treats events as constitutive components of both processes (minoritization and marginalization of Armenians, and Armenian oppositional and radical practice) and structures (Hamidian anti-Armenianism and the Armenian revolutionary movement). The focus on events also allows for transcending outlines of processes and

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<sup>136</sup> The following statement is representative of Karpat's depiction of the sultan throughout the book: "In fact, Abdülhamid's despotism was an act of desperation; but it never degenerated into personal bloody personal reprisals [*sic*], as in the case of his fierce, unpredictable, and vengeful grandfather, Mahmud II. Abdülhamid had a quiet temperament, seldom becoming angry or abusive, although his quelling of revolts in Armenia and Macedonia and the fierce attacks of his adversaries obscured his better side." Kemal Karpat, *Politicization of Islam*, 158

<sup>137</sup> For a discussion of Sultan Abdülhamid II's attempts at integrating the Arab notability at the level of palatial appointments, see Engin Akarlı. "Abdülhamid II's Attempts to integrate Arabs into the Ottoman System," in *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, ed. David Kushner (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1986) 74-88; For a balanced discussion that addresses the successes and failures of the Hamidian regime's attempts at coopting the urban notability in the Arab provinces, see Hasan Kayalı. *The Arabs and the Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 30-36; For a discussion of the *Aşiret Mektebi* within the context of the relationship between the modern state and its tribal subjects, see Eugene Rogan. "Asiret Mektebi: Abdulhamid II's School for Tribes (1892-1907)," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28.1 (1996): 83-107

structures, and provides textured snapshots of the local, imperial, and international forces at play. For example, a microhistorical approach to the making of the Sasun massacre, which foregrounds the immediacy and the contingency of the event, allows for the exploration of changes in the interaction of a sedentary Kurdish notable with government officials and Armenian peasants in the course of two years. In turn, the changes reveal a lot more than the choices and tribulations of an individual Kurd; they shed light on “traditional” modes of clientage and tributary arrangements in Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan, the complexities of inter-ethnic relations that run counter to the *outline* of a supposedly omnipresent Kurdish-Armenian conflict over land and resources, and the practices by which Ottoman officials attempted to remake social and economic relations in the region -- precisely in that mould of a perennial conflict between Muslims and Armenians.

The focus on the event also provides the opportunity to investigate the means by which social and political structures and relations are made. This is particularly true in the context of the Hamidian regime and the early Armenian revolutionary movement, because practices of punishment, organization, and rewards were as important in their constitution as imperial edicts, rescripts or ideological party programs, if not more. In other words, Hamidian and Armenian revolutionary practices made the regime and the parties on the ground respectively in the absence of well-articulated and regularized institutions in this period. William Sewell’s conceptualization of “eventful temporality” is particularly relevant here. Sewell argues that “historical events” – that is events of historical significance – are recognized as notable by contemporaries and result in durable transformation of structures, and “structure is the cumulative outcome of past events.”<sup>138</sup> He adds that such events “introduce new conceptions of what really exists, of what is good, and of what is possible”.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social History and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 214-218

<sup>139</sup> Sewell, *Logics of History*, 245

While Sewell's own focus is on the transformation of semiotic and cultural structures, he contends that the study of the event can also shed light on the transformation of social and political relations.

For the purposes of this dissertation, Hamidian punitive judicial practices against the Armenians of Central Anatolia in the events surrounding the Ankara trial (1893) and the Yozgat pogrom (1894) are particularly enlightening. Despite the regime's use of different judicial tools (an internationalized public trial in the former and a closed court-martial under a state of emergency in the latter) in the two events, a close examination of the Palace's interaction with local officials reveals that highly similar practices of policing and adjudication were employed in both cases. Mass imprisonment of Armenians, the employment of Muslim irregulars and civilians in the policing of Armenian spaces and people, their abuse of and violence against Armenians, and the careful protection of Muslim offenders from any legal measures were encouraged/ordered by the Palace and practiced by the officials on the ground. None of these practices were predetermined by a code of laws or a well-established set of precedents; the Armenians of Yozgat organized a large demonstration and submitted petitions and might have expected some resistance and/or negligence from government officials. However, the establishment of a state of emergency and the mass imprisonment of Armenian notables and peasants alike showed them, their Muslim neighbors, and other government officials in the region that submitting the wrong kind of petition in a public manner would now be treated as an act of sedition.

While none of the events at the focus of the dissertation can be attributed a unique degree of significance (with the arguable exception of the Sasun massacre), they were building blocks in the contemporaneous constructions of the Hamidian regime and the Armenian revolutionary movement. The transformative effects of each event and episode were sharpened by two specific factors. The Hamidian regime consciously dismantled the

regulatory and standardizing ideological orientation of the Tanzimat. In the absence of explicit regulatory or standardizing blueprints for the future of the Hamidian regime, events simultaneously assumed the character of its building blocks and examples and signposts for its future development. Similarly, Armenian revolutionaries targeted, intimidated and/or persuaded the Armenian notability, whose social and political standing relied considerably on their connections with the Ottoman state.

### **Groups, Processes, and Violence**

The dissertation sets the aforementioned processes against the shifting social and political salience of Muslimness and Armenianness in the late Ottoman Empire. As has been discussed in the previous sections, both the Tanzimat and Hamidian regimes attempted to transform imperial (and local) ethno-confessional hierarchies, albeit in divergent directions. Moreover, the expansion of and reforms within Armenian national institutions in the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Armenian revolutionary movement established several geographic and socioeconomic foci of identity formulation (at times competing and others complementary) to determine who constituted the Armenian nation, and where it was centered.

Rogers Brubaker's proposal that "ethnicity, race and nation should be conceptualized not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals... but rather in *relational, processual, dynamic, eventful* and disaggregated terms [emphasis added]" is particularly apt here.<sup>140</sup> It was through contentious and constitutive processes that the political and social salience of what it meant to be Muslim or Armenian in different parts of the Ottoman Empire was determined in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. It should be stressed that the boundaries between Muslim and Armenian were not "made up" or "invented" during the period under study. Rather, the attendant political and social

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<sup>140</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) 11

expectations within and the relations between Muslim and Armenian communities were reshaped and redefined. Andreas Wimmer argues that the presence of ethnic boundaries, even rigid ones, does not accord them any political or social salience in and of themselves.<sup>141</sup> In this light, the dissertation asserts that Muslimness and Armenianness were not “made up” during the period under study; nor did the boundaries become particularly restricted as far as the possibility of crossing it was concerned. Rather, their relational dynamics were transformed, and they acquired imperial and international social and political salience.

To go back to the previously used example of the sedentary Kurdish notable in Sasun, attention to the process by which his tribe was first identified as a potential problem in the late 1880s sheds light on the shifting political salience of Muslimness and Armenianness in the region. The relationship between the sedentary Kurds of Sasun and the Armenian peasants was initially represented as an aberration to be corrected. It was not only the tributary arrangement (Kurdish tribesmen were to protect the Armenian peasants against attacks from other tribes in exchange for payments in cash, crop, and dairy) that the Ottoman officials found troublesome: the sedentary Kurds of Sasun spoke Armenian and occasionally gave Armenian names to their children; they even asked Armenian priests to oversee their funerals at times. The extant hierarchy between the two communities was not sufficient and had to be remade in order to preclude practices of cooperation. The government’s fears were not unfounded: the sedentary Kurds opposed the extension of the local government’s tax regime to the Armenian villages of Sasun, which they viewed as their domain. Moreover, when the authorities sent military detachments to collectively punish the Armenians of Sasun, the sedentary Kurds afforded the fleeing refugees protection from the pastoralists Kurds and the government troops. Furthermore, Kurdish-Armenian relations in Sasun invalidated the

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<sup>141</sup> Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 80-89



Hamidian portrayal of an insurgent Armenian nation, bent on massacring and reducing their Muslim neighbors. Ottoman officials set out to transform inter-confessional relations in Sasun and infuse new “responsibilities” to the Muslimness and Armenianness there. Sedentary Kurds were to withhold their protection of the Armenians (and enjoy a free license to raid), while the latter were to accept the new arrangements and refrain from seeking oppositional organization.

The most important component of such processes that changed the political and social salience of ethnic identities was undoubtedly “purposive violence.”<sup>142</sup> Whether it was the gendarmes and local Muslim recruitments’ “searches” in the Armenian villages of Central Anatolia, where physical abuse and looting was rampant, the public assassinations of Armenian notables by the revolutionaries for their perceived servility to the Ottoman state, or the anti-Armenian pogrom in Yozgat where mobs attacked and raided Armenian shops and homes, killing several men and a woman, violence was an integral part of the events and the processes under study. These events and processes transformed the relationship between Muslims and Armenians throughout the Empire, and the competing interpretations of Muslimness and Armenianness. The dissertation’s framing of the transformative effects of violence is comparable to the position laid out in İpek Yosmaoğlu’s recent monograph: Yosmaoğlu argues that a new mode of political violence set the tone for competing projects of nation-building in Ottoman Macedonia at the turn of the twentieth century, when competing revolutionary committees, state-sponsored irregulars, and Ottoman soldiers engaged in years

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<sup>142</sup> I borrow this term from Stanley J. Tambiah’s study of collective violence in South Asia, in which he argues that waves of collective violence against specific ethnic groups were often purposive, in that the perpetrators found their solidarity “not in divisive class interest, but in conceptions of collective ethnic identity whose continued salience and role, and adaptation and manipulation for winning collective entitlements and rewards have to be given their proper weight”. Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (California: University of California Press, 1996) 218

of violence, which included civilian communities.<sup>143</sup> In other words, “national differences” were not the cause, but the result of decades of communal violence in the region. One key difference in the current study from this position is that communal violence did not engender the national differences between Muslim and Armenian communities in this period. Projects of nation-making at the behest of institutional and non-institutional actors predated the Hamidian period. What violence did was to alter the internal boundaries of “national loyalty and belonging” and the set of relationships *between* Muslim and Armenian communities.

A final note has to be made about the distinction between the purposive violence noted above and inter-confessional violence in the period that preceded the establishment of the Hamidian regime. This question is particularly difficult in the realm of the routinized violence Armenian peasants faced from Kurdish pastoralists and Ottoman gendarmes. The dissertation argues that the scope and shape of the violence in the period under study differed from the previous period. Mass imprisonment and torture of Armenians in Central Anatolia, the Muş plain, and Sasun were unprecedented. In addition, Armenian petitions and complaints about the aforementioned routinized violence were criminalized and met with additional punitive measures. Although government officials in the imperial center and the provinces were accused of negligence towards Armenian petition and complaints during the Tanzimat, the act of petitioning itself was not criminalized, and continued to be a field of legitimate bargaining between the state and the complainant. In the period under question, Armenian petitions about government officials’ corruption and abuse were met with direct hostility, even imprisonment as the case of the state of emergency in Yozgat clearly demonstrates. In the case of revolutionary violence, the differences were also palpable. Certainly, the revolutionaries

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<sup>143</sup> İpek Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014); Ryan Gingeras also discusses the constitutive role of violence in the making of national and ethnic identities in his work. Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

sought to incorporate extant practices of brigandage (The *Cellos* in Central Anatolia) and armed resistance (helping the Sasun Armenians in their feuds with pastoralist Kurds) into their arsenal. Nevertheless, the public assassinations of Armenian notables and perceived “collaborators” were unprecedented.

### **Sources**

The dissertation makes use of several bodies of unpublished and published primary sources. The first and largest collection of documents is from the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives in Istanbul. The collection includes direct correspondence between the Palace and a variety of officials of the Sublime Porte. The first are governor-generals of the provinces of Bitlis, Ankara, and Sivas, who regularly reported to the Palace, especially during periods of crisis regarding the “Armenian Question.” Although much smaller in volume, direct correspondence between the Palace and district governorates is also present (particularly in the case of the district governorate of Muş). Official correspondence between local government officials, such as sub-district governors in Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan is also utilized. The correspondence listed here usually includes reports, inquiries and direct orders. In many cases, there are duplicate copies of the governors’ reports as they had traditionally been expected to correspond with the Porte. Most such reports were also presented to the Palace by the Grand Vizier.

There is also correspondence between the Palace and government officials, who were not serving under the ministries or departments of the Porte. The most important collection is the correspondence between the Fourth Army Command and the Palace. This is particularly crucial, because a large portion of the military archives are closed or partially accessible to researchers. However, the Palace’s direct contact with the Fourth Army and propensity to keep records of its correspondence with the General Staff as well, has allowed me to examine military reports, which were crucial, particularly in the making of the Sasun massacre. The

Palace was also in contact with its aides-de-camp, who were dispatched to the provinces in times of crises and served as ad hoc observers of local developments and enforcers of the Palace's directives, when local government officials were suspected of incompetence, disloyalty, or both. The Palace also maintained a direct line of communication with ad hoc commissions and the court-martial in Yozgat, to which orders and inquiries were sent almost on a daily basis.

The third set of sources from the Ottoman archives consists of judicial records in the form of hearing minutes, interrogation reports, and witness statements. While Palace officials were not directly involved in the interrogative and judicial processes for which these documents were produced, the Palace was their recipient insofar as they were pertinent to the "Armenian Question." Interrogation reports and witness statements are complex texts to decipher, in which the voice of the (mostly Armenian) suspect or (mostly Muslim) witness/plaintiff is directly present, but always mediated through the overbearing context of the verbal (and at times, presumably, physical) domination of the interrogator. Nevertheless, they are rich and layered sources.

Finally, the Ottoman archives contain crucial documents produced by Ottoman Armenian peasants, merchants, homemakers, and revolutionaries. These include petitions addressed at the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior and the Palace, which were produced to request the intervention of higher authorities to end local officials' abuse, secure clemency for political prisoners, and encourage the deployment of the gendarmerie to rein in the depredations of pastoralist Kurds. The documents also include by-laws and regulations of local Hnch'ak committees, summaries of their meetings, and a manuscript of songs and poetry authored by a prominent revolutionary, all of which were confiscated by the authorities. Some of these documents were written in Turkish, while others in Armenian. The Armenian

originals, however, are not always present in the current collections (with the notable and important exception of the aforementioned revolutionary manuscript).

Apart from Ottoman archival documents, the dissertation makes use of the diplomatic records of the British Foreign Office. These include reports produced by British consuls and ambassadors as well as memoranda submitted by dragomans and military attachés. Foreign diplomatic personnel often had different sources of information and prioritized the testimonies of Armenian informers on issues related to the “Armenian Question.” Furthermore, Ottoman government officials and representatives of the Apostolic Armenian Patriarchate adopted different voices in their conversations with representatives of Great Britain. British diplomatic personnel also provided reports on and kept records of Ottoman public trials, making note of issues such as the hostility of public prosecutors to Armenians, which would not be present in official Ottoman records.

The records of the Foreign Office also contain direct submissions by Armenian communities. Although Armenian notables, like others within the provincial elite, had developed close ties with diplomatic representatives of the Great Powers, the Treaty of Berlin magnified the general Armenian population’s expectations from vice-consuls and consuls. For example, the Armenians of Yozgat, when they realized that government officials would not take any measures in their favor to alleviate their grievances, submitted copies of their complaints and petitions with affixed requests for the immediate intervention of Great Britain on their behalf.

Finally, the dissertation utilizes a number of Armenian-language sources. The most notable is the official organ of the Hnch’ak Party, which was the most popular Armenian revolutionary organization in the Empire during the period under study. The organ published editorials and exposés on the condition of Ottoman Armenians in accordance with its ideological program. More importantly for the purposes of the dissertation, however, *Hnch’ak*

published letters and reports by revolutionaries on the ground in Ankara, Merzifon, Muş, and Sasun. These reports provide alternative accounts of peasant unrest and complaints, which would be recorded under the general rubric of sedition or evil-doing in Ottoman records.

*Prnutian Tem* [Against Oppression], which was published by the Hnch'ak press in Athens, is another publication, which provides detailed accounts of alleged abuses of Armenian peasants at the hands of government officials in Central Anatolia, and the public statements of revolutionary defendants at the Ankara trial, which were not allowed to be read during the hearings. Finally, Arsen Kitur's semi-official history of the Hnch'ak Party is frequently utilized. Although the two-volume work does not conform to modern scholarly standards strictly, and occasionally reads like a hagiographical account of the revolutionaries and their actions during the period in question, the author's access to Hnch'ak correspondence and institutional memory makes it a unique and rich resource.

## **PETITIONS AND ARMS: PRACTICES OF RESISTANCE AND COOPTATION IN MUŞ AND SASUN (1887-1892)**

The Muş plain and the neighboring mountainous region of Sasun, which lie west of Lake Van, were among the first zones of contention between the Hamidian regime and the Armenian revolutionary movement. The particular combination of the weakness of the local government, the increasing rapacity of attacks by many Kurdish pastoralist tribes, and the development of multiple practices of resistance by Armenian peasants drew the attention and resources of the Palace, the Porte, and members of the nascent Hnch'ak Party. Furthermore, foreign diplomatic and missionary observers were well-established in the region. As ethno-confessional tensions escalated, and attacks by Kurdish pastoralists on Armenian peasants intensified, the state of crisis and disorder in the region acquired imperial and international significance.

This chapter examines the dispossession of Armenian peasantry, Hamidian practices of inclusion, exclusion, and criminalization as well as Armenian peasants' and revolutionaries' acts and patterns of resistance and defiance. The first part focuses on the Armenian petitioning campaign against Musa Bey, who was one of the most prominent local strongmen of the Muş plain, his particularly brutal attempts at reinforcing his dominance, and his subsequent trial in the imperial capital. It highlights changes in Armenian attempts to challenge ethno-confessional hierarchies that marginalized them and the Hamidian regime's attempts to silence Armenian dissent and reinforce Muslim primacy. The Musa Bey affair has been the subject of two studies in the past decade. Owen Miller's article explores the influence of the affair in the popularization of Armenian self-defense bands through the extensive use of British diplomatic archives, travelogues, and, to a limited degree, of

Gülizar's memoir.<sup>1</sup> Musa Şaşmaz focuses extensively on the Ottoman and British documentation of the trial in order to reiterate the official Ottoman position that the popular expression of Armenian grievances constituted a seditious effort to limit the influence of a well-respected Kurdish notable such as Musa Bey.<sup>2</sup>

The second part of the chapter focuses on the regime's and revolutionaries' attempts to expand their influence in the mountains of Sasun, approximately 100 kilometers south of Muş. It analyzes the former's identification of its priorities and efforts at enforcing Sunni orthodoxy, molding interethnic relations and influences in its interests, and securing the allegiance of sedentary and pastoralist Kurdish tribes in the region. Furthermore, it examines Armenian peasant and revolutionary tactics and strategies of resistance and defiance, and their particular intersection. This was enabled by the fact that the Hamidian regime had started to adopt an ambitious program of integrating large numbers of Kurdish pastoralist and sedentary tribes to its socio-political coalition as enthusiastic clients, if not entirely obedient subjects.

A note has to be made about the use of a primary source, which was not discussed in the introduction. The memoir of Gülizar, who was an Armenian girl at the age of fourteen and was kidnapped by Musa Bey in the spring of 1889, was compiled and published by her daughter Arménouhie Kevonian in 1946. Gülizar's account is invaluable, because it is among the few Armenian narratives of the affair that were not mediated through the language of Ottoman petitioning or sabotaged by the Ottoman public prosecutor before and during the trial.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Gülizar herself played an active and important role in exposing Musa

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Miller, "Back to the Homeland" (*Tebi Yergir*): Or, How Peasants Became Revolutionaries in Muş," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4.2 (2017): 287-308

<sup>2</sup> Musa Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı (1883-1890)* [The Kurdish Musa Bey Affair] (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2004). The appendix to the book include transcriptions of the pre-trial depositions.

<sup>3</sup> The experiences were written down by Gülizar's daughter, when Gülizar visited her in Paris 1934-5. The text was originally published in Armenian in 1946 in Paris. Armenuhi D. Karapetian, *Gülizar*, (Paris: Der Agopian, 1946). It was translated to French in 1993 with supplementary articles on the subject by Anahide Ter Minassian and Kegham Kevonian. Arménouhie Kévonian, *Les Noces Noires de Gulizar* [The Black Wedding of Gulizar] (Marseilles: Editions Paranthèses, 1993) Gülizar's memoirs and the articles were translated to Turkish in 2015, which is the version that is used in this



Bey's brutal conduct towards the Armenian peasants of the Muş plain by her resistance to forced conversion. This resistance is not only evident in her actions and official Ottoman and British records, but also the mode of her recollections and her frequent reiterations of her attachment to Armenian identity during her captivity.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Gülizar's kidnapping and liberation became a cause célèbre on the local, imperial, and international stages that contributed to the historical memory of Muş Armenians during the Hamidian period. Finally, Gülizar's memoir is at the intersection of a personal, sharply delineated and multi-layered narrative, many details of which can be corroborated by official records, and the social memory of Armenian experience in Muş, the Ottoman Empire, and the Republic of Turkey.<sup>5</sup> Her memories both formed and were informed by it.

### **Musa Bey and the Muş Plain**

The promises of a clampdown on the dispossession of Armenian peasants in the Treaty of Berlin rarely materialized in the province of Bitlis. Major C. B. Trotter, a former British military attaché, reported towards the end of 1887 that whatever little efforts had been undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the treaty had completely dissipated within a few years due to disagreements among the Great Powers. He even advised against diplomatic efforts to raise the question of Armenian reform to the sultan again since “the LXIst Article ha[d] never been carried out as regards the Armenian.”<sup>6</sup> The British vice-consul at Van echoed Trotter's observation in his report on the region several months later, stating that the

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chapter. Arménouhie Kévonian, *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü: Bir Kürt beyi tarafından kaçırılan Ermeni kızın gerçek hikayesi* [The Black Wedding of Gulizar: The true story of an Armenian girl who was kidnapped by a Kurdish lord] (İstanbul: Aras, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> During her captivity, for example, she recounts her deep desire to converse frequently with the Armenian cook in the household. *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 49

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the creation and reproduction of memory and memories as a social process, see Erika Apfelbaum, “Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory,” in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, (Fordham University Press: New York, 2010)

<sup>6</sup> FO, 424/185, No. 1, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury (Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, who was the British Foreign Secretary at the time), 24 December 1887, inclosure, undated memorandum by Major C. B. Trotter

Armenians' "sufferings were really pitiable, and if they [were] not looked upon as seditious by the Government, the utter contempt and neglect they meet with must be felt as a sore burden."<sup>7</sup> The Ottoman government displayed little interest in reining in the rampant impoverishment of the region's peasantry.

During the 1880s, the Muş plain was dominated by Musa Bey and his retinue. Musa Bey was a Kurdish notable, who hailed from a tribe based in Huyt. His father, Mirza Bey, was killed during a clash with another tribe. Musa Bey, however, succeeded in establishing his primacy in the countryside. His followers culled payments in cash and kind from Armenian and Kurdish peasants in the plains. They also engaged in waylaying with no fear of government retribution. He even secured an official post as a tax collector in exchange for a lump sum payment from the district governorship, placing a veneer of legitimacy on his extortionary practices. He cultivated close relations with members of the local administrative council and other officials of the government over the course of his rise.<sup>8</sup> It was those relations and the size of his armed retinue that allowed him to avoid the charges laid against him for waylaying, robbing, and wounding two American missionaries in 1883. Despite the intervention of the United States legation and the missionaries' identification of him as the main assailant, the regional Court of First Instance decreed the evidence insufficient and released Musa Bey.<sup>9</sup>

His brief appearance in a court of law did not seem to have a strong impact on Musa Bey's conduct. Kurdish and Armenians peasants and merchants started petitioning the local

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<sup>7</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 46, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 5 June 1888, inc. 3, Vice-Consul Devey (Van) to Consul Chermiside (Erzurum), 13 April 1888

<sup>8</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 42, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 30 May 1889, inc.2, Vice-Consul Devey to Consul Chermiside, 27 April 1889

<sup>9</sup> The Court of First Instance (*Bidayet Mahkemesi*) was the lowest court for criminal cases in the reformed Ottoman judicial system. Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı*, pp.28-31; The US Legation in Constantinople attempted to seek recompense for the 1883 attacks after the trial of Musa Bey was announced. However, the Porte ignored their requests. FO, 424/162, No. 90, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 11 October 1889

government to take action against his abuses. On 17 July 1887, a Muslim peasant from the village of Süprit reported to the district governorship of Muş the murder of his nephew at the hands of Musa Bey, after they fended off a group of bandits that attempted to steal oxen from their neighbors' flock. He brought his deceased nephew's body to be inspected by government officials to no avail.<sup>10</sup> About a year later, several Armenian village headmen started petitioning the district governorship with letters that listed the deprivations they had been subjected to over the past several months. The peasants complained that the brigands' attacks and extortion had reached an unprecedented level that threatened not only their property but also their honor. In their most recent attack, Musa Bey's followers attempted to plunder, despoil and burn a church in Khars. Although the peasants succeeded in repelling the attackers from the church, the adjacent primary school building was burned down.<sup>11</sup> In other petitions, peasants claimed that Musa Bey's followers picked out individuals from their communities and publicly tortured them in order to coerce the rest of them to accede to their demands. The peasants requested that government officials protect their lives, property, and honor. They also called for the capture, trial, and punishment of Musa Bey, his relatives, and his followers.<sup>12</sup>

As early as 1 March 1888, the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior was aware of the petitioning campaign against Musa Bey. An order sent out to the Governorate of Bitlis on that day called for the conduct of the necessary investigations into the Armenian peasants' complaints and a solution to the issue at hand.<sup>13</sup> That solution, however, appeared elusive. The petitioning campaign continued in the following year, reporting the increasing frequency and intensity of Musa Bey's followers' attacks. According to the peasants, the number of

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<sup>10</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 70/12, Saho's Petition to the District-Governorate of Muş, 17 July 1887

<sup>11</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 70/12, Petition from the headmen of Argavank, Khars, and Vartenis, 27 January 1888

<sup>12</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 70/12, Petition from the headman of Khars, 14 February 1888

<sup>13</sup> BOA, DH. MKT. 1490/109, From the Ministry of the Interior to the Governorate of Bitlis, 1 March 1888

sheep and oxen lifted by the notable's followers had exceeded five hundred, and their targeted attacks on storage depots and granaries in Armenian villages had ruined the livelihoods of the Armenian peasantry of the plains. The peasants also complained about the inability and/or unwillingness of local government officials to address their grievances. They stated that one of Musa Bey's cousins had, in fact, been captured after a series of outrages that included the kidnapping of an Armenian girl. His fellow brigands, however, organized a raid on the prison and liberated him within a short period of time.

In the case of the murder of an Armenian peasant by Musa Bey's followers, the authorities simply refused to get involved. One of the petitions asked "Is it not known by all that Musa Bey and his men targeted and murdered a Christian on his way back to his village? And has this information not been reported to government officials?"<sup>14</sup> It was not only local administrative officials, who had been made aware of Musa Bey and his followers' exploits on the plains. In the meantime, the Ministry of the Interior repeated its orders to the Governorate of Bitlis to bring about a swift and decisive solution to the problem. In another order in September, the Ministry reiterated the Armenian plaintiffs' identification of Musa Bey and his followers as bandits, and ordered the resolution of the question.<sup>15</sup>

In the spring of 1889, Musa Bey was detained by the local officials in Muş in response to the vigorous petitioning campaign and orders from the Ministry of the Interior. The conditions of his capture and detention are not clear from the sources available. While he was in custody the Armenian peasants, who had been petitioning for his capture, submitted another request for the deployment of government officials to their villages to ensure the peaceful return of their flocks from the followers of Musa Bey.<sup>16</sup> A few days later, however,

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<sup>14</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 70/12, Petition from the headmen of Argavank, Khars, and Vartenis, 21 March 1888

<sup>15</sup> BOA, DH. MKT. 1540/90, From the Ministry of the Interior to the Governorate of Bitlis, 9 September 1888

<sup>16</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 70/12, Petition from the headme of Argavank, Khars, and Vartenis, 28 March 1889

Musa Bey was released. The consensus among Armenian peasants and British diplomatic personnel was that he had bribed government officials in order to secure his release.<sup>17</sup>

Once he was released, Musa Bey systematically targeted the Armenian village headmen who had been petitioning for his capture. His first victim was Ohan, son of Asadur, of Argavank. According to Vice-Consul Devey, Musa Bey and his followers captured Ohan while he was traveling back from Muş to his village. They took him to the Kurdish village of Godni, where they “put him to death by fire, under circumstances of appalling torture.”<sup>18</sup> Arménouhie Kevonian, in her introduction to Gülizar’s memories, gives a similar account of the headman’s murder at the hands of Musa Bey. After Musa Bey’s release, Ohan was promised safe conduct to his village by the district governor and escorted by armed guards of the post courier. They stopped by at the aforementioned village of Godni to rest for the night. Ohan was separated from the guards to board at the house of a village notable. Musa Bey and his followers came to the house in the middle of the night. They tied Ohan up, suspended him from the ceiling with a rope, and burned him alive. His mutilated body was left by the side of the road for passers-by to see.<sup>19</sup>

Musa Bey then set his sights on the household of Miro, the headman of Khars. While the headman was away at Muş, he dispatched his armed followers to raid Miro’s house and kidnap his niece, Gülizar. According to Gülizar’s memoir, her family was expecting an attack by Musa Bey. When his followers surrounded the house, the men of the family made an attempt at defense. Musa Bey’s followers prevailed and looted most of the family’s property. They also kidnapped Gülizar and her aunt despite pleas by the other women. Although a small Ottoman gendarmarie squad made an effort to stop the assailants, they were quickly driven

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<sup>17</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 42, Ambassador White to the Marquis of Salisbury, 30 May 1889, inc. 2, Vice-Consul Devey to Consul Chermside, 27 April 1889. *Gülizar’ın Kara Düğünü*, 13

<sup>18</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 42, Ambassador White to the Marquis of Salisbury, 30 May 1889, inc. 2, Vice-Consul Devey to Consul Chermside, 27 April 1889

<sup>19</sup> *Gülizar’ın Kara Düğünü*, 14

back by the bandits' superior numbers. Gülizar's aunt was abandoned on the road after she fell off her horse and passed out.<sup>20</sup>

Gülizar's family and the Armenian peasants of Muş responded with a new wave of petitions to the authorities. On 9 April 1889, the day after Musa Bey's raid on his household, headman Miro submitted a petition to the district governorship of Muş. He reported that a group of Musa Bey's relatives and followers, who were armed with breech-loaded rifles of British and Russian issue, had besieged Khars. They then proceeded to attack the headman's household, killing his father Agop in the process. They broke into Miro's house and looted his property. The headman stated "they then kidnapped my wife and the fourteen-year-old virgin daughter of my brother Ağacan, although they were compelled to leave my wife on the side of the road after breaking her arm."<sup>21</sup>

On the same day, eight Armenian village headmen from the Muş plains submitted a petition to the Ministry of the Interior, which recounted Musa Bey's murder of headman Ohan, and kidnapping of Gülizar. The petition concluded with the following plea for government intervention:

We have grown destitute despite appealing to the higher authorities with numerous telegraphs for several years. The provincial authorities have neglected to capture him. If the state continues to refrain from defending law and order, the commoners lack the means to resist the brigands. The aforementioned brigand [Musa Bey] continues to raid and pillage a village every day. Our children suffer under the heels of the brigands. If the aforementioned [Musa Bey] is not exiled from this region along with his family and followers, the restitution of our safety is not possible. We will dissolve soon. We are in dire need of the defense of law, justice and the general order... For God's sake and in the name of justice of humanity, we beg for the imperial display of mercy by the exile of the aforementioned brigand and his family and brothers Cezo and Ömer from here, and redress for the poor Ohan, who was burned alive for defending our lives and honor.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 70/12, Miro's Petition to the District-Governorate of Muş, 9 April 1889

<sup>22</sup> BOA, DH. MKT. 1617/42, Petition to the Ministry of the Interior, 9 April 1889

While Musa Bey's earlier attacks and extortion of the Armenian peasantry of Muş were a major source of local grievances and concern, his brutal murder of the headman Ohan and his brazen raid on Khars engendered a crisis of imperial and international import. There were two major reasons for this. The first was Musa Bey's intentionally brazen violation of the lives and "honor" of Armenian rural notables. While he had mostly destroyed Armenian property before to induce them to accede to his extortionary demands, with the murder of headman Ohan he sent out a clear message to all the residents of the Muş plain that the Ottoman authorities were either powerless or unwilling to help them. The public display of Ohan's burned body served the same purpose. News of his recent conduct spread quickly throughout the plain and the towns of Muş and Bitlis. Two weeks after the kidnapping of Gülizar, British Vice-Consul Devey traveled to Bitlis to conduct an unofficial investigation into the matter. In addition to the recounting of his attacks, Devey reported that Musa Bey's "rule is absolute over five or six large Kurdish villages of Khuit, and he is able to do much as he likes both there and in the Mush Plain between Bitlis and Mush."<sup>23</sup>

The second, and arguably more important reason, was the dogged determination of the peasants to seek redress from whatever authority possible. The Armenians of Muş organized a demonstration in front of the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate in the imperial capital on 2 May 1889. A group of Armenian peasants from Muş and migrant workers that originated from the town who had come to Constantinople in search of work gathered in front of the patriarchate to complain about Musa Bey. According to the a British report, "the Patriarch endeavored to calm the people, and decided to report the matter to the Grand Vizier, with a view to obtaining redress, and, at the same time, to send two or three of the deputation [of the demonstrators] to his Highness [the Grand Vizier] for reference in case of necessity." The

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<sup>23</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 42, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, inc. 2, Vice-Consul Devey to Consul Chermide, 27 April 1889

peasants refrained from a direct confrontation with the authorities and dispersed when the police arrived on the scene.<sup>24</sup> They succeeded in engaging multiple audiences with their calls for justice, including high-ranking Ottoman officials at the Porte and the Palace, diplomatic representatives of the Great Powers, and foreign journalists. According to the same diplomatic report, the peasants were received at the Porte. Furthermore, their complaints reached higher governmental and ecclesiastical authorities. During the same period, Gülizar's desperate family continued to petition the local government for her liberation from her captors.

Public knowledge of Musa Bey's outrages and the failure/unwillingness of the local authorities to detain him caused a stir among high-ranking Ottoman officials. A British dragoman, who interviewed Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa on the day of the demonstration, reported that "[Kamil Paşa] did not see how a crime committed at Moosh could affect the Armenians at Van, Ismid, and Constantinople, who had joined the deputation, the real object of which, in his view, was to create a sensation, and afford subject matter for the foreign press."<sup>25</sup> Kamil Paşa's remark hints at important aspects of the Ottoman view of the developing crisis and their strategies to contain it.

On the one hand, the Palace and the Porte made substantive efforts at stopping Musa Bey's abuses and securing his arrest in order to deter growing accusations of official complicity in the Kurdish notable's conduct. Strict orders were sent out directly from the palace to the local authorities to capture Musa Bey and send him to the imperial capital for a public trial, where he would be prosecuted on the complaints laid against him. However, those local authorities lacked the means to realize his capture. British Vice-Consul Devey reported that Musa Bey commanded about a thousand armed men, one-hundred-ten of whom were patrolling the roads around Muş. He added that "the Government is indeed miserably feeble at

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<sup>24</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 37, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, inc. Memorandum by Dragoman Hardinge, 13 May 1889

<sup>25</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 37, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, inc. Memorandum by Dragoman Hardinge, 13 May 1889



the moment; the vilayet force of zaptiehs [gendarmes] consists of 520 (200 are horse), but Moussa Bey would smile at the futility of any attempt on their part to seize him.”<sup>26</sup> Unless the capture of Musa Bey was transformed into a military matter, which would involve the deployment of 4<sup>th</sup> Army regiments, the administrative authorities needed to seek the intermediacy of local notables who could convince him to surrender to the authorities.

According to Gülizar’s memoir, the imperial order was framed in the guise of an invitation by the local notables who contacted him. Musa Bey appeared convinced that his Imperial Sovereign had invited him to the capital to reward him for his services with gifts and new appointments. He first traveled to Bitlis and lodged at the house of Hacı Necmeddin, a local notable and a member of the provincial administrative council. He held meetings with the provincial governor. Afterward, he traveled back to his home village in the company of the provincial chief secretary (*vilayet mektupçusu*) and held a feast on the eve of his departure. He was accompanied by an entourage of sheikhs and gendarmes on his journey to Constantinople.<sup>27</sup> Later, the governor of Bitlis recommended that Hacı Necmeddin, who had convinced Musa Bey to travel to Constantinople, and Pertev Bey, the chief secretary who accompanied him to Constantinople, be rewarded with imperial medals for their services to the state.<sup>28</sup>

Musa Bey arrived in Constantinople on 25 June 1889 and was immediately taken to the palace where Süreyya Paşa, the Chief Secretary of the sultan, interviewed him. Süreyya Paşa described him as “a courteous man in Kurdish garb,” who “refused to accept the allegations of brigandage and rebellion as a loyal servant of the sultan and was ready to face

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<sup>26</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 42, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, inc. 2, Vice-Consul Devey to Consul Chermeside, 27 April 1889

<sup>27</sup> British diplomatic sources reported that he appeared in Bitlis unharassed in the middle of May. FO, 424/162, No. 42, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, inc. 3, Consul Chermeside to Ambassador White, 30 May 1889; Also see Gülizar’s account of Musa Bey’s departure, *Gülizar’ın Kara Düğünü*, 45-7

<sup>28</sup> Y. PRK. UM. 14/79, The Governorate of Bitlis to the Yıldız Palace

anyone's complaints and allegations in court."<sup>29</sup> The Chief Secretary's positive portrayal of Musa Bey foretold the palace's intent to secure his acquittal in the eventual prosecution.

Despite their avowed dedication to addressing the concerns of their Armenian subjects, the Palace would remain committed to clearing Musa Bey's reputation.

At the same time, authorities at the Porte and the Palace attempted to downplay the significance of the whole affair in order to prevent discussion of the "Armenian Question" in European press and diplomatic circles. Therefore, they sought to cast doubt on the prevailing view that Musa Bey's crimes were symptomatic of the harrowing conditions of the Armenian peasantry. At the same time, they viewed the mobilization of the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate, the Prelacy of Muş, and Armenians of Constantinople on behalf of the peasants of the Muş plain as a seditious effort to undermine Ottoman authority. Kamil Paşa succinctly summarized this view in a memorandum to Sultan Abdülhamid II a few months into the crisis, in response to the sultan's request for policy proposals to prevent the resurgence of the "Armenian Question". Kamil Paşa warned that

it was obvious that the Armenians had sought the assistance of the Armenian Patriarchate before presenting their petitions to the Sublime Porte, and that the Patriarchate is resorting to every means to conclude the Armenian Question in their favor... As is evident from the basic evidence, Armenian complaints about their conflict with the Kurds is originally a local matter. Therefore, it is obvious that Armenian peasants would not have been capable of seeking international patronage in their favor.<sup>30</sup>

The Grand Vizier continued to claim that if such calamities had befallen a Muslim people of the Empire, such as the Albanians, they would not have engaged in such treachery. Albanian subjects of the Empire in the capital would prevent the escalation of such a crisis even if local elements had presented complaints. He advised that the Palace and the Porte communicate the

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<sup>29</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK. 16/19, Palatial Chief Scribe Süreyya Bey's Report, 25 June 1889

<sup>30</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 227/43, Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa to the Palace, 12 July 1889

potential impact of the crisis on the personal fortunes and positions of Armenian elites in the capital in order for them to stop supporting the peasants' cause.<sup>31</sup>

Kamil Paşa's deft observation suggests that he was ready to utilize class divisions within the Ottoman Armenian community in order to isolate the peasants. Although it was the peasants' grievances that had rekindled Great Power interest in the condition of the Ottoman Armenians, it was the Armenian clergymen's support for their cause that sustained it. As far as the Porte was concerned, the cause of the peasants could only be heard on the international stage through the intermediacy of Armenian clergymen. Without their support, Great Power interest in Armenian grievances would disappear. For the Palace and the Porte, it was not the content of the Armenian grievances but their reception by foreign observers and diplomats that constituted the crisis and the Musa Bey affair. Whether the clergymen had organized or assisted in the peasant mobilization is difficult to determine. In Gülizar's memoir, she speaks fondly about her encounter with the former patriarch Khrimian, who arranged for her to visit a doctor.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout this period, Gülizar remained hostage at the hands of the extended family of Musa Bey. According to her, Musa Bey's initial plan was to marry Gülizar after forcing her to convert to Islam. His elders within the tribe warned him about marrying a fifth spouse as he had already four wives in his family. At the added objection of several sheikhs, Musa Bey consented to wedding Gülizar to his younger brother, Cezahir/Cazo. After several weeks of physical and mental abuse at the hands of her captors that left her partially blind in one eye, she made the appearance of a genuine conversion to Islam.<sup>33</sup> Shortly thereafter, Musa Bey left for Constantinople.

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<sup>31</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 227/43, Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa to the Palace, 12 July 1889

<sup>32</sup> During her captivity, Gülizar was beaten and struck several times. As a result of her injuries, she lost sight with one of her eyes. She states that the visit to the doctor saved her other eye. *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 90-1

<sup>33</sup> *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 40-2

Gülizar's family did not cease petitioning the local government for her liberation and return. Around the time of Musa Bey's departure, headman Miro submitted another petition to the district governorship in which he stated his profound grief at the continued captivity of his niece at the hands of Musa Bey's family. He renewed his request for government intervention and implied his determination to stay in contact with Gülizar through intermediaries until her release, pleading "My complaints have had no productive result and I receive devastating news from the aforementioned girl [Gülizar]... Conscience and justice cannot dictate such a state of affairs and no Armenian can withstand it. Mercy, sir!"<sup>34</sup> Gülizar had succeeded in establishing contact with her family through an Armenian servant who worked at the household of Musa Bey.<sup>35</sup> As the crisis surrounding Musa Bey deepened in the capital, the governor felt compelled to accede to the family's requests and summoned Gülizar to Bitlis to testify on the sincerity of her conversion to Islam. Musa Bey's brother, who was the husband-captor of Gülizar, reluctantly consented after repeated assurances from the girl that she had truly become a Muslim and a Kurd.<sup>36</sup>

By the time of her arrival in Bitlis, the case of Gülizar had become a public affair. She was placed in the home of a prominent sheikh before her appearance in front of the governor. For three days, she was coached by the sheikh's family and relatives of Musa Bey not to recant her conversion. She was allowed to meet her mother twice in closely-monitored settings. Although she initially made a public display of her devotion to Islam, she told her in private that she had longed for her liberation.<sup>37</sup> During her detention at the sheikh's home, Altun, Gülizar's mother sent a telegram to the Ministry of the Interior demanding her release. Her petition stated that her family had been attempting to complain against Musa Bey, who had murdered her father-in-law and stolen their property, and to secure Gülizar's release for

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<sup>34</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 70/12, Miro's Petition to the District-Governorate of Muş, 11 May 1889

<sup>35</sup> *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 53-6

<sup>36</sup> *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 63

<sup>37</sup> *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 70-2

the past three months. However, Gülizar had been brought into the city and placed in the residence of Molla Emin, a Muslim sheikh and the greatest protector of Musa Bey. As if it were not enough that Gülizar had been subject to pressure from Musa Bey's family to convert, she was now suffering under constant pressure from the sheikh's family as a result of the governor's "evildoing" (*ifsadat*). The petition concluded with a plea to the imperial compassion and mercy of the Sultan for the immediate return of Gülizar to her family.<sup>38</sup>

Altun's reference to the evildoing of as high-ranking an Ottoman official as the governor is truly remarkable. It is indicative of the desperation and determination of Gülizar's family to secure her freedom. At the same time, Gülizar's family was keenly aware of the mounting pressure on the local government officials against Musa Bey. The Muş Armenians had succeeded in taking their complaints on the imperial and international stages. Government officials were ordered to take every measure to stop the flow of news and information that implied that Armenians were being harassed and extorted in the Ottoman Empire. Continued reporting of Armenian grievances could jeopardize the international standing of the Empire as well as the individual fortunes of high-ranking bureaucrats.

Altun's petition was successful. Gülizar's memoir contains a vivid description of the hearing that resulted in her return to her family. She recounts that she noticed that there were no Armenians in the courthouse upon her arrival. The governor asked her in the presence of the Muslim notables of the city, and of the clerics that had brought her to Muş, if she had converted willingly. She was hesitant to answer any of their questions in the absence of her family and representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church. As the governor grew impatient, Altun arrived at the doors of the courtroom and demanded entry. After Edhem Paşa allowed her to enter the hall, Gülizar openly declared that she had been kidnapped from her family home by Musa Bey's followers and that she remained an Armenian. She then

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<sup>38</sup> BOA, DH. MKT. 1635/13, Petition of Altun of Muş to the Ministry of the Interior, 4 July 1889

proceeded to remove her Kurdish garb. Despite the protests and anger of Muslim notables, Edhem Paşa ordered that Gülizar be returned to her family.<sup>39</sup>

In the summer of 1889, it seemed that the Porte and Palace had finally taken decisive steps in addressing the grievances of Muş Armenians. Musa Bey had arrived in the imperial capital for his public trial, and Gülizar had reunited with her family. After years of petitioning Ottoman governmental officials and representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate, and informing European diplomatic officials of their conditions, the Armenian peasants of the Muş plain had succeeded in getting their voices heard. Reporting the arrival of forty-seven peasants in Constantinople in late August to testify against Musa Bey in the impending trial, the British ambassador shared his optimism with the Foreign Secretary that “there appears to be a reasonable prospect that the ends of justice will not be evaded, and that the fearful outrages of which this Chieftain is accused... will be properly sifted and examined in this capital.”<sup>40</sup>

However, the conduct of the Ottoman government betrayed ulterior motives. First, the Porte and Palace pressured the provincial authorities only after the dissemination of the news of Musa Bey’s attacks among European diplomats and journalists. They feared the possibility of overt European intervention on behalf of the Armenians and renewed international efforts to enforce an administrative reform program in the Six Provinces. Long before the judicial proceedings in the capital, the Porte and Palace portrayed the whole affair as a seditious effort by Armenian political circles abroad and the Patriarchate to discredit the Ottoman state. At the end of June, the Ottoman ambassador met with the British Foreign Secretary and “proceeded to point out the extent to which this case was analogous to that of Bulgaria twelve years ago, and said that he had no doubt whatever that these legends of atrocities were invented purely

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<sup>39</sup> Gülizar’s success in convincing her captors of her genuine conversion to Islam was the British Vice-Consul Devey. FO, 424/162, No. 75, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 13 August 1889, inc. 2 Vice-Consul Devey to Consul Chermside, July 26 1889; *Gülizar’ın Kara Düğünü*, 73-7

<sup>40</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 78, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 30 August 1889

from a political aim. It was quite impossible, however, under any circumstances that Armenia could receive institutions resembling those of Bulgaria, inasmuch as the Christian population was only a minority in the district.”<sup>41</sup> Both Kamil Paşa’s memorandum to Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Ottoman ambassador’s words at his meeting with the British Foreign Secretary indicate that the Ottoman government prioritized the resolution of the affair by casting doubt on the authenticity of Armenian grievances and precluding European intervention.

Second, Ottoman central and provincial officials went to great lengths in order not to offend Musa Bey and his followers. Although he was officially summoned to the capital to answer to the grave charges laid against him, he was received warmly by the Palace circles. After all, Musa Bey only agreed to come to Constantinople after repeated assurances from local notables that he would not be detained. According to Gülizar, he was convinced that the whole episode would conclude with the sultan bestowing imperial favor upon him in the form of honorary posts or gifts. Even before his arrival, the Chief Secretary of the Palace Süreyya Paşa attested to his innocence in an unofficial meeting with a British dragoman.<sup>42</sup> His “detention” in Constantinople must have strengthened this view. He was “detained” at the mansion of Bahri Paşa, who was his uncle and the district governor of Üsküdar. The government’s treatment of Musa Bey differed considerably from that of ordinary criminals awaiting trial under detention. On the other hand, it was somewhat reminiscent of the warm welcome Sheikh Ubeidulah had received, when he came to the imperial capital after his invasion of Urumieh.

### **The Trial**

By the late summer of 1889, the impending trial of Musa Bey had become a matter of international and imperial (dis)repute. The Ottoman newspaper, *Tarik*, published several

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<sup>41</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 48, Marquis of Salisbury to Ambassador White, 26 June 1889

<sup>42</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 45, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 2 June 1889, inc., Dragoman Sandison’s report, 27 May 1889

articles as well as petitions regarding the affair. Musa Bey was depicted as an honorable man, who had been wronged by his enemies' depictions.<sup>43</sup> In preparation for the trial, the Porte and the Palace requested information and documents regarding the Musa Bey affair from the Governorate of Bitlis. At this point, Edhem Paşa, whose reputation had suffered from his inability to contain the Musa Bey crisis before it acquired political significance, had been replaced by Rauf Paşa, the former district governor of Beirut. The Porte specifically referred to the raid on the household of headman Miro, the murder of his father-in-law, and the kidnapping of Gülizar.<sup>44</sup> Some two weeks later, the new governor responded after inquiring into the matter with local officials. He confirmed that the attack, murder, and kidnapping were all attributed to Musa Bey, his brother, and their followers. Gülizar was reunited with her parents, who traveled with her to Constantinople to lay charges against Musa Bey in his upcoming trial. Rauf Paşa added

During my journey from the border of Erzurum to the seat of my current office, what I have heard on Musa Bey's atrocities from administrative officials, military officers, and others have exceeded the confines of hearsay. His brazen conduct has become the talk of the town. Taking into account the manifest state of public knowledge of his acts and reports from the district governorship of Muş, it would not be possible to deny their veracity by a telegraphic report.<sup>45</sup>

The highest ranking administrative official in the province of Bitlis thus confirmed that Musa Bey was really responsible for most of the atrocities attributed to him. Rauf Paşa's tenure in Bitlis would prove short; he was replaced by Tahsin Paşa in 1892. However, neither the Porte nor the Palace were able to control the spread of news of Musa Bey's atrocities.

British vice-consul Devey reported that upon his arrival in Bitlis in May, government officials, missionaries, Muslim and Armenian residents of the town were all talking about what Musa Bey had done. Although many Muslims believed the reports to have been

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<sup>43</sup> FO, 424/162, No. 57, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 2 July 1889

<sup>44</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 231/69, The Porte to the Governorate of Bitlis, 7 September 1889

<sup>45</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 231/69, The Governorate of Bitlis to the Porte, 24 September 1889



exaggerated, Devey claimed he had heard a judicial inspector from the Constantinople Court of Cassation refer to Musa Bey as a “ruffian” and decry his “burning innocent people and committing atrocities”. Upon his return to Van, the vice-consul “heard the Vali of Van one evening at the house of the Defterdar express in the strongest terms most severe strictures on the mis-government of the adjoining vilayet [Bitlis] in referring to the crimes of Moussa Bey”. Devey conceded that a bitter rivalry had existed between the two governors, but reported that other officials such as the chief religious judge (*kadı*) and the jurisconsult (*müftü*) both referred to Musa Bey and his father’s cruel treatment of the peasants of the Muş plain.<sup>46</sup>

Notwithstanding Ottoman and British confirmation of Musa Bey’s atrocities, however, the Porte and the Palace remained dismissive of the plaintiffs’ complaints and well-being. Although the Palace pledged to compensate the forty-seven plaintiffs that had traveled from the Muş plain for their travel and lodging costs until the conclusion of the trial, the reimbursement appears not to have been sufficient. In her memoir, Gülizar recounted the charity sale of copies of a photograph of her and her mother in traditional Muş Armenian garb, in order to cover the costs of the plaintiffs’ lodging at Vezir Han. She further stated that the costs of her school attendance were covered by Mgrdich Khrimian. Khrimian was a former Armenian patriarch of Constantinople, who had been active in raising awareness of the conditions of the Armenian peasantry and had led the Armenian delegation at the Congress of Berlin.<sup>47</sup> His involvement further roused the suspicions of the Porte and the Palace, which distanced themselves from the plaintiffs. No legal counsel was provided to the plaintiffs by the authorities during their depositions before the trial. As was mentioned before, the Porte

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<sup>46</sup> FO, 424/126, Ambassador White to Dragoman Sanderson, 25 September 1889, inc. 2, Vice-Consul Devey’s Memorandum, September 3 1889

<sup>47</sup> *Gülizar’ın Kara Düğünü*, 90-1

and the Palace also pressured the Patriarchate not to become too involved in efforts to assist the plaintiffs.

During the pre-trial depositions of the plaintiffs, the judge dismissed two of the ten charges citing the lack of substantive evidence to indict Musa Bey officially. Initially, the cases of the kidnapping of Gülizar and the murder of her grandfather Agop, were suspended until the arrival of the related documents from the local authorities and the deposition of more witnesses *en route* from Muş to the imperial capital to testify against him. The judge later cited inconsistencies in the testimonies of the witnesses that placed Musa Bey at the house during the assault and those that claimed the attackers were led by Musa Bey's brother, Cezahir. Furthermore, several Muslim notables from Bitlis testified that Musa Bey had been in their company in the town, at least a day's distance from the villages where the attack and the murder took place. Eventually, the judge dismissed the case, and Musa Bey was not indicted for his followers' assault on the household of headman Miro, the murder of his father, and the kidnapping of Gülizar.<sup>48</sup> One of the two incidents that had elevated Musa Bey's notoriety to the imperial and international level, the veracity of which was confirmed by Ottoman and British official reports and supported by the testimony of a girl who had not only survived the initial assault but also months of captivity, was thus dismissed from the purview of the Ottoman judiciary.

In addition to casting doubt on the veracity of the statements of the Armenian plaintiffs, the Porte and the Palace were making efforts to profess the innocence and defend the integrity of Musa Bey to the representatives of the Great Powers. In late August, the Porte submitted a *pro-memoria* to the British embassy, which claimed that Musa Bey was the target of a well-organized campaign to destroy his reputation and reduce his influence in his home region. In defense of his innocence, the *pro-memoria* asserted that "burning living bodies is

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<sup>48</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 6/93

against the Moslem religion, and the present charge could not possibly be true”.<sup>49</sup> Several days before the commencement of the trial, the British embassy informally contacted the Porte on the question of Musa Bey’s “detention.” The embassy dragoman Alvarez informed the Ministry of Justice that if Musa Bey were not arrested and placed in custody for the duration of the trial, it would cast a shadow on the impartiality of the court. Furthermore, it would attest to official approval of Musa Bey’s atrocities towards the Armenians. Rıdvan İsmail Paşa, who served as the mayor of Beyoğlu during this period, reported the visit to the Sultan.<sup>50</sup> Despite British objections, however, Musa Bey continued to lodge at his uncle’s mansion in Üsküdar for the duration of the trial.

The trial began on 25 November 1889. The plaintiffs were represented by Simon Tıngır Efendi, an Armenian attorney. Musa Bey was represented by İzzet Bey and Mehmet Ali Efendi. The trial was closely followed by high-ranking government officials, dragomans from the embassies of the Great Powers and spectators from the general public. British dragoman Justin Alvarez stated that “the Court-Room was literally packed, and the greatest interest was taken by those present in the proceedings, which were frequently disturbed especially in the beginning, by the angry knocking for admittance on the doors of the Court by the disappointed crowd outside.”<sup>51</sup> Summaries of each hearing were published in the Ottoman official judicial journal *Ceride-i Mehakim* as well.<sup>52</sup> Alvarez was present at each hearing and provided detailed summaries with excerpts of the minutes.

To the surprise of most spectators, Public Prosecutor Halid Bey adopted a harsh tone towards the plaintiffs from the beginning of the trial. His practice differed sharply from the established norms of public prosecution in that he treated the plaintiffs as defendants. He

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<sup>49</sup> FO, 424/126, Ambassador White to Dragoman Sanderson, 25 September 1889, inc. 2, Vice-Consul Devey’s Memorandum, 3 September 1889

<sup>50</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZJ. 16/20, Rıdvan İsmail Paşa to the Palace, 22 October 1889

<sup>51</sup> FO, 424/162, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 27 November 1889, inc. Dragoman Alvarez’s Memorandum, 25 November 1889

<sup>52</sup> Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı*, .3-4

often attempted to intimidate the plaintiffs and the witnesses who testified in support of their allegations. In the first trial he “not being satisfied with the witness’ manner of taking the oath, as he did not keep his hand on the Gospel, by permission of the President pronounced the formula himself, and told the witness to repeat his words exactly: -- The witness, an ignorant rustic, repeated what the Prosecutor had said, word for word (laughter among the audience).”<sup>53</sup> Most of the plaintiffs and witnesses had never been in a courtroom before. The hostility of the prosecutor was undoubtedly intimidating for them.

His confrontational attitude towards the plaintiffs and witnesses, most of whom did not speak Turkish and required the assistance of an interpreter, was accompanied by his efforts to highlight inconsistencies among their testimonies. He occasionally directed questions in order to solicit answers that contradicted other witnesses’ testimonies. One example involved the questioning of a witness about the arson of hayricks in the village of Ardonk. The prosecutor asked the witness about the number of hayricks in the village. When he responded with a number far fewer than the number of houses in the village, the prosecutor claimed that there was a major discrepancy, implying that the witness’s statement had lost its validity (the underlying assumption was that there was a hayrick outside each house). The witness clarified that the fewer number he had given referred to the hayricks in his row, but the “discrepancy” had entered the court records.<sup>54</sup>

In other cases, he sought inconsistencies between the pre-trial depositions of the witnesses and the defendants. On the third sitting, he asked a witness the date of the murder of a peasant named Melkhas he claimed to have seen. When the witness said it was winter, and that there was snow, Halid Bey called on the President to have a section of the witness’

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<sup>53</sup> FO, 424/162, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 27 November 1889, inc. Dragoman Alvarez’s Memorandum, 25 November 1889

<sup>54</sup> FO, 424/162, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 27 November 1889, inc. Dragoman Alvarez’s Memorandum, 25 November 1889

deposition read, which apparently contradicted his trial testimony.<sup>55</sup> In his original deposition, the witness was asked if anybody else had seen Melkhas' murder. In response, he had stated that several peasants had seen it from their rooftops. The witness only made a remark about the snow after he was asked how peasants could get on their rooftops in the winter if there was snow. He said he could not remember if there was snow on the rooftops of the houses, since peasants frequently clear the snow off their roofs.<sup>56</sup> This was an example among many when Halid Bey utilized ambiguous answers from the pre-trial depositions to cast doubt on the validity of the witnesses' testimonies or confuse them.

The difference between the prosecutor and the president's attitude towards the plaintiffs and the defendant was palpable. Musa Bey was not only able to provide lengthy denunciations of the witnesses after the testimonies, but even pronounce veiled threats. In his questioning regarding the murder of the aforementioned Melkhas, the president of the court asked him if he were in Ardonk that day. He responded in the positive and went on to say: "...all these people have a spite and enmity against me. They see me here; they say they wish to see me in prison. The Government prison is better than my house. Whatever they say, I know nothing about it. There is a priest, Malkhass' brother on the mother's side. If he were to get into my clutches I would treat him worse. I would take out his eyes. (Sensation)"<sup>57</sup> The public prosecutor did not address Musa Bey's last sentence, and simply carried on with the previous line of questioning by confirming his presence at the village at the time.

The blatant bias of the judicial officials in favor of Musa Bey escaped nobody. In order to preclude the wave of objections he expected, Halid Bey dedicated the first part of his concluding statement to a veiled defense of his actions. He argued that the public prosecutor

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<sup>55</sup> FO, 424/162, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 5 December 1889, inc. Dragoman Alvarez's Memorandum, 4 December 1889

<sup>56</sup> Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı*, 314

<sup>57</sup> FO, 424/162, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 5 December 1889, inc. Dragoman Alvarez's Memorandum, 4 December 1889

was responsible not only for “speaking against the suspected and accused person,” but must intervene “if they see the falseness of the case.” After pointing out the perceived contradictions in the statements of the plaintiffs and “generally abusing the witnesses,” according to the British dragoman, he demanded their indictment as false witnesses under oath. The prosecutor thus turned on the plaintiffs and revealed that the government had utilized the trial as a means of discrediting Armenian grievances.<sup>58</sup>

After Halid Bey’s unprecedented denunciation of the plaintiffs, İzzet Efendi, the counsel for the defense, held the floor. He began by stating that Musa Bey was an honorable man, who hailed from a noble family with some three hundred years in the service of the state. His lengthy speech irked Musa Bey, who called on him to conclude. When he had the floor, Musa Bey openly stated that a lengthy defense after a week of hearings was unnecessary. It was up to the judge and the court to determine his guilt.<sup>59</sup> Considering the conduct of the trial, Musa Bey was right that a defense was superfluous. On December 2 1889, he was acquitted of five of the eight charges.<sup>60</sup> Three of the remaining charges were dismissed by the court. Musa Bey penned a personal letter of gratitude to the sultan shortly after his acquittal.<sup>61</sup>

Considering the unprecedented performance of the public prosecutor and the veiled hostility of the president of the court towards the plaintiffs, the decision was not entirely surprising. The other British dragoman, who attended the hearings, submitted a report to the Embassy. The report summarized the abnormalities in the prosecution of the cases against Musa Bey. Dragoman Stavrides stated that the public prosecutor “usurped the authority of the President in conducting debates himself, in putting either irrelevant or captious questions in

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<sup>58</sup> FO, 424/162, no. 105, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 6 December 1889, inc. Dragoman Alvarez’s Memorandum, 5 December 1889

<sup>59</sup> FO, 424/162, no. 105, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 6 December 1889, inc. Dragoman Alvarez’s Memorandum, 5 December 1889

<sup>60</sup> Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı*, 263

<sup>61</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 4/8, Musa Bey to the Palace, 21 December 1889

order to perplex them [witnesses] or make them fall into contradiction, and in constituting himself as the advocate and defender of the accused.” But his objections were not limited to the “systematically hostile” conduct of the prosecutor. Stavrides reported that the legal counsel for the defense was placed under pressure by the Ottoman government after the first hearing. The dragoman attributed plaintiff counsel Simon Tingir Efendi’s passive conduct during the trial and lack of protests at the prosecutor’s blatant breaches of acceptable conduct in the courtroom to a meeting he had with Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, the Minister of Justice. The Minister had reportedly told Simon Efendi that “he was expected to behave as ‘loyally’ towards the Imperial government as he and the rest of the family had done hitherto.” In the same memorandum, Stavrides also claimed that the president of the court was similarly briefed at the Ministry of Justice after the second or third hearing in order to ensure his compliance with the official view of Musa Bey’s innocence.<sup>62</sup>

The British Embassy delivered its reservations about the conduct of the trial to the Porte and the Palace. An undated memorandum, which listed the objections and Ottoman counter-arguments, was submitted to the Palace by an Ottoman official. The memorandum defended the conduct of the public prosecutor, whose aggressive questioning of the plaintiffs and the witnesses was attributed to his desire to strengthen their narratives. The memorandum represented the prosecutor’s request to the court in the final hearing that plaintiffs and witnesses be put on trial as false witness under oath as evidence of his dedication to legal principles. If the prosecutor had declared them false witnesses before or during the trial, they would have lost their prerogatives to testify against Musa Bey. By waiting until the end of the trial, the prosecutor had given them the right to present their cases, and only declared them false witnesses after they had delivered their testimonies. British concerns about the focus on

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<sup>62</sup> FO, 424/162, no. 101, Ambassador White to the Marquis of Salisbury, inc. Dragoman Stavrides’ Memorandum, 6 December 1889

Musa Bey while the crimes that were attributed to him involved other perpetrators were dismissed by stating that the other perpetrators deserved trials in their home provinces, as their transfer to the capital for crimes committed in their home province would deprive them of their livelihood if proven innocent.<sup>63</sup>

The Ottoman authorities' legal and argumentative acrobatics did not deliver them the result they wanted. The British embassy, which had received reports of Musa Bey's attacks through its consuls and followed the trial through its dragomans, remained dismissive of the elementary excuses the Ottoman authorities mustered in their defense of a blatant display of preferential treatment. Twelve days after the conclusion of the trial, the British ambassador reported that Sultan Abdülhamid II had been convinced by some of his advisors and Kurdish notables that the chief interest of the British lay in the resurgence of the Armenian Question. He attributed the sultan's clear intervention in the legal proceedings in favor of Musa Bey to his conviction that any official recognition of Musa Bey's guilt would lead to further inquiries. The ambassador even suggested that the Kurdish notables had told the sultan "that if here were to sacrifice Moussa to the Gaiours [sic], a massacre would be sure to take place in Kurdistan, which would just bring on the calamities which His Majesty wanted to avert for his empire, by Moussa's trial and condemnation."<sup>64</sup> It is clear, however, that neither the Palace nor the Porte were ever interested in Musa Bey's condemnation. The organization of a trial was only made possible by Musa Bey's intensification of his attacks and the Armenian peasants' success in reaching international audiences about their grievances. Both the Palace and the Porte were interested in achieving a swift conclusion to the crisis without offending Musa Bey.

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<sup>63</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 6/93

<sup>64</sup> FO, 424/162, Ambassador White to Marquis of Salisbury, 17 December 1889



While the Palace and the Porte were in agreement about the necessity of the resolution of the Musa Bey affair in a quiet manner as soon as possible, they differed on their approaches. Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa, whose pro-British views had earned him the epithet *İngiliz Kâmil* (Kamil the English), suggested the administrative exile of Musa Bey with an honorary title in order to appease the British Embassy while maintaining the official façade of his innocence.<sup>65</sup> However, the British ambassador considered it unlikely that the British public would be appeased with an underhanded admission of guilt. Kamil Paşa's attempted intermediacy with the British embassy also earned him the ire of the Palace. In the summer of 1890, the Palace demanded that the Grand Vizier inquire into the allegations of a British plot to create a pretext for their intervention by appealing to Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin. Kamil Paşa's strongly-worded reply stated that this was not even a remote possibility. However, if the Palace continued its inquiries on the matter and the British Embassy found out that there were such efforts, the results would be highly damaging for the Ottoman state. He offered that the instigator of such a rumor be identified instead of questioning its veracity.<sup>66</sup> In the end, Kamil Paşa's proposal prevailed. Musa Bey was exiled to Medina with a yearly stipend. He left the imperial capital in late August 1890.<sup>67</sup>

Musa Bey remained in Medina for approximately fourteen years. He was kept in close supervision by local government officials, who regularly reported on his conduct, and his relations with the local notability.<sup>68</sup> During that period, he submitted several requests regarding the inadequacy of his stipend and his desire for his relocation in a more central part of the Empire.<sup>69</sup> In 1905, the Palace approved his request to move to Damascus with his

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<sup>65</sup> BOA, Y.A. HUS. 233/81, The Grand Vizier to the Palace, 20 February 1890

<sup>66</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 237/90, The Grand Vizier to the Palace, 9 August 1890

<sup>67</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 238/30, The Grand Vizier to the Palace, 22 August 1890

<sup>68</sup> For example, the District-Governor of Medina informed the palace of his suspicion that Musa Bey was plotting his escape because of his recent overtures to a local sheikh. BOA, Y. MTV. 75/14, District-Governorate of Medina to the Palace, 13 January 1893

<sup>69</sup> He submitted a request to be moved to Damascus in 1897. BOA, Y. PRK. AZJ. 28/1, "Imperial Servant" (*Abdü'l-Memluk*) Musa Bey to the Palace, 15 February 1897

family. He was given a sinecure in the ranks of the gendarmerie.<sup>70</sup> Musa Bey was allowed to move back to his home region after the 1908 Revolution. During the Armenian Genocide, he was reputed to have utilized his armed militia in the massacre of Muş Armenians.<sup>71</sup> He was given a medal for his services in combat during the First World War and recognized by the Ottoman government as a militia leader.<sup>72</sup>

Upon her return to Muş, Gülizar married Kegham Der Karapetian, the son of the secretary at the Prelacy of Muş. Musa Bey's relatives continued to harass and threaten Armenian peasants on the Muş plain. Gülizar recounts that her uncle, headman Miro was murdered by a relative of Musa Bey upon his return to his home village after the trial. In order to avoid a similar revenge attack, Gülizar and her husband moved between different cities to the south of Muş for the next few years. They settled in Muş in 1899-1900. Kegham Der Karapetian joined the local ARF committee there and served a brief prison sentence due to his membership. After the 1908 Revolution, Der Karapetian was elected to the Ottoman parliament as a representative of his home province.<sup>73</sup> During the First World War, the family moved to the imperial capital. Der Karapetian was spared the widespread deportation and murder of Armenian notables and intellectuals during the Armenian Genocide. Gülizar claims that his frail physique and chronic illnesses convinced the authorities to allow him to stay in the imperial capital. Der Karapetian died shortly after the Mudros armistice.<sup>74</sup> Gülizar continued to live in Istanbul, even though her children and nieces migrated to Paris. She passed away shortly after the publication of her memoir in Paris, a copy of which her daughter

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<sup>70</sup> BOA, BEO. 2322/174101, The Porte to the Governorate of Syria, 3 March 1905; BOA, BEO. 2367/177519, The Porte to the Ministry of the Interior, 13 July 1905

<sup>71</sup> Miller, "*Back to the Homeland*," 301

<sup>72</sup> BOA, İ. DUİT. 66/26, Sultanic Order

<sup>73</sup> *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 92-4; For a brief summary of Kegham Der Karapetian's role in the ARF, see Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology*, Appendix 1.

<sup>74</sup> *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 96-7

sent back to her with the inscription “A heartfelt gift to my worshipful mother Gülizar and brother Aram. Armenuhi Der Karapetian”.<sup>75</sup>

The Musa Bey affair encapsulates important local, imperial, and international aspects of the transformation of the “Armenian Question” during the Hamidian period. First, the determined petitioning campaign of the Armenian peasants of the Muş plain signals a heightened level of organization in the face of a rapacious strongman with ties to the local Muslim notability. Despite the increasing intensity of Musa Bey’s attacks and official neglect of their grievances, the peasants continued to utilize a range of tactics to seek redress, including traditional methods such as petitioning the Ottoman state and the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate, and an innovative method such as the public demonstration in the imperial capital. While the peasants did not voice explicitly “political” demands such as the application of a reform program based on Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin or the creation of an autonomous administration in Ottoman Armenia, their defiance was political in the sense that it struck at the fiction that Armenian grievances resulted either from individual cases of oppression or the machinations of an Armenian elite that fabricated them in the hopes of provoking European intervention.

It was precisely this fiction that the Porte and the Palace committed themselves to preserving. Despite reports and testimonies, which emanated from Ottoman and British officials as well as the peasants themselves, that confirmed the veracity of many of the allegations, the Porte and the Palace viewed and portrayed the affair as an issue of national security. Kamil Paşa’s doubt at the peasants’ genuine interest in Musa Bey’s prosecution and incredulity at their punishment and capacity for organization are quite telling of the Ottoman official attitude. Furthermore, the Porte and the Palace attempted to reduce the affair to a case of individual criminality. In other words, the formal and informal structures that allowed

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<sup>75</sup> *Gülizar’ın Kara Düğünü*, 6

Musa Bey to act in the way he did were made invisible by holding a trial only of the man, and not of his relatives or followers, who were frequently named in the peasants' petitions.

Finally, the prosecutor Halid Bey's concluding statement foreboded the deterioration of traditional methods of seeking redress for Ottoman Armenians. By declaring the Armenian witnesses and plaintiffs criminals, the prosecutor turned the case on its head and exonerated Musa Bey and his followers' conduct while criminalizing the formulation of complaints against him.

The Palace sought to silence Armenian dissent, which it viewed primarily as a vehicle of sedition and foreign intervention. After all, Halid Bey was recommended for a promotion and imperial favor by the Minister of Justice after the trial in recognition of his services.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, Musa Bey's acquittal sent a message to the Muslim notability and general populace about the patrimonial commitments of the Hamidian regime and the preservation of Muslim superiority over non-Muslims. In other words, Sultan Abdülhamid II was primarily the patron and protector of his Muslim subjects and clients, even when their violation of Armenian life, property, and dignity was publicly known.

Somewhat paradoxically, however, many Ottoman Armenians saw that Musa Bey only faced administrative exile as a result of Great Power interest and intervention. The peasants' petitioning campaign through traditional means bore no results for over two years, because the local administrative officials were powerless to intervene without the involvement of the military and the government showed no interest in deploying soldiers against a Kurdish bey who was well-connected. It was British pressure that initially drove a wedge between the Porte and the Palace, and forced the regime to adopt the half-measure of exiling Musa Bey to Medina with a yearly stipend. While attempting to intimidate Armenians into remaining silent about their grievances, the regime showed that international pressure bore some results.

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<sup>76</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 4/21

### **The Pastoralists and the Mountaineers**

What had made Musa Bey's conduct a particularity was not his extortionate conduct towards Armenian peasants or his frequent utilization of violence to enforce it. Rather, it was the scale of his network of followers and the concerted efforts of the peasants to organize a multi-faceted petitioning and protesting campaign against him that reached an international audience. The abject poverty of a large section of the Armenian peasantry and the frequency of Kurdish attacks were repeatedly mentioned in British diplomatic reports as well as letters from local revolutionaries to *Hnch'ak*. At the same time, however, correspondence between local administrative officials, the Porte, the Palace, and military authorities hinted at a different mode of organization among the Armenian peasantry. Petitioning was no longer the only means through which Armenian peasants attempted to curb Kurdish encroachments on their lives and property. The frequent use of coercion by Kurdish tribes and the authorities' reluctance and inability to rein them in, pushed Armenian peasants to seek means to arm themselves for self-defense.

Around the same time as the beginning of the petitioning campaign by headmen Miro, Ohan, and others on the Muş plain in the fall of 1887, disputes about cattle lifting led to armed confrontation between the Kurdish peasants of Mahbubat and the Armenian peasants of Tapik in the mountainous region of Sasun. The Kurdish peasants were accused of having stolen over two hundred sheep, and wounding several peasants from Tapik in the process, including women. As tensions escalated, both sides prepared for a prolonged armed conflict before the advent of winter. The local government, the Porte, and the Fourth Army acted under direct order from the Palace to coordinate the dispatch of a military battalion to the region to de-escalate the tensions. The threat of a prolonged armed conflict pushed the authorities to take measures to deter Kurdish attacks, at least in the short term.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> BOA, DH. MKT. 1467/26, The Ministry of the Interior to the Army General Staff (*Seraskerlik*), 30 November 1887

The mountainous terrain and the presence of arms afforded the Armenian peasants of Sasun with the possibility of defending themselves against Kurdish raids. While similar efforts had been made in the Muş plain in the immediate aftermath of Musa Bey's departure to the imperial capital, they had not been very successful. Armenian defenders were either overrun by the Kurdish attackers, or the intervention of the gendarmerie on the side of the Kurds proved sufficient to deter prolonged armed resistance. Nonetheless, several armed bands, which called themselves the *fedai* (self-sacrificing), were organized in the region in the late 1880s and early 1890s with the aim of defending Armenian villages against Kurdish incursions and organizing retaliatory raids on tribes that had engaged in cattle-lifting.<sup>78</sup> Armenians, who participated in these bands, were sought by the local government, and many were imprisoned or killed against clashes with Kurdish tribesmen or the gendarmes. Many *fedais* joined the ranks of the Hnch'ak Party or the Armenian Revolutionary Federation during the 1890s.

The presence of such armed resistance drew some among the first generation of Armenian revolutionaries to the region. The province of Bitlis, and specifically the Muş plain and the mountainous region of Sasun were among the first places Hnch'ak revolutionaries organized. There were several factors that influenced this decision. The dismantlement of socio-economic structures and relations that had impoverished the Armenian peasantry of the Ottoman East was among the top programmatic priorities of the Hnch'ak Party. Both the Muş plain and the mountains around it were home to a largely rural Armenian population whose socio-economic conditions were deteriorating by the day. As stated above, letters to the *Hnch'ak*, and British diplomatic reports affirmed that the problems of double taxation and

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<sup>78</sup> Anahide Ter Minassian wrote about the armed clashes between the peasants of Vartenis and relatives of Musa Bey after the trial in her supplementary article to Gülizar's memoirs. "Birbirine Karışan Hatıralar," in *Gülizar'ın Kara Düğünü*, 126-7; There were also earlier efforts to promote self-defense at a wider organizational level in the 1870s and 1880s. These earlier groups did not espouse the revolutionary principles of the Hnch'ak Party or the ARF. Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 84-5

Kurdish cattle-lifting were acute in the province of Bitlis. Second, the presence of the *fedai* bands signaled the development of a culture of armed resistance among the peasantry. It also resulted in the government's organization of a routine of periodic searches and arrests, which further alienated the Armenian peasantry. It was this intersection of political and economic oppression, on the one hand, and the existence of the practice of armed resistance that drew early Hnch'ak revolutionaries to the region.

Mihran Damadian was among the first major Hnch'ak revolutionaries to organize extensively in Muş and Sasun. Damadian was an Armenian Catholic from Istanbul. He had worked as a primary school teacher in Muş between 1884 and 1888. He traveled to the imperial capital and became a member of a revolutionary circle there. He was one of the chief organizers of the Kumkapı Demonstration. He fled the Empire and traveled to Athens, where the Hnch'ak central committee was located. He was tasked by the central committee to travel to Sasun and organize armed bands there.<sup>79</sup> Sometime in late 1891, he traveled by boat from Athens to Mersin in southern Anatolia. In an effort to avoid the attention of the authorities and regions where cholera had struck, he traveled to Muş through Diyarbakır, and established contact with several of his former friends, who formed the core of the regional Hnch'ak committee. Although Damadian was centered in Sasun, he maintained contact with revolutionaries and other Armenians, who were sympathetic to his efforts in the city and the plain.<sup>80</sup>

Damadian's arrival in Sasun signaled a marked increase in the coverage of the Muş region in general in *Hnch'ak*. In February 1892, *Hnch'ak* published a letter from Damadian, who was writing under the pen name Scourge (*Mdrag*). Damadian reported that the socio-economic difficulties the Armenian peasants of the region were facing had recently been

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<sup>79</sup> Kitur, *Patmut'iwn*, 135-6.

<sup>80</sup> He provided the details of his entry into the Empire during his first interrogation after his capture in 1893. BOA, Y. EE. 172/10, Interrogation Minutes of Mihran Damadian, 13 June 1893; Kitur, *Patmut'iwn*, 136

compounded with an unprecedented zeal in their political persecution. This development had made Muş unique in the Ottoman East, where Armenian peasants were routinely impoverished and unjustly taxed. Dozens of Armenian peasants had been imprisoned in the Muş prison. The prisoners included famous *fedai* leaders such as Arakel Avedisian (*nom de guerre*: Arabo) and the defenders of Vartenis, who had clashed with Musa Bey's followers after the latter's exile to Medina. The authorities continued their searches for rebels and evidence for seditious activities, and even targeted churches and homes of clergymen. The searches did not yield any tangible results. Kurdish tribesmen periodically organized raids against Armenian peasants, plundering their flocks.<sup>81</sup>

The tensions Damadian referred to in his letter were recorded in official Ottoman correspondence as well. Earlier in the summer of 1889, the Ministry of the Interior responded to the request by the Governorate of Bitlis for the dispatch of a military battalion to the mountainous borderlands between the district of Sasun and Siird. Some peasants from the district of Siird were taking advantage of their proximity to Sasun and engaging in activities that were inimical to public order and security. The Ministry asserted that the involvement of the military was to be used a last resort and ordered the continued use of the local gendarmerie to end the attacks. A year later, the Ministry received complaints from the Patriarchate through the intermediary of the Ministry of Justice and Religions. Peasants from Sasun had submitted petitions to the Patriarchate about the frequency of Kurdish raids from the south, the Bekranlı tribe in particular. The Ministry requested the Governorate of Erzurum to inquire into the veracity of the claims.<sup>82</sup>

In the fall, the Palace finally approved the dispatch of military battalions to the region in order to stop the Kurdish incursions. The timing could not have been a coincidence: the

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<sup>81</sup> "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey]," *Hnch'ak*, 2 (1892) 31 December 1891

<sup>82</sup> BOA, DH. MKT. 1662/72, The Ministry of the Interior to the Governorate of Erzurum, 28 September 1889



Ottoman government was under pressure from the British to prosecute Musa Bey for his conduct towards the Armenians of the Muş plain. Similar occurrences further south could have caused the British government and public opinion to assume an even harsher attitude towards the Ottoman administration. Therefore, Field Marshal Zeki Paşa of the Fourth Army was given the order to restore order and prevent the escalation of the tensions and violence.

On September 15, he stated that measures would be taken to detain the bandits and annihilate them in case they resisted. He also informed the Palace that the military detachment would remain vigilant about any activity by Armenian evil-doers.<sup>83</sup> A month later, Zeki Paşa informed the Chief of Staff that two battalions and mountain artillery had been dispatched to Sasun. The brigands, who had murdered an Armenian man and caused the peasants not to pay their taxes, had been detained without further incident. The field marshal added that the Governorate of Bitlis had been consulted about the recurrence of such incidents in Sasun every year and possible reforms that might be undertaken since a military force was present on the ground already.<sup>84</sup>

Such reform expeditions had been previously utilized by the Ottoman government in the expansion of the state's tax regimes into the countryside or the forced settlement of pastoralist tribes, which had theretofore avoided government censuses, conscription or the payment of taxes. A famous example was the expedition that was led by Derviş Paşa and Ahmed Cevdet Paşa in 1861 into the outskirts of the Taurus Mountains in the province of Adana. Kozanoğulları, who were the most prominent of the pastoralist tribes in the region, were forced to settle in the neighboring Çukurova region, and their leaders exiled to the imperial capital.<sup>85</sup> The Sasun expedition was organized under the joint leadership of colonel

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<sup>83</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. ASK. 57/45, Field Marshal Zeki Paşa to the Palace, 15 September 1889

<sup>84</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. ASK. 57/45, Field Marshal Zeki Paşa to the Palace, 15 October 1889

<sup>85</sup> Reşat Kasaba, *The Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009) 99-103; Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, whose career spanned the second half of the nineteenth century, wrote about the expedition in a series of advisory memorandums he presented to Sultan Abdülhamid II. Cevdet Paşa served as Minister of Justice during the sultan's reign.

Ahmed Bey and Mehmed Safi Bey, who had previously served as the district governor of Muş and Siird.

Mehmed Safi Bey penned two detailed reports based on the findings of the expedition and his views on the tensions between the Kurds and the Armenians of the province. His encounters with the tribes can be placed in two categories: the first group of tribes he encountered was based in the borderlands between Siird and Sasun and had been engaged in acts of brigandage against Armenian villages over the past few years. The second group, which was based in Sasun, had established relatively cordial relations with the Armenians of the region. As the highest ranking administrative official in the expedition, he was initially tasked with the subduing of a populous Kurdish pastoralist tribe that was named the Reşkotanlı and recognized as the “wildest and most audacious among the Kurds”.<sup>86</sup> The tribe had been successful in repelling smaller expeditionary forces. Mehmed Safi Bey reported that his expedition consisted of two-hundred-and-ten soldiers and two pieces of mountain artillery. Upon their arrival in the midst of the Reşkotanlı, the men of the tribe fled into the mountains, leaving their wives, children, and property behind. Through intermediaries, the men of the tribe were informed that the aim of the expedition was not their expropriation; rather the state wanted to punish those that had acted improperly and protect the defenseless. If the men did not submit to the authorities within two days, the military would force them to do so.

The following day, all of the one-hundred-and-thirty men of the tribe surrendered without any bloodshed. The military officers in the expedition oversaw the building of a military barracks in the midst of the tribe’s villages at the tribesmen’s expense. This marked the end of the “rebellious” days of the Reşkotanlı tribe, who, Mehmed Safi claimed, now ranked highest in the most loyal and obedient subjects of the sultan in the region. According

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His tenure coincided with the Musa Bey affair during which he took an active role. Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir*, 21-39, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1986)

<sup>86</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. UM. 19/64, Mehmed Safi Bey’s Memorandum, 13 November 1890

to him, this was strong evidence that Kurdish tribes were yearning for loyalty and obedience to the Ottoman state under the right circumstances. The military expedition turned to two other tribes, which were known for their periodic raids into Sasun. Mehmed Safi Bey recommended the construction of a government hall and a military barracks at two commanding geographical locations that would ensure the obedience of the two tribes. He claimed that the tribes would have to travel back to the plain and pastures around Dirgöl in the summer. If the state could establish a permanent military presence there at an advantageous location, the tribes would not only cease their raids but also submit to taxation and conscription.

According to the report, the district governor then traveled to Sasun itself in order to collect geographical and ethnographical knowledge of the region in the company of eight gendarmes. He traveled between the Muslim villages of Sasun for twenty-five days. Mehmed Safi Bey reported the differences between state-sanctioned Sunni orthodoxy and Islam as practiced by the Muslims of Sasun in very strong terms. He stated that the Muslims of Sasun had remained Muslim only in name, and that a thorough reform of the mountainous region was necessary. The Muslim tribesmen of Sasun had built a shrine out of a rock that was reported to have been broken by İsmail Hakkı Paşa, a high-ranking Ottoman military officer and governor, who had led expeditions in the vicinity of the area some twenty years ago.<sup>87</sup> Mehmed Safi Bey added that the tribesmen did not allow the settlement of Sunni clerics among them. They had unorthodox sexual practices and freely engaged in extramarital sex.

More than anything else however, Mehmed Safi Bey was alarmed with the degree of the tribes' adoption of their Armenian neighbors' cultural practices and free engagement with them in economic matters. The tribesmen spoke Armenian in addition to their native language of Arabic. They sought the advice of Armenian clergymen and elders in delicate matters, and

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<sup>87</sup> İsmail Hakkı Paşa served as Governor of Diyarbakir from 1868 to 1875.

occasionally gave Armenian names to their children. Some even requested the participation of Armenian clergymen as holy men in their funerals. The leaders of the Kurdish tribes also registered large portions of their lands under the names of Armenian peasants in order to avoid paying taxes to the government. Mehmed Safi Bey argued that the Armenian peasants had agreed to this as part of an insidious plan to rid the region of Muslims. They plotted to overthrow the Kurds in due time by claiming in courts that the Kurds had been squatting on lands that they had possessed for generations. The district governor “corrected this mistake” upon his return by reordering some of the deeds that were given to the Kurdish tribal notables.<sup>88</sup>

In the conclusion of his first report, Mehmed Safi Bey stated that he had already recommended the construction of a mosque and school, and the dispatch of several Sunni clerics to the region in order to bring the tribes of Sasun into the Hamidian fold. With the recitation of the Muslim call to prayer five times a day, the proper education of the children, and the employment of Muslim clerics in funerals, the Islamization of the region was in full swing. The costs of the construction of the school, mosque, a government hall, and the military barracks were to be met by the tribesmen. Mehmed Safi Bey reported that the mosque and the school had been built, and the other constructions were well under way. He maintained that the pace with which the obedience and loyalty of Kurdish tribes were secured served as definitive proof that they were a reliable people for the expansion of imperial authority in the region.<sup>89</sup>

The district governor had attached a sketch of a map of the region to his report. The report and the map shared a remarkable absence: the Armenians of Sasun. The report made no direct mention of the Armenians of Sasun, their customs or their relationship to the state.

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<sup>88</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. UM. 19/64, Mehmed Safi Bey’s Memorandum, 13 November 1890

<sup>89</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. UM. 19/64, Mehmed Safi Bey’s Memorandum, 13 November 1890

Armenians only made an indirect appearance through their apparently nefarious influence on the Muslim tribes of Sasun, whose religious orthodoxy they had contaminated. Similarly, no Armenian village was marked on the map, despite the fact that Armenians constituted a considerable portion of the region's population. The location of the major Muslim villages of Sasun and the wintering villages of the Kurdish tribes from the south that had conducted the raids on the Armenians of Sasun were marked. The absence of Armenians from Mehmed Safi's report and map was telling of the immediate priorities of the expedition, which were to secure the surrender and allegiance of Muslim pastoralist tribes without bloodshed and establish permanent military and administrative sites of authority amidst them. It was expected that this would reduce the possibility of their raids on nearby Armenian villages and traveling merchants.<sup>90</sup>

Mehmed Safi Bey submitted another memorandum on the same day. The second memorandum was a much more general policy proposal about the incorporation of Kurds into the Hamidian fold and the suppression of Armenian dissent. The former district governor praised the bravery, piety, and the martial qualities of Kurdish pastoralists. Citing his successes in the expedition against the tribes in the borderlands of Siird and Sasun, he claimed that Kurdish tribes could be convinced to stop their internecine conflicts and swear loyalty to the state. Although the general state of "ignorance" that was widespread among the Kurds could not be ignored, Mehmed Safi Bey affirmed that its gradual eradication was attainable. If this could be done, a powerful bulwark against Armenian sedition would be established and Armenian efforts that targeted the state would have no effect.<sup>91</sup>

The reference to Armenian sedition in the report did not concern the nascent revolutionary movement. Mehmed Safi Bey was actually writing about the former prelate of

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<sup>90</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. UM. 19/64, Mehmed Safi Bey's Memorandum, 13 November 1890

<sup>91</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZJ. 17/116, Mehmed Safi Bey's Memorandum, 13 November 1890

Muş and a group of teachers, who had been found possessing seditious writings. Among the writings was a petition to be submitted to the Patriarchate by ninety-five Muslims of Sasun, who stated that they had been forcefully converted to Islam at an earlier period. The petition asked for the dispatch of the Prelate of Erzurum to travel to the region and affirm the veracity of the petitioners' claims. Mehmed Safi Bey dismissed the petition as a forgery on account of the fact that the Muslim petitioners' seals were found in the possession of a local priest, and that none of the Muslims of the region displayed any awareness of the scheme. He went on to allege that a recent raid on an Armenian village on the Muş plain had been carried out by such seditious Armenians in Kurdish disguise with similar aims: to attract European attention to the region.<sup>92</sup> Regardless of the veracity of Mehmed Safi Bey's allegations, the existence of the petition as a genuine or forged document reflected heightened anxieties about the ethno-confessional demographics of the region on the part of Ottoman officials and Armenian clergymen. The former district governor's warnings about the absence of Sunni orthodoxy among the Muslims of Sasun were also motivated by such governmental logic.

The concerns, however, were not limited to demographics. Mehmed Safi Bey warned the Palace not to pay too much heed to Armenian complaints about the raids of the Kurdish tribes. He acknowledged the necessity of precluding Armenian complaints and petitions but asserted that too much reliance on Armenian accounts in the settlement of such conflicts would result in the decline of the influence of Kurdish tribal notables in the region. If Kurdish leaders felt that the government was influenced by Armenian testimony and petitions, they would be inclined to seek alternative paths. They would either act openly in defiance of the government's orders or they would seek better relations with the Armenians. Mehmed Safi Bey simply stated that both would be highly injurious to government authority in the region. He suggested that local officials resort to a combination of assurances and threats to the

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<sup>92</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZJ. 17/116, Mehmed Safi Bey's Memorandum, 13 November 1890

leaders of the Kurdish tribes in order to deter them from further attacks on Armenian villages. He also stated that as long as the allegiance of the Kurdish tribes was ensured, any Armenian attempt at a revolt or an insurrection would be met with decisive violence by the Kurds.<sup>93</sup>

Mehmed Safi Bey's reports were both descriptive and prescriptive documents. In addition to describing the operation of the military expedition and its conduct towards the marauding tribes, he advocated the pursuit of a somewhat ambiguous set of policies of integration and marginalization vis-à-vis the Kurdish tribes and Armenian peasants. He explicitly advised against the alienation of Kurdish tribes through the use of excessive violence in bringing them into the Hamidian fold. He also warned against the prioritization of Armenian concerns and grievances, which he believed would push Kurdish tribal leaders away from the state. While local officials were to be ordered to check Kurdish attacks on Armenians, they were not to do so in a manner that would result in the decline of the Kurdish leaders' influence. It was not clear, however, what the limits of acceptable disciplining were regarding Kurdish leaders in his reports.

Those limits appeared a little clearer in a detailed response by the Governor of Bitlis to the Palace's inquiry on his recent punishment of several Muslim government officials in the same year. Governor Rauf Paşa began his response by lauding the recently reinforced sultanic policy of withholding forceful punishments such as administrative exile and imprisonment on Muslim notables. He stated his absolute acceptance of the wisdom of preserving Islamic influence in the region in order to protect the state against "the well-known thoughts and plans of the Armenians," which consisted of destroying the power of Islam and Muslims in the region in order to realize their "seditious designs."<sup>94</sup> He asserted that he only resorted to forceful measures against Muslim men of influence because of their extensive networks of

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<sup>93</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZJ. 17/116, Mehmed Safi Bey's Memorandum, 13 November 1890

<sup>94</sup> BOA, Y. MTV. 44/55, Governorate of Bitlis to the Palace, 29 July 1890

corruption, collection of bribes in return for services, and the Muslim populace's complaints about them. In other words, the men were not exiled for their conduct towards Armenians. Therefore, their punishment did not have an impact on Islamic influence in the region according to Rauf Paşa.<sup>95</sup>

Mehmed Safi Bey's recommendations regarding the reform of the tribes in and south of Sasun appear to have been quite influential. The following spring, the reforms were discussed in the Council of Ministers, which submitted a report that argued for the construction of schools and mosques not only in Sasun but amidst tribes that neighbored the Reşkotan such as the Velikanlı. In addition to the adoption of Armenian cultural and religious practices by the Muslim tribes of Sasun, the council drew attention to the danger posed by the revolutionary movement. The council argued that recent reports had pointed to the relocation of revolutionaries to Sasun in preparation for an insurrection. Therefore, it was imperative that the Islamic piety and orthopraxy of the tribes be reinforced and their allegiance to the imperial government ensured in order to prevent the dissemination of Armenian sedition among them.<sup>96</sup> The construction of thirteen schools and mosques in the region were proposed for these purposes along with the dispatch of imams and teachers. The construction, however, would have to be postponed as tensions between Armenian peasants and Kurdish tribes from the south of Sasun reached unprecedented levels in the following years.

### ***A Revolutionary on the Road: Mihran Damadian***

While the Ottoman government was debating the shape and timing of substantial reform in Sasun in order to ensure the primacy of "Islamic influence", Hnch'ak revolutionaries continued to propagandize and organize among the Armenian peasantry of the region and report on the deleterious effects of Kurdish and Ottoman oppression on the

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<sup>95</sup> BOA, Y. MTV. 44/55, Governorate of Bitlis to the Palace, 29 July 1890

<sup>96</sup> BOA, Y. A. RES. 54/26, Report by the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*), 8 April 1891; BOA, Y. A. RES. 54/31, Report by the Council of Ministers, 13 April 1891



Armenians of Muş. Damadian was soon joined in Sasun by another revolutionary dispatched by the Hnch'ak Central Committee. Hampartsum Boyajian (*nom de guerre*: Murad), who had also participated in the Kumkapı Demonstration and fled the Empire in its aftermath, arrived in Sasun in late 1892.<sup>97</sup> Damadian and Boyajian recruited several locals in their armed bands such as Hrayr Tzhokhk, whose revolutionary career would span the following decade.

Boyajian and Damadian continued their efforts to expand and strengthen the Hnch'ak network throughout Sasun and the Muş plain during the spring of 1893. While Damadian was meeting with village headmen in the western portion of the Muş plain, Boyajian traveled to Tblisi in order to establish connections with revolutionary committees there. Another aim of his visit was to establish a steady flow of modern arms and ammunition into Sasun. The government had recently allowed Kurdish pastoralists from the south and southwest of Sasun to summer in the pastures of Sasun, subjecting Armenian peasants to extortionary tributary arrangements with the pastoralist tribes and frequent acts of flock-grabbing. Boyajian sought to secure modern rifles in order to deter the pastoralist Kurds and withstand a general assault. However, his efforts proved fruitless; neither the Hnch'ak committee nor the ARF were able to provide him with any material assistance.<sup>98</sup>

In the meantime, Damadian was active in the Muş countryside. Government officials had been aware of Damadian's efforts for over a year before his capture. Spies and gendarmes had been dispatched to Sasun in pursuit of Damadian as early as May 1892. His active engagement with village headmen throughout the Muş plain and Sasun were known by the authorities. He traveled frequently between villages of the plain and the mountains. Damadian was attempting to encourage armed resistance against pastoralist Kurds and government authorities among the Armenian peasantry. His previous tenure in teaching at Muş in the mid-

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<sup>97</sup> Kitur, *Patmut'awn*, 137-8

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-2

1880s and recent experience in radical political activism in Constantinople and Athens provided him with skill and purpose as he worked towards the creation of a united Armenian militia in the region. Damadian also commanded a small armed band of revolutionaries. According to the report of one of Sultan Abdülhamid II's aides-de-camp he and his team had killed a Muslim man and an accompanying gendarme in the vicinity of Avzun, a village in Muş in January 1893. Although three of his followers were captured afterwards, Damadian remained at large until the summer.<sup>99</sup>

Damadian was also a prolific writer. Throughout this period, he continued to report on the condition of Muş Armenians to the *Hnch'ak*. He wrote in detail about their hostile encounters with pastoralist Kurds, the indifference of government authorities to their suffering, and the increasing frequency with which gendarmes searched the villages for revolutionaries and weapons, taking into custody village headmen they deemed suspicious. The geographical expanse of his reports ranged from small hamlets in Sasun to large villages on the Muş plain. His frequent and detailed reporting on the region proves the extent of his travels and success in establishing networks of information-gathering, if not revolutionary committees.

His writings were not limited to journalistic reports. Damadian started composing poetry/songs before his arrival and in Muş. He continued doing so as he traveled and recorded popular songs in the villages he stayed in. The subject matter of the songs and poems ranged from the kidnapping of Gülizar to Damadian's physically and psychologically demanding journey through the province of Diyarbekir to reach Muş after he was dispatched by the Hnch'ak Central Committee in Athens. Damadian's literary production was an integral part of his political activism. Each poem and song was followed by a list of annotations that expounded on geographical locations, famous people or events that were mentioned in the

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<sup>99</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, From the Muş command to the Palace, 6 January 1893

piece. The collection of his poetry and songs was organized in a neat manuscript, most likely to be smuggled out of the region, published abroad and disseminated among urban Armenians. The book would be an educational tool to teach urban Armenians about the plight of their peasant compatriots, and their historic homeland.<sup>100</sup>

It is also telling of the rhetoric and propaganda Damadian employed in the villages of the Muş plain and Sasun, if not in mode and style, then in content. One of the poems, for example, is a list of rules and regulations for the members of the armed revolutionary bands written in verse. Damadian explains the basic tenets of revolutionary organization and the importance of revolutionary discipline. He warns against the participation in the band in order for personal gain, and states that the revolutionary is separated from the brigand by his impeccable sense of duty and selfless ethic.<sup>101</sup>

Thus, the manuscript is an invaluable artifact of Damadian's two-sided political project of promoting revolutionary organization in the countryside, and sympathy for the cause among Armenians at large. In this way, the annotations were educational tools that sought to improve the listener's and reader's basic knowledge of the depicted events and the Muş plain and the mountains as well as the *Armenians* that inhabited them. The section of explanations that accompanied a song titled "The Migrant *Mshetsi*," for example, included topographical information on the famous Armenian monasteries and churches of the Muş plain. Another poem on the kidnapping of Gülizar was accompanied by an explanatory section that summarized Musa Bey's depredations, Gülizar's eventual liberation and the trial in Constantinople. The affective component of the songs was complemented by the annotations in order to orient the listener towards membership in a larger community of

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<sup>100</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/10. "Pandukht Mshetsi," [The Migrant *Mshetsi*] The folder at the Ottoman archives contains the original manuscript as well as the translations of Damadian's poems and songs into Ottoman Turkish. I am grateful to Melissa Bilal for her insightful comments and invaluable assistance in the comparison of the Armenian originals and the Ottoman Turkish translations of Damadian's songs and poems.

<sup>101</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/10. "Kanonagir Hrosakhumbi," [The Regulations of the Heroes' Band]

Armenians. Damadian's song about Musa Bey's kidnapping of Gülizar or the gendarmes' harassment and imprisonment of the peasants of Vartenis (a major Armenian village on the Muş plain) were not only about particular cases of injustice, but rather framed as building blocks of a general hierarchy that continued to marginalize and oppress Armenians.<sup>102</sup>

Both the songs and annotations were thus aimed at making the Muş geography, Armenians, and their experience immediately recognizable and relatable to his listeners. The educational function was intricately linked to Damadian's goal of fostering a mode of Armenian belonging and solidarity. Many of the songs highlighted the myriad abuses rural Armenians faced at the hands of Kurdish pastoralists and Ottoman government officials. The songs did not only consist of affective expositions of the extortion, dispossession, and imprisonment of Armenian peasants, but also calls for a general awakening and mobilization. The lyrical accounts of Ottoman and Kurdish oppression were meant to engender anger and disgust against the existing regime. Furthermore, they were meant to communicate the centrality of Ottoman and Kurdish abuses as a shared feature of the Armenian experience. In other words, the imprisonment and impoverishment of Armenian peasants at the hands of Kurdish tribal leaders and Ottoman officials were not simply local matters, but sustained, community-wide practices that threatened the long-term survival and well-being of Armenians everywhere.

Furthermore, Damadian's poems and songs fostered a particularly selfless and militant mode of belonging and solidarity. The awakening was not simply confined to sharing the grief of suffering fellow Armenians, but to acts of individual and communal self-transformation that included physical and armed confrontation against the oppressors, and the surrender of material comforts. One of his poems, which was titled "A Revolutionary on the Road," was an autobiographical piece that recounted Damadian's selfless journey through the unforgiving

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<sup>102</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/10. "Giwlızar"

and mountainous terrain of the province of Diyarbekir in order to avoid detection by government authorities. In his annotations, Damadian explained that he had written the song under the influence of the hardships he had faced during his journey from Athens to Muş. He was inspired by his perpetual sickness and physical discomfort due to having covered most of his trip within the Ottoman Empire on foot on difficult terrain. The revolutionary's journey to Muş is cast as an example to other Armenians aspiring to contribute to the new, national cause.<sup>103</sup>

Although selfless sacrifice was a prominent theme, Damadian's writings also promoted a militant and confrontational culture. One of the longest songs/poems in Damadian's manuscript was about Perm, in which he recounted his encounter with a young man from the village of Perm in the Khian district of Sasun. Damadian begins his account with a description of the setting of his encounter on a hot summer morning at the heights of the Maruta (Maroutag) hill. Having traveled continuously on foot for a long time, Damadian sat down to enjoy the view of a nearby ancient fortress, a river and a small plain. His contemplative mood was disrupted by the appearance of a young man clad with a muzzle-loaded rifle, several cartridges, a sword, and a buckler. Amazed at the sight of such a perfect soldier, the revolutionary asked where the young man was going. The youth stated that he was planning to go hunting for birds, and maybe a fox if he happened to come across one. He then went on to explain that "fox" was a euphemism for Muslims.

Shocked by the young man's audacity, Damadian expressed his surprise. To him, the Muslim was the wolf, and the Armenian the sheep. He told him that he had considered the Armenians of Talori (Dalvorig) the only exception to this analogy on account of their refusal to pay taxes to the government for two decades. The young man retorted that the peasants of Perm were braver and went on to narrate two instances of their armed clashes with gendarmes

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<sup>103</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/10. "Chambord Heghapokhakan" [A Revolutionary On the Road]

and Kurds. Ten years before Damadian's encounter with the armed peasant, the gendarmes had arrived in Perm to collect taxes. Fed up with their frequent physical abuse, the peasants of Perm gathered in numbers to drive them off under the leadership of the old priest of the village. On account of the superior weaponry of the gendarmes – the troops carried breech-loaded rifles as opposed to the older muzzle-loaded rifles of the peasants – the peasants retreated to the hills with their families. Having regrouped there, the peasants continued to fire on the gendarmes, who had moved to occupy the village, and killed several of them, including their corporal. The clashes ceased as the day drew to a close. The soldiers stayed in the village for the night and departed in the early hours of the morning in order to avoid another armed confrontation with the peasants. The young man showed Damadian the crescent-and-moon shirt button he looted from the deceased corporal and proudly asked the revolutionary if he had recognized the gallantry of the peasants of Perm.

The other instance recounted by the young peasant was an armed confrontation that took place two years before. Two Armenian peasants had been killed by Kurdish peasants from the village of Kabilcevaz in Sasun. Young men from Perm organized a raid into Kabilcevaz, and killed two Armenians, who were allies of the aforementioned Kurds and stole several oxen. The tensions quickly evolved into a feud, wherein both sides ambushed and killed peasants from the other and stole their animals. In order to beat their opponents into submission, the Kurds of Kabilcevaz and their Armenian allies attacked Maruta in numbers and started a clash, which lasted for two hours. After several people were killed and wounded from both sides, a Kurdish sheikh stepped forward and shouted in Kurdish to call for a ceasefire between the two sides for the sake of God, Jesus, and Muhammad. An Armenian peasant responded by shooting the sheikh in the chest, prompting the Kurds to flee in terror.

The peasant added that the feud had worsened over the two years, and remarked that he did not know for how long they would shed each other's blood.<sup>104</sup>

It is difficult to determine the veracity of the young man's account of the peasants' armed clashes with government officials or the Kurds. Even the conversation itself might have been Damadian's creation as a literary device. Nonetheless, the song is an invaluable text, which presents a clear portrayal of the exemplary Armenian peasant for the revolutionary cause. Armed to the teeth, the young peasant was not only adept at self-defense, but turned the tables on the Armenians' traditional oppressors and actively sought them out. The young man's narratives also contain numerous characters and events, which would be immediately recognizable to an Armenian peasant in Muş such as physical abuse at the hands of the gendarmes, bloody feuds among Armenians and Kurds, and raids on others' flocks. However, the recognizable pattern was profoundly shaken by the Armenian peasants' victories over their enemies. Whether it was the gendarme corporal, whose shirt buttons were looted or the Kurdish sheikh, whose call for a ceasefire was cut short by a bullet, the Armenian peasants persevered in their armed confrontations and prevailed. Damadian's lesson to his listeners, whether they were peasants in Muş or the intellectuals in Tiflis or Istanbul was clear: Armenians' salvation lay in their transformation by embracing their martial practices and responding in kind to their oppressors. Armed struggle, even without explicitly political motivation or articulation, was the most basic component of the Armenian national cause. Gallantry and truculence were among its most important values.

On the March 1892 issue of the *Hnch'ak*, another letter from the aforementioned Damadian was published. It provided a detailed account of overtaxation in the villages on the Muş plain. The letter further alleged that several tax-collectors had recently started demanding that the beautiful young women of the village be turned over to them. When a village

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<sup>104</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/10. "Permts'ots' K'achut'iwn" [The Gallantry of *Permts'is*]

headman refused their demands at Koms, the tax-collector and his henchmen kidnapped nine women from the village and went to Muş. The prelate intervened with the district governor and secured the return of the women to their villages, but the episode served as further evidence that the oppression of Armenians was reaching an unprecedented level.<sup>105</sup>

The 1892 issues of the *Hnch'ak* contain over a dozen letters from Muş. The June issue was specifically dedicated to the region with several reports focusing on Ottoman and Kurdish overtaxation, attacks on Armenian lives and property, mass detention of Armenian notables, and Armenian acts of defiance. The sudden increase in the quantity and frequency of reporting from Muş signal that the region had become a site of major interest for the revolutionaries. Furthermore, the reporting was very detailed with accounts of specific episodes in villages in the plain and the mountains.<sup>106</sup> That the revolutionaries were able to glean information on what was happening in different corners of the Muş countryside testifies to their advancing degree of organization in the region, and the sympathy of the Muş Armenian peasantry they enjoyed.

Disorder in the countryside had reached new levels according to the letters published in *Hnch'ak*. Damadian reported extensively on government policies and Kurdish raids they identified as manifestations of the root cause for the oppression Armenian peasants faced – a general government effort to destroy Armenian influence in their homeland. In a letter to *Hnch'ak* in late February, he claimed that the recent arrest and imprisonment of Armenian notables and teachers was not simply the result of a government effort to destroy the revolutionary threat. Rather, it was a general attack on Armenians, since many Armenians of standing and education had been targeted regardless of their membership in revolutionary committees. The clampdown on “sedition” was not limited to the city. Damadian argued that

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<sup>105</sup> “Namakner T'urk'iyayits',” [Letters from Turkey] *Hnch'ak*, 3 (1892), 21 December 1891

<sup>106</sup> “Namakner T'urk'iyayits',” [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 4 (1892), 20 February 1892;

“Namakner Daronits',” [Letters from Daron] *Hnch'ak*, 6 (1892) 20 April 1892, 15-27 April 1892, 22 April 1892 O.S. (3 May 1892)



the villages of the Muş plain had been placed in a state of virtual siege by the extended presence of the gendarmerie. Village headmen feared further searches and arrests. Peasants refrained from traveling on the plain for fear of being accused of seditious activities. Such government policy had a profound effect on Muslim-Armenian relations, according to Damadian, as mutual suspicion and distrust had spread among the communities.<sup>107</sup>

Another letter by Damadian asserted that government efforts at suppressing Armenians were not limited to the mass arrests, especially when they faced open defiance from them. In the mountainous areas around Muş, several village headmen refused to obey the subpoenas issued in their names because they suspected that they were a legal ruse to lure them into the city of Muş where they would be held prisoner until peasants from their villages bribed officials. The numbered Ottoman gendarmerie held little sway in these areas. According to Damadian, this was why the Ottoman authorities resorted to other means in order to bring Armenians to heel. Kurdish tribes organized frequent raids into the villages not only to steal animals and grains but also to plunder Armenian churches with no fear of retribution by the government. However, the complicity of state officials was not limited to their tacit approval of such attacks. Damadian claimed that the government was seeking the active participation of Kurdish tribes to suppress Armenian dissent. Government officials dispatched mollas and sheikhs to secure the allegiance of semi-independent Kurdish pastoralists to the south of Muş.<sup>108</sup>

Damadian claimed that one such cleric was Hacı Tayyib, who had acted as a mediator between the local government and Musa Bey in order to convince him to travel to Constantinople and to prevent Gülizar from recanting her “conversion.”<sup>109</sup> According to Damadian, Hacı Tayyib traveled to the southern reaches of Sasun, which bordered with Siird

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<sup>107</sup> “Namakner T’urk’iyayits’,” [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch’ak*, 4 (1892), 20 February 1892

<sup>108</sup> “Namakner Daronits’,” [Letters from Daron] *Hnch’ak*, 6 (1892), 20 April 1892

<sup>109</sup> “Namakner Daronits’,” [Letters from Daron] *Hnch’ak*, 6 (1892), 20 April 1892

and Silvan, and reached out to the leaders of the Kurdish pastoralist tribes of Bakranlı and Badikanlı. He told them that “game was plentiful” for them in Sasun. Both tribes had previously been banned from entering the pastures around Armenian villages in Sasun because they forced the peasants to pay them tributes in kind, or stole sheep and oxen from their flocks. While the government had sporadically honored the ban by deploying a company of soldiers in the mountain passes before, the officials had ignored recent Armenian complaints and petitions. Two peddlers were murdered outside the hamlet of Ağpi by the Bakranlı the previous summer, and the government had not intervened. The peasants were terrified, Damadian stated, that the tribes would repeat their past crimes.

It was not only the Badikanlı and Bakranlı who were invited to the pastures around Sasun. According to Damadian, it had become part of a general government strategy to invite various pastoralist tribes that wintered in the province of Diyarbekir to the pastures in Sasun, Hulp, and Genc. Furthermore, sedentary Kurdish peasants received their share from the government’s encouragement of anti-Armenian policies. Damadian recounted a recent incident in the Muş plain. The Kurds of the mixed village of Tsenund seized most of the property owned by their Armenian neighbors after witnessing government neglect for Armenian complaints. When the Armenian peasants traveled to Muş to petition the district governor, the paşa simply told them to seek help from the villages of Şenik and Semal because they were the state and government of the Armenians, a thinly veiled reference to the recent defiance of their leaders to government order. The headmen of both villages had refused to respond to recent subpoenas issued in their names.

Damadian claimed that such blatant discriminatory policies revealed the true intentions of the Ottoman government: on the one hand, they planned to reduce the independence of the Kurdish tribes by offering them material gains for their allegiance. On the other, they aimed to destroy any spirit of resistance among the Armenians by depriving

them of their livelihood. Damadian warned of the dangers of an ethno-confessional war and stated that the revolutionary struggle was solely directed against the tyrant's government, and the revolutionaries would not be driven by religious hatred or zeal.<sup>110</sup>

The aforementioned accounts of government oppression and Armenian victimization were generally contrasted with two types of Armenian defiance on the pages of *Hnch'ak*. The first consisted of stories of passive and active peasant resistance against the authorities. The aforementioned refusal of village headmen to respond to subpoenas was repeatedly mentioned. More active episodes included physical confrontations between gendarmes or Kurdish tribesmen on the one hand and Armenian peasants on the other. A remarkable example included the involvement of Armenian clergymen in armed clashes. According to Damadian, the custodians of Surp Karapet monastery had customarily collected the tithes of the nearby Armenian village of Govars. In the past, the government had sided with the clergymen and the peasants, who had resisted attempts by Kurdish pastoralists to lay claim to the village's taxes. However, recently the government had refrained from intervening in the escalating tensions, and the tribesmen had mounted an attack on the monastery itself. The attack was repelled, with several dead and wounded on both sides.<sup>111</sup>

Damadian recounted another incident that had taken place in the vicinity of Geligüzan in Sasun. A gendarme band had arrested two peasants they suspected of having aided revolutionaries. The peasants' neighbors confronted the gendarmes. The gendarmes were bested by the larger group of peasants, who liberated the prisoners. When the gendarmerie corporal, Talip Efendi, found out about the incident from the wounded gendarmes, he immediately traveled to Geligüzan and demanded an audience with the village headman, Bedo. The corporal demanded that the village surrender the suspected revolutionaries. The

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<sup>110</sup> "Namakner Daronits'," [Letters from Daron] *Hnch'ak*, 6 (1892), 20 April 1892

<sup>111</sup> "Daroni Sharzhumnerë," [Movements in Daron] *Hnch'ak*, addendum to 6 (1892) 16 May 1892 O.S. (28 May 1892)

headman stated that the government had detained too many people from his village in recent times. Talip Efendi was enraged by the headman's defiance and threatened him with unleashing the neighboring Kurdish tribes upon his village before leaving his presence. The revolutionary thus connected the threads of government-tribal collaboration and popular Armenian resistance in this narrative.<sup>112</sup>

The second type of Armenian resistance narratives involved direct action by the revolutionaries. The revolutionaries' activities in Sasun were not limited to the formation of secret committees, the encouragement of peasant resistance to the authorities and the preparation of detailed reports for publication in *Hnch'ak*. They created armed bands that targeted perceived allies of the Ottoman government, particularly suspected informants. Most of the recent arrests of Armenians rested on anonymous tips from informants. Damadian claimed that only a few of such detained Armenians were actual revolutionaries, and that the conduct of the authorities was generating considerable anti-government sentiment. He argued that an endemic culture of secret denunciations had spread. He mentioned Priest Abraham from a village outside Muş as one of the chief informants, whose statements had led to the arrest of dozens of Armenians. He concluded the letter with news of the recent assassination of two such informants, implying that assisting the government would have dire consequences.

As will be shown in chapters 2 and 3, assassination of suspected informants and "allies" of the government was a central component of *Hnch'ak* strategy in Central Anatolia as well. What separated *Hnch'ak* conduct on this issue in the Muş region was their targeting of Muslims as well as Christians. While the *Hnch'aks* of Central Anatolia rarely targeted Muslims, the *Hnch'aks* of Muş did not refrain from assassinating Muslims. A letter sent in

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<sup>112</sup> "Daroni Sharzhumnerë," [Movements in Daron] *Hnch'ak*, addendum to 6 (1892), 16 May 1892 O.S. (28 May 1892)

May 1892 from Muş reported that a Kurd named Khuli, who had participated in a raid on the church of the village of Haygerd, had recently been killed. His body was placed at the entrance of the church. Despite numerous searches and interrogations, the authorities were not able to locate the perpetrator of what Damadian called “a valiant act”.<sup>113</sup>

Another Muslim named Hurşid was assassinated in the same year. Hnch’ak historian Kitur claimed that Hurşid had been involved in the detention of the former headman of Geligüzan in Sasun. A seven-man armed band of revolutionaries encountered him on a mountain road and killed him and his horse in early September 1892. His body was thrown into a ditch on the roadside for all to see. When the local government started an investigation about the murder, Boyajian and Damadian convinced the headmen of the Armenian villages in Sasun not to travel to Muş to testify as they believed that it was a ruse to imprison them.<sup>114</sup>

The investigation began after Hurşid’s son filed a complaint to the district public prosecutor at Muş. He claimed that his father had traveled to Geligüzan to visit healer Beydo and purchase medicine from him for his friend. As Hurşid and his horse had been missing for three weeks since his departure from Muş, his son requested the intervention of the government to investigate his whereabouts and his fate, also suggesting that healer Beydo was responsible. A few days later, a gendarmerie corporal was dispatched to the village to interview the healer. Beydo acknowledged that Hurşid had visited him a few weeks earlier, and invited him to Muş to examine his friend. The healer refused on account of his own illness at the time and hosted the man for the night. The following day, Hurşid left the village and was never seen again. When the gendarmerie corporal asked the other residents if they

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<sup>113</sup> “Namakner T’urk’iyayits’,” [Letters from Turkey],” *Hnch’ak*, 6 (1892) 29 April 1892 O.S. (11 May 1892)

<sup>114</sup> Kitur, *Patmut’iwn*, 139

had seen the man, all replied in the negative. The headmen of the Armenian villages in the vicinity refused to accompany him to Muş to testify there.<sup>115</sup>

The family of the deceased continued to petition the government to find and punish the assailants. Hurşid's wife and son gave a testimony the following week. They both accused the Armenian residents of Şenik, Semal and Geligüzan having conspired to kill the man. They asserted that they had heard on good authority that Hurşid's body had been horribly mutilated after he was killed, and that three to four thousand Armenian rebels had taken control of the Sasun countryside. When asked if there was any enmity between the peasants and Hurşid, his widow said that there was none, and the reason for the killing was the simple fact that he was a Muslim and that they were Armenians.<sup>116</sup> Another team of gendarmes was immediately sent to the region to find Hurşid's body. The local peasants continued to deny any knowledge of Hurşid's fate. When a peasant from the village of Semal was told that they held collective responsibility for the man's disappearance, and that it was unthinkable for local peasants not to know anything of a man who was killed a few kilometers outside their village, he simply said "We know nothing. We will abide by the legal ruling."<sup>117</sup> It was more than likely that the local Armenian peasants were aware of the circumstances surrounding Hurşid's "disappearance." Their reluctance to assist the authorities can be interpreted as evidence of their sympathy for the revolutionaries.

## **Conclusion**

The Muş plain and Sasun were one of the early zones of confrontation and contention during the Hamidian period between a variety of actors and institutions including Armenian peasants, Hnch'ak revolutionaries, the Hamidian regime, local government officials, Kurdish

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<sup>115</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/20, Petition of Hüsni, son of Hurşid to the Muş Prosecutor's Office, 27 September 1892. Gendarme Corporal İskender's Report, 1 October 1892. Translation of Bedo's Testimony (undated)

<sup>116</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/20, Petition of Kadife bint Seydi, wife of Hurşid to the Muş Prosecutor's Office, 10 October 1892.

<sup>117</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/20, Interrogation of Kivork of Semal, 1 November 1892

pastoralist and sedentary tribes. While the problems of double taxation and land grabbing and cattle lifting had been present in the region at least since the middle of the nineteenth century, peasant tactics of resistance that sought engagement with multiple audiences, revolutionary organization as well as Hamidian practices of cooptation, exclusion, and criminalization were recent, contemporaneous, and mutually constitutive. By the end of 1892, several Hnch'ak revolutionaries had established themselves in the city of Muş and Sasun. The Hamidian regime, on the other hand, attempted to silence Armenian dissent through intimidation, while co-opting pastoralist and sedentary Kurdish tribes through reinforcing their superiority over Armenians.

The peasants of the Muş plain coordinated a determined petitioning campaign against Musa Bey despite the Kurdish strongman's large retinue, frequent utilization of violence, and connections to local government officials and Muslim notability. Although the petitioning campaign was primarily directed at the local government and the Ministry of the Interior, the peasants changed their tactics in response to the neglect of local officials and the increasing rapacity of the attacks of Musa Bey and his followers. Their organization of a public demonstration in the imperial capital elevated their grievances to the imperial and international stages and forced local and imperial government officials to react. Undoubtedly, the remarkable perseverance of Gülizar under captivity as well as her family's determination and financial means to continue to seek liberation despite official neglect enabled the popularization of the campaign against Musa Bey.

Peasant tactics were not limited to the expansion and redirection of existing patterns of petitioning in order to reach higher Ottoman authorities and international observers. Some Armenian peasants around Muş attempted to defend themselves and engaged in armed clashes with Kurdish tribesmen. In addition to deterring Kurdish tribesmen from organizing future raids, the organizers of such armed resistance among Armenian peasants attracted the

attention of Ottoman imperial officials. In the 1880s, such armed resistance was not the result of revolutionary organization under strictly delineated political parties. Rather, local peasants became *fedais*, who were willing to operate outside the bounds of law to arm the Armenian peasantry and organize active resistance against Kurdish attacks.

The nascent revolutionary networks in the region sought to incorporate existing practices of resistance and redirect Armenian grievances to the Ottoman state. Furthermore, they assassinated Armenians and Muslims alike, whom they deemed as allies of the state. They attempted to intimidate local communities away from assisting government officials during their investigations by doing so. Similarly, they encouraged armed resistance against Kurdish attacks.

The Hamidian response to the mobilization of Armenian peasants, the increasing international attention on the condition of Ottoman Armenians, and the establishment of revolutionary committees and networks in the Muş region consisted of several facets. On the local stage, local officials had sought to silence Armenian dissent by a combination of intimidating the peasants and limiting instances of physical confrontation and violence between the Kurdish tribesmen and Armenian peasants. The deployment of military units with the approval of the Palace had usually put a swift end to physical confrontations as both Armenian peasants and Kurdish pastoralists refrained from head-on clashes with trained imperial soldiers.

The Palace's involvement in the suppression of Armenian dissent and cooptation of Kurdish notability was quite direct once the Great Powers started to display an interest in Armenian grievances. Preferential application of administrative exile and police coercion were among the most prevalent practices to reproduce hierarchies that privileged Muslims over Armenians. While Kurdish tribesmen and notables that participated in the dispossession and extortion of Armenian peasants were able to continue their conduct without fear of



serious repercussions for the most part, Armenian peasants who participated in armed confrontations against Kurdish attackers or were suspected to have aided others in doing so faced imprisonment. Aforementioned practices of deterrence that occasionally placed government officials and troops on the side of Armenian peasants such as the prevention of the pastoralist tribes of Siird and Silvan to move to the pastures of Sasun in the summer, were eroding as the Hamidian regime turned its gaze towards the region.

With the active intervention of the regime, preferential judicial practices and the cooptation of Kurdish tribes became a matter of official policy. During Musa Bey's trial, court officials made every effort not to offend him, while intimidating the Armenian plaintiffs and witnesses, and criminalizing the pronouncement of their grievances. Had it not been for British pressure and Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa's commitment to the preservation of British support for the Ottoman Empire, Musa Bey's exile would not have been possible. Similarly, the governor of Bitlis was explicitly ordered not to apply administrative punishments to Muslim officials, particularly when the complaints were originating from Armenians. When contrasted with the large spike in the number of imprisoned Armenians for sedition from the city of Muş, its countryside, and the neighboring region of Sasun, the official sanction of this blatantly discriminatory practice comes sharper into focus.

The reasoning is less transparent. Mehmed Safi Bey's reports on his expedition into Sasun provide important clues on the components of the governmental logic behind the reinforcement of Kurdish primacy over Armenians. Although the sedentary tribes of Sasun or pastoralist tribes that conducted raids against the Armenians of Sasun were not included in the newly-formed Hamidiye regiments in 1890, the regime sought to integrate them to its ruling coalition through other means. Mehmed Safi Bey advised the Palace not to pay too much heed to Armenian grievances lest the Kurdish tribesmen lose their confidence in the imperial government as their benefactors. Similarly, he called on the Palace to secure their allegiance

through a combination of limited displays of military might, establishment of educational, religious and administrative infrastructure to reinforce their Sunni identities, and most importantly, the preservation of their “influence” over Armenians. Not only would such policies ensure their obedience to the imperial government, but they would also preclude the popularization of any Armenian insurgence as the Kurds would be sure to crush any such efforts in the name of their imperial sovereign.

The connection between imperial security and Kurdish primacy in the Ottoman East was of paramount importance. Mehmed Safi Bey’s report and the subsequent policy memoranda that were submitted by the Council of Ministers also accentuated the martial qualities of the Kurds. Despite their oft-cited “ignorance” and propensity for misdirected violence (from the Palace’s perspective), sedentary and pastoralist Kurdish communities of the Ottoman East were considered vital to the preservation of Ottoman authority in the region. Human resources at the command of local government officials were scarce, while the Kurds constituted a large section of the population. As such, they were viewed as a crucial resource to be moulded as “proper” Muslims and mustered in the service of the state.

In this way, the cooptation of pastoralist Kurdish tribes around Sasun resembled British colonial practices of cooptation and echoed conceptualizations of “martial races” in India in the nineteenth century. After the rebellion of 1857, the British crown took over the administration of India. In response to the perceived unreliability of south Indian soldiers, many of whom participated in the rebellion, British colonial administrators turned to the recruitment of north and north western Indian populations in much greater numbers than before.<sup>118</sup> This practice was accompanied by new discourses on the martial qualities of

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<sup>118</sup> For a discussion of Ottoman officials’ colonial attitudes during this period, see Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45 (2003); 311-342; For an examination and discussion of the discourses of race and recruitment in the British Empire after the rebellion of 1857, see Heather Streets, *Martial races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004)

different groups in India. Despite the proliferation of official discourses on the comparative courage and martial prowess of native communities, however, British policies of recruitment remained highly contingent upon established practice and local social and economic dynamics.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, despite Mehmed Safi Bey's enthusiastic approval of Kurdish martial prowess and propensity towards Islamic zeal, Hamidian cooptation of rural Kurdish communities in and around Sasun would not proceed smoothly. While the pastoralist tribes proved more pliable to government proposals to "reduce Armenian influence," the sedentary Kurds of Sasun remained dismissive. The summers of 1893 and 1894 would prove decisive in the remaking of intercommunal relations in the region.

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<sup>119</sup> For a discussion of the praxis of colonial recruitment and its occasional incongruity with British discourses of martial races, see Gavin Rand and Kim Wagner, "Recruiting the 'Martial Races': Identities and Military Service in colonial India," in *Patterns of Prejudice*, 46.3-4 (2012): 232-254

## ***THE EDIFICE OF OPPRESSION: PROPAGANDA, ORGANIZATION, VIOLENCE AND THE ANKARA TRIAL***<sup>1</sup>

Central Anatolia attracted a notable number of revolutionaries in the 1890s. The Ottoman government, however, did not become aware of the extent of the revolutionary network until the winter of 1892-1893. At the beginning of 1893, two different placards, which were written in Turkish, were affixed to public buildings, mosques, and schools in Central Anatolian villages, towns, and cities. The first placard stated that the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, who had “soiled the sacred throne of Osman and rendered the religion of Islam detestable,” was about to come to an end, and that “the moment of vengeance ha[d] arrived.” The short text ended with the message that foreign intervention would save the Empire and its residents from oppression and was signed by the mysterious “The Committee of the Patriots of Islam.” The other placard was written in a more cryptic tone, and claimed that “the renowned Indian remedy,” which was a veiled reference to the British colonial administration in India, was about to be administered to the people of Turkey by “the doctor who has great celebrity” in its usage. As a result, “the people, with the assistance of this doctor and his medicine, will be cured will drive out those oppressors and tyrants [*sic*].” The second placard was signed by “The Indians who seek the salvation of the people of Islam.”<sup>2</sup>

Local officials immediately forwarded news of the appearance of the placards to the capital. High-ranking government officials debated on the authorship of the placards for a few days. Initially, it was suggested that dissatisfied *medrese* graduates, who had recently been expelled from the capital, had decided to express their discontent with the Hamidian regime with an open call for foreign intervention.<sup>3</sup> Soon, the authorities in the region determined that

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<sup>1</sup> For a focused analysis of the trial based on research conducted for this chapter by the author, see Toygun Altıntaş, “The Placard Affair and the Ankara Trial: The Hnchak Party and the Hamidian Regime in Central Anatolia, 1892-1893,” in *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*. 4.2 (2017): 309-337

<sup>2</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 44, April 13, 1893, Sir Ford to Earl of Rosebery, inclosures no. 2 and 3

<sup>3</sup> Y.A.HUS. 268/120, January 10 1893, The Grand Vizier to the Yıldız Palace

the placards had been published, distributed, and affixed by Armenian revolutionaries. Although the placards had little impact on fostering anti-Hamidian sentiment among local Muslims or increasing government officials' suspicion towards them, the investigation, the wave of arrests and the subsequent trial of suspected revolutionaries in Ankara in June 1893 became events that acquired local, imperial and international significance. This chapter will examine revolutionary practices, Hamidian policies of suppression, and the shapes and implications of Great Power interest and intervention.

The first part of the chapter will examine and discuss the main venues of revolutionary organization in Central Anatolia in the early 1890s. Existing Armenian grievances about the deterioration of their social and political status as well as their material conditions will be examined. Attention will also be paid to the multiplicity and diversity of discursive and violent revolutionary strategies that were employed in order to expand the Hnch'ak network or challenge existing social and political institutions in the region. Next, Ottoman strategies of containing and suppressing sedition, and their impact on socio ethnic tensions and relations during the "Placard Affair" will be discussed. Attention will be drawn here to the heavy involvement of the palace in the investigation through its aides-de-camp and direct communications with the governors and subgovernors in question, sidestepping establishing institutional precedence by limiting the involvement of the Sublime Porte. The mass internment of local Armenians, the recruitment of local Muslims in the policing of sedition, and the application of torture as a means of suppressing dissent will also be discussed. The final section of the chapter will focus on the Ankara trial, which was the first major trial of Armenian revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire. The Hamidian regime planned to indict Armenian social and political activism by exposing the existential threat posed by the revolutionaries. For the defendants, whether they were committed revolutionaries or individuals whose political activism was limited, it represented a public platform where they

could plea for public support, seek clemency or showcase the popularity of the Hnch'ak Party. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the interrelated impacts of the aforementioned Hnch'ak and Hamidian strategies as well as the trial and the sentencing on the evolution of the Armenian revolutionary movement.

### **The Revolutionaries**

As was discussed in the introduction the Hnch'ak Party was founded on a program of political freedom and socialist revolutionism. Although the program was an influential document in establishing the contours of early revolutionary activity in the Ottoman Empire, revolutionary practice was a process that involved willing and unwilling participants, observers, and objects. It was also contingent upon the grievances and concerns of local Armenian communities. If local Armenians did not support and/or participate in nascent revolutionary committees, the Hnch'ak network would not have been able to expand. Central Anatolia was one of the first major theaters of activity for the Armenian revolutionaries and is of particular significance in the articulation of the revolutionary project and its making with the participation of Ottoman Armenians. Although some of the most influential revolutionaries and largest revolutionary cells in Central Anatolia maintained contact with the Central Committee in Athens, many of the local members of the party and their sympathizers acted with considerable autonomy as will be explored in the chapter.

After the Kumkapı Demonstration of 1890, the authorities assumed a much firmer stance against oppositional politics in the imperial capital, pushing many of the revolutionaries out to the provinces, where they sought to organize opposition.<sup>4</sup> Central Anatolia was one of the zones that were selected by the revolutionaries to organize intensively because of the comparatively small presence of policing institutions and personnel. The center for revolutionary organization in Central Anatolia was Merzifon. The town was home to

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<sup>4</sup> See the introduction for the organization of the Kumkapı Demonstration.

sizable Protestant and Apostolic Armenian communities as well as the Anatolia College, which was administered by Protestant missionaries.<sup>5</sup> During the early 1890s, several Hnch'ak agents played key roles in the recruitment of locals to a network of revolutionary committees. These committees formed the backbone of the Central Anatolian organization of Hnch'ak cells under the primacy of the Merzifon committee. The revolutionary agents also worked towards the arming of the local population, and "taxation" through donation, extortion, and robbery. Of the several individuals, whose efforts proved the most influential for the Party's organization in Central Anatolia, two were Ottoman Armenians from other provinces, one a Russian Armenian, and the rest local Armenians. The overwhelming majority of the cadres, whether it were the small armed bands or the administrative committees, was also composed of local Armenians.

The Merzifon committee was run by Harutiun Tumaian, a local Armenian, and Parsegh Zakarian, a Russian Armenian from Shusha. The former was engaged in a variety of activities from recruiting locals to bolster the Party's ranks to the organization of a network of Hnch'ak committees around Merzifon. While Tumaian served as the chairman of the Merzifon committee, Zakarian acted as the secretary. After a brief spell in the Ottoman Empire, Zakarian traveled to Athens to confer with the Hnch'ak central committee. He then returned to the Ottoman Empire and went to Merzifon. There, he worked as a propagandist and attempted to draw peasants and craftsmen into the organization. At the same time, he emphasized the necessity of armed struggle to bring about national liberation and social advancement. Tumaian and Zakarian travelled to the surrounding villages and towns dressed as shepherds in 1891 and 1892, and gave speeches to peasants encouraging them to organize

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<sup>5</sup> For a history of the Anatolia College based on American sources, see Nazan Maksudyan, "Amerikan Kaynaklarında Merzifon Anadolu Koleji'nin Kısa Tarihçesi," [A Short History of the Anatolia College in Merzifon in American Sources] *Kebikeç*, 36 (2013): 131-154

and arm themselves against government officials and landowners.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the explanation of class struggle and national liberation in socialist terms, they also emphasized both the necessity and attainability of foreign intervention. An Armenian accused of affixing placards, who was one of the early detainees during the investigation but not a member of the committee, alleged that Tumaian and other revolutionaries had told him that the British prime minister and American president were ready to help Ottoman Armenians achieve liberty. However, “blood needed to be shed” in order for them to use public opinion against the Hamidian regime. Therefore, Armenians had to organize and start an armed insurgency.<sup>7</sup> Since it is known that Ottoman interrogators were frequently accused of torturing their suspects to extract confessions of foreign interference, it is impossible to ascertain that the revolutionaries used such rhetoric. On the other hand, it is also possible that Hnch’ak revolutionaries emphasized the necessity of the utilization of violence in order to accentuate the inevitability of the success of their program under the right circumstances.

In the fall of 1892, Tumaian and Zakarian called on secret societies in Central Anatolia to send representatives to a regional congress in Merzifon. The minutes of the meeting, which were confiscated by the Ottoman authorities during the investigation reveal that it had been organized in order to formalize the hierarchy between the Merzifon committee and the semi-autonomous revolutionary circles in the surrounding towns and villages.<sup>8</sup> According to the minutes of the meeting, the Merzifon committee was to serve as a regional center for a the Hnch’ak Party. The first recorded meeting for the congress took place at the end of September 1892, when each representative submitted their letters of recommendation, which they presumably received from revolutionary agents such as Tumaian and Zakarian. The

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<sup>6</sup> Arsen Kitur, *Patmut’iwn S.D. Hnch’ak Kusaksut’iwn*, vol.1, (Beirut, 1962) p. 92 This is corroborated by the testimony of Agop Pahlaf and Mardiros Knadjian, both of whom claimed that the two attempted to draw recruits from Apostolic and Protestant Armenian communities. BOA, Y.A.HUS. 271/54, March 8 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Sublime Porte

<sup>7</sup> BOA, Y.MTV. 74/50, January 29 1893, From the Governorate of Ankara to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>8</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.BŞK. 31/60, 81-2, June 29 1893, From the Ministry of Justice to the Yıldız Palace



representatives then delivered short reports on recruitment and propaganda in their local committees. In the third meeting, the delegates debated the creation of a new “executive” unit. This unit would consist of mobilized armed bands and would be directly answerable to the Merzifon regional center. Its expenses would be covered by revolutionary taxes submitted by the local chapters. In addition to expanding the coercive capacity of the party in the region and maintaining stable communication between the committees, the executive unit would be tasked with tax collection. The Merzifon congress also authorized the publication of a local bimonthly revolutionary journal named *War* in order to bolster propaganda efforts.<sup>9</sup> The regional congress reveal an elementary, but successful degree of political organization spearheaded by revolutionary agents. The network, however, would be exposed at the conclusion of the Ankara trial. Tumaian and Zakarian avoided capture during the investigation that followed the “Placard Affair”. Zakarian was killed in a clash against the gendarmes in 1894.<sup>10</sup> In order to compel Tumaian to surrender, his wife was imprisoned, where she was raped according to the British vice-consul in Ankara.<sup>11</sup> Tumaian was wounded and captured in another clash shortly thereafter. He died in prison.<sup>12</sup>

Mardiros “*Zhirayr*” Boyajian (1856-1894) was another key figure for Hnch’ak organization in central Anatolia during this period. He was born in Haçin in the province of Adana. He received his higher education in Istanbul thanks to a scholarship from a wealthy Armenian. During the two years he spent in the imperial capital, he was introduced to political circles, where issues of social inequality and national liberation were debated. Upon his return to his hometown, he founded a society under religious auspices in order to avoid the attention of the local authorities. The society served as a platform from which Zhirayr attempted to

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<sup>9</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 272/81, April 2 1893, From the Grand Vizier to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>10</sup> Kitur, *Patmut’iwn*, 94-5, Y.A. HUS. 292/166, April 6 1894, From the Grand Vizier to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>11</sup> FO, 424/178, Sir Currie to the Earl of Rosebery, no. 143, inc. 1, Consul Cumberbatch to Sir Currie, 21 May 1894

<sup>12</sup> Kitur, *Patmut’iwn*, 95

encourage people to engage in revolutionary politics. He traveled between Russian Transcaucasia and Haçin for some time until 1890, when the Kumkapı Demonstration took place in Istanbul. His brother, Hampartsum “*Murad*” Boyajian, was one of the leaders that were engaged in armed clashes with the Ottoman police during the demonstration. He fled his hometown in order to avoid capture and started traveling among villages and towns in Central Anatolia to organize local committees and encourage resistance to taxation. His efforts started to bear fruit, as Armenian, Sunni and Alevi peasants from villages around Yozgat attempted to negotiate better terms of taxation with tax-farmers and local landowners. He also established contact with local committees in Merzifon and Kayseri. He encouraged the revolutionaries there to arm themselves and engage in armed struggle against government officials.<sup>13</sup> Boyajian was active during the “Placard Affair” as well and was alleged to have affixed the placards in several villages around Kayseri.<sup>14</sup>

The last revolutionary whose role in Hnch’ak organization in Central Anatolia and the “Placard Affair” would prove most consequential was Andon Rshtuni. Rshtuni was a professional actor and teacher from Istanbul, who had fraternized in Armenian revolutionary circles there in the late 1880s. After his participation in the Kumkapı Demonstration of 1890, and his realization that one of his supposed comrades was a government informant, he fled the Ottoman capital and traveled to Alexandria, Egypt. After he failed to start a career in political journalism, he went to Athens to become a member of the Hnch’ak Party. He was ordered by the Central Committee to organize committees in Cilician towns and villages and incorporate existing circles that had been formed by locals for the purposes of self-defense. He entered the Empire through Mersin, where local Hnch’ak contacts suggested that he travel to Central Anatolia instead, where secret revolutionary committees had proliferated in the past months.

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<sup>13</sup> Kitur, *Patmut’iwn*, 95-100

<sup>14</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, 38, 46

Rshtuni was initially suspected of being a government informant by the local revolutionary circle in Kayseri where the committee members did not trust the authenticity of his letter of recommendation. He was only allowed to participate in the meetings of revolutionaries in Kayseri after the Merzifon committee confirmed his recommendation's authenticity.<sup>15</sup> He traveled extensively around Kayseri and regularly met with members of the local revolutionary committee as well as the aforementioned Zhirayr. He played an active role in the planning of attacks on government officials and the formation of revolutionary cells in the villages around Kayseri. He also remained in contact with the Central Committee in Athens, to which he dispatched periodic reports on the degree of revolutionary organization in the rural areas and the demographics of the region.<sup>16</sup> Rshtuni was captured by the authorities shortly after the "Placard Affair." The letters that he carried with him served as evidence of his revolutionary activities. Both Zhirayr Boyajian and Andon Rshtuni were instrumental in maintaining lines of communication and coordination between the dispersed Hnch'ak chapters in the villages and towns in Central Anatolia.

Rshtuni's letters connected him to the Derevank, a monastery which was close to Kayseri. The monastery and the resident priest played a key role in revolutionary organization after the arrival of the first Hnch'ak revolutionaries to the region. The resident Priest Taniel, who was a Kayseri native that had received his education at the Patriarchal Seminary in Jerusalem, had met with Zhirayr during one of the latter's tours of the region. According to Zhirayr, Priest Taniel was active in the recruitment efforts and convinced many peasants in the region to join the Hnch'ak party, earning him the epithet "the revolutionary baptizer".<sup>17</sup> The monastery was not only crucial for the revolutionaries' recruitment efforts: it also served as a safe haven for armed revolutionaries that participated in raids and robberies. The

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<sup>15</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.UM. 27/35, 27-8

<sup>16</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.BŞK. 31/60, 83-4

<sup>17</sup> Kitur, *Patmut'awn*, 114-5

government's recovery of significant Hnch'ak documents at the monastery was a turning point for the investigation. Despite his initial protestations, Priest Taniel confessed his involvement after a round of interrogations and torture and told the gendarmes the location of the aforementioned documents, which included the minutes of a regional congress of Hnch'ak branches, correspondence between Andon Rshtuni and other members of the party in the region, and several issues of the party's organ.

A band of five young men led by Giwlbenk Parseghian who called themselves the *Cellos* organized several raids from the monastery. The band was composed of young craftsmen and peddlers from the neighboring villages of Kayseri. At least one member of the band was on the run for waylaying and brigandage. It also became evident during the Ankara trial that weeks before their arrival at the Derevank, three members of the *Cellos* had robbed and murdered a carriage driver, buried his body in the wilderness, and sold his carriage and horses. It is therefore likely that Zhirayr, Rshtuni and other revolutionaries sought the allegiance and assistance of individuals with experience in fighting and avoiding the law. Ohannes Minasian, another famous brigand from Çarşamba, had pledged allegiance to the Hnch'ak Party in 1892. He commanded a large group of armed men who clashed with the gendarmes frequently over the course of the 1890s. He left the Empire several years later in order to avoid capture.<sup>18</sup>

The *Cellos'* raids often targeted the postal mail couriers, because the government and the Public Debt Administration (*Düyun-ı Umumiye*) used them as a means to transport cash from the capital to the countryside. The confiscated money was then supposed to be transferred to the monastery, where Andon Rshtuni, Zhirayr Boyajian or Priest Taniel would oversee its use.<sup>19</sup> The *Cellos'* affiliation with the revolutionary/nationalist cause was complex.

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<sup>18</sup> A letter from a revolutionary in Merzifon described Minasian's clashes in some detail. "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey], in *Hnch'ak*, 4 (1892) 19 April 1892.

<sup>19</sup> Kitur, 116-7

On the one hand, Parseghian provided a detailed account of the band's exploits under the title "The Armenian does not fear imprisonment" to Priest Taniel. He emphasized the need for armed struggle for national liberation for Armenians. Parseghian also professed his loyalty to the party and to the cause in order to realize that aim. It is likely that the biographical note was prepared in order to be sent to the *Hnch'ak* editorial board. Parseghian was to serve as an example of the ideal self-sacrificing revolutionary for the journal's readers.<sup>20</sup>

Parseghian's self-aggrandizing account of his exploits was an effort to recast his own image as an ideal revolutionary instead of a brigand. He described his band's raids and robberies as an expression of righteous defiance against an alien oppressor, and self-realization through the practice of armed force. In this way, his short biography can be viewed as a testament to the ideological transformation many revolutionaries undertook throughout the globe during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, there was at least one incident when the *Cellos* did not forward their loot to the revolutionary committee.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the minutes of another *Hnch'ak* committee in Sivas contain repeated references to the need for the collection of the party's dues from the raids and robberies conducted by the armed bands in the name of the party.<sup>23</sup> While the revolutionary affiliation served a variety of functions for the likes of *Cellos* such as escape from the surveillance of local authorities to popularity among Armenian communities, their attacks on the post courier followed existing

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<sup>20</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.UM. 27/35, 93-4

<sup>21</sup> For accounts of revolutionary self-definition among Bengali revolutionaries against Britain, see Shukla Sanyal, *Revolutionary Pamphlets: Propaganda and Political Culture in Colonial Bengal*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 112-114. For a comparable process among Jewish revolutionaries in fin-de-siecle Russia, see Inna Shtakser, *The Making of Jewish Revolutionaries in the Pale of Settlement: Community and Identity During the Russian Revolution and Its Immediate Aftermath* (New York: Palgrave, 2014)

<sup>22</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.UM. 27/35, 65

<sup>23</sup> The authorities confiscated a set of *Hnch'ak* confidants at an abandoned mill outside Sivas on February 1 1894. The documents included the minutes of the *Hnch'ak* Sivas committee from the previous years. The translations were preserved in the archives, while the originals appear to have been discarded. BOA, Y. PRK. UM. 29/36, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Grand Vizier. Sitting 12, October 19 1893

practices of brigandage. Priest Taniel, Gülbenk Parseghian and his followers were captured by the authorities during the investigation.<sup>24</sup>

Another method of extracting resources for the revolutionary movement was the intimidation of Armenian notables. Mardiros Knadjian, a Protestant pastor in Merzifon at the time, recounts a conversation with a fictional revolutionary, who was supposed to represent the ideological commitment and tenacity of all Armenian revolutionaries. The revolutionary responds to Knadjian's reservations about the use of violence against other Armenians as follows:

We do not expect to succeed if we leave it to their free will offerings. That method has been tried without appreciative result. We asked the people to contribute willingly. The rich hardly ever responded. Only the common labourers and tradesmen helped us with their mites. Moreover, this method laid us open to exposure and jeopardized our cause. There are some men who go as far to threaten to betray us to the government.<sup>25</sup>

Knadjian claims that many Armenian notables of Merzifon received comparable threats from the committee. While some agreed to pay the whole sum demanded, others negotiated with revolutionaries through intermediaries to reduce the "tax." There were also some notables who turned informant against the revolutionaries because they opposed their politics, did not want to pay tribute to the committees, or both. Members of the last group were sentenced to death by the committee.<sup>26</sup> After the sentencing, the "convicts" had a final opportunity to save their lives by paying a larger sum and receiving a "certificate of safety."<sup>27</sup>

During the course of the investigation, the revolutionaries assassinated several individuals. The first major target was Sahag Pakraduni in Amasya, whose testimonies had

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<sup>24</sup> Kitur, *Patmut' iwn*, 113-117

<sup>25</sup> H.M. Knadjian, *The Eternal Struggle: a Word Picture of Armenia's Fight for Freedom* (Fresno: Republican Printery, 19-?) 10

<sup>26</sup> Knadjian, *The Eternal Struggle*, 12, 21-25. The committee's assassination of such individuals is confirmed by a report from the Governor of Sivas sent to the palace on February 26 1893. Y.EE.d. 871/4d

<sup>27</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 273/112, May 4 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Sublime Porte

led to forty arrests.<sup>28</sup> The American consul in Sivas claimed that Pakraduni had initially been detained because the authorities believed he was a revolutionary. After he turned informant, Pakraduni was allowed out of the prison during certain times of the day.<sup>29</sup> Once news of his cooperation with the authorities was publicly known, the committee decided to kill him. He was fatally wounded in front of the Protestant Church under broad daylight in March 1893. The governor of Sivas, Halil Paşa informed the Porte that such assassinations were not unprecedented as the revolutionaries had used such methods in order to discourage Armenians from informing government officials.<sup>30</sup> In a telegram that he sent to the Palace four days after the attempt, he suggested that a government stipend be assigned to Pakraduni's family in recognition of his services to the government.<sup>31</sup>

The revolutionaries also targeted Armenian notables who had established good relations with government officials or who served in government institutions. Agop Agha, who was a member of the local administrative council, was assassinated in the same month. The governor requested a similar stipend to be issued to his family.<sup>32</sup> A month and a half later, a merchant named Mardiros, who had recently settled in Merzifon with the invitation of the *kaymakam*, was targeted.<sup>33</sup> Allegedly, he was turning large profits off of goods that were looted from Armenian homes during the searches.<sup>34</sup> It is also probable that the *kaymakam* and merchant were engaged in the statesman-moneylender arrangement discussed in the introduction. In other words, the local government official partnered with an Armenian merchant whereby he benefited from the cash reserves of the latter, and the merchant benefited from the official's political influence. It was not only Armenians, who served as

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<sup>28</sup> BOA, Y.A. HUS. 270/59, February 25 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Sublime Porte. Y.A. HUS. 270/62, February 26 1893, From the Grand Vizier to the Yıldız Palace.

<sup>29</sup> FO, 424/175 no. 81, inc. 2, Dr. Jewett (Sivas) to Consul Longworth (Trebizond), May 13 1893

<sup>30</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, February 25 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>31</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, March 1 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>32</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, April 15 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>33</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, May 4 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>34</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 82, inc. 2, May 12 1893, Dr. Jewett (Sivas) to Consul Longworth (Trebizond)

informants or government officials that the revolutionaries targeted, but also Armenian notables who owed their wealth to unofficial or semi-official relationships of patronage and sponsorship with Ottoman administrators.

The assassinations had a profound impact on other informants. Although informants continued to constitute one of the principal sources of intelligence regarding the revolutionaries throughout the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, they were often forced to exile from their hometowns if they cooperated with the authorities. Misak Uğurluyan, an established merchant, requested to leave his hometown Yozgat after informing on a number of individuals who had delivered a threatening letter to him on behalf of the local *Hnch'ak* committee. He refused to pay the fee that was demanded and delivered the letter to the government with the help of a Muslim colleague. It was only a year later that Uğurluyan mustered the courage and resources to return to Yozgat to repeat his statement in a court of law.<sup>35</sup> Similarly Parsegh Shehbenderian, who had provided the authorities with important information regarding the leadership of the Merzifon committee requested to be moved to a locale with no Armenian residents, or given a post at an imperial embassy. He was given two thousand *kuruş*, and invited to the imperial capital the day after.<sup>36</sup> Some of the assassinations were announced in *Hnch'ak* in the hopes of deterring further cooperation with government officials and convincing targeted merchants to contribute financially to the movement.

Control over the lives and deaths of informants and skeptical Armenian notables thus became another field of contention between the revolutionaries and the Ottoman government. Through the display of their ability to harm powerful Armenian notables, revolutionaries substantiated their claim to the governance of the Armenian nation. In order to maintain its legitimacy among its Armenian subjects and to encourage future informants and

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<sup>35</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, March 25 1894, Interrogation Reports from the Yozgat Court-Martial

<sup>36</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 871/4d, May 5 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace.



collaborators, the Ottoman government had to punish the revolutionaries and their sympathizers with the utmost severity, while protecting anti-revolutionary Armenians from harm. This struggle between the revolutionaries and the Ottoman authorities remained one of the central aspects of the conflict between them.

The placarding campaign was a recent addition to the revolutionaries' overall strategy in the region. It is likely that the revolutionaries sought to foster Muslim discontent in the region and drive a wedge between the Muslim population and the government. The *Hnch'ak* editorial board and revolutionary correspondents writing under pseudonyms from Central Anatolia, for example, maintained the fiction that the placards had been authored and affixed by a secret Muslim oppositional group. In two separate letters, which were dispatched in late February, Khanadjan claimed that the placard campaign had been orchestrated by Turkish revolutionaries and opponents of the Hamidian regime. In another letter sent by a revolutionary from Amasya, the author reported that the mass arrests, incessant searches of Armenian houses, and evidence of torture on the detainees had turned Muslim public opinion against the state.<sup>37</sup> A letter by a certain "Karadayı" from Kayseri, reported that Turkish revolutionaries had decided to utilize the growing resentment among the Muslim populace towards their maltreatment at the hands of local government officials. Furthermore, the majority of Turks in the region had started to sympathize with the local Armenians. Therefore, it was inevitable that Turkish dissent and discontent would have surfaced in such a manner.<sup>38</sup> Almost all correspondents claimed that Hamidian officials had simply taken advantage of the presence of the political placards in order to initiate a new phase in the oppression of Ottoman Armenians. According to Khanadjan, the officials extracted false confessions from innocent individuals by torture and intimidation. They also attempted to

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<sup>37</sup> Namakner T'urk'iyayits', [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 2 (1893) December 30 1892, January 29 1893

<sup>38</sup> "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 2 (1893) 10 January 1893

incite the local Turkish population against Armenians in order to prevent the further development of sympathy among them towards the revolutionaries.

As will be discussed in the next section, it was true that Ottoman officials recruited civilian Muslims in the policing and suppression of Armenians which had serious consequences. However, the claim that the placards had been authored by a secret Turkish political group was entirely false, and possibly repeated and disseminated in order to foster aversion to government officials among the Muslim population and create suspicion on the part of government officials towards them. It was even suggested that the location of some of the placards on the morning of January 6<sup>th</sup>, such as mosques and minarets, was evidence of a major revolutionary upheaval among local Muslims that involved members of the clergy.<sup>39</sup> The revolutionaries repeated such claims as late as May 1893, when the Ankara trial commenced. However, as the prosecutor would declare in his opening statement at the trial, the *Hnch'ak* editorial board had published the translation of the texts four months before they were distributed with a short description that claimed that they had received the placards anonymously and that the placards were found everywhere throughout Turkey, suggesting that the campaign had been planned in advance, but suspended temporarily.<sup>40</sup>

The aforementioned revolutionaries constituted the “vanguard” of the *Hnch'ak* organization in Central Anatolia. In other words, they played crucial roles in shaping and directing a nascent social, political, and militant organization. However, there were multiple degrees of involvement in the revolutionary movement with varying levels of engagement with the political program of the *Hnch'ak* Party. Many Armenians, who became members of local *Hnch'ak* branches or contributed financially to the party claimed not to have been aware of the leaders' plans to carve out an independent Armenian state or seek social revolution

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<sup>39</sup> “Namakner T'urk'iyayits',” [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 3 (1893) 28 February 1893

<sup>40</sup> “Yerku Haytararut'iwnner T'urk'iyayits',” [Two Declarations from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 9 (1892) 25 September 1892

during the Ankara trial. While it is likely that some of them feigned ignorance of such goals in order to escape the consequential charges of treason and intent to harm the integrity of the state, there were others whose engagement with the Hnch'ak party appeared limited or conditional. Furthermore, even individuals that hosted revolutionaries in their homes and had engaged in political discussions with them could reject certain principles of the party or simply reject an "official" post due to disagreements. When Rshtuni and Zhirayr offered the position of leadership to a regional secret committee, Arsen Kalfayan in 1892, he refused. As he claimed and several others attested during the trial, he declared that he had become disillusioned with the direction of the party with regard to the frequent robberies of the post couriers and the integration of the likes of the *Cellos*, whose political commitment and engagement he strongly doubted, into its ranks.<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding the evident popularity of the party as a venue for working towards the alleviation of the socio-economic pressures on Armenians or organizing resistance to the government, the Hnch'ak base was far from uniform in terms of its practical priorities and ideological engagement.

Leading up to the "placard affair," a core cadre of revolutionaries led a multifaceted campaign of propaganda, recruitment, agitation and violence in Central Anatolia. By appealing to the social injustices suffered by the peasantry they sought to expand their network in the countryside. In towns and cities, they recruited disaffected youth and craftsmen to collect resources and expand their influence. They adopted a variety of discursive strategies emphasizing the necessity of armed struggle or foreign intervention at certain times, while claiming to push solely for reforms that would address the specific grievances of the local Armenian communities at others. Furthermore, they sought to assume the entitlements and execute the privileges of modern statehood by taxing individuals, adjudicating disputes between locals, and founding representational branches on a geographical basis. They were

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<sup>41</sup> BOA, Y.PRK. BŞK. 31/60, 36-37

certainly aware that another state existed on the same space and aimed to tarnish its legitimacy and disrupt its policing efforts through the use of violence. The assassination of informants and other Armenians that were deemed traitors by the party was a largely successful effort in damaging the links between the Hamidian regime and local Armenian notability. The Hamidian regime contributed to the revolutionaries' efforts to pit a growing portion of the Armenian community against the state through the adoption of draconian measures during the investigation.

### **The Investigation**

Although the Ottoman Empire did not have an official institution of political police like its European and Russian counterparts, the Hamidian regime employed extensive and fluid networks of intelligence gathering in order to police dissent.<sup>42</sup> Ottoman local authorities had detected the presence of a revolutionary network in the provinces of Sivas and Ankara months before the appearance of the placards. In the fall of 1892, the Palace was making direct interventions in the policing of the Armenian Question as a result of the sultan's dissatisfaction with the Porte's failure to suppress the revolutionaries. On October 27<sup>th</sup> 1892, the Ministry of Justice reported that local authorities were reluctant to detain suspected revolutionaries for fear of being accused by Armenians of cruel governance. The Ministry of Justice added that strict instructions had been dispatched to the provinces that any individual found in possession of seditious documents was not to be released.<sup>43</sup> It is likely that prior to this period that there were local authorities that treated the acts of Armenian revolutionaries as

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<sup>42</sup> For a history of the political police in Europe, see Hsi-Huey Liang, *The Rise of Modern Police and the European State System from Metternich to the Second World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For the development of the Russian political police (Fontanka) over the course of the nineteenth century, see Fredric S. Zuckerman, *The Tsarist Secret Police in Russian Society, 1880-1917* (London: Palgrave, 1996). For efforts at interstate cooperation against political radicals and anarchists, see Richard Jensen, "The International Campaign against Anarchist Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21:1 (2009)

<sup>43</sup> BOA, Y.MTV. 70/17, October 25 1892, From the Ministry of Justice to the Yıldız Palace

similar to other common crimes, and often released individuals accused of such acts in exchange for bribes.

Since the Palace had determined that Armenian dissent constituted one of the most important challenges to the imperial government and that the revolutionaries had arrived in Central Anatolia, its security-minded attention turned to the region. Therefore, when the placards appeared in the villages and towns of the provinces of Ankara and Sivas on January 6 1893, Armenian “evil-doers” were among the top suspects. Although the Porte entertained the possibility of the participation of dissatisfied *medrese* students for a few days, it had become quite clear to central and provincial officials that the focus of the investigation was going to be on the Armenian revolutionaries. Sultan Abdülhamid II suspected that other individuals such as the director of the American College of Merzifon and the governors of Ankara and Sivas had assisted the revolutionaries in their endeavor and ordered the Grand Vizier to conduct the investigation with the utmost secrecy and severity.<sup>44</sup>

During the “Placard Affair,” the operation of the investigation was monitored by officials from the Palace, while representatives of the Porte were initially treated with suspicion. At the behest of the sultan, an ad-hoc commission composed of high-ranking officials from four ministries (the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Security) was created to survey official correspondence regarding the revolutionaries, and provide policy advice to the sultan.<sup>45</sup> More consequentially, Sultan Abdülhamid dispatched two of his aides-de-camp (Arif Hikmet Bey and Sadi Bey) to Ankara in order to interview/interrogate the governor and survey the towns and villages in that province such as Kayseri and Yozgat where the placards had been spotted, thus securing an alternate source of information.<sup>46</sup> The sultan would continue to resort to the observations of a closed small circle of advisors during times of

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<sup>44</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 268/120 January 9 1893, From the Grand Vizier to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>45</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 269/36, January 29 1893, From the Chief Imperial Secretary to the Sultan

<sup>46</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, 1893-1896

crises.<sup>47</sup> In the particular case of the “Placard Affair,” he was suspicious of the involvement of high-ranking local officials, including the governor himself.

The aides-de-camp reported on their findings almost on a daily basis for approximately three months. During their first interview, they informed the governor, Abidin Paşa, that the sultan had invested them with the authority to conduct a secret investigation into the matter and questioned him about his knowledge of the Armenian revolutionary movement. The paşa told them that he knew of overseas secret committees in England that had sent agents into the region in order to provoke the Armenians, but that he had not been able to uncover their network because of their use of various codes in their communications.<sup>48</sup> Afterwards, the governor, the subgovernors, and the provincial commander of the gendarmerie were ordered to conduct wide-ranging and continual searches in suspected Armenian locales and question suspected Armenians about the revolutionary movement.<sup>49</sup> The capture of Andon Rshtuni and the confiscation of the Party’s documents at the Derevank Monastery were critical moments in the advancement of the investigation.

In the early stages of the investigation, it was assumed that Armenian revolutionaries received the support and blessing of external powers. Based on the testimonies of the ten Armenians suspected of affixing the placards on the night of January 5<sup>th</sup>, the governor Halil Paşa and the Commander of the Gendarmerie Hüsrev Bey determined that the placards had been duplicated by the use of a cyclostyle at the American College in Merzifon. They were particularly adamant that professors Karapet Tumaian and Ohannes Kayaian at the College

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<sup>47</sup> The sultan dispatched an investigative commission, followed by a court-martial after the Yozgat demonstration and pogrom of 1894. This will be examined in detail in the next chapter. He also dispatched an aide-de-camp when the palace received news of extended clashes between Armenian peasants and Muslim pastoralists in the Sasun region of the province of Bitlis in 1893. Based on the reports of the aide-de-camp and the alarmist telegraphs of the provincial governor, Sultan Abdülhamid II ordered a large military expedition against the Armenian peasants that resulted in the massacre of more than a thousand peasants. The massacre and the subsequent international and domestic crisis will be analyzed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>48</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, January 9 1893, From the Aides-de-Camp (Ankara) to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>49</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, January 12 1893, From the Aides-de-Camp (Ankara) to the Yıldız Palace

and the director himself were complicit in revolutionary agitation.<sup>50</sup> The former was the paternal cousin of the aforementioned Harutiun Tumaian, the chairman of the Merzifon committee. This familial connection was to prove crucial during the trial. The Porte requested a comparison of their samples of handwriting in order to determine the exact origin of the placards. It was consequently determined based on the handwriting samples that Professor Tumaian had written the placard.<sup>51</sup> Tumaian's and Kayaian's houses were searched, and their personal letters and documents were confiscated. Although the documents revealed a steady line of communication between the professor and his Swiss wife, who was in London at the time, the information was limited to the collection of aid for the purposes of building a hospital in Merzifon.<sup>52</sup> The governor opined that the "hospital" was a metaphor for seditious affairs. He and the commander of the gendarmerie remained convinced that Tumaian was a revolutionary and, therefore, did not release him. As British involvement in favor of the professors increased, the Hamidian regime remained intent on establishing the professors' guilt.

Confiscated Hnch'ak documents were influential in determining the course of the investigation. The confiscated documents included the proceedings of the meeting of Central Anatolian Hnch'ak committees in September 1892 as well as correspondence between the Merzifon committee, the Central Committee in Athens and the Kayseri committee. The subject matter of the day-to-day correspondence included the collection of demographic data on the numbers of Armenians in different locales and the costs of arming committee members without the means to purchase guns for themselves. Among the other confiscated Hnch'ak documents there were two registers of the Kayseri committee that separately recorded the members of the local branch as well as the size and frequency of the members' financial

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<sup>50</sup> BOA, Y.EE.871/4d, January 30 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>51</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS 269/36, February 4 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Sublime Porte, Y.EE.871/4d, February 3 1893 From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>52</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4, February 16 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

contributions to the revolutionary cause.<sup>53</sup> The discovery of the Kayseri registers resulted in the arrests of large numbers of Armenians in the town and the surrounding villages.

The testimonies of informants and detained Armenians were also significant in driving the investigation. As part of the large wave of arrests in Central Anatolia, a local teacher by the name of Misak Keçeciyan from Yozgat was detained by the authorities along with thirty-eight others. Keçeciyan initially denied any involvement in the “Placard Affair”. After “the necessary advice was administered to him” twice, Keçeciyan claimed to have been visited by the Imperial Sovereign in his dream. The Sultan had promised him clemency in exchange for information on the revolutionaries. He was interrogated in the presence of the two aides-de-camp of the Sultan as well as the governor Halil Paşa. He gave up the names of his immediate accomplices, who helped him affix and disseminate the placards all over Yozgat. He also stated that he had destroyed all the documents related to the revolutionary committee after the beginning of the investigation, fearing that their recovery by government officials would cause him serious trouble.<sup>54</sup> The aforementioned Sahag Pakraduni, who was assassinated, and Parsegh Shehbenderian were among the other informants whose detailed testimonies exposed the network of sympathizers who had assisted in the distribution of the placards.<sup>55</sup> Most of the sympathizers were local craftsmen or peasants, some of whom denied any knowledge of the contents of the placards, claiming that they were illiterate in Turkish.<sup>56</sup> Based on the confiscated documents and informants’ testimonies, the investigation was expanded to the countryside.<sup>57</sup>

Local authorities such as the subgovernor of Yozgat or the governor of Sivas frequently complained about the lack of material resources and personnel under their

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<sup>53</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.BŞK. 31/60, 94-5

<sup>54</sup> BOA, Y.MTV. 74/50, January 28 1893, From the Governorate of Ankara to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>55</sup> “Namakner T’urk’iyayits’,” [Letters from Turkey],” *Hnch’ak*, 3 (1893) February 14 1893

<sup>56</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 272/81, April 1 1893, From the Sublime Porte to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>57</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, February 13 1893, From the Aides-de-Camp (Kayseri) to the Yıldız Palace



command.<sup>58</sup> Halil Paşa, who was serving as the governor of Sivas, reported that the provincial police force was absolutely inadequate to respond to the heightened security concerns. His request for the recruitment of additional police officers to the province was repeated twice during the course of the investigation.<sup>59</sup> One-hundred-and-fifty reserve soldiers were finally sent to Merzifon in order to facilitate the searches and help conclude the investigation in early March.<sup>60</sup> Considering the scarcity of their resources, it would appear rather remarkable that the provincial authorities were able to survey and search as many locales, and detain as many Armenians as they did.

A letter of complaint and the attached report compiled by the headmen of a predominantly Armenian village near Kayseri provide some clues. The report claims that on the night of January 21 1893, eight government officials and gendarmes came to an Armenian village in search of two suspected revolutionaries. The gendarmes and the officials were backed by some three hundred Muslims drawn up from Kayseri and Talas.<sup>61</sup> The crowd forced their way into the Armenian peasants' homes searching for seditious documents and arms, while harassing people and looting valuable property. They then detained forty Armenians in the homes of two Muslims and started torturing them to extract confessions and relevant information. The following morning, Muslim peasants from a neighboring village attacked the Armenians, which resulted in more looting and physical harassment. An Armenian woman, who was among the peasants that withstood the aforementioned attacks recounts an episode of sexual assault as follows:

About 8 or 9 o'clock at night our fellow-villagers Shakir and Shehreddin, Tcherkess Hamza and Djin Ali, accompanied by a number of zaptiehs (gendarmes) compelled me by force to open my door, and entered my house, saying "Tell us where your husband is." They

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<sup>58</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, January 24 1893, From the Aides-de-Camp (Ankara) to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>59</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, February 26, 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>60</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d March 6 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>61</sup> As was mentioned in the introduction, it was common for provincial officials to recruit bands of irregulars for specific policing tasks.

dragged me from wall to wall and got me down into the stable, where they violated me. They took from my house a large quantity of grain and other property. I remained all night in the stable in a fainting condition, and next morning was rescued by the neighbors and carried to my bed. Subsequently, Lutfullah, Ali Bey's son, Nouh, and Shehreddin came back again and ransacked the house.

Thus it was not just the property of the Armenian peasants that the irregulars violated; they were given free license to torture and rape. The rest of the petition includes references to the negative effects of such discriminatory policing practices on the region's commercial life, and thus the Armenians' ability to pay taxes, defined as "a sacred obligation". Although the document was intended to be submitted to the Yıldız Palace and also read during the Ankara trial, neither was allowed by the authorities. Afterwards, it was submitted to the British consulate in Ankara.<sup>62</sup>

The series of events described in the report displays the deleterious effects of the recruitment of one section of the population in the policing and terrorization of the other.<sup>63</sup> The terms of recruitment in the aforementioned case included the seizure of property and physical violation of the Armenians without fear of prosecution. Such measures terrorized not only the subjected peasants, but also other Armenian communities in the vicinity. As was the case in the immediate aftermath of the "search," opportunists from neighboring Muslim communities could try their chances with blatant acts of theft and violence with little fear of persecution by the government. Furthermore, the integration of Muslims as first-class subjects based on their confessional identity into the mechanisms of surveillance and intimidation reinforced the government's perception of them as the ruling element in the region. Such measures would continue to contribute to the escalation of tensions between Muslims and Armenians, marginalizing the latter and provoking mob violence.

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<sup>62</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 153, July 20 1893, From Ambassador Nicolson (Istanbul) to the Earl of Rosebery

<sup>63</sup> Another example is the recruitment of forty neighborhood guards in Yozgat during the height of the crisis. BOA, Y. EE. 871/4d January 15th 1893, From the Aides-de Camp (Ankara) to the Palace.

There were some officials who attempted to limit mob violence, even when they recruited irregulars to bolster the ranks of the police force. In Kayseri, Muslim irregulars joined the police in their search for suspected revolutionaries.<sup>64</sup> Ohannes Arzumian, who was on the run after having been spotted affixing placards in Kayseri, was discovered by three Muslims in an orchard on the outskirts of the city. He shot and killed one of them. His companions and followers took the body of the deceased Muslim to the subgovernor's residence and demanded retribution. The following day, Muslim peasants attacked Armenian property. The mob was dispersed after the district governor personally went to the vicinity with a number of gendarmes in his retinue.<sup>65</sup> When informed about the incident, the Palace ordered the aides-de-camp, who were in the region, to arrange a meeting with Muslim notables and appease them by promising that the "evildoers" would be severely punished. However, the notables were also to be warned about the negative impact of mob violence, as it "aided the evildoers." In these matters, obedience to government officials was both a legal and religious obligation. Arzumian was captured two days later.<sup>66</sup>

Another frequent complaint about the conduct of government officials was the use of trumped up charges to detain as many Armenians as possible in the early stages of the investigation. The American consul in Sivas reported the example of a certain Boghos, who was detained and imprisoned for forty-three days with little explanation. When he tried to learn what he was being accused of, he was simply told that "as his wife [wa]s a Protestant and his children attend[ed] the Marsovan school, and as the Protestants are revolutionists, he must have some share in the business." He was only released after paying a substantial sum in

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<sup>64</sup> The Hnch'ak Party published a compilation of documents related to the Ankara trial and the Placard Affair in 1894, which included a list of abuses of Armenians at the hands of government officials. *Brnut'an Dem: Gaghatiayi Datavarut'iwn* [Against Violence: The Ankara Trial] (Athens: Hnch'ak Press, 1894) 5

<sup>65</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d February 16 1893, From the Aides-de-Camp (Kayseri) to the Palace

<sup>66</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d February 15 1893, From the Yıldız Palace to the Aides-de-Camp (Kayseri)

bribes to several government officials. According to Boghos, there were many others who faced similar experiences at the hands of government officials.<sup>67</sup>

In Merzifon, the situation was no better. A letter to *Hnch'ak* reported that the wives, mothers, daughter, and sisters of the imprisoned Armenians protested the conduct of the government in front of the district-governor's mansion in Merzifon and wanted to present a petition to the Chief Prosecutor. The petition called for the immediate release of Armenians, who were detained during the investigation. Despite the initial resistance of the guards, the women succeeded in convincing the public prosecutor, who told them that he would take their grievances seriously.<sup>68</sup> When it became obvious that the district-governor was refusing to take decisive action, the women presented another petition in the following month. This time, the district-governor met with the women personally and told them that he was awaiting further instructions from the imperial capital. The following night, most of the prisoners were sent off to Çorum in fetters, where they were held until the Ankara trial.<sup>69</sup>

Throughout the investigation and during the trial, allegations of the use of torture by Ottoman officials were frequent. *Hnch'ak* published numerous letters about forced confessions. The most detailed account of widespread torture was submitted by one of the attorneys who represented some of the Armenian defendants to the British vice-consul in Ankara after the trial. It contained vivid descriptions of physical and psychological torture inflicted upon nineteen Armenian prisoners during the investigation in Kayseri. The methods the officials used included severe beatings, brandings, solitary confinement and rape. The Ottoman officials would only end the torture if the Armenian prisoners agreed to sign and seal prepared statements, which implicated either themselves or other people the officials

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<sup>67</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 70, inc. 2, May 6 1893, Dr. Jewett (Sivas) to Consul Longworth (Trebizond)

<sup>68</sup> "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 3 (1893), February 28 1893

<sup>69</sup> "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 4 (1893), April 4 1893

suspected of being revolutionaries. Harutiun Denkmejian, who was kept in solitary confinement for three days under the aforementioned circumstances, perished.<sup>70</sup>

By early March, hundreds of Armenians had been imprisoned for their alleged involvement in the publication and dissemination of the placards. Some local officials also used the prevailing enmity towards Armenians to their advantage. Among the detainees were prominent Armenian notables and merchants, who were told that they would be reported as members of the revolutionary committee unless they paid bribes.<sup>71</sup> Political prisoners were detained across Central Anatolia, including the cities and towns of Çorum, Kayseri, Sivas, as well as Merzifon. The American estimate of seven hundred was probably the closest to the actual number of political prisoners.<sup>72</sup> The high number as well as mounting public discontent in Great Britain against the Hamidian regime resulted in greater British involvement in the conduct and outcome of the “placard affair”. The inclusion of two professors from the Anatolia College among the suspects further increased British interest, since the professors were both Protestants. International pressure resulted in the release of the majority of the prisoners before the trial.<sup>73</sup>

Around the same time, the Ministry of Justice recommended to combine the cases against individuals accused of sedition and complicity in the “placard affair” in a general trial. The Palace agreed with the suggestion that the defendants in Çorum, Tokat, Yozgat, Kayseri, Merzifon and Sivas be tried in a public trial in Ankara.<sup>74</sup> In a memorandum submitted to the embassies of the Great Powers in response to allegations of partiality and arbitrariness in the administration of the investigation, the Ottoman government announced that the revolutionaries were going to be tried in an open trial with the full rights accorded to them in

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<sup>70</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 121, inc. 30 June 1893, Ambassador Nicolson to the Earl of Rosebery

<sup>71</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 70, inc. 2, May 6 1893, Dr. Jewett (Sivas) to Consul Longworth (Trebizond)

<sup>72</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 52, inc., April 12 1893, Consular Secretary Newberry (United States of America)

<sup>73</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 52, inc., April 12 1893, Consular Secretary Newberry (United States of America)

<sup>74</sup> BOA, Y.MTV. 75/169, March 3 1893, From the Ministry of Justice to the Sublime Porte

the Ottoman Penal Code. Some revolutionary documents as well as confessions extracted from some of the suspects were included in the report as evidence of a widespread conspiracy intent not only in destroying the Hamidian regime, but also instigating social revolution.<sup>75</sup>

### **The Ankara Trial**

The same memorandum started with a conflicting preamble that stated that the Armenian Question was simply the creation of a few mal-intentioned and seditious individuals, who had been seeking to enlist Western assistance for their purposes for several years.<sup>76</sup> This statement reflected one of the major anxieties of the Hamidian establishment: Great Power interest and interference in administrative and security affairs in the guise of addressing Armenian grievances. The involvement of two professors (and one cyclostyle) from the American College in Merzifon in the “Placard Affair” deprived the local and central officials of the Sublime Porte and the Yıldız Palace the opportunity to avoid international attention. From the beginning of the investigation, the governor Halil Paşa and commander of the gendarmerie Hüsrev Paşa firmly believed that the entire personnel of the college had been involved in the affair. According to the director and several Armenian students of the college, Hüsrev Paşa threatened to burn the entire college down if the culprits were not delivered to him immediately. Several days later, a recently-built wing of the college intended to be a new dormitory building was burnt down.<sup>77</sup> While the personnel of the college and local Armenians laid the blame on Hüsrev Paşa, the Hamidian regime accused the revolutionaries of having committed arson with the aim of destroying evidence of seditious conspiracy having taken place on the grounds of the college.<sup>78</sup> The revolutionary writing under the nom de guerre of “Khanajan” in *Hnch’ak* reported an alleged conversation between Hüsrev Paşa and the

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<sup>75</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 272/81, April 2 1893, From the Grand Vizier to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>76</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 272/81, April 2 1893, From the Grand Vizier to the Yıldız Palace

<sup>77</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 21, February 26 1893, From Sir Ford (Istanbul) to the Earl of Rosebery (Foreign Secretary)

<sup>78</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 871/4d, January 31 1893, From the Governorate of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace

gatekeeper of the college, when the former impressed upon the latter the necessity of supporting the government's representation of the events.<sup>79</sup> Although the Hamidian regime never accepted official responsibility for the arson, it accepted to pay full damages.<sup>80</sup>

More importantly, the attack on the college resulted in greater international attention on the whole affair. British consuls from Trebizond, Van, Erzurum, and Ankara were requested to provide information on the numbers of Armenian prisoners. Dr. Jewett, the American consul in Sivas, reported to both American and British diplomatic representatives about the Armenian revolutionary movement and the conduct of local government officials. As late as May, he remained convinced that Muslim opponents of the Hamidian regime were responsible for the dissemination and affixing of the placards. He also reported on the arbitrary and heavy-handed manner in which most searches were taking place<sup>81</sup>. In addition, the second dragoman of the American embassy was dispatched on an official mission to evaluate the veracity of the government's claims regarding the arson of the American College in Merzifon and extensive seditious activity in the region. The dragoman, Mr. Newberry, surveyed several locales in the province of Sivas including Merzifon and claimed to have met with Armenian revolutionaries. He reported that Merzifon was unique among the towns he visited in terms of the level of revolutionary agitation and organization as well as the hostility of government officials towards the Armenian community. He stated that there was a well-established revolutionary committee in Merzifon that had a considerable amount of explosive material, revolvers and ammunition at its disposal<sup>82</sup>. The Porte and the Palace attempted to represent the dragoman's findings as incontrovertible proof of a widespread seditious movement that necessitated large numbers of arrests<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 3 (1893) February 28 1893

<sup>80</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 53, April 24 1893, From Sir Ford to the Earl of Rosebery

<sup>81</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 70, inc. 2, May 6 1893, From Dr. Jewett to Consul Longworth

<sup>82</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 52, inc. April 12 1893, From the Second Dragoman of the American Embassy

<sup>83</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 272/90, April 4 1893, From the Sublime Porte to the Yıldız Palace. Y.A.HUS. 272/128, April 12 1893, From the Sublime Porte to the Yıldız Palace

The British Foreign Ministry assigned two diplomatic officials to report on the “Placard Affair”. Consul Graves, who was stationed in Erzurum, included Ankara in his tour of the provinces in order to report on the status of the prisoners. He met with the governor Abidin Paşa in early May. The governor told him that a number of agitators had arrived in different districts of Central Anatolia in order to establish committees and recruit adherents to their cause. With the help of informers, the government was able to discover and expose their network. The paşa then allowed the visiting consul to interview Andon Rshtuni, one of the revolutionaries who was heavily involved in the Hnch’ak organization in Central Anatolia. Graves reported that Rshduni “showed the boldest front possible, told us that he was a Socialist by conviction, and prepared to see any means, even to the taking of life, to attain his end... the intention of the movement was, he declared, to cause such disturbances in the country as should attract attention to the oppressed conditions of his fellow-countrymen, and compel the interference of foreign Powers.”<sup>84</sup> Rshtuni was not the only defendant that the governor allowed the visiting consul to interview. Professor Tumaian was also brought to the governor’s mansion. There, the professor informed the consul that unlike his previous experiences in Ottoman prisons, his treatment in Ankara had been humane. He continued to profess his innocence and deny his alleged involvement in the revolutionary movement. He claimed that he had simply been confused with his cousin Harutiun Tumaian, who was the chairman of the Merzifon Hnch’ak branch. The visiting consul was allowed to see Prof. Tumaian again several days later, when the latter continued to deny allegations of traveling around villages in the province of Sivas in the hopes of recruiting peasants for the revolutionary committee, arguing instead that he had traveled there for business purposes.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 65, inc., May 6 1893, From Consul Graves (Erzurum) to Sir Ford

<sup>85</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 67, inc. 1, May 9 1893, From Consul Graves to Sir Ford



It is noteworthy that an Ottoman governor would allow a British diplomatic representative to interview the defendants in a case that revolved around the “Armenian Question”. Abidin Paşa promptly informed the palace of his actions, possibly because he feared the palace’s wrath if his initiative was discovered later. There are several reasons as to why the governor may have acted differently from many of the local government officials we have encountered in this chapter. First, it is likely that the governor sought to earn the good will of the British Foreign Office by providing their representatives unofficial access to some of the defendants they were most interested in. Second, the governor might have attempted to alleviate the injury to the reputation of the Ottoman state by emphasizing the fact that the defendants were to receive due process in accordance with the legal code and providing “evidence” of their humane treatment by the authorities. The governor also took Prof. Tumaian’s response to the accusations quite seriously, and wrote back to the Porte, reporting that the revolutionary Tumaian was Prof. Tumaian’s cousin, and that the latter was almost certainly not the leader of the Merzifon committee.<sup>86</sup> His report went unheeded. Last, but not least, the governor may have sought to impress upon the British consul that revolutionary sedition was not simply an Hamidian invention to oppress the Armenians, but rather a political project pushed forward by dedicated revolutionaries as the consul’s interview with Rshtuni seemed to indicate.

The mounting international pressure and the Hamidian decision to hold an open trial for the revolutionaries were related. By exposing the network of Armenian revolutionaries in a publicized manner, the Ottoman authorities would be able to curb European public sympathy for the revolutionaries. A highly publicized spectacle of nefarious “anarchists” and revolutionaries recanting in the presence of an international audience would serve the palace’s efforts to cultivate the image of the Armenian revolutionaries as immoral evildoers whose

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<sup>86</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 274/38, May 17 1893, From the Governorate of Ankara to the Sublime Porte.

political project amounted to nothing more than a nihilistic attempt to destroy State and Society. It is clear that the palace and the local authorities firmly believed they had a strong case to prove the presence of revolutionary societies, and that their exposure would be sufficient to cast away any doubts of the Ottoman authorities' draconian measures of mass internment of Armenians, employment of torture on political prisoners, and increasingly hostile attitudes towards Armenians.

Despite the institutional innovations that afforded unprecedented autonomy to judicial officials in theory, administrative and executive intervention in high-profile cases was frequent.<sup>87</sup> The Ministry of Justice attempted to stave off administrative intervention and meddling in the legal process, but high-ranking administrative officials as well as the Sultan himself carried considerable influence in the prosecution and outcome of such cases. The Ankara trial, with its imperial and international implications, was similar. During the course of the investigation, the prerogatives of the public prosecutor, who procedurally should have built the case against the alleged revolutionaries, were repeatedly sidelined by the heavily involved palace aides-de-camp, governors, and subgovernors.

The trial was conducted in ten hearings from 20 May 1893 to 12 June. The court had five members, three of whom were Muslims, one Armenian Catholic, and the other a Greek Orthodox. The defendants were represented by eight lawyers. The majority of the defendants were craftsmen or merchants from towns and villages in Central Anatolia. There were four school teachers along with four students, three of whom were under eighteen years of age.<sup>88</sup> The hearings were attended by the British vice-consul in Ankara, who provided detailed descriptions of the defense of the two professors. The proceedings of the trial, which had been recorded by the court clerk, were forwarded to the palace in two separate copies. The Ministry

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<sup>87</sup> Rubin, *Ottoman Nizamiye Courts*, 133-138

<sup>88</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.UM. 27/35, 2-4

of Justice published most of the proceedings in the *Ceride-i Mehakim*, which was a legal journal that served as a compendium of notable cases.

The trial commenced with the identification of the defendants and the lengthy description of their alleged crimes. The specific crimes included membership in seditious organizations, brigandage and robbery, aiding and abetting the revolutionaries in the dissemination of the placards, and hiding them from the authorities. Although some of the indictments were based on documentary evidence such as the financial register of donations to the Kayseri branch of the Hnch'ak Party, the majority were primarily based on confessions of the defendants under custody. At the conclusion of the reading of the official indictments, State Prosecutor Arif Bey delivered his opening statement. He claimed that the Armenian community had lived in safety and prosperity under Ottoman rule for hundreds of years. They had preserved their nationality, freedom, religion, customs, and language thanks to the beneficent mercy of the Ottoman dynasty. Therefore, it was watched with grief (*nazar-ı teessüf*) that some among Ottoman Armenians had been tricked by some ill-intentioned governments and individuals. These people committed sedition which ran against the rules and principles of servility and imperial subjecthood. These acts had caused shame among loyal Armenians, and were viewed as “base ingratitude” (*kıfrân-ı nimet*) by the general public.<sup>89</sup>

The prosecutor added that Armenian translations of the texts in the placards had been published during the previous year in *Hnch'ak*. It was therefore evident that the whole campaign had been orchestrated by the Hnch'ak Party, the headquarters of which were located in Athens. The Prosecutor stipulated that the committee had been founded by Armenian criminals, who had been involved in political crimes several years ago and had fled to Europe. These individuals had started publishing a “compilation of lies and slander under

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<sup>89</sup> BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, 22-24

the guise of a journal,” and initiated a campaign of reporting on the “so-called” oppression of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and attributing a series of acts of brigandage, which were in fact committed by Armenian bandits, to Muslims. The aim of the journal and the slanderous reporting was to “confuse the minds of the simple folk” and “to influence the ideas of the foreigners”. These journalistic activities were bolstered by the efforts of other evil-doers, who had secured professorships in educational institutions under the direction of some foreigners. These professors traveled through the countryside under the guise of giving lectures and tending to their commercial enterprises while secretly preparing the minds of the simple folk towards a revolution.<sup>90</sup> The Merzifon Hnch’ak committee, which functioned under the name of the “Hnch’ak Revolutionaries of the Province of Armenian Minor,” was formed in order to oversee and coordinate these interrelated efforts at sedition and rebellion. At the conclusion of the opening statement, the Prosecutor stated that the alleged crimes of the defendants fell under four separate categories with the general aim of “separating a portion of the well-protected domains in order to establish an independent state under the name of Armenia”:

- 1) The establishment of seditious committees that formed the basis of many crimes and felonies with the hopeless dreams of establishing Armenia,
- 2) The placards against the imperial monarchy and the Ottoman state,
- 3) The felonies comprised of the robbing of mail couriers under the protection of the state by means of waylaying and murder,
- 4) Efforts and seditious meetings conducted in order to spread revolution and rebellion.<sup>91</sup>

The first hearing was thus concluded with the announcement of the defendants under each category. The Prosecutor’s opening statement is particularly representative of Ottoman

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<sup>90</sup> BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, 21

<sup>91</sup> BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 27/35, 22

attitudes towards the “Armenian Question”. He touched upon the key concerns of the Hamidian regime with regard to the Armenian revolutionary movement. Because the open trial was a public platform to address multiple audiences that included local government officials, Armenian and Muslim notables, and foreign consuls and journalists, he employed different registers. Throughout his statement, Arif Bey spoke at some length about the comfort and safety that allowed Armenians to prosper for generations under Ottoman rule. This was a reiteration of the Hamidian fiction that Armenian dissent and discontent had no basis in reality. It was, rather, the product of seditious individuals who were encouraged by unidentified and malleable foreign actors, whose identities could be changed in accordance with the foreign policy exigencies of the regime. According to this narrative, the few occasions which caused harm to innocent Armenians were arranged by the seditious Armenians, who planned to attribute their sinister acts to the Muslim population in order to garner the sympathy of European public opinion.

The prosecutor built upon the aforementioned Hamidian fiction by providing an account of the public reaction to the proliferation of seditious committees in central Anatolia. The statement simultaneously served as a description and a prescription. Arif Bey claimed that loyal Armenians were ashamed of their compatriots, who participated in such acts. The general public, on the other hand, was offended by such “base ingratitude,” as Armenians had always been treated with respect and courtesy under Ottoman rule. In fact, Armenian notables in general were left in a precarious position between imprisonment/exploitation at the hands of government officials or extortion/assassination at the hands of the revolutionaries. Arif Bey chose to call the unease and terror caused by such a state of affairs “shame”.

Such phrasing implied that Ottoman Armenians were collectively accountable towards the state as far as sedition was concerned. The previously mentioned protection of the safety, property, liberty and religion of the Armenian community, which had been in place for

hundreds of years, was not an unconditional right, although this was exactly what the Tanzimat had promised some fifty years ago. Rather, safety of life and property for Armenians was dependent on their aversion to “base ingratitude.”<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Arif Bey stated that Armenian sedition had caused concern among the general public. It is significant that he made a distinction between loyal Armenians and the “general public,” which was a thinly veiled reference to the Muslim majority. Thus, the public prosecutor signaled at the hierarchical superiority of the Muslims over Armenians. It was not, however, a simple question of the superiority of one over the other. Not only were Armenians not part of the general public and thus inferior, but their protection from harm depended on their collective loyalty and subservience to the state.

The prosecutor’s distinction between the general public and the Armenians was deliberate. By doing so, he sought to erase the social and political causes of widespread Armenian dissent, instead portraying the affair as a simple struggle between loyalty and treason. Such “dichotomous rather than dialectic” framing of the “Armenian Question” was a fundamental component of Hamidian anti-Armenianism.<sup>93</sup> The Hamidian regime ignored widespread Armenian complaints regarding social and political marginalization, and instead explained the situation by placing the roots of Armenian dissent in “foreign” ideas and attributing its popularity to the naivete and ingratitude of the Ottoman Armenian populace. When faced with the prospect of a growing revolutionary movement in Bengal, the British colonial authorities developed a comparable fiction of misguided local youths who did not comprehend the present and future benefits of benevolent colonial rule, which simply

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<sup>92</sup> This attitude would be pronounced again in a confidential note from Sultan Abdülhamid II to the British ambassador in the wake of the Sasun massacre. See Chapter 4 for details.

<sup>93</sup> The “dichotomous rather than dialectic” construction of political space is borrowed from Antoinette Burton as quoted in Sanyal, *Revolutionary Pamphlets*, pg. 125

happened to perpetuate itself by its systemic exclusion of locals from the higher echelons of political power.<sup>94</sup>

Another important aspect of the prosecutor's opening statement was the deliberate ambiguity surrounding the culpability of Ottoman Armenians. In official correspondence, the governors, subgovernors, and palace officials would interchangeably refer to Armenians or Armenian evildoers in order to denote the revolutionaries or political prisoners. The spread of the revolutionary movement among Ottoman Armenians would cause the further blurring of the lines between loyal Armenian subjects and the evildoers, particularly in times of crisis when any expression of Armenian dissent or discontent would be equated with an expression of sympathy or support for the revolutionaries. In such periods of crises, Ottoman Armenians would be placed under even greater precarity as both government officials and opportunists from Muslim communities abused them.

During the examination of the defendants by the prosecution, it became clear that many of them had been tangentially involved with the revolutionary committees. Kirkor Isayan, who was a craftsman in Kayseri, was commissioned by some members of the revolutionary committee to make a seal for them. The seal would affirm the committee's claims to state-like authority and confirm the authenticity of its orders and letters. Isayan accepted the commission and made the seal under the name "Hnch'ak Revolutionaries of Kayseri" in exchange for one and a half *mecidiyes*. During the trial, Isayan claimed that he was illiterate and that he had not understood the implications of his commission. His acceptance of the commission and failure to report on the existence of a revolutionary committee in Kayseri after he had met two of its members were considered sufficient by the prosecution to build a case for his involvement in the revolutionary movement.<sup>95</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>94</sup> Sanyal, *Revolutionary Pamphlets*, pg. 124-156

<sup>95</sup> BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, 33

Serpuhi Keshladjian of Everek (referred to as Serpik Kadın in official Ottoman documents) was accused of having rented rooms to Anton Rshduni and Jirayr Boyajian and assisted in the affixing of a few placards in her own village as well as the town of Develi during the night of January 5, 1893.<sup>96</sup> Although it is likely that she was aware of the political content of the placards as well as the numerous meetings between the two revolutionaries and their contacts in the village, she was not a member of the Hnch'ak Party as had been claimed in her indictment. The prosecution attempted to frame any communication and cooperation with the revolutionaries as proof of one's membership in the movement, if the defendant or the witness had not turned informant. It is also likely that some of the defendants simply lacked the social capital and financial means to secure their release before the trial, even though evidence of their involvement in the "placard affair" or the revolutionary movement was scarce. As had been mentioned previously, local officials frequently demanded bribes to grant the release of detainees in cases related to the "Armenian Question". If a detainee were unable to produce the demanded payment, or did not have a social or familial network that could negotiate his release, he could find himself among the defendants.

The prosecution's case relied heavily on the testimony of witnesses and defendants. Documentary evidence was compiled against several key revolutionaries to successfully indict them, but the evidence against the likes of the aforementioned defendants whose involvement in the revolutionary movement was limited or conditional was scarce. However, the majority of the defendants had signed prepared statements that confirmed their participation in the revolutionary movement during their interrogations before the trial in order to be released. Whenever defendants denied the accusations leveled against them or objected to the account of events as presented by the prosecution, the prosecutor reminded them of their signed statements. Many of the defendants stated that their signatures were

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<sup>96</sup> BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, 37-8



obtained under torture. The prosecutor simply claimed that the defendants had been directed by the revolutionaries to fabricate accounts of torture before the trial so that the legitimacy of the court would be tarnished and European public opinion would be moved in favor of the Armenians.

Several Hnch'ak revolutionaries confessed their membership in the Party during the trial. As was previously mentioned, Andon Rshtuni had declared that he was a committed revolutionary in the presence of the governor of Ankara and the visiting British consul of Erzurum. His testimony during the trial was critical for the prosecution's case. He provided a detailed account of his travels. He also explained the involvement of several other revolutionaries including those among the defendants and those on the run. He confirmed the involvement of Priest Taniel of Derevank in recruiting, aiding and hiding revolutionaries when they needed shelter from the authorities.<sup>97</sup> It is striking that Rshtuni was willing to forgo the secrecy of the organization. However, he did not do so as a government witness. His sentence was not reduced in light of his testimony, and he was not denounced in *Hnch'ak* as an informant even after the trial where he delivered the aforementioned statement. It is likelier that he viewed the open trial as a public platform through which he could showcase the extent of the popularity of the Hnch'ak Party in the region. Through his testimony, it became clear that Andon Rshduni, Harutiun Tumaian, and Zhirayr Boyajian had been successful in establishing multiple Hnch'ak branches in over a dozen Central Anatolian towns and villages. In contrast to the opening statement of the prosecution, Rshtuni revealed that the Hnch'ak organization in the region was not simply the work of a few seditious individuals with foreign backing, but rather the collaborative effort of several hundred Ottoman Armenians for whom it represented a venue for pursuing social and political change. He was not allowed to read his

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<sup>97</sup> BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, 26-27, 65, 82

written defense, however, which included his reasoning for his actions. In it, he stated that he had acted to liberate the Armenians from the Ottoman yoke.<sup>98</sup>

Mardiros Jivanian, a nineteen-year-old member of the Hnch'ak committee of Everek, attempted to utilize the public platform he was given in a similar manner. His written defense, which was not allowed to be read out during the trial, was submitted to the British consulate in Ankara. In the statement, Jivanian denied allegations of attempting to form an independent country and stated:

Our complaints and lamentations are against the acts of oppression perpetrated by the greater number of the officials, and against their venality and corruption, and their failure to maintain legality and justice; against the imposition of new and burdensome taxes to the extent of diminishing the wealth and resources and enfeebling the commerce of the country; against the withholding of the freedom of the press which is enjoyed by other civilized countries; against the impediments placed in the way of our progress along the path of civilization and prosperity

Jivanian's passionate reiteration of the Hnch'ak call for the dismantlement of the socio-economic and political mechanisms of oppression was supported by a general plea for the pursuit of individual liberty.<sup>99</sup> His claim that the Hnchak Party did not aim to establish an independent country, however, was not true. Interestingly, the Hnch'ak program, a translation of which was presented to the court as evidence, stipulated that the establishment of independent Armenia was one of the foundational goals of the organization. Was Jivanian, a young disciple of the Party, not aware that the stated political and national freedom in the program amounted to the establishment of a new state? It is impossible to provide a definitive answer, but it is likely that the young revolutionary planned to represent the Hnch'ak Party as a group of "concerned citizens" in contrast with the Ottoman portrayal of the party as a cabal in the light of Russian "Nihilists" or French anarchists. Because the audience at the trial was

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<sup>98</sup> *Brnut'ean Dem*, 43-56.

<sup>99</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 161, Sir Nicolson to the Earl of Rosebery, inc. 1, August 3 1893

composed of a wide range of spectators that included foreign and domestic observers, Jivanian aimed to represent the Hnch'ak Party as a moderate association, the aims and methods of which were palatable to liberal Europeans and conscientious Ottomans alike. It is also possible that the young revolutionary did not accept the party program's position on the question of political independence.

Rshtuni and Djivanian were two of the few revolutionaries, who openly acknowledged their involvement in the movement without expressing any regret. The participation and involvement of the members of the Kayseri Hnch'ak committee were confirmed by documentary evidence including letters signed in their names and a register containing the names of the committee's members. They also admitted to having assisted in the distribution and affixing of placards in and around Kayseri. Parsegh Diwkmejian added that he destroyed several "seditious documents" and the seal of the Kayseri branch of the committee after the appearance of the placards and the beginning of the investigation in their hometown. Ohannes Arzumanian, another member of the Kayseri committee, spoke of the regional congress of the Hnch'ak committees that took place in Merzifon, where he represented his hometown. He also took the opportunity to openly state that all of the statements attributed to him apart from those he had given in the presence of the court, had been compiled by the scribe of the interrogator, casting doubt on many of the claims the prosecution had presented with certainty.<sup>100</sup> The other members of the Kayseri committee expressed regret for having been "seduced" into participating in such activities. The *Cellos* either denied their membership in the committee altogether or claimed that they had met at the Derevank Monastery with Andon Rshtuni in exchange for regular payments.<sup>101</sup> Giwlbenk Parseghian even claimed that he had deliberately lied to Priest Taniel to compile the biographical note

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<sup>100</sup> BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, 32-33

<sup>101</sup> BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, 57-58

about him raiding postal couriers and shooting gendarmes in order to receive a financial reward from the Hnch'ak Central Committee in Athens.<sup>102</sup> Among the defendants, who professed their innocence, the professors from the Anatolia College in Merzifon, Ohannes Kayaian and Karapet Tumaian were of particular significance.

It is very likely that Sultan Abdülhamid II himself desired their conviction, because the professors' connections in Europe and their official status as employees of an educational institution under the indirect patronage of the British Empire had started to harm the reputation of the court. By establishing their guilt and connection to the revolutionary movement, the Ottoman government attempted to dispel any notion of wrongdoing on the part of its officials. However, the case against the professors was very weak. Apart from a tour they undertook of several villages and towns in Central Anatolia during which they were accused of having delivered seditious speeches, and the erroneous attribution of the leadership of the Merzifon committee to Prof. Tumaian instead of his cousin Harutiun Tumaian, the prosecution could not present any evidence of the professors' involvement in the Hnch'ak Party or the "placard affair". Before the trial, the lack of a strong case against the professors had caught the attention of the governor of Ankara, who informed the Palace and the Porte about the strong possibility of their innocence. These warnings were ignored. The governor also felt compelled to send a telegraph on the day of the announcement of the verdicts and the sentences that Prof. Tumaian was among those that had received the death penalty.<sup>103</sup> During the trial, both professors claimed that they had been confused with the latter's cousin and his comrades. In her work on the history of the Armenian revolutionary movement, Louise Nalbandian states that Prof. Tumaian collaborated with the revolutionaries based on an interview with a graduate of the Anatolia College.<sup>104</sup> Therefore it is likely that Prof. Tumaian

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<sup>102</sup> BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, 60-61

<sup>103</sup> BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 27/35, June 12 1893, The Governor of Ankara to Yıldız Palace.

<sup>104</sup> Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 120

assisted the revolutionaries with access to the cyclostyle at the Anatolia College in order to print the placards. However, the prosecution could not present any evidence that linked the professors to any seditious activity.

Furthermore, only one hearing out of the ten was given to the defense. The defendants' request to submit their prepared statements to be read aloud was denied. Instead, the defense team was allowed to provide brief statements along with several of the defendants who made brief remarks about their innocence. The British vice-consul reported "the prisoners were not allowed to make any lengthy explanations relative to their individual cases. They were allowed to make a few comments, but, on entering minutely into details, were at once stopped by the President."<sup>105</sup> The vice-consul also stated that the defense was not allowed to develop its case since it was not allowed to bring witnesses on the defendants' behalf.<sup>106</sup> The court board wanted to conclude the trial as swiftly as possible without allowing the defendants to draw public sympathy within and outside the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the defense was not only compelled to present short statements for each defendant, but also unable to address the considerable allegations of torture and intimidation.

The final hearing was dedicated to the announcement of the verdict. The professors from the Anatolia College, Andon Rshtuni, Priest Taniel of Derevank, Ohannes Arzumanian, and the *Cellos* who had attacked the postal courier and members of the Kayseri committee were condemned to death.<sup>107</sup> Fourteen of the defendants were acquitted. The rest were sentenced to seven to fifteen years of imprisonment. The defendants, who were condemned to death, were found guilty of membership in a seditious organization against the Imperial Sovereign, the intent to form an independent Armenia or providing assistance to seditious

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<sup>105</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 161, From Ambassador Nicolsn to Secretary Rosebery, August 3, 1893, incs. 1 and 3

<sup>106</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 95, inc.2, June 13 1893, From Vice-Consul Newton (Ankara) to Ambassador Ford

<sup>107</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.BŞK. 31/60, 2-3, FO, 424/175, no. 91, inc.2, June 12 1893, From Vice-Consul Newton to Ambassador Ford.

activities.<sup>108</sup> The governor of Ankara reported that the decision had struck terror in the hearts of traitors while inspiring confidence and security among the loyal populace.<sup>109</sup> *Hnch'ak* reported the names of the forty-one defendants that received sentences in its June issue in a short editorial. The author stated that the state had finally succeeded in convicting forty-one people after having resorted to countless lies and intrigue. The author also reiterated the declaration of an attorney reportedly dispatched from the United States Embassy in Istanbul to observe the proceedings, who stated that the verdicts as well as the sentences were arbitrary.

The publicized trial of alleged rebels and revolutionaries was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the Ottoman authorities wanted to showcase the state's modern judicial institutions in a public setting. In doing so, they would be better-equipped to deter future allegations of monarchical caprice and religious fanaticism in the prosecution of political criminals. Furthermore, the trial would allow the prosecution to "expose" the revolutionary character of the *Hnch'ak* Party and the multiplicity of the methods its members employed to realize its social and political goals. In other words, the *Hnch'ak* Party's goals of social and political transformation through violence and propaganda, which Ottoman officials considered would be perceived in an overwhelmingly negative light by local and foreign audiences alike, would be revealed. Finally, the harsh sentences would serve as an effective "lesson" to the rest of the Armenian community among whom some might have sympathy for the cause and efforts of the revolutionaries.<sup>110</sup>

On the other hand, the public trial provided political opponents of the state with a public platform. The whole episode was reminiscent of the trial of Vera Zasulich and Russian

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<sup>108</sup> BOA, Y.PRK. UM. 27/35. June 11 1893, From the Sublime Porte to the Yıldız Palace. Ahmet Kolbaşı, *1892-1893 Ermeni Yafta Olayları* [1892-1893 The Armenian Placard Events] (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Yayıncılık, 2011), 407-420

<sup>109</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.UM. 27/35, June 12 1893, From the Governorate of Ankara to the Yıldız Palace.

<sup>110</sup> Two telegraphs from the Governor of Sivas to the Yıldız Palace and the Porte on the issue of the location and scale of the trial of the revolutionaries in early 1893 include statements on this concern. BOA. Y. EE. 871/4d, February 26 1893, The Governor of Sivas to Yıldız Palace. Y. A. HUS. 270/59, February 26 1893, The Governor of Sivas to the Porte

populists in 1877-8. The Populists were accused of sedition and provoking the Russian peasantry against the autocracy. They were detained in prison for three years before the commencement of the trial. Legal reform in Russia had transferred political cases from regular courts to a special branch of the Senate. Even though the hearings could only be attended by government officials, the scale and political character of the case drew the attention of the public. Most of the defendants rehearsed their speeches in prison in preparation, and openly questioned the legitimacy of the court in their statements. They gained the sympathy of the senators in court and received light sentences. More than a hundred were acquitted, further exposing the authoritarian and “uncivilized” practices of the Russian state that had resulted in their harrowing detention for three years awaiting trial.<sup>111</sup> The day after the final hearing of the “Trial of 193,” Vera Zasulich, another revolutionary, attempted to assassinate the municipal governor of St. Petersburg. The governor had ordered the flogging of a political prisoner for refusing to remove his cap in the governor’s presence.<sup>112</sup> In order to dispel the aura of political heroism and self-sacrifice around Zasulich, the Russian authorities decided that she would be tried as a common criminal in an open trial with a jury. A conviction seemed certain as the defendant readily accepted her role in the assassination attempt. However, the defense turned the case on its head: the capricious cruelty of the municipal governor was emphasized, while Zasulich was represented as simply having responded to a vile act by a public official. The jury acquitted the revolutionary, who was taken away by a jubilant crowd. Zasulich succeeded in fleeing the Russian Empire before the tsar’s police could arrest her again after the annulment of the court decision.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Laura Engelstein, “The Theater of Public Life in Imperial Russia,” in *Revolution and the Meanings of Freedom in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Isser Woloch, (California: Standard University Press, 1996), 336-339

<sup>112</sup> Jay Bergman, *Vera Zasulich: A Biography* (California: Standard University Press, 1983), 35-39

<sup>113</sup> Bergman, *Vera Zasulich*, 51

Thus, the Russian revolutionaries “used the courtroom as an opportunity to address the public and the scaffold as a stage on which to enact the heroism of ultimate self-sacrifice and dramatize the villainy of the established order.”<sup>114</sup> For Rshtuni and Jivanian, the open trial constituted a similar opportunity: They were able to address multiple audiences. The prosecution in the Ankara trial attempted to deny the revolutionaries an unrestricted public platform and mediate the content of their communication by refusing for their written statements to be read aloud. Rshtuni was able to communicate some of his concerns at the trial by appearing to cooperate and acknowledging the involvement of some of the defendants in the Hnch’ak Party. He was thus able to speak at some length on the popularity of the revolutionary committees and widespread dissent among Armenian communities in Central Anatolia. The written statements also exposed the obvious tasks of the court to indict the revolutionary defendants and to deny them an open platform. This did not escape the foreign observers, who viewed the trial as a predetermined affair.

Nevertheless, the announcement of the verdicts and the sentences came as a shock because so many of the defendants had received death sentences. International pressure, especially from the British ambassador, became considerable in the immediate aftermath of the trial. This was particularly because of the death sentence the professors at the Anatolia College had received. Many of the other defendants were only accused of having assisted in the distribution and affixing of the placards. On June 21, the British ambassador met with the Grand Vizier Ahmed Cevad Paşa and the Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs Artin Dadian Paşa. He strongly objected to the conduct of the trial and expressed his hope that the Court of Cassation would revoke the sentences imposed upon the professors. The Grand Vizier replied that the Sultan could intervene to commute some of the death sentences, if the Court failed to do so. The ambassador was told by Dadian Paşa that the injustice of the sentences imposed on

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<sup>114</sup> Engelstein, “The Theater of Public Life,” 336-337



most of the defendants was clear to all. He added that the professors would almost certainly receive imperial clemency. However, he was of the opinion that “it would be prudent to allow him (the Sultan) to have the appearance of doing so on his own initiative, and not under pressure”<sup>115</sup>.

The following days witnessed more negotiations between British diplomatic representatives and high-ranking government officials to work out a solution that would secure the lives of the professors. Although the Court of Cassation confirmed the sentences, the Sultan acquiesced to British pressure and commuted twelve of the death sentences.<sup>116</sup> The professors were banished from the Ottoman Empire and allowed to settle in a country of their choosing. The remaining ten defendants were sentenced to eight years in prison, and were shortly dispatched to Fezan in Ottoman Tripoli to serve their sentences.<sup>117</sup> The death sentences of the *Cellos* and Ohannes Arzumanian were confirmed. According to the British vice-consul, the death sentences of the five defendants were carried out on August 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>118</sup>

## Conclusion

The execution of the five revolutionaries after a much publicized trial represented a significant turning point in the evolution of the Hamidian security state and the Armenian revolutionary movement. The August issue of *Hnch'ak* hailed the executed defendants as the first martyrs of the revolution. The *Hnch'ak* correspondent in Ankara reported that the last words of the revolutionaries were “Long live Armenia! Long live the Revolution!”<sup>119</sup> It was argued in the unsigned editorial that the “cannibalistic drive” with which the “sultan-executioner” arranged for the torture and execution of the revolutionaries had shown the path to liberation to all Armenians. That the sultan had decided to attack the Armenians with such

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<sup>115</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 97, June 21 1893, Sir Nicolson (Istanbul) to Earl of Rosebery

<sup>116</sup> Kolbaşı, *Yafta Olayları*, 437-8

<sup>117</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 206, September 23 1893, Consul-General Moore (Tripoli) to Sir Nicolson (Istanbul)

<sup>118</sup> FO, 424/175, no. 163, inc., August 1 1893, Vice-Consul Newton to Sir Nicolson

<sup>119</sup> “Namakner T'urk'iyayits’,” [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 8 (1893)

ferocity was evidence that he considered the revolutionary movement a serious threat to his rule. It was incumbent, according to the editorial, for the Armenian nation to respond in kind to this declaration of war by weakening the bases of Ottoman rule and organizing to strengthen the nation. The editorial concluded with a call to all Armenians to witness the sacrifice of the revolutionaries and declare in their spiritual presence “Holy martyr! We will follow your footsteps. This edifice of oppression needs to be destroyed, and it is already crumbling. And we shout with you: Long live Armenia! Long live the Revolution!”<sup>120</sup>

After determining Ottoman Armenia as the focus of revolutionary activism, leaders of the Hnch’ak Party called on a few of its committed agents to partake in the organization of a network of its committees in Central Anatolia. As agents like Zhirayr Boyajian, Harutiun Tumaian, and Andon Rshtuni set out to encourage disobedience and resistance among the Ottoman Armenian community against government officials and recruit new members for the party, they employed several discursive tactics. They sought to disseminate socialistic notions of armed struggle and revolutionary liberation that ultimately targeted an alliance of class enemies that included Muslim landowners and government officials as well as Armenian notables that served in administrative councils and Armenian merchants that refused to provide financial resources for the party. In addition, they sought to communicate the centrality of *Armenian* liberation for the revolution. Despite the general affiliation of the Hnch’ak Party with international revolutionism, the party’s primary goal was to secure the economic and political liberation of Ottoman Armenians by establishing an independent state. Finally, the revolutionaries attempted to bolster their claims that such liberation was inevitable by suggesting that British intervention in their favor was imminent so long as the revolutionaries and their followers remained committed.

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<sup>120</sup> “Sult’an-Dahich, ” [The Sultan-Executioner], *Hnch’ak*, 8 (1893)

The revolutionaries' campaign of recruitment and propaganda brought about a loosely affiliated network of committees in Central Anatolia within three years. The network was crucial for the dissemination of information and ammunition. Next, they sought to establish a more defined hierarchy of revolutionary committees that would secure a steady flow of financial resources towards the center in Merzifon through the collection of dues. The Merzifon committee would, in return, provide its subordinate committees with copies of the party organ, arms and ammunition, and of course, directions for future political action. This was decided upon in a regional congress that was attended by the representatives of small Hnch'ak committees from all over Central Anatolia.

Finally, the revolutionaries oversaw the utilization of violence for their purposes. They organized raids and robberies from government and Public Debt Administration postal couriers. They also forced many local Armenian merchants to contribute financially to the revolutionary movement by sanctioning the assassination of those who refused. Resource extraction was not the only motive for the utilization of violence. Revolutionaries also arranged for the assassinations of Armenian informants and "collaborators" with the Ottoman state. By doing so, they attempted to restrict the flow of information on their organization to Ottoman officials and drive a wedge between the Ottoman state and Armenian notability. The frequent utilization of violence by the revolutionaries was also a means of subverting the state's primacy over the application and legitimation of the use of force.

Through the use of aforementioned tactics and the selective replication of some of the state's prerogatives, the revolutionaries could realistically claim some power and authority in the region. They could also claim that they represented a portion of the local Armenian community, including peasants whose complaints had not been received seriously up until that point. In doing so, the revolutionaries were engaging in an ambitious program of redefining "Armenianness," epitomized by the revolutionaries' acts of self-sacrifice, and

redrawing the boundaries of the Armenian nation, put into the practice through the assassination of informants and anti-revolutionary notables. Yet, the trappings of state-like authority were not confined to the revolutionaries' actions. Their material imprint in the form of "official" seals, letters of recommendation, party press, by-laws and regulations, and pamphlets, broadsides, and posters bespoke an ambitious and comprehensive program of revolutionary organization and power creation. Within the matter of a few years, they had succeeded in forming a small but potent anti-state centered in Merzifon with branches scattered throughout the region, which was noticed by foreign observers and the majority of the local Armenians by the time of the "Placard Affair".

Despite diversity in tactics and considerable autonomy in action, several general features of revolutionary activity can be discerned. First and foremost, the "revolutionaries" constituted a sizable group of recruits and cadres as well as brigands, craftsmen, peasants, teachers, and shopkeepers. What united such groups with diverse backgrounds were a common adversity to Ottoman government officials, and a common commitment to the betterment of the conditions of Ottoman Armenians through self-representation and self-defense. Self-representation manifested itself in the proliferation of secret societies with organic links to the Hnch'ak Party. Self-defense materialized in the form of the purchase and distribution of modern rifles and ammunition to the committees' armed bands. Beyond these basic principles, however, many of the members of the party and the larger circle of sympathizers held different views about the necessity of the establishment of an independent Armenia, or the organization of armed bands to waylay passers-by as a means of culling resources for the party.

Second, the betterment of the conditions of Ottoman Armenians involved the re-making the Armenian nation. As has been discussed in the introduction, Ottoman Armenians had developed autonomous political, education, religious, and cultural institutions by the last

decade of the nineteenth century. The revolutionaries' project, then, was not one of creating a new nation, but rather reshaping it through vigorous organization of secret representational committees, targeted violence and agitation. The representational committees considerably extended the reach of the party as discontented Armenians of various backgrounds swelled into its ranks, or aided its members in their pursuits. The targeted violence substantiated the revolutionaries' claim about their ability to create power, and intimidated those that were critical or skeptical of the feasibility of their claims. Agitation through pamphlets, placards, secret meetings, and engagement with public audiences as was the case with the Ankara trial simultaneously communicated the necessity and urgency of substantial political reform under foreign supervision.

Another particularly distinctive feature of the revolutionaries' project was their unapologetic integration of class into the national liberation of their nation to the horror of many wealthy Ottoman Armenians. Although the revolutionaries boasted a few lawyers and teachers, the majority of the rank and file was drawn from the peasantry and the urban craftsmen. The committees often took it upon themselves to arm members that could not afford to pay for rifles and ammunition. In addition, concerns of Armenian peasants over excessive taxation and their rapacious treatment by Ottoman officials, which were sidelined or ignored by the Ottoman palace and its allies within the Apostolic church and the Armenian National Assembly, were brought to the fore by the revolutionaries as the basics of any claim to national liberation.

Armenian revolutionary activity was closely followed by various agents of the Hamidian state. It is clear that by the early 1890s, the "Armenian Question" had come to be increasingly securitized among government officials. In other words, Armenian dissent and discontent would often be interpreted as an underhanded attempt at the administrative and territorial integrity of the Ottoman state. Armenian revolutionary activity was understood in

dichotomous terms and divorced from existing social and economic circumstances in order to promote and publicize the notion that it was caused by a combination of nefarious foreign influences, and an almost innate Armenian propensity to ingratitude. To this grand narrative, local and imperial officials could affix foreign institutions and organizations such as the Anatolia College in Merzifon or British diplomatic representatives as secret accomplices. In the case of the “Placard Affair” the surveillance and suppression of Armenian dissent took the form of draconian measures which resulted in the temporary mass internment of local Armenians. In addition, government officials incorporated and employed segments of the local Muslim population in the policing of local Armenians. The officials’ approval (and in some cases oversight) of the application of indiscriminate violence by local Muslims against local Armenians exacerbated intercommunal tensions, and had dire consequences leading up to the massacres and pogroms of 1895-6.

It is important to note that the Ottoman state was not monolithic. At the same time as local officials in Merzifon were implying direct British involvement in the acts of the Armenian revolutionaries, the governor of Ankara allowed the visiting British consul of Erzurum to interview two of the key defendants in the case. Imperial officials of various ranks were involved in a complicated web of power relations of which British diplomatic officialdom was a key component. There were also tensions between the Sublime Porte and the Yıldız Palace at an institutional level. These often surfaced in the form of the frequent interventions of Sultan Abdülhamid II to secure alternative venues of intelligence gathering and executive control. Furthermore, the supposed primacy of the judiciary over the prosecution of criminal activity was repeatedly ignored when politics became involved. Throughout the affair, the Hamidian regime displayed its commitment to the suppression of Armenian dissent and discontent at the cost of the integrity of existing institutional hierarchies and modern judicial principles. The Palace’s unrelenting commitment to the suppression of

Armenian dissent and open disregard for Armenian grievances would be further crystallized in Yozgat before the end of the year.

## ***THE EDIFICE OF SEDITION: PROTEST, POGROM, AND MARTIAL LAW IN YOZGAT***

The international and imperial resonance of the Ankara trial had not dissipated when news of another crisis reached Istanbul in the winter of 1893. A demonstration protesting the cruel conduct of gendarmes had been organized in Yozgat, a town some 160 km east of Ankara, by local Armenians. On December 12th 1893, a group of peasant women from two villages in the outskirts of Yozgat arrived at the town's Apostolic church with a sizable following. The bells of the church were rung by some of the demonstrators, and a number of couriers were dispatched throughout the city to invite members of the local Armenian lay and religious councils to hear the complaints of the women. A large crowd, some of whom were armed members of the Hnch'ak Party gathered at the church by the middle of the day. At the same time, a crowd of gendarmes, soldiers, and armed Muslims encircled the church, suspicious of a large gathering of Armenians. Major General Osman Safi Paşa, who was stationed in the city at the time, entered the church to learn what the demonstration was about and to prevent the escalation of the tensions between the Armenian demonstrators and the Muslim crowd outside. The peasant women declared that their honor had been stained by the gendarmes, when the latter had arrived in their village looking for revolutionaries several weeks ago. During their investigation, the gendarmes separated the men from the women. Their leading officer raped a dozen of the women in their homes while the men were confined. The women threw their bloodied underwear in front of the paşa and demanded justice.<sup>1</sup> Osman Safi Paşa informed the peasants that the correct course of action was to

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<sup>1</sup> There are numerous accounts of the demonstration. The witnesses' identities and those of their audience inform the tone and content of their observations. The account presented above is a composite representation based on the report of the Ottoman military commandant, a lengthy petition by Armenian representatives of the lay and religious councils, testimony of Armenian witnesses, and summaries by Ottoman administrative officials and British diplomatic representatives. A representative sample of documents include the petition and the commandant's report in BOA, Y. EE.



present a petition to the administrative government official of the town and that he was confident that justice would be served. Before he left the church, however, several gunshots were heard outside, and armed clashes began between the armed Armenians on the one side, and the gendarmes and armed Muslims on the other. The paşa was rushed out of the church, with curses from many Armenians, who thought that he had simply wanted to deceive them.<sup>2</sup> The clashes went on for some hours. Three Muslims and two Armenians were killed as a result, with several wounded on both sides.

This chapter will focus on the Yozgat demonstration and its aftermath. The demonstration was followed by a government investigation, mass internment of local Armenians, declaration of martial law, the establishment of a court-martial and an anti-Armenian pogrom. The aim of the chapter is to highlight and dissect three connected processes. First, the government, with the heavy-handed involvement of the palace, was actively silencing Armenian complaints about maladministration and concentrating its energies on the suppression of all Armenian dissent and the pursuit of revolutionaries. Second, the central government's consistent enforcement of the adoption of discriminatory measures through the commission of inquiry or the court-martial against local Armenians was reshaping the extant ethno-confessional hierarchies. The local Muslim population was becoming an integral part of not only the policing of Armenian dissent, but also its suppression. The tensions culminated in an anti-Armenian pogrom. Third, the revolutionary leaders and committees were becoming a significant part of Armenian politics. As will be shown in the remainder of the chapter, the revolutionaries had cooperated with some Armenian notables and administrators in order to publicly express local discontent regarding corruption and oppression. Such cooperation is not only a testament to the popularity of the revolutionaries

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179/5, and a witness report to the British consulate in Ankara in FO, 424/178, no. 132, inc. Consul Cumberbatch to Ambassador Currie, May 16 1894.

<sup>2</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, Proces Verbal of the Interrogation of Artin Tekirian, January 2 1894

among the local population, but to the success of their propaganda and organization in redirecting local grievances to the higher echelons of state power.

### **The Demonstration and the Commission of Inquiry**

The Yozgat demonstration was organized in response to a recent wave of atrocities against Armenian peasants in the countryside. A communique from Zhirayr Boyajian to members of the Yozgat Hnch'ak committee called for the necessary arrangements to be made for a demonstration by peasants, and the drafting of a petition to be submitted to the subgovernor. Armed revolutionaries were to be present in order to respond in the case of military intervention. The demonstration was to take place approximately a month after the date suggested by Boyajian.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that the local Yozgat committee was negotiating with the local Armenian notability and planning their course of action in the meantime. In the end, the demonstration and the subsequent petitioning were coordinated by the local Hnch'aks, disaffected peasants, and Armenian notables as represented by legally recognized institutions of Armenian communal administration (The Apostolic lay and religious councils, the Prelacy, and the Protestant religious council). In other words, the organization and execution of the demonstration cannot be solely attributed to the Hnch'ak Party, although its members assumed important roles.

According to the peasants, several gendarmes under the command of their officer, Dursun Bey, were touring villages in the countryside of Yozgat in pursuit of revolutionaries. When they arrived in the village of Karayakub, the officer had the men of the village rounded up and confined in one of the houses in order to interrogate them. While the men were being questioned about their knowledge of the whereabouts of armed bands of the revolutionaries, some of the gendarmes entered the homes of other peasants and raped several Armenian

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<sup>3</sup> Kitur, *Patmut'iwn*, pg. 101.

women. When the confined peasants found out what had occurred and confronted the gendarmes, several of them were put in chains and taken to Yozgat.

The emotion-laden arrival of Armenian peasant women at the Apostolic church accompanied by a large crowd of other peasants and the ringing of the church bells was a momentous event. It was shocking for local Armenians and Muslims alike. Within a matter of a couple of hours, hundreds of Armenians, peasants and townsfolk, had gathered at the church to hear the complaints of the women. Importantly, members of the Yozgat religious and lay council were personally invited to attend by couriers that were most likely dispatched by the Hnch'ak committee. After their arrival, the peasant women explained the reason for their presence in the town. At the same time, soldiers and some members of the local Muslim population, who were suspicious of such a large gathering of Armenians on a regular day of the week, assembled outside the church. A clash occurred between the soldiers and armed Muslims outside the church and the armed Armenians (some of whom were members of the local Hnch'ak committee) that left two Armenians and three Muslims dead. Osman Safi Paşa attempted to prevent the escalation of violence between the two sides. His later report emphasized the panic and anger of the Muslim population about rumors regarding a secret Armenian plot to disperse into Muslim neighborhoods and kill Muslims. As a result, the Muslims had gathered outside the church. The report also confirmed the presence of armed people on both sides, and the tensions between them. The major-general claimed that his efforts had prevented the devolution of the limited clashes into a much graver situation.<sup>4</sup> The early reports by the British viceconsul were in agreement with the paşa's remarks.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that the personal testimonies of the women, who were assaulted and raped by the gendarmes, galvanized the Armenian community. Witnesses claimed that the women

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<sup>4</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, Osman Safi Pasha to the Commission of Inquiry, February 21 1894

<sup>5</sup> FO, 424/178, No. 9, inc., Consul Cumberbatch to Acting-Ambassador Nicolson, December 29 1893

dumped their bloodied underwear in front of the Ottoman officer after relating the violence to which they were subjected. They demanded the intervention of the authorities and the punishment of the perpetrators. The physical presence and passionate plea of the peasant women transformed the actions of the gendarmes from usual harassment and maladministration to a particularly egregious insult to the entire community. If the perpetrators were not brought to justice, it would not simply have been a case of the usual governmental indifference to Armenian suffering, but rather an affirmation of the violence inflicted on the peasant women, and a tacit permission to other soldiers to commit similar acts. Furthermore, the women's physical presence and forceful narration of the violence heightened the tensions. A witness claimed that when shots were fired outside the church, the Armenian community started throwing stones at the Ottoman major-general and forced him out, claiming that he had entered the church in order to trick them.<sup>6</sup>

The interpretation of the atrocities as the defiling of the collective honor of the Armenian community undoubtedly played a key role in drawing large crowds. While the mass internment of Armenian men, the sporadic searches of Armenian locales that were accompanied by looting and physical violence contributed to growing discontent among the community, the rape of Armenian women, while men from their families were confined in a separate house, was a different threshold. As was the case with the kidnapping of Gülizar, hundreds of Armenians reacted strongly against the gendarmes' rape of the women. The fact that the gendarmes had gone unpunished was not only a matter of violence and insult against a particular village, but on the whole Armenian community.

The gravity of the demonstration and the clashes did not escape the Ottoman authorities. Abidin Paşa, the governor of Ankara, informed the palace and the Porte that the Armenians were protesting their maltreatment by a gendarme officer on the day of the

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<sup>6</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 132, inc. Consul Cumberbatch to Ambassador Currie, May 16 1894

demonstration. As he had spent a good amount of his time and efforts at the Ankara trial, he added that the influence of the revolutionaries was palpable. Over the course of the next two days, he forwarded telegraphs from the subgovernor stating that regular sentries comprising gendarmes and members of the local Muslim population had been instituted in order to prevent another episode of violence.<sup>7</sup> The sultan and his retinue, however, had lost confidence in Abidin Paşa's ability to suppress Armenian dissent. He was dismissed within a week of the demonstration and replaced with Memduh Paşa, the former governor of Sivas, who had cultivated a reputation for his hostile attitude towards Armenians. The subgovernor of Yozgat was also replaced due to his inability to foresee and prevent the demonstration.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, a commission of inquiry was hastily put together and dispatched from the capital in order to determine and expose the involvement of the revolutionaries.<sup>9</sup> The palace would thus maintain a similar two-pronged hold on the direction of the investigation by direct contact with the ad hoc commission of inquiry on the one hand, and the governorate on the other. Both institutions would also continue to inform the Sublime Porte about their findings, which would present the intelligence to the palace in abridged memorandums.

The tensions remained high for several weeks. The Armenian section of the town's market remained closed in defiance to local officials' requests. The newly appointed governor of the province, who was stationed in Ankara, conducted negotiations with Armenian notables

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<sup>7</sup> BOA, İ. DH. 1310/32, The Subgovernorate of Yozgat to the Governorate of Ankara, December 12 1893. The Governorate of Ankara to the Sublime Porte, December 12 1893; BOA, Y. EE. 50/32, The Governorate of Ankara to the Sublime Porte, December 12 1893; BOA, Y. A. HUS. 286/29, The Governorate of Ankara to the Sublime Porte, December 13 1893; BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, The Governorate of Ankara to the Yıldız Palace, December 12 1893.

<sup>8</sup> The replacement took place within the space of a few days. FO, 424/178, no. 2, inc. 1 Consul Cumberbatch to Acting-Ambassador Nicolson, December 16 1893; Abidin Pasha served as the governor of the Aegean Islands for the rest of the Hamidian period. Abdulhamit Kırmızı, *Abdülhamid'in Valileri: Osmanlı Vilayet İdaresi 1895-1908* [The Governors of Abdülhamid: Ottoman Provincial Administration 1895-1908] (İstanbul: Klasik, 2008) 148-9

<sup>9</sup> BOA, Y.A. HUS. 286/79, The Sublime Porte to the Yıldız Palace, December 20 1893; FO, 424/178, no. 2, inc. 3, Consul Cumberbatch to Acting-Ambassador Nicolson, December 19 1893; Y. EE. d. 871/4, The Commission of Inquiry to the Yıldız Palace, December 23 1893.

through the telegraph. He reported to the palace that the Armenians were adamant in their refusal to open their shops and schools unless their demands were taken seriously.<sup>10</sup> In response, the palace instructed the governor to determine the ostensible causes of their complaints. More importantly, the governor was instructed to adopt a perspective in line with the assumption that Armenian revolutionaries under instructions from London were seeking to provoke foreign intervention.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the palace was signalling towards the framing of the demonstration as an infringement on public order and its aftermath in line with its recent policies towards the “Armenian Question.” The view was reinforced by another telegraph from the palace to the commission of inquiry on their arrival to Yozgat. The members of the commission were instructed to inform the Armenians that any further insistence on keeping schools and shops closed would be viewed as tantamount to open rebellion against the sultan.<sup>12</sup>

The notables and the Armenian community capitulated to the thinly veiled threat of violence.<sup>13</sup> On the same day, the Apostolic prelacy, lay and religious councils, and the Protestant religious council presented a joint petition to the commission of inquiry. The petition sought to explain the reasons for the recent demonstration and the heightened tensions between the local Armenians and Muslims by distinguishing between the “ancient afflictions of abuse and corruption,” and the more recent deprivations by a section of local Muslims emboldened by the conduct of local officials. The first set of grievances referred to “established” practices, and consisted mainly of excessive taxation and its rapacious enforcement by tax collectors. Other complaints in this category included the recent prohibition on peddling, which had taken a heavy toll on the peasantry. Peddling was the main alternative source of income to agriculture for many Armenian peasants, but was viewed

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<sup>10</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d 871/4, The Governorate of Ankara to the Yıldız Palace, December 15 1893

<sup>11</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d 871/4, Yıldız Palace to the Governorate of Ankara, December 16 1893

<sup>12</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d 871/4, Yıldız Place to the Commission of Inquiry, December 24 1893

<sup>13</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 287/20, Commission of Inquiry to the Sublime Porte, December 24 1893

with suspicion by local officials because its wide practice facilitated the circulation of people and materiel between Armenian villages. The petitioners also complained of the widespread confiscation of primitive armaments such as flintlock muskets and daggers from Armenians, while Circassians and other local Muslims hoarded breech-loading rifles and revolvers. This had increased the frequency of attacks by local Muslims who demanded tributary arrangements in order not to harrass Armenians. The peasants' grievances also included the expropriation of the property of detainees under suspicion of sedition, which had turned into a profitable endeavor for many government officials.<sup>14</sup>

The second section referred to several recent incidents. The first was the mass internment of Armenian peasants in the Akdağ Maden district. Using the pretext of the recent assassination of a Greek man by the revolutionaries, local gendarmes detained dozens of Armenians from the surrounding villages, beating village priests in public. The peasants could only secure their freedom by paying bribes to the prison guards and the gendarme officers. The authors of the petition also described in some detail the atrocities committed by the gendarmes in two villages outside Yozgat, which had formed the basis of the peasant women's complaints before and during the demonstration. The petitioners added that the behavior of the gendarmes served as a dangerous precedent; the two villages were "searched" over the course of a few days by other groups of gendarmes, the subgovernor of the district of Maden, and local Circassians, all of whom demanded to be provided with grain and food. In another village, the gendarme officer publicly insulted the village priest and declared in the presence of many peasants that the "people of base religion," (i.e. Armenians) had to be massacred from young to old or expelled from the country, "just as Russia was doing to the Jews." Many peasants from these villages migrated to Greek villages in order to escape such

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<sup>14</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, Petition to the Commission of Inquiry with the seals of the Armenian prelate, Protestant and Apostolic lay and religious councils, December 25 1893

treatment. The petition concluded with a brief description of the demonstration and the subsequent clashes between the Armenians and Muslims. The petitioners placed the blame solely on the Muslims who had gathered outside the church with malicious intent and attacked Armenians wherever they could. They claimed that it was the few merciful Muslims who placed themselves between the mob and fleeing Armenians that saved dozens of lives that day.<sup>15</sup>

It is not surprising that local Armenians petitioned the Ottoman government and the Apostolic Patriarchate in order to voice their discontent and request institutional intervention. Nineteenth-century Ottoman history is replete with examples of active petitioning by Ottoman subjects on a wide range of platforms from seeking redress for perceived injustices to requests for the official recognition of a community's conversion/reversion to Christianity after the Islahat Edict of 1856.<sup>16</sup> It is important, however, to note that the Yozgat Armenian notability did so under an increasingly authoritarian Hamidian establishment which had little patience for its subjects' involvement in political questions. The Ankara trial, which was a clear expression of the regime's attitudes towards the administration of the "Armenian Question," had concluded recently. Therefore, what was truly remarkable was the petitioners' open criticism of state institutions. Although the petitioners professed their undying loyalty to the sultan, and employed the trope of a benevolent monarch whose justice was undermined by evil administrators, their demands were not limited to the replacement of corrupt officials. They asserted that injustice and corruption had spread to administrative, judicial, and military

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<sup>15</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, Petition to the Commission of Inquiry with the seals of the Armenian prelate, Protestant and Apostolic lay and religious councils, December 25 1893

<sup>16</sup> For examples of studies that have utilized petitioning campaigns, see Zeynep Türkyılmaz, "Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire," Phd Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles: 2009; Masayuki Ueno. "For the Fatherland and State": Armenians Negotiate the Tanzimat Reforms," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*; Yuval Ben-Bassat, "Bedouin Petitions from Late Ottoman Palestine: Evaluation the Effects of Sedentarization," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 58 (2015) 135-162; Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine, 1865-1908*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013)



components of the state. They complained about the scarcity of Armenian government employees, which they viewed as both a symptom and cause of their maltreatment. They also demanded the “return of justice” and the “execution of reforms as necessitated by the times”. It is highly unlikely that the petitioners, who were respected and educated members of the local Apostolic and Protestant communities, were unaware of the implications of their call for “necessary reform.” It invoked the vague mandate for reform as stipulated by the Treaty of Berlin. More importantly, it betrayed their awareness that recent government practices could not simply be explained within the context of former ethno-confessional hierarchies. Both local officials and Muslim groups were harrasing and exploiting Armenians on an unprecedented scale. Furthermore, replacement of particular individuals could only serve as a necessary first step towards structural change that would include Armenians in government administrative positions.

The petitioners were aware that the conduct of the commission of inquiry was going to be skeptical of, if not directly hostile to their statements. Therefore, they submitted an alternative petition to British viceconsul in Ankara. The tone of this document was profoundly different from the petition addressed to the sultan. The petitioners wrote of the despair of the local Armenians who found themselves in the hands of corrupt government officials and their increasingly aggressive Muslim neighbors. In addition to the physical violence their community was subjected to, the petitioners accentuated the confessional dimension of their oppression. They concluded with the following statement, which was an open call for Great Britain to intervene and enforce the execution of wide-ranging administrative reforms as had been stipulated in the Treaty of Berlin:

O England, the greatest of Christian Powers, O ye noble sons of freedom and humanity, O ye our patrons, has not the time come when ye will do the favour of freeing us from the bonds of slavery? If the spirit of the age has extinguished the religious zeal and enthusiasm, we believe that no Peter the hermit is to preach new crusades for the relief of the Christians crushed

under the despotic rule of Turkey, for the enfranchisement of the lands made sacred by the blood of our devoted ancestors. Yet the age is one of humanity. In the name of humanity at least will you not lend a helping hand?<sup>17</sup>

The petitioners, then, were engaging two different audiences not only to ameliorate the peasants' grievances, but also gain imperial or international recognition of the need for structural change. Their two-pronged efforts after the demonstration provide evidence of their keen awareness of the local, imperial, and international political landscape. Without the direct involvement of the palace, change was not possible. At the same time, they were aware that the palace had made its anti-revolutionary agenda clear; therefore diplomatic pressure was essential to push the sultan and his retinue to action. Furthermore, the petitions depict the desperation of the Armenian notables. Their direct accusations against local officials in their petition to the sultan would certainly draw the government's ire. Their call for foreign intervention in their petition to Great Britain was tantamount to treason, which they also acknowledged in the postscript. On the other hand, they were responding to pressure from within the rural and urban communities of Yozgat, whose grievances the revolutionaries were attempting to direct towards the state. In other words, the notables were facing pressure from the government and the Armenian communities. Fortunately for them, the Ottoman authorities never learned of its existence.

After the Armenians opened their shops and schools, the commission of inquiry started to issue subpoenas for Armenians suspected of having incited the demonstration. These included members of the lay and religious councils, young men sighted at the church during the demonstration, and others whose names were provided by anonymous informants as the instigators of the whole episode.<sup>18</sup> It quickly became evident that the primary purpose of the commission of inquiry was not to address Armenian grievances; rather its chief goal

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<sup>17</sup> BOA, FO, 424/178, no. 28, inc. 2, Petition with the seals of the Armenian and Protestant lay and religious councils submitted to Viceconsul Cumberbatch, December 25, 1893

<sup>18</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, 179/6, 179/7, 179/11, 179/13

was to suppress the interlocutors of Armenian dissent and revolutionary accomplices. The palace maintained a double grip on the process through its direct contact with the commission of inquiry, which was solely responsible to the sultan, and the governor Memduh Paşa and subgovernor Baha Bey, who were officially directly responsible to the Porte, but whose posts were secured by the intervention of the sultan. Before another wave of mass internment of local Armenians, the commission of inquiry warned the palace of the inadequacy of the penal infrastructure and legal institutions in Yozgat.<sup>19</sup> The palace insisted, however, that the investigation and subsequent ad hoc trials be conducted in Yozgat in order to prevent the wide dissemination of knowledge about the demonstration. They specifically referred to the Ankara trial, open knowledge of which had in fact worked to the advantage of the revolutionaries.<sup>20</sup> Having received clear instructions from the palace, the commission of inquiry expanded its investigation and continued its policy of mass internment. Using the pretext of anonymous tips from the Armenian community, the commission also pushed for the search of the Apostolic church for weapons. Despite the protests of the local clergy, the soldiers conducted a thorough search of the church grounds and its surroundings. Although nothing was found, the search was an affront to the Armenian community and an affirmation of Muslim suspicions of Armenian insurgency.<sup>21</sup>

In the same week, some three weeks after the demonstration, the commission started to hear witnesses and suspects. The members of the commission were still interested in operating under a veneer of “neutrality”. As a result, the peasant women of Karayakub and Karaçayır were among the first witnesses to be heard. However, the palace had dismissed the allegations, stating that such events had not taken place since the Mongol invasion. In addition, explicit instructions were given for every possible measure to be taken to oppose and

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<sup>19</sup> BOA, Y.EE. d 871/4, The Commission of Inquiry to the Yıldız Palace, December 30 1893

<sup>20</sup> BOA, Y.EE. d 871/4, Yıldız Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, December 30 1893

<sup>21</sup> BOA, Y.A. HUS. 287/105, Ministry of Justice to the Sublime Porte, January 5 1894; BOA, Y.A. HUS. 287/109, Sublime Porte to the Yıldız Palace

silence such slander that insulted the honor of the state and the religion of Islam.<sup>22</sup> The commission followed the instructions to the letter. When Antaranik, one of the peasant women from Karayakub, refused to explain the details of her rape in the presence of the commission, the members of the commission quickly concluded that she had simply made up the story in order to tarnish the reputation of government officials.<sup>23</sup> The commission members also decided that it was “impossible” that government officials, whose statements had made no mention of rapes, could have agreed to withhold information of such an egregious act during the investigation.<sup>24</sup> Thus, one of the most important events that had motivated local Armenians to hold a political demonstration was casually dismissed at the onset of the investigation by the official commission, ostensibly dispatched to address local concerns.

Despite the clear views of the palace, there were occasional discordant voices within the bureaucracy about such a heavy-handed approach. An ad hoc advisory council within the Ministry of the Interior drafted a memorandum for policy recommendation to the palace shortly after the reception of the Yozgat Armenians’ petition in the capital. The report acknowledged the existence and evident danger of revolutionary committees to the Empire. It also conformed to the position of the palace with regard to the peasant women’s complaints about rape by the soldiers, namely that such an egregious act could not have taken place in the presence of Ottoman government and military officials. It also warned the palace, however, of the dangers of treating the affair solely from a security perspective. Although the suppression of the revolutionaries would naturally take precedence, the report conceded, measures also had to be taken to discipline corrupt officials that were abusing loyal Armenians. Since the

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<sup>22</sup> BOA, Y.EE. d 871/4, Yıldız Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, January 6 1894

<sup>23</sup> A local Armenian, in his interview with a representative of the British consulate in Ankara, claimed that the members of the commission of inquiry were very dismissive towards the women. This attitude was reflected in later iterations of the Yozgat demonstration in official documents. FO, 424/178, no. 132, inc. Preacher Karakin’s interview with a British consular official, May 16 1894

<sup>24</sup> BOA, Y.EE. d 871/4, The Commission of Inquiry to the Yıldız Palace, January 19 1894.

petition had been signed by respected Armenian notables and clergymen, the complaints would gain some credence in the eyes of foreign observers as well. Therefore, in order to prevent foreign intervention and lose more Armenian subjects to the lure of revolutionism, it was recommended that such accusations from Ottoman Armenians throughout the Empire be examined and investigated by officials from the Porte.<sup>25</sup> The advice was ignored by the palace circles.

That the commission followed the instructions of the palace with regard to the dismissal of Armenian complaints and grievances is also evident from the recorded testimonies of Armenian notables during the investigation. At the onset of the investigation, the status of many of the Armenians subpoenaed for their testimonies was ambiguous. Notwithstanding the increasingly hostile attitude of members of the commission towards the Armenians, they did not employ soldiers or gendarmes to detain suspects in the first week. Over the course of the investigation, however, many Armenians were subpoenaed as suspects for having engaged in “seditious activities”. A number of Muslims were also called as witnesses to describe what had happened before and during the demonstration.

It became clear over the course of the investigation that the commission was intent on establishing the culpability of the Armenian community as a whole. The commission members interpreted the demonstration as part of a revolutionary plot to attack Muslim neighborhoods. Many of the suspects simply denied all allegations of their previous knowledge of or involvement in the demonstration. Armenian notables also claimed that they had resigned from the lay and religious councils recently for new elections to be held.<sup>26</sup> Thus, they could claim that they bore no responsibility for the seals at the end of the petition submitted to the sultan, which was viewed in a suspicious light by the commission members.

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<sup>25</sup> BOA, Y.A. HUS. 288/11, The Commission’s Memorandum to the Sublime Porte, January 8 1894

<sup>26</sup> BOA, Y.EE. 179/5; BOA, Y.EE. 179/6; BOA, Y.EE. 179/7

It is likely that the notables sought to avoid the wrath of the revolutionaries and the government officials by denying any knowledge of the demonstration. Any admission of previous knowledge would have amounted to an admission of guilt for the officials. Any reference to a revolutionary as one of the contributors to the petition, on the other hand, could have been construed as collaboration with the regime by the revolutionaries.

Muslim witnesses, for the most part, did not face such a conundrum. They were specifically called on to relate their observations during the demonstration and confirm the identity of Armenians accused of using firearms with the intention of massacring Muslims. Armenians, who were in contact with the British consulate in Ankara, claimed that the state encouraged false testimonies by Muslim individuals.<sup>27</sup> This is likely, because several Muslim witnesses named over a dozen armed Armenians they claimed to have seen during the demonstration while standing outside the church or fleeing to their homes during the clashes.<sup>28</sup> That the commission did not question the veracity of such precision in the circumstances of a notable instance of civil disorder suggests that it was primarily interested in piling up evidence against Armenians. Therefore, the proceedings of the commission resembled more an indictment of local Armenians than an inquiry about the causes of the demonstration. As evidence, the commission even produced a private letter from one of the members of the Apostolic lay council requesting subscription fees for the Istanbul-based Armenian weekly *Hairenik*. The commission claimed that the letter was a cover for a general call for donations to the local revolutionary committee.<sup>29</sup>

The transcripts of the interrogations (*istintak*) are similar in tone. The interrogations would commence with a series of questions about the suspect's activities during the day of the

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<sup>27</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 50, inc. 3, Petition from the Armenians of Yozgat, January 31 1894

<sup>28</sup> BOA, Y. PRK.AZN. 7/32; Muslim witnesses are listed after the summary of each case in the records of the proceedings submitted to the Yıldız Palace. Individual Muslim testimonies can also be found in the interrogation reports. BOA, Y. EE. 179/6; BOA, Y. EE. 179/11

<sup>29</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, Letter to Avedis Mshaljian, November 11 1893

demonstration and relationship to the local Armenian community at large. Then, the commission would demand confessions of seditious intent or denunciations of other Armenians accused of having used firearms or having made seditious and incendiary remarks during the demonstration.<sup>30</sup> Although rare, some of the defendants openly questioned the legitimacy of the proceedings of the commission. Artin Tekirian, an attorney and member of the Apostolic lay council, responded to the interrogator's questions with his own inquiries regarding the commission's plans to address Armenian grievances that were listed in the petition. The interrogator reminded Tekirian that he had been summoned to the commission because he was suspected of a serious crime. According to the interrogator, Tekirian was not a representative of the Armenian community, making his inquiry regarding the status of the petition untenable. Tekirian agreed that as an individual he could not boast such credentials. However, the petition was an expression of the wishes of the Armenian community. Therefore, his request for knowledge regarding the government's plans for the redressing of Armenian grievances was perfectly in accordance with the law. The attorney's familiarity with the law and his intransigence seem to have greatly annoyed the interrogator. He warned Tekirian that any further questions regarding the status of the petition would amount to contempt of court, for which he would face additional charges. Tekirian finally acquiesced and answered the commission's questions. Towards the conclusion of the interrogation, the commission asked him why, according to several witnesses, he had urged the armed Armenians to attack the Muslim crowd, yelling "Why are you standing there? Let the chips fall where they may. Let's go!" Tekirian denied the allegation, stating "if those who commit such slander truly loved their state, nation, and fatherland, they would not have engaged in

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<sup>30</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/12, Proces-Verbal of the Interrogation of Peyik Der Minasian, February 1 1894. An example is one of the concluding remarks directed at a 22-year-old haberdasher, Peyik Der Minasian. "The informants tell us that you kicked the deceased gendarme Necib after he was murdered, and stole his rifle and ammunition. Wherever they are, tell us and we'll bring them here, you dog!... It is stated by informants that you were among the Armenians that attacked Muslims that day... Stop denying, it is useless!" Der Minasian denied the allegations.

such provocations when the circumstances necessitate words of compromise to ameliorate the current unfortunate situation... May such provocateurs find their punishment from God.” He claimed that a list of prominent Armenians had been compiled by some Muslim provocateurs in order to arrange for their detention. When asked to identify the slanderers, Tekirian responded that he would momentarily refrain from naming them in the interest of public peace, but would not hesitate to do so if he was subjected to injustice and oppression.<sup>31</sup>

Several Armenian notables continued to submit petitions to the commission and the British consulate in Ankara in order to prevent the further criminalization of their dissent and the dismissal of their grievances. One of the petitions referred to the aforementioned practice of Muslim notables’ compiling lists of Armenians to be submitted to the commission as members of revolutionary societies. The notables also lamented the absence of any Armenians in the groups dispatched to tour and report on Armenian complaints around the countryside of Yozgat. A copy of the petition was submitted to the British viceconsul, who stated that the commission of inquiry seemed to be following strict guidelines from the palace in suppressing Armenian complaints.<sup>32</sup> Although the commission promoted the image of an impartial investigation about Armenian grievances as well as the threat of sedition, it was obvious to local, imperial, and international observers that the officials were primarily interested in the exposure of revolutionary committees and suppression of Armenian dissent.

The commission of inquiry compiled a preliminary report on its findings and its policy recommendations on January 18th. It stated that the accusations of rape leveled against the gendarmes were groundless. In the case of Karaçayır, the failure of the peasant women to identify all of the perpetrators, and the alleged connection of their husbands and relatives to

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<sup>31</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, Procès-Verbaux of the Interrogation of Artin Tekirian, January 1 & January 2 1894. An approximate description of Tekirian’s exchange with the Commission of Inquiry is recounted in an anonymous informant’s testimony to the British Consulate in Ankara. FO, 424/178, no. 117, inc. April 24 1894

<sup>32</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 27, inc. 2, Petition by the Armenians of Yozgat to the Commission of Inquiry, January 17 1893



sedition, were considered adequate to dismiss the complaints. In the case of Karayakub, the commission stated that it was simply impossible for numerous women to have been raped when other government officials, the imam of the neighboring village, and local Muslim and Armenian muleteers were present. There was no evidence that suggested that local officials were demanding bribes to allow for the release of prisoners who had been proven innocent. The ban on peddling was recently lifted. According to the commission, the peasant women's complaints and the demonstration were part of a revolutionary plot to bring about civil disorder in the town of Yozgat. It found that Armenian complaints about hostile behavior by certain Muslim groups were also baseless, although "it could not be denied that there were suspicions about Armenians, which had been caused by the Armenians themselves." Forty-nine suspects, all of whom were Armenian, were detained at the prison of Yozgat with the possibility of more arrests and detentions in the interest of public safety. The report concluded that the peasant women's complaints, the demonstration, and the petition were all part of a general effort to bring about civil disorder in the town of Yozgat.<sup>33</sup>

The investigation continued after the submission of the report. The commission continued to issue subpoenas and arrest Armenians suspected of sedition. On January 31st, 1894 another petition was submitted to the British consulate by the Protestant and Apostolic communities of Yozgat, listing examples of official misconduct and Muslim hostility towards Armenians since the beginning of the investigation. The petition stated that false testimony against Armenians was being encouraged by the conduct of the officials, who treated many allegations of sedition as facts until proven otherwise. Furthermore, government officials, with the exception of Osman Safi Bey, were indifferent to overt Muslim hostility towards Armenians. The petition alleged that Muslims, who were indebted to Armenian merchants for previously purchased goods, simply threatened them with false accusations if they insisted on

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<sup>33</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Committee of Inquiry to the Yıldız Palace, January 19 1894

receiving payment. The Armenians asked for British help again in order to stop the trivialization of their complaints and the utilization of the threat of sedition by government officials and Muslim civilians alike.<sup>34</sup> Their plea for international assistance went unheeded. The absence of any high-profile Protestant defendants and the Ottoman government's attempts to limit foreigners' access to the town might explain why British interest was limited in this case unlike the Ankara trial.

The Yozgat demonstration and the subsequent petitioning campaign was a remarkable feat of local politicization and organization. Local revolutionaries, Armenian community leaders, and discontented peasants coordinated hoping to effect transformative change in ethno-confessional hierarchies, practices of taxation, and official corruption. To that end, they utilized different available venues including legal petitioning, illegal assembly and protest, and potentially treasonous contact with foreign powers. Notwithstanding the differences in the specific grievances of various classes, the demonstration also signified the remarkable politicization of the local Armenian community. It is also noteworthy that peasant women took the central stage in the mobilization of the community. The physical and sexual assault they suffered, which they were courageous enough to describe in the presence of other Armenians and government officials galvanized different sections of the Armenian community. The composite campaign of demonstrating, protesting, and petitioning also reveals a heightened awareness of imperial and international political dynamics.

By late 1893, the revolutionaries had become an integral part of the politics of the local Armenian community. Zhirayr Boyajian oversaw the establishment of communication between Armenian community leaders and the local Hnch'ak committee. Armed revolutionaries were also instrumental in reassuring the protesters about their safety before

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<sup>34</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 50, inc. 3, Petition by the Armenians of Yozgat to the British Consulate in Ankara, January 31 1894

and during the demonstration. Furthermore, the existence of the party as a platform for protest cast a profound influence on the discontented peasantry, whose arsenal of protest was expanded considerably by a mass demonstration at the center of a *sancak*. The revolutionaries and the discontented peasantry were also successful in convincing and/or intimidating some of the legally recognized Armenian community leaders to seek redress from the Ottoman government, the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate, and the British government. Such a high degree of politicization and engagement that targeted governmental corruption and maladministration was a major success for the revolutionaries. The Hamidian regime now confronted the prospect of facing pressure from a politicized local community of Armenians and the British government.

The Palace sought to offset the challenge to its authority by expanding its efforts at the containment and suppression of Armenian dissent. Not burdened this time by the presence of a group of foreign observers, the Commission of Inquiry swiftly acted to trivialize and invalidate Armenian claims of official maltreatment and excessive taxation under instructions from the palace. Mass internment of Armenians, particularly targeting those Armenian notables who had been involved in the drafting of the petition of their grievances, was an important component of the suppression. Furthermore, factions within the Muslim community were anxious about the devolution of an ethno-confessional hierarchy that privileged them. The presence of armed Muslims during the demonstration and the employment of Muslim armed guards to patrol the streets in its immediate aftermath serve as a testament to such anxieties as well as local officials' continuation of the strategy of integrating Muslims in the policing of Armenian dissent. From the perspective of the palace, it seemed that the commission had succeeded in silencing Armenian dissent and was making progress in the disclosure and dismantling of the edifice of sedition that had organized the Yozgat

demonstration. The commission and the palace also believed that the danger of the outbreak of mass violence had passed. They were wrong.

### **The Pogrom and the Court-Martial**

On February 1st, Ottoman gendarmes arrived at the residence of an Armenian who had refused to respond to the subpoena issued in his name. The man, who was accused of being a member of the Hnch'ak party, refused to surrender to the gendarmes. The following day, he was detained after a bloody scuffle, and paraded through the streets while he was being taken to prison with a growing Muslim mob in tow. The news of the man's resistance to the gendarmes was disseminated among the rest of the Muslim populace as the harbinger of an Armenian uprising. Muslim mobs, with the approval or supervision of some soldiers according to Armenian witnesses, attacked Armenian neighborhoods for much of the rest of the day. The violence was only quelled after several hours. By the end of the day, seven Armenians had been killed, more than sixty wounded and dozens of Armenians shops and houses vandalized or destroyed. The man, whose resistance to the gendarmes had served as the spark for the anti-Armenian violence, was killed that night in prison.<sup>35</sup> The Ottoman authorities claimed that he had committed suicide.<sup>36</sup>

For the Ottoman government, the pogrom was the culmination of Armenian efforts at inciting disorder throughout Central Anatolia. The palace immediately ordered the declaration of martial law in order to prevent the further deterioration of public order in favor of the revolutionaries.<sup>37</sup> The palace also instructed the local authorities to confiscate the arms and

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<sup>35</sup> Initial reports claimed seven Armenians had been killed. One of the heavily wounded died shortly thereafter. Ottoman authorities claimed that seventeen Armenians had been wounded, basing their figures on the number of those treated by the municipal doctor. Armenians presented the number of the wounded at seventy. BOA, Y.A. HUS. 289/99, February 5 1894; Viceconsul Cumberbatch reported that irregulars, recently armed by the authorities to "preserve order" had participated in the pogrom. FO, 424/178, no. 59, inc. 1, Viceconsul Cumberbatch to Ambassador Currie, February 26 1894

<sup>36</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Commission of Inquiry to the Yıldız Palace, February 7 1894

<sup>37</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Yıldız Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, February 2 1894

ammunition from “the evildoers and the common folk.” Telegraphs from the palace also informed the commission that military officers had been dispatched from proximate cities in order to serve on a court-martial that would be established to try Armenian evildoers (*fesede*). The commission informed the palace of the necessity of the hasty arrival of the military officers, implying that harsh verdicts on the perpetrators were crucial for the preservation of public trust in the government.<sup>38</sup> Mehmed Memduh Paşa, the new governor of the province after the dismissal of Abidin Paşa, informed the Porte in a separate report that Armenians had been submitting official complaints to the courts about the violence that they suffered during the pogrom.<sup>39</sup> The governor added that Armenian complaints were backed by the statements of several Muslims, suggesting that further indifference to Armenian complaints would have a negative effect on public order.<sup>40</sup> This was a concern, because the pogrom had a much clearer line between “victims” and “attackers”, and it was important that the local subjects could witness the impartial execution of justice when there was no ambiguity about the “victimhood” of the Armenians.

The palace, however, had different priorities. They sent inquiries to the governorate of Ankara on the ethnic composition of the population of the town of Yozgat.<sup>41</sup> The governor stated that “he had ordered the compilation of demographic data upon his arrival to his post since measures had to be taken in accordance with the demographic make-up of a locale when events occurred”. The coded language of the governor’s statement was an admission of

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<sup>38</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d 871/4, Commission of Inquiry to the Yıldız Palace, February 2 1894

<sup>39</sup> Mehmed Memduh Paşa had entered the bureaucracy as a clerk in the Foreign Ministry in 1853. He assumed various bureaucratic posts in the Ministry of Education and the Sublime Porte over the course of the next two decades. He was admitted to the Council of State in 1882. Sultan Abdülhamid II appointed him to the governorate of Konya in 1887. He was transferred to the governorate of Sivas in 1889. After his tenure in the governorate of Konya, Sivas, and Ankara, Mehmed Memduh Paşa became the Minister of the Interior. He served in that position for thirteen years until the 1908 Revolution. For more information see Zekeriya Kuşun, Mehmed Memduh Paşa, “*Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*. vol. 28 (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2003)

<sup>40</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 291/6, Governorate of Ankara to the Sublime Porte, February 21 1894

<sup>41</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Yıldız Palace to the Governorate of Ankara, February 5 1894

imperial anxieties about the importance of the size of Armenian communities throughout Anatolia.<sup>42</sup> In other words, he was aware of the palace's expectations in his new post, where Armenian discontent was growing. Ottoman authorities were particularly concerned about the size of the Armenian population in the Empire, as claims of demographic majority or plurality had served the cause of non-Muslim autonomy and independence in the Empire's European provinces throughout the nineteenth century. The palace advised the governor to re-evaluate his data and decrease the number of Armenians in his records. If the ratios he had provided were to be applied to the rest of the region it would implicate the presence of a general Armenian population of some two million.<sup>43</sup>

Any "event" involving Armenians whether it was a demonstration, clash, pogrom, or written petition was always already connected to the question of imperial territorial integrity and security according to the palace and its subservient bureaucracy. The veracity of Armenian grievances, or even the size of existing Armenian communities could not be detached from strategies of containing and suppressing imperial and international threats it presented to Ottoman interests. The clarity of the resolution of the palace did not escape bureaucrats in the Sublime Porte. The ad hoc advisory committee within the Ministry of the Interior, which had recommended that Armenian grievances of official misconduct within Central Anatolia be addressed after the demonstration, advised caution on the local authorities after the pogrom. It stated that although imperial justice was to be meted out to all regardless of their ethnicity or nationality, the real intention of the Armenians was to level accusations of barbarism and fanaticism on their Muslim neighbors. Therefore, even the presence of Muslim witnesses in Armenian petitions was to be viewed with "caution," with particular attention to the reputation of the witnesses.

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<sup>42</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Governorate of Ankara to the Yıldız Palace, February 5 1894

<sup>43</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Yıldız Palace to the Governorate of Ankara, February 6 1894

The declaration of martial law and the establishment of a court-martial was an important turning point and signaled the further deterioration of official attitudes towards the local Armenians. Mustafa Paşa, the newly-appointed head of the court martial was informed that Armenians had caused another “incident” in Yozgat, referring to the pogrom organized against them. He was further instructed with the collection of all arms and weapons from “seditious men,” a thinly veiled reference to local Armenians. It was added that since the Muslims only possessed old and obsolete weaponry, the confiscation campaign was not to be extended to them.<sup>44</sup> Upon his arrival, Mustafa Paşa encountered a terrorized Armenian community. Armenian shop-owners refused to open their businesses unless measures were taken to ensure the safety of their lives and property. This measure included the detention of the parties responsible for the pogrom. Mustafa Paşa, who was emboldened by clear directives from the palace to employ violent means to reinstate order, threatened the Armenian community with more detentions and punishments if they did not open their shops.<sup>45</sup> Two days later, he boasted that every Armenian establishment had been opened including the ones whose owners had been imprisoned after the demonstration or wounded during the pogrom.<sup>46</sup> Within a matter of days, the court-martial had dispelled any pretense to impartiality.

Despite the hostile attitude of the court-martial towards Armenian grievances, the community continued to petition the Ottoman government about the maltreatment in the countryside, the recent pogrom, and the torture of political prisoners whose numbers had exceeded a hundred by early March.<sup>47</sup> Yozgat Armenians also submitted another report to the

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<sup>44</sup> BOA, Y.A. RES. 69/16, Instructions for Mustafa Pasha as listed by Yıldız Chief Secretary and the Sultan’s aides-de-camp, February 5 1894

<sup>45</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Mustafa Pasha (Representing the Court-Martial) to the Yıldız Palace, February 12 1894; For the palace’s directive to have the shops opened with the use of force if necessary, see the telegraph in the same volume, Yıldız Palace to the Court-Martial, February 13 1894.

<sup>46</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Court-Martial to the Yıldız Palace, February 14 1894.

<sup>47</sup> FO, 424/178 no. 53, inc. 2, Petition by the Armenians of Yozgat to the Court-Martial; By the end of the spring, the number of Armenian political prisoners would reach two hundred according to a British source that had visited the Yozgat prison. FO, 424/178, no. 143, inc. 2, May 21 1894

British viceconsul, in which they listed several reasons as to why they suspected the government officials of organizing the pogrom. They alleged that the local officials had distributed breech loading rifles among the Muslim populace a few days before the pogrom. They claimed that some of their Muslim friends and acquaintances had informed them that orders had been disseminated among the Muslim population to attack Armenians on that day. They also expressed their disappointment and fear at the fact that no Muslims had been arrested since the pogrom despite the fact that ten days had elapsed since it happened.<sup>48</sup> When the vice-consul asked the British ambassador in Istanbul if he should travel to Yozgat to observe the proceedings, the ambassador instructed him not to do so because his presence in the town might “excite” Armenians and Muslims alike.<sup>49</sup>

The absence of foreign observers facilitated the work of the court-martial. At the beginning of the proceedings, the palace stated that members of the court-martial would be rewarded and promoted for their services if they conducted and completed their assignment in accordance with the glory and majesty of the Sultan. On the same day, they inquired on the number of the victims and the identity of the perpetrators of the pogrom. Mustafa Paşa, who was the president of the court-martial, responded with the numbers and reported the prevailing sense among the Armenians that the perpetrators were Muslim as evidenced by their written complaints.<sup>50</sup> The palace warned the head of the court-martial that it was highly likely that seditious Armenians had killed other Armenians who had refused to partake in the demonstration or the “slander against the state.”<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the palace advised the court-martial to “address” the evidence that was presented against the Muslim pogrom-makers, as “every Ottoman subject was equal under criminal law.”<sup>52</sup> These telegraphs did not

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<sup>48</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 59, inc. 1, Consul Cumberbatch to Ambassador Currie, February 26 1894

<sup>49</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 51, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Rosebery, February 25 1894

<sup>50</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Court-Martial to Yıldız Palace, February 18 1894

<sup>51</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Yıldız Palace to the Court-Martial, February 19 1894

<sup>52</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Yıldız Palace to the Court-Martial, February 24 1894



only communicate the palace's strong anti-Armenian attitudes and suspicions, which by this point would have been obvious to any high-ranking official tasked with containing Armenian dissent. The palace's directed inquiries and advice for caution were prescriptive: before the causes and consequences of the pogrom were investigated, the Palace sought to mould the verdicts and findings of the members of the court-martial and other Ottoman officials.

Although the palace ordered the court-martial to maintain the appearance of a neutral arbiter, it was clear that its priorities were to establish Armenian culpability and suppress Armenian dissent. The palace's warning to the governor of Ankara on the size of the Armenian population and to Mustafa Paşa on the identity of the pogrom-makers should be understood as indirect instructions to "work" any and all aspects of the Armenian Question to the Armenians' detriment. The influence of the palace's directives was palpable in Mustafa Paşa's reporting; even when he stated that Armenians had been killed or wounded by Muslims using blunt and primitive weapons, he would add that the pogrom had been caused by Armenians.<sup>53</sup>

Another priority of the authorities was the capture of the famed revolutionary, Zhirayr Boyajian. Identified by his *nom de guerre*, "Moruk (Beard)," in Ottoman documents, the revolutionary had been active in the organization of Hnch'ak committees throughout Central Anatolia for several years. After an informant stated that Boyajian had established the Hnch'ak committee in Yozgat, both the governor and the head of the court-martial frequently stated their commitment to his hasty capture. Mustafa Paşa recommended that information about his appearance be circulated in the province of Adana, since he was originally from that province.<sup>54</sup> Boyajian and his armed band were encircled by a large group of gendarmes in a village outside Yozgat on March 20th, and compelled to surrender to the authorities. On the

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<sup>53</sup> BOA, Y.EE. d. 871/4, Court-Martial to Yıldız Palace, February 18 1894

<sup>54</sup> BOA, Y.EE. d. 871/4, Court-Martial to Yıldız Palace, February 28 1894

same day, the gendarmes detained another armed revolutionary band, a member of which was Dülüt Parseghian, the brother of one of the revolutionaries executed after the Ankara trial.<sup>55</sup> Mustafa Paşa expressed his surprise and delight at the fortuitous coincidence, and formulaically attributed it to the effect of the Sultan's vigilant oversight of the operations.<sup>56</sup> Boyajian's capture was a considerable blow to revolutionary organization in Central Anatolia. He was intensively interrogated and presumably tortured over the course of his detention.<sup>57</sup>

During the interrogations, Boyajian was compelled to explain his involvement in the organization of the Hnch'ak network in Central Anatolia, almost definitely under torture. He stated that he had received instructions from a book vendor in Istanbul after he had decided to join the party. He traveled to his home province of Adana to organize a network there but decided to flee to Central Anatolia after he realized that the authorities were pursuing him. He made the Derevank his home base, the same monastery which had served as a safe haven for the armed band condemned to death at the Ankara trial. After the exposure of the revolutionary committee in Kayseri after the placard affair, he arrived in Yozgat to form a Hnch'ak committee in that town. He established connections with a few members of the Armenian religious council of Yozgat through intermediaries. His contacts included the aforementioned attorney, Artin Tekirian. Boyajian stated that he had proposed the creation of a shadow administrative council outside the purview and oversight of the government with membership from the notables.<sup>58</sup> However, only a couple of notables agreed to assist the revolutionaries. The majority of the members of the religious and lay councils refused his

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<sup>55</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS. 292/60, Governorate of Ankara to the Sublime Porte, March 20 1894; Kitur claims that Boyajian surrendered to the authorities in order to stop their draconian persecution of local Armenians. *Patmut'iwn*, pg. 103

<sup>56</sup> BOA, Y.EE. d. 871/4, Court-Martial to Yıldız Palace, March 20 1894

<sup>57</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5. Boyajian's interrogations lasted for days during which he was confronted with Yozgat Armenians he said he had established contact with. Although direct evidence of his torture at the hands of the authorities is difficult to produce, Armenians frequently complained the widespread use of violence to extract confessions during this period.

<sup>58</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, Cross-Examination of Zhirayr Boyajian, and the defendants Agop Papazian, Artin Tekirian, Avedis Arslanian, Avedis Mshaljian and Yaver Karabetian

proposal for extensive cooperation. He then proceeded to organize attacks against non-Muslim “collaborators” in the proximate town of Akdağ-Maden and the surrounding countryside. After several Greeks and Armenians were assassinated in this manner, the government sent out a large number of gendarmes to the countryside to pursue the revolutionaries. It was during this period that the gendarmes committed the atrocities on the Armenian peasantry whom they suspected of aiding and abetting the revolutionaries. When the peasants complained to the revolutionaries that they had been subjected to such treatment, Boyajian suggested that they organize a protest and present a petition to the government.<sup>59</sup>

Boyajian also stated that he had told peasants in multiple villages to resist the exploitative demands of tax-collectors and government officials, specifically with regard to taxation. He arranged for the purchase of several hundred rifles to be distributed among the peasantry. The weapons would be delivered to region through the intermediacy and assistance of the Hnch’ak committee in Merzifon. The distribution of rifles and ammunition among the peasantry would encourage widespread resistance to taxation, and would compel government officials to take peasant demands and complaints seriously. Boyajian’s extensive activities and vision appealed to many Armenian peasants, whose complaints about excessive taxation and maltreatment by the gendarmes were not new. Furthermore, several craftsmen in Yozgat also joined the Hnch’ak party and agreed to provide shelter to revolutionaries operating in the region.

The court-martial interpreted Boyajian’s statements as a confirmation of the extent of the revolutionary threat to Ottoman government in the region. According to them, the revolutionary’s testimony proved that the expression of any dissent and criticism from the Armenian community must necessarily have emanated from the Hnch’ak Party.<sup>60</sup> It did not

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<sup>59</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 7/32, Proces-Verbal of the Proceedings regarding Zhirayr Boyajian, compiled on April 5 1894

<sup>60</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 7/32, Proces Verbal of the Proceedings regarding Zhirayr Boyajian, Compiled on April 5 1894

matter that Boyajian also cleared the names of several other Armenian notables, who had been accused of collusion with the local revolutionary committee in the organization of the demonstration. His confirmation of connections between some Armenian notables and the revolutionaries, and Hnch'ak presence in the countryside were deemed sufficient not only to dismiss Armenian complaints and grievances as baseless, but also to reframe their pronouncement as sedition. In other words, the court-martial was not interested in whether the communication between the revolutionaries and the local religious and lay councils amounted to anything more than proposals or limited cooperation based on common Armenian grievances. Notables in the lay and religious councils, who had established contact with the revolutionaries, were regarded as members of the revolutionary committees.

In a short telegraph in late March, the palace ordered the execution of the revolutionary. Boyajian was executed by hanging at the Saat Hanı square in Yozgat sixteen days after his capture.<sup>61</sup> An informant to the British viceconsul in Ankara claimed that the revolutionary had tried to convince the authorities to move his trial to the imperial capital. It is possible that he thought his trial would have reached a much wider audience and he could have sought consular intervention for clemency there. As was mentioned above, his trial at the court-martial was conducted with utmost haste. He was reported before his execution to have declared “the revolutionary party is strong and better disciplined than the Turkish army, that they will attain their ends.”<sup>62</sup> The organization of a funerary procession in the town was prevented by the acting-prelate of the Patriarchate, who feared another mass demonstration and wave of arrests. His death was a major blow to the revolutionaries. Rumors were circulated after his execution in some Armenian villages that he had, in fact, escaped from prison, and the authorities executed a Muslim prisoner instead.<sup>63</sup> According to Hnch'ak

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<sup>61</sup> Kitur, *Patmut'iwn*, 103-104

<sup>62</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 98, inc.1, Consul Cumberbatch to Ambassador Currie, April 4 1894

<sup>63</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, April 28 1894, Governorate of Ankara to Yıldız Palace

historian Arsen Kitur, Boyajian's remains were smuggled out of the Ottoman Empire to the United States, only to be returned after the 1908 Revolution to Yozgat.<sup>64</sup>

The court-martial's prosecution of the other "organizers and provocateurs" reflected their aforementioned attitude towards Armenian dissent. Notables who had voiced serious complaints and grievances against government officials were treated in the same manner as members of the armed bands that had assassinated "collaborators" or revolutionaries in Yozgat who were detained while trying to intimidate a notable to join the demonstration at the Apostolic Church. Artin Tekirian, who had been accused of provoking Armenians to attack Muslims, was one example. Despite his protestations that he had not engaged in sedition and was not a member of any revolutionary committee, and had only sought to draw the officials' attention to a growing problem, he was convicted of sedition.<sup>65</sup> The evidence against him consisted of the questionable testimony of several Muslims and Boyajian's acknowledgement of having contacted him asking for his membership in the revolutionary committee which he rejected. Tekirian was among the thirteen defendants that were sentenced to death.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to some thirty Armenians convicted of membership in revolutionary committees, the court-martial also prosecuted several individuals for the killings and beatings of Muslims during the clashes after the demonstration in Yozgat. In most cases, there were diametrically opposite testimonies from the Muslim and Armenian witnesses in court. While Muslims reported that they had seen the accused Armenians attacking other Muslims on the streets, or firing their weapons from the windows of their houses, Armenians claimed they had been beaten by Muslim mobs. With regard to its verdicts on the clashes, the court-martial reliably sided with the Muslim plaintiffs, handing out long terms of imprisonment to

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<sup>64</sup> Kitur, *Patmut'iwn*, pg. 104

<sup>65</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.AZN. 7/32, Proces Verbal of the Proceedings regarding Zhirayr Boyajian, compiled on April 5 1894

<sup>66</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.AZN. 7/42

Armenian craftsmen and professionals.<sup>67</sup> The court-martial justified its position by depicting the clashes after the demonstration as an Armenian uprising that targeted Muslims. Armenian complaints about getting attacked and/or robbed by Muslim groups on the streets were ignored. Therefore, the official announcement of the verdicts that were submitted to the palace made no reference to the Armenians killed or wounded on the day of the demonstration.<sup>68</sup>

After the conclusion of the court-martial's proceedings on the demonstration, it proceeded to handle the cases of three Armenian complaints about the pogrom. One Muslim, who was convicted of the murder of an Armenian during the pogrom, was sentenced to death, while three others were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.<sup>69</sup> As was mentioned previously, eight Armenians were killed during the pogrom. Several times that had been wounded, while dozens of Armenian shops had been looted or destroyed. That four Muslim defendants received verdicts, as if their crimes were primarily of an individual nature and not part of a group attack, clearly communicated the court-martial's hesitation in meting out punishments to Muslims. Furthermore, while dozens of Armenians were convicted for the killing of three Muslims, and many Armenians received sentences for having fired weapons or threatened Muslims on the day of the demonstration, only four Muslims were convicted for a much more concerted and greater attack on Armenians. It is likely that members of the court-martial thought the four convictions "in favor of" the Armenians would validate the court-martial's general mandate in the eyes of domestic and foreign skeptics.

The governor of the province, who was competing against Mustafa Paşa for imperial favor, immediately reported the verdicts to the palace. He expressed his surprise at the

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<sup>67</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.AZN. 7/42

<sup>68</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.AZN. 7/32, Proces Verbal of the Proceedings on the killings of Muslims after the demonstration, compiled on April 5 1894

<sup>69</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.AZN. 7/32, Proces Verbal of the Proceedings on the killings of Armenians during the pogrom, compiled on April 16 1894

verdicts, because “Armenians had caused the event to occur by firing on Muslims, whereafter some killing and violence had taken place.”<sup>70</sup> The following day, the palace sent the following telegraph:

It has been reported with confusion from the governorate that a man by the name of Hüseyin was sentenced to death while two others received sentences of fifteen years of hard labor, and another individual eight years from among the Muslim subjects. It is known that Armenians caused the second incident as well as the first one by firing on Muslims and provoking them so that they could complain to the Europeans about Muslims. It is also known that several of them (Armenians) were killed during the incident by other Armenians. Sentencing a Muslim to death and three others to hard labor/imprisonment will serve the cause of the Armenian evildoers and strengthen their slanderous accusations.

It is stated with certainty that this state of affairs will not be in accordance with the interests of the state and country. It is also contrary to the oath of service taken by Your Honor and the other members of the court-martial at the time of your departure from here (Istanbul).

With this in mind, it is ordered that the verdicts regarding Muslim subjects as were announced by the court-martial be changed, and the legal justification for such verdicts in the first place reported in detail.<sup>71</sup>

The telegraph is a poignant representation of the central concerns of the palace on the “Armenian Question.” The deliberate lack of distinction between Armenians and Armenian evildoers was important and was becoming common in official parlance. It signaled to the palace’s direct representatives on the ground that Armenians were to be treated either as potential or actual rebels. Additionally, the palace reinforced the fiction that in any “disorder” in which Armenians were participants, they were to be regarded as its makers. In other words, it did not matter that Armenians were killed or their property looted during the Yozgat pogrom; their complaints necessitated their criminalization. The palace did not even need to explicate the unbelievable claim that Armenians had intended to be attacked by firing on

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<sup>70</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d. 871/4, Governorate of Ankara to Yıldız Palace, April 21 1894

<sup>71</sup> BOA, Y.EE. d. 871/4, Yıldız Palace to the Court-Martial, April 22 1894

unsuspecting Muslims. It was assumed that Ottoman Armenians were motivated by their hostility to the Ottoman state and the prospect of an independent country to the extent that they would not hesitate to commit acts they knew would result in their deaths, torture or imprisonment.

Another important aspect of the telegraph was the white-washing of the violence of the pogrom and the ambiguity about its makers. Muslims who had participated in the violence were portrayed as reluctant defenders, whose patience had been tested by an ungrateful and seditious minority. Furthermore, the shape and impact of the pogrom violence were downplayed or ignored. Neither the governor nor the palace made any mention of the looting of Armenian shops and establishments during the pogrom. It is clear that the refusal of Armenians to open their shops after the demonstration or the pogrom was linked with their fear of a wave of violence that targeted their property. However, the palace was willing to see sedition wherever it encountered Armenian dissent or protest. Its narrative maintained its logical and political coherence if its convictions on innate Armenian political criminality and sedition were accepted.

As direct as the palace's framing of Armenian "disorders" was the severity with which it ordered the reversal of the verdicts. It was implied that the court-martial, whose work had resulted in the capture of several revolutionaries, the terrorization of the local Armenian community, and the collapse of the local revolutionary committee, would be held accountable for treason if the sentences of the Muslims were confirmed. Mustafa Paşa responded the following day with an explanation for the court-martial's controversial decision to punish four of the Muslim pogrom-makers. He stated that the Armenian defendants had been denied the right to produce any witnesses in their defense as the court had decided this would facilitate the acquittal of many of them since the first incident. In a gesture of "reciprocity," the court had denied the Muslim defendants the right to produce witnesses in their defense. This



mistake had caused the serious error in their judgment<sup>72</sup>. Mustafa Paşa saw no need to conceal the court-martial's heavy-handed measures to secure as many convictions for the Armenian defendants as possible by denying them any vestiges of a legal defense. It is also remarkable that the court-martial would not include the strength of the cases against the Muslim pogrom-makers as they were selected from what was undoubtedly a much larger pool of Muslim attackers that were reported by the Armenians.

The court-martial continued to hear cases from the countryside of Yozgat over the course of the rest of April and May. The cases included clashes with the gendarmes and Régie guards, the aiding and abetting of the revolutionaries, and promoting sedition among the peasantry. In one case, six peasants were accused of organizing a concerted attack on the Muslim village of Hozman. The peasants claimed that they were harassed by the gendarmes and guards, who beat them and stole the horse of one of them. When they learned that the guards and the gendarmes were quartering at Hozman, they traveled there to reclaim their fellow peasant's property. They claimed that the gendarmes and the guards collaborated with the local Muslim peasantry to subdue and chain them, and send them to Yozgat. A few of the defendants denied any connection to the incident, claiming that they had not left their village in weeks when they were detained for organizing an attack on Hozman. The guards and the gendarmes, on the other hand, claimed that they had been called on by the peasants of Hozman to assist them to repel the Armenian attackers. The Muslim peasants of Hozman confirmed their story and stated that the village was suddenly attacked by fifteen armed Armenians at the time of the noon prayer. Hozman was saved by the six gendarmes and Régie guards, who also succeeded in detaining six of the attackers with the help of the peasants. The rest of the attackers had fled, but the peasants and the guards were able to identify every one of them. The narrative of the Muslim peasants, the gendarmes, and the Régie guards, which

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<sup>72</sup> BOA, Y.EE.d. 871/4, Court-Martial to Yıldız Palace, April 23 1894

made no mention of why Armenians from another village had decided to come to Hozman apart from assumed malintent, was in the same spirit with that of the court-martial regarding the Yozgat demonstration and pogrom. Unsurprisingly, the court-martial delivered a verdict in their favor, sentencing all of the defendants to eight years of imprisonment with hard labor.<sup>73</sup>

Another case involved the priest of the town of Sungurlu. He was accused of conducting propaganda in the name of the revolutionary committee and asking for donations for its use. He claimed that he had only sought the donations of the congregation in support of the local Apostolic church and the school, and advised his flock to continue to pay taxes to the government. Several witnesses and informants came forth, however, contradicting his claims. According to them, the priest declared in one of his sermons that the community had to support the committee because they did not have a king or any protector. Any donations to the committee would serve the welfare of the community. The priest was also accused of having organized meetings between the leader of the town's revolutionary committee and some of the notables for fixing tributary arrangements. The alleged leader of the revolutionary committee and the priest were sentenced to seven years of imprisonment with hard labor by the court-martial.<sup>74</sup>

Another group of defendants was brought from the village of Terzili, where Zhirayr Boyajian and his armed band were captured several weeks earlier. The peasants were accused of hiding Boyajian and his comrades from the authorities and their provision between their raids. The village priest was accused of advising and guiding the revolutionaries. Most of the peasants denied that they had ever met Boyajian or his men. One peasant admitted that he had indeed talked to him in the past and that Boyajian would often advise him to maintain good relations with his Muslim neighbors. The court-martial then heard the testimony of the

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<sup>73</sup> BOA, Y.PRK.AZN. 7/32, Proces Verbal of the Proceedings regarding the peasants in Hozman, compiled on May 3 1894

<sup>74</sup> BOA, Y.PRK. AZN. 7/32, Proces Verbal of the Proceedings regarding the Sungurlu incident, compiled on May 16 1894

detained revolutionaries, who identified the peasants and the village priest who had assisted them during their raids. One revolutionary claimed that the village priest would read aloud the orders left for them by Boyajian, since the rest of the band was illiterate. The priest and most of the peasants were sentenced to ten years of imprisonment with hard labor.<sup>75</sup>

The conduct of the court-martial and its criminalization of any Armenian criticism of the state had a profound effect on the Armenian community in general. The wives, daughters, and relatives of the Armenian political prisoners petitioned the Ottoman government and the Apostolic Patriarchate for the release of their loved ones from detention.<sup>76</sup> The petition described in some detail the ways in which the lengthy detention of the families' breadwinners had reduced many local Armenians to abject poverty. The officials dismissed the emotion-laden language of the petition. Although the women had submitted the petition to be telegraphed to authorities, the governor reported that he had decided to dispatch it through the regular mail in order to conceal the "excited" language from prying eyes.<sup>77</sup> As with the case of Merzifon before and during the Ankara trial, Armenian women took an active role in pushing the authorities to abandon particularly draconian policies of mass internment and torture. Their efforts, however, were stalled by the local authorities.

The martial law further diminished the extent of communications between the town's residents and the outside world. Communication between Yozgat and the rest of the province of Ankara had already been curtailed by the deployment of a large number of gendarmes and armed irregulars who were recruited from the Muslim peasantry and townsfolk.<sup>78</sup> Two weeks after the women's submission of their petition, the lay council of Yozgat submitted another

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<sup>75</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. AZN. 7/32, Proces Verbal of the Proceedings regarding the peasants of Terzili, May 3 1894

<sup>76</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 294/94. Petition to the Yıldız Palace and the Apostolic Patriarchate, signed by forty-five Armenian women in Yozgat. April 12 1894

<sup>77</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 293/36. Governorate of Ankara to the Sublime Porte. April 12 1894

<sup>78</sup> The governor of Ankara, Memduh Pasha, reported that the irregulars, who had been under arms since the Yozgat demonstration had started to express discontent about their situation as they faced the prospect of untilled fields if they were not relieved of their posts.

one, requesting the release of the political prisoners.<sup>79</sup> It is important that the language of the petition was drastically different from those that were submitted in the immediate aftermath of the Yozgat demonstration. None of the grievances listed in the earlier petitions were mentioned in the council's latest request for royal intervention for the release of the prisoners. This last petition read more as a desperate plea for clemency than a list of requests and demands for the betterment of the conditions of Armenians.

Since the declaration of martial law, the Armenians of Yozgat interpreted the conduct of the court-martial as an indication of the government's firm dedication to the exposure of the revolutionary network and the silencing of Armenian dissent above all other concerns. The authorities' relentless pursuit of the revolutionaries and indiscriminate harshness on the local Armenians resulted in the unraveling of the revolutionary network. Throughout the court-martial's proceedings, several members of the local Hnch'ak committee and its armed bands in the countryside surrendered to the authorities. The governor boasted that the sight of former revolutionaries seeking clemency from the sublime state served as an important lesson to those who were still hiding.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the authorities discovered the hierarchical modes of paramilitary organization employed by the revolutionaries in the countryside. The apparent weakness and the exposure of the revolutionary network encouraged more informants from the Armenian community to come forth. Regardless of the veracity of their claims of the collusion of the Apostolic lay and religious councils with the Hnch'ak committee, the informants confirmed the officials' suspicions about the involvement of the revolutionaries in the demonstration and their connections with the concerted expressions of dissent earlier.

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<sup>79</sup> BOA, Y.A. HUS. 296/53, Apostolic Lay Council of Yozgat Armenians to the Yıldız Palace, April 28 1894

<sup>80</sup> BOA, Y.A. HUS. 291/55, Governorate of Ankara to the Sublime Porte, February 28 1894

The role of two informants during the proceedings was important enough for the governor to report their names to the palace, and recommend that they be rewarded for their services to the state. The first was Drtad Efendi, the acting-prelate of Yozgat, who arrived in the town after the demonstration. His hostility towards the revolutionaries and close connections with the subgovernor and the court-martial earned him their ire. He was also reported to have played a significant role in convincing the general populace of the wisdom of submission to and collaborating with the authorities and refraining from participating in any more mass demonstrations.<sup>81</sup> He arranged for the submission of a public declaration of loyalty to the sultan, in which the signatories would blame “the minds of some ignorant and youthful members of our nation have been poisoned by seditious ideas imported from abroad.”<sup>82</sup> Otherwise, the declaration reiterated the Hamidian narrative of a 600-year-long benevolent Ottoman rule over the Armenian people, during which they prospered, multiplied, and freely practiced their religion.

The other informant, Onnik Ajemian, was a silk merchant and member of the Apostolic lay council. In the first round of interrogations conducted under the aegis of the commission of inquiry, he had stated that he did not know anything about the organizers of the demonstration.<sup>83</sup> At the end of February, the governor reported that Ajemian had provided them with crucial information about the organization of the demonstration and the taxes imposed on the town’s well-to-do merchants by the revolutionary committee. Memduh Paşa also recommended that his Muslim “mediator” Hafız Efendi, another silk merchant, be rewarded for his efforts.<sup>84</sup> Hafız Efendi mediated between the court-martial and another

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<sup>81</sup> Hnch’ak historian Kitur regards Drtad Efendi as the chief opponent of the revolutionaries in Yozgat within the Armenian community. An Armenian petition submitted to the British consulate also lists him among the Ottoman state’s accomplices in its persecution of Armenians. Kitur, *Patmut’iwn*, 103

<sup>82</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 76, inc. 1, Consul Cumberbatch to Ambassador Currie, March 29 1894

<sup>83</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 179/7, Proces-Verbal of the Testimony of Onnik Acemyan, January 5 1894

<sup>84</sup> BOA, Y.A. HUS. 291/64, Governorate of Ankara to the Sublime Porte, February 28 1894

Armenian merchant, who testified to the court-martial about the threats he had received from the revolutionary committee in the past.<sup>85</sup>

News of the demonstration, the pogrom, and the conduct of the court-martial reached other parts of the Empire. During the proceedings on the pogrom, Kadri Bey, the governor of Trebizond met with Consul Longworth, the British diplomatic representative stationed in that city. When the consul asked for his opinions regarding the events, he attributed Armenian complaints not only to the work of evildoers, but also corrupt local officials who wanted to extort well-to-do Armenians. According to the consul, the governor even expressed sympathy for some of the Armenians who “may well be excused for invoking and accepting help against their oppressors from whatever quarter it may come and of whatever nature it may be.” He informed the consul of a circular from the Sublime Porte that had advised forbearance and caution regarding the mass internment of Armenians several months ago. He also stated his unease about the growing resentment among the Muslim community towards the Armenians as a result of the recent events.<sup>86</sup> The opinions of the governor of Trebizond, although undoubtedly worded in response to his British audience, signal to the presence of doubts about the accuracy of the palace’s narrative, and anxiety about its policies within the high-ranking bureaucracy.

Approximately a month later, the governor of Ankara submitted a report to the palace that listed and explained the two major accomplishments of the court-martial in the recent months. First, Memduh Paşa argued, the court-martial had succeeded in openly establishing the culpability of the Armenian evildoers in the organization of the demonstration and the provocation of the pogrom by having the perpetrators confess their involvement. Peasants from several villages in the vicinity of Karayakub and Karaçayır, where the peasant women

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<sup>85</sup> The other merchant was Misak Uğurluyan, who described in some detail the manner in which the revolutionary committee would attempt to extract payments from him. BOA, Y. EE. 179/5, Process-Verbal of the Testimony of Misak Uğurluyan, March 30 1894

<sup>86</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 103, inc. Consul Longworth to Ambassador Currie, April 14 1894

were from, had stated that Boyajian had suggested that they hold a demonstration. For the governor, Boyajian's indirect involvement was sufficient evidence of the fallaciousness of the women's complaints and the seditious nature of the whole affair. The governor further stated that it was necessary for the Armenians to acknowledge their responsibility for what had happened after the demonstration. He did so by "convincing" Armenians to write up petitions in which they blamed the revolutionaries for having conspired to massacre Muslims en masse, destroying their houses of worship, planning to steal or loot their property and for attempting to overthrow the government. The signatories, according to the governor, demanded the punishment of their co-religionists in the hopes of re-establishing public order. He suggested that the petitions be disseminated through appropriate venues in the European press in order to influence European public opinion in favor of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>87</sup> It is significant that Memduh Paşa expressed no anxieties about the dissemination of such views about latent Armenian disloyalty among the general population and its potential impact on intercommunal relations. In a private conversation with the British viceconsul in Ankara at the end of May, he blamed the harsh sentences and the conduct of the officials during the investigation on the head of the court-martial, Mustafa Paşa. This was simply an attempt to divert British annoyance at the conduct of the government to another official.<sup>88</sup>

Although, the work of the court-martial was mostly completed by the middle of May and sentences passed on the majority of the defendants, martial law remained in place for several months until the fall of 1894 in Yozgat. Memduh Paşa, the governor of Ankara, and the members of the court-martial received decorations and raises in their government stipends for their service and loyalty.<sup>89</sup> While there were still armed revolutionary bands roaming the

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<sup>87</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d 871/4, Governorate of Ankara to Yıldız Palace, May 20 1894

<sup>88</sup> FO, 424/178, Sir Currie to the Earl of Rosebery, no. 153 inc. 3, Consul Cumberbatch to Sir Currie, 31 May 1894

<sup>89</sup> Throughout the investigation and the proceedings, the palace would attempt to encourage the members of the court-martial and the governor through imperial praises and promises of future decorations. BOA, Y. EE. d 871/4

countryside, the revolutionary committee of Yozgat and those of the surrounding villages had been compromised. In addition, hundreds of Armenians, suspected of having aided or communicated with the revolutionaries, had been detained. In the absence of the presence of any defendants with British citizenship in the Yozgat trials, British diplomatic efforts were much less concerted than the Ankara trial to pressure the palace for clemency towards the prisoners. However, the majority of the prisoners, many of whom had been detained and imprisoned based on false testimonies, were released in the fall of 1894. The sultan also commuted the death sentences of the revolutionaries to lengthy terms of imprisonment with hard labor.<sup>90</sup> It is likely that the palace was wary of the fallout of dozens of potential executions and the long-term imprisonment of the economic and social notability of Armenians in the town and vicinity of Yozgat.

## **Conclusion**

The Yozgat demonstration and the petitioning campaign was a testament to the breadth and efficacy of the politicization of Armenian discontent, which was directed towards excessive taxation, maltreatment and violence by government officials, and the making of an unofficial ethno-confessional hierarchy of communities. Armenian peasants were suffering under the burden of heavy official and unofficial taxes. The tax-collectors and their accompanying gendarmes acted with increasing impunity as official attitudes towards Armenians grew hostile. As the palace prioritized the capture of the revolutionaries and suppression of any Armenian dissent, gendarmes and irregulars committed numerous abuses against the peasants, ranging from theft and looting to physical violence. They were aware that their actions were likely to go unpunished so long as the victims were potential supporters of the Armenian “evildoers”. As such actions became more commonplace with the spread of the revolutionary committees, the government sought the unofficial assistance of local

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<sup>90</sup> FO, 424/178, Consul Cumberbatch to Sir Currie, no. 220, 6 September 1894



Muslim communities. As had been the case with the policing of Armenian dissent before and during the Ankara trial, Muslim communities in and around Yozgat participated in the suppression of Armenian dissent. Thus, the government significantly contributed to the making of an unofficial ethno-confessional hierarchy, at the bottom of which were Armenians, whose loyalty was always already suspect, and whose bodily integrity and inviolability of property could be legitimately challenged under certain circumstances.

The revolutionaries transformed the individual and particular grievances of the local Armenian community, and redirected them at their main adversary, the Ottoman state. This required the politicization and generalization of complaints about a particular gendarme officer, or a haphazard tax. Instead of targeting the specific sources of the grievances, the revolutionaries attempted to convince (and in some cases, intimidate) Armenians to demand general, structural reforms. The important role of the revolutionaries in effecting this politicization was unmistakable. They traveled between villages, and assisted in the establishment of armed bands among Armenian peasants. They incorporating existing modes of brigandage into their arsenal, boosting their images as self-reliant warriors who defied the harsh conditions imposed on the Armenians. They sought to integrate the complaints of the peasantry with that of the Armenian notability of Yozgat in an effort to organize a new, national political platform that did not have organic links with the representatives of the Ottoman state. Finally, they killed Armenians, whom they deemed treasonous for refusing to contribute to their cause, for continuing to cultivate good relations with government officials, or for coordinating with the state to bring about the collapse of the revolutionary network. The expanse of their network throughout the countryside, the ease with which they traversed Armenian villages, and the reluctance of the peasantry to inform government officials on their activities testify to their popularity and authority.

Armenian political engagement extended beyond the confines of revolutionary organization or strategic petitioning. The peasant women, who had experienced the assault of the Ottoman gendarmes, actively sought justice during the demonstration. However, women from the Armenian community of Yozgat were also active after the demonstration. As had been the case in Merzifon during the Ankara trial, local Armenian women took active roles in their attempts to secure the release of their loved ones and convince the subgovernor and members of the court-martial to desist from further detentions of Armenians. In an environment where the expression of grievances and complaints by Armenian men could and would be interpreted as sedition, Armenian women assumed such tasks.

Despite the striking level of politicization among the Armenian community, the revolutionaries did not enjoy the support of the whole population. Revolutionary organization was a classed process that primarily drew the interest of peasants and craftsmen. Although the government offered financial rewards for informing on the revolutionaries, it is clear that rewards were not the only incentive for Armenians to assist the government. Several Armenian merchants, notables, and clergymen detested the widespread politicization of the peasantry, the revolutionaries' extortionary methods, and the assassination of Armenians deemed treasonous by secret committees. Therefore, they testified at the court-martial or became anonymous informers.

However, the revolutionaries succeeded in finding a few Armenian notables who were willing to cooperate with them to address the growing hostility of local officials to the Armenian community at large. The Yozgat demonstration and the subsequent petitioning campaign took place as a result of this cooperation. Many local Armenians were convinced that a general protest of their conditions would either push the palace to punish the most gruesome offenders (the gendarmes who raped the women of Karaçayır and Karayakub) and

prevent the recurrence of such atrocities or compel Great Britain to intervene in their favor. To their dismay, neither happened.

When news of the Yozgat demonstration and subsequent clashes reached the capital, the palace decided to follow a different course of action from the Ankara trial. Armenian petitioning against government officials was immediately criminalized and designated as a component of revolutionary strategy.<sup>91</sup> The open trial had worked against the Ottoman government. The palace would oversee the adoption of a different series of measures to suppress Armenian dissent this time. First, the governor of Ankara and the subgovernor of Yozgat, who were viewed as too “lenient” towards the Armenians, were replaced by bureaucrats, who were thought to carry out the policies ordered by the palace. The Hamidian regime also established an ad hoc commission of inquiry that would conduct an investigation on the revolutionary committees in and around the town. Second, Armenian complaints about excessive taxation and the rapacious conduct of the gendarmes were dismissed. The palace communicated its aversion to the investigation of Armenian complaints quite clearly in its correspondence with both the governorate and the commission of inquiry. Third, as had been done before the Ankara trial, hundreds of Armenians were imprisoned on trumped up charges of sedition. This terrorized the local Armenian community, and served as a strong deterrent against any action or communication that might be interpreted as “sedition” by the government. Although the majority of the defendants were released after several months of imprisonment, the harrowing conditions of their detention was meant to deter them from future engagement with politics. The release of the majority of the prisoners was also meant to boost the image of the sultan as a just and merciful mediator. It was thought that a

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<sup>91</sup> This was becoming a general attitude during the reign of sultan Abdülhamid II. A notable exception was plea letters and petitions from Armenian prisoners, in response to which the Palace could occasionally respond favorably. Çiğdem Oğuz, *Negotiating the Terms of Mercy: Petitions and Pardon Cases in the Hamidian Era* (İstanbul: Libra, 2013) 83-104

combination of the aforementioned policies would suffice to curb the popularization of Armenian dissent, and restore public order.

An important result of the palace's aggressive strategy was the official and unofficial recruitment of a section of the Muslim population in the policing and suppression of Armenian dissent. The local officials lacked the personnel to enforce the draconian measures demanded by the palace. A few hundred Muslims were recruited into irregular or reserve units as an additional police force. Gendarmes and Regie guards in the countryside could also recruit peasants on an ad hoc basis in their searches and investigations. The government's employment of one section of the population in the policing of another had a decidedly deleterious effect on intercommunal relations and reshaped an imperial ethno-confessional hierarchy of loyalty, the top of which was to be occupied by Sunni Muslims. It was not only in the matter of security that government policy diverged significantly with regard to the two communities. When Muslim peasants submitted a series of petitions complaining about excessive taxation around Yozgat, the palace ordered the governor to immediately address their grievances. It is likely that they feared that similar complaints from Muslims would validate Armenian claims of maladministration.<sup>92</sup>

There is strong evidence to suggest a connection between government policy and the overall deterioration of Muslim-Armenian relations in Yozgat. The conduct of the commission of inquiry worsened the tensions between the Muslim and Armenian communities of Yozgat and its surrounding villages, resulting in an anti-Armenian pogrom in early February. The arrival of the official court-martial and the declaration of the state of emergency strengthened the Armenian understanding that the state had laid a figurative siege on the Armenians to suppress any expression of dissent or sympathy towards the revolutionaries. Furthermore, the state sought to coerce the Armenians to "admit" that the

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<sup>92</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d 871/4, The Governorate of Ankara to the Palace, 15 May 1894.

revolutionaries were solely responsible for the violence and disorder. Finally, the palace's direct intervention to prevent the punishment of any Muslims, despite the blatantly anti-Armenian motives and results of the pogrom, served as a clear signal to civilians and officials alike. The demonstration and the connections of some members of the Armenian community in Yozgat to the revolutionaries had suspended their protections from physical harm and looting.

It is not suggested that the palace was solely responsible for all of the anti-Armenian violence. It is clear that many Muslim notables, townsfolk, and peasants were suspicious of the revolutionary movement, and Armenians in general. They were also anxious about the collapse of the former imperial hierarchy that privileged them vis-a-vis the Armenian community with the potential application of the reforms stipulated by the Treaty of Berlin. The mass demonstration at the Apostolic Church drew a crowd of suspicious Muslims despite the failed attempts of the military commandant Osman Paşa to prevent the outbreak of violence. Many Muslims felt threatened by expressions of Armenian dissent, as they believed that their privileges as the ruling nation would be undermined. It is also clear, however, that government officials deliberately cultivated Muslim suspicions and anxieties about the Armenians. The aforementioned government policies went in tandem with the promotion of a general narrative of Armenian sedition by the government. This narrative, parts of which were iterated during the Ankara trial by the public prosecutor, stipulated that a group of Armenian evildoers motivated and paid by foreign governments sought to sow chaos among the Ottoman Armenian community, which had flourished under imperial rule for centuries. The simple-minded Armenian folk had been duped into engaging in sedition without knowing the implications of their activities. More importantly for the Muslim community, the government claimed that the revolutionaries sought to provoke the Muslim subjects of the Empire to attack Armenians en masse by engaging in acts of terrorism and provocation. The Yozgat

demonstration was one such example. According to the government, the revolutionaries were planning a general massacre of Muslims. Although there was no evidence to prove such allegations, they gained currency among some Muslims, and played into their fears of a general Armenian uprising.

There were also other observers that argued that the revolutionaries viewed the draconian government policies as a blessing in disguise, a development that would force the Great Powers to intervene in favor of the Armenians. Cyrus Hamlin, an American missionary and educator, alleged in a public letter that targeted the revolutionaries, that he had been told by a Hnch'ak member in Istanbul that they were working to provoke Muslims to massacre Armenians so that the Christian world would intervene.<sup>93</sup> An informant to the British Embassy in Istanbul claimed that he believed high-ranking revolutionaries to actively provoke the government to engage in mass determent of Armenians in order to galvanize public opinion in Europe.<sup>94</sup>

The veracity of such claims is difficult to ascertain. It is clear, however, that the revolutionaries actively worked against the formation of a coalition of government officials and local Muslim populations. They distributed pamphlets and affixed placards that called on Muslims to distance themselves from the government. In one such placard in Sivas, the revolutionaries responded to some of the government officials' claims that they were planning a general attack on Muslims. The authors of the placard stated that the object of their violence had primarily been other Armenians, referring to the assassinations of Armenians and Greeks that were considered traitors by the revolutionary committees.<sup>95</sup> They feared mob violence, which would undoubtedly target many people within their ranks. On the other hand, the revolutionaries were aware that the authoritarian Hamidian regime would prioritize the

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<sup>93</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 416, Pro-memoria communicated by Rüstem Paşa, Annex 1, 10 December 1894

<sup>94</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 73, Sir Currie to the Earl of Rosebery, inc., 28 March 1894

<sup>95</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 17, Sir Nicolson to the Earl of Rosebery, inc. 3, 12 January 1894

suppression of any expression of dissent. They anticipated that government policies like the mass internment of Armenians or the court-martial's open disregard for Armenian complaints would serve to tarnish the reputation of the Ottoman state.

When Mustafa Paşa, the head of the court-martial, reported the capture of several of Zhirayr Boyajian's comrades in March, he referred to them as "the architects of the edifice of sedition. (*bünyan-ı fesad*)"<sup>96</sup> As was mentioned in the previous chapter, a *Hnch'ak* editorial identified Ottoman state as "the edifice of oppression" after the execution of five revolutionaries that were sentenced to death during the Ankara trial. It is telling that both employed almost identical metaphors of construction to refer to their object of political antagonism. The leading roles of the likes of Zhirayr Boyajian in revolutionary organization or the overwhelming influence of Sultan Abdülhamid II and his retinue of aides-de-camp in the palace in the suppression of Armenian dissent in Central Anatolia cannot be denied. However, both sides interpreted the object of their struggle less as a group of individuals than a set of structures and relationships that extended beyond the personal interests and wills of revolutionary leaders or Ottoman administrators. The enemy, then, consisted not only of the officials, revolutionaries, or informants to be targeted but their official and unofficial networks, their economic base and their modes of legitimation. The strategies they utilized that were examined and discussed in this chapter can be better contextualized with this conceptual expanse of their struggle.

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<sup>96</sup> BOA, Y. EE. d 871/4, The Court-Martial to the Yıldız Palace, 20 March 1894

## ***A POWERFUL LESSON: THE SASUN MASSACRE AND ITS AFTERMATH***

Sasun continued to draw the interest of Armenian revolutionaries and government officials alike. In 1892, Mihran Damadian was joined by Hampartsum Boyajian (*nom de guerre*: Murad), who was one of his comrades in the Hnch'ak Party. Hampartsum Boyajian's older brother, Zhirayr (Moruk) Boyajian had been active in Central Anatolia during the events recounted in chapter two and three. The younger Boyajian was also born in Haçin in Cilicia. He attended the Imperial Medical School in Constantinople, where he participated in Armenian oppositional circles. He was among the organizers and participants of the Kumkapı Demonstration, after which he was forced to leave the Ottoman Empire to avoid capture. After spending a couple of years in Geneva and Athens, he traveled to Sasun, and joined Damadian in his efforts to organize the peasants in revolutionary bands and encourage practices of self-defense and disobedience vis-a-vis the government and the pastoralist Kurds.<sup>1</sup>

Local Ottoman officials also intensified their efforts to intimidate the Armenian peasants of Sasun to distance themselves from the revolutionaries, cease their attempts to organize self-defense bands, and accept the imposition of tributary extortions from various pastoralist and sedentary Kurds as well as taxes from the government. After the capture of Damadian by the authorities in June 1893, the Palace became directly involved in Sasun. During the summer of 1894, a coalition of Ottoman imperial troops and Kurdish pastoralists (with some help from their fellow sedentary tribesmen) besieged a number of Armenian villages in Sasun. These included Şenik, Semal, Geligüzan, and the numerous wards of the district of Talori (Dalvorig). From mid-July onwards, the pastoralists started attacking Armenian villages. Many Armenian peasants abandoned their villages for the safety of the heights of the nearby Mount Antok and organized a defense against the pastoralists. After the

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<sup>1</sup> Kitur, *Patmut'iwn*, pp. 135-7; The January 1895 issue of the Hnch'ak also featured a biography of Boyajian and his picture on the front page. "Hampartsum Boyajian (Murad)", *Hnch'ak*, 1 (1895)



pastoralists failed to break their lines, imperial troops were ordered to march on the region. Over the course of two weeks, the soldiers and the pastoralists killed over a thousand Armenian peasants and laid to waste over a dozen of Armenian villages.

The scholarly attention on the Sasun massacre is unique in the context of the historiography on the Armenian revolutionary movement and anti-Armenian state and mob violence in the late Ottoman Empire. One of the most important Armenian-language accounts is undoubtedly that of ARF member Garo Sasuni, who himself was from Sasun. In his encyclopedic collection of geographic, historical, and folkloric information about the Muş plain and Sasun, Garo Sasuni recounts the background to the Sasun massacre from 1890 to 1894. Sasuni's account is rich with details and draws from the memoirs of other revolutionaries as well. It is also a hagiographical tale of revolutionary sacrifice and will in the face of great odds, and is less reliable on the motives of the Ottoman government. Similarly, the Armenian peasants appear as an integral component of the revolutionary movement, even though they had slightly divergent interests as will become clear in the rest of the chapter.<sup>2</sup>

Much of the Turkish-language scholarship as well as the recent *Sasun: The History of an 1890s Armenian Revolt* reiterate the official Ottoman position, which reduces Armenian testimony and dissent to sedition.<sup>3</sup> A special issue of the *Armenian Review* contains articles focusing on the massacre's different facets, such as the composition and British reports on the Ottoman commission of inquiry and the demographics of Sasun based on the records of the

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<sup>2</sup> Garo Sasuni, *Patmut'iwn Taroni Ashkharhi* [The History of the World of Taron], (Ant'ilias: Mets Tann Kilikiyo Kat'oghikosut'iwn [The Great House of the Cilician Catholicosate], 2013) 497-518

<sup>3</sup> Justin McCarthy, Ömer Turan and Cemalettin Taşkıran, *Sasun: The History of an 1890s Armenian Revolt* (Utah: University of Utah Press, 2014). McCarthy et al's apologist account is somewhat unique in its underutilization of Ottoman archival documents; For a representative example of the apologist Turcophone literature see Nurettin Gülmez, "Tahkik Hey'eti Raporlarına göre 1894 Sason İsyanı," *Bellekten*, 8(2006): 695-741

Apostolic Patriarchate.<sup>4</sup> These highly specialized studies are very informative but do not provide a holistic picture of how and why the massacre occurred. Owen Miller's dissertation *Sasun 1894: Mountains, Missionaries, and Massacres at the end of Ottoman Empire* primarily utilizes travelogues, missionary records of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) as well as the archives of the British Foreign Office.<sup>5</sup> The dissertation argues that the Ottoman assault into Sasun should be viewed as a part of a century-long effort on the part of the state authorities to expand their direct control – of legitimate violence and narrative – in the Ottoman East. Within this context, the governor of Bitlis and other local officials utilized growing anti-Armenian sentiment within the imperial government for their personal interests. While the dissertation does an admirable job of delineating the chronology of the massacre, the identification of the main actors, perpetrators, and survivors, its reliance on British and missionary records is reflected in some of the author's conclusions. Furthermore, the prescriptive, investigative, and punitive practices of the Ottoman government as well as Armenian disobedience and oppositional organization are primarily viewed through the lens of foreign observers, silencing or clouding local and imperial developments that were outside the diplomats' and missionaries' purview. Finally, Mehmet Polatel's "The Complete Ruin of a District: The Sasun Massacre of 1894," in the edited volume *The Ottoman East* provides a microhistory of the massacre through the use of Ottoman archival documents.<sup>6</sup> While Polatel's contribution clearly establishes the government's intent on the collective punishment of Sasun Armenians through massacre and destruction, there is less on the explication of why and how the massacre occurred.

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<sup>4</sup> Two of the important studies in the special issue are Raymond H. Kévorkian, "The Armenian Population of Sassoun and the Demographic Consequences of the 1894 Massacres," and Rebecca Morris, "A Critical Examination of the Sassoun Commission of Inquiry Report," in *Armenian Review*, 47.1-2 (2001)

<sup>5</sup> Owen Miller, "Sasun 1894: Mountains, Missionaries, and Massacres at the end of Ottoman Empire," PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2015

<sup>6</sup> Mehmet Polatel, "The Complete Ruin of a District: The Sasun Massacre of 1894," in *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics*, (I.B. Tauris: 2016)

This chapter attempts a holistic narrative of the massacre and its aftermath through the use of British and Ottoman archival records as well as the official organ of the Hnch'ak Party with particular attention to the intersection of local, imperial, and international practices and motives. It explores the background to the Sasun massacre of 1894 and its immediate aftermath. The first part of the chapter focuses on the summer of 1893. This period marked the capture of Mihran Damadian, who was one of the prominent Hnch'ak revolutionaries in the region, and the violent clashes between a coalition of Kurdish pastoralists and the Sasun peasants that followed it. The Ottoman government intervened with the dispatch of a military company to stop the fighting. The pastoralists were convinced to return to their wintering grounds with the loot they had gathered from the abandoned Armenian villages and the peasants compelled to return. The Palace and the Field Marshal of the Fourth Army feared the potentiality of increased British intervention in the case of a general military maneuver against the Armenians because of the contemporaneous Ankara trial. Nevertheless, Sasun was earmarked as a zone of trouble and sedition to be subdued.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the summer of 1894, during which local government officials conducted a series of investigations to determine the extent of the revolutionary committee in Sasun. Their findings confirmed the presence of a revolutionary band, they alternatively referred to as “black-hats” or “foreigners.” What was more troublesome for the local officials and the Palace, however, was that Armenian peasants had established defensive patrols against the Kurdish pastoralists to deter them. Convinced that the presence of armed Armenian peasants and a revolutionary band warranted “a powerful lesson” the Palace ordered the killing of all “rebels,” a blanket term that applied to all Armenians capable of bearing arms, without taking prisoners. The imperial troops and the Kurdish pastoralists (and their fellow tribesmen from their wintering grounds) coordinated and laid Sasun to waste.

The last part of the chapter examines the immediate aftermath of the massacre. The Palace attempted to control the flow and the shape of the information from the region. In the words of a palace aide-de-camp, Ottoman officialdom was ordered by the Palace to act as a monolith in order to delegitimize alternative accounts of what had occurred. Nevertheless, survivors, perpetrators, and observers continued to contact diplomats, government officials, and others to describe what had transpired. This section focuses on two related developments. On the one hand, the Palace attempted to collect and reframe as much information as possible from the ground through the official reports of the military operation compiled by the colonel, who commanded the troops, and Field Marshal Zeki Paşa of the Fourth Army. On the other hand, British diplomats expressed interest in compiling their own reports on the violence, dispatching a vice-consul to the region as well as entrusting one of their dragomans to investigate the Palace's involvement through his sources within the bureaucracy. The Palace initially attempted to deter British interest by casting the vice-consul as a revolutionary accomplice. However, the British did not take the diplomatic offense lightly and pressured the Palace into starting an inquiry into the Sasun affair, where witnesses from all sides would be heard in the presence of consular delegates.

### **Damadian's Capture**

After spending the winter of 1892-3 in an Armenian village on the western portion of the Muş plain, Mihran Damadian arranged a meeting with several peasants from the village of Semal. The resident monk at the monastery where the two parties were scheduled to meet, however, refused to provide lodging to Damadian for fear of government retribution. Damadian and his companion Sogho were forced to leave the monastery to spend the night on the mountain. On June 13th 1893, the Hnch'ak revolutionary and his companion encountered a gendarme and a group of Kurds. The gendarme was irked by Damadian's inability to speak

Kurdish and attempted to take him into custody. After a brief struggle, Damadian and Sogho were overpowered and put in fetters to be taken back to Muş, then Bitlis.<sup>7</sup>

According to a biographical note, which was probably authored by his comrade Hampartsum Boyajian, Damadian was extremely disappointed with the obsequious conduct of the Armenian peasants of Semal, a Sasun village where he was cornered by his Kurdish pursuers. The peasants did not make an effort to rescue Damadian, despite their previous pledges to him of their commitment to the cause, and prevented their neighbors from intervening for fear of retribution from government officials. Shortly after his arrival in Muş, he was taken to Bitlis, the administrative center of the province. The journey was harrowing; Damadian withstood constant physical and psychological abuse from his captors, and received a leg injury that would leave him lame for the rest of his life.<sup>8</sup> Upon his arrival in Bitlis, he was interrogated.

Damadian's engagement with his interrogators was highly complex according to the Ottoman transcription of his answers. It is more than likely that he was tortured in order to extract information. And he certainly provided the authorities with detailed information of his own activities as a revolutionary. He told them of his participation in the Kumkapı demonstration after which he had decided to travel to Athens in order to avoid capture by the police in Constantinople. He told them of his role in organizing a demonstration in Athens. The demonstration was organized as a commemoration of the struggle and sacrifice of Vardan Mamikonian, a 4th century Armenian leader, who fought and died in battle against the Armenians' Sasanian overlords, and was later consecrated as a saint. Damadian stated that about a thousand Armenian migrant workers and refugees in Athens, who had hailed from Muş and other parts of Ottoman Armenia, participated in the demonstration. He addressed the

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<sup>7</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/10, the account of Damadian's capture is taken from his biographical note, which was found on Hampartsum Boyajian at the time of his capture.

<sup>8</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 175/10; Also see Ara Aharonian, *Heroic Figures of A.D.L.*, (Los Angeles: Nor-or Publications, 2006), 36

demonstrators in a speech in which he called on them and all Armenians to embody Vardan Mamikonian's defiant spirit, and fight against the Ottoman state in the name of freedom. The demonstration was covered by Greek and western newspapers. His other participation in revolutionary endeavors in Athens was his involvement in the compilation of a commemorative text that covered the organization of the Kumkapı demonstration and the biographies of the two revolutionaries, who were killed during and after it.<sup>9</sup>

When questioned about his presence in Muş, Damadian claimed that he did not entertain any revolutionary ideas in his previous tenure as a teacher in Muş from 1884 to 1888, although the government's persecution of Armenians had influenced him.<sup>10</sup> When he returned to Istanbul, he started to participate in local revolutionary committees, and contacted the Hnch'ak Central Committee after he fled the capital. After his participation in the organization of the aforementioned demonstration, he was dispatched by the Central Committee to propagandize among the Armenian peasantry in Muş, and convince them to participate in an armed rebellion against the Ottoman state. He claimed, however, that his efforts were mostly fruitless, and his small band of followers had either abandoned him due to his inability to provide them with wages, or had been captured by the authorities. After his recent tour of Armenian villages in Sasun, he had been planning to return to Athens to continue his revolutionary activities there.<sup>11</sup>

Although Damadian did not refrain to explicate the motives of the Hnch'ak party and his personal involvement in it, he refused to provide the names of his hosts in Muş or Sasun, stating that "he would rather have his head cut off." The only names of his comrades and collaborators that he provided were either individuals that had been killed or captured by the

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<sup>9</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/10. Transcription of Damadian's Interrogation, 13 June 1893

<sup>10</sup> According to Ara Aharonian, Damadian regularly met with other discontented Armenians in Muş during this period including the secretary of the prelate and future husband of Gülizar, Kegham Der Karapetian.

<sup>11</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/10. Transcription of Damadian's Interrogation, 13 June 1893

government, or ones that had fled Ottoman realms. He also downplayed the extent of his success in the recruitment of peasants for the Hnch'ak party, stating that he was not well-received by the majority of Armenian peasants, and that "the time for revolution had not arrived anyway."<sup>12</sup>

Five months after his capture, Damadian was taken to the imperial capital. He was offered amnesty in return for his knowledge of the Armenian revolutionary movement. He prepared a four-chapter memorandum with an affixed plea for imperial mercy.<sup>13</sup> The first chapter contained short descriptions of five strands of Armenian "sedition." While the first two consisted of patriotic associations in London, whose activities centered mostly around lobbying the British government to apply pressure on the Hamidian regime to enact reforms, the other three were the famous revolutionary parties, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Armenakan Party, and the Hnch'ak Party. The Hnch'aks remained the most influential and significant among these groups, according to Damadian, despite the success of government measures to reduce their presence in the imperial capital after the Kumkapı Demonstration.

The next two chapters focused on the international and interorganizational connections of the Hnch'ak Party. Damadian recounted several interviews with representatives of Cretan separatists as well as a British journalist, who he claimed was connected to the British Liberal Party. While the Cretan separatists welcomed the prospect of the formation of a grand alliance of anti-Hamidian nationalist organizations, the British journalist expressed his sympathy for the Armenian cause, and advised continued agitation in the imperial capital. Damadian also intimated the presence of an anti-Hamidian conspiracy among Muslim bureaucrats and intellectuals. The last chapter focused on the influence of British missionaries on the

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<sup>12</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/10. Transcription of Damadian's Interrogation, 13 June 1893

<sup>13</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK. 35/29; The transliteration of the memorandum is published in Haluk Selvi, *Mihran Damadyan: Bir Ermeni Komitecinin İtirafı*, (İstanbul: Timaş, 2009) 175-211

Armenian Apostolic Church, and alleged negotiations between the two about the incorporation of the latter into the Anglican Church. Damadian concluded the memorandum with a plea for an imperial pardon, claiming that his involvement in the revolutionary movement was limited and that he was genuinely remorseful of his actions, and that his family had suffered from his absence.<sup>14</sup>

Like the transcription of his interrogation in Bitlis, the memorandum is a complex text, in which Damadian was negotiating the extent of his cooperation with the Hamidian regime with his reluctance to expose the organizational network and methods of the Hnch'ak Party and its sympathizers. On the one hand, Damadian provided information on the location of the Hnch'ak Central Committee in Athens, the name of one of its founders, Rupen Khanazat, and an outline of its (inconsequential) negotiations with other oppositional organizations. He disclosed the revolutionaries' use of "invisible ink" in sensitive correspondence using potassium ferricyanide and iron sulfate in different stages of the composition and reading of the texts. Furthermore, the memorandum placed considerable emphasis on Damadian's contact with a British journalist, catering to Hamidian anxieties about British cooperation with the anti-Hamidian opposition. Similarly, Damadian foregrounded British contact with leading clergymen (Former patriarchs Khrimian and Nerses II) of the Armenian Patriarchate regarding the issue of Armenian reforms.

On the other hand, the text vacillates between the exposition of organized Armenian opposition to Sultan Abdülhamid II in broad strokes and the description of several anecdotes of contact between the Hnch'ak Party, a British journalist, and a few representatives from other opponents of the regime. There is certainly more emphasis on the dangers of a united front of Greek, Balkan, and Muslim opponents of the regime than Armenian revolutionaries. It is also devoid of any overt references to Hnch'ak activities after the Kumkapı

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<sup>14</sup> Selvi, *Bir Ermeni Komitecinin İtirafı*, 210-1



Demonstration in the Ottoman Empire. Damadian passingly refers to having heard of the placard campaign in Ankara. In this regard, it is remarkable that the memorandum barely touches upon Damadian's presence and contacts in Muş and Sasun, briefly stating that he had shared his knowledge related to that area in his interrogation in Bitlis. From the transcription of that interrogation, however, we know that Damadian did not share the names and locations of any of his active accomplices or hosts in the villages of Sasun and the Muş plain.

Mihran Damadian was released and given a sinecurial position in the Ministry of the Interior in the spring of 1894 in exchange for the information he provided to the Ottoman government.<sup>15</sup> He fled Constantinople shortly thereafter. He traveled between Greece and Romania, and remained engaged with the affairs of the Hnch'ak Party. He attended a Central Committee meeting in London in 1896, where the party leadership was divided over the primacy of socialism in the party's political program. Damadian was among the leading figures in the splitting of the Hnch'ak Party in 1896, and would go on to join the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramgavar). He remained an influential figure in Armenian politics.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Summer of 1893**

Shortly after Damadian's capture in June 1893, tensions escalated between the Armenian peasants of Talori and Kurdish pastoralists, who had traveled from the province of Diyarbekir to seek pasture and extract tribute. Several of the pastoralists were ambushed by armed Armenians, who stole from their flock, and killed a few among them. The governor-general of Diyarbekir reported that Şeyh Mehmed, a prominent Sufi shikh with a large following among the tribes of the region, told him that he would lead his own men to the region and protect the rights of the Muslim populace and avenge the killings of his kinsmen.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Selvi, *Bir Ermeni Komitecinin İtirafları*, 62-5

<sup>16</sup> Aharonian, *Heroic Figures*, 37-8

<sup>17</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 155/21, Governorate of Diyarbekir to the Sublime Porte, 29 June 1893

The governor immediately reported the sheikh's intent to the governorate of Bitlis, one of the sultan's aides-de-camp, and the Fourth Army. The governor-general of Bitlis acknowledged the clashes between the tribes of Badikan, Hiyan and Reştonan (the latter was the tribe that was "brought into obedience" several years earlier according to Mehmed Safi Bey's report mentioned in Chapter 1) and the Armenian peasants of Talori. He left immediately for Talori, ostensibly in order to prevent the escalation of the violence.<sup>18</sup>

A week later, Tahsin Paşa wrote from Talori. He reported that the Muslims had been killed in horrific fashion during the clashes. The physical condition of the deceased had provoked the tribesmen into further attacks. In response, the Armenian peasants had retreated into the heights of Mount Antok to more defensible locations. The governor claimed that his efforts in placating the Kurdish pastoralists had been successful. He also claimed that the Armenian peasants would not have dared to engage in such brazen acts of belligerence against the Muslim populace without the meddling of seditious elements from outside. In fact, he stated, one of the Armenians who was killed during the clashes had fair skin and blue eyes, physical features that were alien to the local inhabitants of the region.<sup>19</sup> A few days later, Tahsin Paşa reported that Armenian peasants had been compelled to return to their villages from their hideouts in the mountains and that the Kurdish pastoralists had been convinced to return to Silvan.<sup>20</sup>

Sultan Abdülhamid II's aides-de-camp also maintained an alternative line of communication with the Fourth Army after the capture of Damadian in order to investigate the extent and activities of the revolutionary network and suppress expressions of Armenian dissent. They forwarded a report compiled by two officers of the Fourth Army. The officers stated that the crisis was caused by the "Christian peasants of Talori, Geligüzan, Şenik and

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<sup>18</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 277/44, Governorate of Bitlis to the Sublime Porte, 2 July 1893

<sup>19</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 277/112; BOA, Y. EE. 155/22, Governorate of Bitlis to the Sublime Porte and the Ministry of the Interior, 8 July 1893

<sup>20</sup> BOA, Y. A. HUS. 277/141, Governorate of Bitlis to the Sublime Porte, 13 July 1893

Semal, who were influenced by the provocations of the evildoers named Damadian and Arabo.” The peasants attempted to prevent the Bekranlı pastoralists from reaching their pastures. Several Muslims were killed in mid-June in the vicinity of Şenik and Semal. In response, the pastoralists gathered in large numbers and marched on Talori in late June. After several hours of fighting, four Muslims and five Armenians were killed. The officers echoed the governor’s remark about the blue-eyed and fair-skinned body found among the Armenian dead. The companies’ arrival had convinced both sides to retreat to their homes and cease their fighting.<sup>21</sup>

Two other officers, however, presented a different account of events in their own report to the district governorate of Muş. The names and identities of the deceased among Armenians and the pastoralist Kurds were given, and no description of a blue-eyed and fair-skinned body among the Armenian dead was presented. Furthermore, the officers reported that some of the Armenians had sought refuge among the sedentary Kurds of Sasun. It was only through the mediation of Hişman Ağa, who was a prominent notable among the Sasun Kurds, that the Armenians were assured of their safety and convinced to return to their villages. The officers further stated that the pastoralist Kurds carried away considerable booty, which they looted from the Armenian villages after the Armenians retreated to the mountains or sought refuge among the Sasun Kurds. In fact, the distribution of the booty among the pastoralists led to armed conflict among each other on their return to their wintering grounds.<sup>22</sup>

What both reporters neglected to mention was the fact that the pastoralist tribes from Silvan had been barred from the pastures of Sasun in the previous decades in response to complaints from Armenian peasants. However, the ban had eroded in the late 1880s and the

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<sup>21</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, Report by Bedri Bey (aide-de-camp of Bekir Sadık Bey, imperial aide-de-camp) and Salim Ağa (Fourth army captain), 17 July 1893

<sup>22</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/10, Report by colonels Salih and Talip Beys, 7 July 1893

early 1890s. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, the Armenians of Sasun had submitted petitions to the Patriarchate in 1889 complaining that the Bekranlı tribe had used their pastures and harassed them despite the ban. By the summer of 1893, the number of pastoralist tribes from Silvan that traveled to Sasun for pasturing and extracting tributes increased considerably. A telegram from the district governorate of Genc (the south-western portion of Sasun fell under its jurisdiction) to the district governorate of Muş provides evidence of the erosion of the ban. The district governor stated that the ban had been lifted for the Bekranlı tribe in the previous summer, provided that they accept the company of a corporal and a private to “oversee” their yearly migration. The reason for the abolition of the ban was the wretched conditions of the pastoralists.<sup>23</sup> A local struggle over tributes and access to pasture was gaining imperial significance in the face of continued presence of a band of Armenian revolutionaries in the region and sustained Armenian peasant resistance to Kurdish pastoralist incursions.

The January 1894 issue of *Hnch'ak* featured an article on the clashes of the summer of 1893. The main outline of the events were in accordance with the officers' report to the district governorate with two major differences. First, the article did not mention any of the early clashes which resulted in the deaths of several pastoralists at the beginning of the summer. Second, the *Hnch'ak* revolutionary correspondent argued that Ottoman officials in Bitlis had contacted a Muslim sufi master of considerable influence, Şeyh Mehmed of Zilan, whom the governor of Diyarbakir had reported was leading a large group of his followers to attack Talori at the beginning of the summer. The officials in Bitlis requested the sheikh's help in bringing the Armenians of Sasun to heel. The sheikh told his followers that Sasun had become the abode of war, that the wives and daughters of the Christians were legitimate war booty, and that the pastoralists would receive as many maidens in paradise as the droplets of blood they would shed. A swarm of pastoralists, whose number reached five thousand

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<sup>23</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/10, District Governorate of Genc to District Governorate of Muş, 7 August 1893

according to the article, descended upon Sasun and eventually prevailed against the Armenians, who retreated to the mountains while the former looted their property. Ottoman officials simply stood by as the assault took place and later threatened the Armenian peasants to return to their looted villages.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the differences in the reports, several aspects of the clashes in the summer of 1893 are discernible. First, the involvement of the revolutionaries and government officials transformed a local power struggle over natural resources and extortionary arrangements into a matter of imperial significance. The revolutionaries attempted to organize and amplify existent practices of armed resistance against the pastoralists, while government officials lifted previous restrictions on pastoralist incursions into Armenian areas they considered to be unruly or under the influence of the revolutionaries. While there is no direct evidence that points to the officials' encouragement of the pastoralists to attack the peasants as suggested by the article in *Hnch'ak*, it is clear that they sided with the pastoralists once the attacks began both at the local and the imperial level.

In fact, the pastoralists' looting and the previous ban on their use of Sasun pastures disappeared in the reports of the military officers and the governor of Bitlis to the Palace. As far as the Palace was concerned, the clashes were a result of Armenian sedition, and were to be addressed as such in the future. Both the governor and the officers' introduction of an unidentified blue-eyed and fair-skinned man to the deceased Armenians is also noteworthy. Since the initial report that provided the names of the deceased did not contain such a detail, and it only became a part of the narrative in the reports submitted to the palace, it is likely that this detail was fabricated. The presence of a foreigner among armed Armenians was aimed to bolster the perception that Armenian sedition under foreign patronage and guidance had caused the crisis.

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<sup>24</sup> "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey] *Hnch'ak*, 1 (1894)

### **Turning Peasants into Rebels**

Forbidding weather conditions and the mountainous geography of the region sustained the fragile ceasefire of the summer of 1893 throughout the winter. In the spring of 1894, however, local government officials started reporting armed patrols from the Armenian villages and wards in the district of Talori. The district-governor of Genc wrote to his superior in Bitlis (Tahsin Paşa) that the peasants also continued their well-established practice of not paying taxes to the government. According to him, the peasants justified their possession and display of arms by claiming that they were hunting for game in the mountains.<sup>25</sup> Tahsin Paşa's response was a prescriptive inquiry about the armed Armenians in the mountains. He stated that "it was clear that the Talorians' reluctance to pay taxes and wander about with arms stemmed from their intent to start a rebellion." Therefore, he demanded information on the number and location of the armed Armenians so that imperial orders could be secured to dispatch soldiers to the necessary places.<sup>26</sup>

In his response, the district governor reported that there were about three-hundred armed peasants in Talori. However, the number was likely to increase in the coming months as peasants from Şenik, Semal and other villages of Sasun would join them. The district governor also picked up on his superior's identification of the peasants as rebels, and added that he suspected that the peasants harbored seditious ideas.<sup>27</sup> Suspicions, however, were not enough for the governor of Bitlis. He wrote that the dispatch of imperial troops to the region would only be possible by a direct order from the Palace. In order to ensure the timely dispatch of troops and forceful action against the threat of Armenian sedition, the governor wrote, his inferior would have to state with certainty that the Armenians were preparing for rebellion.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the troops the district governor requested in order to ensure the

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<sup>25</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, District-Governorate of Genc to the Governorate of Bitlis, 21 April 1894

<sup>26</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, Governorate of Bitlis to the District Governorate of Genc, 23 April 1894

<sup>27</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, District-Governorate of Genc to the Governorate of Bitlis, 24 April 1894

<sup>28</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, Governorate of Bitlis to the District Governorate of Genc, 29 April 1894

safety of the roads and the prevention of inter-ethnic violence of the yesteryear would only be made available if he would officially state that an Armenian rebellion was afoot.

The governor's prescriptive inquiry started another line of correspondence between the district governor of Genc and his inferior in Kulb in early May. He ordered the dispatch of informants to the Armenian villages to determine the number of armed men, the frequency and location of their patrols, and the veracity of a seditious movement among them. The district governor also asked the feasibility of a military expedition to the villages in case it became clear that the Armenians were plotting a rebellion. He received the response to his inquiry ten days later. The sub-district governor of Kulb wrote that Talori and the twenty or so neighboring Armenian villages had close relations. He added that all of the villages could be home to as many as three to four thousand armed men. Moreover, the Armenians were under the protection of the sedentary Kurds of Sasun. The sub-district governor stated that sending informants to the Armenian villages was not possible. The villages were not located on a frequently traveled road, and few outsiders dared to go there. One of the notables of a Kurdish tribe in Khian was the government's principle source of information about the condition and conduct of the Sasun Armenians. Finally, the sub-district governor stated that a military expedition was not advisable on account of the high altitude of the region and the impenetrable mountains that surrounded it.<sup>29</sup> In an addendum to his report a couple of days later, the sub-district governor informed his superior of basic fortifications that the peasants had constructed in Talori in preparation for another assault from the pastoralists of Silvan.

At the repeated behest of Tahsin Paşa, the district governor of Genc dispatched Abdülmecid Efendi, who was the assistant director of official correspondence (*tahrirat müdürü muavini*), to a Muslim village close to Talori in order to gather more information

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<sup>29</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, District-Governorate of Genc to the Sub-District-Governorate of Kulb, 30 April 1894; BOA, Y. EE. 172/16 Sub-District-Governorate of Kulb to the District-Governorate of Genc, 10 May 1894

about the conduct and condition of the Armenian peasants. Abdülmecid Efendi wrote a detailed report based on the testimony of Muslim informants he had recruited locally and the gendarmes he had dispatched to the Armenian villages. He stated that the people of Talori, Şenik, Semal, and Geligüzan were insistent on not paying taxes to the government and not responding to the subpoenas issued by the government. Their armed patrols were meant to deter government officials from attempting to detain Armenians from the villages or collect taxes from them. In addition, the armed patrols attacked Kurds and tribesmen with whom the Armenians had developed a feud over the past years. They also occasionally robbed travelers and passers-by on the road they encountered. The Armenians owed their strong position partially to the protection of the sedentary Kurds of the region, whom Abdülmecid Efendi described as an ignorant and uncivilized lot. Armenian peasants paid small amounts of tribute to their Kurdish overlords in exchange for their protection and freedom to trade for foodstuffs and other provisions.<sup>30</sup>

As far as the coercive capacity and seditious elements were concerned, Abdülmecid Efendi reported that there were a few leading figures who were encouraging Armenians to resist the pastoralists' incursions, claiming that the government would not interfere in their conflict. Among these leaders were some village headmen and some outsiders, whom the peasants hid in their homes whenever they heard of approaching government officials or gendarmes. Therefore, none of these people had been seen by Abdülmecid Efendi's informants. Furthermore, the peasants were producing and importing gunpowder in preparation for another round of clashes against the pastoralists, whom they no longer feared. However, rumors of extensive Armenian fortifications were simply false. The assistant director concluded that a simple military expedition would simply push the peasants to seek

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<sup>30</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, Assistant-Director of Correspondence of Genc to the District-Governorate of Genc, 1 June 1894



refuge among the sedentary Kurds of Sasun, and continue their aforementioned conduct after the departure of imperial troops. In order to achieve concrete results, the troops would have to encircle the Armenian villages and prevent the peasants' flight to their Kurdish protectors. This would force their submission and surrender of their leaders to the government. Without the display of military force and the prevention of the Sasun Kurds from helping them, the Armenian peasants could not be brought to heel.<sup>31</sup>

An imperial order was secured from the sultan for the dispatch of a company of troops to Sasun. Before the order would be put to effect, the sub-district governor was ordered to visit the region in person with a small group of gendarmes and investigate the political situation. He reiterated earlier statements about the impossibility of sending Muslim informants to the Armenian villages without fear of detection. After several days of staying in a near-by Muslim village, the sub-district governor reported that a thousand and five hundred Armenians surrounded their place of residence and harassed and insulted them.<sup>32</sup> Because of the disparity in their numbers, the sub-district governor and the gendarmes were compelled to leave the village the following day. Hnch'ak historian Kitur recounts a similar confrontation between the sub-district governor and the peasants. In his description, however, the sub-district governor attempted to hold several peasants prisoner in order to compel the Armenians to turn in the revolutionaries. The peasants overpowered and killed some of the guards where their neighbors were kept and liberated them.<sup>33</sup>

A *Hnch'ak* correspondent described another confrontation between teams of revolutionary bands and gendarmes. According to the former, a crossing called Devil's Bridge occupied a strategically vital position. Ottoman military authorities were hoping to use that

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<sup>31</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, Assistant-Director of Correspondence of Genc to the District-Governorate of Genc, 1 June 1894

<sup>32</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, Sub-District-Governorate of Kulb to the District-Governorate of Muş, 3 July 1894

<sup>33</sup> Kitur, *Patmut'iwn*, 140-2

crossing to move large numbers of troops into the region in order to bring Armenians to heel. The bridge had fallen into disrepair over the past decades, and government officials dispatched workers to repair the bridge, and gendarmes to guard the workers. The revolutionaries killed seven gendarmes in an ambush and drove the workers to flight in the spring of 1894.<sup>34</sup> Hnch'ak historian Kitur embellishes the narrative a bit further by adding the detail of the planting of the red Hnch'ak flag at the crossing as a challenge to the government authorities.<sup>35</sup>

While it is quite probable that the sub-district governor did not include his provocation of the peasants in his description of the events, it is highly unlikely that he did not report the killing of several gendarmes to his superiors. The entire administrative hierarchy including the governor, district governor, and palace officials displayed a keen interest in identifying Sasun as a zone of Armenian rebellion. They were interested in adopting a military solution to force the Armenian peasants to submit to extortionary arrangements with the pastoralist Kurds from Silvan and to accede to frequent government searches and arrests. An actual attack by the peasants with several casualties from the gendarmes would have provided the government with a pretext for the adoption of military measures. As will be explained later in the chapter, the government utilized a variety of discursive strategies to justify its conduct, but the killing of gendarmes was never mentioned, despite the fact that it would have significantly bolstered their argument.

By the beginning of the summer, it was established in the official parlance that the presence of armed Armenians in the mountains and the Talori Armenians' refusal to pay taxes had amounted to the preliminary stages of a general Armenian rebellion. After local authorities identified the peasant mobilization as a rebellion, the Palace ordered the dispatch

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<sup>34</sup> "Sasuni Abstambut'iwně" [The Sasun Revolt] *Hnch'ak*, 12 (1894) 23 October 1894

<sup>35</sup> Kitur, *Patmut'iwn*, 142-3

of two additional companies of troops, not only for the preservation of order and safety, but the “detention of the rebels dead or alive” (*fesedenin hayyen ve meyyiten derdesti*).<sup>36</sup> The sub-district governor’s aforementioned estimates of three to four thousand Armenian men in the designated areas had been transformed into estimates of three to four thousand armed rebels in the mountains of Sasun by mid-August. In other words, any Armenian of the designated Sasun villages, who was capable of bearing arms, had become a rebel from the perspective of the government.

### **A Powerful Lesson: The Massacre**

A company of troops had been sent to the region in late June. However, the orders of the company were not clear. On the one hand, it was expected to pursue rebels in the mountains. If all Armenian men capable of bearing arms were to be designated as rebels, though, a company of troops was unlikely to prevail over thousands of peasants. In the meantime, local government officials continued to investigate the identity of the revolutionary leaders, and the amount of arms the Armenian peasants possessed. In early July, reports of armed peasant patrols were supplemented by sightings of a group of well-armed “black-hats” (*siyah kalpaklılar*).<sup>37</sup> The reports differentiated between the armed peasants and the black-hats, who were held responsible for instigating the Armenians.

In addition to the Armenians, the local officials were concerned about their sedentary Kurdish lords, who had continued trading with them. Hişman Ağa of Sasun and Hüseyin Ağa of Hiyan were noted in particular for their reluctance to isolate the Armenian peasants. The

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<sup>36</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 155/14, The Palace to the Ministry of the Interior, 11 June 1894

<sup>37</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, Governorate of Bitlis to the District-Governorate of Genc, 1 July 1894. It is likely that the officials were referring to the Caucasian-style *kalpaks/papakhs*, which many revolutionaries wore; For an insightful exploration of the importance and dynamics of garb and representation in the Armenian revolutionary movement (and the latter popularization of the Sasun dress) see Elke Hartmann, “Shaping the Armenian Warrior: Clothing and Photographic Self-Portraits of Armenian *fedayis* in the late 19th and early 20th Century,” *Fashioning the Self in Transcultural Settings: The Uses and Significance of Dress in Self-Narratives* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Komissio, 2015) 117-148

implication was that Muslim peasants and pastoralists were not to trade with the Sasun Armenians as they had been designated as rebels and troublemakers. Not only did the sedentary Kurdish lords refuse to isolate the Armenians, they openly claimed that the Armenians were their clients and under their protection, therefore would not pay taxes to the government (*bu Ermeniler bizim reaya ve himayemizdedirler devlete akça vermeyeceklerdir*).<sup>38</sup> The government's attempted isolation of Armenians was also mentioned on the pages of *Hnch'ak*. Letters from Muş and Sasun claimed that the government had placed the Armenians under a virtual siege after the summer of 1893, and called for material aid to the region as the government continued to contract the flow of food and provisions to the region.<sup>39</sup>

Before the mobilization and arrival of the reinforcements, the local officials secured discretionary funds from the provincial budget and risked the dispatch of two Muslim informants to the Armenian villages in order to determine the exact number of armed Armenian peasants, and verify sightings of "black-hat" revolutionaries. On July 27th, Mehmed Said, a Muslim peasant from Hiyan, wrote a long report of his findings. After having traveled between several Armenian villages including Semal and Tapik, both of which were considered within the zone of revolutionary sedition, the informant and his companion were heading towards Geligüzan, when they came across a large group of approximately one hundred armed men, whom they initially mistook for imperial troops. The armed men encircled them and took them captive shortly thereafter. Although a revolutionary wanted to kill the two hostages, Armenian peasants interceded on their behalf.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/8, Sub-District-Governorate of Sasun to the District Governorate of Muş, 22 July 1894

<sup>39</sup> "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 2 (1894) 25 November 1893; "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey], 8 (1894)

<sup>40</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/8, Mehmed Said in the village of Tapik in Sasun to the District-Governorate of Muş, 27 July 1894

Some among the armed Armenians proceeded to hurl insults at Şeyh Mehmed, the sheikh that had led pastoralists against the Sasun Armenians previously, the Ottoman state and Islam.<sup>41</sup> Others claimed that Sasun had now become Armenia. After a few rounds of physical abuse and insults, the Muslims were compelled to take an oath not to report what they had seen to the authorities, and were released by the armed band. According to Mehmed Said, the majority of the armed band consisted of peasants from the near-by Armenian villages, although there were five Russian Armenians among them. He also received news of a proposal by one of the revolutionaries to organize an attack against the imperial troops that were stationed near Semal and Şenik. However, the peasants rejected the proposal, because they were not powerful enough to withstand a direct confrontation against the government. Soldiers and government officials would crush their families and children easily. Mehmed Said concluded his report by claiming that although the armed band they had encountered consisted of approximately a hundred fighters, the Armenian villages in the region could produce up to two thousand armed men.<sup>42</sup>

The sub-district governor in Sasun recruited an Armenian informant from Kulb. He was instructed to travel to Sasun under the guise of a discontented peasant, who had ignored a government subpoena issued in his name. The Armenian informant reported that he had encountered an armed band of about forty Armenians with breech-loading rifles from whom he had learned that Armenians of several villages had packed up their belongings and retreated to Mount Antok. They maintained a couple of supply lines for provisions and ammunition.<sup>43</sup> What the informants' and government officials' reports neglected to mention was the aftermath of the clashes of the yesteryear. It is more than likely that the Armenian

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<sup>41</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/8, Mehmed Said in the village of Tapik in Sasun to the District-Governorate of Muş, 27 July 1894

<sup>42</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/8, Mehmed Said in the village of Tapik in Sasun to the District-Governorate of Muş, 27 July 1894

<sup>43</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/8, Sub-District-Governorate of Sasun to the District Governorate of Muş, Undated

peasants packed their valuables and retreated to the mountains in order to prevent a repetition of the Kurdish pastoralists' looting in the summer of 1893. For local government officials, however, the Armenians' retreat to the mountains with their valuables was a sign of rebellion.

At this point, government officials also displayed little interest in preventing clashes between the pastoralists from Silvan and the Armenian peasants. In fact, the Fourth Army Command pointed to the former ban on the pastoralists' access to the pastures of Sasun as the underlying reason for the Armenians' audacity to commit seditious acts to the civilian administration of the region (*tertib-i mefşedete cüreti Bekran aşiretinin Talori içinden memnu'iyet-i mürurlarından neşet eylediği*).<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the pastoralists were encouraged to travel through Sasun for their yearly migration in 1894. Months later, a letter by Armenag Ghazarian in *Hnch'ak*, which provided an account of the violence and massacre in Sasun, would report that imperial troops simply stood by as waves of pastoralists attacked the peasants in the mountains in the first half of August.<sup>45</sup> The clashes were fierce with numerous casualties on both sides. Unlike the clashes of yesteryear, however, the Armenian peasants held their ground before the pastoralists, who failed to break their defensive lines. The pastoralists took several of their dead to the troops stationed near-by and protested their passivity.<sup>46</sup> Some Armenian peasants as well as the first report in *Hnch'ak* stated that dozens of soldiers had participated in the attack in Kurdish garb.<sup>47</sup>

The Ottoman military's assault on Sasun would begin almost three weeks later on August 24. The company, which was encamped near Semal, was deemed insufficient for such

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<sup>44</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/8, District-Governorate of Muş, 5 August 1894

<sup>45</sup> "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey] *Hnch'ak*, 1 (1895)

<sup>46</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 153/5, Muş Command to the Fourth Army, 23 August 1894; FO, 424/178, no. 339, Consul Graves to Ambassador Currie, Inc. 1, Vice-Consul Hallward's report. The vice-consul interviewed several of the soldiers, who had participated in the assault.

<sup>47</sup> The Armenian peasants' resistance against the Kurdish pastoralists was memorialized, and reinterpreted as an uprising by contemporary Armenian opponents of the Hamidian regime as well as later generations of Armenian intellectuals and writers. For a representative example, see Armenag Ghazarian's description of the clashes, "Namakner T'urk'iyayits'," [Letters from Turkey], *Hnch'ak*, 1 (1895)

a major undertaking. Once Sasun was defined as a zone of rebellion, two additional companies with mountain artillery from the Fourth Army were called up from Erzurum under the leadership of Colonel Tevfik Bey. They were ordered to destroy all the rebels in the region.<sup>48</sup> The “rebels”, however, were not only the revolutionary leaders or members of armed peasant patrols. The entire Armenian peasant population, which had retreated to the mountains and were estimated at around three to four thousand, were designated as rebels.

The reinforcements reached Muş on August 23rd. Although the initial plans were for the dispatch of about two thousand troops to the region, the companies that arrived in Muş numbered around seven hundred. Nonetheless, the reinforcements were ordered to proceed immediately to Talori in order to subdue the Armenians, while orders were sent out to neighboring provinces to dispatch additional troops and a company from the Hamidian regiments. The sultan gave his aides-de-camp a *carte blanche* (*mezuniyet-i kamile*) for measures they considered necessary in the eradication of the rebels.<sup>49</sup> They reached the outskirts of Mount Antok, where the majority of the Armenian peasants of Şenik, Semal and Geligüzan had sought shelter, on August 26th. Colonel Tevfik Bey reported that the Armenians, who had stayed in the villages of Şenik and Semal, fled at the sight of the Ottoman troops. The troops continued on to encircle Mount Antok, and were making preparations to prevent the formation of a line of retreat for the Armenians once the troops began their ascent.<sup>50</sup>

Two days later, the Fourth Army Field Marshal Zeki Paşa informed that Palace that the Armenians in the mountains offered no resistance to the imperial troops and scattered in

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<sup>48</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 153/5, Governorate of Bitlis to the District-Governorate of Muş, 22 August 1894. The governor was forwarding instructions given to the Fourth Army; Mehmed Arif Efendi, one of the imperial aides-de-camp, forwarded the dispatch of these orders to the sultan. BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, 24 August 1894

<sup>49</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, 24 August 1894. Mehmed Arif Efendi and Derviş Paşa were among these officers.

<sup>50</sup> Zeki Paşa wrote in one of his telegrams to the Palace that the Armenians had dispersed at the sight of the imperial troops. BOA, Y. EE. 153/115, Fourth Army Command to the Palace, 28 August 1894.

terror based on reports he had received from Tevfik Bey. The troops had ascertained that the majority of the Armenians fleeing from the mountain were women, children, or unarmed male peasants. There was a small band of “foreigners” in military garb under the leadership of a revolutionary named Murad, whose current whereabouts were unknown. In response to this information, the Palace reiterated its original orders in even stronger language, commanding the pursuit of fleeing Armenians – still referred to as rebels – and their immediate destruction without taking prisoners so as to constitute a powerful lesson for Armenian evildoers (*bu eşkıyanın iltica ve istimanlarına mahal ve meydan verilmeksizin hem 'en ve seri 'en cümlesinin mahv edilmesi...cümlesinin Ermeni erbab-ı mefşedetine ibret-i müessire olacak suretde mahv ve izalesi*). Not all the rebels were to be killed, however. The aforementioned “foreigners”, or the actual band of revolutionaries under the leadership of Murad were to be captured alive (*ecnebilerin nerede olduklarının behemehal tahkikiyle hayyen elde edilmesi*).<sup>51</sup> The survey of Mount Antok and the wholesale killing of all encountered “rebels” were completed by the end of the day and reported back to the Palace.<sup>52</sup>

At this point it had become clear that the peasants, despite their vastly superior numbers to the troops, displayed no interest in clashing with the troops. The troops, on the other hand, were divided into small bands in order to pursue and kill Armenians wherever they encountered them. The only armed group of peasants were encountered to the south of Geligüzan, and completely destroyed. Colonel Tevfik Bey was now ordered to advance on the villages of Geligüzan and Talori in order to search for remaining “rebels,” whom they would immediately destroy to the last man (*bir ferd kalmayıncaya kadar behemehal mahv edilmesi*).<sup>53</sup> It is noteworthy that the Palace repeatedly reiterated its orders to destroy the

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<sup>51</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 153/142, Fourth Army Command to the Palace, 30 August 1894; Aide-de-camp Bekir Sıdkı Bey confirmed the dispatch of these orders. BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, 30 August 1894

<sup>52</sup> Mehmed Arif Efendi reported that orders had been relayed to the Muş command for the destruction of the rebels to the last man. BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, 1 September 1894

<sup>53</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, Mehmed Arif Efendi's report, 1 September 1894



Armenians in the mountains *after* it was informed that the overwhelming majority were unarmed and attempting to flee the imperial troops.

On August 31st, a group of Semal peasants under the leadership of their priest Der Ohannes sought clemency from the advancing troops. The men were separated from the women and children, and interrogated. They were asked about the number and condition of the other Armenians in the mountains, and about the identities of the revolutionaries. After gathering the testimonies of the peasants, Colonel Tevfik Bey reported the incident to Field Marshal Zeki Paşa.<sup>54</sup> Upon the reception of Zeki Paşa's telegram, the Palace reiterated its orders for the killing of all rebels without any exceptions (*bila istisna*).<sup>55</sup> Lieutenant General Edhem Paşa, who was stationed in Muş and was responsible for relaying information to and from colonel Tevfik Bey in Sasun, attempted to intervene. Tevfik Bey stated that he was going to arrange for the execution of the peasant prisoners as he had received orders not to take any prisoners during the military operation. Edhem Paşa objected to his plan, claiming that the execution of unarmed prisoners would facilitate the spread of anti-Ottoman propaganda and tarnish the reputation of the state. Tevfik Bey did not relent; he stated that he had received his orders from Field Marshal Zeki Paşa himself, and if Edhem Paşa objected to his conduct, he could discuss the situation with him. The peasants were executed that night.<sup>56</sup>

The execution of the peasants, and more importantly its reporting by a lieutenant general in the imperial army heightened the regime's anxieties about the long-term implications of the military operation. That a high-ranking military officer would report an

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<sup>54</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 153/147, Fourth Army Command to the Palace, 31 August 1894

<sup>55</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 153/157, The Palace to the Fourth Army Command, 31 August 1894

<sup>56</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 155/14, Lieutenant General Edhem Paşa to the Palace, Undated. Edhem Paşa was ordered to provide a report on what he knew about the assault into Sasun shortly after the capture of Hampartsum Boyajian. He reiterated the correspondence between himself, colonel Tevfik Bey and Zeki Paşa, and confirmed that both Tevfik Bey and Zeki Paşa ordered the execution. He claimed that he had not heard of any other atrocities committed by the troops, that the Armenian villages had been torched by the pastoralist Kurds, and that the troops had otherwise acted in good discipline against the Armenian "rebels"; BOA, Y. EE. 155/14, Lieutenant General Edhem Paşa to the Palace, Undated.

atrocities *during* the operation shook the regime's confidence that it could control the flow of information about the "powerful lesson". On September 2nd, the Palace sent out orders to the effect that women, children, and unarmed peasants were not to be harmed. What the previous telegrams had emphasized, the new order stated, was that only armed rebels, who were fighting against the state, were to be killed. Any official, who disobeyed this most recent order to cease killing peasants, would be held responsible in the future. The new order also inquired as to how small teams of imperial troops had managed to prevail over much larger groups of rebels in the mountains without any casualties.<sup>57</sup>

Of course, the Palace had been aware previously that earlier reports of thousands of "rebels" in the mountains were referring to the Armenian peasants of Sasun. The district-governor of Muş had been replaced immediately before the beginning of the assault into Sasun. Celal Paşa, who was the new appointee to the position, repeatedly wrote to the palace to object to the military and civilian officers' conduct against the Armenians. He reported that the Armenians had offered no resistance to the troops, that their property had been looted by the pastoralist Kurds, and that reports of an Armenian rebellion were wildly exaggerated. His reports went unheeded.<sup>58</sup>

However, Edhem Paşa's report dispelled the established designation of the Sasun peasants as rebels. Edhem Paşa was a high-ranking officer, whose disagreement with the conduct of the operation could be consequential. If the earlier orders to kill all of the "rebels" without taking prisoners were not rescinded, the Palace would have implicitly reaffirmed its orders for the massacre of unarmed peasants without any plausible deniability. In other words, Edhem Paşa's acknowledgement of the fact that the Armenian peasants were not military

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<sup>57</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 156/7, The Palace to the Fourth Army and the Fourth Army Command, 1 September 1894

<sup>58</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 153/36, District-Governorate of Muş to Aide-de-Camp Derviş Paşa, 26 August 1894. The newly appointed district governor would request his assignment to another post; BOA, Y. EE. 156/39, District-Governorate of Muş to the Palace, 5 September 1894

combatants deprived the Palace of the possibility to deny its knowledge of the extent and ferocity of the anti-Armenian violence in the future.

Any discerning official would be able to comprehend the fundamental change about the Palace's approach to the military operation. The following day, the governor of Bitlis stated that he had not been notified before the execution of the Armenian peasants. He claimed that it was done under the knowledge and orders of Colonel Tevfik Bey and Field Marshal Zeki Paşa.<sup>59</sup> On the same day, Zeki Paşa left his post in Erzurum to travel to Sasun in person and oversee the conclusion of the operation.<sup>60</sup> From this point onward, the operation focused primarily on the capture of the revolutionary band, which was initially suspected to have included "foreigners". On September 6th, Hampartsum Boyajian was besieged in a cave with his followers. After several hours of clashes, the revolutionary band was compelled to surrender to the authorities along with a few breech-loaded rifles, explosive materiel, and personal writings. Boyajian and his comrades' capture marked the end of the Ottoman assault into Sasun.<sup>61</sup>

### ***In Accordance with Islam and Humanitarianism: The Official Reports***

On September 7th, a joint report was prepared by Colonel Tevfik Bey, Colonel İsmail Bey, and the sub-district governor of Genc that provided a timeline of the "rebellion" and the military assault on Sasun. The report reframed the clashes between the Kurdish pastoralists and the Armenian peasants as a pre-conceived assault by the latter against the lives and property of Muslims. The peasants, who were able to carry and use arms, were deceived by a small group of evildoers and convinced to attack Muslims and insult Islam. The deceased among the Muslims included a pastoralist notable from the Bekranlı tribe and others, whose

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<sup>59</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 156/1, Governorate of Bitlis to the Palace

<sup>60</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 156/4, Fourth Army Command to the Palace, 2 September 1894

<sup>61</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 156/57, District-Governorate of Muş to the Palace, 6 September 1894; Mehmed Arif Efendi provided the details in his report. BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, Mehmed Arif Efendi's Report, 8 September 1894

bodies had been mutilated before they were returned. Since the company that had been stationed within the vicinity of the village of Semal at the beginning of the summer was deemed insufficient to stop the “rebels” attacks, they were ordered to hold. Their numbers were bolstered to three battalions, three mountain guns, and cavalry with the arrival of reinforcements from Muş, and marched on Semal.<sup>62</sup>

At the sight of the Ottoman military assault, the “rebels” broke into small groups and escaped into the wilderness. The troops only met with brief resistance at the village of Geligüzan some time later, when a group of some thirty peasants attempted to stop them. Several of the peasants were killed on the spot, while the remainder were driven from the village. The officers were joined by the sub-district governor of Genc at this location. The troops marched on to the wards of Talori while destroying bands of “rebels” they encountered on the way. After encountering no resistance in the wards of Talori, they pursued and destroyed scattered groups of Armenians in the nearby hills. The operation was concluded by the final siege of the cave, where Hampartsum Boyajian and his revolutionary band had sought refuge. This was the only other instance when the troops were met with resistance. The revolutionaries were soon forced to surrender, and captured alive.<sup>63</sup>

According to the report, the imperial troops suffered no losses during the operation. The officers attributed this to the inferior weaponry the Armenians possessed. Their muzzle-loaded rifles had a much shorter range than the breech-loaded rifles with which the troops were equipped. The final section of the report touched on the conduct of the troops with regard to Armenian women and children. It was stated that “the women and children, who were encountered during the military operation, were treated with the cordial conduct dictated by Islam and humanitarianism (*İnsaniyet ve İslamiyet icab ettirdiği*)” thanks to the exemplary

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<sup>62</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, Joint Report by colonels Tevfik and İsmail Beys and the District-Governor of Genc İbrahim Bey, 7 September 1894

<sup>63</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, Joint Report by colonels Tevfik and İsmail Beys and the District-Governor of Genc İbrahim Bey, 7 September 1894

discipline and order of the imperial troops. The “rebels” were utterly bereft of any further hope of revolution or rebellion after their total defeat and destruction.<sup>64</sup>

A separate report was compiled by Zeki Paşa. He arrived in the region at the conclusion of the Ottoman assault on Sasun in early September. He stated that the “foreigners” and the “black-hats” that were mentioned in earlier reports referred to Boyajian and his revolutionary band. At the time of the compilation of his report, Boyajian had already been interrogated in Muş. According to Zeki Paşa’s report, Boyajian had admitted to having disguised himself as a European to fool the naive peasants of Sasun, and had promised them that the British would assist them with reinforcements that would arrive in hot air balloons. Boyajian had started the revolt by convincing the peasants to move their families and valuables to the safe heights of mount Antok and organizing attacks against pastoralists that had migrated to the pastures of Sasun for the summer. Although the eventual plan was to descend on Muş, raid the military depot, and expand the zone of rebellion, the rebels were intimidated at the sight of imperial troops stationed nearby. Instead, they formed armed bands, which were tasked with organizing raids and ambushes against the pastoralist tribes of Bekranlı and Badikanlı. After several Muslims were killed in these attacks, the reinforcements were dispatched from Muş and the rebels were confronted by the imperial troops.<sup>65</sup>

In its description of the assault on Sasun, Zeki Paşa’s report was more detailed than the earlier report. It mentioned the successful maneuver to block the Armenians’ line of retreat by a platoon on the outskirts of Geligüzan. The platoon was able to destroy the majority of the “rebels.” When the troops reached the wards of Talori, they encountered six hundred “rebels” preparing for a defense. Having decided that the women and children had

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<sup>64</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 172/16, Joint Report by colonels Tevfik and İsmail Beys and the District-Governor of Genc İbrahim Bey, 7 September 1894

<sup>65</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 157/26, Zeki Paşa to the Palace, 16 September 1894; A copy of the report was forwarded to the sultan by aide-de-camp Mehmed Arif Efendi. BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, 16 September 1894.

already been evacuated, the officers ordered the shelling of the wards by the mountain artillery, destroying more than half of the “rebels”. During this clash, four troops were killed and ten were wounded. On September 5th, a group of Armenians, who surrendered to the troops, informed the officers of the location of the cave where Hampartsum Boyajian and his comrades were hiding. The troops besieged the cave, and were met with resistance. After a day of fighting, the mountain guns were brought to the vicinity and fired at the entrance of the cave to compel the revolutionaries to surrender. Realizing that further resistance would result in their deaths, Boyajian and his followers gave up their arms, surrendered, and were promptly taken to Muş, where they were interrogated. Zeki Paşa, who had personally ordered the execution of the unarmed peasants of Semal, added that the military operation was conducted in accordance with Islam and humanitarianism. A few villages, including Geligüzan, had been burned by the Armenians themselves so that the imperial troops would not be able to reside in the region during the snow season. However, women and children, who had been hiding in the mountains, were slowly coming back to their home villages. Thus, Zeki Paşa declared that the rebellion of the Armenian evildoers, who had not been paying any taxes to the government for eighteen years, had been crushed in such a way as to cast a powerful lesson to all other Armenian evildoers elsewhere.<sup>66</sup>

The reports shared several important features. It was implicit in both reports that any male Armenian capable of carrying arms had been declared a rebel at the beginning of the assault. In order for the designation to be justified, the Armenian peasants were represented as having engaged in an indiscriminate wave of attacking and murdering Muslims, pastoralists and travelers alike. The context of the killings of Muslims, the clashes of 1893, and the previous ban on the Kurdish pastoralists’ access to the pastures of Sasun were not mentioned in order to bolster this view. Furthermore, there was no reference to what had happened to the

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<sup>66</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 157/26, Zeki Paşa to the Palace, 16 September 1894

pastoralists after the beginning of the assault. In other words, their participation in the attack against the Armenians was omitted in order not to lend credence to accusations of governmental encouragement of Kurdish attacks on Armenians. Finally, the surrender and the subsequent execution of the unarmed peasants of Semal under the guidance of their priest were not mentioned. According to both reports, the imperial troops had not committed any atrocities and had made every effort to supply the Armenian women and children with provisions during the course of the military operation.

However, there was a major point of divergence. While the initial report of the officers that led the assault did not mention any casualties, and specifically stated that no Ottoman soldiers had been killed, Zeki Paşa asserted that six soldiers had been killed. The first instance was when the remaining peasants of Talori attempted to defend their villages against the incoming troops. After a brief firefight, the Ottoman officer ordered the shelling of the village. The other casualties occurred when the troops were attempting to ensure the surrender of Boyajian and his comrades. There are two explanations for the major difference. It is possible that colonels Tevfik Bey and İsmail Bey wanted to emphasize the total “success” of the military operation they conducted, and lied about not having suffered any losses. On the other hand, it is likely that Zeki Paşa inserted military casualties into the narrative of the operation at the only possible intervals in order to solidify the fiction that the Armenians had indeed rebelled and killed imperial troops. In any case, Zeki Paşa’s report of the casualties would trump the earlier report on this front, and his casualty figures became part of the Ottoman standard narrative.

### **The Aftermath**

News of the massacre and the rampant looting and burning of Armenian villages reached the Palace and the Porte through various means. On September 16th, the governor of Diyarbekir reported that the pastoralists, who had participated in the attack against Sasun, had

started returning to the province. They were openly claiming that they had acted under imperial orders to massacre Armenians and boasting about the number of people they killed. They also sold some of their loot in open markets in Silvan. According to the governor, the pastoralists had been invited to participate in the attack either by the colonel at the the head of the imperial troops or the sub-district governor of Genc. Their open talk of massacring Armenians and looting their property had terrified Christians and emboldened the ignorant among Kurds (*Hristiyanların havf-ı vahşetini ve cühela-ı Ekradın cüretini mucib olduğu*). The governor reported news of Kurdish pastoralist raids on Armenian villages in Silvan, and their plans to attack and rob non-Muslims of the town itself. Since the gendarmes stationed in Silvan were not adequate in numbers and did not possess enough ammunition to fight the pastoralists, the governor requested that orders to contain the pastoralists' aggression be sent to the necessary military authorities immediately.<sup>67</sup>

Once news of the violence reached the British Embassy in Constantinople in late September, Vice-Consul Hallward in Van was immediately dispatched to visit Muş, Bitlis, and Sasun itself.<sup>68</sup> The Palace was wary of British interest in what had transpired in Sasun. Orders were sent to the Fourth Army Corps at the beginning of October to prevent the British viceconsul of Muş from engaging in any activities that might embolden Armenian evildoers.<sup>69</sup> The Palace did not want foreign diplomats to see the destruction of Sasun; reports from the region in early October still mentioned groups of starving women and children in the mountains whose "rebel" husbands had been killed during the assault. The vice-consul was stopped when he attempted to set out for Sasun from Muş. Government officials informed him that a recent cholera outbreak had been contained with a strict quarantine.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 159/91, Governorate of Diyarbekir to the Palace, 16 September 1894

<sup>68</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 157/79, Governorate of Van to the Ministry of the Interior, 27 September 1894; FO, 424/178, no. 242, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 9 October 1894.

<sup>69</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 157/92, The Palace to the Fourth Army Command, 1 October 1894

<sup>70</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 242, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 9 October 1894



The vice-consul was stalled for several days, before it became clear that he would not be able to visit the district before the arrival of the snow season, which would make extensive travel in the mountains impossible. When the viceconsul attempted to interview Armenian peasants and clergymen in Muş, they refused for fear of government retribution.<sup>71</sup> Zeki Paşa proudly reported that “the British had been the greatest refuge of Armenians. Previously, they [the Armenians] would persist in conglomerating around and acclaiming any man with a top hat. The fact that now they act in such a way [refrain from speaking with him] and that the acting prelate informed the military of the viceconsul’s designs ... testifies to the intensity of the terror caused by the recent military operations”.<sup>72</sup> In the meantime, the governor of Bitlis had the viceconsul followed by his agents, and kept the Palace informed of his plans.<sup>73</sup>

In the light of increasing international attention, the Palace ordered the compilation of a detailed report on the lead-up to the “Talori affair”. On October 6, Zeki Paşa submitted a longer report than his previous one. The new report reframed Armenian “sedition” in Sasun as a decades-long project. Twenty years ago, the Armenians of Sasun had succeeded in acquiring the protection of the sedentary Kurds of Hiyan and Sasun, whose ignorance and savagery knew no bounds (*vahşet ve bedeviyetleri son mertebede bulunan*), by presenting themselves as loyal clients. After achieving this goal, they started petitioning the state and the Patriarchate through the intercession of the seditious priests of St. Karapet Monastery (*Çanlı Kilise*). They represented themselves as the victims, and cast the pastoralists of Silvan, who had traditionally used the pastures of Sasun in the summer, as their oppressors. Government officials were fooled by the trickery of the Armenians and imposed a ban on the pastoralists’ access to Sasun without realizing the malicious intent of the Armenians. As a result, the Armenians multiplied in numbers, and established seventeen prosperous villages and wards in

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<sup>71</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 283 Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, inc., Vice-Consul Hallward to Ambassador Currie, 9 October 1894

<sup>72</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 158/16, Fourth Army Command to the Palace, 9 October 1894

<sup>73</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 158/3, Governorate of Bitlis to the Palace, 2 October 1894

the region with some immigrants from the Muş plain. During the course of those twenty years since the ban on the pastoralists' access to the pastures of Sasun, the Armenians never paid taxes to the government. A similar report compiled by Colonel İsmail Bey, who also joined the troops at the conclusion of the operation, expanded on Zeki Paşa's narrative, adding that the sedentary Kurds of Sasun had been fooled into defending the pastures of Sasun Armenians in exchange for tribute.<sup>74</sup>

According to Zeki Paşa, it was for this aforementioned tradition of Armenian sedition and the mountainous geography of the region that the provocateurs decided to make Sasun the abode of sedition (*darü'l-fesad*). First Mihran Damadian, then Hapartsum Boyajian established themselves as leaders of a revolutionary committee and worked towards the organization of an Armenian rebellion that would encompass not only Sasun, but the Muş plain and the cities of Bitlis and Van. He represented himself as a European, and fooled the naive people of Sasun into thinking that the British would assist them with battalions of soldiers, who would arrive in hot air balloons, if they rose in rebellion. He sent messengers to the Muş plain and Armenian villages of Silvan to invite the Armenians of those regions to join the rebellion. In July 1894, he ordered the abandonment of the villages and the retreat into the mountains to signal the revolt's beginning. The rebels' plan was to destroy the Muslim populace that stood in their way, march in full force to Muş, raid the arms depot of the army, and distribute modern weaponry to Armenian peasants. After killing several Muslims and mutilating their bodies, their plot was foiled by the imperial troops. The Ottoman force delivered such a heavy blow to the rebels, that it had become impossible to imagine Armenian sedition in Sasun any more. The total number of those killed from the rebels was approximately one thousand.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 158/8, Zeki Paşa to imperial aide-de-camp Mehmed Arif Bey, 6 October 1894

<sup>75</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 158/8, Zeki Paşa to imperial aide-de-camp Mehmed Arif Bey, 6 October 1894

Zeki Paşa's second report was as telling of the violence inflicted on the Armenian peasants of Sasun as it was of Hamidian perceptions of and anxieties regarding Armenians writ large. The Field Marshal dated "sedition" in Sasun fifteen years before the formation of the Armenian revolutionary parties, and five years before the Treaty of Berlin, which internationalized the "Armenian Question". Past Armenian attempts at maintaining control of their pastures and preventing pastoralist incursions were reframed as insidious efforts to "increase their numbers" in defiance to the state. In other words, Armenian presence and control over land was represented as a matter of state security. It was not revolutionary organization or even peasant mobilization that transformed Sasun into a zone of crisis in this representation. Rather, the ability of Sasun Armenians to navigate local socio-ethnic relations and tensions, and establish themselves as a social and economic force among others placed them beyond the pale of obedient imperial subjecthood. Undoubtedly, Zeki Paşa's account of the "history" of Armenian "sedition" in Sasun was a retrospective attempt at justifying the terrible violence inflicted on Sasun Armenians. Nonetheless, his choices in the construction of that "history" and its representation to the Palace are telling of the Hamidian identification of Armenians as a potential demographic threat.

Moreover, the absence of foreign interference in the peasant mobilization or revolutionary movement in Sasun was compensated by the claim that Boyajian had presented himself as a European to the peasants, and promised them British aid with hot air balloons. It is difficult to determine whether Zeki Paşa expected his claims to be taken at face value. After all, Boyajian used the *nom de guerre* "Murad," lived among the peasants and communicated with them in Armenian for an extended period of time, and possessed no credentials to convince the peasants of the imminent arrival of squadrons of British hot air balloons to destroy the Ottoman troops. Furthermore, there is no explanation as to why Boyajian and the peasants retreated to the mountains and placed themselves under a virtual siege by the

pastoralists during the only season when extended travel was possible in the region, if they had originally planned to sack Muş. Nonetheless, the recasting of Boyajian as a cynical nihilist, and the employment of the trope of foreign intervention served to justify the tremendous violence inflicted upon the peasants. For the first time since he had announced the conclusion of the military operation, Zeki Paşa stated that approximately a thousand “rebels” had been killed. A few days later, Derviş Paşa, an aide-de-camp of Sultan Abdülhamid II, would state that approximately an additional thousand had perished due to their wounds since the conclusion of the military operation.<sup>76</sup> Despite their use of the term “rebel,” there was no doubt at this point that both officers were referring to the Armenian peasants of Sasun.

Despite Ottoman attempts to curb the flow of information, the British Embassy in Constantinople soon compiled its own narrative of the events. The British ambassador forwarded the intelligence to the Foreign Office on October 15th. The report started with demographic information on Sasun and its surroundings. Sasun Armenians, “unlike those of the lowland districts, are a fierce and warlike race, hardly distinguishable from their Kurd neighbours, who exercise a sort of feudal authority over them, but do not, as a rule, oppress them further than by levying taxes on them, and requiring their help as vassals in their feuds and quarrels with the local authorities.”<sup>77</sup> According to the ambassador, the troubles dated back to the summer of 1893, when pastoralists from neighboring districts appeared in the pastures of Sasun in great numbers and raided Armenian flocks and plundered their villages. Although the governor of Bitlis blamed the episode on Armenian sedition, the ambassador concluded that local government officials had encouraged the pastoralists to attack Sasun based on intelligence he had received from the British consul in Erzurum. The tensions remained high throughout the year, and Armenians expelled a local official that came to collect taxes

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<sup>76</sup> Mehmed Arif Bey relayed this information to the sultan. BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, 9 October 1894

<sup>77</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 260, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 15 October 1894

from their villages.<sup>78</sup> This, according to the ambassador's report, was what had prompted the governor of Bitlis to report exaggerated claims of Armenian rebellion in the mountains, and the Palace to order the dispatch of imperial troops to restore order. Although Hamidiye regiments were also called up for the military operation, the Palace rescinded its orders after the British ambassador warned Ottoman officials about the diplomatic repercussions of the employment of ill-disciplined militias.<sup>79</sup>

By the end of October, the Palace had lost control of the flow of information on the massacre of Sasun Armenians at the hands of the imperial troops. Rumors of direct orders from the Palace to the Fourth Army for the destruction of all Armenian rebels in Sasun, which was correctly interpreted to be a euphemism for the massacre of all men capable of carrying arms, circulated among European diplomatic circles. On November 1st, the British Embassy submitted a memorandum to the sultan's chief secretary on the massacre, the recruitment of the Kurdish pastoralists in the assault, and the necessity of the creation of an independent commission to assess the responsibility of military and civilian officials that oversaw the affair.<sup>80</sup> Two days later, Sultan Abdülhamid II responded, and expressed his "horror and sorrow" regarding the British report. He claimed that he had had no knowledge of the events, and would order an internal inquiry to determine the veracity of the British account and the culpability of the governor of Bitlis.<sup>81</sup>

In the meantime, the Palace had sent out summaries of the British report to the governor of Bitlis and Field Marshal Zeki Paşa. The former was asked if the allegations were true about his recruitment of pastoralists in collusion with the Kurdish notable Şeyh Mehmed. An explanation was demanded if the governor had truly recruited pastoralists, and he would

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<sup>78</sup> This was a slightly different narrative of the sub-district governor's attempts to collect information about the Armenians in mid-July. FO. 424/178, no. 260, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, October 15 1894,

<sup>79</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 260, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 15 October 1894

<sup>80</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 277, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 2 November 1894

<sup>81</sup> FO, 424/ 178, no. 278, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 3 November 1894

be held responsible.<sup>82</sup> The governor responded two days later, and blamed the colonels commanding the troops during the operation for the recruitment of the pastoralists and the execution of unarmed peasants. Over the course of the next two weeks, he sent two additional telegrams claiming that he was the victim of a British-inspired Armenian conspiracy to which his Muslim rivals within the bureaucracy had given support.<sup>83</sup>

Unlike the governor, whose personal responsibility was implied, Zeki Paşa was ordered to determine those responsible.<sup>84</sup> He was told that the British report mentioned Kurds selling their loot in the Muş market, while survivors of the massacre still remained hidden in the mountains for fear of further violence. Zeki Paşa responded a week later, affirming that at the beginning of the “rebellion,” there were mutual killings of Armenians and Kurdish pastoralists. Furthermore, Kurdish pastoralists had been employed during the military operation as local guides due to their knowledge of the terrain. Other pastoralists had been tasked with the provisioning of the troops. The Field Marshal claimed that the total number of pastoralists that had been with the troops during the operation was around seventy to eighty.<sup>85</sup> Since, however, the pastoralists had previously been insulted and attacked by the Armenians, they held a grudge against them. It was possible that some pastoralists killed “rebels here and there” during the operation, although it could not be verified. However, the military had not engaged in any undesirable conduct, and had not massacred any women, children or loyal subjects. It was more likely that the content of the British report was entirely made up of rumors and fabrications.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 160/95, The Palace to the Governorate of Bitlis, 2 November 1894

<sup>83</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 160/90, Governorate of Bitlis to the Palace, 4 November 1894; Y. EE. 160/71, Governorate of Bitlis to the Palace, 14 November 1894

<sup>84</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 160/95, The Palace to the Fourth Army Command, 2 November 1894

<sup>85</sup> This would amount to approximately ten percent of the troops that had participated in the assault and the massacre.

<sup>86</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 160/44, Fourth Army Command to the Palace, 20 November 1894

Zeki Paşa attributed the growing foreign interest in the affair to three factors. First, Armenians, as they had always done, had fabricated stories of atrocities in order to make themselves seem like victims to European observers. Second, the local Muslims, who did not understand the interests of the state and wanted revenge on the Armenians, proudly accepted the veracity of these rumors and reproduced them as their own to others. Finally, the civilian officials such as the governor of Bitlis and the district governor of Muş had not bothered to travel personally to the region during a crisis of life and death for the imperial crown, and relied on the reports of strangers like journalists. Neither the governor nor the district governor appreciated the dire circumstances surrounding the crisis.<sup>87</sup>

The Palace had been contacting local civilian and military officials on a daily basis at the height of the crises in 1893 and 1894. With the possible exception of the number of pastoralists that had been attached to the imperial troops during the assault and massacre, the Palace was already in possession of detailed reports regarding all of the aforementioned information. In addition, imperial medals and decorations had been conferred on Colonel Tevfik Bey, Field Marshal Zeki Paşa, and others, who were precisely the officials responsible for the atrocities committed against the Armenians.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, Edhem Paşa, who blew the whistle on the execution of the unarmed peasants that had surrendered to Colonel Tevfik Bey's forces, and Celal Paşa, the district-governor of Muş, who reported on the recruitment of pastoralists by the governor and the massacre of Sasun refugees at the hands of marauding Kurds, were both dismissed and assigned to other posts.<sup>89</sup> In other words, the Palace had not only collected most of the available information, but also made its priorities clear by bestowing favors and revoking positions of power.

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<sup>87</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 160/44, Fourth Army Command to the Palace, 20 November 1894

<sup>88</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 160/44, Fourth Army Command to the Palace, 20 November 1894

<sup>89</sup> Zeki Paşa had requested that medals and decorations be awarded to the officers, who had participated in the attack on Sasun. BOA, Y. EE. 157/44, Fourth Army Command to the Palace, 18 October 1894; The British Ambassador reported news of the medals and decorations in one of his reports to the Foreign Office. FO, 424/178, no. 410, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley

Then why did Sultan Abdülhamid II order the compilation of these new reports? It can be speculated that the sultan wanted to maintain the fiction that he had not been aware of the shape and extent of the violence inflicted upon the Armenians. After all, this view was common among British diplomats throughout the crisis as their local sources also pointed the finger at the governor of Bitlis. Considering the leaks within the bureaucracy, he might have guessed that news of the inquiry would reach British ears and would afford him some more time in withstanding British pressure. Second, the sultan might have wanted to notify the leading civilian and military officials on the ground about the accusations they were facing in the guise of an inquiry. Both Zeki Paşa and Tahsin Paşa would then be able to develop cogent counter-narratives in response to what the British knew about the massacre as they subsequently did.

### **The Commission of Inquiry**

Despite the Hamidian regime's efforts to stop the flow of information about the massacre, British diplomats continued to gather intelligence regarding the atrocities. In fact, Ottoman government officials of high position and standing admitted confidentially that hundreds of Armenians had been killed by imperial troops. Foreign Minister Said Paşa, for example, confirmed the occurrence of a massacre in Sasun, and blamed Tahsin Paşa for the whole affair.<sup>90</sup> Initially, the Palace submitted a memorandum to the British Embassy, which defended the conduct of the imperial troops. The memo stated that the troops had only employed "summary punishment" against armed rebels. Furthermore, it placed Armenians in the same group of global socio-political undesirables as "Nihilists, Socialists, and Anarchists," claiming that the Ottoman government simply followed European precedence in its policy towards Armenians. Sultan Abdülhamid II cited the examples of British conduct during and after the 1857 Rebellion in colonial India and the Urabi Revolt in Egypt. The same

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<sup>90</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 290, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 10 November 1894



memorandum, which cast the Armenians as political renegades, however, then went on to claim how generous Ottoman dynasty had been to its Armenian subjects. Armenians were not and had never been oppressed since the establishment of Ottoman rule over them. The only explanation for the unfavorable reporting on Ottoman rule was Armenian sedition.<sup>91</sup>

On the ground, the governor of Bitlis made an abortive attempt at portraying the visiting British viceconsul of Van as an accomplice of the Armenian revolutionaries, who was touring the region in an effort to collect “fake” complaints and facilitate foreign intervention. The regime briefly entertained the possibility of confronting the British Embassy and casting further doubt on the veracity of the consular reports. An unsigned paper was compiled at the Porte, which was undoubtedly drawn together at the behest of the Palace and stated that “Vice-Consul Hallward had gone as far as to urge the Armenians to rise against the Imperial Government.”<sup>92</sup> Ambassador Currie retorted that the allegations were very serious, and would necessitate the opening of a British-led inquiry of not only the viceconsul’s alleged connection to the revolutionary movement, but also the Sasun affair itself. The military attaché of the Embassy was ordered to prepare for a journey to the region to survey Sasun and investigate the veracity of the governor’s claims.

The Palace’s diplomatic offensive turned out to be a major blunder. The threat of a British-led inquiry shook the confidence of the Palace. Foreign Minister Said Paşa was dispatched to the Embassy to personally request that the military attaché’s mission be stopped. The Palace rescinded its allegations and ordered the creation of its own commission to investigate the “Sasun affair.”<sup>93</sup> The commission consisted of four members, imperial

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<sup>91</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 294, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 4 November 1894, inc. Undated Memorandum

<sup>92</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 289, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 9 November 1894

<sup>93</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 298, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 16 November 1894

aides-de-camp and middle-rank officials from the Ministry of Justice and Religions.<sup>94</sup> The Palace's efforts were not sufficient for the British. They continued to push for the immediate dispatch of an independent commission of inquiry, which would be accompanied by representatives of the Great Powers.<sup>95</sup> In the meantime, the British Foreign Office was in contact with representatives of the Great Powers, some of whom (the Austrian and Russian representatives especially) were wary of the prospect of a new "question" that would necessitate their involvement in Ottoman affairs.<sup>96</sup> After a month of negotiations, during which the Palace attempted to deny Britain a position of primacy in the eventual outcome, a compromise was reached. The ambassador accepted the sultan's proposal on the condition that British, French and Russian delegates from their consulates in Erzurum would be present in the commission's hearings of witnesses and officials in accordance with Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin.<sup>97</sup>

There were considerable differences between the British and Ottoman views of the mandate of the commission of inquiry. For the British, the commission had not only been created to investigate what had transpired in the summer of 1894. It was meant to uncover the reasons for the tensions between the Armenian peasants and Kurdish pastoralists as well as the conduct of the imperial troops before and during the assault. Furthermore, the consular

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<sup>94</sup> The original members were changed after the confirmation of the commission's mission for undisclosed reason. For the original commission see FO, 424/178, no. 352, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, Inc. "Circular addressed to Turkish Ambassadors at Foreign Courts"

<sup>95</sup> The British demands were both communicated to the Ottoman Foreign ministry through the Embassy and the Ottoman ambassador through the Foreign Office. FO, 424/178, no. 304, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 18 November 1894; FO, 424/178, no. 317, The Earl of Kimberley to Ambassador Currie, 22 November 1894.

<sup>96</sup> The British ambassador in Vienna reported that the Austrian Foreign Ministry was skeptical of the mandate of any commission of inquiry so long as punishment could not be meted out to Ottoman officials, who were found guilty. FO, 424/178, no. 424, Ambassador Monson to the Earl of Kimberley, 11 December 1894; Similarly, neither the French nor the Russian ambassadors were interested in involving themselves in the affair at the level of their consuls. The Russian ambassador to Great Britain informed the British Foreign Secretary that the Russian Empire was primarily interested in the containment of the crisis as Armenian revolutionaries had also started to establish themselves there. FO, 424/178, no. 435, the Earl of Kimberley to Ambassador Lascelles (St. Petersburg), 12 December 1894

<sup>97</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 442, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 14 December 1894

delegates would “indicate the places and methods of carrying on the investigation” and “appear at all the proceedings of the commission.” They also retained the right to keep their own records of the proceedings and the testimonies, and produce their own reports to their respective governments if they disagreed with the conclusions deduced by the Ottoman members of the commission.<sup>98</sup> Confidentially, the British delegate was tasked with determining which, if any, Ottoman civilian or military officials had been implicated in the massacre.<sup>99</sup>

The Palace compiled a list of instructions for the commission. They were ordered to prevent any action by slanderous foreigners and Armenian evildoers, who would relish such an opportunity to tarnish the honor of the state. The members of the commission were to defend the rights of the sultan in accordance with their loyalty, wisdom, and military honor.<sup>100</sup> Mehmed and Şefik Beys of the commission, who were already at Muş at the time, were sent a telegram in early January in which it was stated that “imperial confidence in the ability and will of the members of the commission to defend the holy rights of the sultanate was complete”.<sup>101</sup> The Palace viewed the primary function of the commission to be the whitewashing of the Sasun massacre in front of an international audience without lending any credence to Armenian accounts. While obligatory references to impartiality and justice were made, the members of the commission were reminded of their duty to protect the honor and reputation of the imperial troops and the imperial throne, under whose orders the former had massacred the Armenian peasants of Sasun. At least two members of the commission were given substantial payments of two-hundred Ottoman *liras* in advance for their participation and services in the commission of inquiry.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 538, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley

<sup>99</sup> FO, 424/178, no. 538, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley

<sup>100</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 28 January 1895; BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 2 February 1895.

<sup>101</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 6 January 1895

<sup>102</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 25 December 1895

The Ottoman members of the commission and the consular delegates gathered in Muş at the end of January. During the first hearing, the delegates stated that they would not participate in the hearings and declare the investigation null and void if the governor were not suspended from his post. Although Sultan Abdülhamid II had shown considerable resolve at protecting his governor in Bitlis until the beginning of the commission hearings, British diplomatic pressure prevailed, and Tahsin Paşa was dismissed two days after the first meeting.<sup>103</sup>

Nevertheless, the Palace maintained a tight grip on the conduct of the commission members and the shape of the proceedings in the months to come. There was almost daily direct contact between the commission members and the Palace. Directives from the Palace repeatedly prioritized the “preservation of the interests of the imperial throne, the sacred rights of the Caliphate, and the honor of the military” and ordered the commission members to take all necessary measures to invalidate Armenian “slander” in front of the consular delegates.<sup>104</sup> Such measures included the coaching of Muslim civilian and official witnesses before their testimonies as well as the doctoring of official reports. For example, in his initial report to the commission of inquiry, Colonel Tevfik Bey had stated that Kurdish pastoralist notables had accompanied the imperial troops during the attack on Sasun. Some of them served as scouts, while others oversaw the provisioning of the army during the operation. The colonel claimed that the Kurdish pastoralist notables and their followers burned the Armenian villages. Members of the commission forwarded the mention of this “unnecessary” information to the Palace. They also requested permission to demand another report from the colonel, which would confirm their previous “findings” that there were no Kurdish pastoralists among the imperial troops during the operation, and that the Armenians had set

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<sup>103</sup> FO, 424/181, no.80, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 28 January 1895

<sup>104</sup> An example can be found in the Palace’s telegram to the commission dated 12 February 1895. BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 12 February 1895

fire to their own villages. The permission was given along with promises of further payments of 200 *liras* to each commission member in exchange for the favorable conclusion of the inquiry.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the pragmatic underpinnings of the Great Powers' intervention and the openly anti-Armenian instructions and conduct of its Ottoman members, the commission of inquiry produced a unique and extensive collection of information about Sasun. Over the course of the next three and a half months, the commission and the delegates heard over two hundred witnesses, including Armenian survivors of the massacre, members of the revolutionary band in Sasun, Muslim civilian and military officials, and Kurdish pastoralists and peasants. While the Ottoman records were kept in the form of direct transcripts (translations if the witness delivered their testimony in Kurdish or Armenian), the British records summarized what the delegate considered "pertinent" aspects of the testimonies with occasional direct quotations. Although the former transcripts sometimes omit the questions that were asked to the witness, it is possible to extract the commission members' questions and interjections from the changes in the witnesses' tones and narrative flows. The latter occasionally refers to the commission members' interrogative methods, when they are deemed influential on the testimonies themselves.

### **The Armenians**

The Armenians of Sasun faced insurmountable challenges in delivering their testimonies to the commission. While many of the survivors of the massacre had avoided detention at the government prison, they were under severe economic and emotional distress. Some survivors did not know anything about the fate of their loved ones,<sup>106</sup> while others, who

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<sup>105</sup> BOA, Y. EE 66/8, The Commission of Inquiry to the Palace, 16 March 1895; The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 17 March 1895; The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 18 March 1895

<sup>106</sup> FO, *Correspondence Relating to the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey: Turkey, No. 1 (1895), Part 2: Commission of Inquiry at Moush: Procés-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*. (London: 1895) Proces-Verbal, no. 19; BOA, Y. EE. 168/2, Íctima' 19, 15 February 1895

had lost their families during the massacre, had turned to begging on the streets of Muş for sustenance.<sup>107</sup> Even the members of the commission, whose hostility to the peasants was evident in both their private reports to the Palace and conduct during the proceedings, noted the affect of the appearance of impoverished Armenian peasants before the commission in rags.

On top of these difficulties, the Sasun Armenians faced considerable pressure from the authorities. While the recently dismissed governor of Bitlis had established a reputation for indiscriminate detention of Armenian notables for spurious charges as well as petitions of Armenian gratitude for imperial mercy and compassion through the forced collection of signatures, his successor was compelled to use a slightly varied strategy. In addition to intimidation, which a few of the witnesses were brave enough to mention in front of the commission, the officials also tried to bribe Sasun Armenians as well as Armenian notables of Muş to testify in support of the government narrative. The Palace made available a budget of one-hundred-thousand *kuruş* to the commission members in order to “return false witnesses to the path of truth.”<sup>108</sup> (*ecnebilerin parayla celb ve tedarik eyledikleri yalancı şahidleri tarik-i istikamete irca’ için*) A week later, the Palace altered the instructions on how to use these funds, stating that they were meant to alleviate the suffering of Sasun Armenians.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, it is very likely that receipt of aid from the government was contingent upon the delivery of pro-government testimonies for Armenians.

One of the most comprehensive testimonies from Sasun came from an Armenian peasant named Erko from the village of Şenik. The sixty-year-old man spoke in some detail about his interactions with government officials in the past few years. He was briefly detained in the Muş prison for the disappearance of Hurşid, who had been killed by the revolutionaries.

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<sup>107</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V, no. 20; BOA, Y. EE. 168/2, İctima’ 20, 16 February 1895

<sup>108</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 16 April 1895

<sup>109</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 22 April 1895

After he was released, he continued to travel frequently to Muş to bring food for his son and brother, who had also been imprisoned in Muş after their payment for the flock tax (*ağnam resmi*) was deemed inadequate.<sup>110</sup> The peasants of Şenik paid additional taxes to some of the pastoralists from Silvan (Bekranlı, Hoşkanlı, etc.) as well as the sedentary Kurds of Sasun.<sup>111</sup>

Erko was in Şenik during the summer of 1894. In the early summer, pastoralists from the Bekranlı tribe came to their village. They told the Armenian peasants that the government had declared them outlaws (*fermanlı*) and ordered their massacres. The sedentary Kurds of Sasun had also been approached by military officers and ordered to join the attacks. However, Hişman Ağa of the Sasun Kurds refused, and therefore imprisoned by the government. The Bekranlı told the peasants that they would spare their lives in exchange for a cash payment of two-thousand *kuruş*. The peasants told them they would actually pay the taxes they owed to the government if they had the cash, and offered butter and milk instead as they had done over the past couple of years. The Bekranlı refused and started attacking the village the following day.<sup>112</sup>

The peasants retreated to Mount Andok in response and organized under their village headmen in order to drive the pastoralists away. Their advantageous location allowed them to hold their positions. At one point during his testimony Erko claimed that the peasants dispersed at the sight of the arrival of large numbers of imperial troops from surrounding regions. At another point, he stated that the pastoralists were supported by soldiers during the ten-day period when the peasants were defending themselves at Mount Antok. When they started scattering in different directions, the imperial troops pursued them relentlessly and killed many of them. Seven people from Erko's extended family were killed.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/1, İctima 7, 1 February 1895; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V 7, 1 February 1895

<sup>111</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/1, İctima 7, 1 February 1895

<sup>112</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/1, İctima 7, 1 February 1895

<sup>113</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/1, İctima 7, 1 February 1895

Sako, who was another Sasun Armenian from Şenik, mentioned a joint attack of pastoralists and soldiers before the arrival of the main force from Muş under Colonel Tevfik Bey's command. According to him, the company, which was stationed in the proximity of Semal, had established relations with the Armenian peasants, and was supplied with provisions by the villages of Şenik and Semal throughout the summer. Once the pastoralist attack began, the troops soon joined them and many of the peasants retreated to the mountains, although the elderly and unattended children were left behind. Both villages were set on fire by the attacking troops, who encountered no resistance from the terrified peasants. The survivor expressed his shock at the involvement of the troops, whom they had talked to and provided food with for weeks, in the destruction of their homes.<sup>114</sup>

Tavo of Semal also provided a detailed account of what had transpired, which confirmed the aforementioned testimonies. He claimed that some of the Semal peasants had been forced to retreat to the mountains at the end of July, when the pastoralist assault began. Similarly, the Bekranlı had come to him, and demanded a cash payment in order to spare the lives of his kinsmen. He refused. Throughout the summer, government officials and soldiers passed through his village without trouble. After the pastoralists started attacking the village, however, the soldiers joined and set fire upon the houses. When he was asked whether he was sure that the soldiers had burnt the villages and killed the peasants, Tavo replied "The killers are the soldiers, soldiers! Not anyone else. Several of my children are starving. Others were killed. This is what ails me. I do not know why the soldiers killed us for no reason."<sup>115</sup> He protested strongly at the suggestion that the Armenians had burned their own homes, claiming that they simply do not possess the means to reconstruct their homes on such a wide scale. He turned to the commission members and asked "If we burnt our own houses, who killed us

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<sup>114</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/1, İctima 19, 15 February 1895; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V 19, 15 February 1895

<sup>115</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/2, İctima' 19, 15 February 1895



with the bayonet?... We have no custom of burning our own homes and rebuilding them. We have told you a thousand times, you only need to come see it once.”<sup>116</sup>

However, the most shocking part of Tavo’s testimony pertained to the peasants of Semal, who had sought refuge among the troops and were executed en masse. After a couple of days of fleeing from the pursuing troops, the priest of Semal suggested that they turn back and surrender openly. Tavo refused for fear of being put to death. Approximately three hundred people including women and children descended from the hills and surrendered to the troops. According to Tavo, the priest’s eyes were gouged before he was put to death. The other men were separated from the women and children, and were executed and dumped into pits. The women were handed over to the rank-and-file, who raped many of them.<sup>117</sup> Although he did not witness this event, he mentioned a teenager, who survived and explained to him what had happened to the peasants, who surrendered. The teenager delivered his own testimony two weeks later and stated that the colonel ordered the Armenian men to dig the trenches where they were later bayoneted. He survived by hiding under two corpses after a soldier wounded him with a bayonet.<sup>118</sup>

Ovak’s damning testimony placed the commission members in a very difficult position. In order to invalidate the teenager’s description of the massacre, the commission members ordered the conduct of a medical examination of his wounds to determine whether they had been caused by a bayonet like he claimed. The doctors, who were employed by the Muş municipality, shortly submitted a report to the effect that the wounds had been caused by a searing metal object no longer than three months ago. This directly contradicted the teenager’s account, and was represented by the commission members as evidence of his

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<sup>116</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/2, İctima’ 19, 15 February 1895

<sup>117</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/2, İctima’ 19, 15 February 1895; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 17, 15 February 1895

<sup>118</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/2, İctima’ 19, 15 February 1895; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 17, 15 February 1895

slander.<sup>119</sup> The members of the commission wrote to the Palace that they would utilize “scientific” methods to invalidate Armenian claims a week later. The quickly compiled medical report was undoubtedly an example of such methods.<sup>120</sup>

Although the testimonies of the Armenian men from Sasun definitively pointed to the soldiers and the pastoralists as the authors of the massacre, commission members maintained that they should not be regarded as reliable witnesses as they had recently participated in a rebellion against the state. This argument was weakened and repeated once women from the affected villages of Sasun started to petition the commission to deliver their testimonies.<sup>121</sup> Maryam of Geligüzan, for example, did not only describe the violence inflicted upon her family members, neighbors, and their homes, but also the pressures they faced from the local authorities. Even the gendarmes stationed at the door of the hall, where the witnesses were being heard, did not refrain from attempting to influence their testimonies through threats. Maryam exposed a gendarme lieutenant, who had threatened her with imprisonment if she did not shift the blame of the massacre and the destruction of the villages to the pastoralists. When the commission confronted the witness and the gendarme, she repeated her accusation with the exact words the officer had told her. The lieutenant was dismissed from guard duty.<sup>122</sup>

On the same day, thirteen women from the village of Semal “reached the presence of the Commission with some difficulty.”<sup>123</sup> Several of them delivered their testimonies over the course of the next few days. Their testimonies converged on several important facts: they all testified to the murder of the priest of Semal and the mutilation of his body, their separation from their fathers, husbands, and brothers upon their surrender, and the subsequent killing of

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<sup>119</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 22, 19 February 1895

<sup>120</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Commission of Inquiry to the Palace, 25 February 1895

<sup>121</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 43, 16 March 1895

<sup>122</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/4, *İctima*’ 57, 4 April 1895; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*. P-V. 57, 4 April 1895, P-V. 58, 5 April 1895

<sup>123</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*. P-V. 57, 4 April 1895

the men, which lasted for several hours as the fatally wounded screamed for help throughout the night.<sup>124</sup> Maryam of Semal told the commission that several soldiers came among the women, raped the ones they could get their hands on as the women attempted to escape.<sup>125</sup> Commission members attempted to interrupt the harrowing accounts of the women by attempting to determine inconsistencies in the minutiae of their testimonies such as the color of the soldiers' caps or the exact distance between the mass graves of the peasants of Semal and the colonel's tent.<sup>126</sup>

The persistence and courage of the Sasun Armenians were deeply troubling for the Ottoman members of the commission, who had been tasked with the invalidation of Armenian "slander". To that end, the commission called on Armenian peasants and priests from the Muş plain to testify against the Sasun Armenians. The former claimed that Hampartsum Boyajian had goaded the peasants of Sasun to start attacking their Muslim neighbors and preparing for a rebellion against the state. He had fooled them into thinking that they would be aided by the British in these efforts. The peasants believed the revolutionary's promises, and did not hesitate to burn their villages when they were ordered to do so.<sup>127</sup> One of the priests provided a more comprehensive account of Armenian "sedition," which grouped Damadian and Boyajian's efforts at organizing revolutionary committees with Armenian petitioning spearheaded by Nerses Karakhanian, a bishop who was imprisoned in the early 1890s.<sup>128</sup> The priest was called on again a few days later to testify on the massacre of the peasants of Semal, who had surrendered. He claimed that the peasants had had no intention of surrendering, but to collect information on the troops in order to organize an ambush. The priest's testimony

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<sup>124</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/5, *İctima'* 61, 8 April 1895; *İctima'* 62, 9 April 1895; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 61, 8 April 1895; P-V. 62, 9 April 1895

<sup>125</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/5, *İctima'* 61, 8 April 1895; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 61, 8 April 1895

<sup>126</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/5, *İctima'* 61, 8 April 1895

<sup>127</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 34, 5 March 1895; P-V. 35, 6 March 1895; For other examples, see BOA, Y. EE. 168/3, *İctima'* 42, 14 March 1895

<sup>128</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 11, 6 February 1895

was received with great enthusiasm at the Palace. The following day, the commission was thanked for its efforts and promised future rewards upon their return to the imperial capital as “they will have done an unforgettably great service to the religion of Islam, the people of faith, and our majestic sovereign, who is the protector of religion and the abode of the Caliphate.”<sup>129</sup>

Despite the immense difficulties they faced during and after the massacre, Sasun Armenians came before the commission in considerable numbers, and described what the soldiers and the pastoralists had done to them. Undoubtedly, they foregrounded their own priorities over those of the Ottoman officials, often denying any knowledge of Hampartsum Boyajian or the revolutionary movement. They also knew that any person, who associated with him and his band had been declared rebels and imprisoned, and most likely thought that any mention of their personal contact with him would have invalidated their testimonies. Despite the heavy-handed manipulation of the commission members and the overbearing involvement of the Palace itself, the Sasun Armenians irreparably damaged the government’s narrative. They also described, in detail, the web of tributary arrangements with the Kurds and abusive treatment at the hands of government officials, which had driven many of them to deter Kurdish incursions through reciprocity.

### **The Muslims**

A large number of Muslims also delivered testimonies before the commission. Some were notables of Muş, who claimed knowledge of widespread Armenian “sedition,” which had spread to Sasun in the recent years. These accounts served the function of affirming the official government narrative that Armenian sedition was widespread in the town as well as the countryside. Furthermore, the notables claimed that they had heard that Hampartsum Boyajian had fooled the Armenians to rebel against the state and attack their Muslim

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<sup>129</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Palace to the Commission of Inquiry, 6 February 1895

neighbors, that the Armenian peasants burned their own villages before their retreat to the mountains, and that the troops did not engage in any kind of violence against unarmed peasants.<sup>130</sup> Nonetheless, these testimonies were evidently based on what the witnesses had heard from third parties. Over the course of the inquiry, the commission called on other Muslims to deliver more cogent evidence of Armenian “sedition.”

Some of the other Muslim witnesses hailed from the tribes of Kurdish pastoralists. Derviş bin Maksun of the Badikanlı claimed that the pastoralist tribesmen and the Armenian peasants had cordial relations and traded with each other until recently. He claimed that Armenian peasants from many villages in Sasun owed him money and/or sheep without explaining the terms or the conditions of this debt arrangement. In the summer of 1893, he had traveled to the region to collect some debts and saw that a man was being chased by two Kurds and a gendarme. The man turned out to be Mihran Damadian, whom some Armenian peasants tried to free. Derviş bin Maksun intervened and convinced the peasants to back down. On his return journey, he was ambushed by a group of Armenians, who robbed him. The Armenians continued to carry a grudge against him, and raided his flock on the pastures. His son was wounded by the attackers, and died of his wounds three months later. He reported these attacks to the government and requested their intervention. Another man from the Badikanlı affirmed the Armenian attack on the pasture and claimed that there had been no conflict between the pastoralists and the peasants in the previous years. He claimed that Boyajian had been responsible for convincing the Armenians to attack them.<sup>131</sup> Other witnesses from the Badikanlı also claimed that most of the Armenian men from Sasun, who testified before the commission, had participated in the attack against them.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> For Talib Ağa of Muş, see BOA, Y. EE. 168/1, İctima’ 12, 12 February 1895; For Nadir Ağa of Muş, see FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 13, 13 February 1895

<sup>131</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/2, İctima’ 27, 25 February 1895

<sup>132</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/2, İctima’ 28, 26 February 1895

There were three Muslim witnesses from the village of Geligüzan, which was otherwise recognized as an Armenian village. One of these witnesses, Reşid, claimed that Boyajian had initially told his followers to kill him, because he was Muslim. His Armenian neighbors interceded on his behalf and told him that they would make him Christian in due time. When Reşid was asked by the commission to describe Boyajian's stature, he said that he was a short man, but did not know anything else about his physical features as he had seen him from a distance. Boyajian encouraged the Armenians to burn their homes before their retreat to the mountains. Once they reached the heights, the Armenians organized small bands among themselves to ambush and kill the pastoralists on the pastures. Reşid's testimony also included important details such as the death of the priest of Semal in a clash against the pastoralists. The other Muslim witnesses from Geligüzan recounted an experience of forced conversion at the hands of their Armenian neighbors. After the Armenians had been convinced by Boyajian that they were about to found a new country, they forced the two Muslims in the village to go to the church. They were shaved ritualistically and forced to don a crucifix around their necks while they were paraded around the village. Both witnesses claimed that Boyajian had told the Armenians that he was about to become the "king of Armenia," and that they would have to burn their houses in order to create Armenia.

Another Muslim, who was from Sasun and testified in front of the commission, was Hişman Ağa. He was one of the notables of the sedentary Kurds. The sedentary Kurds of Sasun, whose close relations with the Armenian peasants had troubled government officials for several years, had refused to stop trading with the Armenians and offered no assistance to the imperial troops. As a result, the troops detained and delivered Hişman Ağa to the authorities in Muş. He had been imprisoned in Muş for several months, where he had shared

his story with some of the Armenian inmates.<sup>133</sup> In stark contrast to his previous conduct, Hişman Ağa blamed the Armenian peasants for the entire episode in his testimony before the commission. He claimed that the Armenian had believed the promises of Boyajian, and followed him onto the mountains after burning their own villages. When Colonel Tevfik Bey tried to convince them to surrender to the imperial troops, they refused and told him to fire his guns and cannons at them and their children instead. When the troops prevailed over the Armenians, the latter dispersed and sought refuge among the sedentary Kurds of Sasun as well as the pastoralist tribes, who “the Armenians themselves knew, are wont to care for women and children, even those of their enemies, as if they were roses.”<sup>134</sup> Hişman Ağa’s six-month spell at the Muş prison undoubtedly cast an overbearing influence on his testimony at the commission.<sup>135</sup>

Most of the Muslim witnesses at the commission were coached. The inclusion, for example, of the death of the priest of Semal during a clash in Reşid’s testimony was an attempt at casting doubt on the widely reported surrender and mass execution of the peasants of Semal. Hişman Ağa’s testimony similarly served the purpose of casting doubt on Armenian peasants’ testimonies, which mentioned his warnings to his Armenian clients regarding the impending assault of the military in July. Hişman Ağa was undoubtedly intimidated by his imprisonment in Muş and forced to turn on his Armenian clients and even accuse them of torching their own homes in exchange for his freedom. The coaching was as evident from the aforementioned introduction of false information as it was from the omission of context.

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<sup>133</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 23, 20 February 1895; P-V. 68, 17 April 1895; P-V. 69, 18 April 1895

<sup>134</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 41, 13 March 1895; BOA, Y. EE. 168/4, İctima’ 41, 13 March 1895

<sup>135</sup> Erko had testified to Hişman Ağa’s imprisonment earlier during the commission’s inquiry. FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 7, 1 February 1895; BOA, Y. EE. 168/1, İctima’ 7, 1 February 1895. The British Vice-consul had also reported on Hişman Ağa’s imprisonment for his refusal to participate in the assault; FO, 424/178, no. 390, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, inc., Vice-consul Boyajian to Ambassador Currie,

While the pastoralists' account of Armenian raids on their flocks and killing of their relatives was most likely correct, they neglected to mention the previous ban on their entry to the pastures of Sasun. Similarly, Kurdish pastoralist witnesses did not mention their collection of tribute from the Armenians. A Kurdish witness of the Badikanlı tribe simply denied the existence of any tributary arrangement between the pastoralists and the peasants, claiming that he did not know what *hafir* was!

### **The Officials**

Over the course of the inquiry, commission members called on local civilian and military officials to testify about their conduct before and during the assault into Sasun as well as their knowledge of Armenian "sedition" in the region. In fact, the inquiry began with the testimonies of two captains and two corporals from the company, which was stationed near Semal at the beginning of the summer. The officers asserted that the whole affair was set off by Armenian attacks on pastoralist tribesmen, who were tending to their flocks in pastures they had used for years. Before they commenced the attacks, the peasants of Şenik, Semal and Geligüzan abandoned their villages and gathered at Mount Antok. From there Armenians organized raids and stole sheep and oxen from the pastoralists, as a result of which the soldiers once intervened to restore the animals to their owners. The intervention appeared inconsequential, however, as the Armenians did not cease their harassment of the pastoralists and attacked them several times. While the officers claimed they did not know anything about casualties on the Armenian side, these attacks resulted in the killings of several Kurds. The relatives of the deceased came to the military camp, presented the mutilated bodies of their relatives, and complained about the passivity of the soldiers. By the middle of July, the Armenians had gathered at Mount Antok in large numbers and were lighting large fires every night. The officers heard rumors that the Armenians had decided to attack their encampment



and start a rebellion. Around the same time, a group of Armenians came down from the mountains, and torched their own villages.<sup>136</sup>

Among the civilian officials, the director of correspondence of the district-governorate of Genc also testified before the commission. He was tasked at the beginning of the summer to travel to Sasun and report on the conditions of the Armenians. During the commission's inquiry, Abdülmecid Efendi stated that he had witnessed the production of bullets and gunpowder among the Armenians. He also stated that he had heard from others that the Armenians had decided to torch their villages when they realized they would not be able to fight against the soldiers.<sup>137</sup> Another civilian official, who testified was Rakım Efendi, the sub-district governor of Sasun. He asserted that the Armenian peasants had stopped paying heed to government authority from 1893, even though a few of the villages (Şenik and Semal) paid taxes. In 1894, the peasants burned their homes, and withdrew to the mountains in preparation for a massive attack at the nearby company of imperial troops. It was only postponed because some of the peasants wanted to wait until after they had reaped the harvest. The sub-district governor claimed he had attempted to convince the peasants to cease from engaging in seditious affairs against the state before they retreated to the mountains to no avail.<sup>138</sup>

Although the aforementioned officials reproduced the Hamidian narrative within a reasonable degree of uniformity, the peasants' testimonies had damaged their credibility. Furthermore, the consular delegates requested the appearance of higher ranking government functionaries and military officers, who had either participated in the operation or in charge of civilian administration at the time of the massacre. The commission refused to call on the

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<sup>136</sup> See the testimonies of Captain İskender Ağa, Sergeant Saado and Gendarme Corporal Mecid, BOA, Y. EE. 168/1, İctima' 1, 29 January 1895

<sup>137</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/4, 23 March 1895

<sup>138</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/4, İctima' 52, 29 March 1895; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 52, 29 March 1895

district governor of Muş to testify, stating that as high-ranking a government official as he could not be expected to appear.<sup>139</sup> As a compromise, the commission called on colonel Tevfik Bey, who was the leading military officer during the assault and the massacre. As was mentioned earlier, the colonel received detailed instructions from the Palace and the commission about his testimony, and was coached beforehand by the commission members, possibly in preparation to the types of questions the consular delegates might have been expected to ask.<sup>140</sup>

Tevfik Bey's testimony is a remarkable testament to the Hamidian involvement in the reconceptualization of the Sasun massacre as a skirmish against rebels. In the presence of the commission, the colonel contradicted almost every facet and detail, which he had provided in his initial report to the Palace. He claimed that the imperial troops were attacked by the rebels upon their approach to the region. After breaking their defense lines, the troops marched towards Geligüzan, and camped outside the village for three days. During this period, the troops did not engage the rebels nor the peasants. The troops accepted the surrender of over a hundred rebels, who provided them with the location of Hamparsum Boyajian and his followers. There was another brief clash there, after which the revolutionaries surrendered. Tevfik Bey vehemently denied the massacre of unarmed peasants as well as the mass rape of the women of Semal. He denied that the troops had ever pursued Armenians to and from Mount Antok. He also denied the presence of Kurdish pastoralist notables amongst the troops during the entire operation. During the entire operation, fourteen soldiers were killed according to Tevfik Bey's testimony, while the bodies of nineteen Armenian rebels had been recovered. The colonel conceded, however, that Armenian casualties were probably higher.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 85, 13 May 1895

<sup>140</sup> "Our lowly commission will commiserate extensively with Tevfik Bey beforehand and will ask him appropriate questions in accordance with the imperial orders." BOA, Y. EE. 66/8, The Commission of Inquiry to the Palace, 27 April 1895

<sup>141</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 86, 14 May 1895; BOA, Y. EE. 168/9, İctima' 86, 14 May 1895

The construction and representation of Tefvik Bey's testimony epitomized the Palace's rebranding of a massacre as a minor skirmish through its local servants. Tefvik Bey's testimony completed a wholesale effort by the Palace, the commission members, and local civilian and military officials to represent the massacre of more than a thousand Armenian peasants as a disciplined and humanitarian measure. According to this view, the military operation was a determined and proportionate response to unprovoked Armenian attacks on neighboring Muslims, which in turn had been encouraged by a small group of cynical revolutionaries.

### **The Revolutionaries**

The revolutionaries were among the last witnesses to appear before the commission. They categorically denied allegations of encouraging Armenian peasants to rebel against the state or attacking any Muslims from the neighboring villages and regions. Ohannes, who was captured in the same cave with Boyajian after a clash with the soldiers, claimed that they had used their rifles solely for the purposes of hunting deer and goats in the mountains, and self-defense. He claimed that Boyajian's only advice for them and the people of Sasun was to stop the practice of paying bridewealth. Otherwise, Boyajian only practiced medicine in the mountains and the villages. When he was asked questions on the reasons of Boyajian's residence in Sasun, his means of communication with Armenian peasants, or how he had purchased the aforementioned weaponry, Ohannes simply retorted that he did not know.<sup>142</sup>

In contrast, Ohannes explained in detail the social and economic background to his decision to join Damadian and Boyajian's band. According to his testimony, Ohannes hailed from a family of Sasun peasants from the village of Hatin. After the murder of his grandfather and his three uncles by Kurds, Ohannes' father decided to settle in the village of Mighrakom

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<sup>142</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/9, İctima' 86, 14 May 1895. The Delegates' record of Ohannes's testimony simply indicates that he talked at some length about the misfortunes he suffered; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 86, 14 May 1895

in the Muş plain to avoid a similar fate. Through his hard work and toil, Ohannes's father came to possess a small field. However, worsening economic conditions and high taxes and tribute for the government and the Kurds forced his father to take some debts. He was not able to pay it with the one-hundred-percent interest in a year. This was followed by the "purchase" of Ohannes, his family, and their labor by a Kurdish notable. The *ağa* came to their home, told them that they belonged to him (*Ben senin ağanı, seni satın aldım*), and confiscated their oxen. Ohannes' father gave up farming, and sought work in Constantinople as a migrant worker.<sup>143</sup>

While he was away, the headman of the village started harrasing Ohannes and his family. He sought the help of a Muslim strongman from Muş to seize his family's land from him. Although Ohannes submitted a petition to the government at the time, which was six years ago, nothing came of it. At this point, Ohannes asked the commission "How could I feed children and a family under these circumstances? How could I pay taxes to the government? The Kurd demands a tax, too. He comes and confiscates my property every year, tells me he bought me!" As a result, he abandoned his home to seek work in Constantinople and Izmir. After spending a year in those cities, he met Damadian during his journey back to Muş. He joined Damadian's band and started living in the district of Talori. He avoided going back to his village for fear of the moneylenders and the Kurds.<sup>144</sup>

Hampartsum Boyajian's testimony was delivered over the course of three hearings. Like Ohannes, he denied any connections to a revolutionary society or a plot to encourage peasants to rebel against the Ottoman state. He came to Sasun simply as a medical doctor in order to assist a poor and wretched portion of Ottoman Armenia with his knowledge and expertise. As a responsible educated man, he also gave the peasants advice on their backward

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<sup>143</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/9, İctima' 86, 14 May 1895

<sup>144</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/9, İctima' 86, 14 May 1895

practices such as the collection of bridewealth at the time of marriages, and their tributary arrangements with the Kurds, as a result of which they were perpetually left in a state of poverty. Otherwise, he practiced his craft and took a small band of followers, who were armed, in order to protect him and themselves in a region known for frequent violent encounters. He claimed that he never fired his weapon on the soldiers, and complained about the frequent bouts of torture at the hands of his captors and the inhumane conditions of the jail he was detained in.<sup>145</sup>

Boyajian dedicated a considerable portion of his testimony to the tributary arrangement between Kurds and Armenians. He claimed that Armenians were obligated to make a motley arrangement of tributary payments to their Kurdish lords over the course of the year in exchange for safety of life, property, and honor against other Kurdish tribesmen. If the Armenian refuses to make any of these payments, the Kurdish lord would punish him as he saw fit, sometimes even killing him. Furthermore, the Armenian's yearly tribute was a tradable commodity among Kurdish lords. However, Boyajian claimed, "a man cannot pay two masters, for which reason Armenians of Talori had paid the Kurds for twenty years, and were forced to pay them still more." Furthermore, in the last several years many Kurds had withdrawn their protection of the Armenians while continuing to collect the tribute. All of these practices were widespread in the entire region. While the violence between the pastoralist Kurds and the Armenian peasants may have been triggered by the murder of an individual or an Armenian's refusal to pay tribute, it had its origins in the aforementioned developments.<sup>146</sup>

It was hardly surprising that both revolutionaries categorically denied having called on the peasants to join them in greater numbers and revolt against the state. Similarly, they

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<sup>145</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 168/10, *İctima'* 87-90, 15-18 May 1895; BOA, Y. EE. 168/11, *İctima'* 93, 21 May 1895; BOA, Y. EE. 168/12, *İctima'* 97, 100, 27 May 1895, 31 May 1895; FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 100, 31 May 1895

<sup>146</sup> FO, *Proces-Verbaux and Separate Depositions*, P-V. 100, 31 May 1895

denied having used weapons against the pastoralists or the soldiers as any admission of having done so ran the risk of invalidating their testimonies in front of the consular delegates. It is clear that none of the revolutionaries held any hope of swaying the Ottoman officials' opinions or judgments of them. Rather, they viewed the commission as a platform, much like the Ankara trial, where they would be able to expose the social and economic conditions, which had motivated them to join the Armenian revolutionary movement. As a result, both revolutionaries attempted to turn the inquiry on its head and condemn Ottoman authorities for allowing the continuation of Kurdish extortion of Armenian labor and wealth.

The commission of inquiry completed its investigation in June 1895. The Ottoman officials, however, failed to convince the consular delegates to approve their conclusions regarding Sasun: namely that many of the peasants had participated in a rebellion, that some burned their own villages in accordance with the orders of Hampartsum Boyajian, and that imperial troops acted in perfect discipline throughout the military operation. The consular delegates disregarded the Ottoman findings and prepared their own report, which questioned the blatant Ottoman disregard for Armenian grievances, and the authorities' insistence on the designation of Armenian armed response to Kurdish pastoralist incursions as a rebellion. However, the Ottoman formulation of the whole event as the orderly suppression of an armed rebellion precluded the identification and punishment of the officials and pastoralist leaders responsible for the massacre.

### **Conclusion**

Damadian's capture in June 1893 and his subsequent submission of information on the Armenian revolutionary movement attracted the attention of the Palace to Sasun. Tensions had escalated between the Kurdish pastoralists of Silvan and Siird, and the Sasun Armenians from the late 1880s, because government officials had revoked the ban on the Kurds' access to the pastures of Sasun. The Armenians had previously petitioned the government and the

Patriarchate as the pastoralists imposed additional levies on the peasants, and subjected them to physical abuse when their demands were not met. As the Sasun Armenians were already engaged in a tributary arrangement with several sedentary Kurdish tribes in their region, the pastoralists' demands had impoverished them.

The erosion of the ban signified the acquiescence/encouragement of civilian and military officials for the pastoralists to restore their levies on the Armenians. However, the Sasun Armenians responded by organizing armed bands and securing the assistance of a small group of revolutionaries with modern weaponry. In the summer of 1893, the pastoralists and Armenian peasants clashed for several days over control of the pastures. The pastoralists prevailed, and the peasants retreated to the safety of the heights, while their opponents looted their villages.

The pastoralist incursion into Sasun and the subsequent clashes coincided with the "Placard Affair," which had attracted international attention to the condition of Ottoman Armenians. Through its network of imperial aides-de-camp, direct contact with the governorate of Bitlis and the Fourth Army, the Palace ordered the swift de-escalation of the conflict. The governor traveled to the region and convinced the pastoralist notables to travel back to their wintering grounds with their loot without organizing any other attacks on the Armenians. Likewise, the peasants were ordered to return to their villages without further incidents. Nevertheless, the organized retreat of the Armenian peasants, and their armed defense against the pastoralists cast a strong influence over local and imperial officials.

Once international attention had shifted away from the Empire after "Placard Affair," the governorate of Bitlis started an investigation of Armenian "sedition" in Sasun. The investigation was aimed at determining three facets of Armenian influence and presence in the region. The first was the number of Armenians, who were capable of bearing arms. The second was the presence of the revolutionaries, who were simultaneously recognized as

“foreigners” or “black-hats.” The last was the ultimate motive of the peasants in their resistance to the pastoralists and their armed patrols. The local investigators estimated the number of Armenians capable of bearing arms at about three to four thousand, and reported a few sightings of a group of “black-hats,” who the locals were unlikely to surrender to the authorities. There was no consensus on the question of whether the Armenians intended and/or had the capacity to organize a rebellion against the government.

The presence of revolutionaries and the peasants’ armed mobilization against the pastoralists, however, were enough for them to be designated as rebels. At the beginning of the summer, reports of three to four thousand Armenians capable of bearing arms seamlessly changed into reports of three to four thousand Armenian rebels gathering in the mountains of Sasun. Since the threat of European intervention during the “Placard Affair” had been averted, the Palace ordered the demonstration of a “powerful lesson,” which would break the resolve of Armenian evildoers throughout the Empire at the onset of the military assault into Sasun. The pattern of the previous summer was initially repeated. The pastoralists attacked the Armenian villages en masse. The Armenians of Şenik, Semal and Geligüzan abandoned their villages and retreated to the mountains. However, this time the Armenians succeeded in inflicting heavier casualties on the pastoralists. The army was called in and initiated an assault into Sasun. The Armenian peasants offered no resistance to the incoming army and simply dispersed, clearly shocked at the army’s involvement in the conflict, barring a few cases where the peasants of Talori attempted a last-ditch defense of their homes and were shelled and killed by the troops. A coalition of imperial troops and Kurdish pastoralists proceeded to wreak havoc on the Armenians for the next two weeks. Field Marshal Zeki Paşa reiterated the theme of the powerful lesson in his first report after his tour of the region in the aftermath of



the massacre. He boasted that no attempt at sedition or insurgence would even be imaginable there any more.<sup>147</sup>

The Palace and its servants intended the manifestation of a singular lesson – public Armenian dissent and mobilization would be met with collective punishment and destruction – to a singular audience – Ottoman Armenians. Yet, both the massacre and its aftermath were events and processes of local, imperial and international significance. Therefore, the Sasun massacre engendered a divergent set of “powerful lesson”s for different audiences instead of a coherent and total lesson. These audiences can be broadly identified in three larger groups with their own sub-categories: the Muslims (government officials, notables, commoners), the Armenians (notables, commoners, revolutionaries) and foreign diplomats.

While the interests and plans of the Great Powers diverged on the point of the “Armenian Question,” the conduct of the Ottoman government during and after the Sasun massacre constituted a coherent whole for foreign observers. As far as the “Armenian Question” was concerned, the Palace remained committed to the simultaneous preservation of the fictions that Ottoman Armenians did not face structural problems and that Armenians – as a group – were akin to the political radicals of western Europe in their disregard for Ottoman authority. Any mention of “reform” regarding Armenians would be interpreted as a direct affront not only at imperial prerogatives, but its integrity and authority. The Great Powers would have to present a united front despite their multiplicity of interests and concerns regarding the Armenians if a reform proposal were to be forced on the Hamidian regime. Even then, the British ambassador presciently remarked that it would probably not suffice barring an outright military enforcement of its application.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> BOA, Y. EE. 97/53, Bekir Sıdkı’s summary of Zeki Paşa’s report, 30 August 1894

<sup>148</sup> “It must not, however, be expected that even with the co-operation of all the Treaty Powers the reform of the administration of Asia Minor would be an easy task. The Sultan, I am told, declared quite recently to a foreign Representative that nothing would induce him to introduce reforms into his Asiatic provinces, and it is not likely that he would yield without the employment force. If the attempt were made without being carried through to a successful issue, the position of the Armenians would

For Ottoman Muslims, the government-authorized massacre of Armenian peasants at the hands of soldiers and pastoralists signified the crystallization of the Hamidian reshaping of imperial ethno-confessional hierarchies. Armenians were not simply at the bottom of imperial hierarchies. Rather, their status as accepted imperial subjects itself was placed in perpetual precarity. Armenian public expressions of dissent or emulation of disobedient practices that their Muslim neighbors periodically engaged in could place them beyond the pale of imperial subjecthood at which point Muslim civilians and officials would not face repercussions for violating Armenian lives, honor and property. In Yozgat, Merzifon, and Ankara, Muslim civilians were incorporated into ad hoc bodies of surveillance and policing, and participated in the looting and terrorization of Armenian communities. In Sasun, the Kurdish pastoralists also joined in the massacre of Armenian peasants. The perpetrators' unrepentant descriptions of and boasting about the massacre, which puzzled some observers such as the British consul for Kurdistan, can be partially explained by their anticipation of governmental and societal approval.<sup>149</sup>

On the flip side, Muslims, who expected the continuation of established practices regarding Armenians, were harshly instructed on the transformation of the hierarchies. Hişman Ağa, who was the sedentary Kurdish lord that wanted to honor his obligation to protect his clients in return for their tribute, was imprisoned by the imperial troops, and forced to deliver a pro-government testimony in the presence of the commission. Unlike the neighboring Kurdish pastoralists, who sought to extract tribute from the same Armenians without extending any protection over them, Hişman Ağa was consistently described as the

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become even worse than it is at present, and the Power which had taken the initiative would suffer a serious loss of influence and prestige in the East." FO, 424/178, no. 354, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 26 November 1894.

<sup>149</sup> The British consul interviewed one of the sergeants, who had participated in the Sasun massacre outside of the commission. In his summary of the interview, the consul noted the sergeant's jovial description of the tortures inflicted upon the priest of Semal shortly before the mass execution of the Semal peasants. FO, 424/182, no. 3, Ambassador Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, 27 March 1895, inclosure, Consul Graves's interview with Sergeant Süleyman, 16 March 1895

leader of the “ignorant and savage Kurds” before acquiescing to government pressure. Celal Paşa, who served as district governor of Muş and reported on the atrocities committed on the Armenians, was removed from his post after a brief tenure for his reluctance to accept his superiors’ designation of Sasun Armenians as “rebels.” Surely the differences in the social and political standing of both men resulted in significant differences in the exact manners in which they were disciplined. Nevertheless, their reluctance to participate in the marginalization of Sasun Armenians precipitated some form of punishment from the regime.

For the Armenians, the Sasun massacre and its aftermath epitomized Hamidian hostility. In this way, the government’s intended “powerful lesson” – that any expression of dissent or protest would be met with severe punishment – was communicated clearly. The peasants, who had opposed the revolutionaries’ proposals to attack soldiers and gendarmes, learned that their caution did not merit any restraint on the part of the government to punish them collectively. Their reaction to the lesson would not please the government. After 1894, Sasun continued to be a refuge for the Armenian revolutionary movement. In 1904, when imperial troops were dispatched to the region again in preparation for a similar assault, several hundred armed peasants joined the revolutionary bands in order to defend their villages.

The sustained hostility of government officials to their suffering after the massacre also served to show that there was no hope for any restitution from the Ottoman government. The only Armenians, who were viewed with favor throughout this period, were the clergymen and peasants that delivered doctored pro-government testimonies at the commission. In other words, imperial favor and safety from government repression was contingent upon usefulness to the government. Conversely, the only “officials,” who paid any attention to the Sasun Armenians’ experiences and grievances, appeared to be European diplomats. Much like the case of Musa Bey recounted in Chapter 1, it was only Great Power intervention that had forced the Ottoman government to take any measure regarding Armenian complaints and

grievances. The Sasun massacre had attracted the international attention, which the revolutionaries had desperately sought. Whether that attention would prove consequential, however, depended on a complex web of international relations and Great Power politics over which neither the Sasun Armenians nor the Armenian revolutionary movement had any influence over.

## **EPILOGUE: THE MAKING OF A POGROM IN BİTLİS**

Despite its attempts to blur the responsibility and downplay the scale of the violence Sasun Armenians faced at the hands of imperial troops and pastoralist Kurds, the Palace continued to face pressure from the Great Powers, particularly Great Britain. In May 1895, the Powers presented a reform program directed at incorporating Armenians into local governance and the gendarmerie. Negotiations between the Palace and the Powers continued well into the summer. Meanwhile, the Hnchak Party organized their second large demonstration in Istanbul. On September 30<sup>th</sup>, over a thousand protesters were led by Hnchaks to present a petition to the Grand Vizier, calling for the immediate acceptance of the Great Powers' proposal and the announcement of reforms in Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan. When the police attempted to detain one of the Hnchak leaders, an armed clash occurred between the two sides. Several policemen and revolutionaries were killed. The clash was followed by an anti-Armenian pogrom in the city. A few weeks later in October 1895, sultan Abdülhamid II acceded to the Powers' demands and accepted the reform proposal.<sup>1</sup>

Kamil Paşa, who had been dismissed from the post of the grand vizierate in 1891 due to his disagreements with the Palace, was recalled in early October, shortly after the demonstration and immediately before the official acceptance of the reform program.<sup>2</sup> His presence was undoubtedly an effort by the Palace to appease the British. In his memoirs, Kamil Paşa included one of his reports to the Palace from those years. In the report, he acknowledges that the government held many reservations about the Powers' reform proposal. Most importantly, the inclusion of Christians in the gendarmerie and the appointment of local figures at the low levels of administration were considered inimical to the interests of the state. However, the fact that France and Russia had joined Great Britain on

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<sup>1</sup> Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 122-126

<sup>2</sup> Akarlı, "The Problems of External Pressures," 131-133

this matter necessitated its acceptance.<sup>3</sup> Kamil Paşa's insistence on assuming control of the bureaucracy on matters of economic as well as political import placed him at odds with the Palace again. His tenure would prove short: he was dismissed from the office only one month after his appointment.<sup>4</sup>

The Hamidian massacres of 1895 to 1897, during which hundreds of thousands of Armenians would be wounded, killed, or forced to convert to Islam, took place under these circumstances. In the case of the province of Bitlis, tensions had been high prior to the announcement of the reform project. In the city, Armenians had started to close their shops early on Fridays due to rumors of an impending pogrom. In response to these rumors, the Bitlis prelate of the Apostolic Patriarchate met with the acting-governor Ömer Bey, to discuss the Armenians' concerns. Ömer Bey, who had also served on the commission of inquiry on the Sasun massacre, also held the post of the governorate after the dismissal of Tahsin Paşa. The acting-governor assured the prelate that the Muslims had no such intention. In the unlikely case of an individual attack, imperial troops were ready to intervene immediately.<sup>5</sup>

The following day, a large group of Muslims started attacking Armenians after the Friday prayer. The violence continued for several hours. As the news of the pogrom spread to the countryside, pastoralist Kurds started attacking Armenian villages on the Muş plain, often looting or destroying property. Like much of the rest of the Empire, local officials found that they were powerless to stop the marauding mobs. In many cases, foreign observers reported that the gendarmes and policemen sent to disperse the mobs joined in the plunder and violence.

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<sup>3</sup> Kamil Paşa. *Hatırat-ı Sadr-ı Esbak Kamil Paşa* [The Memoirs of the Former Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa] (Kostantiniyye: Matbaa-ı Ebuzziya, 1329[1913] 185

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-198

<sup>5</sup> FO, 424/184, no. 731, Sir Currie to the Earl of Salisbury, 7 December 1895, inc. 2, George Knapp to Vice-Consul Hampson, 6 November 1895.

In one of his early reports, Ömer Bey argued that the Armenians were to blame for the violence. He claimed that Armenians, who were armed with rifles, started firing on the mosque during the Friday prayer. The Muslims rushed out with sticks and simple tools to defend themselves. Because the Armenians had concocted the plan in advance, they had emptied their shops of valuable goods and had left things of lesser value “here and there” to trick the Muslims into looting and pillaging. In addition to the Armenians themselves, the acting governor (and later the highest ranking military officer in the vicinity, Şemsi Paşa) held the resident American Protestant missionary George Knapp, for organizing and encouraging the Armenians for such a brazen display of treason.<sup>6</sup> The official Ottoman figures for the dead were thirty-eight Muslims and one-hundred-thirty-nine Armenians.<sup>7</sup>

The British vice-consul in Muş told an entirely different story. He based his intelligence on local Armenian contacts and the American missionary Knapp. The vice-consul stated that a Muslim mob had gathered after the Friday prayer and proceeded to attack Armenian homes and shops. Several soldiers from the local military command participated in the attacks. Over five hundred Armenians had been killed and more had been left destitute by the destruction of much of Armenian commercial presence in the city. The vice-consul added that the acting-governor was intent on portraying the pogrom as an Armenian revolutionary plot and had ordered the imprisonment of a hundred Armenians to extract false confessions.<sup>8</sup>

According to the vice-consul, a similar occurrence was avoided in Muş thanks to the timely intervention of the district-governor.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the tensions remained high: the

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<sup>6</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. ASK. 108/103, Commander of the Eighth Brigade Şemsi Paşa to the General Staff, inc. Governorate of Bitlis to Commander Şemsi Paşa, 22 October 1895.

<sup>7</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. UM. 33/13, From the Governorate of Bitlis to the Palace, 24 October 1895; BOA, A MKT. MHM. 619/7, From the Governorate of Bitlis to the Porte, 27 October 1895; BOA, Y. MTV. 130/97, Commander of the Eighth Brigade Şemsi Paşa to the General Staff, 27 October 1895

<sup>8</sup> FO, 424/182, no. 540, Sir Herbert to Salisbury, inc. Vice-Consul Hampson to Sir Herbert, 29 October 1895

<sup>9</sup> FO, 424/182, no. 540, Sir Herbert to Salisbury, inc. Vice-Consul Hampson to Sir Herbert, 29 October 1895

district governor, the Muslim and Armenian notables of the city, and the British vice-consul met shortly after the beginning of the massacres in the provinces. The Muslim notables intimated that a similar pogrom could take place in Muş unless the Protestant missionaries and the aid workers, who were helping Armenian peasants in rebuilding Sasun, immediately left the city. The vice-consul advised that the missionaries agree with the notables' demands.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Muş was one of the few major settlements in Ottoman Armenia/Kurdistan, where a pogrom or a massacre did not occur.

International pressure on the Ottoman government was immense after the outbreak of the Hamidian massacres. Foreign intervention was becoming increasingly likelier by the day. This particular historical moment would be remembered as one of the most acute crises of the late Ottoman period by Münir Süreyya Bey, who served at several posts in the Ottoman Foreign ministry in the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> Kamil Paşa wrote of those days in a similar tone in his memoirs.<sup>12</sup> Orders were sent out from the Porte to stop the violence at all costs to the governorates.<sup>13</sup>

It was at this conjuncture that Ömer Bey of Bitlis sent a surprising telegram to the Porte. Ten days after the pogrom, he reported a sheikh by the name of Emin Efendi – this was the same man who had “hosted” Gülizar before her testimony in which she declared that she had been forcefully kidnapped – had been provoking Muslims to attack Armenians. He added that the sheikh had previously been involved in riling up anti-government sentiment because of the conciliatory measures of the government towards the Armenians after the Sasun massacre. He warned the Porte that the local prestige of the sheikh among the townsfolk and

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<sup>10</sup> BOA, A. MKT. MHM. 619/11, From the Porte to the General Staff, 29 October 1894; BOA, Y. MTV. 131/73, From the Governorate of Bitlis to the Palace, 8 November 1894; FO, 424/182, Sir Currie to the Earl of Salisbury, inc. Vice-Consul Hampson to Sir Currie, 11 November 1895

<sup>11</sup> Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin Siyasi Tarihçesi (1877-1914)* [The Political History of the Armenian Question] (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001)

<sup>12</sup> Kamil Paşa, *Hatırat-ı Sadr-ı Esbak*, 186-193

<sup>13</sup> BOA, Y. A. RES. 77/5, Report by the Porte and the Foreign Ministry, 24 October 1895



pastoralist Kurds was great. Therefore, Ömer Bey suggested that the sheikh be removed from the city through an imperial invitation to the capital.<sup>14</sup> The Porte refused the acting governor's request, ordering him instead to convince the sheikh of the wisdom of imperial policy with gifts and praise.<sup>15</sup>

During the same period, the aforementioned prelate of Bitlis was sending letters to the Patriarchate, the Yıldız Palace and the Ministry of the Interior, explaining the atrocities committed against Armenian townspeople and peasants. He stated that the pogrom started with the attack of a Muslim mob in the bazaar.<sup>16</sup> The Porte asked for an official explanation from Ömer Bey about the prelate's claims. The acting governor responded with several accusations of treason and sedition against the prelate.<sup>17</sup> An aide-de-camp from the palace Sadeddin Paşa, was dispatched to the region to investigate the violence. He met with the prelate and reported his conversation. He stated that he had firmly warned the prelate that to repeat allegations of a massacre or a pogrom against Armenians was to serve the cause of the evildoers.<sup>18</sup> The prelate was tried in a court for treason and sentenced to death in August 1896. It was only through British intervention that the Ministry of Justice commuted his sentence to fifteen years of imprisonment.<sup>19</sup>

The sheikh's appeasement and the priest's imprisonment are significant in that they reveal the priorities of local and imperial officials after the Hamidian massacres. The acting governor, the Porte, and the Palace contributed to the perpetuation of a state of terror in the province of Bitlis, where ethno-confessional tensions had been rising for the past few years.

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<sup>14</sup> BOA, A. MKT. MHM. 619/13, Governorate of Bitlis to the Porte, 1 November 1894; BOA, Y. A. RES. 77/62, 15 November 1895, Governorate of Bitlis to the Porte

<sup>15</sup> BOA, A. MKT. MHM. 619/13, The Porte to the Governorate of Bitlis, 1 January 1896

<sup>16</sup> BOA, A. MKT. MHM. 619/15, Prelate of Bitlis Agop to the Patriarchate and the Palace, 7 November 1895

<sup>17</sup> BOA, A. MKT. MHM. 619/15, Governorate of Bitlis to the Porte, 9 November 1895

<sup>18</sup> BOA, Y. MTV. 133/75, Aide-de-Camp Sadeddin Paşa to the Palace, 27 December 1895.

<sup>19</sup> BOA, A. MKT. MHM. 619/15, The Ministry of Justice and Religions to the Porte, 17 August 1896; BOA, A. MKT. MHM. 619/15, The Porte to the Ministry of Justice, 26 December 1896

The government was primarily interested in the containment of the crisis without lending any credence to Armenian allegations of oppression and suffering, while continuing to appease Muslim notables. The imperial government was insistent on repeating the fiction – publicly pronounced since the Ankara trial – that the Armenian Question was simply a revolutionary project to create the image of the oppression of Armenians. Anti-Armenian violence only occurred as a reaction to Armenian provocations and open rebellion. Despite contradictory evidence from consular officials, local Armenians, Armenian administrative and religious institutions, and resident missionaries, an Ottoman commission reiterated this position after an empire-wide investigation of the 1895 “disorders.” There was also no mention of Sheikh Emin Efendi in the report.<sup>20</sup>

I wanted to conclude the dissertation with this snapshot for two reasons. First, the continuity in the government’s administrative and punitive practices in its reconceptualization of the imperial ethno-confessional hierarchy is striking. In other words, the making of the pogrom in Bitlis carries familiar practices from events and processes covered in the dissertation – from the appeasement of Muslim offenders against Armenians to the promotion of the fiction that all Armenian grievances stemmed from a revolutionary conspiracy. Even at the height of an internationalized crisis, even when the acting-governor hesitated and reported the involvement of a Muslim notable in promoting anti-Armenian violence, the imperial center did not budge and continued to encourage the very practices that had stoked Armenian dissent in the first place.

The other reason I wanted to conclude with this snapshot was to highlight venues for future research on the Hamidian regime and the Armenian revolutionary movement. While there have been valuable contributions to the study of the Hamidian massacres on a general

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<sup>20</sup> BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK. 46/57, Report on the Governorate of Bitlis, 4 October 1896.

scale,<sup>21</sup> local histories based on Armenian, Ottoman, and consular sources are scarce.<sup>22</sup>

Focusing on local governmental and revolutionary practices certainly provides the historian with a more nuanced understanding of its conceptual and geographical distance from the center. As important as this insight, however, is the attendant exploration of how the “central” institutions such as the Yıldız Palace or the Foreign Office of Great Britain interact with the local and each other.

Another venue for future research is the investigation of Hamidian practices of suppression and marginalization, and revolutionary organization and propaganda in other parts of the Empire where Armenians constituted a large section of the population. This is also important, because the immediate socio-economic conditions of Armenians of different classes varied considerably based on geography. In the regions that this dissertation focused on, the Armenians of Central Anatolia did not face pressures from pastoralist groups like the Armenians of the Muş plain did. While the overarching hostility of the government towards Armenian dissent as well its priorities in reshaping ethno-confessional hierarchies can be discerned, the practices varied in shape and scale. The extension of the inquiry to Cilicia or Van is likely to bear fruitful results.

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Melson “A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894-1896,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 24.3 (1982) 481-509. A recent study of the construction of the Hamidian fictions about the massacres, see Edip Gölbaşı, “The Official Conceptualization of the anti-Armenian Riots of 1895-1897,” in *Études arméniennes contemporaines*, 10 (2018)

<sup>22</sup> Jelle Verheij’s recent article on the Hamidian massacres in the province of Bitlis is very informative, but sheds little light on the processes and dynamics that anticipated the violence in the first place. Jelle Verheij, ““The Year of the Firman”: The 1895 Massacres in Hizan and Şirvan,” *Études arméniennes contemporaines*, 10 (2018); For a detailed overview of a Hamidian pogrom in Harput that also explores the themes of ethnic boundary-crossing prevalent in some sources, see Ali Sipahi, “At Arm’s Length: Historical Ethnography of Proximity in Harput,” PhD. Dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2015: 298-374; For a detailed study of the massacres in Diyarbakir, see Jelle Verheij, “Diyarbakir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895,” in *Social Relations of Diyarbakir, 1870-1915*, eds. Joost Jongerden and Jelle Verheij (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 85-146; For a study of the changing conditions of Armenians in Trebizond at the close of the century, see Barbara Merguerian, “Reform, Revolution, and Repression: Trebizond Armenians in the 1890s,” in *Armenian Pontus: The Trebizond-Black Sea Communities*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (California: Mazda Publishers, 2009)

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*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri, İstanbul, Turkey*

A. MKT. MHM.	Sadaret Mühimme Kalemi
BEO.	Bab-1 Ali Evrak Odası
DH. MKT.	Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi
İ. DH.	İrade Dahiliye
İ. DUİT.	İrade Dosya Usulü Evrakı
Y. A. HUS.	Yıldız Sadaret Hususi
Y. A. RES.	Yıldız Sadaret Resmi Maruzat Evrakı
Y. EE.	Yıldız Esas Evrakı
Y. EE. d	Yıldız Esas Evrakı (Defter)
Y. PRK. ASK.	Yıldız Perakende Askeri Maruzat
Y. PRK. AZJ.	Yıldız Arzuhal ve Journaller
Y. PRK. AZN.	Yıldız Perakende Adliye ve Mezahib Nezareti Maruzat
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