

Age of Rogues
Rebels, Revolutionaries
and Racketeers at the
Frontiers of Empires

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Despite evidence of extensive looting by the pastoralists, which was provided by two officers on the ground,²⁹ for example, the affair was reframed as a violent episode of Armenian aggression. Over the course of the next year, the designations of 'evildoer' (*müfsid, fâsid, fesede* (pl.)) and rebel (*sâki, ejkîyâ* (pl.)) were extended from the small band of revolutionaries to the entire Armenian male population of Sasun capable of bearing arms.³⁰ Thus, a local struggle over resources and tributary arrangements had gained imperial significance by the summer of 1894.

In June 1894, a company of imperial troops was dispatched to Sasun with instructions to pursue rebels. Yet the official designation of several thousand Armenian peasants as rebels and evildoers suggests that a mere company of troops was not sufficient to execute the orders.

The subsequent correspondence between the governor of Bitlis and the district governor of Genc affirmed the designation of all male peasants in the Shadakh, Dzovasar, Dalvorig and Geliguzan regions of Sasun as rebels.

It was only in late August, however, that the company in the region was bolstered with two additional companies and mountain guns. Under the leadership of Colonel Tevfik Bey, the troops advanced against the Armenians with orders to destroy all the rebels in the region with the pastoralists in their tow.

The original orders to destroy all rebels were reiterated with deliberate and cynical ambiguity: 'All of the rebels are to be destroyed without giving them the opportunity to surrender and seek clemency. They are to be ruined and eradicated so as to teach Armenian evildoers a powerful lesson' (*'bu ekiyannın iltica ve istimanlarına mahal ve meydan verilmeksizin hem'en ve seri'en cümlesiinin mahv edilmesi . . . cümlesinin Ermeni erbab-ı mefzedetine ibret-i müessire olacak suretde mahv ve izalesi'*).

After the troops surveyed the Antok heights and pursued and killed a large number of Armenians, they proceeded to the larger villages of Geliguzan and Dalvorig.

"The colonel and the commandant insisted; and the male peasants were executed that night."⁴³

Its entire conduct from the beginning of summer 1894, its insistence on the destruction of the 'rebels' to the last man, while simultaneously calling for the capture of the 'black-hats', suggest that the killing of Armenian male peasants was a central component of the military expedition. It is possible that the colonel's earlier decision to accept the surrender of the peasants, *then* order their execution was seen as a violation of proper conduct, even against rebels.