

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

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the Armenian of have maintained close cultural and economic connections with the Kurdish, the towns of Muş and Diyarbakır, and the region itself among other places through trade, education, pilgrimage and cultural exchange.¹ The latter was a particularly common route for the movement as the number of people who moved to have to give their oaths varied in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Ottoman Empire granted all those who claimed this income to the needed officials of their military garrisons.² Thus, Tashlin has pointed to the increasing uses of drought as the movement's catalyst and the political tools in which they placed the practice of Ottoman Kurdish, particularly with regard to the variety of available powers and the more numerous of local officials.³ The use of power in these spaces became a source of dispute between Ottoman power and Kurdish practice. The Armenian practice required the intervention of the state to prove this control. While a law was in place for several years, it was no longer in effect by the 1890s both in order to address the potential disputes and the dominant power and to place the Ottoman Empire under the protection of the sultan. In a region where the inhabitants – Shablis and Romanians alike – possessed firearms, disputes over the use of power resulted in armed clashes. Castle-voicing also took place with increasing frequency.

Between 1891 and 1904, Sasun and its inhabitants came to occupy a central position in the articulation of Ottoman policies of ethnic exclusion and hierarchisation, and Armenian revolutionary plans to organise an armed rebellion

¹ For the Ottoman Empire in Shablis, for example, see William L. Richardson, 'The Ottoman Foundation of Ottoman Kurdish Power', in S. M. Amerson (ed.), *Armenian Highland Shablis and Kurdish Diyarbakır* (New York: C.U. Mouton, 1990), 277–281.

² See Tashlin, 'Religious and the Kurdish: Ottoman Empire, Local Functionaries, and the State: Ottoman Policies in the Diyarbakır Region, 1870–1914', in *Journal of Ottoman and Near Eastern Studies*, 1, 2008, 1–20, 2008, 2–August 2008.

³ Tashlin, 'Religious and the Kurdish: Ottoman Empire, Local Functionaries, and the State: Ottoman Policies in the Diyarbakır Region, 1870–1914', in *Journal of Ottoman and Near Eastern Studies*, 1, 2008, 1–20, 2008, 2–August 2008.

¹ For a discussion on Ottoman state violence towards Shablis on the occasion of 1890, see a study of the 1890 massacre that presents an diplomatic, journalistic and histori-

discussed the indirect influence of government policy in exacerbating the scale of the violence.⁸ Nevertheless, the singular focus on that episode of mass violence needs to be supplemented with studies which outline the dynamic processes by which a combination of Hamidian policy, Great Power posturing, Armenian revolutionary agitation, and the initiatives of local actors transformed ethno-confessional hierarchies over the course of the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II.⁹

At the turn of the twentieth century Sasun became one of the most important testing grounds and showcases for Ottoman policy regarding Armenians.

As imperial attention focused on Sasun, the material circumstances and hierarchies of exploitation in the region disappeared from official accounts. It was replaced by a simple narrative of increasing Armenian aggression against innocent Muslims. 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 (*şâki, eşkiyâ* (pl.)) were extended from the small band of revolutionaries to the entire Armenian male population of Sasun capable of bearing arms.³⁰

By the turn of the century, Sasun had become an important node in the network of revolutionary bands in a larger geography, which encompassed the Muş plain, the towns of Muş and Bitlis, and the districts of Ahlat and Kulp. Revolutionaries continued to assist Armenian peasants and organise targeted attacks against government officials, Muslim lords, whom they accused of oppressing the peasantry, and Armenian informers, whom they accused of cooperating with the Ottoman government. Their actions influenced the political atmosphere of the entire region. Raids by revolutionary bands under the leadership of Serob Vartanian, and the imperial troops' search for them heightened tensions in towns like Muş and Bitlis.⁷⁰

What the government viewed as a definitive victory over the

revolutionaries – much as they had done at the conclusion of the massacre in 1894 – would be a turning point in the escalation of internecine violence among Muslims and Armenians in the region, and the participation of the government in the further marginalisation of Sasun Armenians.

The following section will focus on the British Foreign Office's role in this with a specific focus on reports regarding the 1909 Sasun massacre against Armenians in Sasun. According to British sources, a small group of gendarmes and local Kurdish had arrived at the village of Haghpat in pursuit of revolutionaries, killed 15, killed dozen of gendarmes and burned a number of buildings.¹¹ The report went to the British Foreign Office and distributed to high-ranking officials. Brigadier-General Edward Pease from the 'Central Council of Military Supplies' (Major-General Robert Somerton, Major and Lieutenant Edward from the 'Commissary General of Stores').

The report sets of accusations are as follows for the officials. The first official set of accusations contains a brief summary of the disaster reported by the British Foreign Office, the official's name and who was to be blamed of a just and impartial inquiry (it will be Major-General Robert Somerton, military officer as it concerns the identification).¹² The second set of accusations details the true accusations of the gendarmes. The officials were ordered to withdraw troops in the region due their only role was in the discovery of the truth. In fact, however, they were ordered to cover all military officers to suppress the details of the Sasun massacre by eliminating false reports or diminishing the accusations.¹³ In other words, the officials were ordered to make an omission of an important detail while compiling a simple accusation of the gendarmes, and neglecting a sufficient report written from local Armenian priests which pointed to their affiliation.

Consequently, Edward Pease and Mohamed Elbukh submitted an official report mostly to the other. They used that Mr Pease had previously had a discussion of imperial troops in the village of Haghpat after receiving

¹¹ FO 371/400/26, No. 21, 21 July 1909.

¹² FO 371/400/26, 21 August 1909.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ FO 371/400/26, 21 August 1909.