

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

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the Armenian of Sasun mentioned their cultural and economic connection with the Kurdish, the town of Mox and Moppe, and the regional legal status after peace through such education, pilgrimage and cultural exchange.¹⁰ The latter was a practice continued over the century as the number of pastoralists who arrived in Sasun to graze their cattle increased in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Ottoman Islamic government of Sasun continued this practice as the numbered villages of their military garrisons.¹¹ Thus, Tashlin has passed to the successive waves of migrants in the nineteenth century and the political acts in which they placed the pastoralists of Christian Kurdish, probably with regard to the control of pastures, and the new condition of land usage.¹² The use of pastures in Sasun quickly became a source of dispute between Armenian peasants and Kurdish pastoralists.

After the 1915 massacre, the use of pastures was discontinued. While a law was in place for several years, it was no longer in effect by the 1920s, both in order to allow the pastoralist sheep to find the alternative pastures and to place the focus on the use of the land by the peasants. Thus,

In a region where the inhabitants – Muslim and Armenian alike – possessed firearms, disputes over the use of pastures escalated to armed clashes. ¹³

place with increasing frequency.

Between 1890 and 1900, issues and its solutions came to manage a social problem in the continuation of Ottoman policies of ethnic milletism and Islamism, and Armenian communities often engaged in armed robbery and other criminal activities. But the coming Ottoman law put both pressure to the dynamics of these policies of milletism with the wealth management of the Ottoman ministries of Finance.¹⁴ Subsidies from the

¹⁰ For Ottoman Islamic law in Shatly, for example, see T. Bülent E. Yıldız, 'The Ottoman Islamic Law in Shatly, 1870s-1880s', in B. M. Woodward (ed.), *Armenian History Before 1915* (London, 1998), 123-24, 171-80.

¹¹ See Tashlin, 40-100 and the research of other scholars, local historians, and the local ethnographers on the town of Tashlin. There are also historical documents of the Ottoman period concerning Tashlin and its surroundings during a local administrative government.

¹² The information on religious and ethnic issues in Tashlin can be discussed in Shatly on the occasion of 1890. The result of the 1890 census in Shatly presented on depopulation, concentration and economic

sons of Kurdish sheiks among them, and finally managed to assassinate an Armenian, thus finally enraged with their former neighbours and aligned their 'language and cultural practices'.

Similarly, another Kurdish influence in the region, Mihemed had Bay advised the creation of a network of religious and educational institutions in the region to further infiltration among the indigenous Kurds. Thus importantly, however, the plan was not to put much trust in Armenian conversions due to the Kurdish culture. He argued that Armenian Christians would not be converted, but added that influence on Armenian converts in the context of the surrounding Kurdish culture would reduce the influence of Kurds in the region. If Kurdish tribal leaders felt that their authority was mounting, they might make common cause with the Armenians or openly revolt against the government.¹¹ Therefore, the promotion of Muslim practice in the region would be beneficial to the government, and not an additional spur for their Armenian converts to rebellion.

Sasun was also one of the first regions in which Armenian revolutionaries sought to organise in large numbers. Its location in mountainous terrain afforded valuable shelter to small armed bands, while allowing access to the Muş plain and the town when they needed. The relative scarcity of gendarmes and soldiers in the region also drew the interest of early revolutionary organisers. Perhaps more important than both, however, was the established prevalence of the possession and utilisation of firearms among the peasants of the region. The Armenians of Sasun were known to have clashed with pastoralist Kurds over access to their pastures, and participated in the inter-tribal disputes of their Muslim lords and neighbours. Many revolutionaries viewed the presence of such a martial culture among Armenian peasants as a blessing and an opportunity: the extant truculence and experience were to be refocused and redirected against the state.

¹¹ Mihemed had Bay was one of the five commissioners to arrive in Sasun. He was an Armenian Catholic from the Imperial capital and worked as a primary school teacher in Muş between 1884 and 1889. He joined the Young Turk Liberal Party in the late 1890s and participated