

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

**Edited by
Ramazan Hakkı Öztan and Alp Yenen**

**EDINBURGH
University Press**

In autumn 1900, however, the revolutionaries in Sasun waylaid Halil Beşar Ağa and killed him. Andranig Ozanian, who was one of the rising figures within the ARF, led the attack and cut off the Kurdish lord's head. The act was a deliberate response to both the killing of Serob Vartanian the previous year and the recent sack of the village of Sbghank.⁷⁹ The governor of Bitlis informed his superiors that the lord's assassination had caused a furore among the Kurds, and that orders had been dispatched to local civilian and military authorities to prevent a general Kurdish attack on the Armenians.⁸⁰

The revolutionaries inserted themselves at the centre of the growing conflict between Kurdish lords with a licence to extort and punish, and the Sasun Armenians, for whom armed clashes became an increasingly frequent occurrence. They went further than their predecessors before the 1894 massacre; they targeted gendarmes and soldiers as well as the likes of Halil Beşar Ağa. The latter was not only a powerful Kurdish lord, but also one of the most important agents of the government in pursuing revolutionaries and consolidating the marginalisation of the Sasun Armenians.

The first stage of the rebellion was marked by two developments: first, revolutionaries killed several Muslims from the mixed villages of Tapik and

Laçkan, whom they viewed as agents of the state, and expelled the rest after torching their homes.⁸⁹ According to Ottoman reports, they also took hostages from the Muslim populace.⁹⁰ Second, several revolutionary bands travelled across Sasun to escort the Armenian inhabitants of the outlying villages to the heights of Antok, where they would be safe from the advancing troops and pastoralists. They torched Armenian villages in order to deny food and lodging to the advancing Ottoman troops.⁹¹

Many male peasants from the districts of Sasun, which became the centre of the rebellion, also joined the revolutionaries' armed rebellion. According to Garo Sasuni's estimates, some thousand peasants fought against the imperial troops.⁹² The governor of Bitlis stated that a local Muslim preacher in Sasun estimated that 2,000 peasants had joined the revolutionaries.⁹³ The contrast with 1894 is clear: whereas peasants had been reluctant to fight against imperial troops a decade before, they were willing to attempt a defence of their villages in 1904. The experience of the 1894 massacre obviously motivated many Armenian peasants to join the revolutionaries.