

## BOOK REVIEW 2

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### BIG BETRAYAL: ARMENIAN CHURCH AND TERROR, HISTORICAL SEQUENCE

*Prof. Dr. Erdal İlter*

Ankara: Turhan Kitabevi, 2007, 165 Pages.

**D**r. Erdal İlter, whose book entitled *The Bibliography of Turkish-Armenian Relations* has been used as a guidebook for those studying Turkish-Armenian Relations, has been interested in Armenian question and has been publishing many books and articles on that issue. *Armenian Church and Terror*, which has first been published in 1996 in Turkish and in English, and second time in 1999, was published for the third time with some additions.

As known, Armenian Church has always had a national authority on Armenians and played an active role in the formation of Armenian political organizations, i.e. the Armenian state. Therefore this book is quite significant in dealing with the activities of the Armenian church in the late Ottoman Empire as well as the perceptions developed by Lebanon Antilias and Etchmiyadzin Catholicoses regarding Turkey in the aftermath of Lausanne Peace Treaty.

In the first chapter entitled “The Beginning of Ottoman-Armenian Relations”, the author examines the situation of Armenians within the Ottoman Empire and their religious groupings. Accordingly, due to their relocation by Byzantines, Armenians perceived the Turks as saviors. İlter argues that Ottoman-Armenian relations can be initiated with the sultanate of Orhan Gazi between 1326-1362. The Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire and Armenian-Turkish relations

are also covered in this chapter and, based particularly on foreign resources, it is argued that Armenians had never constituted a majority in the Eastern Anatolia. İlder determines Armenian population within the Empire as 1.300.000 shows the data reached by Armenian scholars and supporting this number.

İlder also argues that since non-Muslims were exempted from conscription they had grown economically and in terms of population continuously. Therefore, they constituted the most prosperous segment of the society due to Ottoman state policies towards non-Muslims. The book includes the perceptions of English, German, Russian and French scholars on Armenians and how they evaluated the 'Turkish-Armenian Relations. What is more, this section includes a thankful manuscript written by one of the prominent Armenians, Mıgırdıç Dadyan, stipulating that Armenians lived under full liberty in the Ottoman Empire.

As known, in the emergence of the Armenian question, Ottoman reform and constitutional movements had a significant role. As a result of this reform movement comes Armenian Nation Law, which brings some regulations for the Armenians. İlder analyses this law in detail. Accordingly, Armenian Patriarchate had been provided with extensive competence and Armenians were granted with the establishment of a general assembly of 140 members. What is more, Armenian Patriarchate would be elected by this assembly, which means that the decisions on the administration of Armenian community could be taken from abroad. İlder argues that non-Muslims benefited from these privileges and had been treated as independent communities: "Armenians, who were benefited from these wide concessions had organized, opened schools and published journals and newspapers. The Patriarchate, which had utilized the Armenian National Law that initiated a new era for the Armenian political and social presence, accelerated its attempts for autonomy through the liberty provided by the aforementioned law. According to İlder, the issue of Armenian autonomy was first demanded by Mıgırdıç Hirimyan and he dispersed his ideas through two journals entitled the 'Eagle of Van' and the 'Eagle of Muş'. After Hirimyan's election as Patriarch, he

aims to direct the attention of Armenian community of Istanbul, the assembly and the government of Armenia.

Another issue covered in the book is the Armenian activities from the proclamation of Ottoman parliamentary government until Mudros Armistice. Accordingly, after the Ottoman entry to the World War I Armenian bands began to support Russia through the Armenian Church and some volunteer troops were established to wage a war against the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Anatolia. As a result of these rebellions, Armenians were relocated as a result of Relocation Law of May 27, 1915. The author also touches upon the territorial demands of Boghos Nubar Pasha for independent Armenia and his connections with the representatives of Allied Powers. What is more, he also examines French-Armenian relations and the disappointment of Armenians after French evacuation of Cilicia region and their immigration to Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus and Egypt.

İlter also argues that with the Lausanne Treaty Armenian question was resolved, at least legally, and with the Treaty, Armenians were perceived as one of the three non-Muslim minorities of Turkish state without any further privilege. İlter examines Atatürk's perception of the Armenian question as well. He argues that Atatürk took this issue within the general framework of minority question and emphasized the great power intervention on this issue. Accordingly, since Erzurum Congress, Atatürk paid attention to the equality of minorities with that of prospective Turkish citizens of the Turkish state.

In the second part of his book İlter argues that Armenian relocation is not an Ottoman phenomenon but an earlier phenomenon started in the Middle Ages. Accordingly, Armenians were relocated by Greeks, Crusaders, Mongolians, Mamluks, Iranians and Russians and the Armenian diaspora was begun to be formed in these periods. He emphasized socio-economic factors for the Armenian migrations besides political ones. In this section, İlter focuses on Armenian settlement in Lebanon, their political and religious situation and the Armenian terrorist

organization, ASALA, which had been established in Lebanon. The author also examined the relationship between Lebanese Armenians and Tashnak part as well as Lebanon becoming one of the main centers of Armenian diaspora.

In sum, this book, in which Armenian demands since 19th century and the positions of the countries supporting these demands are covered, includes significant data for understanding Armenian question being one of the main foreign policy issues of Turkey. Among many books written on this issue, İlter's book attracted attention by its fluent style, in-depth analysis, rich resources and the author's experience on the subject matter. Therefore, some Armenians, including Mesrob Kirkorian from Vienna University criticized the book in an unjust manner. Still, these criticisms are significant for the fame of this book abroad.

# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

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Tuncay Özkan

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Erdal İlter

Türkçe

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Ankara, Turhan Kitabevi, 2007

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Erich Feigl

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Kayseri, Erciyes Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2007  
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Ankara, Turhan Kitabevi Yayınları, 2006  
ISBN : 975-6194-85-5  
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