

# THE MUSLIM AND NON-MUSLIM POPULATION IN MARAŞ AND ZEITUN REVOLT OF 1895

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## **Abstract:**

*Maraş, (Marash), was a sub-province of Aleppo administrative district, and, compared with the other parts of the Empire; it had a dense Armenian population towards the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the non-Muslims here lived in the city of Maraş, and in the town of Zeitun. Zeitun contained somewhere between 7,000 and 9,000 Armenian population while the Muslim population ranged from 6,000 to 7,000 in the same place. Nevertheless, when all of Maraş's population was concerned, approximately 19 percent of it was the non-Muslims, which were overwhelmingly Armenian in terms of the ethnic structure.*

*Because of its large number of the Armenian Population, rough and mountainous geography, historical-outlawed mentality and traditional rebelliousness of Zeitun Armenians, Zeitun became a convenient place for Armenian terrorist and separatist activities toward the end of the nineteenth century. Especially, the Armenian terrorist group called the Hunchaks prepared a big rebellion in 1895. They received assistance from the European Great Powers, especially from Britain. Their aim was to massacre the Muslims in order to get retaliated by the Muslims. If that happened, as they had thought, the Great Powers were to intervene in the Ottoman affairs, and to force the Ottoman government to grant more rights to the Armenians, leading to total independence. The article, hence, deals with the way in which the Zeitun Revolt was conducted, and examines the Armenian objectives behind it. Then, the last parts of the paper examine the outcomes of the Zeitun Revolt and scrutinize foreign influences behind it.*

## **Keywords:**

*The Ottoman Empire, the Armenian Question, the Turks, the Armenians, Zeitun, Maraş, the Eastern Question.*

## **INTRODUCTION: AN EVALUATION OF THE LATE OTTOMAN CENSUSES**

One of the most discussed matters that has widely been discussed among historians and researchers is the

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numbers of the Ottoman ethnic groups in the late period of the Empire. Discussions have risen from different approaches to the matter among the different groups, who have been motivated by various sets of political, national and cultural values. In this respect, it would be much more convenient to look at the sources. Among the sources for the Ottoman population counts, the official statistical data of the Ottomans would be the first to be count on.

Even though the Ottomans had believed in the necessity of making regular census records since 1831 in order to both collect taxes and conscript soldiers, their findings had been widely contested by European and American researchers, as well as by the minorities, especially the Armenians, in order to have political gains.<sup>1</sup> This created a wide variety of different guesses for the Ottoman population statistics. This, also, caused many to predict unevenly on the events took place in the late Ottoman history. For example, in his article published in *Revue d'Orient* on 29 October 1895, a famous Hungarian historian, Arminius Vambery, who intensively wrote books and articles on the Turkish world in the second half of the nineteenth century, stated that the European media and the Armenian sources had greatly exaggerated the events in favor of the Armenians. He exemplified that E. Gladstone, one of the most renowned statesmen of Great Britain in the nineteenth century, had claimed that 10.000 Armenians were killed in the event of Sasun in 1894, though, in reality, there were together with the Muslims only 4.500 people in Sasun.<sup>2</sup>

As they had backed the Balkan Christians in accordance with their international interests, the Western big states tried to disintegrate the Empire and create an 'Armenia' in the Asiatic territories -the so-called Ottoman Armenia- of the Ottoman Empire, comprising six principalities, namely Van, Erzurum, Elazığ, Diyarbakır, Sivas and Trabzon. This was not possible as long as the demographic aspect of the region was concerned, because the Armenians were living not only in these six vilayets, but also in every part of the Empire, as wealthy merchants, small shop owners, doctors, bankers and farmers. Although the Armenians were densely populated in these provinces, they made

<sup>1</sup> Justin McCarthy, 'The Population of the Ottoman Armenians', in Türkkaya Ataöv (ed.), *The Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2001), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Bilal N. Şimşir, *Documents Diplomatiques Ottomans: Affaires Armeniennes, 1895-1896*, Vol. 3, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1999), p. 75.

approximately 19 percent of these places. Not to mention their minority position in every big cities in the region. Indeed, they had never been a majority people in the region for centuries.<sup>3</sup> As an American historian, Justin McCarthy, said, 'In reality, if all the Armenians in the world would come to the Eastern Anatolia, they could not make a majority in the region.'<sup>4</sup> In general, the Armenian population made of 5.5 percent of the Empire's population. In this regard, İstanbul was one of their most crowded cities where the Armenians made of 18 percent of the total population. The total Armenians were around 1.185.392, of which 988.887 were Gregorian, 160.166 were Catholics, and 36.339 were Protestants.<sup>5</sup> At the same period, the total population of the Empire was 20.475.225.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the real demographic estimates of the Empire, the Armenians, hoping to gain military and political backing of the big powers, overly exaggerated their number. For this aim, the Armenian Patriarchate claimed that within the six provinces 2.615.000 people were living, of which 1.018.000 (39% of the region's population) were the Armenians, 165.000 (6%) were the other Christians, and 1.432.000 (55%) were the Muslims. However, the Ottoman official records showed that there were living a total of 4.138.635 people, of which 784.917 (19%) were the Armenians, 176.845 (4%) the other Christians and 3.173.918 (77%) were the Muslims.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, according to the 1906 official statistics, within the Empire, including the Balkans, Anatolia and the Arab lands, while 74 percent of the total population was Muslims, only 26 percent were non-Muslims. Among the non-Muslims, there were the Jews, the Greeks, the Armenians and all the others. 'Anatolia and the Arab lands generally comprised 80 percent of the Muslim majority'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Erich Feigl, *A Myth of Terror*, (Salzburg: EZG, 1986), p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> Justin McCarthy, 'Birakin Tarihçiler Karar Versin', *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, No. 2, (June-July-August 2001), p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Stanford J. Shaw & Ezel Kural Shaw, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Modern Türkiye*, Vol. 2. (Translated) Mehmet Harmancı, (İstanbul: E Yayınları, 1983), p. 250.

<sup>6</sup> Shaw, *Osmanlı...*, p. 250.

<sup>7</sup> McCarthy, 'The Population ...', p. 67.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Quataert, 'The Age of Reforms, 1812-1914', in Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), p. 782.

**The main goal of the Armenian separatists and the Armenians in exaggerating their number was to gain European support in the process of gaining new political rights.**

For the Muslim and the non-Muslim population of the Empire, British consuls whose estimates had been closer to the official statistics, proved that the Armenian statistics were unreliable. Colonel C. W. Wilson, British general consul of Anatolia, stated that one fifth of the population of Sivas were Christians, and the Caucasian immigrants, who had come to

the region after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, were not included in this estimate.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, as the British consul Henry Trotter found out, both the Christians and the Muslims had troubles to hide their actual number in the official censuses because the former did not want to pay the 'askerlik bedeli' (military exemption) tax and the later, especially the Kurdish and Arab tribes, did not wish to serve in the army.<sup>10</sup> Thus, if there was some sort of miscalculation in the official statistics, it equally effected the Muslims and the non-Muslims.

The main goal of the Armenian separatists and the Armenians in exaggerating their number was to gain European support in the process of gaining new political rights. One of the solid example of their miscalculation and misrepresentation of the Armenian population took place in 1880 in Sivas. The Armenian bishop of this city represented a statistical data to British consul C. W. Wilson. According to this statistics the city's Christian population were 201.245 (approximately 22 percent of the total city population), and the Muslim people were 694.431 (78 percent of the total population) in number. Yet, the Patriarchate had a great change on paper in this statistics while presenting it to Europe. According to the new numbers, on the paper, the number of the Christians increased to 216.845 (approximately 36 percent) and the Muslim population decreased to 388.218 (around 64 percent) in the city.<sup>11</sup> Similar examples for exaggerative and wrong information provided by the Patriarchate to Europe can be found

<sup>9</sup> Bilal N. Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians (1880-1890)*, Vol. 2. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989), p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> Şimşir, *British...*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>11</sup> Şimşir, *British...*, p. 140.

in many instances. Since it was the Armenian Patriarchate to persuade the big powers to back their desire to gain an autonomous, or, if possible, an independent state, they were most likely to try every means, including better polished lies, and overly exaggerated realities. On the other hand, the Ottomans, who had less concerns for providing wrong or exaggerated population calculations, left much more reliable statistical data. Thus, it is more convenient to give more credit to the official records than any other sources, especially the Patriarchate's censuses.

### **Population of Aleppo Province and Maraş Sub-Province**

In the discussed period, the population of Aleppo province was overwhelmingly in favor of the Muslims. Ottoman official records held in 1908 openly support this argument. According to these numbers, the total population was 903.269, of this total number, 759.040 were Muslims (84 percent), 65.033 were Gregorian Armenians (7 percent), 10.016 were Catholic Armenians (one percent) and 12.071 were Protestant Armenians (1.33 percent). The rest belonged to the Greeks, Jews, and the Maronites.<sup>12</sup> As these numbers show, while the percentage of the total Armenians was nine, the Muslim percentage of the province was making an overwhelming eighty four percent. Within the Aleppo province, one of the most crowded Armenian populations was living in Maraş sub-province. Despite this, the Armenians made only 19 percent of Maraş, which meant that 3.5-4.4 Armenians were living on per square kilometer in the region.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these reliable statistical records, the Armenian sources, as well as the Western missionary records, had provided various and exaggerated numbers for the Armenian population of Maraş. Their main objective in giving unreliable statistical information can be found in their concern for gaining political and religious supports in the conscience of the international community, especially in the Western consciousness. For example, one of the participants of the Near East Relief Organization, Stanley E. Kerr, claimed that 86.000 Armenians were living in Maraş and in its villages in 1914.<sup>14</sup> As big an Armenian community as this size in

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<sup>12</sup> Hicri 1326 (Miladi 1908) *Halep Vilayeti Sainamesi*, p. 504.

<sup>13</sup> McCarthy, 'The Population...', p. 85.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley E. Kerr, *The Lions of Marash: Personal Experiences with American Near East Relief, 1919-1922*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973), p. 11.

Maraş in the said time was technically, economically and socially was unviable. An open exaggeration can be seen in the number itself. Furthermore, the same source also stated that the city of Maraş housed 22.000 Armenian people in 1920.<sup>15</sup> By this estimates, the author not only contradicts himself with the extent of the number of the Armenian population, but also he proves that the Armenians were not exterminated during the Great War, and the so-called Armenian genocide never took place.

Despite one-sided and exaggerated sources, the Ottoman official records and the British estimates of the period generally represented quite similar statistical data. As Table 1 sent by Henry Trotter, a British consul in 1880 shows, while the British Consul Skene's findings and the Ottoman records came closer to each other, the Armenian Patriarchate numbers represent quite a different result.

Sources	Armenians	Total Non-Muslims	Total Muslims
Armenian Patriarchate	90,500	207,500	135,000
Consul Skene (1860)	--	100,000	400,000
Ottoman Official Records	67,634	95,702	539,702

Table 1: Halep province *male* population.<sup>16</sup>

Consul Skene's numbers for Maraş's population in 1860 give the percentage of the Armenians around 20 percent of the total population. Yet, in the following years until 1880's, the population of the region had drastic changes in favor of the Muslims because of the Armenian emigration to other countries, especially to the USA and Russia, and, most importantly, because of the Muslim immigrants settled in the region, especially after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. These facts have to be taken into consideration and force researchers to accept the Ottoman official sources as the most reliable source for statistical data.

A closer look at the official census of Maraş taken in 1880 gives us a pretty good idea of percentages of different religious groups living in the city. As Table 2 shows, while the Armenians of all sects made 23 percent of the total population, the Muslims had a great clear majority of 77 percent.

<sup>15</sup> Kerr, *The Lions ...*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Şimşir, *British...*, Vol. 2, p. 133.

Religious groups	Numbers	Total	Percentages
Muslims	49,818	49,818	75.99
Gregorian Armenians	12,063	15,316	23.36
Catholic Armenians	1,773		
Protestant Armenians	1,480		
Orthodox Greeks	278	278	0.46
Jews	91	91	0.13
Gypsies	53	53	0.08
Total	65,556	65,556	100.00

Table 2: Male population of Maraş in 1880.<sup>17</sup>

Not too much different than the official census records, the British Consul-General of Anatolia, C. W. Wilson, also telegraphed a statistical data to the British authorities on 8 March 1882. According to his estimates, the population of downtown Maraş was overwhelmingly Muslim, which was making 67 percent of the total population. Furthermore, the Christians and others all together comprised 33 percent, which was not at all an impressive number for a British official to provide a statistical data to back his country's policy of supporting Armenians against the Ottoman 'oppression'.

Besides, numerically being a minority in the city center of the Maraş sub-province, the Armenians, as well as the other Christians, were a small minority in the towns (kazas) of Maraş. As Wilson included in his report, the Ottoman official statistics show that among all the towns only Zeitun had some important Armenian existence. As the Table 3 shows, unlike the town of Zeitun where the Armenians were 12.252 (40%) while the Muslims were 17.990 (60%), the towns of Andırın and Pazarcık had no Armenians. The town of Elbistan, on the other hand, had only 804 Christians minority against the Muslim majority of 14.958.

Meanwhile, it is appropriate to state that the immigrants who came from the Caucasus escaping from both Russian and Armenian oppression during and after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 were settled in the Maraş sub-province in great numbers. In addition, as a part of Ottoman policy of settling down the

<sup>17</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, p. 129.

nomadic Turkmens, such as the Afshars and the Ceritlies, on the region, drastically changed the density of the Muslim population in Maraş in the second half of the nineteenth century. When Henry Barnham, British consul of Aleppo, visited the region in 1885 found out that Maraş had some 69.000 people, of which the Muslims were 54.000 and of which the Armenians were 15.000.<sup>18</sup>

Towns	Muslims	Christians	Jews	Total
Maraş	17,032	8,316	103	25,451
Andırın	7,226	--	--	7,226
Elbistan	14,958	804	--	15,762
Zeitun	8,995	6,126	--	15,121 *
Pazarcık	11,613	--	--	11,613
Total	59,824 * (%79.58)	15,246 (%20.27)	103	75,173 *

Table 3: Maraş sub-province and surrounding towns' male population in 1882.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, when we look at the Aleppo Province Almanac of 1312 (1895), we can see that the Muslims were making 80% percent of Maraş's population. The Armenians, however, had the population of 19 percent of the total population.

<sup>18</sup> Şimşir, *British...*, Vol. 4, p. 636.

\* Originally 10,131, which recalculated and corrected.

\* Originally 54,824, which recalculated and corrected.

\* Originally 70,173, which recalculated and corrected.

<sup>19</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, p. 425.



Religious Groups	Maraş <sup>20</sup>	Zeitun <sup>21</sup>	Elbistan <sup>22</sup>	Pazarcık <sup>23</sup>	Andırın <sup>24</sup>	Total	%in Total
Muslims	37,648	7,534	37,818	17,892	14,072	114,964	79.43
Catholic Armenians	3,224	443	307	--	193	4,167	2.87
Gregorian Armenians	9,148	8,486	922	12	2,409	20,977	14.49
Protestant Armenians	2,874	261	306	--	--	3,441	2.37
Jews	198	--	--	--	--	198	0.13
Foreigners	981	--	--	--	--	981	0.67
Total	54,073	16,724	39,383	17,904	16,674	144,728	100.00

Table 4: 1312 (1895) Population of Maraş sub-province.

#### ZEITUN REVOLT OF 1895: CAUSES OF THE REVOLT

Demographic and geographic aspects of Zeitun had great effects on the Zeitun Revolt of 1895. The town, as the British consul at Aleppo, Henry Barnham, reported, was located twelve hours by horse ride and 57.6 kilometer away from the city of Maraş, lying on a quite rough and mountainous region. According to Barnham, the town had some 8-9.000 Armenian populations,

‘who in time of peace earn their living as muleteers or as blacksmiths, but who take to the road and plunder when harsh treatment by the government makes it difficult for them to earn money by lawful means. Their past history is notorious, and has stamped them as an independent and warlike people, the use of arms being familiar to the women as well as to the men. The town is divided into Upper and Lower Zeitoun, which are separated by small ravine. About a mile from the town there is a flat-topped hill, on which stand the fort of Zeitoun, and in this fort there was...a garrison of 400 soldiers, commanded by a Binbashi, and the position was defended by two pieces of cannon.’<sup>25</sup>

20 Hicri 1312 (Miladi 1895) *Halep Vilayeti Salnamesi*, p. 271.

21 *Halep Vilayeti Salnamesi*, p. 273.

22 *Halep Vilayeti Salnamesi*, p. 276.

23 *Halep Vilayeti Salnamesi*, p. 278.

24 *Halep Vilayeti Salnamesi*, p. 279.

25 Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 634.

The town was located on an important gate between the Central Anatolia and the Eastern Mediterranean region. Because of its position, it controlled the trade route and gained a right from the government to protect and help the traders while traveling on this mountainous region.<sup>26</sup> This right which was called 'derbent teşkilatı' in the Ottoman administration provided the town's people to pay less tax in return for their services in protecting traders and travelers on this Taurus pass. Not only because of their right to pay less taxes, but also using the geographic aspect of their town as a means of escaping from government control, the town had always housed a large number of Armenian inhabitants.

Yet, as the almanac of Aleppo province dating 1890 states, Zeitun was twelve hours from the city of Maraş and received grain supplies from the towns of Elbistan and Andırın. Its people were doing transportation and iron works.<sup>27</sup> In the vicinity of the town, nice orchards and vineyards offered plenty of apples and grapes for the well-being of the people.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the town people were able to make fire arms and gunpowder to sell them with good price to have a lively economy.<sup>29</sup>

According to the new official Turkish records, Zeitun, under the name of Süleymanlı,<sup>30</sup> is located 90 kilometers away from the city of Maraş and as a town of Maraş principality. Its geographic location is 940 meter above the sea level<sup>31</sup> and, according to 1990 official census, it has 1.399 inhabitants.<sup>32</sup> One of the most important reasons for losing the importance of the town and lowering the number of its inhabitants can be found in its troublesome history in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Since the number of Armenian inhabitants of the town had risen many times in the period, the ancient trade route between the Central Anatolia and the Eastern Mediterranean, which was passing through Zeitun, began to lose its importance and safeness. This

<sup>26</sup> Mehmet Gürbüz, *Kahramanmaraş Merkez İlçe'nin Beşeri ve İktisadi Coğrafyası*, (Kahramanmaraş: İl Kültür Müdürlüğü, 2001), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> *Halep Vilayeti Salnamesi*, p. 164.

<sup>28</sup> *Halep Vilayeti Salnamesi*, p. 239.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmet Eyicil, *Osmanlı'nın Son Döneminde Maraş'ta Ermeni Siyasi Faaliyetleri*, (Ankara: Gün Yayıncılık, 1999), p. 367.

<sup>30</sup> The original name 'Zeitun' was changed to 'Süleymanlı' in 1915 by a decree of the Sultan in order to commemorate the name of Binbaşı Süleyman who was killed by the Armenian insurgents in the town.

<sup>31</sup> T. H. 'Zeytun', *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 13, (Eskişehir: MEB, 1997), pp. 556-557.

<sup>32</sup> *Kahramanmaraş'ın 1990 Genel Nüfus Sayımı*, (Ankara: DİE Matbaası, 1993), p. 26.

forced economic and commercial activities to seek a new alternative for a more safe and reliable route. For this reason, in the same period, the Tekir-Göksun-Kayseri trade route began to replace the one that had passed in the town of Zeitun.

The geographic suitability for unlawful activities helped Zeitun to be a favorable place for Armenians who were escaping from law and order. The town was also away from the civilized and cultured centers. Combination of its geographic aspects and its isolation from closer contact with big centers affected the inhabitants to develop a sort of wild and barbaric life style. Thus, 'lying in the most difficult stones of Taurus mountainous, the Zeitun volcano revolted from time to time and always drowned surrounding places with fire and blood.'<sup>33</sup> One of the British consuls, Ferdinand Bennet, while passing by Zeitun in June 1881, reported that the Christian population of the town was in an open revolt against the government; and the castle, which had been poorly constructed, and which contained some 200 soldiers could not control the town. Bennet said,

*'The Zeitounlis themselves do not improve on personal acquaintance. I find them to be a semi-barbarous and depraved community, little better than savages, and so ignorant, self-opiniated, and conceited, that it is impossible to do any good with them by argument and persuasion. Strongly conceived that they are a power of themselves, the Turkish Government is afraid of them, very excitable, reckless, idle to a degree, and utterly ignorant of what goes on outside their own mountains, they are now in such a state that I can hardly conceive it possible that order can be restored without bloodshed. I find an utterly lawless community, split up into parties, quarrelling and fighting among each other, with no one to lead them, they are quite deaf to anything a Turk may say, no Moukhtars, or head of quarters, for the Government to appeal to in its collection of taxes, no Town Council, indescribable filth in the narrow and steep streets, and a parcel of inflammatory and evil-minded priests, who pretend to be animated by a love of justice, but whose hatred of the Moslem yoke is the real cause of their violent language'.<sup>34</sup>*

Among the causes of the Zeitun Revolt of 1895, provocative and separatist activities of Armenian secret and militancy organizations were as important as the geographic and

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<sup>33</sup> Besim Atalay, *Maraş: Tarihi ve Coğrafyası*, (İstanbul: Dizerkonca Matbaası, 1973), p. 82

<sup>34</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, p. 237.

demographic aspects of the town. Especially, the Hunchaks, which was founded in Geneva in 1887 by a group of Armenian students, played a crucial role in planning and executing the revolt. This organization openly criticized and prepared terrorist activities against the Ottoman state in Europe, while secretly working within the Empire. Avedis Nazarbek, the leader of the party, in one of his letters to English Standard on 18 October 1895, stressed that they were teaching revolutionary doctrine, giving back oppression against the oppression, teaching self-protection methods, violence against the violence mentality in everywhere.<sup>35</sup> In addition, according to the news published in The Morning Advertiser in many places, fearing from revolutionary violence, many Armenians were leaving their homes for safer places. For example, the inhabitants of Kesseb village emigrated to Alexandratta on the Mediterranean shore.<sup>36</sup>

Having had a quite bad reputation in rising against the established order in many times in its history, Zeitun increasingly became a gathering place for the Armenian terrorists, militants, separatists and criminals for combining their powers against the 'common' enemy, the Ottoman State. It was also one of the two places within the empire where the Armenians could carry arms without any restriction. Furthermore, the inhabitants of Zeitun could make their own shotgun, Zeitunacı,<sup>37</sup> and ammunition. Besides fire guns produced locally, the militants secretly brought from America and Russia the latest model fire guns, including martin. Moreover, many leaders of the revolt had been to Europe where they perfected themselves in the art of revolution. One of the Hunchak leaders, Agasi (Agassé), had traveled to the USA, England and Cyrus. He had secretly been working in Aintap and surrounding places to promote Hunchak causes and gain supporters and followers to this terrorist organization under the code-name Tufekchiyan since August 1895.<sup>38</sup> He also sent recruits to Zeitun to fight in the revolt, which had been planned for a long time. Agasi himself came to Zeitun lead a large rebel group that was estimated around 15.000 armed men.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> Cezmi Yurtsever, *The 311 Legacies of the Zeitoun Armenians*, (Ankara: Köksav, 1999), p. 12; Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, p. 429. The other place was Sasun in the sub-province of Muş.

<sup>38</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 638.

<sup>39</sup> Yurtsever, *The 311...*, pp. 36-37.

One of the Ottoman internal policies of settling the nomadic subjects on lands positively affected the Armenians. Especially, the *yörüks* (the nomadic Turkmens) wandered in Maraş and surrounding regions, namely Farsaks, Ceritlies, Afshars and Bozdoğan, began to be forcefully settled on lands starting in the mid-nineteenth century. These *yörüks* who professed Islam and lived a harsh life were moving from one grassland to another, and especially in the summers from one mountain to another, created some sort of authority over the Christian subjects who generally lived in villages and tilled the soils in the countryside. From time to time they were essential in controlling the Armenians of Taurus Mountains. Their settlements on lands gave the Armenians a kind of free-action against the official authority.<sup>40</sup> After being saved from a big controlling power of the *yörüks* by the government, the Armenians began to feel strong enough to oppress their weak Muslim neighbors wherever they felt themselves stronger than the Muslims. Thus, Zeitun was a perfect example for Armenian outlawed activities after the mid-nineteenth century.

While the settlement of the *yörüks* on lands eased the pressure on the Armenians, the settlement of the immigrants, who came from the Caucasus in large numbers after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, in and around Maraş increased hateful angers of the Armenians against the government. This anger was based on Armenian assumption that the lands that they had tilled to produce crops were taken from them and distributed among the immigrants.<sup>41</sup> Having had traditional and natural outlawed mentality, and having been used to banditry activities, this anger added a new strain on their hate and vengefulness against the government in Zeitun.

It is a vital question to ask why the Armenians who had lived side by side with the Turks since the mid-eleventh century began to increase their separatist and revolutionary activities starting in the mid-nineteenth century. Since the internal structures of the Turkish Empire had not changed in the negative trend for the minorities, even improved by the Sultan's decree of 1839 and

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<sup>40</sup> Atalay, *Maraş*, pp. 74-82. Besim Atalay considered the settlement of the nomads as a shortsighted, wrong and destructive policy of the Sublime Porte. He wrote, 'In the end, Turkishness and its traditions were destroyed. These lovely men (the Turkmens) who had provided victories in three continents to the Turks disappeared and with them their homes, names, horses, sheep vanished. This is the result of blind imitation of the European civilization. What service they had once provided?'

<sup>41</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, p. 239.

1856, what happened and occurred within the empire to have more and more minority risings? Because it is hard for any researcher to give a full answer to these and similar questions, it is left for them to seek answers to these questions not in the internal structures of the empire, but in the international relations gained new dimensions after Europe's rise in the world politics since the big geographic discoveries. In this respect, it was the imperialist interests of Russia, England and others on the Turkish Empire that began to turn every stone in internal affairs of the empire to create better environments for their economical, commercial, military, cultural and social interests.

As the globalization of the world developed, it brought new problems into lands where political organizations had little say in this development. Since Western countries, which had succeeded in industrialization in the nineteenth century, including England, France, the USA, Russia and Germany, established a sort of 'New World Order' which gave them power to organize the political, cultural, social, and economic spheres, they put their interests first on the table. These powers shaped the world's systems remained from the last several centuries. The Ottoman Empire could not escape from their 'free-will' and 'free-action' to save itself from disintegrating.

The big powers which were adamant in their pursuit of short and long-term interests always found 'problems' or 'questions' in the places they hoped to establish their interests. Since Russia had tried every means, including the so-called protectorate of the Orthodox and the Slavs, to intervene in the Ottoman affairs. She encouraged and supported minorities in the Balkans and in Anatolia to revolt against their legitimate rulers. Under the guise of protecting these Christian minorities from Turkish 'oppression', Russia wanted to pursue her traditional long-term policy of reaching warm waters by establishing a control over the Turkish Straits. On the other hand, the British tried to prevent the Russians from reaching warm waters by supporting territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire until 1878. Both of the imperialist states found a great number of Ottoman subjects to help them further their interests. These middlemen of these imperialists were motivated by their desire to establish autonomous or independent states. Though the Balkan minorities, including the Serbs, Greeks, Romanians, and Bulgarians had some sort of majority in their desired lands, the Armenians had nowhere in the Empire to have a

majority. Despite this vital fact, they doggedly pursued their separatist cause and continued to be the middlemen of the imperialists.

*'Armenian question, during the time of peace, opened the door for big powers to intervene in the Ottoman affairs to weaken her and provide the West a power over the empire; during the time of war, the aggressors played with it as a dimension of using the Armenians to attack the Turks behind the fighting lines.'*

In this respect, the Armenians did more goods for the Imperialists than for themselves.<sup>42</sup>

Besides imperialist games over the destiny of the Empire, some of the Ottoman political steps, though these were taken in good intention to provide more help for the minorities also contributed to revolts in the nineteenth century. Among these steps, the acceptance and the declaration of the Armenian Nation Regulation of 1863, as Armenian writer Kagik Ozanyan stated, helped the Armenians to feel themselves as a 'state' within the 'state'. It caused the Armenians to develop already existing rebelliousness. Furthermore, by this regulation, the Armenians felt freer to publish newspapers, pamphlets, and books to disseminate and further revolutionary activities.<sup>43</sup>

Being seen as the 'visible spirit of the lost country' by the Armenian writes,<sup>44</sup> the Armenian Church played a very important role in stirring up revolutionary upheavals. Since the Armenians had almost never had any long-term independent state in their history, the church played a crucial role in keeping and in preserving the Armenian distinct traits and existence for millenniums. The Armenian Church and its religious leaders had a special place in the Ottoman Empire. Since the Ottomans left the non-Muslim communities within the empire to conduct their own religious, judicial, economical, social, cultural and educational activities without any strong restriction, as part of the so-called 'millet system', the non-Muslims, and especially leaders of these people, the 'milletbaşı', had large opportunities to develop their own differences. As the Ottoman Empire began to crumble and disintegrate by the internal and, more especially, by outside

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<sup>42</sup> Mim Kemal Öke, *Ermeni Meselesi*, (İstanbul: Aydınlar Ocağı Yayını, 1986), p. 130.

<sup>43</sup> Erdal İter, *Armenian Church and Terrorism*, (Ankara: Sistem Ofset, 1999), pp. 35-37.

<sup>44</sup> İter, *Armenian ...*, p. 13.

pressures in the nineteenth century, the Armenian religious leaders began to spread separatist propaganda among their communities.<sup>45</sup>

These religious leaders had both religious and temporal powers over their people. This made them all the more strong to control and canalize the non-Muslims. The Armenians who feared of every pressure from their religious leaders because 'when an Armenian received the punishment of the church he was losing all his rights within the community, no-one was talking to him, nobody was selling anything to him, no-one was marrying to him, and even their bodies were not buried',<sup>46</sup> were alienated from the society. Furthermore, the Ottomans who wanted to establish a control over the Armenians and who wanted to rule effectively the Armenians established the Armenian Patriarchate. Yet, the Patriarchate had legitimate and lawful rights to keep all the Armenians culturally, religiously and socially intact, which made less likely for the Armenians to be mixed in the majority of the Turkish society and be assimilated into the Muslim groups.

As an obvious example for the involvement of the Armenian religious leaders in the revolts of the Armenians can be seen in a conversation took place in 1885 between the British ambassador C. N. E. Elliot and the Armenian Patriarch of İstanbul, Harouthioun Vehabedian. When the ambassador was asking the Patriarch to send new circulars to Anatolia to calm down the revolutionary upheavals, which occurred in many places including Zeitun, the Patriarch said, 'The Bulgarians had attacked the Turks and massacred them wholesale, but this conduct had not alienated the sympathies of Europe.'<sup>47</sup> In addition, the Catholicos of Sis (Kozan) told the general consul of Britain in 1882 that if the British helped him he would be a faithful helper of the British interests in the Cilicia region.<sup>48</sup>

Although the Armenian leaders had adhered the idea of separating from the empire, they had failed to appreciate, indeed, did not want to appreciate, the historical and demographic realities of the Anatolian plateau. The Christians who pursued

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<sup>45</sup> Salahi R. Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire*, (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 1993), p. 281.

<sup>46</sup> Ergün Aybars, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi I*, (İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1986), p. 81.

<sup>47</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 457.

<sup>48</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, p. 346.



goals of independence in the Balkans at least had some sort of demographic facts to support their aims. The Armenians, on the other hand, had no-real and admissible arguments in terms of Armenian population in Anatolia. The Armenians even in their most crowded principalities had made only one fifth of the total population. Thus, they were minority on the lands that they claimed theirs.<sup>49</sup> Arminius Vambery stressed that pursuing the goal of any kind of Armenian separation in Anatolia was against the humanity and the reality. He believed in improving both the Christian and Muslim life standards all together, rather than, as the British 'liberals' did, in putting harmful thoughts to the brains of the people lived in the region.<sup>50</sup>

Despite restless and unlawful activities of Zeitun Armenians, who revolted at least 57 times after 1780,<sup>51</sup> the Ottomans had never established a strong and suppressive military rule over the town, and never seriously contemplated relocating them in another more secure place. Even this point would be enough to exemplify the Ottoman tolerance and commitment towards its subjects. The Ottomans had maintained a weak military existence, and led the ishans (mukhtars) of the Armenian quarters to rule over their co-religious people.<sup>52</sup> Their military power in the town was most of the time fragile and there were around 160-200 soldiers living in a weak military fort which would be taken in a first assault by any large power.<sup>53</sup> Yet, despite their mild power in the region, the Ottomans managed to uncover a revolt which had been planned by Zeitun archbishop L. S. Garabet and his 45 friends in 1881. These people were taken to Aleppo where they were trialled and Garabet were found guilty of indulging revolt and making propaganda toward the people to rise against the state. He was sentenced to life while the others received various sentences.<sup>54</sup> However, with the pressure of the big powers, especially from Britain, the Ottomans had to declare amnesty and let them go free.

<sup>49</sup> Justin McCarthy, 'Bırakın Tarihçiler Karar Versin,' *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, No. 2, (June-July-August 2001), p. 118.

<sup>50</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 78.

<sup>51</sup> Erdal İler, *Ermeni Mes'elesi'nin Perspektifi ve Zeytun İsyanları, 1780 – 1915*, (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1995), p. 81.

<sup>52</sup> İler, *Zeytun ...*, p. 77.

<sup>53</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, p. 112.

One of the most important reasons of Zeitun Armenians to revolt against the state was their allegation of a historical right. According to this allegation, the Sultan Murat IV granted a right for them not to pay any taxes. This claim would have to be an absurd one since the harsh rule of Murat IV would not have allowed to any discrepancies in his realm. Indeed, this claim would be an opposite of what the sultan wanted to achieve.<sup>55</sup> Besides their allegation of being exempt from taxes, the Armenians claimed that the government had collected large quantity of taxes. This claim also had to be wrong since these people had lived in a harsh and virtually uncontrolled region, which provided them to escape from their basic duties for the state. Indeed, the Zeitun Armenians had not paid their taxes. Even the government had reduced taxes and demanded half of the original taxes, the Armenians of the town refused to pay them.<sup>56</sup>

Besides the resistance of the Armenians against the demands of the government, they also spread false rumors to justify their unruly actions. One of such rumors was that the Ottoman soldiers used a religious building, a monastery, as an accommodation, which was against the law and disgraced their religious feelings. Again, in another rumor, the Armenians claimed that around 500 Armenian children were given poisonous shots. These allegations were inspected by the British consul on the spot, and did not found any proof to support such claims.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the British consul, Henry D. Barnham, confessed that nine out of ten accusations of the Armenians were not true.<sup>58</sup> They were made up stories and allegations that they were carefully selected and purposefully executed by the Armenians to take the attention of the big powers to their so-called miseries in the Empire in order to receive assistance from them in the process of a possible autonomy or independence.

In short, the Armenians who had undermined the historical, demographical and geographical realities engaged in infeasible ideas and activities. They were purposefully filled up with false hopes by the big powers. Their so-called educated and

<sup>55</sup> Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1985), p. 158; Fahir Armaoğlu, *19. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi, 1789-1914*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1999), p. 579.

<sup>56</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, p. 238.

<sup>57</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 3, p. 143.

<sup>58</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 634.

intellectuals who had lived or studied in Europe and became revolutionaries and separatists sent wrong signals to their people. Foreign postal organizations carried harmful and revolutionary publications to Anatolia, which created fanatics among Armenians subjects of the empire.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, missionaries and foreign schools, which received too much authority and rights by the capitulations and weaknesses of the Empire, pervaded every part of the peninsula. Every Armenian village and towns filled with propaganda of these people and organizations. Though these were to educate the Armenians, they created a hostile feeling among them against their Muslim neighbors<sup>60</sup> with whom they had had a respectful and peaceful co-existence for at least a thousand years.

After all, Zeitun was a special place for the Armenian separatists and revolutionaries as a headquarters of their activities. Whenever they wanted to indulge in any harmful activities they chose Zeitun as a best place to start, as they were going to do in 1914 in the early days of the Great War.

### **Development of the Revolt**

Having had a quite bad reputation as bandits of Taurus Mountains, the Armenians of Zeitun engaged in more than a dozen revolts since the 1808.<sup>61</sup> Their unruly activities were gained momentum after the declaration of Armenian Nation Regulation in 1860s. Revolts of 1862, 1878 and 1880 were serious and big movements. Yet, these risings seem to have been only preparing stages of the 1895 big revolt. Combined with both their traditional unruliness and open support of the Western powers, Zeitun came on the brink of a big uprising in 1895.<sup>62</sup>

The weak government authority in the town encouraged thousands of Armenian convicts, bandits and revolutionaries to gather in the town prior to the revolt. These, along with the Zeitun people, were prepared by the revolutionaries for coming struggle with the government forces. The revolutionaries had spent a long time to plan the uprising. Thus, it was a well-planned rising which executed by a large group of Armenian armed men.

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<sup>59</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 3, p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 444.

<sup>61</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 3, p. 429.

The sparkle that ignited the revolt came from protests held by Armenians in İstanbul and elsewhere. Because of a report that was inked by an international commission's long investigations, and that came out as short of Armenian expectations about the Sasun uprising of 1894 the Armenians became quite heated and angry. The commission found out that many Armenian revolutionaries and bandits initiated the event and caused many Armenians and Muslims to die during the Sasun events. This judgment of the international commission was largely protested by the Armenians. The Zeitun Armenians, feeling strong enough to rise against the government, found this opportunity to begin their horrible crimes in and around the town.

The events in Zeitun began in late October 1895. Yet, the British knew such happenings in advance. Their consul in Aleppo, Henry D. Barnham, one of his confidential report stated that one of the members of the Armenian revolutionary organizations had visited him on October 11 and told him that they were going to intensify their activities in Aintap, Maraş and Zeitun.<sup>63</sup> Again, knowing such events in advance, the British foreign secretary issued a confidential order on 23 October 1895 to the Admiralty, indicating that they had received news from the Embassy in İstanbul that the Armenians of Zeitun and Andırın were going to revolt against the government. In order to 'protect' them against the Turkish counterattacks, the fleet should be sent and prepared to help the Armenians on the Alexandratta bay.<sup>64</sup> In response to the order of 23 October, the Admiralty sent a telegram stating that they sent ships to the Alexandratta bay and vicinity.<sup>65</sup>

The Zeitun Revolt of 1895 started on 24 October 1894. According to the Ottoman official documents, British newspapers published on 29 October 1895, and the reports of Barnham, the Armenians were responsible from starting the uprising. Leaders of the rising, Agasi, Hrachia, Abah, Nishan, Mleh and Garabet were sent by Nazarbeg, the leader of the Hunchak terrorist organization to Zeitun for the purpose of starting a revolt.<sup>66</sup> The first incident was a terrorist ambush to a gendarme unit. In order to investigate

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<sup>63</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 411.

<sup>64</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 360.

<sup>65</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 368.

<sup>66</sup> Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*, (İstanbul: Documentary Publications, 1988), p. 746.

rumors that Baron Agasi was recruiting militants to the Hunchak organization in Alabash village, the gendarmes were sent from Maraş. Armenian terrorists attacked the gendarme unit. They killed two soldiers. This was the starting event of a bloody uprising.<sup>67</sup> With the support and participation of the militants of secret terrorist organizations, Armenian intellectuals, mountaineers, Armenian Patriarchate and the big powers, the revolt became a very dangerous and quite bloody one.<sup>68</sup>

The next step for the militants was to secure Zeitun from any action taken by the Turkish military garrison stationed there to control the town. In a statement made by Said Paşa, the Sadrazam, dating on November 1 stated that Armenian bandits and terrorists were fiercely fighting with the military forces in Zeitun, and the soldiers were almost cornered by the superior forces of the insurgents.<sup>69</sup> The number of the insurgents, as British records indicate, was reaching to about 8.000 strong armed men.<sup>70</sup> In another source, the forces of the Armenian rebels were around 12 to 14 thousands.<sup>71</sup> These Armenians were generally well-trained in guerilla warfare, and they had some sort of previous experience from fighting against the government forces. Most of them were familiar with the terrain as well. As mentioned earlier, the Ottoman military existence in the fort, on the other hand, was not strong enough to suppress any large scale Armenian uprising. Thus, after two-days fighting with the insurgents led by Agasi, the fort was taken and the remaining soldiers were captured by the Armenians. According to Uras, a Kaimakam, the highest officials of the town, fifty officers and some 600 soldiers were among the government officials living in the fort. They were imprisoned after the fall of the fort into the hands of the insurgents. These unfortunate Turks who had done no harm to the Armenians but to serve for their country in a harsh terrain were later killed by the Armenian men and women.<sup>72</sup> Hatred of the Armenians towards the Turks must have been so high to let even women to kill

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<sup>67</sup> Yurtsever, *The 311 ...*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>68</sup> Yalçın Özalp, *'Millet-i Sadıka' Patirtısı ve Maraş (Kahramanmaraş'ta) Ermeniler*, (İstanbul: Yılmaz Akçakale), p. 169.

<sup>69</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 415.

<sup>70</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 441.

<sup>71</sup> Özalp, *'Millet-i ...'*, p. 189.

<sup>72</sup> Uras, *The Armenian...*, p. 747.

imprisoned and helpless men. Besides Turkish officials and soldiers of the fort, the Armenians captured large quantity of ammunition and two cannons from the fort.

Upon these developments, in order to subdue the insurrection, a military unit that included 700 soldiers was sent from Maraş. But, this power also could not achieve the desired goal.<sup>73</sup> As the revolt got worse, the government arranged new troops under the commandership of Mustafa Remzi Paşa from Aleppo to move Zeitun to suppress the revolt.<sup>74</sup>

It was a large-scale event that affected almost whole of Maraş, even whole of Aleppo province. As the revolt in Zeitun continued, the Armenian separatists in Maraş were killing innocent Turks and Armenians who were most probably pro-government. Horrifying massacres of the Armenian insurgents began to spread surrounding Muslim villages. They attacked the village of Kemerli, pillaged the place and wounded many villagers. In order to investigate this event, a group of gendarmeries were sent to the village. But they were met a large group of Armenian bandits, whose numbers were around 2.000. In the fight, the commander of the gendarmeries and four soldiers were killed and their bodies were burned by the Armenians.<sup>75</sup> The reports written down by the British consul also mentioned that on 28 October, five soldiers and the commander were killed by the Armenians.<sup>76</sup>

While the Armenians were engaging themselves in horrifying massacres in Maraş, Aintap and Zeitun against the Muslims, many armed Muslim villagers around Maraş went to Maraş in order to 'kill gavurs and pillage them'. This kind of seeking revenge against the rebels created a quite dangerous state of existence in the region.<sup>77</sup> However, the government authorities in the big cities, including Maraş, Aintap and Urfa, successfully restrained Muslims to commit any crimes against the Christians, though, as the sources indicate, it was the Armenians who had long been preparing for such insurrections by secretly arming themselves, making their houses as a small arsenals and ammunition centers.

<sup>73</sup> Eyicil, *Osmanlının ...*, p. 206.

<sup>74</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 61; Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, pp. 634-636.

<sup>75</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, pp. 381-382.

<sup>76</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 50; Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 381.

<sup>77</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 636.

The Armenian rebels were increasing their attacks and massacres against the Turkish villagers, travelers and military men. It was reported that they were attacked both Göçerke village and Lieutenant Hasan Ağa. While they were killing Lieutenant Hasan and his family, including his wife and kits, they left a great destruction on the village, on November 2, 1895.<sup>78</sup> On the same day, a group of Armenian rebels attacked not only Geben village but also Göksun. The number of rebels who attacked Göksun was around 2.500. While they were killed many Muslims and destroyed many houses in the first place, they were beaten before Göksun.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, on November 4, the rebels raided on Ismaili village where they burned three houses.<sup>80</sup>

A telegram sent by Tevfik Paşa, on November 11, indicated that the Armenians killed the vice tax collector of Zeitun, and the fate of the wife and four children of the deceased tax collector was not known. It also stated that the rebels attacked the village of Çukurhisar.<sup>81</sup> One of the most horrible massacres committed by the Armenian insurgents during this revolt against the innocent Muslims took place in this village. According to sources, tens and hundreds of Muslims were killed, wounded and hideously tortured. According to British newspapers, the Armenians killed 12 Muslims. But, Tevfik Paşa's telegraph put the death toll of the Muslims to 80 and wounded to 15.<sup>82</sup> Another source provided a graver picture. It stated that the Armenians cowardly killed 150 men, 40 women and 95 children. They also burned 180 homes of the villagers.<sup>83</sup> Even today people call the place as 'Şehitler Deresi' (Martyrs' Valley) where 40 Muslims were taken and killed in cold blood by the Armenians.<sup>84</sup>

The Armenian attacks on civilians and Muslim villages continued throughout the rebellion. On 11 November, as Tevfik Paşa's telegraph states, the rebels attacked villages of Becansis and Kurtul. In the former place, they burned 57 homes. In the second place, on the other hand, they burned the entire village.

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<sup>78</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 432.

<sup>79</sup> Yurtsever, *The 311 ...*, p. 38.

<sup>80</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 67.

<sup>81</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, pp. 478-479.

<sup>82</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, pp. 86, 96.

<sup>83</sup> Yurtsever, *The 311 ...*, p. 38.

<sup>84</sup> Yurtsever, *The 311...*, p. 8.

Many innocent Muslims regardless of women and men were killed by them. The British newspapers of November 16 published news about these events and even included that the Armenians were attacked the villages of Fersak and Biçenli.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, the Armenian rebels who were having food shortages and fears of approaching Turkish military forces appealed to the British for help and intervention on their behalf to the Turkish government.<sup>86</sup>

Despite the food shortages begun to be felt among the rebels and increasing Turkish forces to end the rebellion, the Armenian rebels continued their criminal attacks against the Muslims. A group of them numbered around 800 made a big raid into the town of Andırın where they torched the government buildings, as well as civilian homes. They also killed and wounded many Muslims.<sup>87</sup> Sergeant Yusuf and one hundred Muslims were among the victims who were killed and thrown into a creek.<sup>88</sup> As sources recorded, some of the rebels who attacked Andırın were speaking English. This fact created suspicion in the minds of the officials about the British direct involvement in these terrible events. Upon this development and official inquiries, the British consul in Aleppo made an explanation and denied any involvement of a British people in the raids. He predicted that it would be the members of the Hunchak group who had been to Europe and knew how to speak English. These people would have acted as the British to spread wrong signals.<sup>89</sup>

Although the British consul denied any direct involvement of their fellowmen in the revolt, the British had been in supportive of Armenian uprisings. In a memorandum issued by the British Embassy in İstanbul and signed by Adam Block on November 16, 1895, the English officials accepted that the Armenian rebels killed many Muslims. Only in Çukurhisar, these rebels killed 80 Muslims. Despite their acceptance of such criminal and inhumane acts of the Armenian bandits, the British warned the Ottomans not to harsh on the Armenians. They cautioned the Turks to be careful in dealing with the Armenians unless the big powers would be involved in the conflict and that would be the 'end of the Empire'.

<sup>85</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, pp. 96, 105.

<sup>86</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 503.

<sup>87</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 516.

<sup>88</sup> Yurtsever, *The 311 Legacies of the Zeitoun*, p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> Şimşir, *Documents Diplomatiques Ottomans*, Vol. 3, p. 111; Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, p. 643.



Furthermore, the British premier, Lord Salisbury, also sent a message to the Sadrazam asking him to be mild towards the Zeitun Armenians.<sup>90</sup>

As the massacres and atrocious acts of the rebels increasingly gained more ground in and around Zeitun, thousands of the Muslims began to leave their homes. According to Barnham, these emigrants went as far away as the city of Aleppo. Meanwhile, the Armenians committed atrocities in the city of Maraş, killing a Turk. Upon this, there was a growing unrest in the city and many more were died because of the fights between the rebels and the Muslims. Barnham also reported that there were 40 British subjects in the Aleppo province, of which four were in Maraş, and all of these were in safe position.<sup>91</sup>

As the Armenians were widening their atrocious and cruel acts in the sub-province of Maraş, the Muslim life and property losses were increasing daily. These dreadful acts were enumerated by Tevfik Paşa, the foreign ministry of the Ottoman Empire, in his letter to Morel Bey, the Turkish ambassador in London, on 18 November 1895. According to this, the Armenians looted and burned the villages of Susikadı, Keçker, Musalı and Kerimli. Again, Tevfik Paşa's letter of 16 November stated that the Armenian rebels had attacked Bechan, Kurtul, Sugurju, Okatır, Devrek, Sarız, Köçürke, Keban, Çukurhisar and Andırın, where they pillaged houses, burned and destroyed them. In these attacks, they killed 266 Muslims, of which 16 were women. They also wounded over one hundred women, men and children. After mentioning that there were over 500 Muslims homes were burned during these raids, Tevfik Paşa wrote how brutally the Armenians committed these terrible crimes to their victims. They were *'cutting breasts of the women, slaughtering children before the eyes of their parents. They were also putting gunpowder on the eyes of their victims and then blowing them before killing many of the victims. Furthermore, these bandits were burning alive many of the family members of the soldiers whenever they caught them'*.<sup>92</sup> The Reuter News Agency also reported these horrific events on 17 December 1895.<sup>93</sup> Tevfik Paşa's telegram to London dating

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<sup>90</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, pp. 567, 571 and 593.

<sup>91</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, pp. 574, 634.

<sup>92</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, pp. 184-185.

<sup>93</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 192.

December 19 stated that everywhere within the Empire, except in Zeitun, a state of tranquility was reigning. He also stressed that the Armenian rebels in Zeitun killed all the prisoners except a colonel, a binbashi, and the kaimakam.<sup>94</sup>

British newspapers published on 21 and 23 December also wrote that the Armenian rebels killed all their prisoners except three high-ranking officers and officials. Moreover, according to these newspapers, the rebels attacked the villages of Arbendli, Ezbider and Mehil. They killed one person and stole animals in Arbendli. In Ezbider, under the command of Daniel Çavuş (sergeant) they killed a certain man named Necib Efendi and his two friends. In addition, in the village of Mehil, the rebels killed two men, five women and three children. They also took away cattle and sheep of the villagers. Meanwhile, Daniel Çavuş and his six men were killed by the soldiers.<sup>95</sup>

One of the groups that suffered most from the atrocious crimes of the Armenian rebels was the Muslim women. The Muslim women of Zeitun sent a telegram to the Padişah, II. Abdulhamit, and urged him to stop such crimes and punish the Armenians in kind. They stated that the Armenians were attacking their villages, throwing their children in air and then letting them to land on sticks, torturing and killing their husbands in the most cruel manners. They also stressed that the Armenians burned to ashes at least fifteen villages, and took their properties. Finally, they attacked women and dishonored them by raping and other lowest and inhumane manners.<sup>96</sup>

The fighting between the Turkish forces and the rebels continued for several months. The well-trained rebels who had piled up large quantities of rifles and ammunition prior to the rebellion used the terrain in the best of their interests and doggedly resisted the Turkish military forces. Yet, as the army began to besiege them in all fronts, the rebels started to commit not only massacres against the Turks, but also steal animals and foods around villages. In October 1896, the military forces were approaching the town; they came across many Muslim death bodies. Only on the banks of Zeytunsuyu, they collected 60 such

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<sup>94</sup> Şimşir, *Documents* ..., Vol. 3, pp. 190-191, 193.

<sup>95</sup> Şimşir, *Documents* ..., Vol. 3, pp. 196, 203.

<sup>96</sup> Şimşir, *Documents* ..., Vol. 3, p. 232.

bodies.<sup>97</sup> In an official statement issued on 2 February 1896, the government enumerated the atrocities committed by the Armenians rebels in Zeitun. It showed that the Armenians had a long and bloody uprising starting in October 1895 and lasting into February 1896.<sup>98</sup>

Harsh geographic aspects combined with a large number of determined rebels created big problems for the Ottomans to deal with it with small military units. In order to suppress the uprising, the Ottomans sent large armed forces under the commandership of Ferik Ethem Paşa. Ethem Paşa had managed to reach and besiege Zeitun on January 2, 1896. As they had secretly supported the Armenian rebels by providing hopes, fire arms, and political helps, the British warned the Ottoman government to be careful while handling Zeitun issue. Although the British believed in the honesty and justness of Ethem Paşa, they claimed that Zeitun was bombarded, some rebels were captured, and innocent Armenians were allowed to go Maraş. But, they were afraid that these Armenians who were allowed to go to Maraş would be massacred on the way to Maraş by the Kurds and Cercassians. Meanwhile, ambassadors of the big powers, except Russian ambassador, warned the Sublime Porte not to be too harsh on the rebels. The rebels on the other hand were not confident in the Ottoman 'guaranties' for their lives and they were refusing to lay their weapons and surrender.<sup>99</sup>

While the British were working hard to find a solution in favor of the Armenians by both directly or indirectly establishing pressure on the government and by trying to pull other big powers to act positively towards the Armenians, the Ottomans, as Nazım Paşa claimed, were exhausted from ongoing struggle with the rebels. Nazım Paşa claimed that the Ottomans commissioned around 110.000 soldiers to put down the rebellion but they lost around 13.000 of them and began to fear of losing the struggle. Thus, they sought interventions of ambassadors of big powers to seek an understanding with the rebels.<sup>100</sup> Whether it was the British to intervene in the conflict to save the Armenians from the Turkish forces who were so close to suppress and establish order on the

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<sup>97</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 232.

<sup>98</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, pp. 280-283.

<sup>99</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 4, pp. 669, 670.

<sup>100</sup> Hüseyin Nazım Paşa, *Ermeni Olayları Tarihi II*, (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1994), p. 320.

town, or the Ottoman government to end a long frustrating struggle with the rebels, the ending of the clashes were coming to a conclusion in January 1896. According to Uras, Zeitun was about to fall into hands of the military forces when the big power intervened in the conflict.<sup>101</sup>

The consuls of the six big powers residing in Aleppo were assigned and granted a permission to go into Zeitun to mediate between the government and the rebels. They reached Zeitun on January 11 and immediately started working to find a solution acceptable to both sides. They finally succeeded reaching an agreement on January 28, 1896.<sup>102</sup> According to this agreement, the members of Hunchak, and all leading rebels were to go Europe, the government was to announce a general amnesty for all Armenians who took part in the rebellion, the appointment of a new kaimakam was to be approved by the European big powers, security forces of Zeitun were to be selected among the Zeitunlies, the Zeitunlies were not to pay past taxes and were to be exempt from taxes in the following five years, taxes were to be collected according to incomes of the inhabitants, property, living and religious rights were to be under the European guaranties, all the villagers and militants who gathered in Zeitun were to go back their homes freely, the Zeitunlies were to return their weapons, especially martinis, and two cannons they captured from the military fort after the Muslims living in the vicinity returned their weapons, but they were to keep their shotguns, the destroyed military fort was to be built by the government, the Ottoman military forces were to be a small unit who were to stay in the fort and were not to intervene in the security of the town, the consuls of the big powers were not going to leave Zeitun until the peace conditions were fully implemented, and the big powers were to have right to have consuls in Zeitun.<sup>103</sup>

As the articles of the agreement show, the Ottomans had to sign a humiliating peace with the rebels who were happy to have supports of big powers. The rebels were also happy to gain a 'victory' over the Ottomans, but they were shortsighted to see their long-term interests. They widened the gape between the Muslims and the Christians, which created more hatreds and

<sup>101</sup> Uras, *The Armenians...*, p. 747.

<sup>102</sup> Özalp, *Maraş*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>103</sup> Hüseyin Nazım Paşa, *Ermeni ...*, pp. 320-321; Özalp, *Maraş*, pp. 194-195.

**The Armenians purposefully planned and effectively executed many large scale revolts in many provinces, Among all these, Zeitun rebellion was the most dangerous and the longest uprising.**

disappointments in both sides. By this agreement, the Ottomans *'not only lost some of their honor, but also they further complicated their sovereignty and independence within the Empire'*.<sup>104</sup> Despite horrific crimes of the rebels, the Ottomans could not punish the criminals, which left a bad example for the coming social unrests within the Empire. The

revolt ended in favor of both the rebels and the supporters of the rebels, the big powers.

### CONCLUSION

The year 1895 was one of the most eventful years in terms of the Armenian uprisings throughout the Empire. The Armenians purposefully planned and effectively executed many large scale revolts in many provinces, including Trabzon, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Malatya, Aintap, Van and Aleppo. Among all these, Zeitun Rebellion was the most dangerous and the longest uprising.<sup>105</sup> The rebellion was a product of three main forces, namely the big powers, especially Britain, who were motivated by their economical, military and cultural interests; the terrorists, who were educated and trained in Europe, and who were members of Armenian revolutionary organizations, especially the Hunchak; and the ignorant inhabitants of Zeitun, who were prone to a sort of independent and rough life, and who considered taxes as a burden for themselves. Along with these groups, the geography and weaknesses of the government served the rebellion to spread wider spaces and last longer. In order to suppress the revolt, the Ottomans had to struggle hard against not only the rebels but also the 'protectorates' of the rebels, the big powers. Thus, the rebellion tied down a large Turkish army<sup>106</sup> and faced a sticky situation in the international arena. The British had warned and even threatened the Ottomans not to indulge in any kind of harsh treatment against the Armenians. The British hopes of bringing

<sup>104</sup> Armaoğlu, *19.Yüzyıl ...*, p. 579.

<sup>105</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 10.

<sup>106</sup> Kerr, *The Lions...*, p. 5.

international powers together to force the Ottomans to grant larger concessions to the Armenians were somewhat resisted by the Russians who did not want to see a British-controlled Armenians in their south of Trans-Caucasian lands. It would have been a bad example to their Armenian subjects and it would also have been regretful for the Russians to lose a hope of reaching the eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, the Tsar, who did not want to see 'another Bulgaria', was not anxious to 'liberate' a new and hostile Christian group who would not want to serve Russian interests. Because of Russian objections to many British proposals, the Armenians could not obtain their desired helps from the big powers.<sup>107</sup> Yet, they still managed to receive some most modern weapons and strong enough political supports from the big powers.

Besides the military and political problems created by the rebellion, the already weak Ottoman economy became even worse by the growing military expenses. As the rebellion showed, the Ottomans had not dealt with effectively with the insurgents because their economy was not allowing them to establish well-trained and well-equipped military forces. Besides, the big powers which had a lot to say in the economic situation of the empire since they had landed large quantities of money felt strong and legitimate enough to intervene into the internal affairs of the empire.

The Zeitun Revolt was one of the most, if not the most, dangerous revolts of the Armenians prior to the Armenian revolt of Van in April 1815. In the revolt, thousands of Muslim civilians and soldiers were killed by the rebels. If the accounts of the leader of the revolt, Agassi, were true, the Armenians killed around 20.000 Muslims.<sup>108</sup> The time span of the revolt, the size of the military to put down the revolt and the large size of the well-trained and equipped rebels would be enough to accept that thousands of Muslims had been killed during the uprising.

When one compares the Muslims losses in the revolt with the Armenians, it would be seen that the Armenians were quite few in number. Although Lepsius, one of the most anti-Turkish writers in the Armenian question, claimed that around 6.000 Armenians

<sup>107</sup> Şimşir, *Documents ...*, Vol. 3, p. 302.

<sup>108</sup> McCarthy, 'Birakin ...', pp. 117-118; Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1985), p. 160.

were killed during the conflict, the official statistics, as well as unofficial estimates, told another story. When one looks at the statistical data of Zeitun after the revolt, one can easily see that the Armenian inhabitants of the region preserved their number, and even slightly increased it.<sup>109</sup> It can be estimated the Armenian losses would have been as low as 125 people<sup>110</sup> who were rebels and were killed during the fighting by military forces.

As the losses of both side compared, in terms of properties and lives, the Muslims had obviously been the most sufferers. The revolt showed that a well-prepared revolt would be quite costly to the Muslims and the Empire. The Muslims did not forget this humiliation and insult<sup>111</sup> at the hands of bandits, rebels and murderers, who had lived under their rule in safety, and who had been called 'millet-i sadıka' (loyal nation) for centuries. While the rebellion left a big and incurable scare on the hearts of the Muslims, the Armenians, especially the revolutionaries, celebrated it as a big victory over the Muslims. But, in the long run, this bloody confrontation deepened the gap between the two groups, and reduced the chances of a peaceful co-existence in the region. This hostile environment, though, served only to the interests of separatists and foreign interventionists, further paralyzed the country.

The rebellion contributed a lot to the fall of the good intentions of the Ottomans who had proclaimed the Gülhane Decree (1839), the Reform Decree (1856) and the Armenian Nation Regulation (1862) to provide better and equal rights within the Empire to all subjects regardless of their creeds. The rebellion showed that the Armenians were not just after equal rights but they wanted more than equal and better rights. They wanted to gain not only their total independence but also, as British Consul Wilson put it, power to rule over the Turks<sup>112</sup> who had ruled them for centuries. They were not just after political or judicial rights to equally co-exist with the Muslims. They were after taking a revenge. They wanted to insult, push away, rule or kill their ages-old masters who had

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<sup>109</sup> 1318 (1900) *Halep Vilayeti Salnamesi*, p. 349. According to the Almanac of Aleppo dating 1900, there were 8.356 Muslims, 8.766 Gregorian Armenians, 336 Catholic Armenians and 250 Protestant Armenians in Zeitun.

<sup>110</sup> Gürün, *Ermeni ...*, p. 160; Eyicil, *Osmanlının ...*, p. 246.

<sup>111</sup> Kerr, *The Lions ...*, p. 5.

<sup>112</sup> Şimşir, *British ...*, Vol. 2, pp. 51, 54.

never thought to assimilate or exterminate them, just to rule and provide a safe life for them.

The Armenians who participated in revolutionary activities and in rebellions motivated by the idea of committing bloody attacks on the Muslims in order to push the government to reprisal in kind so that they would have the intervention of the European big powers. By this way, they hoped to gain some sort of autonomy, or even independence, as the Balkan Christians had done. But, during the Zeitun Revolt, the big powers did not come to 'liberate' them. Instead, these powers secretly sent weapons to the rebels to increase their atrocious crimes, and partly provided political helps to protect the crimes and criminals. Their aim was not to bring an acceptable and honest solution to the problems. The ongoing problems of the Empire were serving much better to their interests in the region than any long-lasting solution. Thus, the Zeitun Revolt of 1895 increased chances of the big powers to use the instability of the country in favour of their economical and military interests in the region, rather than providing anything good to both the Turks and the Armenians.

After doing dirty jobs of the imperialist countries, the rebels left behind a worse reputation to the Zeitunlies. They were saved by the intervention of big powers from any punishment of their treasonous and awful crimes. *'After spilling so much blood of innocents in Maraş, the leaders of the rebels, whose travel tickets were bought by the government, went to Europe as heroes (!)'*.<sup>113</sup> But, they were not heroes. They were terrorists, bandits, wrong models for the Armenians whose peaceful life began to change drastically. Furthermore, the rebellion served as a bad example for the coming atrocities committed by the Armenians who began to feel more carelessly and haughtily towards the Muslims. These carelessness and haughtiness came from the hopes of the Armenians that whenever they committed crimes, even in the most dreadful form, they were sure that the European interventions would save them from any harm coming from the government.

Zeitun Revolt was a perfect example for cooperation between imperialist big powers and terrorists. While the former would have used the latter as a tool to pursue its goals in less developed

<sup>113</sup> Özalp, *Maraş*, p. 200.



places, the latter would have thought to get outside supports to reach its separatist aims. In this cooperation, the real losers, however, would have been both the legitimate governments and problematic communities under the rule of these governments. On the one hand, the regimes under attacks would receive great deals of political and economical deterioration. The separatist communities, on the other hand, would lose the confidence of their governments. It would lead to destabilization of the state to fall into small pieces for being swallowed by the big powers.