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New York, I. B. Tauris, 2020, xvi + 240 p. (*Laurențiu Rădvan*); Carol Iancu, *Evreii din Hârlău și împrejurimi. Istorie și memorie*, Iași, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2020, 250 p. (*Dănuț Fotea*); Victor Taki, *Russia on the Danube: Empire, Elites, and Reform in Moldavia and Wallachia 1812-1834*, Budapest, Vienna, New York, Central European University Press, 2021 (*Cristian Ploscaru*); Mirel Bănică, *Bafta, Devla și Haramul. Studii despre cultura și religia romilor*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2019, 472 p. (*Monica Chicuș*); David E. Nye, *American Illuminations. Urban Lighting, 1800–1920*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2018, x + 280 p. (*Simion Câlția*); Mihai Ștefan Ceaușu, Ion Lihaciu, *Autonomia Bucovinei (1848-1861). Studiu și documente*, Iași, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2021, 374 p. (*Ioan-Gabriel Chiraș*); *Universitatea din Cluj în perioada interbelică*, vol. III, *Facultatea de Litere și Filosofie*, coordonator Ana-Maria Stan, editori Ioan-Aurel Pop, Simion Simon, Ioan Bolovan, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2019, 364 p. (*Dragoș Jipa*); Radu Ioanid, *Pogromul de la Iași*, ediție îngrijită de Elisabeth Ungureanu, prefață de Alexandru Florian, București, Editura Institutului Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România „Elie Wiesel”, Iași, Polirom, 2021, 142 p. (*Mihai-Daniel Botezatu*); Michael Shafir, *România Comunistă (1948-1985). O analiză politică, economică și socială*, traducere din limba engleză de Mihai-Dan Pavelescu, București, Editura Meteor Press, 2020, 432 p. (*Andrei Mihai Rîpanu*); *Panorama comunismului în România*, ed. de Liliana Corobca, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2020, 1150 p. (*Daniel Chiriac*).

*Abrevieri* .....

## Between “millet” and self-determination: the Ottoman-Armenian case

Historians that have studied the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century agree that the fate of the parties involved depended not only on the relations between the Great Powers<sup>1</sup> but also on the decisions of the Sultans and Ottoman governments regarding the relationship between the center of the Empire and its hinterlands, between law and religion, and between Islam and reform<sup>2</sup>.

As far as the Ottoman Armenians are concerned, there are some additional factors that need to be mentioned, such as demographic distribution, coexistence, sharing of land and resources with Kurdish tribes in Eastern Anatolia<sup>3</sup> and, importantly, the juxtaposition of secular modernization and radicalization in the Armenian community<sup>4</sup>. The context in which these elements are placed is the attempt to reform the Ottoman Empire by the Sultans, starting with Selim III (1789-1807), the goal being to regain economic and military parity with European powers.

The “millet” system was a complex *modus vivendi* of established procedures, rather unique in the social history records, that came to life gradually following the efforts of Ottoman administration to take into consideration the different religious and ethnic groups that it governed, and how the state apparatus could be best organized to deal with this challenge. The word “millet” comes from the Arab “milla” and its rough meaning is that that of “nation”<sup>5</sup>. The idea of nation,

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Salt, *Britain, the Armenian Question and the Cause of Ottoman Reform: 1894-96*, in “Middle Eastern Studies”, XXVI (1990), no. 3, p. 308; Arshag Ohan Sarkissian, *History of the Armenian Question to 1885*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1938, p. 44-45.

<sup>2</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *Millets and Nationality: The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era*, in Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History. Selected Articles and Essays*, Leiden-Boston-Koln, Brill, 2002, p. 611-615.

<sup>3</sup> Marcello Flores, *Il genocidio degli armeni*, Bologna, Mulino, 2006, p. 33-34.

<sup>4</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement. The development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1963, p. 67-89.

<sup>5</sup> Gabor Agoston, Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, New York, Facts on File, 2008, p. 383; Fatih Öztürk, *The Ottoman Millet System*, in “The Journal of South-Eastern European Studies”, XVI (2014), p. 72.

as it is perceived by Europeans, was almost entirely unknown for the peoples of the former Ottoman Empire<sup>6</sup>. At the dawn of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nation-building intended by the Young Turks – even if the model wanted to imitate Europe – was developed according to local customs and mentalities. There are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire was organized as a bundle of ethnic communities, each with its own identity and with relative cultural and administrative autonomy<sup>7</sup>. Secondly, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman state was made up of decentralized, regional administrations and military elites with strictly circumstantial ties to ethnic communities<sup>8</sup>. Thirdly, one must consider that all communities of the Empire were recognized based on religious grounds and not ethnic ones. Thus, the concept of “nation” did not find its place in the Ottomans’ collective imaginary. This concept struggled to take hold among Muslims who saw any alternative concept of nation as a threat to the ascendancy of Muslim subjects over the non-Muslim ones<sup>9</sup>. This underlying mentality could not be changed despite the best efforts of reformers<sup>10</sup>.

“Millet”, in the Ottoman Empire, described a non-Muslim religious minority, officially represented by a political leader of religious background. As it was structured in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the “millet” was a religious community with its own hierarchy and with poignant political and economic power within the Empire<sup>11</sup>, being more the result of administrative necessity than that of a preordained plan of the Ottoman authorities.

This system incorporated some religious groups into the Ottoman state, allowing them to keep their religious faith, culture, and broad administrative autonomy. The “millet” represented mainly a religious group and, secondly, an ethnic or linguistic one; it enshrined a religious right and integrated non-Muslim groups into the state without fading ethnic or linguistic characteristics<sup>12</sup>. The political actions of Ottoman governments profoundly impacted the social and economic life of ethnic and linguistic communities under their rule but did not alter their religious or cultural lives. For the Armenians (and others) the idea of moving away from the “millet” system towards self-determination arose following a series of social and economic changes caused mainly by the Sultans’ changing approach

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<sup>6</sup> Roderic Davison, *Nationalism as an Ottoman problem and the Ottoman response*, in *Nationalism in a Non-National State. The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire*, William H. Haddad, William Ochsenswald (eds.), Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1977, p. 25-56.

<sup>7</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *Nation and Nationalism in the late Ottoman Empire*, in Kemal H. Karpat, *op. cit.*, p. 544.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 545.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, *Millets and Nationality: The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era*, in Kemal H. Karpat, *op. cit.*, p. 611.

<sup>10</sup> Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire. The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922*, Princeton - New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 147-150.

<sup>11</sup> Gabor Agoston, Bruce Masters, *op. cit.*, p. 383-384.

<sup>12</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *Millets and Nationality*, p. 613.

to authority and towards the relationship between the state and what today we might call civil society<sup>13</sup>.

Until Greek independence (1830), the Armenian “millet” was the second most numerous, after the Orthodox one, often called “Greek-Orthodox” in official documents because the language used by the Orthodox Church was Greek. Bulgarians, Serbs, Vlachs and many others were part of the same Orthodox “millet”. In the Armenian “millet”, there were Syrians, Chaldeans, Copts, Georgians and Abyssinians. As recorded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Armenian Patriarch from Istanbul, Malachia Ormanian, “the two patriarchs, Greek and Armenian, became recognized as the heads of the two great orthodox Christian parties in the East; that division was established on the basis of a profession of faith, independently of any consideration of race or of nationality”<sup>14</sup>.

One peculiarity of the Armenian “millet” was that, hierarchically speaking, within the Apostolic Armenian Church, there were three Catholicoi above the Armenian Patriarch from Istanbul; the latter was the *de facto* ruler of the Armenian “millet” because of his immediate connection to the Sultan (both seating in Istanbul), whereas the three Catholicoi had their headquarters in remote and less economically developed areas<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the Sultan was the one that named the Armenian Patriarch at the behest of the community’s leaders from Istanbul, the Patriarch being equivalent in rank to Pasha. Among the Patriarch’s responsibilities were administration of the “millet”, tax collection among the Armenians, the organization of Armenian education and press, and the restoration and construction of churches, monasteries and other institutional buildings within the “millet”. He also held the role of judge regarding Armenian matters, except those concerning individuals accused of crime or issues regarding state safety<sup>16</sup>.

This peculiarity played an important role in the change in politics within the Armenian community and changing the Armenian’s attitude towards the Ottoman state. “Milleti sadika” became “milleti asiya”<sup>17</sup>, i.e., the “loyal millet” became the “rebel millet”.

According to the Ottoman census of 1844, the Sultan had roughly 2,400,000 vassals of Armenian ethnicity, of these only 25 to 30% were living in urban areas, some 550,000 to 650,000 people<sup>18</sup>. 225,000 of them lived in the Empire’s capital and the rest in rural, agricultural areas, mainly in Eastern

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>14</sup> Malachia Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia: her history, doctrine, rule, discipline, liturgy, literature, and existing condition*, London, A.R. Mowbray, 1912, p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> Hagop Barsoumian, *The Eastern Question and the Tanzimat Era*, in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, vol. II. Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1997, p. 184.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 183-185.

<sup>17</sup> Garabet K. Moumdjian, *From Millet-i Sadika to Millet-i Asiya: Abdülhamid II and Armenians, 1878-1909*, in *War and Diplomacy The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, M. Hakan Yavuz, Peter Sluglett (eds.), Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 2011, p. 302-350.

<sup>18</sup> Hagop Barsoumian, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

Anatolia. The fact that most of the Armenians did not live in urban centers is very important in understanding „the Armenian question”, as the Armenians from rural areas were the ones being burdened by taxes that varied annually and regionally, but mostly by the lack of protection for life and property. Additionally, according to Ottoman documents, until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the demographic growth of the Armenians was so significant that it troubled Ottoman officials<sup>19</sup>.

The borders of the Ottoman Empire from Eastern Anatolia were established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in 1515, after the battle of Chaldiran, when the Kurds allied themselves with Ottoman sultan Selim I (1512-1520) against Persian Shah Ismail I (1501-1524). This was done mostly because the Ottomans and Kurds were Sunni and the Persians were Shiite. Soon after the Ottoman victory, the Kurdish leaders entered into a formal alliance with sultan Selim I that would last, except for a short interlude, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>20</sup>. The Kurds would pay tribute to the Sultan and had to support him militarily whenever there was a need. In return, they would rule and autonomously administer Eastern Anatolia, thus leading to a cohabitation of Ottomans and Kurds for almost three centuries. Kurds were empowered to gather tribute from other peoples living in the area, Armenians included. After centuries of Ottoman-Kurdish symbiosis, the Eastern frontier of the Ottoman Empire was baptized according to ethnic belonging: for the Turks it was Eastern Anatolia, for the Kurds it was Kurdistan and for the Armenians it was Western Armenia.

Starting with Sultan Selim III (1789-1807), continuing with Mahmud II (1808-1839) and Abdul-Medjid I (1839-1861), the Porte begun a policy of reforms in order to stop the Empire’s decline relative to the major European powers<sup>21</sup>. Amongst these measures were the administrative consolidation and payment standardization for civil servants, the elimination of janissaries and modernization of the army, and the universalization of human rights including the elimination of difference between Muslims and Non-Muslims in law. All these initiatives led to major changes in Eastern Anatolia<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, the interference by the Great Powers transformed the region into a powder keg for local actors<sup>23</sup>, each of them trying to expose or impose his point of view in face of the others: the Turks wanted to control the territory more efficiently and to strengthen their Eastern frontier; the

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<sup>19</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914. Demographic and Social Characteristics*, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 18-44; Levon Marashlian, *Politics and Demography: Armenians, Turks and Kurds in the Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge, Zoryan Institute, 1991, p. 34-40.

<sup>20</sup> Tessa Hoffman, Gerayer Koutcharian, *The History of Armenian-Kurdish Relations in the Ottoman Empire*, in “Armenian Review”, XXIX (1986), no. 4, p. 4-7.

<sup>21</sup> Roderic Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1962, p. 3-51.

<sup>22</sup> Masayuki Ueno, “*For the Fatherland and the state*”: Armenians negotiate the tanzimat reforms, in “International Journal of Middle East Studies”, XLV (2013), no. 1, p. 94.

<sup>23</sup> Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide. Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, New York – Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2008, p. 61-103.

Kurds wanted to maintain their ascendancy over other ethnicities; and the Armenians wanted a more secure life including protection of property and equal taxation. The “Armenian question” and the development of the idea of nation among “milleti sadika” had the Eastern Anatolia Armenians<sup>24</sup> in the center of the matter.

As already stated, the leadership of the Armenian “millet” was in the hands of the Armenian Patriarch from Istanbul. It is important to mention that, until 1847, the naming of the Patriarch by the Sultan was done mostly at the suggestion of the Armenian elite, called *amira* (which has its roots in the Arab word “emir”). These wealthy Armenians lived mostly in the capital of the Ottoman Empire; they were often moneylenders and, from 1559, the name was used by Armenians starting with 1559 to nominate the wealthy co-religionaries that had some influence over the Ottoman authorities<sup>25</sup>. Although it was not an official title recognized by Ottoman institutions, the history of the Armenian „millet” proves that, *de facto*, the *amira* behaved and acted as a standalone class. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1847, two councils were created within the Armenian “millet”, one for civic activity and one for spiritual matters. For spiritual matters, the council members were only clergymen; in the administrative council there were nine *amira* and ten *esnaf*, and, in the last decades of the century, the latter came to dominate the council<sup>26</sup>. The *esnaf* were Armenian craftsmen and their perspective and interests were different to those of the *amira* class, the confrontation between these two groups being decisive for the evolution of the Ottoman Armenian position regarding the Empire. From this point forward, the selection of the Patriarch did not depend on the whims of *amira* Armenians but on the clergymen’s council decision. This change is very important for the fate of the Armenians because, from that point on, the Armenian Patriarch from Istanbul did not take into consideration only the interests of the *amira* class, but also those of the *esnafs* and Eastern Anatolian Armenians. In fact, once Megerditch Khrimian was elected Patriarch (1869 to 1873), and later Catholicos (1893 to 1907), the fate of Anatolian Armenians started to be discussed within the framework of official relations with the Ottoman Empire. One year after his nomination as Patriarch, Khrimian created a commission to investigate the fate of the Armenians from Eastern Anatolia. The findings reflected a difficult situation for the Armenians from those regions which the Patriarch reported to the Sultan. The Sultan did not act on the findings. Khrimian, who vacated the role of Patriarch in 1873, led the Armenian delegation that contacted the Great Powers prior to the Congress of Berlin<sup>27</sup>. He had with him two documents: “A Project of Laws for

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<sup>24</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire*, in *op. cit.*, Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), p. 203.

<sup>25</sup> Hagop Barsoumian, *The Armenian Amira Class of Istanbul*, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1980, p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> Idem, *The Eastern Question and the Tanzimat Era*, p. 196.

<sup>27</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 204.

Turkish Armenia”<sup>28</sup> and “Memorandum on the Armenian Question”<sup>29</sup>. These two documents, as the titles suggest, were intended to improve the fate of Armenians in Eastern Anatolia.

Another characteristic of the Armenian “millet”, found also among Greeks and Jews, was the readiness of Armenian merchants to become subjects or citizens of European states due to practical concerns: they would, thus, avoid the corruption of Ottoman authorities in matters concerning the commercial activity that they pursued<sup>30</sup>. As an example, one can consider the situation of the port city of Trabzon, where Armenians, alongside Greeks, were the main commercial intermediaries between the Great Powers and Ottoman Empire. A British archive document from 1884 shows that in Trabzon, from a total of fourteen big commercial agencies, three were Persian, one was Swiss and the rest were Greek or Armenian. I can also refer here to Istanbul, where, in 1906, on a list of large textile importers, one can find twenty-eight Armenians, five Turks, three Greeks and one Jew<sup>31</sup>.

Also important is the situation in the Galata neighborhood in Istanbul, an area populated mostly by Non-Muslims. For example, in 1858, approximately half of Galata’s inhabitants were subjects/citizens of foreign states<sup>32</sup>; in 1882 the neighborhood had 237,293 inhabitants, being the second populated neighborhood of Istanbul with approximately 850,000 inhabitants. From Galata’s inhabitants, in 1882, 111,000 persons were foreign subjects/citizens, although born in Ottoman Empire; besides them, there were other 29,559 Armenians that were Ottoman subjects, thus comprising one fifth of the 159,511 Istanbul Armenians that lived in Galata<sup>33</sup>.

Because of international competition and the steady ascendancy of European states over the Ottoman Empire, the existence of a wealthy Armenian community under the protection of foreign states was regarded suspiciously by Ottoman officials, especially in the times of Abdul-Hamid II. The suspicions were becoming particularly threatening for some Ottoman intellectuals who thought that in order to stop the Empire’s disappearance, there would be a need for a centralization based on real support from all subjects, who, in 1869, had *de jure* became citizens with equal rights, no matter the religion or ethnicity. The 1869 nationality law<sup>34</sup> wanted to continue the Tanzimat reforms following a European

<sup>28</sup> Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*, Ankara, Documentary Publications, 1988, p. 469-476.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 467-468.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Issawi, *The Transformation of the Economic Position of the Millets in the Nineteenth Century*, in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. vol. I – The Central Lands*, Benjamin Braude, Bernard Lewis (eds.), New York – Londra, Holmes & Meier Publishers, p. 274.

<sup>31</sup> Foreign Office, *Public Record Office Archive*, London, 526/10, 1884.

<sup>32</sup> Steven Rosenthal, *Minorities and Municipal Reform in Istanbul, 1850-1870*, in *op. cit.*, Benjamin Braude, Bernard Lewis (eds.), p. 370.

<sup>33</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881/82-1893*, in “International Journal of Middle East Studies”, IX (1978), no. 3, p. 254.

<sup>34</sup> Will Hanley, *What Ottoman Nationality Was and Was Not*, in “Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association”, III (2016), no. 2, p. 277-298.

model started with the edicts of 1839 and 1856 that were aiming toward a social standardization process and relative homogenization by creating a supra-identity defined as “Ottomanism”<sup>35</sup>, a notion that was initially civic in nature, not religious. The civic nation met resistance on both sides: the Muslims could not conceive of full equality with non-Muslims<sup>36</sup>. The latter, especially the Armenians, were reluctant because measures to improve the situation in Eastern Anatolia were still not implemented<sup>37</sup>.

Eastern Anatolia was also on the minds of the sons of rich Armenians, many of whom had studied in Europe and came back with new ideas about equality and self-determination. Young Armenian intellectuals joined the *esnaf* group in their conflict with the *amira*; the Armenian leaders of the „millet” from Istanbul paid attention to the new ideas, and, after a few decades, they became eager to change their status as determined by the “millet” system. Their method to achieve this was Armenian self-determination<sup>38</sup>. Between 1865 and 1878, support for full emancipation was to be found among only a few Armenians, but after the Congress of Berlin, more and more Armenian public figures started to clamor freedom, which would prove decisive in shaping Armenia’s relationship with the Porte.

After the Congress of Berlin, when the Porte lost territories in the Balkans and its approximately 4,500,000 (mostly Christian) inhabitants, the Ottoman authorities concluded that Ottomanism in its universal version was not functional<sup>39</sup>: Balkan Christians were eager to split as soon as possible and many Armenians from Eastern Anatolia cheered the advance of Tsarist armies on the Caucasian front, in spite of the fact that the Armenian Patriarch, Nersès Varjapétian, had issued a pastoral letter asking the Armenians to pray for the victory of the Ottoman army<sup>40</sup>. Sultan Abdul Hamid II and his inner circle had changed their approach, linking Ottomanism to Islam, undoing previous efforts to found a civic identity, described subsequently by historians as “Pan-Islamism”. This happened because once the Balkan territories were lost, the numerical superiority of the Muslims changed, growing from two to one, to three to one across the Empire. In Eastern Anatolia it was five and a half to one<sup>41</sup>.

Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty pressured the Porte to apply reforms in order to protect Armenians from Kurds and Circassians; the content of the article

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<sup>35</sup> Richard E. Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire: Armenians and the Politics of Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2020, p. 100-127.

<sup>36</sup> Roderic Davison, *Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century*, in Roderic Davison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774-1923: The Impact of the West*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1990, p. 112-129; Vahakn N. Dadrian, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Hagop Barsoumian, *The Eastern Question and the Tanzimat Era*, p. 194.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196-198.

<sup>39</sup> Kamal Soleimani, *Islam and Competing Nationalisms in the Middle East, 1876-1926*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 92.

<sup>40</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 207.

<sup>41</sup> Justin McCarty, *Ignoring the People: The Effects of the Congress of Berlin*, in *op. cit.*, M. Hakan Yavuz, Peter Sluglett (eds.), p. 440-441.

had unsettled the Kurds and some of their leaders, especially Sheik Ubeydullah, started to fear that such a provision would impulse the Armenians to force the creation of an Armenian state that would have included territories which the Kurds considered part of Kurdistan<sup>42</sup>. Such a situation seemed plausible at that point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because the Kurds' capacity to control the territory and to face growing Armenian activism was diminished as a consequence of the dismantling of Kurdish emirates<sup>43</sup> after the wars with the Ottomans. In this context, in 1880, Sheik Ubeydullah started the most serious uprising yet against the Ottomans. The Sheik's spiritual and administrative authority extended to more than 220 Kurd tribes from the Ottoman and Persian Empires<sup>44</sup>. The revolt against the Sultan was trans-tribal and trans-border; one year earlier, in 1879, Sheik Ubeydullah revolted against the Persian Shah. From British archives and the Sheik's correspondence<sup>45</sup>, we know that the tribes he ruled over wanted to govern themselves without interference and wanted to solve the "Armenian question" locally. This was to be achieved by preventing every attempt of creating an Armenian state, any thoughts of a larger autonomy for the Armenians or grassroots equality between Kurds and Armenians.

Although the uprising was defeated in 1881, Sultan Abdul-Hamid II feared the subversive potential of Kurdish nationalism and also his own incapacity to control the territory, especially the periphery. One decade later, in 1891<sup>46</sup>, trying to control the centrifugal movements of the area, the Sultan decided to create paramilitary cavalry regiments; the Hamidian cavalry was intended to copy the Cossack regiments of the Tsar. These auxiliary army regiments were made up of Laz people, Azeris and Kurds; the purpose was to maintain order in Eastern Anatolia and to secure the borders. Historians have different opinions with regard to this decision, some stating that it represents either an intent for administrative consolidation by integrating the Kurd tribes and nomads; the wish to gain logistical advantage from the Kurds' semi-autonomy in Eastern Anatolia with the intention to scare Armenians away from self-determination; and last but not least, to harmonize the Empire by promoting Pan-Islamism<sup>47</sup>. Still, there is one more hypothesis: the lack of funding to provide for a professional army<sup>48</sup>. I find this hypothesis more likely as the lack of funds resulted in poor military training and,

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<sup>42</sup> Kamal Soleimani, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1989, p. 4; Adiyamane, Zaningeha, Rahman Dag, *Ottoman Reforms and Kurdish Reactions in the 19th Century*, in "Nubihar Akademi", I (2014), no. 2, p. 48; Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire. Kurish Militas in the Ottoman Tribal Zone*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2011, p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> Kamal Soleimani, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>45</sup> Foreign Office, *Public Record Office Archive*, London, 195/1315, 1880.

<sup>46</sup> Bayram Kodaman, *The Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments. Abdülhamid II and the Eastern Anatolian Tribes*, in *op. cit.*, M. Hakan Yavuz, Peter Sluglett (eds), p. 382.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Duguid, *The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia*, in "Middle Eastern Studies", IX (1973), no. 2, p. 145-146.

<sup>48</sup> Hakan Ozoglu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2004, p. 60.

foremost, poor discipline, an issue that contributed decisively to the involvement of the Hamidian cavalry in the massacres of 1894 and 1895 against the Armenians<sup>49</sup>.

As already mentioned, in 1878, the representatives of Ottoman Armenians drafted “A Project of Laws for Turkish Armenia” and “Memorandum on the Armenian Question” that were to be presented to the chancelleries of the Great Powers before the Congress of Berlin. In short, the two documents stated that the Armenians did not have secessionist ambitions and that they only wanted the creation of a Christian administration in Turkish Armenia, following Liban’s model. The disregard of the Armenian struggle by the signatories of the Treaty of Berlin led to the radicalization of parts of the Armenian community and paved the way for actions and methods characteristic of European revolutionary movements<sup>50</sup>.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman Empire’s finances were lacking, thus other ways were found to fund the Hamidian paramilitary regiments, namely double taxation of Armenian villages or Kurd banditry at the expense of Armenians and other ethnic/religious groups<sup>51</sup>. Led by Kurdish tribal chieftains sympathetic to the Ottoman government, the Hamidian regiments were poorly remunerated. Even if the regiments’ leaders were paid like the rest of the Ottoman army officers, ordinary soldiers were paid only when mobilized. These practices occurred in a climate of poor conventional military discipline that afflicted most of the paramilitary regiments. The existence and activity of such regiments compelled the Armenians to increase their self-defense efforts and to build a legal framework that would offer them protection.

From this point on, attitudes within the Armenian community crystalized: some wanted autonomy within the Empire, obtained either by working together with the Ottoman institutions or by subversive actions; others considered independence necessary, gained either through diplomatic activities with the support of the Great Powers, or by force<sup>52</sup>. This was when political parties like Hanceak or The Armenian Revolutionary Federation came to the fore. No matter the objective, the Armenian collective mentality could not accept anymore the idea of “millet”; at the same time, Armenians started to question their own administrative structure, particularly the Armenian Patriarch and his role as the head of the community. As noted by Hrach Dasnabedian, an official historian of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation: „the renaissance of the Christian people of the Ottoman Empire (Greeks, Romanians, Serbians, Bulgarians) were a contagious stimuli that infected Armenians. The impotence of the [Armenian] Patriarchate and its national bodies in asking for reforms for the Armenians in the interior were enough for the creation of a revolutionary tendency within the Armenians. Moreover, the Armenian Nationalistic Movement was a peaceful reformist attitude

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<sup>49</sup> Vahakan N. Dadrian, *1894 Sassoun Massacre: A Juncture in the Escalation of the Turko-Armenian Conflict*, in „Armenian Review, XLIX (2001), no. 1-2, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 212-218.

<sup>51</sup> Garabet K. Moumdjian, *op. cit.*, p. 310-312.

<sup>52</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *op. cit.*, p. 30-66.

aiming at attaining for Armenians what already was normal for the dominant Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire; these included: human dignity, equality within the social, economic and religious spheres”<sup>53</sup>. Although it is a partisan record, it does summarize the path covered by the Ottoman Armenians: from peaceful subjects, divided *de facto* by the Empire’s geography, to activists for life, liberty and equality. To legitimate the existence of their own nation, they were put to choose between gradual reformism and secessionist activism.

### **Between „millet” and self-determination: the Ottoman-Armenian case**

#### *Abstract*

*The “millet” was an ethno-religious community within the Ottoman political system, created in order to facilitate the act of government and the relationships between the numerous religions and ethnicities ruled by the Sultans and Ottoman authorities. The Armenian “millet” was defined by three dimensions that shaped for better or worse the “Armenian question”. Firstly, the geopolitical characteristic of the Empire: the center of power where most important decisions were made was Istanbul, while the powder keg of the matter in discussion was Eastern Anatolia. Secondly, the daily cohabitation of Armenians and Kurds at the eastern border of the Empire, where they needed to share and fight for the same land and resources. Last but not least, the diplomatic interests that transformed the Ottoman Empire into an open field of battle for influence. All these elements shifted the commitments of the Armenian leaders and the decisions of the Ottoman government in such a way that the path from “millet” to “self-determination” blended together gradual reform and secessionist activity.*

*Keywords: Ottoman Empire; 19<sup>th</sup> Century; millet; modernization; national awakening; Islam; Armenian Question.*

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<sup>53</sup> Apud Garabet K. Moundjian, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

## ABREVIERI

<i>AARMSI</i>	= Analele Academiei Române, Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice
<i>AARMSL</i>	= Analele Academiei Române, Memoriile Secțiunii Literare
<i>AARPAD</i>	= „Analele Academiei Române”, seria II, București, 1879-1916
<i>AA.SS.</i>	= <i>Acta Sanctorum</i> , ed. Bollandisti, III <sup>a</sup> edițiune, Parigi 1863-1870
<i>AB</i>	= Arhivele Basarabiei
<i>ACNSAS</i>	= Arhivele Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității
<i>AE</i>	= L'Année Epigraphique, Paris
<i>AIR</i>	= Arhiva Istorică a României
<i>AIAC</i>	= Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie Cluj
<i>AIIAI</i>	= Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie „A. D. Xenopol”, Iași
<i>AIIC</i>	= Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Cluj
<i>AIINC</i>	= Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Națională, Cluj
<i>AIIX</i>	= Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A. D. Xenopol”, Iași
<i>ALIL</i>	= Anuarul de Lingvistică și Istorie Literară, Iași
<i>ALMA</i>	= <i>Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi</i> . Genève.
<i>AM</i>	= Arheologia Moldovei, Iași
<i>AMAE</i>	= Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe
<i>AmAnthr</i>	= American Anthropologist, New Series, Published by Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association
<i>AMM</i>	= Acta Moldaviae Meridionalis, Vaslui
<i>AMMB</i>	= Arhiva Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, Iași
<i>AMN</i>	= Acta Musei Napocensis
<i>AMR</i>	= Arhivele Militare Române
<i>AMS</i>	= Anuarul Muzeului din Suceava
<i>ANB</i>	= Arhivele Naționale, București
<i>ANC</i>	= Arhivele Naționale. Serviciul Județean Cluj
<i>ANDMB</i>	= Arhivele Naționale. Direcția Municipiului București
<i>ANG</i>	= Arhivele Naționale. Serviciul Județean Galați
<i>ANI</i>	= Arhivele Naționale, Iași
<i>ANIC</i>	= Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale
<i>ANR-Cluj</i>	= Arhivele Naționale, Cluj-Napoca
<i>ANR-Sibiu</i>	= Arhivele Naționale, Sibiu
<i>ANRM</i>	= Arhivele Naționale ale Republicii Moldova, Chișinău
<i>ANRW</i>	= Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, Berlin-New York
<i>ANSMB</i>	= Arhivele Naționale. Serviciul Municipiului București
<i>ANV</i>	= Arhivele Naționale, Vaslui
<i>AO</i>	= Arhivele Olteniei
<i>AP</i>	= Analele Putnei
<i>APH</i>	= Acta Poloniae Historica, Varșovia
<i>AqLeg</i>	= <i>Aquila Legionis. Cuadernos de Estudios sobre el Ejército Romano</i> , Salamanca
<i>AR</i>	= Arhiva Românească
<i>ArchM</i>	= Arhiva Moldaviae, Iași
<i>ArhGen</i>	= Arhiva Genealogică
„Arhiva”	= „Arhiva”. Organul Societății Științifice și Literare, Iași
<i>ArhMold</i>	= Arheologia Moldovei
<i>ASRR</i>	= Arhiva Societății Române de Radiodifuziune
<i>AȘUI</i>	= Analele Științifice ale Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași

- ATS = Ancient Textile Series, Oxbow Books, Oxford și Oakville  
 AUAIC = Arhiva Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași  
 AUB = Analele Universității „București”  
 BA = *Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, Roma, Città Nuova Editrice  
 BAR = Biblioteca Academiei Române  
 BArchB = Bundesarchiv Berlin  
 BAR int. ser. = British Archaeological Reports, International Series  
 BBR = Buletinul Bibliotecii Române  
 BCIR = Buletinul Comisiei Istorice a României  
 BCMI = Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice  
 BCU-Iași = Biblioteca Centrală Universitară, Iași  
 BE = Bulletin Epigraphique  
 BF = Byzantinische Forschungen, Amsterdam  
 BJ = Bonner Jahrbücher, Bonn  
 BMI = Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice  
 BMIM = București. Materiale de istorie și muzeografie  
 BNB = Biblioteca Națională București  
 BNJ = Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbücher  
 BOR = Biserica Ortodoxă Română  
 BS = Balkan Studies  
 BSNR = Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române  
 ByzSlav = Byzantinoslavica  
 CA = Cercetări arheologice  
 CAI = Caiete de Antropologie Istorică  
 CartNova = *La ciudad de Carthago Nova 3: La documentación epigráfica*, Murcia  
 CB = Cahiers balkaniques  
 CC = Codrul Cosminului, Suceava (ambele serii)  
 CCAR = Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România, CIMEC, București  
 CCh = *Corpus Christianorum*, Turnhout  
 CChSG = *Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca*  
 CCSL = *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, Turnhout, Brepols  
 CDM = *Catalogul documentelor moldovenești din Arhivele Centrale de Stat*, București, vol. I-V; supl. I.  
 CDȚR = *Catalogul documentelor Țării Românești din Arhivele Statului*, București, vol. II-VIII, 1974-2006  
 Chiron = Chiron: Mitteilungen der Kommission für Alte Geschichte und Epigraphik des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, 1971  
 CI = Cercetări istorice (ambele serii)  
 CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin  
 CL = Cercetări literare  
 CLRE = *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire*, eds. R. S. Bagnall, A. Cameron, S. R. Schwartz, K. A. Worp, Atlanta, 1987  
 CN = Cercetări Numismatice  
 CNA = Cronica Numismatică și Arheologică, București  
 CSCO = *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, Louvain  
 CSEA = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiae Aquileiensis*, Roma, Città Nuova Editrice  
 CSEL = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, Wien, De Gruyter  
 CSPAMI = Centrul de Studii și Păstrare a Arhivelor Militare Centrale, Pitești  
 CT = Columna lui Traian, București  
 CTh = *Codex Theodosianus*. Theodosiani, Libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis, I, edidit adsumpto apparatu P. Kruegeri, Th. Mommsen, Hildesheim, 1970-1971  
 Cv.L = Convorbiri literare (ambele serii)

„Dacia”, N.S.	= Dacia. Nouvelle Série, Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne, București
DANIC	= Direcția Arhivelor Naționale Istorice Centrale
DGAS	= Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului
DI	= Diplomatarium Italicum
DIR	= <i>Documente privind istoria României</i>
DIRRI	= <i>Documente privind Istoria României. Războiul pentru Independență</i>
DOP	= Dumbarton Oaks Papers
DTN	= <i>Din trecutul nostru</i> , Chișinău
DRH	= <i>Documenta Romaniae Historica</i>
EB	= Études Balkaniques
EBPB	= Études byzantines et post-byzantines
EDCS	= <i>Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss-Slaby</i> ( <a href="http://www.manfredclauss.de/">http://www.manfredclauss.de/</a> )
EDR	= <i>Epigraphic Database Roma</i> ( <a href="http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php">http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php</a> )
EpigrAnat	= Epigraphica Anatolica, Münster
ERAsturias	= F. Diego Santos, <i>Epigrafiya Romana de Asturias</i> , Oviedo, 1959.
Gerión	= Gerión. Revista de Historia Antigua, Madrid
GB	= Glasul Bisericii
GCS	= <i>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller</i> , Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1897-1969
GLK	= <i>Grammatici Latini Keil</i>
HEp	= <i>Hispania Epigraphica</i> , Madrid
„Hierasus”	= <i>Hierasus</i> . Anuarul Muzeului Județean Botoșani, Botoșani
HM	= Heraldica Moldaviae, Chișinău
HU	= Historia Urbana, Sibiu
HUI	= Historia Universitatis Iassiensis, Iași
IDR	= <i>Inscripțiile din Dacia romană</i> , Bucurști-Paris
IDRE	= <i>Inscriptions de la Dacie romaine. Inscriptions externes concernant l'histoire de la Dacie</i> , I-II, Bucarest, 1996, 2000
IGLN	= Inscriptions grecques et latines de Novae, Bordeaux
IGLR	= <i>Inscripțiile grecești și latine din secolele IV-XIII descoperite în România</i> , București, 1976
ILLPecs	= Instrumenta Inscripta Latina. <i>Das römische Leben im Spiegel der Kleininschriften</i> , Pecs, 1991
ILAlg	= <i>Inscriptions latines d'Algérie</i> , Paris
ILB	= <i>Inscriptiones Latinae in Bulgaria repertae. Inscriptiones inter Oescum et Iatrum repertae</i> , Sofia, 1989
ILD	= <i>Inscripții latine din Dacia</i> , București
ILN	= <i>Inscriptions latines de Novae</i> , Poznan
ILLPRON	= <i>Inscriptionum Lapidarium Latinarum Provinciae Norici usque ad annum MCMLXXXIV repertarum indices</i> , Berlin, 1986
ILS	= <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> , 1892
IMS	= <i>Inscriptiones Moesiae Superioris</i> , Belgrad
IN	= „Ioan Neculce”. Buletinul Muzeului Municipal Iași
ISM	= <i>Inscripțiile din Scythia Minor grecești și latine</i> , București, vol. I-III, 1983-1999
JGO	= Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas
JL	= Junimea literară
JRS	= The Journal of Roman studies, London
LR	= Limba română
MA	= Memoria Antiquitatis, Piatra Neamț
MCA	= Materiale și cercetări arheologice
MEF	= <i>Moldova în epoca feudalismului</i> , vol. I-XII, 1961-2012, Chișinău
MEFRA	= <i>Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Antiquité</i> , Roma

- MGH** = *Monumenta Germaniae Historica inde ab anno Christi quingentesimo usque ad annum millesimum et quingentesimum auspiciis societatis aperiendis fontibus rerum Germanicarum medii aevi*, Berlin 1877-  
**MI** = Magazin istoric, București  
**MIM** = Materiale de istorie și muzeografie  
**MM** = Mitropolia Moldovei  
**MMS** = Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei  
**MN** = Muzeul Național, București  
**MO** = Mitropolia Olteniei  
**MOF** = Monitorul Oficial al României  
**Navarro** = M. Navarro Caballero, *Perfectissima femina. Femmes de l'elite dans l'Hispanie romaine*, Bordeaux, 2017.  
**NBA** = *Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana*, Roma, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum  
**NDPAC** = *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, I, A-E, 2e edizione, Marietti, 2006; III, P-Z, 2e edizione, Marietti, 2008  
**NEH** = *Nouvelles études d'histoire*  
**OI** = Opțiuni istoriografice, Iași  
**OPEL** = *Onomasticon provinciarum Europae latinarum*, vol. I-IV, Budapesta-Viena, 1994-2002  
**PG** = *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1886-1912  
**PIR** = *Prosopographia Imperii Romani. Saec. I.II.III*, editio altera, Berlin.  
**PLRE** = *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 3 vol., eds. A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris, Cambridge, 1971-1992  
**RA** = Revista arhivelor  
**RBAR** = Revista Bibliotecii Academiei Române, București  
**RC** = Revista catolică  
**RdI** = Revista de istorie  
**REByz** = *Revue des Études Byzantines*  
**RER** = *Revue des études roumaines*  
**RESEE** = *Revue des études Sud-Est européennes*  
**RHP** = *Die römischen Hilfstruppen in Pannonien während der Prinzipatszeit. I: Die Inschriften*, Viena  
**RHSEE** = *Revue historique de Sud-Est européen*  
**RI** = Revista istorică (ambele serii)  
**RIAF** = Revista pentru istorie, arheologie și filologie  
**RIB** = *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, Londra  
**RIM** = Revista de Istorie a Moldovei, Chișinău  
**RIR** = Revista istorică română, București  
**RIS** = Revista de istorie socială, Iași  
**RITL** = Revista de istorie și teorie literară  
**RIU** = *Die römischen Inschriften Ungarns*, Budapesta  
**RJMH** = *The Romanian Journal of Modern History*, Iași  
**RM** = Revista muzeelor  
**RMD** = *Roman Military Diplomas*, Londra  
**RMM** = *Römische Militärdiplome und Entlassungsurkunden in der Sammlung des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums*, Mainz  
**RMM-MIA** = Revista muzeelor și monumentelor, seria Monumente istorice și de artă  
**RMR** = Revista Medicală Română  
**RRH** = *Revue roumaine d'histoire*  
**RRHA** = *Revue roumaine de l'histoire de l'art*  
**RRHA-BA** = *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art. Série Beaux Arts*  
**RSIAB** = Revista Societății istorice și arheologice bisericesti, Chișinău  
**Rsl** = Romanoslavica

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<i>SAHIR</i>	= Studia et Acta Historiae Iudaeorum Romaniae, București
<i>SAI</i>	= Studii și Articole de Istorie
<i>SCB</i>	= Studii și cercetări de bibliologie
<i>Sch</i>	= <i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> , Paris
<i>SCIA</i>	= Studii și cercetări de istoria artei
<i>SCIM</i>	= Studii și cercetări de istorie medie
<i>SCIV/SCIVA</i>	= Studii și cercetări de istorie veche (și arheologie)
<i>SCN</i>	= Studii și Cercetări Numismatice, București
<i>SCȘI</i>	= Studii și cercetări științifice, Istorie
<i>SEER</i>	= The Slavonic and East European Review
<i>SHA</i>	= <i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
<i>SJAN</i>	= Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale
<i>SMIC</i>	= Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană, București
<i>SMIM</i>	= Studii și materiale de istorie medie, București
<i>SMIMod</i>	= Studii și materiale de istorie modernă, București
<i>SOF</i>	= Südost-Forschungen, München
<i>ST</i>	= Studii Teologice, București
<i>StAntArh</i>	= Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica, Iași
<i>T&amp;MBYZ</i>	= <i>Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de recherches d'histoire et de civilisation byzantines</i>
<i>ThD</i>	= Thraco-Dacica, București
<i>TR</i>	= Transylvanian Review, Cluj-Napoca
<i>TV</i>	= Teologie și viața, Iași
<i>ZPE</i>	= Zeitschrift für Papyralogie und Epigraphik
<i>ZSL</i>	= Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde