

**In Subversive Service of the Sublime State: Armenians and Ottoman State Power,  
1844-1896**

**by**

**Richard Edward Antaramian**

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**Doctoral Committee:**

**Professor Juan Cole, Co-Chair  
Visiting Professor Gerard Libaridian, Co-Chair (Retired)  
Professor Selim Deringil, Boğaziçi University  
Professor Fatma Müge Göçek  
Professor Ronald Suny**

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For Liliya

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the stories of our ancestors, who were teachers and tax collectors in Charsanjak, offered me from a young age a historical perspective that fully undermined the nationalistic narratives available to someone of my background.

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## List of Abbreviations

A. DVN	Divani (Beylikçi) Kalemi Defterleri
AGBU	Armenian General Benevolent Union
ARF	Armenian Revolutionary Federation
BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Istanbul)
BN	Bibliothèque Nubar (Paris)
CP	Correspondance des provinces
DH. MKT	Dahiliye Nezâreti Mektubî Kalemi
DHP	<i>Divan Hayots Patmutedan</i> (Tiflis, 1915)
FO	Foreign Office (British National Archives, Kew)
GAT	Eghishe Charentsi anvan grakanutyán ev arvesti tangaran (Yerevan)
IJMES	International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
İ	İradeler
Matenadaran	Mesrop Mashtotsi anvan hin dzeragreri institut (Yerevan)
Y	Yıldız Sarayı Arşivi

## Introduction

The Armenian epic, *Sasuntsi Davit* (David of Sasun), is a popular, mythological tale of Armenian heroes who resisted the oppressive Abbasid Caliphate and its rulers. Told in four cycles, the story centers primarily on three Armenian protagonists: Older Mher, David, and younger Mher. Older Mher, after gaining the blessing of the Armenian king, goes off to fight the invaders who had made Sasun an Abbasid vassal. He defeats one villain, White Dev, over the course of a three-day battle. Thereafter, he engages the tale's most notorious antagonist, Misra Melik. After jousting back and forth, Misra Melik comes to the realization he cannot defeat Mher and proposes a truce, offering to free Sasun, a town in eastern Anatolia, from its obligations of tribute, whereafter he recognized Mher as the country's ruler. The two then forged a blood pact.

Following the death of Misra Melik, his widow sent for Mher. As part of the truce, Mher had promised to care for Misra Melik's family should he precede Mher in death. Over the protestations of his own wife, Mher went to the widow. The widow asked that Mher rein in the seven Muslim princes who undermined her rule, and that he also share a bed with her. Invoking his Christian faith, he objected. The widow plied him with wine; he remained in a state of drunkenness for seven years, during which time he fathered a son. Realizing he had unwittingly rebuilt the house of Misra Melik, and fearing it would lead to the future subjugation of Armenia, he returned to his home in Sasun.

Arriving there, he found himself barred from his palace. His wife, hurt by his betrayal, informed him he could not enter or be reunited with her for forty years. The Armenian Church intervened on Mher's behalf—a number of priests gathered and reduced the penance from forty years to forty months, forty months to forty weeks, forty weeks to forty days, and forty days to forty hours. At the conclusion of Mher's penance, the couple came together, and conceived. A son, David, was born; he was taken and baptized. His parents then died, leaving David an orphan. David's uncles then decided to send him to his father's former lover, the widow of Misra Melik. She hoped to raise David as one of her own, where he would join with his half-brother, the new Misra Melik.

Eventually, David returned to Sasun. Following some misadventures, he slowly began defeating Misra Melik's troops, some of whom had attacked and pillaged a monastery built by Older Mher. He punished the tax collectors sent by Misra Melik. Eventually, Misra Melik marched on Sasun to fight David. As the fight turned back towards Baghdad, David killed the second Misra Melik, cutting him in half from head to toe with his sword. Later, David married and had a son, whom he named Mher. Little Mher later avenged David's death, after a Muslim rival had assassinated the father.

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*Sasuntsi Davit* was first published in 1874 in Istanbul, having only been recorded a year prior on the plain of Mush. Quite probably, the epic is several centuries old. Yet, it is possible the story was enjoying a revival in the second half of the nineteenth century, and its storytellers may very well have manipulated the narrative as a form of passive cultural resistance. Armenians on the plain of Mush, at this time, sent letters to the

Patriarch of Istanbul, complaining of governors, tax collectors, Kurdish impositions, and raids on monasteries. In a confessional political state such as the Ottoman Empire, they were marked by their religious identity. David may have been the savior they were awaiting, as the carefully told story imagined a hero reality could not produce. Instead of an Ottoman sultan or Kurds, the Christian David killed Arab Muslims, who in one instance had pillaged a monastery, to deliver his people. Tellingly, he also punished tax collectors. And while the Abbasids may have been consigned to the distant past, the town of Sasun was nearby, located approximately thirty miles to the south.

Enjoying a revival as a form of cultural resistance may count as one reason the story was finally recorded in the 1870s. The presence of the individual recording it is at least as important. The story was published in a collection of folklore entitled *Grots u Brots ev Sasuntsi Davit kam Mheri Dur*,<sup>1</sup> that had been compiled by a young Armenian priest named Karekin Srvantstians. Srvantstians was a *vardapet*, a celibate priest, who would go on to hold numerous important positions in the Church, and later attain the rank of bishop. In the Ottoman Empire, this meant he enjoyed some political clout. He first discovered the epic among peasants in a faraway province; what, exactly, was a person of Srvantstians' importance and stature doing among some of the lowliest subjects of the sultan?

Srvantstians had first come to Mush in the service of his teacher and mentor, Mkrtich Khrimian, when the latter was dispatched to the St. Garabed monastery, where he served as both prelate and abbot. Khrimian had gone to Mush to carry out reform that

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<sup>1</sup> Garegin Sruandzteants, *Grots u brots ev Sasuntsi Davit kam Mheri dur* (K. Polis, 1874); reprinted as *Sasuntsi Davit kam Mheri dur* (Ghalatia-K. Polis: Pishtofchean Eghbarts "Aramazd'i" Gratan, 1910); in English translation, Leon Surmelian (tr.), *Daredevils of Sassoun: The Armenian National Epic* (Denver: A. Swallow, 1964)

would more fully subordinate Church institutions and power to the Patriarch of Istanbul on the one hand, and the flock on the other. The Armenian Church was an institution of formal politics in the Ottoman state; consequently, its leadership was oftentimes dominated by the powerful in society. As the state continued its bid for a more fully centralized bureaucracy, the Armenian Church, as part of the state apparatus, had to implement similar policies. Carrying out reform and producing knowledge legible to the center necessitated a deeper engagement with all segments of society. Thus, someone like Srvantstians took an interest in the stories villagers told one another.

Making successive tours of eastern Anatolia, Srvantstians' records of village life, folklore, and art, are perhaps rivaled only by the more famous Komitas. While Srvantstians did have a genuine appreciation for folklore, he and Khrimian devoted their careers to political and social reform. In fact, while touring the provinces, Srvantstians also made blistering observations of local politics and governance—views he was unafraid to publish in the Ottoman Armenian press. For the Ottoman Armenian community, political reform entailed the implementation of the Armenian Constitution. First promulgated in 1860, then temporarily suspended, and finally reinstated in 1863, the Armenian Constitution transformed the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul into a representative body; it was now ruled over by a national assembly, composed of delegates elected by Armenians from all corners of the Ottoman Empire, who in turn selected the Patriarch. Patriarchs, who represented the millet to the imperial government, were now subject to popular checks.

The Constitution was a part of the empire-wide program of reform known as the Tanzimat, or re-ordering, which had commenced in 1839. The Reform Rescript of 1856

launched a second round of changes, including the provision that restructuring should occur within the administration of the non-Muslim communities. Discovering the *Sasuntsi Davit* epic, therefore, occurred in the context of a larger Tanzimat story. While I deal with the specifics of this historiography in the succeeding chapters, I will paint a general overview of my critique here.

For many scholars of the Ottoman Empire, this period of reform marks the onset of nationalism and nationalist mobilization that would later rip the state apart. Forming such a conclusion is seductive; the reform internal to the community facilitated the standardization of language, produced empire-wide school systems for the non-Muslim communities, and produced a politics that allowed for members of the same ethno-religion groups to develop more robust relationships with one another. Moreover, that state-building projects inadvertently fostered nationalism is a well-established fact, as demonstrated in the study of the Soviet Union and its collapse.<sup>2</sup> Finally, deploying Miroslav Hroch's influential theorization of the phases of national revival, seems to confirm the observation that the Tanzimat led to nationalism: Servantstians and his folklore in the 1870s would constitute Phase A (scholarly interest), Armenian demands for reform at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and the subsequent appearance of isolated armed groups in the 1880s mark Phase B (patriotic agitation), and finally Phase C (mass national movement) is made apparent by national revolutionary parties that gained traction in the 1890s.<sup>3</sup> Was this in fact the case?

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<sup>2</sup> On this, consult the works of Francine Hirsch, Terry Martin, Yuri Slezkine, and Ronald Grigor Suny, among others.

<sup>3</sup> Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Postulating that Armenians, or other non-Muslim groups, were merely awaiting a structural shift that would engender nationalism evokes the “sleeping beauty” view of nations as timeless. Scholars whose work focuses on Ottoman Armenian social actors and their cultural production merely reinforce this view. James Etmekjian, for example, speaks of a “renaissance.”<sup>4</sup> Louise Nalbandian, whose early work on the Armenian revolutionary movement is still frequently cited by Ottomanists, weaves together the rebellion of feudalistic notables in Zeytun against state-centralization with socialist revolutionaries into one coherent national narrative.<sup>5</sup>

Srvantstiants’ primary reason for being in Mush, however, was not to record folklore or other yarns villagers might spin. He was there to implement the Armenian Constitution and, by extension, reform Ottoman governing structures. The Armenian Constitution was not some derivative policy decision of Tanzimat statesmen that accidentally fostered nationalism; it was a constituent part of the policy of state-centralization. The Constitution fully subordinated provincial prelaties and monasteries to the rule of the Istanbul Patriarchate. Provincial prelates and monastery abbots, however, formed an important part of local power structures. Given the confessional organization of the Ottoman state, priests represented their flock before the government. They could also use their influence to deter peasants from filing complaints against tax

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<sup>4</sup> James Etmekjian, *The French Influence on the Western Armenian Renaissance, 1843-1915* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964) Some nineteenth century Armenians referred to this period as “the awakening” (*zartonk*), just as Levantine Arabs referred to a similar explosion of cultural production as either “the awakening” or “the renaissance” (*al-nahda*).

<sup>5</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) The works of Gerard Libaridian, Razmik Panossian, and Ronald Suny have argued against the essentialist claims of Etmekjian and Nalbandian.

collectors, utilize their connections with the government to support merchants, or otherwise exploit their position in a system where the distinction between formal and informal politics was blurred. Removing a priest, subjecting him to democratic referenda (as would now be the case with prelates), or otherwise circumscribing his role was not simply an internal Armenian affair; it had reverberations for all of provincial Ottoman society. Thus, priests such as Srvantstiants circulated through the empire implementing the Constitution, and thereby undermining delicately constructed networks of power that structured imperial society and politics.

My primary concern with this dissertation, therefore, is to advocate that Ottoman Armenians, their institutions, their experiences, and their cultural and material production be read as sources for Ottoman history. This necessitates locating Armenian institutions in the larger web of social relations that comprised Ottoman imperial society. To do this, I view the Ottoman state's project of reform as one of gridding, which strove to make the state, its subjects, and its sites of power legible.<sup>6</sup> I therefore find Karen Barkey's deployment of social capital theory, as elaborated by the sociologist Ronald Burt, to analyze Ottoman systems of rule, particularly insightful.<sup>7</sup> In Barkey's analysis, the grid elaborated by James Scott becomes a "spoke-and-hub-without-the-wheel," where the empire's peripheries may only interact with one another by navigating via the center, the primary node in a larger imperial network. Social entrepreneurs able to connect a periphery to the center are in fact bridging structural holes, and thereby accumulate social

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<sup>6</sup> James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998)

<sup>7</sup> Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Ronald S. Burt, *Brokerage and Closure: An Introduction to Social Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)



capital, which they may then use at home to crush rivals; as the primary node in this setting, the imperial center, the government in Istanbul, enjoys the most social capital.

It was, therefore, in the context of this top-down center-periphery project that Srvantstians found himself in Mush. I maintain, however, that when we “bring the Armenians back” into the Ottoman picture, different sites of power and connections are revealed. These sites of power, while theoretically the exclusive concern of Armenians and their Church, were thoroughly integrated into imperial and local systems of power. Here, analyzing social capital is most fruitful; by emphasizing actors, I am able to identify not only how they bridged different sites of power, but also how their social capital allowed them to circulate throughout the empire. Oftentimes, these connections failed to correspond with the “grid” the center had imagined, stitching together peripheries, and frustrating the center in the process. Still, Istanbul reigned supreme—even if not always on the terms it had hoped.

If compelled to use a metaphor, I would describe the Ottoman Empire as a heavily layered, yet incomplete, concave lattice-like structure. Sites of power, structures, and networks that transcended and overlapped ethnic and religious boundaries, while spilling across and over jurisdictional and administrative borders, were deeply integrated and connected. While Ottomanists have emphasized the center-periphery axis, horizontal linkages were far more pronounced than the current literature has imagined. In order to overcome these structural obstacles to reform, the Ottomans deployed a number of strategies in the context of the Tanzimat state. One was the formal institutionalization of the millet system. In creating a gridded Armenian political community subject to democratic controls and subordinated to the imperial center, the Sublime Porte and the

Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul “unmixed” those sites of power described above and limited the mobility of actors who circulated through them. Implementing such an ambitious project necessitated a deep engagement with Ottoman Armenian society, who in turn required incentives for investing in imperial reform. As part of the political culture of Ottomanism, Armenians developed their own repertoires of action and institutions that ultimately served policies of state centralization. Ironically, their success in reforming the millet led to the political marginalization of the community and the imprisonment or exile of many leaders and activists. This is the argument presented in the following pages.

The dissertation consists of two parts, each comprised of three chapters. The first, “The Armenian Tanzimat,” covers the Armenian Constitution of 1860/63 and the multiple challenges that very nearly toppled it. Chapter One, “Bringing Osmanlılık Back,” covers the Constitution’s beginnings, promulgation, and early years. Tracing the connections between the Sublime Porte and the Patriarchate, I demonstrate that the Constitution was in fact integral to, rather than derivative of, the broader Tanzimat, and presented a new governing strategy that would transform political structures. Because the Constitution formally ordered the millet in a distinct hierarchy, while defining the roles of provincial clergymen and their responsibilities to the flock and before the government, I argue that this marks the beginning of the millet system in Ottoman governance.

While the Armenian Church, particularly the Patriarchate of Istanbul, was quickly becoming a *de facto* office of the Sublime Porte, it was still of course a religious institution. While its political legitimacy stemmed from the Ottoman state, it lacked the spiritual legitimacy necessary to enjoy that political power. Chapters Two (“The Armenian Church, Itinerant Priests, and Ottoman Sites of Power”) and Three (“Killing

Bishops and Mobilizing Space”) detail the Patriarchate’s attempts at reining in and subjecting to Constitutional rule three other major seats in the Armenian Church: the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Catholicosate of Aghtamar, and the Catholicosate of Sis. These three seats mobilized whatever resources they had available to them. Chiefly, they invoked competing claims to spiritual jurisdiction, which in the context of a confessional state, constituted a challenge to the center’s political prerogatives. Priests wishing to evade the gaze of the imperial center benefited from the legally pluralistic organization of political power in the empire, which allowed them to circulate through sites, and connect networks that in some cases proved structurally resilient against the centralizing state. This included alliances with provincial Muslims; that they worked so hard to protect their Armenian allies from the Istanbul Patriarchate indicates that the Constitution truly was projecting the power of the Sublime Porte into the provinces. Disrupting the Armenian Tanzimat therefore became a tool for combatting the imperial Tanzimat.

Chapter Four (“Destabilizing Center and Periphery in the Ottoman Empire”) begins Part II, entitled “The Bishops’ Wars.” While the first part of the dissertation looks at reform promulgated in the capital and the challenges political actors there faced, Part II takes the conflicts between bishops from Van as a lens for understanding how the Tanzimat played out in the provinces. Chapter Four, for example, considers how the reform program was accepted and instrumentalized by provincial actors. Firstly, I question the center-periphery paradigm used to explain Ottoman governance. Rather than a contest between a monolithic center and immutable periphery, the distinction was a cultural production of the Tanzimat program. In the case of the Armenians, some provincial Armenians weaponized the language of center-periphery to provide political

justification to their attempts at removing local powerbrokers. Contests for control over religious institutions, which enjoyed pronounced relations with governors and informal political actors, such as Kurdish tribesmen and moneylenders, erupted.

Many of the efforts succeeded. Chapter Five, “From Patriarch to Exiled Subversive,” reviews the final sixteen years of Mkrtich Khrimian’s career in Ottoman politics. A native of Van in the eastern provinces, Khrimian ascended to the highest positions a clergyman could, and served as Patriarch of Istanbul for four years (1869-73). He took the reform program seriously; the irony, however, was his success. Armenians implemented reform, instituting formal institutions and practices that should have been an important step in the process of reordering governing structures. Without consonant efforts made by the imperial government, however, the gridded polity imagined by imperial reformers remained stillborn; instead, Armenians unwittingly removed their own institutions and actors from previously established sites of power.

Finally, Chapter Six (“Ottomanism Goes Underground”) examines the relationship between Armenian civil society, Tanzimat institutions, and revolutionaries. The Armenian revolutionary parties formed in the Russian Empire imagined themselves as representatives of their co-ethnics in Anatolia; the interactions they had with that community, however, reveals more than just cultural differences between provincial actors in one empire and cultural elites in another. It leaves us asking just how deeply entrenched the Tanzimat and its culture of Ottomanism actually was.

## **Part One: The Armenian Tanzimat**

### **Chapter One**

#### **Bringing *Osmanlılık* Back: Making the Armenian Millet in the Ottoman Empire, 1844-1871**

The refrain is now old hat for Ottomanists. Reform kicked off under Selim III. Mahmud II massacred the Janissaries, allowing for the more rapid modernization of the military. The *Hatt-ı Şerif* of Gülhane was introduced in 1839, ushering in major public works projects as well as, with the first printing of paper banknotes and the creation of a national anthem, the sights and sounds of contemporary European states. In 1856 the state doubled down on the *Tanzimat* with the *Hatt-ı Hümayûn* or *Islahat Fermanı*. With its promises of equality before the law for all subjects, irrespective their religion, a new identity rooted in “Ottomanism” (*Osmanlılık*) would be the tie binding together the hearts of all with both one another and with the state.

The 1856 reforms included the provision that, in cooperation with the Sublime Porte, the non-Muslim millets (communities, in this case the Orthodox Greek, Apostolic Armenian, and Jewish) undergo reorganization. By the middle of the 1860s each of the major non-Muslim communities had a charter that democratized their institutions while limiting, in theory, clergymen’s prerogatives. Surely such reform would guarantee Ottomanism’s success.

But, according to the conventional wisdom prevalent in the major works on Ottoman history, it was not to be. A recent representative view summarizes the view that reform transformed the millets not into bastions of Ottomanism, but instead sources of sedition:

...while reinforcing Ottoman solidarity and creating conditions for specific communities to flourish were philosophically reconcilable, under Ottoman conditions *communal reforms could not be carried out without reinforcing separatism and thus undermining Ottomanism*. Inasmuch as the religious differences basic to *millet* reform seldom matched the ethnic differences basic to modern nationalism, variable and unpredictable consequences ensued, as the Greek Orthodox and Armenian cases illustrate. Among Ottoman religious minorities only the Jews were ideas of nationalism or separatism foreign in this period.

Millets as the incubators of nationalism offers a seemingly plausible explanation. As an analytical paradigm it finds resonance with other studies of empire and nationalism, most notably that of the Soviet Union. Reform led to the proliferation of community schools. Community schools emphasized national language, history, and identity. Prodded by outsiders, be it co-ethnics abroad or the ubiquitous Great Powers, Armenians and Greeks rose in revolt against the very state that inadvertently nurtured their nascent national consciousness. We may conclude, “*millet* yields nationalism.” But should we?

Constrained by teleology and dependent on a view of ethno-religious communities as bounded and vertically integrated, this perspective not only contains the echoes of modernization theory, it also ignores the contingency of empire as a political system. Most importantly, it reflects the inability of the current literature to deal with non-Muslims as sociological groups or, more specifically, view them as Ottoman social actors embedded in Ottoman social and political structures.<sup>2</sup> This chapter argues that

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<sup>1</sup> Carter Findley, “Tanzimat.” In Reşat Kasaba, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 4. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 29. Italics my own.

<sup>2</sup> Christine Philliou’s *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* and Julia Phillips Cohen’s *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* are welcome exceptions.

reforming the administration of the non-Muslim communities was a central component of broader state projects of legibility, particularly gridding.<sup>3</sup> The Tanzimat programs focused on, above all else, centralizing the state's administration and making it uniform (as much as possible) across the empire. Unsurprisingly, as I will demonstrate in Part II of this dissertation, the Armenian millet's ability to implement its own brand of reform was inextricably tied to the state's ability, or willingness, to do the same.

This is because the Armenian Church was a political institution of the Ottoman state. Recognized by the state as an intermediary or representative between it and the empire's Apostolic Armenian Community, the Church filled the very important political roles of both conducting internal communal affairs *and* participating in imperial decision-making processes at various levels as the community's "representative." This is contrary to the widely held view that the millets' authority was limited only to their own communities' internal cultural concerns. As Ottoman political institutions, the millets' own sites of communal power (such as monastic orders and the monasteries they operated) in actuality functioned as sources of Ottoman political and social power. The democratization of millet control ordered by the 1856 reform edict did not, therefore, "reinforce separatism." It instead democratized one part of the Ottoman political apparatus, and thereby allowed one segment of the broader Ottoman community access to elements of Ottoman state power (and coercion) they had previously not enjoyed.

The "Armenian Tanzimat" was a political program that, when enacted, entailed the actual systematization or formalization of the millet. Earlier scholarship has shown the famed millet system (erroneously considered an example of multiculturalism by

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<sup>3</sup> James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999)

some) did not exist throughout the entirety of the empire.<sup>4</sup> I take the argument one step further. Non-Muslim communities always existed, obviously, as did their leadership and intermediaries with the government. But the actual millet system was a product of the 1856 reforms and the state's drive for inscribing legibility in its well-protected domains. I will show in Chapters Five and Six that this system underwent a process of dismantling in the 1880s, and was largely in a shambles by 1896.

To this end the Armenian National Constitution of 1860 was a quintessential Tanzimat document. The Constitution streamlined and formalized control of the millet. It ordered its affairs and legislated controls over its various political bodies throughout the country. It created a National Assembly to which Armenians from all over the country were to be elected. More than ever before, the Patriarch of Istanbul asserted the centrality of his position. The National Assembly, headed by the Patriarch (also an elected position), constantly asserted its supremacy over any other major Apostolic Armenian centers of political power and religious influence.<sup>5</sup> While after the first Tanzimat decree in 1839 the Istanbul Patriarchate engaged in a policy of reasserting its political dominance over the Catholicosates of Sis and Aghtamar and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, each of which enjoyed spiritual supremacy superior to Istanbul, the Constitution legally affirmed this and codified the political reality while the Assembly with its various councils and ready access to the coercion afforded by an imperial *ferman* provided the disciplinary or coercive muscle.

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myth of the Millet System." *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society* (New York: Holmes and Meier Company, 1982) pp. 69-88

<sup>5</sup> The Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul was the institution that represented Ottoman Armenians to the Sublime Porte and the Palace. See below.



The project of legibility, or making the community more “readable” to the authorities, reordered the millet. The Armenian Tanzimat did not encourage sedition or secession. It reaffirmed the centrality of the imperial capital in daily life and facilitated state-society relations. For these reasons special examiners sent by Istanbul to rein in recalcitrant bishops or provincial assemblies, dominated by *çorbacı*s or other local power groupings, described their project as “enforcing the Constitution.” It is also why reformers using these new tools invoked the Tanzimat. Theirs was the goal shared by the Porte: Ottoman state building.

### **The “Ottomanness” of Ottoman Armenians and their Politics**

The Armenian Constitution represented not only, as others have overemphasized, secularization and increased lay participation in the affairs of the millet; a class of celibate priests who could muster the necessary political and social capital would, just as was the case before the Constitution, be the ones to ascend to the most important political offices, where they would be subject to the influences of lay powerbrokers. It represented also the culmination of one political battle determining who would speak on behalf of the Apostolic Armenian community to the Ottoman state

Located in the Kum Kapı district of Istanbul, a short walk down the hill from both the Sublime Porte and Topkapı Palace, the Armenian Patriarchate formed the ultimate locus of political and religious power for the empire’s Apostolic Armenian community. According to legend, Mehmet II established the office of patriarch in 1461 when he brought his friend Hovakim, the bishop of Brusa, to Constantinople and conferred in him

authority over the Armenians of the nascent empire.<sup>6</sup> The available colophons tell a different story. Only in 1543 did an Armenian priest, Astvatsatur, deign to call himself a patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>7</sup> The expansion of the Patriarchate's authority, as well as its specific role in a disjointed Ottoman state system, remained inconsistent and uneven. Around 1608, for example, the Armenian community of Erzurum succeeded in petitioning Sultan Ahmed for independence from patriarchal authority.<sup>8</sup> Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the patriarchate gradually won more and more prelacies and in 1726, under the patriarch Hovhannes Kolot, became the intermediary between Etchmiadzin<sup>9</sup> and the Sublime Porte. In 1828, Etchmiadzin ceded the last Ottoman dioceses it controlled to the jurisdiction of Istanbul. By 1844, Etchmiadzin had ceased sending nuncios to the Ottoman Empire for the purpose of soliciting alms, permitting instead Istanbul to transfer any collected.<sup>10</sup>

Though the Patriarchate's development as a political institution and imperial intermediary entailed the theoretical expansion of its political and spiritual jurisdiction, in reality this was constrained by geography, the structural holes of empire, money, and the freedom of non-Muslim Ottomans to convert. Gauging the actual influence of the Patriarchate proves difficult. Theoretically, it had many of the trappings of state power and coercion, including a prison where the Patriarch could jail opponents, as well as

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<sup>6</sup> For a thorough debunking of this myth, see Kevork Bardakjian, "The Rise of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople." *Christians and Jews...* pp. 89-100

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 90

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 92

<sup>9</sup> The Catholicos of Etchmiadzin is the supreme spiritual leader of all the world's Armenians. The seat is located in present-day Armenia, immediately west of Yerevan. The spiritual jurisdiction of the Patriarchate was considered a diocese (*tem*), which ruled over prelacies (*arajnordutium*).

<sup>10</sup> Bardakjian, 96

access to imperial *fermans* to take more drastic measures it deemed necessary, including exile. According to a mid-nineteenth century Protestant observer “a note from him [the Patriarch] to the Porte was quite sufficient, in most cases, to procure the banishment of any individual, whether an ecclesiastic or a layman, the mere word of the Patriarch being taken as sufficient to establish the guilt of the accused... the Patriarch could, with the greatest ease, use the power of the Turkish government to vent a private pique upon an individual, or visit a suspected heretic with persecution.”<sup>11</sup>

Some evidence shows the Patriarch’s jurisdiction was recognized in the empire’s eastern provinces. Local church officials could not easily deny a patriarchal appointment backed by an imperial *ferman*.<sup>12</sup> Still, important monasteries of some size (and, by extension, economic significance), such as Surb Karapet near Mush, found other ways to resist what they considered impositions.<sup>13</sup> The direct coercive power of the Patriarch decried by our Protestant writer against his co-religionists was, therefore, largely confined to the capital and other major urban centers near the Ottoman center. Enforcing anathemas and other discriminatory measures against Protestant converts in Istanbul was a matter of surveillance in a handful of neighborhoods with pronounced Armenian populations. Sizable conversions in some parts of western Anatolia, Cilicia, Sivas, and later Kharpert (Harput), show that executing orders in provincial villages was another matter entirely. Despite these practical limitations of the Patriarchate, the power to appoint bishops and abbots to high positions in the provinces (and represent, therefore, the community in an official capacity) theoretically allowed for the projection of

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<sup>11</sup> Dwight, *Christianity in Turkey* (1854) pp. 84

<sup>12</sup> Hayk Achemean, *Hayots Hayrik: Nuagogh Vshtits Hayreneats Hayots* (Tavriz: Atrpatakani Hayots Temakan Tparan, 1929) pp. 249-252

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 324-333

Patriarchal power. In the middle of the nineteenth century, this was decidedly not the case.

### **The Princely Bankers and their Discontents**

Other historians have asserted the domination of the Patriarchate by a class of bankers stemmed from their inability to play a larger political role in the Ottoman state.<sup>14</sup> Such a perspective is predicated on a view of Armenian political and social institutions, as well as capital, being somehow detached from the Ottoman state apparatus. The bankers, or *sarrafs*, were moneylenders who exploited the *İltizam* tax system. In this system a provincial governor earned his salary off the tax revenue of his administrative unit. Taxes were farmed out to the highest bidder, requiring cash-on-hand to be paid to the treasury; turning a profit meant exploiting the peasantry. Such an arrangement encouraged collusion between *sarrafs*, governors, and tax collectors. The Armenian clergy, a part of the provincial hierarchy, played a role in this.

The aforementioned power to appoint provincial *arajnords* (prelates), therefore, proved a powerful political weapon in the hands of a patriarch. Dominating the Patriarchate ensured that *sarrafs* would have, if not reliable, certainly useful people on the ground to protect their economic interests without creating too many problems. Coordinating with local Armenian notables, who also benefited from the tax system, the political benefits of the Church as an intermediary or representative flowed in only one direction. For some priests, simply acceding to the Armenian *çorbacıs* of Palu or the

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<sup>14</sup> Most notable is Hagop Barsoumian, “The Armenian Amira Class of Istanbul” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1980)

*onikiler* of Van, for example, provided job security and material benefit. Challenging them could lead to losing one's post, or worse.

By stacking Church offices with clerics who kept the Patriarchate relatively weak, the *sarrafs* kept open structural holes that they exploited to their own immense benefit; through their financial means, their capacity for economic brokerage connected sites of power while preventing others from exploring alternative approaches to bridging those holes. Robust relationships with governors provided them political insulation in the capital. In league with the provincial powerbrokers described above, they formed a potent force for disrupting projects of state centralization at multiple levels.

Challenges to *sarrafs* control of the Patriarchate occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century. Most studies of the Constitution emphasize the battle over funding a high school in Üsküdar as the onset of a struggle leading directly to that document's eventual promulgation as law. They attempt also to insert an element of class conflict to the analysis by emphasizing the diverging interests of the *esnaf* (artisan) class and the *kghera-amirayakans* (high-ranking clergymen and amiras).<sup>15</sup> While there is truth to the notion of social tension, control over the Patriarchate and the Armenian Church was in fact one more site of contestation during a period of empire-wide reform and the

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<sup>15</sup> Vartan Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1863: A Study of Its Historical Development* (Istanbul, 1988), Hagop Barsoumian, "The Armenian 'Amira' Class of Istanbul" (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1980), Arakel Sarukhan, *Haykakan Khndirn ev Azgayin Sahmanadrutiune Turkiyayum* (Tiflis, 1912), and Hayk Ghazaryan, *Arevmtahayeri Sotsial-Tntesakan ev Kaghakan Katsutyun, 1800-1870 tt* (Erevan: Haykakan SSH Gitutyunneri Akademiayi Hratarakchutyun, 1967). Ghazaryan, the Soviet Armenian historian, is predictably most bullish on class struggle. The *amiras* broke into two groups, technocrat (i.e. imperial architects) and banker (*sarrafs*).

redistribution of political power it entailed. Reverberations from the process of transferring power from the Palace to the Porte were felt here.

The Üsküdar school is a small but important chapter in that story. Plans to open the school, which was to educate boys from all backgrounds, commenced in 1836 at the urging of Patriarch Stepanos Aghavni Zakarian. The idea of opening a school in the first place was that of the imperial architects Garabed Amira Balian and Hovhannes Amira Serverian. Well-to-do students would be charged at a higher rate, moneyed sarrafs would sponsor students from less privileged backgrounds, and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem would fund day-to-day operations with an annual payment of 120,000 kuruş.<sup>16</sup> The school opened in 1838 only to close in 1841 after the sarrafs convinced the Patriarch of Jerusalem to withhold the financial support that had been promised. In 1843, the physical building of the school was converted into a military hospital.<sup>17</sup>

In 1841, the banker *amiras* managed also to remove Zakarian (who was serving his second term as patriarch) from his post and replace him with the more pliable bishop Astvatsatur, who was a tool in their hands.<sup>18</sup> Then, in a more ostentatious display of power, the sarrafs organized the Anatolia and Rumelia Company, which sought to control various taxes along the Mediterranean coast.<sup>19</sup> Through their control of the Patriarchate, they secured orders appointing individuals among themselves as *mütevelli* to various

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<sup>16</sup> Barsoumian, 174-175

<sup>17</sup> Maghakia Ormanean, *Azgapatum: Hay Ughapar Ekeghetsvoy Antskere Skizben minchev Mer Orere Hator 3* (Kostandnupolis: Hratarakutiun V. ev. H. Ter-Nersesean, 1927) col. 2592

<sup>18</sup> Ormanean, col. 2584

<sup>19</sup> Ormanean, col. 2548. Notable members of the company included Hovhannes Erganian, Misak Misakian, Mkrtych Jezayirlian, and Janig Papazian.

Armenian institutions, meaning near total control of the community's finances was concentrated in the hands of a few bankers.

These actions enraged certain elements within the Istanbul Armenian community, especially the *esnafs*, as well as the labor migrants from the provinces. A series of demonstrations in the 1840s led to the arrests of some Armenians. Periodic petitions, invoking the Tanzimat, were forwarded to the government decrying the amiras.<sup>20</sup> The amiras, who had made themselves *de facto* intermediaries between the government and the community, were no longer fulfilling their role. They therefore came under pressure from the government to make concessions that would return tranquility to and stitch up ruptures within the community.

This happened in July 1844 when the amiras selected Matteos Chukhajian as patriarch. Like almost all prior patriarchs he was a native of Istanbul, but was a “well-known partisan of the people” against amira domination of the Patriarchate.<sup>21</sup> Matteos' term as patriarch would prove to be one of the most important periods in nineteenth century Ottoman Armenian history, as the steps he took gave more concrete definition to the political role of the Patriarchate as an expanding imperial institution.

Firstly, he addressed the question of relations with Etchmiadzin. Given that the Patriarch's political role was predicated on its spiritual legitimacy, this was a most important step. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1828 Ottoman Armenian churches had ceased reciting the name of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin during the liturgy.<sup>22</sup> Matteos reversed this, first by reciting the name himself during liturgy that he conducted, and then

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<sup>20</sup> Barsoumian, 178

<sup>21</sup> Ormanean, col. 2587

<sup>22</sup> During the liturgy, prayers are made for secular and religious leaders.

by issuing the order that the name of the Catholicos be remembered in all Ottoman Armenian churches on 14 September 1844.<sup>23</sup> Contrary to the actions of prior patriarchs, he also sent a letter of submission to Catholicos Nerses Ashtaraketsi.

In response, Matteos first received from Nerses the Order of St. Anna. To avoid potential problems or offend the Ottoman state, the Catholicos sent the award to the Porte with the request it be forwarded to the Patriarch of Istanbul. The Catholicos then formally recognized the Patriarch of Istanbul as Etchmiadzin's representative to the Porte, promised to cease sending nuncios to Anatolia for the purposes of collecting alms for the Catholicosate, instead vesting the Patriarch with the right to collect and then forward them to Etchmiadzin.

While the ecclesiastic negotiations and exchange of symbolic gestures by two bishops may appear inconsequential to Ottomanists, the political ramifications were especially acute. Recognition of the Patriarch of Istanbul as representative of Etchmiadzin formalized the political superiority of Istanbul vis-à-vis other major Church offices. The submission of Istanbul to Etchmiadzin further deepened this connection and restricted the ability of those other centers, especially Sis, to advance candidates to the seat of patriarch.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the Ottoman state would not have to contend with other claimants to the role of imperial intermediary for the Armenian community. This also put to rest Sis's centuries-long attempts at controlling the Patriarchate.

Matteos was now free to pursue other projects. He standardized the headgear and dress of Ottoman Armenian clerics.<sup>25</sup> This ended some of the regional dissimilarities in

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<sup>23</sup> Ormanean, col. 2589

<sup>24</sup> See below

<sup>25</sup> Ormanean, col. 2593



dress that had existed, made clearer the difference between Ottoman and Russian Armenian priests, while also distinguishing between bishops of the Etchmiadzin and Sis Orders. In a sense, Ottoman officials (which in important respects Armenian priests were) now wore uniforms.

In 1845, Matteos raised the political profile of the Patriarch and his office further. That year he began the tradition of non-Muslim religious leaders (specifically the Armenian Patriarch, the Catholic Armenian Patriarch, the Greek Patriarch, and the Chief Rabbi) visiting one another to pay respects.<sup>26</sup> A display of inter-confessional harmony, Matteos laid the groundwork for potential cooperation while assuaging animosities between non-Muslim communities. This left a positive impression on Sultan Abdülmecid. Most notably, that same year Matteos reversed the amiras' victory over the Üsküdar school.

The amiras' victory, which had led to the closure of the school, was largely symbolic, as it reflected the inability of any other social group to manage the finances of the Patriarchate effectively. It represented also the necessity of leaning on moneyed sarrafs to use the Patriarchate for any kind of purpose. Matteos' actions likewise symbolize the changing role of the Patriarch. He visited and directly engaged government ministers, sidestepping the amiras in the process. On 5 June 1845, he met with Serasker Rıza Paşa to argue for the reopening of the school. The Serasker agreed to the Patriarch's request, and the following day Matteos met with the Foreign Minister (whose portfolio included relations with the non-Muslim communities) Şekib Paşa, who arranged for the building to be emptied and the keys returned to the Patriarch. The school reopened on

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, cols. 2590, 2591

October 1. Significantly, fifty of the students enrolled in the school came via a special boat that traveled past the imperial palace.<sup>27</sup> The school was placed under the supervision of a technocrat amira, Boghos Ağa Odian, and the schoolmaster Hovhannes Deroyents.<sup>28</sup>

### **From Palace to Porte, In Armenian Translation**

The middle decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the transfer of political power from the Palace to the Porte. This, far more than class struggle, set the parameters for later changes within the administration of the Patriarchate. Not only would it play a central role in Matteos' ability to give clearer definition to the role and administration of the Patriarchate, the changing locus of power also helped facilitate his later forced registration.

Reşid Paşa, the Grand Vezir, figured at the center of this new web of relations. The prototypical "man of the Tanzimat," Reşid Paşa rose through the bureaucratic ranks via the foreign ministry, first as the Ottoman ambassador to Paris, then London, and later as foreign minister. While in power he sponsored the careers of other ascending bureaucrats, notably Fuad and Ali Paşas, who would later succeed him. He, as well as his successors, also employed Armenians. They would serve not only as bureaucrats, but also as a new class of intermediaries whose status was tied intrinsically to the reform program.

It was this context that created opportunities for Hagop Grjigian. Born in Pera to a technocrat amira family in 1800, Grjigian was a close confidant and adviser of Reşid Paşa. Though likely an exaggeration, at least one Armenian source argues Grjigian

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 2592

<sup>28</sup> Deroyents would later become a principal ideologue, as well as editor and publisher of the conservative journal *Erevak*. His virulent anti-Protestant polemics helped propel him to the fore of Armenian intellectual life.

worked hand-in-hand with Reşid Paşa in crafting the first Tanzimat.<sup>29</sup> In 1835, he went to Paris with the future Grand Vezir, where he served as a translator. Four years later he followed Reşid Paşa to London, and by 1846 he was employed as both a translator and advisor at the Sublime Porte.

In 1847, Grjigian managed to convince Reşid Paşa of the need for reform within the Armenian community. As one of the few people respected by both the guilds and amiras, he was particularly qualified to attempt this.<sup>30</sup> On May 7, Matteos traveled to the Porte to meet with Foreign Minister Ali Efendi and discuss Grjigian's reforms. By imperial order, two new councils were formed within the Patriarchate to manage the millet's affairs, under the leadership of the Patriarch.<sup>31</sup> On May 9, Matteos convened an assembly at the Patriarchate to announce the new councils. The first, the Spiritual Council (*Hogevor zhoghov*), was composed of fourteen members, all clerics. The Supreme Council (*Geragoyn zhoghov*) was the other one, charged with conducting political affairs. Consisting of twenty members, the council was split evenly between amiras and esnafs. The amiras' numbers included five sarrafs (Mikayel Pishmishian, Maksud Sarkisian, Kevork Yeremian, Misak Misakian, and Mkrtich Jezayirlian) and four technocrats (*barutçubaşıs* Hovhannes and Boghos Dadian, architects Garabed Balian and Hovhannes Serverian), and also Grjigian.<sup>32</sup> Through all of this, Reşid Paşa, on the basis of the Greek millet, created the position of *logofet* (executive) for the Armenian community and named his confidant Grjigian to the post.

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<sup>29</sup> Siruni, 205

<sup>30</sup> He was an especially close friend of the Dadians. Cf. "Hovhannes Bey Dadian to Hagop Grjigian," 21 May 1861, reprinted in Toros Azadean, *Tatean Kerdastanne* (Istanbul, 1953) pp. 20.

<sup>31</sup> BOA İ.MSM. 33/939, 33/940

<sup>32</sup> Ormanean, col. 2595

Matteos continued to cultivate relationships at both the Palace and the Porte. In 1848, for example, he forwarded complaints to the Porte on behalf of the Armenians of Van respecting the ongoing rebellion by Bedr Khan and Mahmud Bey. Under advisement from the Porte, Matteos forwarded orders to the prelates of Van, Erzurum, Bitlis, Palu, and Diyarbakir, urging them to act in support of Osman Paşa and the military. Some Armenians even participated in the fighting. The Patriarch received the thanks of the Porte and Sultan, the latter of whom asked Matteos to pray for him.<sup>33</sup>

Those links, though, could not save him. In the course of raising the profile of the office of Patriarchate and putting in place legislative reform that curbed the overwhelming influence of the bankers, Matteos earned the derision of the amiras, who denounced him as a “glory seeker.” The bankers found their opportunity to make a move against the Patriarch after Matteos handled a large donation made anonymously by the imperial architect Garabed Amira Balian. Claiming the Supreme Council had a right to know the donor’s identity, the sarrafs complained to the Ottoman Government. Notably, they sent the individual closest to the Porte, Reşid Paşa’s personal sarraf, Mkrtych Jezayirlian. Claiming that Matteos was unwilling to cooperate with the Councils, Jezayirlian requested the Porte’s intervention. On September 17, Reşid Paşa acceded to his request and charged Grjigian with obtaining Matteos’ resignation. In a farewell address invoking early Christian martyrs, Matteos formally resigned four days later.<sup>34</sup>

In the end, Matteos’s defeat revealed the extent of his victory. Firstly, the amiras could not confront him directly as they had done to prior patriarchs. They not only had to appeal directly to the Porte for assistance, they also deployed the lone sarraf who had a

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, col. 2596

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, col. 2692

robust relationship with the Grand Vezir. Most importantly they argued Matteos was unwilling to work with the councils introduced by Reşid Paşa and Grjigian. These actions entailed the tacit acceptance of Tanzimat institutions by the sarrafs, and recognition of the new source of political legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire. The Patriarchate had been the site of the principal Tanzimat battle in the Armenian community. While the banker amiras would enjoy occasional success in resisting reform, the men of Tanzimat had won.

The wave of reform that shifted the locus of power from Palace to Porte took many of the amira families with it. Krikor Odian, whose father was tied to the Balian, went on to work with Mithat Paşa at Rusçuk, served in various posts at the Porte, was one of the shepherds of the Armenian Constitution, and eventually collaborated with Mithat on the Ottoman Constitution (1876-78). The same was true of other architects of the Armenian Constitution. Serovpe Vichenian, better known as Servichen, was the son of a sarraf.<sup>35</sup> While studying medicine in Paris he developed close relations with Reşit Paşa and, as a doctor, would go on to participate in professional organizations, the Red Crescent, and various imperial commissions.<sup>36</sup> In 1861, he traveled as part of Fuat Paşa's mission to Lebanon to settle the Maronite-Druze conflicts. For his service to the state he received numerous distinctions, including the Nişan-ı Mecidi.<sup>37</sup> Nigoghos Balian, son of the imperial architect Harutiun, followed in his father's footsteps in the state's service. He was also a beloved member of the group of young intellectuals whose death at a

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<sup>35</sup> Tokt. Vahram Torgomean, *Bzhishk Tokt Servichen Efenti* (Vienna: Mkhitarian Tparan, 1893). His father worked closely with Harutiun *Amira* Bezjian, one of the most influential *sarrafs* in the country.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>37</sup> BOA İ.DH. 880/70201 (29-Ca-1300/27 April 1883); for a complete list of honors, see Torgomean.

young age evoked moving obituaries in the liberal press.<sup>38</sup> The *barutçubaşı* Dadian family also came around to embrace the new order. Mkrtich Dadian's French-language writings on rights, for example, were rendered into Armenian by Mikayel Iutiujian, a member of one of the most liberal Istanbul Armenian families.<sup>39</sup>

This pattern unfolded somewhat similarly, albeit more unevenly in the provinces. Though the political calculus and interests of those involved may or may not have been congruent with the ideals of reform, a short prosopography of select provincial families bears out the same pattern of political reorientation. In Van, the Tevkants and Natanian families, both embedded in local power structures that existed outside the legal limits of the state, embraced the reform movement as early as 1858. Khachadur Khan Der Nersisian,<sup>40</sup> a merchant who conducted business linking Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, and the Caucasus, was an early ally of the provincial reformer Khrimian in the 1850s.<sup>41</sup> His son went on to serve in the provincial bureaucracy,<sup>42</sup> and another married the sister of Maghakia Ormanian, the future *arajnord* of Erzurum and later Patriarch of Istanbul.<sup>43</sup> Similar repositioning by families in Harput, Charsanjak, Palu, and elsewhere happened throughout the nineteenth century, many of them after direct confrontation by priests sent

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<sup>38</sup> *Meghu* (10 March 1858) The obituary consumes the entire issue.

<sup>39</sup> Mkrtich Tatean, *Irawunk azgats*. Targmanich Manuel B. Iutiuchean (K. Polis: Tparan T. Tivitchean, 1864)

<sup>40</sup> Either he or his father immigrated to Anatolia from Iran in the early nineteenth century, allowing the family to retain the honorific "khan."

<sup>41</sup> *Artsvi Vaspurakan* lists him as a correspondent and contributor as early as 1856.

<sup>42</sup> FO 195/1376, No. 25 P (9 December 1881) Aleksan was an assistant governor (*muavin*) in Erzurum who, along with a number of other provincial Armenian officials, was discharged by order of the Sultan in 1881.

<sup>43</sup> *Agapi: Ormanean Entaniken, Mihran Ef. Ter-Nerseseani amusin Tikin Agapi, anmoray hishatakkın hushartzan* (K. Polis: Tpagrutian V. ew H. Ter-Nersesean, 1906) pp. 20

from Istanbul.<sup>44</sup> “Conversions” to the reform program in the provinces could be harder to come by given the comparative durability of structural holes in the periphery.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike their provincial co-religionists, Istanbul Armenian reformers had ease of access to the Porte. They also had numerous networking opportunities, which raised their personal profile and social capital, within both Istanbul Armenian and Ottoman society. The aforementioned Servichen not only served the state at the Porte, he also taught medicine and law at Gatasaray for three years (1846-1849), and began a medical journal, which lasted until 1852.<sup>46</sup> Through his network he managed to help promote the career of another Paris-trained Armenian doctor, Nahabed Rusinian. At Servichen’s insistence he became Fuat Paşa’s personal physician<sup>47</sup> and later worked at the Bab-ı Seraskeri Hastahanesi.<sup>48</sup> He also published articles in *Gazette Medicale d’Orient* and taught at the Imperial Medical College.

In 1853 the Patriarchate introduced a new auxiliary council, the Educational Council (*Usumnakan Khorhurd*). The *amiras* opposed it. Unsurprisingly, the council’s members included most of the new generation of Armenian officials with ties to the Porte, such as Servichen (who chaired the council), Rusinian, Krikor Odian, and Nigoghos Balian. Charged with directing the *millet*’s growing educational system, the council ultimately proved a failure. Its major contribution was serving as a platform for Rusinian’s book *Ughghakhosutiun*, which aimed at standardizing and promoting the

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<sup>44</sup> See chapters 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). I expand on this argument in Chapters 4-5 below.

<sup>46</sup> Torgomean, 6

<sup>47</sup> N. Yıldırım, “Nahabed Roussignan, the First Professor of Deontology at the Royal School of Medicine,” *Yeni Tip Tarihi Araştırmaları* no. 1 (1995) pp. 148-161

<sup>48</sup> T.T.V., “Bzhishk Tokt. Nahapet Rusinean,” *Handes Amsoreay* (1902) pp. 205.

vernacular language. While representative of the general direction of reform, this did little more than earn Rusinian the hatred of the increasingly conservative *amiras* and Deroyents, who was quickly becoming their spokesman.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the council provided another example of the expansion of the Patriarchate and its bureaucracy that would continue a few years later under the Constitution. The increasing expansion of the Patriarchate and the assignment of Tanzimat-affiliated Armenians to posts within it continued before and after the 1856 announcement of the *Islahat Fermanı*, which required the formal reorganization of the millets. Up until being elected Catholicos of all Armenians at Etchmiadzin in 1858, the ex-Patriarch Matteos headed the Spiritual Council, beginning in 1855.

The 1856 *Islahat Fermanı* served as a catalyst for not only reform, but also the “Tanzimatification” of the Apostolic Armenian millet. Following the proclamation, Krikor Margosian, successor to Grjigian as *loghofet*, began sketching out a plan for the administration of millet affairs. Under pressure from the *amiras* Dadian and Eramian, the first draft went nowhere. A second draft bereft the specifics of the first was presented to the Political Council on March 22, 1857, and approved by a general assembly convened by the Patriarch. The new regulations, called *kanonagrutiun*, were then given the name *sahmanadrutiun*, or Constitution, and forwarded to the Sublime Porte for ratification.<sup>50</sup>

There the Porte would reject the new constitution, as it could not tolerate “a state within a state.” Intervention by the *amiras*, however, was the true reason for its rejection.<sup>51</sup> Opportunity to continue the push for the Constitution quickly reappeared in

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ormanean, col. 2706

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 2707



1858 with the selection of Servichen to the Supreme Council. He was able in May 1859 to convince the Council's other members to form a committee for the purpose of revisiting Margosian's original proposal. The committee (now named the Constitutional Committee) included among its membership Garabed Utiujian (editor of the liberal weekly *Masis*), as well as Mkrtich Aghaton (from a family of translators at the Foreign Ministry<sup>52</sup>), Krikor Odian, Nahabed Rusinian, Minas Minasian, Tovmas Kayserian, Hovhannes Siurenian, and Parnuag Bey Kotigian.<sup>53</sup> Servichen, Nigoghayos Balian, and Stepanos Aslanian, though noticeably absent from the official committee, assisted with the drafting in private.<sup>54</sup>

The reigning patriarch, Kevork Kerestegian, abhorred the idea of limiting the prerogatives of the clergy, and therefore remained a bitter opponent of the new Constitution. Sensing its momentum he tendered his resignation on 21 April 1860, and was replaced by Sarkis Kuyumjian on May 2. Sarkis arrived from Adrianople, where he had been serving as prelate, on May 12. Little more than one week later the members of the Constitutional Committee signed the newly drafted Constitution, whereafter Patriarch Sarkis took it to the Porte for ratification. On May 24 a general assembly was convened at the Patriarchate, where a group of clerics that included the ex-Patriarch Hagopos declared the new document did not violate any of the laws of the Armenian Church. The amiras on the Supreme Council acceded to the new document, and the Constitution was unanimously declared as the new law governing the millet.

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<sup>52</sup> Y. G. Çark, *Türk Devleti Hizmetinde Ermeniler* (İstanbul: Yeni Matbaa, 1953) pp. 199

<sup>53</sup> *Azgayin Sahmanadrutiun Hayots* (K. Polis: Tpagrutiun F. Y. Kiurkchean, 1860) pp. 46.

Hereafter *Sahmanadrutiun* 1860

<sup>54</sup> Ormanean, col. 2707

## **The Armenian Apostolic Church as a Tanzimat Institution**

As a text, the Constitution was divided into five separate chapters that detailed the National Administration, the National Tax, General Elections, Internal Rules, and Review of the Constitution. Those five chapters entailed a total of 150 articles, and were prefaced by six Fundamental Principles (*himnakan skzbunk*). The Fundamental Principles spoke much on rights and responsibilities, but they also located the locus of legitimacy on which the new administration would be based: the popular voice of the people, loyalty to the Ottoman state, and submission to the doctrines of the Armenian Church.

Dealing with the National Administration, the first chapter addressed the legislative bodies charged with directing millet affairs. The National Administration, as a unit, was responsible for regulating relations between the millet and the Sublime Porte as Ottoman subjects, as well as between the Apostolic Armenian community of the Ottoman Empire with the Mother See at Etchmiadzin. It was the intermediary (*mijnord*) with the Porte, responsible for defending the religious and political rights of the Armenian *millet*, while also keeping the flock loyal subjects of the state.<sup>55</sup>

The center of the Administration was the Patriarchate in Istanbul, headed by the Patriarch. He would preside over the bodies that composed the Administration: the Political Council (the successor to the Supreme Council) and the Religious Council (the former Spiritual Council), as well as ancillary committees on education, the economy, finances, and the courts. In the case of issues blurring the distinction between lay and religious affairs, a mixed council would be formed to address the issue. Issues not subject directly to the charge of those councils, or proscribed otherwise by the Constitution,

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<sup>55</sup> *Azgayin Sahmanadrutiun* 1860, 8-9

would be handled by the National General Assembly (*Azgayiin Endhanur Zhoghov*), composed of elected members representing Armenians from all prelaties located in the Ottoman Empire. The General Assembly bore responsibility for electing the Patriarch and other major offices.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond the Central Administration, the Constitution also set forth a system for provincial administration. By and large, the Constitution reproduced the organizational structures of the Central Administration in the provinces. Instead of the Patriarch and the Patriarchate, the Provincial Administration was centered on the prelate (*arajnord*) and the *arajnordaran*, which governed a prelate. In towns where a prelate sat, a Provincial General Assembly was to be formed, along with its own auxiliary Political and Religious councils. The Provincial General Assembly elected its own prelate (then to be confirmed by the Mixed Council at Istanbul), who was then made responsible for ensuring the Constitution was implemented in the administration of millet affairs.<sup>57</sup> The prelate represented his flock before the local government as the Patriarch's proxy or deputy (*pokhanord* or *vekil*), and therefore had the right to "escalate" issues or problems to the Patriarchate when unable to resolve it suitably through local channels.

The true systematization of the millet lies in the formalization and codification of the relationship between center (the Patriarch at Istanbul) and periphery (the provincial prelates). In the decades prior to the establishment of the Constitution, the Patriarchate had engaged in a policy of combining smaller dioceses (*vichaks*) into larger prelaties,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 25, 87. "The election of a prelate will be [done] in the General Provincial Assembly, [conducted] the same as in the election of the Patriarch." The Mixed Council, following a petition from the Provincial General Assembly, would investigate requests to remove a prelate.

which would serve as more coherent administrative units.<sup>58</sup> Not only did this create better organization, it also wrested political power away from local monasteries and monastic orders preying on the structural holes of the haphazard and differentiated administrative system. In many cases monastic orders tied to a monastery had a near monopoly on selecting a prelate, which predictably led to networking opportunities with an array of fixers and local intermediaries embedded in provincial power structures. This allowed also for the abuse of the *mütevelli* system by notables in the provinces (and also the center), a practice formally outlawed by the Constitution. Tellingly the only mention of monasteries in the first Constitution was in the 41<sup>st</sup> article where guidelines are set forth for their review by the Economic Committee—and there subordinate to the Political Council rather than the Religious.<sup>59</sup>

Theoretically, the Patriarchate legislated a reorganization of the millet that would make its administration uniform throughout the Ottoman Empire. This reordering, which more forcefully asserted “the authority [of the Patriarchate] be spread over all the Armenians of Turkey,”<sup>60</sup> systematized the organizational hierarchy of the Armenian community. With the authority to demand reports and subject certain activities to the authority of its auxiliary bodies, the Patriarchate had the tools to inscribe legibility in all its flock. Given its practical authority over a subaltern community within the Ottoman body politic, it also had the capacity to obtain different kinds of information useful to the Sublime Porte in its reform project for the entire Empire.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ormanean, cols. 2651, 2652

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 17-18

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 8

<sup>61</sup> This was especially true of government policy in Cilicia.

This systematization also gave Armenians not only more control over their own institutions through elections, it also provided them greater access to state power. Most obviously, the Church was one such site of power. But through the Church, which helped to mediate the Apostolic Armenian Community's relationship with the government, a clear line was drawn linking an Armenian in the smallest village to a *vali*, a Patriarch, or even the Prime Minister. Rather than an incubator for nationalism, the Armenian Tanzimat facilitated the more active participation of Armenians in the political life of the Ottoman Empire. One can only assume the Men of Tanzimat, who drew up these regulations while working in both the Porte and the Patriarchate, had such ideas in mind. Quite probably, so did Ali Paşa when he issued his approval.

Finally, the Constitution emphasized the centrality of the Patriarchate of Istanbul, not only through its organizational structure, but also by manipulating its sources of legitimacy. The political centrality of the Patriarchate is clear given its physical proximity to the Sublime Porte and its role in administering the Armenian community. The second source of the Patriarchate's legitimacy, submission to Etchmiadzin, helped provide it more complete control over access to administrative posts.

Within the Armenian Church there are two classes of priests: *kahanays*, not bound by any vow of celibacy and usually deployed as parish priests, and *vardapets*, celibate priests. Of the two, only the latter may receive promotions, be it political or ecclesiastic. Only *vardapets*, therefore, may be elevated to the office of prelate or rank of bishop. Becoming a *vardapet* (or "gaining the hood") usually entailed not only membership in the order of a monastery, but also being promoted by the abbot (*vanahayr*) or elevation by another bishop in the Armenian Church. Abbots and orders, therefore, controlled the

keys to political office. Later versions of the Constitution as well as actions by the Patriarchate reflected a growing awareness of the persistence of monasteries as sites of political power. As the highest political office in the Church hierarchy within the Ottoman Empire, the Patriarchate reserved the right to remove those office holders whose actions contradicted the Constitution.

While the projection of central power to the level of monasteries would grow only during the 1870s, the Constitution did codify access to the office of Patriarch. According to Article 115, the Patriarch had to meet two criteria: be an Ottoman subject and a bishop ordained by Etchmiadzin.<sup>62</sup> The necessity of being an Ottoman subject is apparent. Being ordained by Etchmiadzin provided the Patriarchate more stringent control over the Church hierarchy in the Ottoman domains. Within the Ottoman Empire, at Sis in Cilicia and Aghtamar near Van, were two relics from feudal past: Catholicosates. As Catholicosates, both Aghtamar and Sis reserved the right to ordain priests, as well as bishops.

Of the two, Sis posed the larger “threat” to the political prerogatives of the Patriarchate. Aghtamar, in partial violation of agreements with Etchmiadzin and Istanbul, only occasionally ordained bishops. Sis, however, did with great regularity. While Aghtamar’s bishops largely remained at the monastery, bishops ordained by Sis had greater mobility and access to economic resources in a wealthier part of the empire. Many of the bishops ordained by Sis not only came from all over western Anatolia (including Istanbul), they also ascended to posts as high as prelate. As a patriarchate,

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<sup>62</sup> *Azgayin Sahmanadrutiun* 1860

Istanbul had no authority to ordain bishops, a rank necessary for claiming the office of patriarch.

Ensuring the sitting patriarch be ordained by Etchmiadzin ensured firstly there would be no “re-centering” of the millet on Sis. Locking out bishops from Sis maintained spiritual subordination to the Mother See at Etchmiadzin, which by extension guarded the political role of its representative to the Porte, the Patriarchate. Moreover, beginning in the 1820s under Catholicos Yeprem, Etchmiadzin only ordained as bishops Ottoman Armenian clergymen sent by the Patriarch. Choosing to ordain bishops without first consulting the Patriarch, such as was the case in 1860 when Catholicos Matteos invited four prelates from Anatolia to Etchmiadzin for ordination, rose the ire of the Patriarchate.<sup>63</sup> This is because the right to select its own *vardapets* for promotion meant the Patriarchate controlled the right for eventual ascension to the seat of Patriarch. As such, the Patriarchate ensured all roads to power always led to Istanbul—in theory, at least.

### **Jerusalem versus Istanbul, or How the Constitution Flunked Its First Exam**

With the Constitution in place as law and Sarkis Kuyumjian seated as Patriarch of Istanbul, the very first session of the National General Assembly opened on 25 August 1860. The Political and Religious Councils were formed, with the former featuring only one amira among its twenty members, Mirijan Amira Papazian. Three other amiras, Garabed Balian, Bedros Khorasanjian, and Hovhannes Yeghiazarian, each resigned their

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<sup>63</sup> “Haytagir Kaghakakan Zhoghovoy. Session XII (2 December 1860)” in *Atenagrutiwnk Azgayin Zhoghovoy, 1860-1870 amay* (Session V, 4 April 1861). The Political Council sent a formal note of complaint to the Catholicos.

place on the council.<sup>64</sup> Mkrtich Aghaton assumed the position of speaker (*atenapet*), with the authority to put issues to vote or grant permission to representatives to speak, though Servichen would assume that role by the next session (September 6).

The first meetings of the National General Assembly focused by and large on ground rules for the new institution. On 4 November 1860, the question of the debt accrued by the St. James Monastery at Jerusalem. The Patriarchate attempted to address the issue before the Assembly began convening, sending Servichen (who was already in the region as part of Fuat Paşa's mission to the Lebanon) to investigate Jerusalem and conduct meetings with the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Hovhannes Movsesian of Izmir.

The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem was charged with overseeing the Holy Places and the complex at St. James, which included the monastery, the cathedral, a seminary, and a printing press. The brotherhood at St. James carried out the day-to-day operations of the patriarchate and produced students who served in various positions throughout the Ottoman Empire. Income derived from pilgrimages not only raised the profile of the Jerusalem Patriarchate (and, by extension, the Armenian Church), it provided funds necessary for financing schools, such as the one at Üsküdar. Additionally, the Patriarchate served as the prelate for the small Armenian community in Palestine.

Hovhannes Movsesian reigned for ten years as Patriarch of Jerusalem, during which time he twice ignored calls to report to Istanbul (1856 and 1860).<sup>65</sup> Servichen's mission included the charge he secure a payment of 600,000 kuruş from Hovhannes to

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<sup>64</sup> *Atenagrutiunk* 1860-1870 (Session I, 25 August 1860)

<sup>65</sup> Ormanean, col. 2702. The debt was in fact taxes in arrears, the non-payment of which was compounding debt accrued by Istanbul. In meetings of the political council, some questioned whether or not Jerusalem should be forced to contribute to debt accrued that funded projects in Istanbul.



ease the burden of the debt.<sup>66</sup> Hovhannes resisted, contending Jerusalem had no money. Seeing in this yet another example of Jerusalem resisting the center, the Patriarchate initiated preparations to rein in the brotherhood at St. James. Servichen took the opportunity to describe the sad state of affairs at Jerusalem, which necessitated intervention and reform. During the November 4 meeting of the National Assembly, the Political Council revealed the Constitutional basis for intervening in the affairs of monasteries, and plans were discussed for sending a commission from Istanbul.<sup>67</sup>

The passing of Patriarch Hovhannes on 23 December 1860, provided Istanbul an opportunity for further imposing its will. Driven more and more by the Political Council, the National Administration rushed to install a new Patriarch of Jerusalem before Easter of the following year to ensure stability before pilgrims' arrival. They attempted at first to send a *locum tenens* Patriarch (*teghapah*) who was not a member of the brotherhood. The Prelate of Izmir, Boghos Taktakian, was first approached for the job. Belonging to a brotherhood himself (at Armash), he knew full well the dangers of trying to deal with a the political culture of a religious order, and declined the offer. The St. James Brotherhood protested the decision, sending a formal letter of complaint to the Patriarch at Istanbul. Additionally, they elected a new Patriarch, Isahag, whose election was later ruled null by the National Administration at Istanbul.<sup>68</sup>

Unabated, the Political Council pushed on. A "Mixed Subcommittee" featuring representatives from both the Political and Religious Councils composed a set of regulations for Jerusalem, which was presented to the National Assembly on 17 February

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 2701

<sup>67</sup> *Atenagrutiunk* 1860-1870 (Session III, 4 November 1860)

<sup>68</sup> Ormanean, col. 2710

1861.<sup>69</sup> Composed of forty-two articles, the *Kanonagir* outlined rules for the administration of Jerusalem's affairs. Most importantly, it provided the Istanbul Patriarchate near unilateral rights in decision-making. Article 12 stipulated Jerusalem's need to obtain Istanbul's permission before selling property. Articles 5, 28 and 38-42 provided Istanbul the right to select Jerusalem's Patriarch, to interfere in finances, and to send external examiners to determine whether or not the rules set forth were being implemented. The Patriarch Sarkis, the members of the Religious Council and the Political Council, all signed the document, which the National General Assembly then ratified.

In a display of central power, Istanbul sent the priest Hovhannes Hiunkarbeyendian to Jerusalem to implement the new regulations.<sup>70</sup> Traveling with two laymen, Hiunkarbeyendian presented the brotherhood with three documents: the first introduced the delegation and its mission, the second how to install the regulations, and the third a response to objections raised by the brotherhood. He spent a full month trying to convince Jerusalem to accept and implement the *Kanonagir*; the brotherhood responded they could not take any further action without first having a patriarch in place. There he met with Hagopos Chilingirian, formerly of the St. James Brotherhood. Together they returned to Istanbul where Chilingirian launched attacks on Jerusalem, casting his opponents as participants in a larger Jesuit conspiracy.<sup>71</sup>

Jerusalem submitted another official protest with the National Assembly. Deploying rhetorical devices, the St. James Brotherhood reduced the program of reform

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<sup>69</sup> *Atenagrutiunk* 1860-1870 (Session IV, 17 February 1861)

<sup>70</sup> Ormanean, 2715

<sup>71</sup> Hakobos Chilinkirean, *Patmutiun Erkameay Antsits* (K. Polis: Tpagrutium Aramean, 1866)

to one of “illumination,” learning, and the advancement of scholarship; in these matters Jerusalem was of course a fellow traveler and in no need of external supervision.<sup>72</sup> It had after all, protected the Armenians’ role in the Holy Places, produced works published on its own press, and contributed priests who served the Church. In this regard, the brotherhood took special exception with its presentation in the Istanbul Armenian press, lodging specific complaints against the journals *Meghu* and *Masis*. *Masis* had reported that the brotherhood included illiterate *vardapets* in its ranks, an especially onerous accusation. With respect to depictions made in the press, Jerusalem saw comparisons of the brotherhood to Boghos of Van or Nigoghayos of Cilicia especially insulting.<sup>73</sup> Those charges were serious enough to cause the National Assembly to consider special rules for journals in its May 5 session. Moreover, Jerusalem also questioned the authority of the Political and Religious Councils.

Most important, however, was Jerusalem’s objection based on the Anathema of Catholicos Karapet II (r. 1726-1729). The Anathema’s two major points stipulated that one person could not sit simultaneously as Patriarch of both Istanbul and Jerusalem, and that the Patriarch of Jerusalem must be a member of the St. James brotherhood. Article 41 of the regulations in particular violated this dictum. The Political Council within the Patriarchate pushed on, however, insisting on its right to select someone from outside to ensure the reform program be carried out.

Seizing the opportunity, the old guard encouraged the members of the Religious Council to side with the brothers at Jerusalem in their bid to keep the Jerusalem seat in

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<sup>72</sup> *Boghok erkrord ar Azgayin Endhanur Zhoghovn, Zvor khonarhabar matutsane amboghj miabanutiwn Surb Erusaghemi* (Erusaghem: Tparan Srbots, 1861) pp. 4

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 24. See below for more on actions taken by those two priests.

the hands of the St. James brotherhood. This of course challenged the legality of the Constitution and the sovereignty of the Istanbul Patriarchate over the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire. Naturally the “insider-outsider” battle became a proxy in the war over the Constitution between the conservatives and the liberals, or constitutionalists; in other words, it was a battle over the efficacy of the Tanzimat. The result was a growing divide between the Religious Council, stocked entirely with clergymen, with Patriarch Sarkis on their side, and the Political Council, where the men of Tanzimat sat.

Having already ruled the January election of Isahag *Vardapet* as Patriarch of Jerusalem null, Servichen and the Political Council pushed on, demanding an election at the July 12 sitting of the National Assembly. Three names were brought forth for consideration: the former Patriarch Kevork Kerestegian, the former Patriarch of Istanbul who had bitterly opposed the Constitution; the Prelate of Izmir, Boghos Taktakian; and the Prelate of Edirne, Arisdages.<sup>74</sup> Of the three, Taktakian had previously declined a mission to Jerusalem, while Arisdages had expressed his disinterest in leaving Edirne. Kerestegian, who most probably negotiated this with members of the Political Council ahead of time, won the election by default after each candidate received 19 votes. Members of the Assembly protested the ballot, yelling, “an outsider bishop cannot become Patriarch of Jerusalem! There’s an anathema!” At the conclusion of the voting Servichen asked the seated members of the Religious Council if there in fact was an anathema, to which he received different answers. Thereafter, Patriarch Sarkis announced that the Religious Council had already discussed and concluded the issue. Servichen could only argue that the issue should be sent to the General Assembly for consideration,

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<sup>74</sup> *Atenagrutiwnk* 1860-1870 (Session IV, 12 July 1861)

while a mixed committee was put together for the purposes of reconciling the two factions.<sup>75</sup> The mixed council met on July 15<sup>th</sup> where three proposals were raised: 1. Re-convene the General Assembly, 2. Conduct the ballot, but do not approve the result until consulting Etchmiadzin, 3. Subject the issue to the authority of the Religious Council.<sup>76</sup> Each of these proposals locked out the Political Council from the decision-making process.

At an August 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of bishops, it was resolved that: 1. The Patriarch of Jerusalem would be a member of the St. James Brotherhood, 2. The decision by Istanbul to install an outsider as Patriarch violated the Anathema of Karapet II, 3. Religious issues would not be resolved by balloting, 4. The new Patriarch need not be a bishop, 5. There was no basis for not honoring the selection, 6. As a religious issue this meeting (of the bishops) had the authority to make such decisions.<sup>77</sup> The following day a delegation of ten representing the Political Council had an audience with Patriarch Sarkis, where upon being asked to explain the decision he replied they were merely dealing with religious issues.

In the context of Ottoman political culture, where religious identity and the Church mediated political power, this meant everything. With the line now blurred between what constituted something religious as opposed to exclusively political, the authority of the Political Council in all matters was called into question. On this basis the Religious Council could claim authority over all matters. Livid, Servichen called an emergency session of the National Assembly for the 5<sup>th</sup> of August. Tellingly, while most

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.; Ormanean, col. 2717

<sup>76</sup> *Atenagrutiwnk* 1860-1870 (Session IX, 5 August 1861) Details revealed by Servichen during a monologue.

<sup>77</sup> Ormanean, col. 2718

sessions took place in the Patriarchal complex in Kum Kapı, this one was held at the Naregian School in Beyoğlu. The invitations announcing the session indicated “the honor of the Constitution and the National Administration” was at stake, and the session presided over not by Patriarch Sarkis, but instead the ex-Patriarch Kevork Kerestejian.<sup>78</sup> During the session, Servichen unsuccessfully attempted to widen divisions between members of the Religious Council and declared the August 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting and its decisions illegal, while questioning the constitutionality of Patriarch Sarkis’ actions.

Kerestejian continued to play both sides. After working with the Political Council to make himself Patriarch of Jerusalem, he joined the other bishops in signing the August 2<sup>nd</sup> declaration before presiding over Servichen’s emergency session. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, along with members of the Political Council, Kerestejian traveled to the Porte to meet with Ali Paşa, where he submitted a list of accusations against Sarkis.<sup>79</sup> The next day, Sarkis was called to the Porte to answer the accusations, where he was told the government would be withdrawing its approval of the Constitution. Whether his goal or not, Kerestejian succeeded where he had failed fifteen months earlier. The decision by the Porte set off a series of demonstrations outside the Patriarchate in Kum Kapı.

The following months weighed down Sarkis. Branded anti-Constitutional, calls for his resignation circulated. A decree received in late September from Catholicos Matteos in Etchmiadzin, the former Patriarch who had worked so hard to give some administrative shape to the Patriarchate, agreed with the stance of the Religious Council that the regulations for Jerusalem violated the Anathema of Karapet II. Instead of finding some measure of justification or vindication, some labeled Sarkis a Russian agent who

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<sup>78</sup> *Atenagrutiunk* 1860-1870 (Session IX, 5 August 1861)

<sup>79</sup> Ormanean, col. 2719

was working to win himself medals.<sup>80</sup> Despite support from the well-to-do conservatives, he resigned on 19 October 1861.

### **Reinvesting in the Armenian Men of Tanzimat**

Stepanos Maghakian, who had been called back to the capital for consultations with the Porte, became the *locum tenens* Patriarch of Istanbul after Sarkis' resignation had been accepted. The Porte organized a special committee that was charged with revising the Constitution. Eight laymen and three priests (including Sarkis) formed the committee, which notably included two amiras (Kevork Eramian and Hovhannes Dadian) and a handful of individuals tied to the expansion of the Istanbul Patriarchate's power in Servichen, Krikor Aghaton, and the priest Hovhannes Hiunkarbeyendian.<sup>81</sup> Servichen did most the heavy lifting of revising the document, and submitted a draft of the new Constitution to the Porte in January 1862.<sup>82</sup>

On February 14, the Porte ordered the suspended National Assembly to convene and select seven members (*millet tarafından müntekab komisioni azası*) to join the Porte's commission.<sup>83</sup> Here the official publications of the Patriarchate provide conflicting information. Per the Minutes of the National Assembly (*Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*), the selection of members only took place on 20 February 1862, but in the National Constitution of 1863, a letter to the government dated 18 February 1862,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, col. 2720

<sup>81</sup> “Bardragoyn Dran ew Azgayin Handznazhoghovnerun ar Kayserakan Karavarutiun Matutsats Haytagrin Orinakn” in *Azgayin Sahmanadrutiun Hayots* (1863). See signatures on page 7.

<sup>82</sup> Ormanean, col. 2728.

<sup>83</sup> “Nezareti Jelilei Kharijiye, Aded 191. Badrik Ka’immakamı Dirayetlu Efendiye” (in Turkish with Armenian characters), published in both *Azgayin Sahmanadrutiun* 1863 and *Atenagrutiunk* 1860-1870 (Session X, 20 February 1862)

includes the signatures of the elected members. Regardless, the elected members were almost exclusively men of the Tanzimat: Stepan Bey Aslanian, Minas Efendi Minasian, Mkrtich Agha Aghaton, Krikor Efendi Odian, Nahabed Efendi Rusinian, Hovhannes Agha Siurenian, and Manug Agha Manugian.

The 18 February 1862 letter included in the 1863 Constitution is particularly emblematic of the Tanzimat and its reception. It begins with a pronouncement on the freedom of religion non-Muslim Ottomans had always enjoyed, as well as their equality before law.<sup>84</sup> Thereafter, it referenced the changes to the administration implemented by Grjigian and Patriarch Matteos, and legitimized the new institutions as “old traditions.”<sup>85</sup> The bulk of the document revolves around what is necessary for the Constitution, be it change or retention, in light of its suspension. In numerous places it reemphasizes the centrality of the Istanbul Patriarchate as the intermediary between the people and the government.<sup>86</sup> It expresses a need to give more definitive shape to the National Assembly, its role, and its membership. Most importantly it hints at an expansion of the authority of the Political Council, which was of course essentially the Porte’s institution within the Armenian millet. Finally the three sources of legitimacy were reemphasized in laying out the Administration’s three main responsibilities, those being to keep the millet loyal to the state, be just towards “the nation,” and not oppose Etchmiadzin.<sup>87</sup>

The Porte delayed its response to the Armenians for many months. In August, demonstrations broke out in Kum Kapı, and in September both Stepanos and the Constitutional committee threatened resignations over the delay. Throughout the fall

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<sup>84</sup> “Bardzragoyn Dran ew...” 2

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 3

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 4, 5, 6

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 6



requests were made for the reinstatement of the Constitution, but to no avail.<sup>88</sup> Only on 16 March 1863, while Stepanos was visiting Ali Paşa for the purpose of congratulating him on the Ramadan Bayram, did he learn that the Constitution had been approved.<sup>89</sup> On March 17 the Porte sent a letter to the Patriarchate officially informing them of the decision to allow the Armenians to implement the Constitution.

On 23 March 1863, the National Assembly opened under the revised Constitution. The preface invoked the *Islahat Fermanı*, placing the Constitution within its framework.<sup>90</sup> Previous scholarship has argued the revisions consisted mostly of a reduction in the number of articles (from 150 in the original to 99), many of which were combined into larger articles. This was designed to ease the implementation of the Constitution, a point further evidenced by the decreased number of representatives (220 to 150). The revisions instead reflected lessons learned from the failure with Jerusalem, and a clearer expression of central power.

The revised Constitution reasserted the centrality of Istanbul as the leader of the empire's Armenians. It also provided more concrete steps to be taken if a Patriarch were accused of violating the Constitution, as was the case with Sarkis.<sup>91</sup> The subsequent articles (17-22) addressed directly the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, a marked expansion from the original document, where it was mentioned once. The central authorities at the Patriarchate in Istanbul retained the right to investigate affairs at Jerusalem, and also the right to select the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, however, had to be consulted in all

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<sup>88</sup> Ormanean, cols. 2728, 2729

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> *Azgayin Sahmanadrutiun* 1863, 9

<sup>91</sup> *Azgayin Sahmanadrutiun* 1863, 17

matters, and the Patriarch (in addition to being an Ottoman subject) had to be a member of the Order at St. James.

Additions outlining the authority of the Political Council provided that institution, dominated by Armenians linked to the Porte, more control over millet affairs. Articles 44-51 detail the expansion of this authority.<sup>92</sup> The Political Council had formal control over councils on education, the economy, the courts, and monasteries. Of these the one on monasteries was not only the most important with regards to the projection of central authority, it also marked the site of most change from the 1860 document. That document only mentioned monasteries once, and in the context of finances. While the 1863 version reiterated the right of the center to interfere in financial questions, it also required monasteries to draw up their own regulations (in consultation with the Religious and Political Councils) and subjected their approval to the National Assembly. In addition to giving the Political Council authority in the selection of abbots at monasteries, clergymen fulfilling those roles had to be Ottoman subjects.

These changes provided the center the means by which it could break up the networks of power into which monasteries were embedded. Article 95, dealing with the provincial administration, mandated that a monastery superior could not simultaneously serve as a prelate. Relocating real provincial power from the monasteries to the prelaties provided the center a more coherent system to control. In theory, the community was being gridded as a vertically integrated hierarchy where the Patriarch of Istanbul (and the Sublime Porte) reigned supreme.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 29-37

## **Conclusion**

The battle over the Constitution was not merely an internal Armenian squabble that revealed tensions within the community. Nor did it prefigure a national community that would seek secession from the empire. Rather, it not only brought the Tanzimat to the Armenian community; it brought Armenians, as a millet, into the Tanzimat state. Theoretically, these new institutions provided Armenians unprecedented access to Ottoman power. Enjoying those benefits, however, required actually implementing and perfecting those institutions. As the diffusion of the central state's power throughout the empire was uneven, this presented challenges.

The tension between theory and praxis, therefore, created sparks. The unfolding of the state and its bureaucracies outside the center revealed the limits of Istanbul's authority. Reading Ottoman Armenian experiences as Ottoman history, we may therefore see conflict within Armenian Church institutions as part of the larger empire-wide conflict over the Tanzimat. The struggle to implement the Constitution met heavy resistance in the form of clergymen, who not only circulated through different sites of power, but were also embedded in local power structures. They, not nationalists, were Ottomanism's enemies. Sealing off these paths of circulation and imposing Istanbul's sovereignty became the basis of a high stakes game that vaulted a number of bishops to the forefront of Ottoman politics. The winners would enjoy unprecedented power. For the losers, the consequences could prove deadly.

## Chapter Two

### **The Armenian Church, Itinerant Priests, and Ottoman Sites of Power: Challenging the Tanzimat State, 1839-1865**

While traveling in the Ottoman Empire's eastern provinces in 1872 and 1873, Bishop Eremia Tevkants, himself a native of Van and scion of a wealthy family that actively supported imperial reform, encountered many of the issues plaguing the centralizing state. Charged with enforcing the implementation of the Armenian National Constitution, a document that systematized the administration of the Armenian millet, Tevkants encountered predictable resistance. Priests, who understood perfectly well that the new regulations would place constraints on their ability to exploit their positions in the Ottoman social and political hierarchy, objected. Some government officials assumed that Tevkants, as an Armenian circulating in the east, must be up to no good. Meanwhile, some peasants and town-dwellers were also mortified by the terms "visit" or "investigation" and the projection of central power it represented.<sup>1</sup>

Tevkants found himself, however, confronted by a different type of problem. Over the previous decades, the Apostolic Armenian community of the Ottoman Empire had fallen more fully under the political and religious jurisdiction of the Istanbul Patriarchate, which derived its legitimacy as the intermediary among the community, the

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Eremia Tevkants to Patriarch Mkrtych Khrimian (No. 4, 6 May 1873) in Tevkants, *Chanaparhordutyun Bardzr Hayk ev Vaspurakan, 1872-73 tt. Dzeragire patrastel ev tsanotagrel e H.M. Poghosyan* (Erevan: Hayastani GA Hratarakutyun, 1991) pp. 156-159 "...are clearly disconcerted by the fright-inducing term that is investigation."

Ottoman government, and the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin. The aforementioned Constitution, a part and parcel of *Tanzimat*, ostensibly synched the loose ends in competitions over jurisdiction by emphasizing the primacy of Istanbul. The peripheral nature of the borderland areas of the empire provided an obvious test, one exacerbated by the presence of an anomaly: monasteries belonging to the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin.

The tension and ensuing conflict emerged due to the fact that monasteries provided an avenue to power in the Ottoman political system. While the Constitution attempted to separate prelates -- who had direct access to governors and the right to petition on behalf of their flock -- from monasteries retaining their political influence due to their location in more remote areas of the Empire. The monasteries controlled by Etchmiadzin kept one part of the Church that had increasingly turned into a bureaucracy within the broader Ottoman state apparatus, outside the purview of the center. Disconnected, these monasteries and the areas under their immediate jurisdiction stood alone, unable to access fully the networks that stitched together empire and community. Tevkants describes the problems of two such monasteries. The first, Baghenits Vank, was accessed after a seven-hour trip north of Van. Tevkants notes that, on account of its poor and impoverished condition, it had fallen under the control of the Lim Anapat, a politically influential monastery located on Adır Island at the northeastern corner of Lake Van.<sup>2</sup>

The second case, Surb Arakel Monastery near Başkale, is more telling. With a diocese that extended all the way down into Hakkâri, this monastery and its flock sat at the very remote edge of the empire. Tevkants lamented the fact that Etchmiadzin had the

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<sup>2</sup> Tevkants, 254

right to change the head of this monastery at will. The weak church institution proved especially dangerous for Armenians living in the village Khanjalis. Since it had no real representation before the government, either locally or through Church networks before the Porte at Istanbul, the local notables, in this case the Temuroğulları of Van, utilized their position in the Van government to register the village's land, evict the Armenian residents, and settle Kurds in their place.<sup>3</sup> The Temuroğulları, also called the Timurzades, were a powerful Turkish family that had initially ascended to power in the nineteenth century during the state's earlier efforts at extending control over the borderlands.<sup>4</sup> Their ability to expel all the Armenian inhabitants of a village without complaint reflects the fragmentary nature of jurisdiction and politics in the Ottoman Empire on the one side and how social and political entrepreneurs exploited these gaps to consolidate power on the other.

This case also entails the question of legal pluralism that scholars of the Ottoman Empire have sometimes entertained. Their studies, however, have focused largely on the role played by the Capitulations in Ottoman legal and diplomatic history at the imperial center. Exclusively reading such state-centered cases as the sole examples of legal pluralism, these studies often overemphasize the relationship between the Capitulations, the foreign consular system, and the empire's non-Muslims; in one case, this overstatement went so far as to make the specious claim that this legal system produced

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 302-306

<sup>4</sup> On the Timurzades, see Sinan Hakan, *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Kürtler ve Kürt Direnişleri (1817-1867)* (İstanbul: Döz Yayıncılık, 2007) pp. 214-216. Their presence in Van likely extends back further. See Mehmet İnbaşı, "Van Valileri (1755-1835)." *A.Ü. Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi* (2006) pp. 195-212. A member of the family represented Van in the Ottoman Parliament (*Meclis-i Mebusan*) for the 1908-1912 session.

“a comprador class composed of Christians and Jews that dominated Ottoman commerce.”<sup>5</sup> Such an emphasis finds resonance with the World-system intervention in Ottoman historiography, which exclusively cast and thereby reduced Ottoman non-Muslims to “agents of western imperialism” while the empire was being incorporated as a periphery into the world economy.<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising that the result is a familiar narrative, not too dissimilar from an earlier body of scholarship rooted in modernization theory and, by and large, in the Turkish nationalistic discourse.<sup>7</sup> Once again, non-Muslims thus remained segmented and tangential to the larger Ottoman historiography.

Recent scholarship has attempted to reconsider and recast Armenian historical agency as Ottoman. These efforts often fail, however, because they are unable to develop a proper appreciation for Armenian social and political institutions, namely the Church. Such failure in turn leads to confusing narratives about how the Armenians “negotiated” Ottoman rule.<sup>8</sup> If the Tanzimat state of the nineteenth century was, as its name invokes, reorganizing the empire, then reform and contests over jurisdiction not only as they are discussed at the center, but also as they are executed throughout the empire must form the basis of how we approach Ottoman legal pluralism. This constitutes the main theoretical and methodological argument of this chapter. Legal pluralism entails the study of the

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<sup>5</sup> Timur Kuran, “The Economic Ascent of the Middle East’s Religious Minorities: The Role of Islamic Legal Pluralism.” *The Journal of Legal Studies* 33.2 (2004) pp. 475-515

<sup>6</sup> Çağlar Keyder and Huri İslamoğlu, “Agenda For Ottoman History.” *Review* 1.1 (1977) pp. 31-55

<sup>7</sup> For examples, consider Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (volume 2), or Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)

<sup>8</sup> For an example, see Masayuki Ueno, “‘For the Fatherland and the State’: Armenians Negotiate the Tanzimat Reforms.” *IJMES* 45-1 (2013), pp. 93-109. Stephan Astourian’s dissertation, “Testing World-System Theory” (Ph.D. Dissertation UCLA, 1996), ignores the Church almost entirely.

movement of one system of laws not only as they are formulated at the center, but how they then travel and are put into practice across a border. Understandably, this conceptualization has often been deployed to develop new understandings of colonial regimes and how they elaborated institutions of control in particular. For the Ottoman Empire as a confessional state and a contiguous empire, exporting a new legal order required crossing not only imperial and international borders or seas, but also webs of meaning and religious hierarchies that mediated the relationship between communities and local structures of power. The consequent negotiation of meaning and interpretation through religious networks forms the focus here.

One strategy deployed by the Porte to eliminate multiple claims to jurisdiction, thereby making the imperial domains more legible and rational to the centralizing state, was the more formal elaboration of the millet system. A proper analysis of the Armenian Church in the Ottoman Empire will thus shed new light on how historians understand the construction of Ottoman state power and the complexity of relationships and hierarchies, formal and informal, that the Porte had to confront in its bid for centralization. Specifically, the new emerging bureaucracies redefined not only the relationship between subject and state, but also that between formal political institutions. It is in this context, I argue, that the Armenian Constitution of 1860/1863 must be viewed not as an insular phenomenon, but instead as a significant Tanzimat document that centralizes political administration and jurisdiction. Implementing any reform, especially a new legal regime, necessitated conflict with preexisting power structures. Such conflict, however, has rarely been analyzed in the Ottoman context because the narrative is often structured at the



imperial center from the standpoint of the dominant Muslim Turkish element, not taking into account and including the just as significant narrative of the millet communities.

This chapter will therefore analyze and systematically present how Armenian religious institutions participated in the Tanzimat reforms. The Church, recognized as the intermediary between state and flock, played an explicitly political role in the empire. Armenian clergymen, therefore, were also de facto bureaucrats serving the state. Unsurprisingly, the Church passed a series of regulations on monasteries and monastic orders within the context of implementing the reforms. This provided Istanbul with more power to curb entry to the clergy, thereby consolidating more political control in the center. Since monasteries were charged with tax collection and, in some cases, acted as the representatives of the community before the local government, they had to negotiate imperial coercion. They were also embedded in local networks of power that, in some instances, escaped the official purview of the state. The ensuing tensions between vertical networks with the state and the horizontal networks with local notables placed the Church in a difficult political position; all too often, they became actively involved in undermining horizontal power structures in the empire's periphery.

### **Armenian Religious Networks in Practice**

In general, Armenian Apostolic subjects of the Porte were part of a diocese subordinated to the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin (*Katoghikos Amenayn Hayots*, or Catholicos of All Armenians) that was led by the Patriarchate of Istanbul, a bishopric. The Patriarchate of Istanbul, in turn, engaged in dual representation of power, entailing the Catholicos of All Armenians to the Porte on the one side, and the Porte to the flock on

the other. In addition, they were subordinate to the religious jurisdiction of Istanbul, but subject spiritually to Etchmiadzin. As such, Armenian monasteries in the Ottoman Empire in theory posed no threat to the juridical prerogatives of the Istanbul Patriarchate. The conundrums of legal jurisdiction, I argue, revolved more around questions of coercion and the imposition of a normative order; the main issue was therefore not claims to jurisdiction, but rather the execution and implementation of such an order.

Jerusalem posed no problem in theory because it was within the Ottoman imperial domain. As discussed in Chapter One, however, problems emerged in practice: the Patriarchate of Jerusalem succeeded in turning the Istanbul-Etchmiadzin relationship on its head when it decided to bid to reject the imperial center's claim to jurisdictional supremacy. Jerusalem, like Istanbul, was spiritually subordinate to Etchmiadzin; it employed this network connection to increase its local power. The Istanbul Patriarchate's headaches in negotiating the spiritual connection to Etchmiadzin intensified due to this challenge from Jerusalem; this was particularly acute while Istanbul was attempting to expand its jurisdictional prerogatives over the Catholicosates of Sis and Aghtamar. Here the duel came down to a contest between spiritual hierarchies and political supremacy. The intersection of two different types of law, intertwined and central to the production of Ottoman sovereignty, in turn provided social and political entrepreneurs in Istanbul, Jerusalem, Sis and Aghtamar with the tools necessary to not only execute but also thwart the reform program. This layered and variegated legal arrangement thus challenged the elaboration of the millet system, creating a tension that threatened the new paradigm of state-society relations in which the Sublime Porte had invested so much effort. As part of the program of state centralization, the Patriarchate of Istanbul attempted to make itself

the principal node of Armenian political and religious power in the Ottoman Empire, in both theory and praxis. Even before being armed with its Constitution, the office engaged in policies to either mitigate the power or reduce the importance of its rivals, but often without success.

Hence the initial controversy over Jerusalem was not only a microcosm, but also the opening salvo in a high-stakes political game: as such, it made and broke Patriarchs, while also vaulting entrepreneurial priests to the forefront of the Ottoman political world. The focus of the analysis here will entail the empirical case of two such clergymen, namely Harutiun Vehabedian and Mkrtich Kefsizian. Constantly on the move, these two bishops circulated throughout the empire, exploiting cracks, fissures, inconsistencies, and blind spots in regulations and law to propel themselves to the highest seats in the Ottoman Armenian Church. That they both began their careers in the St. James Monastery at Jerusalem only reemphasizes the complexity of the challenges the Istanbul Patriarchate had to confront in the state's drive for centralization.

Such networks were utilized for fierce power plays either to access or resist the centralization efforts of the Istanbul Patriarchate. Only through an analysis of the relationship between these sites of ecclesiastic power (namely Etchmiadzin, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Aghtamar, and Sis) and the Ottoman state can we finally begin to understand the complexities of the empire-wide reform program. This chapter will first consider the competing sites of power and how they confronted the programs of the Armenian Constitution, as described in Chapter One. How enterprising priests circulated between and through these different sites to frustrate the state will form the second half of the chapter. And finally, Chapter Three will concentrate on how similar actors deployed

social, political, economic and religious space to rebut the Patriarchate of Istanbul and, by extension, the Sublime Porte.

### **The Patriarchate of Istanbul between the Sublime State and the All-Armenian Pontiff: Diocese and Millet**

The Patriarchate of Istanbul, as discussed above, derived its power from both the Sublime Porte and the Catholicos of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin. That the Patriarchate was sanctioned as Etchmiadzin's representative to the Porte provided spiritual justification to the Ottoman state's use of the Patriarchate as a political office.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Patriarchate accumulated more and more dioceses, to the point where it enjoyed formal control over all dioceses (*vichak*) and monasteries in the Ottoman Empire, with, however, important exceptions in the borderlands.

The Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin was, according to legend, founded in 301 CE. Over the subsequent centuries, the Catholicosate became the center of what would be known as the Armenian Apostolic Church. It succeeded, by and large, at defeating pretenders and navigating the many collapses of Armenian kingdoms to maintain its preeminent position in the Church hierarchy. Etchmiadzin employed the Patriarchate of Istanbul to keep its two principal challengers, Sis and Aghtamar, at bay. The Patriarchate, in turn, benefited from the protection of Etchmiadzin; full subordination to the mother see provided a barrier against possible attempts at bringing Istanbul under either Sis or Aghtamar, and thereby tilting the balance of power in the Ottoman Armenian community. Etchmiadzin and Istanbul thus had a symbiotic power relationship that benefited both parties. As a part of this arrangement and as noted earlier, the Constitution made it

explicitly clear that a clergyman could only become Patriarch of Istanbul if he was a bishop ordained as such by Etchmiadzin. The locus of legitimation on foreign soil in turn meant that the intermediary of the Ottoman Armenian community remained in the imperial capital, with Etchmiadzin providing justification for the Porte's dealings with the Patriarch of Istanbul.

This nature of this relationship between Etchmiadzin and Istanbul proved especially useful as the community was being transformed into a systematized millet consonant with new arrangements of imperial control and state-society relations. Constructing this new political community initially entailed a two-step process that involved the combined efforts of the Istanbul Patriarchate, the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, and the Sublime Porte around the formation of a diocese.

The first step concerned the construction of the diocese. The smaller *vichaks* Istanbul had acquired had to be made into one diocese (*tem*) subordinate to Etchmiadzin. Constructing this larger diocese lied at the heart of Istanbul's bid to be the principal node of power in the Ottoman Armenian Church. Monasteries, as the smallest unit of religious and political power, had to be controlled as a part of this centralizing process. Monasteries in turn held under their jurisdiction a comparatively smaller community, the spiritual needs of which they tended to, while also serving as intermediaries with the government. The negotiating power of disconnected monasteries, such as those visited by Eremia Tevkants at the beginning of this chapter, with local forces was minimal. Such monasteries headed by an abbot (*vanahayr*), who also presided over the resident monastic order, were also involved in the collection of tithes while also holding local economic

interests, however. This intersection of religious and economic power often generated a new resource and thereby a potential source of tension.

In such an intersection, unsurprisingly, money oftentimes trumped spiritual concerns. Writing from Palu in 1868, for instance, the priest Karekin Srvantstians lambasted the local clergy in a series of letters to the Patriarchate.<sup>9</sup> He chastised them for their subservience to the local Armenian elite, who worked in concert with Kurdish notables to dominate government and economy.<sup>10</sup> His harshest words were directed at the members of the local monastery, whom he described as being “worse than the government” as they descended from their sanctuary in the hills only once a year to collect taxes and donations.

As this example indicates, it is not surprising that changing the political culture of monasteries became the primary official business of the National Assembly in the 1870s during the reign of Patriarchs Khrimian and Varjabedian. Yet there was another actor in this intersection of religious and economic power, one whose networks stretched from the center to the periphery and one who then formed one of the greatest impediments to the extension of central control: *mütevellis*. Mütevellis were well-to-do laymen who, in the context of the Ottoman politics and society, used their wealth to control the finances of religious institutions that performed political functions.

A mütevelli in Istanbul had the ability to dominate a monastery at the other end of the empire. Beyond the financial dimension, the mütevelli also acquired political power

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<sup>9</sup> *Divan Hayots Patmutedan*, IG (July 1868)

<sup>10</sup> The Kurds, of the Cibranli tribe, intervened in Armenian marriages in order to prevent capital accumulation. In cases where the Armenian clergy refused to marry a couple proposed by the notables, the Kurds would have their own mullahs conduct the ceremony.

in that he controlled a monastery's access to the government. If unable to resolve a matter locally, a monastery had to forward the issue to the Patriarchate of Istanbul, with the hope it would then be taken up with the Sublime Porte. To do so, however, the abbot had to first appeal to the mütevelli, who then enjoyed the right to intercede on the monastery's behalf with the Patriarch. An empirical example articulates the entangled relationship among the religious, economic and political dimensions of power: In the 1850s, Bishop Hagop Topuzian, abbot of the Lim Monastery on Lake Van, penned a series of letters to the monastery's mütevelli, Kaspar Agha Hamamjian in Istanbul. In his letters, Topuzian pleaded numerous times for assistance with an issue to which the local authorities had turned a blind eye.<sup>11</sup> Hamamjian, it appears, ignored the issue and left the monastery to its own devices, thereby choosing not to exercise his power, probably because it did not fit his interests to do so.

This interaction and the mediating role of mütevellis lead to the second step necessary for making the diocese: the creation of prelacies. Before the Constitution was promulgated in the 1860s, the Patriarchate had also already initiated a process whereby smaller *vichaks*, subordinate to a monastery, were being combined not into one pan-Ottoman diocese, but instead into larger prelacies (*arajnordutiunk*) centered on larger towns. In many cases, however, the preeminent local monastery ended up dominating the prelacy at the expense of others. As such, the mütevelli associated with such a dominant monastery also expanded his power, disproportionately influencing the affairs of a much larger constituency extending beyond the particular monastery.

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<sup>11</sup> BN CP 23-1/022, 023, 024, 025 Topuzian was trying to reclaim the monastery's stake in a salt mine that had been gifted in a patron's will.

This power expansion instigated the Istanbul Patriarchate to take steps to ‘clean up’ the node. The mütevellıs and rich bankers formed the principal node in the network of Ottoman Armenian Church power; by doing so, they dampened the Patriarchate’s capacity for brokerage because they served as moats preventing the Patriarchate from bridging the political space between itself and its sometimes far-flung institutions. Such decreased brokerage by the Patriarchate meant, of course, less social capital, a weaker Church structure — and, by extension, a less effective state apparatus. It was for this particular reason that the Constitution necessarily abolished the müteveli system, placing the control of monasteries instead under a subcommittee of the Political Council within the Patriarchate.<sup>12</sup>

As a consequence of the marginalization of the mütevellıs, the Patriarchate was now free to increase its role in brokerage that in turn enabled it to extend control over faraway lands and centralize power in the process. And it did so through another actor, namely the prelates. As part of this process, there is, as early as the late 1850s, already evidence of prelates who were being appointed by Istanbul in place of local clergy.<sup>13</sup> The Constitution also attempted to separate the office of prelate from that of local abbot. If a monastery were located more than a day’s journey from the prelate’s residence, for example, the clergyman would be forced to choose between the two offices.<sup>14</sup>

In theory, then, the Ottoman Armenian diocese resolved jurisdictional inconsistencies, practical hurdles, and other challenges to the rule of the Istanbul Patriarchate by creating a gridded hierarchy in which Istanbul was supreme; mütevellıs

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<sup>12</sup> Article 46 of the 1863 Constitution

<sup>13</sup> Ignadios Kakmajian, an Istanbul native, replaced Kapriel Shiroian as prelate of Van in 1859 following the latter’s death.

<sup>14</sup> Article 95 of the 1863 Constitution



were replaced by prelates, and the mütevelli networks by a subcommittee of the Political Council within the Patriarchate. As will be clear, however, what happened in praxis was another issue. Never were the challenges to the process of turning the Patriarchate's diocese into an empire-wide millet more evident than in the Patriarchate's attempts to include the Catholicosates of Sis and Aghtamar.

### **“Seats in Opposition”: Sis, Aghtamar, and the Tanzimat State**

Historically, an unoccupied throne at Etchmiadzin could undermine the Armenian Church in terms of spiritual legitimacy; and such legitimacy crises did indeed occur in the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. In the Patriarchate of Istanbul's reliance on Etchmiadzin to imbue political action with spiritual legitimacy, 1865 proved to be yet another especially contentious year: that year, it so happened that all three catholicosates of Etchmiadzin, Sis, and Aghtamar, were vacant at the same time. This structural weakness combined with the centralizing reform attempts to create a vacuum, one that was ably exploited especially by local actors to further their personal interests.

The death of Matteos I, Catholicos of All Armenians at Etchmiadzin, first appeared on the agenda of the National Assembly on 24 December 1865. Almost immediately, members of the Religious Council attempted to treat this issue as the exclusive realm of the priesthood. Bishop Nerses Varjabedian rejected this position, however, noting that these elections were not religious in nature alone but carried with them political overtones; he then argued that helping to strengthen Etchmiadzin would in

turn empower the Istanbul Patriarchate in its dealings with Sis and Aghtamar.<sup>15</sup> Though the power and influence of Sis and Aghtamar had been limited greatly through prior agreements with both Istanbul and Etchmiadzin, the former nevertheless retained a number of important prerogatives that, left unchecked, could potentially undermine the integrity of Istanbul's claim to jurisdictional supremacy in the Ottoman Empire.

Despite misgivings over the conditions surrounding Etchmiadzin and the election of a new Catholicos of All Armenians, the National Assembly had little option but to participate and cast its ballots. Sending Varjabedian as one of the electors, the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire cast their ballots for the ex-Patriarch Kevork Kerestegian who became the new Catholicos.<sup>16</sup> With the seat at Etchmiadzin thus settled, the National Assembly and the Istanbul Patriarchate next turned their attention to Sis and Aghtamar; there sat two self-appointed catholicos, namely Nigoghayos and Khachadur, respectively.<sup>17</sup> At its 22 July 1866 meeting, the National Assembly did not recognize the self-appointed catholicos, declaring the two seats vacant; it then read a report

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<sup>15</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy* (1860-1870, Session XX, 24 December 1865). The 1836 *Polozhenie*, which increased the rights of the Russian Empire to interfere in the affairs of Etchmiadzin and the Armenian Church, threatened to undermine Istanbul's claim to jurisdictional supremacy in the Ottoman Empire. Compared unfavorable to religious freedom in the Ottoman Empire, the issue and analysis of it filled the pages of both the Istanbul Armenian press and deliberations in the Armenian National Assembly.

<sup>16</sup> That the National Assembly, dominated by pro-*Tanzimat* representatives, would promote the man who resigned in opposition to the Constitution and then exploited the original conflict with Jerusalem to convince the Porte to suspend it appears strange at first glance. After a review of the *Polozhenie* presented in the "Teghekagir i veray katoghikosakan khndrots ar Azgayin Zhoghov," the National Assembly came to the conclusion that "in its current state, the Supreme Head of the Church carries the title "Catholicos of All Armenians" in name only" (*Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy* 1860-1870, Session XXI, 27 May 1866). In light of this it is probable the National Assembly hoped to rid itself of a problem by promoting Kerestegian to a higher post devoid of power and beyond the frontiers of the Ottoman state.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter Three below for more.

recommending instead Bishop Hagop Topuzian for Aghtamar and Nerses Varjabedian for Sis.<sup>18</sup>

Neither Varjabedian nor Topuzian would ever be enthroned, however. The seemingly simple step of removing one cleric from office and replacing him with another entailed more than simple bureaucratic actions taken at the imperial center. On the one hand, Aghtamar, itself located in Lake Van, ruled over a see stretching from the southern shores of Lake Van down into the southeastern borderlands of the empire. these were the same contested lands where Bedr Han and Mahmud Han had revolted in 1847, where Ubaydallah would lead an uprising in 1879, and where the Hamidiye would be organized to manufacture the impression of Ottoman sovereignty in the 1890s. On the other hand, Sis, located in the highlands of Cilicia, rested in the middle of a territory under the direct control of *derebeys*, namely the Kozanoğulları, notorious for their overt displays of disregard for the imperial center's authority. After all, the Patriarchate of Constantinople had struggled to control the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, an equivalent archbishopric where the presence of the central state was very real. Given this power struggle at a location where the state's control and presence were comparatively strong, what problems would await the Patriarchate with a catholicos at the edges of empire where the center's existence was little more than fiction? And, what would happen should the latter's power spill over into the diocese Istanbul was building?

Combining competing claims to spiritual supremacy with the social and political distance from the center afforded by imperial borderlands proved a combustible mix. Developing new repertoires for mobilizing space within a networked hierarchy, Sis and

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<sup>18</sup> Topuzian (23 votes), narrowly edged Mkrtych Khrimian (22) and Eremia Tevkants (19). Tevkants and Khrimian, also natives of Van, were Topuzian's students.

Aghtamar did indeed end up fighting largely successful battles against Istanbul. Before Sultan Abdülhamit II abrogated the National Assembly in 1896, neither Sis nor Aghtamar ever seated a representative. More importantly, these two seats also turned into power nodes where two circulating priests, each originating from the St. James Monastery at Jerusalem, could find other avenues for accruing social capital and challenging the Patriarchate of Istanbul. This contestation of power necessitates the analysis in turn of Jerusalem and its bishops, as it was there that the challenge to Istanbul initially originated.

### **Jerusalem and Its Bishops: Paradigm for Problems**

Following the suspension of the Constitution in 1861, brought about over the controversy between Istanbul and Jerusalem, the Armenian National Assembly reconvened on 20 September 1863. Most of the pro-Tanzimat faction within the millet insisted on the speedy election of a patriarch.<sup>19</sup> On October 15, they selected Archbishop Boghos Taktakian, the prelate of Izmir, over Archbishop Ignatios, the prelate of Van, by a vote of 58-30.<sup>20</sup> In his opening remarks as Patriarch of Istanbul, Taktakian linked the resumption of the Constitution and its implementation with the broader program of reform in the Ottoman Empire, highlighting the necessity of reform for the improvement of Armenian provincial life. On account of stalling by the conservative block and inability to reach quorum, the work of the National Assembly was reduced to gridlock, however, enraging Taktakian on the one hand and compelling the resignation of leading

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<sup>19</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Elections, 20 September 1863)

<sup>20</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Elections, 15 October 1863)

Tanzimat statesmen on the other.<sup>21</sup> The pace of the National Assembly's work increased greatly beginning on 18 February 1865, however, when the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Esayi Talastsi, came to Istanbul for discussions with the National Executive regarding the regulations that Jerusalem had drafted for itself. It was the interaction of Istanbul and Jerusalem that laid bare the problems regarding the negotiation of religious, political and economic power between these two nodes.

What were the special problems that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem posed for the Istanbul Patriarchate? As the millet attempted to centralize through its new system of governance, Jerusalem's inability to control its own affairs provided a significant challenge to the reform program. In the 1840s, for example, Jerusalem failed to defend the Church's prerogatives in Bethlehem and the Holy Places from incursions by the Greek Church.<sup>22</sup> More telling, the ineffectiveness of the Jerusalem Patriarchate was further revealed when internal divisions within the St. James Brotherhood created an opportunity for the Prelacy of Egypt to break from Jerusalem's See.<sup>23</sup> And finally, the monastery had incurred an incredible amount of debt over the first half of the nineteenth century, stemming from the imperial and therefore patriarchal loss of Egypt as a tax base, the loss of properties during the increasingly frequent regional upheavals, and continuous cronyism within the ranks of the brotherhood. Patriarch Esayi arrived in Istanbul under these circumstances to discuss a new set of regulations for his monastery. The heated discussions it brought about within the National Assembly ably demonstrate in great detail the power struggle, albeit in exaggerated form due to important exceptions, that the

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<sup>21</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session VI, 17 July 1864)

<sup>22</sup> *Azgapatum* cols. 2604, 2605

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, col. 2607

Istanbul Patriarchate would encounter in its campaign to transform the sometimes ad hoc administration of the Armenian millet into a functioning Tanzimat institution.

If Patriarch Esayi did not fully understand the intentions of Istanbul before his arrival in front of the National Assembly, he realized them shortly after the session opened on February 25. While the assembly, directed by Abro Sahag Efendi, made clear at the outset its plan to discuss internal regulations for Jerusalem, it nevertheless did not initially know whether or not Esayi would be permitted to participate in the deliberations. The assembly leadership first expressed its desire that the Patriarch of Jerusalem not be permitted to speak at all; then it relented, deciding it would be acceptable for Esayi to talk, but only in response to specific questions.<sup>24</sup> He was not permitted to participate in any arguments between elected representatives. Though a more forceful participant in subsequent sessions, the center's desire that he as a representative of the periphery passively accept their authority and rubberstamp their decisions was plenty apparent.

Istanbul's goals vis-à-vis Jerusalem during the debate over regulations fell into two intertwined categories, administrative and authoritative. The administrative aspects included transforming the political culture and day-to-day functions of the monastery in Jerusalem to make it more accessible to the view of the National Administration located at the Istanbul Patriarchate. Emphasizing the monastery side of the Jerusalem Patriarch's (who was also Prelate of Jerusalem's See) political portfolio, Istanbul sought to clamp down on the politics and organization of the brotherhood. Yet it was this same brotherhood from which the Patriarch derived his legitimacy and consolidated his position, thus leading to an inherent tension between the central interests of the National

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<sup>24</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session VIII, 25 February 1865)

Administration and the local interests of the Patriarch of Jerusalem. And the deliberation of two issues, finances and taxation on the one side, and the priests removed from the St. James Order on the other by National Assembly amply document this tension.

### **Finances and Taxation**

The first issues discussed by the National Assembly included finances and taxation. While it was quickly determined that priests bore no tax responsibility, Jerusalem's status as both a monastery and a prelacy left its tax obligation ill defined.<sup>25</sup> How the funds Jerusalem raised were managed, however, constituted a different matter.

Istanbul demanded Jerusalem to keep detailed accounts of all incoming revenues, thus rendering its finances more transparent. Yet Patrarch Esayi declared this would be impossible, since much of its income came in the form of gifts from pilgrims, making it difficult to provide a proper accounting.<sup>26</sup> This discussion quickly gave way to who actually controlled the monastery's treasury. In a prior session, Stepan Bey Aslanian and Servichen, two of the leading reformers in the National Assembly, expressed their desire that a treasurer be appointed, one who would be responsible to the Jerusalem Patriarch, thus attempting to make the organization more efficient and bureaucratically responsible.<sup>27</sup> The role of the *luserar* thus assumed more importance in the system; as

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. At the following session (March 5), figures were discussed that would allow Jerusalem to continue operating its school and press.

<sup>26</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session X, 5 March 1865) "Again I must state, collecting receipts in the monastery is an impossibility!" pp. 181-2

<sup>27</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session IX, 25 February 1865) pp. 165-7. Esayi successfully removed their suggestions from the Regulations.

Esayi would later explain, that official was, “according to the old traditions,” central to the administration of finances.<sup>28</sup>

After the abbot of a monastery, a *lusarar* assumed the most importance in the day-to-day activities of the monastery. Originally charged with lighting candles in preparation for religious services, the position of *lusarar* eventually evolved to encompass the management of most of the monastery’s daily business, including oversight of buildings, distribution of goods within the order, and economic activities. Previously, the *lusarar* at Jerusalem was subject to the direct orders of the Patriarch; the National Assembly instead placed that office instead under the authority of a new Executive Council (*Tnoren Khorhurd*) within the monastery, thereby indirectly undermining the decision-making power of the patriarch.<sup>29</sup> Thereafter, the National Assembly also legislated, contrary to Patriarch Esayi’s wishes, that only priests at least 45 years of age and 15 years of experience at Jerusalem should be considered eligible for the post of *lusarar*, once again challenging the patriarch’s ability to appoint a priest he wanted regardless of the latter’s age and experience.<sup>30</sup> In all, then, these decisions weakened the executive power of the Jerusalem Patriarch as abbot and, consequently, as prelate as well.

Limiting the prerogatives of monasteries’ abbots was designed primarily to increase their answerability before both Istanbul and their orders, in the process making Church institutions more democratic. In the case of Jerusalem, it was also a tool for rooting out the problem of factions within the St. James Order; this is due to the fact that

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<sup>28</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session X, 5 March 1865) pp. 183  
Several times Esayi insisted on the sufficiency of the “old traditions” (*vaghemi sovorutiunner*).

<sup>29</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session IX, 25 February 1865) pp. 164

<sup>30</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session X, 5 March 1865) pp. 183



appointments were made in accordance with the factions to which the priests belonged. The next interrelated action in this regard taken by the National Administration was to end the tradition of child ecclesiastics (*pokravorner*).<sup>31</sup> Child ecclesiastics, sometimes considered to have been either “adopted by” or the “son of” an older priest, entered the monastery in their youth before (oftentimes, without ever) receiving their education. Limited to the culture of the monastery, they were versed at an early age in the politics of personalities and the life of the brotherhood, and would therefore only rise within the organization as far as their “father” could take them. These “families” thus turned into organized parties within the monastery that competed for power.<sup>32</sup> Such arrangements were crucial in helping, for instance, propel the child ecclesiastic Harutiun Vehabedian from a probable life of poverty in Egypt onto a trajectory to the upper echelons of Ottoman power.

Harutiun Vehabedian was born into a presumably Coptic family in Egypt in either 1812, 1819, or 1823.<sup>33</sup> He was “adopted” by a bishop named Giragos with whom he eventually came to Jerusalem in 1834. There he was baptized, given the name Apraham, and put to work in the monastery’s press. He later changed his name to Hovsep Giragosian, thereby symbolically identifying himself more directly with his patron. In 1839, traveling with a group of returning pilgrims, he made his way to Istanbul hoping to continue his education there and, in the process, further the interests of Bishop Giragos in the Ottoman capital. In Istanbul, Harutiun Sahatjian, another member of Giragos’ clan,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 184. The National Assembly only permitted the practice with the written permission of the Jerusalem Patriarch.

<sup>32</sup> In their correspondence, Mkrtych Khrimian and Karekin Srvantstians sometimes referred to these groups as (extended) families (*gerdastan*).

<sup>33</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the following biographical information on Vehabedian is derived from *Azgapatum*, cols. 2651 and 2652.

assisted him. After a brief trip to Izmir to study at the Mesropian School, Hovsep Giragosian returned to the imperial capital and enrolled in the Protestant school in Bebek. The English language skills he learned there proved invaluable, as he served as translator for an Englishman traveling in the empire (1843-44). With the networks he acquired through this engagement, Hovsep then briefly traveled to the United States to study medicine, returning to Istanbul in 1846 where Matteos, the Patriarch of Constantinople, appointed him as a teacher of arithmetic and English.

Utilizing his original sponsorship to construct a network in the imperial capital, Vehabedian's career began to take off in 1846 when his sponsor Bishop Giragos was elected as Patriarch of Jerusalem. Still called Hovsep, he returned to Jerusalem in 1847 where he provided the newly installed patriarch assistance. Giragos then sent his understudy back to Istanbul to help handle Jerusalem's business in the capital, and arranged for his ordination as deacon in 1849. Giragos's death in 1850 led to the ascension of his ally, Hovhannes, who was also in Istanbul at the time. Hovsep then traveled with the newly elected patriarch to Jerusalem for Giragos' funeral. While Hovhannes was consolidating his position against Giragos' predecessor Zakaria and his supporters, he ordained Hovsep a *vardapet* (celibate priest). It was at this point that Hovsep officially took the name Harutiun Vehabedian; the selection likely revealed his ambition for power, as the name "Harutiun" means resurrection, and "Vehabed" (*vehapet*) supreme leader. Vehabedian then returned to Istanbul in 1852 where Patriarch Hagopos Seropian appointed him the cleric in charge of the patriarchal crosier.

The following year, Hagopos made Vehabedian a Patriarchal Vicar, a post he held until 1857. At that time, he was appointed Prelate of Kharpert (Harput), and charged with

consolidating the dioceses subordinate to the monasteries at Sursuri, Zartansah, Khile, and Taden into one prelate. In 1858, Kevork Kerestegian ascended to the seat at Istanbul and reappointed Vehabedian to his post as Patriarchal Vicar. While increasingly identifiable as a part of the block of clergymen resistant to the unfolding administrative reform that granted laymen more formal control over millet institutions, Vehabedian was then appointed Prelate of Erzurum on 24 April 1859, a post he held until 1880.<sup>34</sup> While there, he engaged in usury, ingratiated himself to the local notables (Muslim and Armenian), and drew the wrath of the Armenian *esnafs* (guilds). After the Armenian guilds succeeded in temporarily removing him from Erzurum in 1868, the *vali* (governor) İsmail Paşa and the Armenian notables nevertheless eventually succeeded in realizing “the return of their intriguing bishop Harutioon.”<sup>35</sup> During his travels in Erzurum in 1873, Tevkants found Vehabedian’s rule there objectionable, and was particularly dismayed by the infrequency of constitutionally mandated elections. Most offensive was Vehabedian’s failure to appoint a dragoman, or translator, to the prelate to facilitate official business with the government.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> It is unclear whether or not Vehabedian played a role in helping Kerestegian use Jerusalem as a tool for disrupting the first attempt at implementing the Armenian Constitution. What is clear (see below) is Vehabedian’s alliance with groups resistant to the expansion of the state, and that Istanbul’s motivation for controlling Jerusalem was in no small way related to the actions of Patriarch Hovhannes, whose reign lasted until 1860.

<sup>35</sup> FO 195/889 No. 44 Erzerum (24 December 1868) Consul Taylor also reported that Vehabedian had allegedly amassed a fortune of over 15,000 liras, most of it made from his engagement in usury. Most probably Tevkants and Khirmian, who spent the winter in Erzerum in 1868 on their return from Etchmiadzin following their consecration as bishops, helped to bring about Vehabedian’s temporary removal (Tevkants, 37). On their trip and stay in Erzurum, see GAT Khirmiyani Fond 875/1 (23 September 1868)

<sup>36</sup> Tevkants, 31

Prior to his temporary eviction, Vehabedian was one of two investigators sent to Aghtamar to inspect the murder of the Catholicos Bedros Bülbul. There he assisted the accused, Khachadur Shiroian, win exoneration.<sup>37</sup> Here it is important to emphasize the danger of a circulating priest: though sent in an official capacity by Istanbul, the principal node, Vehabedian was able to connect a theoretically marginalized site of power, Aghtamar, with his own office. Linking the two is an example of why the Tanzimat statesmen insisted so vehemently on regulating entry to the clergy; once in the system, such clergy acquired access to local power, which they then employed to mobilize local opposition to the center.

After leaving Erzerum, Vehabedian returned to Istanbul where, benefitting from Abdülhamid's dismantling of the millet system,<sup>38</sup> he succeeded Nerses Varjabedian as Patriarch of Istanbul in 1885. He sat there until 1888 when he finally returned to Jerusalem, where (having been elected in 1885) he reigned as patriarch until his death in 1910. In all, it was the system of child ecclesiastics that allowed such a priest to enter the system to rise within not according to his own merits, but instead through the personal networks he cultivated with people in positions of power. And when such a priest rose to significant positions of power himself, it is not surprising that he took a stand against centralizing reforms and the ensuing transparency that would have undermined his *modus operandi*.

### **Priest Removal from the St. James Order**

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapter Three below.

<sup>38</sup> On this process, see Chapter Six below.

The second focus of control for Istanbul comprised the question of priests removed from the St. James Order, voluntarily or otherwise. According to the regulations decided by the National Assembly, the Jerusalem Patriarch retained the right to permit or reject the return of a departed or exiled priest to the Order. In the original draft proposed by Jerusalem, the Jerusalem Patriarch would be able not only to decide whether or not such priests could return to the Order, but he could also prevent them from entering into Church service anywhere in the Ottoman Empire. Hence, the entire decision-making power over the priest's destiny was localized. Following brief deliberation, however, the National Assembly also decided to restrict Jerusalem's authority over departed priests' service to its own immediate jurisdiction, thereby confining its realm of power to the immediate geographic vicinity. The Assembly then took away the rest of Jerusalem's power and added it to Istanbul by giving Istanbul's Religious Council the right to permit an exiled Jerusalem priest to work in other parts of the empire.<sup>39</sup>

In so doing, Istanbul asserted its jurisdictional supremacy in the following ways. First, while it respected the Jerusalem Patriarch's privileges vis-à-vis priests within his own order, the Patriarchate of Constantinople assumed precedence in jurisdiction in all other areas of the Church's administration including the most significant financial one; Jerusalem would enjoy no check on Istanbul. Nor would Jerusalem have the means to interfere in the internal affairs of other prelaties, a right that was now solely reserved for Istanbul. Second, this decision further weakened the office of the Patriarch of Jerusalem in important ways. Limiting Jerusalem's control over former members of the St. James Order living outside Jerusalem's now carefully defined geographical territory, Istanbul

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<sup>39</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session X, 5 March 1865) pp. 184

provided a potential jurisdictional refuge for those who had been ousted by Jerusalem. Istanbul's ability to choose whether or not to rehabilitate an expelled priest gave the center more control over the circulation of priests who held the keys to political power in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the reformers in Istanbul likely saw this delimitation as one more tool with which to smash the clans within the St. James Order. After all, previous bishops, upon ascending to the patriarchal seat, did not hesitate to stack the monastery's positions with people within their personal networks; they would then employ their now expanded networks to try to more successfully challenge and undermine potential rivals. The provision that Istanbul should retain authority over priests departed from the order ensured that Istanbul would be able to prevent vengeful patriarchs from destroying people's careers, while also giving the center the opportunity to save clergymen who might prove useful later on, especially against future challenges from the periphery. Such a strategy also officially sanctioned the center's control over priests to freeze the careers of clerics it might not want circulating, as others had exposed this incongruity in the past. How such decisions taken at the center worked in praxis is best demonstrated by tracing the life trajectory of another priest.

The case in point this time centers on the eventual Catholicos of Cilicia, Mkrkich Kefsizian. Born Garabed in 1818 to parents from a poor background in Marash, Kefsizian was married while still young. After his wife passed away early into their marriage, he was ordained deacon in 1845. Four years later, he was ordained a priest and made a member of the St. James Order at Jerusalem, at which point he took the name Mkrkich. Very quickly he ascended to the position of dragoman, a position he quickly began

abusing for his own personal gain. Vehabedian's sponsor, Bishop Giragos, turned a blind eye to such activity. The bishop's ally in Istanbul, Hovhannes, however, did not.<sup>40</sup>

As part of his efforts to consolidate his position, Hovhannes tried to remove as many problems from the monastery as possible. And the way in which he made appointments reveals his strategy: First, he sent a priest named Kapriel back to his native Ethiopia. Then he sent a deacon named Hovsep, an ethnic Ethiopian of Muslim parentage, to Istanbul; from there Hovsep traveled to the conservative Armash Monastery near Bursa, where he was elevated to the rank of *vardapet*. Thereafter Hovhannes removed Bishop Davit from Erzerum, an old ally of Giragos who had actually ordained Vehabedian as deacon, from his post within the order.<sup>41</sup> All such maneuvering of influence through reassignments reveals the manner in which those in positions of authority like Hovhannes wielded power.

As a part of such maneuvering, Patriarch Hovhannes ordered Mkrtych Kefsizian to Damascus in the capacity of an overseer in 1853. Not taking his demotion lightly, Kefsizian resisted the authority of Hovhannes and tried to split Damascus from Jerusalem's control. Hovhannes tried to remove Kefsizian but, using his skills as a talented orator, Mkrtych convinced the people to help him resist the Jerusalem Patriarch. Undeterred, Hovhannes later deployed Kefsizian's replacement as dragoman, Hagop Chilingirian, with orders for the vali to arrest Kefsizian. After attempting to flee to the

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<sup>40</sup> Babgen Kiuleserean, *Patmutiun Katoghikosats Kilikioy: 1441-en minchev mer orere*. (Antilias, Libnan: Tparan Dprevanuts Katoghikosutean Kilikioy, 1939) pp. 693-697. While Giuleserian hints that Giragos had appointed Kefsizian to the position of dragoman, Ormanian states that it was Hovhannes (*Azgapatum*, col. 2818). Ormanian adds that Kefsizian was born in 1815 (not 1818) and was apprenticed to a coppersmith during his adolescence.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 697-698

French consulate at Beirut, Kefsizian was captured, sent to prison, and then transferred to the St. James Monastery. Hovhannes delivered the final blow by expelling Kefsizian from the order in 1856.<sup>42</sup>

Under normal circumstances, expulsion would have concluded a clergyman's career. Yet, this was not the case here. Exploiting his physical location in a new jurisdiction, and in a time before Istanbul's Religious Council had been granted right of refusal, Kefsizian gained the support of the Noradungian family (who were imperial bakers) and became a preacher in Üsküdar. Having successfully navigated Istanbul's fragmented jurisdiction, he was then made the prelate at Ankara in 1858. As such, Kefsizian was one of four Anatolian prelates, along with Harutiun Vehabedian, who were invited to Etchmiadzin by Catholicos Matteos in 1860 to be elevated to the rank of bishop.<sup>43</sup>

Kefsizian eventually wore out his welcome in Ankara. While an "intriguing" prelate such as Vehabedian embedded himself in local power structures through entrepreneurial activity (social and economic) with available powerbrokers, Kefsizian managed to offend even the ağas, who would ordinarily be only too happy to do business with such a clergyman.<sup>44</sup> As a consequence, he was forced to leave, arriving in Cairo on 30 October 1864. By doing so, he cleverly placed himself beyond the religious jurisdiction of Jerusalem on the one hand, and Istanbul's coercive capacity on the other. Kefsizian had thus once again managed to maneuver the incongruences of imperial control to protect himself. In Cairo, he became the de facto prelate for Egypt in his role as

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 699-700

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 700-702

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 704



*pokharajnard* (vice-prelate) to the aging Bishop Gabriel of Marash. Winning the protection of Nubar Paşa in the process, Kefsizian was fully shielded from the reach of Istanbul when Nerses Varjabedian, following up on complaints that had been submitted by Armenians from Ankara, tried unsuccessfully to bring Kefsizian back to the imperial capital. After moving around and making overtures to Jerusalem in the hopes of reinstatement, Bishop Mkrtych Kefsizian arrived in Marash on his own and, after serving as prelate there, became Catholicos of Sis in 1871. In so doing he entered into and found protection in a different type of legal pluralism, one that openly challenged the Tanzimat as it threatened the very integrity of the millet system. Through his maneuverings, he succeeded in turning the Istanbul Patriarchate's sources of legitimation, the Sublime Porte and Etchmiadzin, against the archbishopric.

In summary then, the new regulations for Jerusalem that granted Istanbul more power over the movement of priests provided the center the means to clamp down on the routes to high office that had been so successfully exploited by Vehabedian and Kefsizian to challenge the center.

The next step for Istanbul in centralizing power and, with it, in eliminating local challenges, was the control of the circulation of bishops. This was the case because bishops often enjoyed a higher prestige that they often translated into political power. With the exception of the four Anatolian prelates who had been raised to the rank of bishop by Catholicos Matteos in 1860, Apostolic Armenian priests in the Ottoman Empire could only be elevated to such positions at the request of the Istanbul Patriarchate. Given this central intervention in local power building, it is no accident that the National Assembly insisted that this provision be formally recognized by Jerusalem in

its new regulations. This insistence irked Patriarch Esayi, providing him an opportunity to question the legitimacy of Istanbul's actions.<sup>45</sup> When Nerses Varjabedian reiterated that Jerusalem must be regarded as subordinate to Istanbul, Esayi complained against Istanbul's attempt to "denigrate" the Jerusalem seat, wondering aloud if Istanbul enjoyed more prestige simply because Sultan Fatih (Mehmed II, the conqueror) had created the seat.<sup>46</sup> Esayi was trying to point out that the Church hierarchy as such was determined not by its own religious principles, but instead by the political power of a Muslim ruler.

Throughout the course of his discussions with the National Assembly, Esayi continued to continually challenge the authority of the Istanbul Patriarchate to assert its authority over Jerusalem. At the beginning of the 25 February 1865 session, Esayi once again questioned the jurisdiction of the Religious Council. This time, Abro Sahag Efendi, the speaker of the assembly (*atenapet*), responded forcefully:

Leaving aside the religious aspects of the issue, I would like to speak on the political part of it. Only the Armenian Patriarchate [of Constantinople] may have direct relations with Etchmiadzin, which no other monastery or order may have. They must go through the Constantinople Patriarchate. When a monastery or order wishes to have direct relations [with Etchmiadzin], it is saying that it is independent of the Constantinople Patriarchate. The regulations show that the Jerusalem Brotherhood is dependent on the Constantinople Patriarchate, and only through [Constantinople] may it have contact with the Sublime Porte. Aside from that, the [Ottoman] State has recognized the Religious Council here and has given it jurisdiction over [all] the Armenians of Turkey.<sup>47</sup>

Sahag had struck at the heart of the millet's organization and the sources of Istanbul's legitimacy. Only one node of power could dominate. Still, Esayi resisted.

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<sup>45</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session XI, 12 March 1865) pp. 197

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 197-198

<sup>47</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session IX, 25 February 1865) pp. 167-168

During this heated discussion, the Tanzimat statesmen within the millet administration insisted numerous times on the subordinate status of Jerusalem. After making clear that Jerusalem would contact Istanbul through the Council for Monasteries (and thus be answerable to the Political Council, not the Religious Council), Esayi argued that as a patriarchate it should have a special status. Servichen responded that, “the Jerusalem Monastery was not to be viewed differently from any other monasteries. The question of [being a] patriarchate is a wholly separate matter.” While pressing Esayi to pledge himself to the regulations under discussion, Servichen attempted a compromise that kept Istanbul’s true goals intact by stating they should “leave aside the points pertaining to internal affairs, and focus only on those concerning relations with the central authority.” Unsatisfied, Esayi prepared to storm out of the session as some of the conservatives in the assembly cheered him on.<sup>48</sup>

After taking counsel from the Istanbul Patriarch Boghos Taktakian, however, Esayi decided not to leave and remained in the assembly hall. Retreating slightly from his earlier protest, he now rejected the role of secular forces in determining the relationship between the two patriarchates. Bishop Nerses Varjabedian, to the delight of the vast majority of the assembly, shot back that the Church belonged to the people and restricting them from the decision-making process would be equivalent to “behaving as Catholics.”<sup>49</sup> Bishop Nerses Varjabedian thus resolved the jurisdictional challenge by emphasizing the political aspects of the relationship. The power wielded from economic, political, and religious authority was entangled, and how things eventually worked out depended on the particular context in question.

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<sup>48</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy*, 1860-1870 (Session XI, 12 March 1865) pp. 186

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 198

The National Assembly passed the regulations, then forwarding them to the Political Council for final approval, a mere formality. Esayi, now more contrite, later promised to work with Istanbul “for the pride and honor of the national church.” Before the National Assembly ended discussion on Jerusalem and Esayi had left Istanbul, Bishop Nerses Varjabedian defended the new political institutions one last time. Answering a question on Istanbul’s authority, he stated that “with an order from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, I can go to the dioceses at Sis and carry out reforms, as has happened in the past... I can enter Aghtamar’s See and with an order from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, carry out any type of reform...”<sup>50</sup>

In theory Nerses was of course correct. Yet praxis was another issue. Jerusalem presented Istanbul with problems of legal pluralism that were easily resolved through a straightforward consolidation of jurisdiction favoring the prerogatives of the center. While physically distant from the center, the state still existed in Jerusalem. Yet Sis and Aghtamar, located at the periphery of empire, belonged to different political regimes. Their spiritual rank as catholicosates further complicated the matter, producing an intricate web of incongruent jurisdictions and hierarchies that could be easily and quickly mobilized by social and political entrepreneurs. In the case of Sis and Aghtamar, the Patriarchate of Constantinople that was a partner in the Tanzimat’s push for state centralization, found its authority stretched and its legitimacy tested. It is to this case that we turn to next.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 199

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Killing Bishops and Mobilizing Space: Repertoires For Breaking Community and State, 1844-1871**

In creating a gridded diocese subordinate to Etchmiadzin and politically empowered by the Ottoman state, the Patriarchate of Istanbul laid the foundations for the development of a more rigidly structured political community that would be more capable of participating in the Tanzimat state. With more and more power being invested in the Patriarchate, the office served, in theory, as a powerful tool in the state's bid to express its sovereignty throughout the empire. The intersection of religious jurisdiction and political control tempered praxis and, in the case of the Armenian Church, provided actors at the edges of empire, embedded in horizontally- and vertically-integrated structures of local power, the means to create and mobilize space in a manner that could undermine state policies.

Becoming the principal node of its own diocese, the Patriarchate of Istanbul abolished semi-official control of monasteries. This provided the Patriarchate a free hand to empower a system of prelaties over which it would preside. As a unit of the central state, the Patriarchate theoretically succeeded in inscribing legibility in its flock, as it now had the administrative tools necessary to access the periphery and penetrate previously resistant political institutions. Clergymen such as Boghos Melikian, a subject of Chapters Four and Five, activated local networks to which they belonged in order to rebel against

the Patriarchate. During the patriarchal reigns of Mkrtych Khrimian, especially, and Nerses Varjabedian in the 1870s, however, Istanbul increasingly resorted to heavy-handed measures to remove rebellious clergymen. Access to the Sublime Porte, via a cadre of Ottoman statesmen who served in both state ministries and the Church committees, provided the Patriarchate tools of coercion it could deploy to enforce its decisions. Gradually, the Patriarchate succeeded in removing many of the prelates and abbots who resisted. More direct access to and control of monasteries and prelacies increased the Istanbul Patriarchate's capacity for political brokerage.

Brokerage, or the ability to connect different sites of power in a network setting, became a source of difficulty as the Istanbul Patriarchate attempted to expand beyond the jurisdiction of the large diocese it had constructed as part of the Tanzimat reform program. Its sights were now set on two relics from the past, the Catholicosates of Sis and Aghtamar, located in Cilicia and the southeast borderlands of the empire, respectively. Legal historians, in the context of overseas colonialism, have described areas of "quasi-sovereignty" where an imperial power enjoys some control over both a territory's internal and external policy-making.<sup>1</sup> The peripheries of the Ottoman Empire, located at the margins of a contiguous empire, were very clearly not overseas colonies. Unstable regions where local powerbrokers, particularly those with immense tools of coercion, frequently made forays into diplomacy, and weighed anti-Ottoman overtures from Europeans, the Romanovs, and the Qajars.

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Benton, "From International Law to Imperial Constitutions: The Problem of Quasi-Sovereignty, 1870-1900." *Law and History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Fall, 2008), pp. 595-619

The Catholicosates, as discussed below, existed outside the spiritual jurisdiction of the Istanbul Patriarchate. Formed at different moments in history, the Catholicosates at times challenged Etchmiadzin for leadership of the Armenian Church. While each Sis and Aghtamar eventually recognized Etchmiadzin as the supreme throne and Catholicos of All Armenian (*Katoghikos Amenayn Hayots*), the antagonistic posture they occasionally took earned them the pejorative epithet *hakator*, or “seat in opposition.” Though they acknowledge the superiority of Etchmiadzin in spiritual and liturgical matters, they retained day-to-day control of the dioceses belonging to their sees.

Autonomy in their own dioceses, combined with the political distance of an imperial periphery from the center in a zone of quasi-sovereignty proved a potent mix. With the ability to ordain their own priests, much like a monastery or bishop in the Istanbul diocese, the Catholicosates of Sis and Aghtamar could produce clergymen able to circulate throughout the Ottoman Empire. For example, two of the most important pro-reform clergymen and eventual patriarchs of Istanbul, Nerses Varjabedian and Mkrtych Khrimian, saw their careers advanced by seated catholicoi at Sis and Aghtamar, respectively. The challenge to Istanbul was not dissimilar from the one it had faced with Jerusalem. The intersection of spiritual jurisdictions and political law exacerbated the intensity of the conflict.

In the end, the distance between sites was not one the Istanbul Patriarchate could bridge unilaterally to impose a normative legal and political order. The clergy at both Aghtamar and Sis both developed repertoires for creating and mobilizing space to thwart Istanbul’s attempts at brokerage. The consequence was an uneven diffusion of Ottoman

state power that, in the end, led to the disenfranchisement of large portions of the Apostolic Armenian community.

### **Aghtamar: Getting Away With Murder**

A chess piece in the internal politics of the Artsruni Dynasty, King Gagik had fortified the island of Aghtamar, established a monastery there, and made it a bishopric in the tenth century. By the twelfth century, the monastery had been turned into a catholicosate under the leadership of a bishop named Davit I, and in open rebellion against Etchmiadzin. In the fifteenth century, the Catholicos of Aghtamar Davit III pledged submission to Etchmiadzin. One century later, in either 1535 or 1547, a Catholicos of Aghtamar named Grigor attempted unsuccessfully to claim a number of dioceses from Etchmiadzin's jurisdiction, including Van, Bitlis, and Mush.<sup>2</sup> In the middle of the seventeenth century another Catholicos of Aghtamar, Martiros Gurji, made another fruitless attempt at stealing dioceses from Etchmiadzin.

During the years 1737-1748, Catholicos Nikoghayos of Aghtamar attempted another unsuccessful revolt against Etchmiadzin. In response, the sitting Catholicos of All Armenians, Ghazar, excommunicated Nikoghayos. After apologies were extended and the dioceses under Aghtamar had forwarded letters of submission and obedience to Etchmiadzin, Ghazar reversed the excommunication and issued a bull returning Nikoghayos to his seat. Ghazar also proclaimed an anathema ordering that Nikoghayos

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<sup>2</sup> Matteos Izmirlean, *Hayrapetutiun Hayastaneats Arakelakan Ekeghetsvoy ev Aghtamar u Sis* (K. Polis: Tpagr. Zardarean, 1881) pp. 297. Izmirlian lists 1441 for the date of Davit's promise of submission, while Ormanian (utilizing Agiunian's chronology) notes Davit III's reign as ending in 1433. For Grigor's sixteenth century rebellion, the catholicos would have been either Grigoris I (r. 1512-1544) or Grigoris II (1544-1586). Ormanian denotes, however, the uncertainty of those dates in the appendix to *Azgapatum*.



be the final Catholicos of Aghtamar. Following Nikoghayos' death in 1751 Aghtamar promptly elected Grigor (r. 1751-1761) to the seat.

Unable to end the Aghtamar Catholicosate, Etchmiadzin opted instead to revive the seat on its own terms. In 1762, Tovma II, who had been elected catholicos a year earlier at Aghtamar, appealed to Hakob Shamakhetsi, the Catholicos of All Armenians at Etchmiadzin, asking for acceptance. He included promises of submission to Etchmiadzin and the Church's laws. Calling Tovma to Etchmiadzin along with the abbots of the monasteries of Lim and Ktuts, Hakob signed an agreement recognizing Tovma as the Catholicos of Aghtamar, his right to bless the Holy Chrism, and lifted the anathema of Ghazar against Aghtamar.<sup>3</sup>

As Izmirlian notes, little to no information exists for the period 1763-1843. In 1843, some Kurds murdered the Catholicos of Aghtamar Hovhannes Shataketsi.<sup>4</sup> Seizing the opportunity presented by the vacancy, the Patriarch of Constantinople Asdvadzadur decided to use whatever means available to him to prevent any further elections taking place at Aghtamar. Though no available evidence expresses it officially, it is quite likely that the Patriarch acted at the behest of the Porte to assist in its efforts to weaken the political structures undergirding the Kurdish emirs in the region. After all, Aghtamar's see included Moks (Müküs), Siirt, Cizre, and Hakkâri, places where notable Kurdish families such as those of Bedirhan had concentrated power. As the Armenian clergy, especially its higher-ranking members, were embedded in local power structures,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 301-309

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 400

removing the Catholicosate of Aghtamar would help allow for the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Sublime Porte to extend policy decisions to the periphery.<sup>5</sup>

Aghtamar's response to the Patriarchate's decision supports this observation. The Patriarchate forwarded a copy of its decision to Mahmud Han, whom Istanbul recognized as the true authority there, imploring him not to permit another election at Aghtamar and to no longer recognize it as a catholicosate. A group of clergymen from the Aghtamar Order, led by Bishop Khachadur, approached Mahmud, asking him to revive the catholicosate. Contrary to the wishes of the Istanbul Patriarchate, Mahmud permitted an election that led to Khachadur Mokatsi's installment at Aghtamar in 1844.<sup>6</sup> Learning of what had transpired, the Patriarchate secured an imperial order for Khachadur's removal from Aghtamar. Yet, following an imperial pardon and after an exile of two or three years at Şebinkarahisar (Nikopolis), Khachadur returned to Aghtamar where he struggled to run the catholicosate effectively. By 1848, for example, his dioceses no longer had any Holy Chrism, meaning they could not perform simple ceremonies such as baptisms.<sup>7</sup>

Istanbul appeared to have won a partial victory in the contest for jurisdictional supremacy over the political affairs of Aghtamar. In separate letters, for example, Khachadur asked the permission of the Spiritual Council to perform certain functions or ordain priests.<sup>8</sup> After Khachadur's death in 1851, Aghtamar asked permission of Istanbul to conduct new elections. After some delay, three hundred representatives from

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<sup>5</sup> One source claims that in the southeast Armenian prelates, particularly that at Van, acted as intermediaries between the government and the Kurds. See Hakob Shahpazean, *Kiurto-Hay Patmutiun* (K. Polis: Tparan "Araks", 1911). On the integration of the Church and clergymen into local power structures, see chapters 4-6. On Cilicia, see below.

<sup>6</sup> Like Mahmud Han, Khachadur was from Müküs (*mokatsi*).

<sup>7</sup> Izmirlian, 310-313

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 314-315. The Spiritual Council left Khachadur's letters unanswered.

Aghtamar arrived in Van declaring their intention to convert to Islam if they were not allowed to continue the catholicosate. While admonishing the people of Aghtamar for making such a threat, Istanbul consented on the condition that Aghtamar continue to recognize Etchmiadzin's spiritual supremacy, and not attempt to elect any bishops ordained by Etchmiadzin. They of course elected Bishop Kapriel Shiroian, the prelate of Van, and an Etchmiadzin bishop. Despite this the Patriarchate did move quickly to sponsor Kapriel's ascension to the seat at Aghtamar, procuring a *berat* from the Porte and a bull from Etchmiadzin. On 5 June 1852, the Patriarchate informed Kapriel that he could be consecrated as Catholicos of Aghtamar.<sup>9</sup>

The Patriarchate attempted to make further use of the situation by compelling Aghtamar to agree to a set of formal regulations.<sup>10</sup> The regulations asserted the political supremacy of Istanbul, without whose permission Aghtamar could ordain neither priests nor bishops. In addition, they limited the circulation of Aghtamar's clerics to its own dioceses and Van, and excluded lay people from becoming abbots of monasteries.

Kapriel remained at Van in his capacity as prelate until 1856, only moving to the island in 1857. He passed away that same year. So, too, did the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Nerses Ashtaraketsi. Thus the question of Aghtamar was opened once again. On 26 September 1857, the Supreme Council discussed Aghtamar's request that their catholicosate be approved and that they be freed from the influence of the notables and the prelate at Van. The Supreme Council responded in a letter to the people of Aghtamar on 10 October 1857, indicating the Patriarchate's inability to do anything at Aghtamar

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 314-322

<sup>10</sup> "Hamarot kanonk sahmanealk i pets barekargutean Metsi Tann Aghtamaray," reproduced fully in Izmirlean, 328-344.

until a new Catholicos of All Armenians was elected in Etchmiadzin. Aghtamar indicated it wanted Sarkis, prelate at Edirne, to become its new Catholicos. In a “final decision on the Aghtamar question,” the Supreme Council approved Aghtamar’s choice of Sarkis, but still demanded Aghtamar wait until after Etchmiadzin had elected a successor to Nerses Ashtaraketsi.<sup>11</sup> The Supreme Council deployed Harutiun Dadian, a high-ranking *amira*, to deliver a letter to Sarkis on 15 November 1857.

Sarkis elected not to accept the position, however. Aghtamar then requested that Bishop Tateos, prelate of Tekirdağ, be made the new Catholicos. Choosing loyalty to Etchmiadzin, Tateos also rejected the offer. After two Etchmiadzin bishops had rebuffed Aghtamar’s overtures, the Supreme Council opted to turn to a member of the Aghtamar Order. On 7 February 1858, the Supreme Council tasked the Patriarch with writing a petition to the Porte obtain an imperial order for Bedros, also called Biulbiul (*bülbiül*, Turkish for nightingale) on account of his singing voice.

Aghtamar had first to agree to a list of demands from Istanbul in a document entitled simply “Paymanagir” (Conditions).<sup>12</sup> These included that “the Catholicos of Aghtamar is REQUIRED TO RECOGNIZE AND ACCEPT THAT THE MOST HOLY CATHOLICOS OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN IS THE EMINENT CATHOLICOS AND SUPREME PATRIARCH OF THE CHURCH OF THE EAST AND THE LEGAL SUCCESSOR OF SAINT GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR.”<sup>13</sup> The following articles stipulated that Aghtamar sign a letter of submission to the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin and recognize its history as a “seat in opposition” (*hakator*) and “rebellious.” Moreover,

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<sup>11</sup> Izmirlean, 364-375

<sup>12</sup> “Paymanagir,” reproduced fully in Izmirlean, 383-412

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 404 Capitalization in the original. Gregory the Illuminator was the first Catholicos of Etchmiadzin.

Aghtamar would recite the name of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin during the liturgy as a “sign of subjection.” Aghtamar could not ordain bishops until they were approved by Istanbul. Etchmiadzin’s spiritual supremacy legitimized Istanbul’s course of political action.

Following Aghtamar’s acceptance of the “Paymanagir,” the Supreme Council consented to Bedros’ selection on 28 March 1858. He was, however, ordered not to accept consecration before Etchmiadzin had a new catholicos. The former Patriarch of Constantinople, Matteos Chukhajian, was elected Catholicos of Etchmiadzin on 17 May 1858, and consecrated in 1859. In violation of Istanbul’s orders, Bedros was consecrated Catholicos of Aghtamar on 24 July 1858, and three days thereafter ordained the *vardapets* Khachadur, Hagop Khizantsi, and Ghazar as bishops without first consulting either Istanbul or Etchmiadzin. A letter to the Patriarchate describes how the vice-prelate of Van, Boghos Melikian, ordered the consecration to go ahead without any further word from either Istanbul or Etchmiadzin.<sup>14</sup>

According to Izmirlian, this either touched off or reverberated along preexisting splits within the Aghtamar Order. Bedros wished to await permission from Istanbul, but one part of the Order insisted he assume the throne immediately.<sup>15</sup> One of the priests pushing Bedros to ignore Istanbul’s directives was Khachadur. Though ordained bishop by Bedros in 1858, Khachadur would later have Bedros killed before making himself catholicos in 1864.

Khachadur Shiroian was born in 1819 to Assyrian parents and brought to Aghtamar by Khachadur Mokatsi (r. 1844-1851). On 2 April 1840, he became a deacon

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 413-419

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 420-421

and thereafter a *vardapet*. As an assistant to Bedros, he manipulated his position to enrich himself and gain the trust of the local Kurds.<sup>16</sup> Apparently a landlord, Bedros is remarked to have once told Khachadur, “I ordained you a bishop, not a *miultazim* [*mültezim*, or tax collector]. Enough! You ruin my poor people worse than the Kurds.” Tevkants notes that in the course of traveling and collecting money, Khachadur never bothered even to preach.<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising therefore, that Khachadur also won protection from some of the notables at Van.

Khachadur and his close confidante and partner, Bishop Hagop from Hizan, manipulated the local political culture and the legally pluralistic borderlands to consolidate their power, kill Bedros, and win exoneration. Negotiating an intricate web of legal orders, Khachadur and Hagop mobilized the jurisdictional claims of the legally-centric Istanbul Patriarchate and Sublime Porte, asserted a traditionalist claim to the Aghtamar See’s jurisdictional independence, and threatened the implementation of a different legal entity (conversion), while resorting to non-state forms of coercion (protection from the Kurds). These techniques were deployed to create, protect, and order a geographical space at the margins of the Ottoman Empire.

The first steps taken by Hagop and Khachadur involved delegitimizing Bedros’ rule before different audiences. They sent numerous petitions to the Patriarchate of Constantinople complaining of Bedros’ misrule at Aghtamar. Tevkants notes, however, that Hagop routinely stole people’s seals to forge their endorsement of his petitions.<sup>18</sup> Reference to Bedros’ alleged misdeeds was recorded in an official report by the

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<sup>16</sup> Ormanean, col. 2752

<sup>17</sup> Tevkants, 176

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 190

Patriarchate on Aghtamar.<sup>19</sup> The appeal to the legitimacy bestowed by Istanbul continued after the murder. After learning from the governor at Van, through communication with the Sublime Porte, of what had transpired and the probable culpability of Khachadur and Hagop, the Patriarchate deployed two investigators to assist the police at Van. The first was the prelate of Van, Bishop Ignadios Kakmajian.<sup>20</sup> If Khachadur had developed important links with notables at Van, Ignadios would have belonged to a similar network. The other investigator was the reigning prelate at Erzurum, another cleric well acquainted with managing local networks of power for personal enrichment: Bishop Harutiun Vehabedian.

The investigators, therefore, belonged to the same horizontal networks with not only the person whom they were sent to investigate, but those who stood to benefit from Khachadur's exoneration. This was one more technique Khachadur could instrumentalize to create space that the government, namely the Patriarchate of Istanbul, would struggle to penetrate.

Upon completing their investigations in April 1865, Kakmajian and Vehabedian submitted a report to the Patriarchate in which they blamed Bedros for his own death, pointing to the inappropriate manner by which he governed Aghtamar. They added that the Aghtamar Order, specifically Khachadur, played no role in the murder, and noted that if the Patriarchate failed to recognize Khachadur as Catholicos of Aghtamar, the people

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<sup>19</sup> *Teghekgir kharn hantznazhoghovoy Aghtamaray atoroy katoghikosakan khndroyn* (K. Polis: I Tparan Hovhannu Miuhentisean, 1872) pp. 6

<sup>20</sup> Kakmajian's role is somewhat unclear. As covered in Chapter Four, he was appointed by Istanbul and a patron of pro-reform clergymen, specifically Hagop Topuzian and Mkrtich Khrimian. That he would have used his position to protect Khachadur speaks to the relative weakness of Istanbul's presence in Van, and the comparative social capital of local networks.

in those dioceses would convert. Meanwhile, the report compiled the Vali pointed to two known Kurdish bandits, Yusuf and Şahin, but still found Khachadur and the Order suspicious of involvement.<sup>21</sup>

Tevkants offers an explanation for the discrepancy. When Hagop attempted to intimidate Tevkants by insinuating the Kurds might assassinate him, he responded, “You cannot trick us like that. Not only are we native Armenians, but also natives of Van.”<sup>22</sup> Tevkants made clear his ability to see past the production of a reality Hagop and Khachadur manufactured for the center’s consumption.

Upon learning that Khachadur planned to have himself enthroned as Catholicos of Aghtamar, Bedros, who was off the island on business, hurried to board a boat back to the island. As he prepared to return, Hagop and two other bishops intercepted him, dragged him off the boat, and beat him. Leaving him for dead, the three bishops returned to the island for Khachadur’s consecration. Meanwhile, Bedros was taken to his nephew’s home where he ordered an anathema against Khachadur, stripping him of his title. Several days later Devriş Bey’s son (and grandson of Mahmud Han) Gülihan finished the job by shooting Bedros.<sup>23</sup>

A source Tevkants refers to only as “Krikor” reveals that Devriş Bey traveled to the monastery at Aghtamar and met with four bishops, where he informed them of Bedros’ death. Upon learning of his predecessor’s demise, Khachadur allegedly entered Bedros’ chambers and stole anything of value. Khachadur then proceeded to spread the

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<sup>21</sup> Izmirlean, 1010-1013

<sup>22</sup> Tevkants, 200

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 180-181



rumor that Bedros' nephew had committed the crime, a rumor he put an end to once the nephew paid a bribe.<sup>24</sup>

Before being taken to Van for questioning, Khachadur ordered Bedros buried in a funeral ceremony for a layperson, not a priest. This was of course a final insult. After the interrogations, the governor of Van Abdullah Paşa concluded Khachadur and Hagop were complicit in the murder and informed the Porte as much. To undermine the story and present his own as reality, Khachadur resorted to bribery.

According to Tevkants, Khachadur paid 50,000 kuruş to Vehabedian and another 40,000 kuruş to Kakmajian. Police investigators received another 30,000 kuruş to ignore important evidence near Pshavank, where Bedros' nephew lived. Even the Patriarch Boghos Taktakian is supposed to have received 50,000 kuruş. All told, Tevkants totals that over 500,000 kuruş were paid in bribes.<sup>25</sup> Likely derived from sources hostile to Khachadur and Hagop, Tevkants' numbers may be exaggerated. That large bribes were paid in a country notorious for corruption, however, is very likely.

Khachadur's manipulation of the legally pluralistic empire and the space it afforded allowed him to murder Bedros. His mastery of it helped to pave the way not only for his eventual exoneration, but also the consolidation of his rule in Aghtamar. The Patriarchate procured an order from the Porte for Khachadur to come to Istanbul in November 1866. He finally arrived on 12 October 1868. Coincidental to his arrival, Taktakian resigned from his post as Patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 182

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 187-188

<sup>26</sup> Izmirlean, 1017-1018

While mobilizing Istanbul's jurisdiction against itself to create space, Khachadur and Hagop turned to their prerogatives within their own see to liquidate and intimidate Bedros' allies, thereby dominating that space. They removed Bishop Hovsep from the important position of *lusarar*. Pshavantsi Hagop, another ally of Bedros, was exiled to the monastery at Ktuts where he was "advised" not to submit complaints against Khachadur and Hagop; there he would also be watched over by Boghos Melikian and his allies, who had pushed Bedros to rush the consecration in the first place.<sup>27</sup> The condition of the monasteries under Aghtamar's jurisdiction more fully reflects the concentration of power in the person of the Catholicos as the sole intermediary and executive. Of the ten monasteries in the old Armenian province of Rshtunik (near Gevaş), six lacked an abbot, laymen operated two, and a clergyman used another for his own profit. These arrangements were widespread in other parts of Aghtamar's see, especially in Hizan and Müküs.<sup>28</sup> As Tevkants noted, these laymen and village heads were made monastery abbots so that nobody would "complain against the actions taken by Bishops Khachadur and Hagop, nor would anyone turn their attention to the Aghtamar Monastery to request reforms or demand accountability."<sup>29</sup> With their opponents removed, Khachadur and Hagop had positioned themselves better to resist the centralizing state by expanding the distance between the limits of society and the boundaries of the legal order. This space, reinforced by the coercion provided by Khachadur's Kurdish allies and embedded state actors, provided an arena that the Istanbul Patriarchate lacked the capacity to pierce.

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<sup>27</sup> Tevkants, 214-216

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 168-176

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 172

Two decades earlier, the Istanbul Patriarchate had acted unilaterally in securing the temporary banishment of Khachadur Shiroian's patron, Khachadur Mokatsi. The new millet system and its constitutional order preempted the possibility of such action against Shiroian. The Aghtamar issue infrequently appeared on the agenda of the National Assembly. In January 1870, Taktakian's successor Mkrtych Khrimian attempted to raise the issue and provide Khachadur the opportunity to defend himself.<sup>30</sup> The issue moved between councils, while petitions poured in from Aghtamar demanding their catholicos be recognized by Istanbul. With little evidence beyond the Porte's belief Khachadur had played a role in Bedros' murder, the Patriarchate and the National Administration had to move on and pursue a different strategy.

On 15 April 1875, the Mixed Council inquired with the Porte whether or not Khachadur was still suspected of playing a role in Bedros' murder. The only individuals ever formally accused of the crime were the bandits mentioned in the report submitted by Vehabedian and Kakmajian, Yusuf and Şahin. The Porte responded on 26 July 1875, that on account of the bandits' deaths the police could not carry out any further investigation. The Political Council of the National Administration thereafter declared that Khachadur bore no political responsibility for the crime. Appearing before the Religious Council, Khachadur declared his "conscience clear" on 4 December 1875.<sup>31</sup>

Instead of actual consolidation of jurisdictions and the expansion of a legal order, Istanbul chose instead to project the "image" of sovereignty. At the 4 June 1876 meeting of the National Assembly, the issue was declared resolved.<sup>32</sup> Having already signed a list

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<sup>30</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy* 1860-1870 (Session XXXIV, 23 January 1870)

<sup>31</sup> *Izmirlean*, 1030-1033

<sup>32</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy* Batsum 1876 amin (Session IV, 4 June 1876) pp. 66

of conditions that recognized the *de jure* supremacy of both Istanbul and Etchmiadzin in February, Khachadur was free. Armed with a *berat* and a Mecidiye medal of the first order, Khachadur left Istanbul for Aghtamar triumphant on 20 October 1876.<sup>33</sup>

Khachadur succeeded in making space that Istanbul could not broker, recognizing instead the social capital he had accrued in the periphery. As a technique for undermining the centralizing efforts of the state, this example would be replicated, if not emulated. In that same part of the empire, Şeyh Ubaydallah and Musa Bey deployed their social capital while activating networks, which created legal and political space to which the Sublime Porte could only hope to lay a theoretical claim. In this part of the empire, reform could only ever be partially implemented. As repertoires of rule changed at the Sublime Porte and Palace over the successive decades, this uneven diffusion of law would ensure an ever-widening social chasm between communities.

### **Sis: Cracking the Periphery, Breaking the Millet**

While Aghtamar was created to challenge Etchmiadzin directly, the Catholicos of All Armenians once sat at Sis. In response to collapsing Armenian kingdoms, the catholicosate frequently moved, eventually landing at Sis in 1293. After a church council elected to return the seat to Etchmiadzin in 1441 the reigning Catholicos Grigor IX Musabekiants chose to remain at Sis. While Etchmiadzin elected Kirakos Virapetsi as its new catholicos, Musabekiants was permitted also to retain the title catholicos on the condition that Sis elect no successor.

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<sup>33</sup> Izmirlean, 1067

Sis of course elected a successor, thereby initiating a competition with the Mother See over dioceses. In 1652, the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Pilippos I convened an assembly at Jerusalem. With the Patriarch of Jerusalem Asdvadzadur Taronetsi, he brokered an agreement with the Catholicos of Sis, Nerses Sebastatsi. According to the agreement the two sees would recognize one another's jurisdictions and cease sending nuncios into the other's territories.<sup>34</sup> In the early eighteenth century Sis attempted to challenge the Patriarch of Constantinople's de facto role as representative of all Ottoman Armenians to the Porte and the Sultan, but failed.<sup>35</sup>

More than Aghtamar, the Catholicosate of Sis was extensively embedded in local and imperial networks of power. While prior catholicoi had come from various locations within Sis's see, beginning in 1733, they originated exclusively from the town of Sis (Kozan). They also hailed from the same extended family—the Ajapahians. One source attempts to trace the roots of the Ajapahian clan back to the family of Cilician King Hetum.<sup>36</sup>

The Ajapahians derive their name from an important source of Sis's spiritual legitimacy. Sis held some important relics, including the supposed right hand of Gregory the Illuminator. The terms *ajpah* or *ajpan* were used to denote those relics' custodians. A part of the family's political legitimacy stems from their alliance with the Kozanoğlu family of *derebeys*. The beginnings of this relationship and how it was consolidated remain unclear; that the two developed intimate links over the succeeding 130 years is

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 438-445

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 448-457

<sup>36</sup> *Ajapahean Tohme dareru entatskin* (Pasadena: Araks Tparan, 2008)

abundantly apparent, even if those relations were neither on an equal footing nor always so fraternal.

The first Ajapahian to hold the title of catholicos was Ghugas I. In 1731, he traveled to Istanbul and acquired a *berat* from the Ottoman state naming himself Catholicos of Sis. Upon his return, he forcibly removed the reigning ecclesiastic, Hovhannes VI.<sup>37</sup> Ruling until his death in 1737, he was succeeded by Mikael I. Consecrated four months after Ghugas' death, Mikael reigned until his own death on 31 August 1758, when Yusuf Ağa Kozanoğlu had him killed by poisoning.

In addition to Mikael, derebeys killed at least three other catholicoci: Kapriel (1770, by the Divanoğlu), Teotoros (1796, by the Kozanoğlu), and Giragos I (1822, Kozanoğlu).<sup>38</sup> Before his death, Mikael also twice visited Istanbul (in 1749 and 1751) to conduct business with both the Patriarchate and the Porte. Consultations with the Patriarchate are understandable within the context of general Church concerns. The need to see the Porte points to something else. Despite a dearth of source material, it is possible to venture some observations on the role the Catholicosate of Sis played in connecting Cilicia to the rest of the Ottoman Empire.

First, the relationship between the Ajapahians and the Kozanoğlu must be contextualized. The derebeys of Cilicia ruled over a periphery of the empire sufficiently distant from Istanbul. The legal space between the two was such that the derebeys operated their own militias and issued land deeds. In some instances, they openly rebuked *fermans* and *berats* from Istanbul. On more than one occasion, they resisted incursions

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<sup>37</sup> Kiuleserean, 483-484. Sanjian claims Ghugas' father Husik traveled to Istanbul to procure the *berat*.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 501-505, 528-532, 560. Berberian dates Teotoros' death to 1801 (Perperean, *Patmutiun Hayots skseal i 1772 ame minchev tsamn 1860*)

into their territory by the Ottoman army.<sup>39</sup> While certainly defensive of what they perceived as their traditional prerogatives, they were not necessarily in open revolt against the state in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In Cilicia, the Kozanoğlu and Ajapahians relied on one another. Though certainly not equal partners, their relationship did have symbiotic features. Citing Protestant records, Andrew Gould describes how the Ajapahians and the Armenian notables used the coercive force offered by the Kozanoğlu to engage in exploitative tax farming.<sup>40</sup> The Armenian merchants and notables of Cilicia enjoyed more freedom of movement and performed a type of economic brokerage, linking Cilicia to the surrounding areas.<sup>41</sup> The two families shared a mutual interest in keeping the center and other potentially threatening social actors away. As noted above, the Ajapahians did not necessarily take an antagonistic position towards the Porte or the Patriarchate. Patriarch Zakaria in fact consecrated Catholicos Teotoros while the latter was in Istanbul.<sup>42</sup> Much of this began to change during the catholicosate of Mikael II (r. 1832-1855), whose rule coincided with the onset of empire-wide reform.

In 1839, Mikael II ordained the Prelate of Egypt Kapriel as a bishop. When news of this and other charges of corruption in managing the Church reached Istanbul, the Patriarchate issued an encyclical rebuking Mikael. Ignoring orders to cease ordaining bishops without prior consent, Mikael continued paying the Kozanoğlu to retain his

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<sup>39</sup> William Burckhardt Barker, *Lares and Penates: or, Cilicia and Its Governors* (London: Ingram, Cooke, and Co., 1853) For numerous examples see pp. 73-109.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Gould, "Lords or Bandits? The *Derebeys* of Cilicia." *IJMES*, vol. 7 no. 4 (October, 1976) p. 494-495

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 495; Rev. E.J. Davis, *Life in Asiatic Turkey. A Journal of Travel in Cilicia (Pedia and Trach(ea), Isauria, and Parts of Lycaonia and Cappadocia)* (London: Edward Stratford, 1879). See pp. 87-90 for a description of one such notable.

<sup>42</sup> Kiuleserean, 527-528

ecclesiastic privilege to do so.<sup>43</sup> Then, around 1850 Mikael appeared more receptive to Istanbul, possibly due to the temporary waning of Kozanoğlu power. In 1850 Bishop Ghugas, a member of the Ajapahian family, was made Mikael's representative in Istanbul. On 3 July 1851, the Supreme Council addressed a formal request from Mikael to ordain a *vardapet* named Krikor as a bishop; it was summarily rejected, demonstrating once again Istanbul's efforts to centralize power.<sup>44</sup>

Over the following sixteen years the Patriarchate engaged in a more concentrated campaign to weaken and ultimately remove the Ajapahian dynasty. Unsurprisingly this coincided with the expansion of the Tanzimat state, the establishment of the Armenian Constitution, and the Porte's eventually successful incursions against the Kozanoğlu clan. Contact between new forms of state organization under the Tanzimat and the Kozanoğlu occurred as early as the 1840s. In 1848, Çadırcı Mehmed requested of the Sultan that he be allowed to implement the Tanzimat on his own in Cilicia. Throughout the 1850s, the government engaged in policies that both coopted and divided the derebeys. Armed action against local power magnates increased during the 1860s; in 1862, government forces beat back the Armenian notables in Zeytun (Süleymanlı), and in 1865 the newly organized Reform Division claimed victory over the derebeys and settled a small rebellion in its wake in 1866.<sup>45</sup>

The Patriarchate meanwhile continued its efforts to control Mikael and the Sis Catholicosate. In 1854, Istanbul sent a commission to Sis to impose a set of regulations on the see. The two-person commission included the aforementioned Bishop Ghugas and

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<sup>43</sup> Sanjian, 158, 234; for text of encyclical, see Kiuleserean, 1441.

<sup>44</sup> Izmirlean, 481-485

<sup>45</sup> Gould, 496-500



his assistant, a young teacher originally from Van named Mkrtych Khrimian. A future Patriarch of Constantinople and Catholicos of All Armenians at Etchmiadzin, Khrimian had endeared himself to the Armenian Tanzimat statesmen through his progressive writings. In his reports on Cilicia, Khrimian criticized Mikael for his work with the Kozanoğlu, warning that should such a system of rule continue, Armenians would be compelled to convert.<sup>46</sup> Trading one religious designation for another was one more way to solve the riddle of jurisdiction.

After agreeing to the regulations, Mikael immediately set out to undermine Ghugas and Khrimian.<sup>47</sup> He passed away the following year, however, and was succeeded by Ghugas as Catholicos of Cilicia. Assuming the throne on 24 December 1855, he took the pontifical name Giragos II and ruled for a decade until October 1865. Conflicting information exists on him. Per Gould, Giragos took the throne without any election and resorted to the Kozanoğlu to deal with any bishops who objected to his rule.<sup>48</sup> Giuleserian notes, however, that Giragos received the Mecidiye medal of the first order, and submitted numerous complaints to the Sultan against the Kozanoğlu.<sup>49</sup>

Giragos II passed away in 1865. While the National Assembly in Istanbul attempted to stall the election while waiting for the Etchmiadzin seat to be filled, it deputized Bishop Mkrtych Dikranian, who would later be succeeded by another bishop named Mkrtych as *locum tenens*. Meanwhile, two major factions came to the fore in Cilicia. One faction advocated that the new Catholicos of Sis be elected. Led by Shahen

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<sup>46</sup> A portion of Khrimian's report is reproduced in Izmirlean, 486-496. For more on Khrimian's trip to Cilicia, see K. Tiurean, "Khrimean Hayrik." *Handes Amsoreay* (1892), pp. 247-249

<sup>47</sup> Izmirlean, 480-481

<sup>48</sup> Gould, 495

<sup>49</sup> Kiuleserean, 657

Ağa, an advisor to the Kozanoğlu, the other faction wished to keep the Ajapahian dynasty intact. The latter group convened a secret consecration on 11 June 1866, at which Bishop Nigoghos, an Ajapahian, was made Catholicos of Sis, adopting the name Giragos III. Mikael II's nephew, Bishop Harutiun Ajapahian, conducted the ceremony.<sup>50</sup>

The National Assembly and the Porte immediately declared the election illegal. At the Patriarch's request, the Porte issued an arrest warrant for Nigoghos, who was brought to Istanbul. On 22 July 1866, the National Assembly declared both the Sis and Aghtamar seats vacant, recommending that Nerses Varjabedian be named the new Catholicos of Cilicia.<sup>51</sup> A letter from Cilicia to the National Assembly declared Nigoghos "guilty before the nation of making trouble and creating disturbances, guilty before the National Administration of rebellion and disobedience, and guilty before the [Ottoman] State of deceitful undertakings," and added that to justify his actions would mean, "degrading the Church and trampling on the rights of the National Administration."<sup>52</sup> At the same session a letter from Nigoghos was also read, where he accused the *locum tenens* appointed by Istanbul, Mkrtych Dikranian, of being a thief, declaring that "a large majority of the Armenians of Cilicia" had greeted his own elevation to the seat "with love and satisfaction."

While the National Assembly had recommended Varjabedian for the seat, it did not know what role it would play in actually selecting a new Catholicos of Sis. Sis once again pried open the incongruences between the religious and political jurisdiction of the Istanbul Patriarchate, straddling the coercive capacity (and willingness) of the Ottoman

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 684-688; Izmirlean, 500

<sup>51</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy* 1860-1870 (Session XXII, 22 July 1866)

<sup>52</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy* 1860-1870 (Session XXIII, 11 February 1867)

state and the spiritual supremacy of the Catholicos of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin. After being permitted by the Sublime Porte on 23 August 1868, to return to his native Sis, Nigoghos continued to defy the Patriarchate's political jurisdiction by ordaining bishops.<sup>53</sup> This compelled the National Administration at the Patriarchate to work with urgency. First, the Political Council forwarded a *takrir* to the Porte requesting Nigoghos be returned to Istanbul; the Porte then issued an order that brought the bishop back to the capital.<sup>54</sup> From there, he was exiled to the Ardashir Monastery near Bursa where he participated in the selection of Khoren Ashkian, a future Patriarch of Constantinople, as monastery abbot.<sup>55</sup>

While the Political Council and the Porte dealt with Nigoghos, the National Assembly addressed the question of finally replacing Giragos II. For Nahabed Rusinian, a Tanzimat statesman, the question contained exclusively political overtones that made the religious aspects moot. As discussed at the Assembly, although Sis "bears the name of a catholicos, it is in actuality not a catholicos in any real sense of the word. Rather, it is a specific shepherd, a provincial prelate or, more correctly, a local patriarch like the Patriarch of Jerusalem," and as such fell under the jurisdiction of Istanbul.<sup>56</sup> His detractors leveled a complicated counterargument, insisting first on Istanbul's right unilaterally to select a Catholicos of Sis just as they had a right to participate in the selection of a Catholicos of Etchmiadzin.

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<sup>53</sup> Kiuleserean, 688

<sup>54</sup> *Teghekagir Kaghakakan Zhoghovoy Ketronakan Varchutean 1870-1871 ami ar Azgayin Endhanur Zhoghov* (K. Polis: Tpagrutiun Miuhentsean, 1871) pp. 9-10

<sup>55</sup> Kiuleserean, 689

<sup>56</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy 1870-1874* (Session V, 18 September 1870)

Rusinian reemphasized that for administrative purposes the Catholicos of Sis must be regarded simply as a provincial prelate. Given the dual nature of a prelate as both a religious and political leader, Rusinian insisted that the rights of the people to select their own political leader be respected. The National Assembly only had a right to participate in Etchmiadzin's election because the Catholicos of All Armenians, as the highest-ranking member of the Church, was ultimately their prelate. Yet Sis was not the "universal" catholicos of the Church, it was only Cilicia's prelate. To deny Sis (and Aghtamar) the right to select their own prelates would undermine the legitimacy of the National Assembly, thereby providing them with more reason to resist central authority.<sup>57</sup>

The National Assembly accepted Rusinian's arguments and consented to elections in Cilicia. On 4 May 1871, the Patriarchate issued a set of instructions for the election. Notably the elections were to be held in Adana and not Sis, the Ajapahian stronghold.<sup>58</sup> They were to be overseen by Bishop Simeon Seferian, a member of the Jerusalem Order, sent from Istanbul.<sup>59</sup> Hovhannes Efendi Frengian, one of the leaders of the anti-Ajapahian faction, assisted him; he was joined by Hurşid Efendi, one of the leaders of the government's incursions against the Kozanoğlu, sent by the Porte at the behest of the Patriarchate. They convened a council that formed a list of nominees on 22 October, which was telegraphed to Istanbul the following day. On 27 October 1871, the council at Adana selected Bishop Mkrtych Kefsizian of Marash.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, and Sessions VI (25 September 1870) and VII (7 October 1870). Rusinian's arguments actually differ little from recommendations compiled by a special religious council in 1867, which also resolved the religious aspects ignored by Rusinian. For text of recommendations, see Izmirlean, 639-649.

<sup>58</sup> Adana, a major commercial town roughly seventy kilometers south of Sis, was comparatively immune from Ajapahian/Kozanoğlu influence.

<sup>59</sup> A copy of the "Instructions" is reproduced in *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy 1870-1874* (Session IV, 12 November 1871) pp. 517-519

As relations between Istanbul, Etchmiadzin, and Sis within the context of the new Constitutional regime had yet to be finalized, the Patriarch of Istanbul, Mkrtych Khrimian, felt it wise to delay the confirmation of the election by the National Assembly. Kefsizian offered to sign a “letter of promise” to adhere to any agreement concluded to by the Patriarchate and the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin.<sup>60</sup> With the promise in hand, the National Assembly moved to resolve finally the question of Sis. After short deliberation and with only six votes against, the Assembly declared Kefsizian the new Catholicos of Cilicia.<sup>61</sup>

An enraged Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, Gevorg IV, issued a blistering pontifical bull to Khrimian on 11 December 1871, accusing the Istanbul Patriarch of breaking with Church tradition and acting illegally. Choosing not to accept Kefsizian’s letter of promise as sufficient, Gevorg turned the ratification of Sis’ election into yet another opportunity to undermine the Constitutional administration in Istanbul. In 1868 he had already attempted to establish his own personal deputy at the Porte; the Porte denied the request, pointing out it would recognize only the Patriarch of Constantinople as the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin’s representative.<sup>62</sup>

In a letter dated 10 March 1872, Khrimian rejected Gevorg’s assertions that he had undermined the Church, insisting instead he had strengthened Etchmiadzin. He wrote that “until now Cilicia had considered itself an independent seat,” and “the danger was in that independence. Now [Sis] is subjected to the Central Administration of Constantinople, which is a diocese of Etchmiadzin.” Khrimian continued that Istanbul

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<sup>60</sup> Izmirlean, 860-873

<sup>61</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy* 1870-1874 (Session IV, 12 November 1871) pp. 530

<sup>62</sup> Izmirlean, 738-740, 895-898

had used the coercive force of the state to remove Nigoghos, and that if any future Catholicos of Sis violated any agreement on its status concluded by Istanbul and Etchmiadzin, that particular Catholicos would be in violation of his duties. Khrimian concluded that the question of relations could not be properly resolved until Etchmiadzin had dealt with the *Polozhenie*, something Gevorg had failed to accomplish.<sup>63</sup> As far as Khrimian was concerned, he had resolved the question of legal pluralism within the Armenian Church by consolidating jurisdictions in an explicit hierarchy reinforced by the coercion of the Ottoman state.

This proved insufficient for Gevorg who again responded to Khrimian. Restating Etchmiadzin's spiritual supremacy and describing Sis as a *hakator*, Gevorg's letter forced the National Assembly to reconsider the question of relations within the context of the ongoing review of the Constitution. The slow review of the Constitution would be the underlying reason for Khrimian's resignation as Patriarch of Constantinople in 1873. Gevorg's letter also emboldened Kefsizian.

Kefsizian, who had deftly maneuvered the overlap in the fragmentary control of the Church and the state to circulate throughout the Ottoman Empire, would continue attempting to buffer the center's legal capacity by asserting his own space. First, he set about breaking the Ajapahians and their base in Sis. During the Ajapahian dynasty, a tradition had developed whereby the people of Sis closed the other churches in town and came to the principle monastery to convey New Year's greetings to one another and extend their salutations to the catholicos. On 1 January 1872, instead of taking advantage of the opportunity to build bridges with a community not very excited about his election,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 932-950

largely by Cilician towns outside of Sis, Kefsizian instead turned the monastery into a bully pulpit. He berated the people for their tradition and demanded they return everything they had stolen from the sanctuary. The people of Sis responded by refusing to recite his name during the liturgy.<sup>64</sup>

Next, Kefsizian expanded his conflict with the people of Sis by more aggressively attacking the Ajapahians. In late January 1872, he published the Armeno-Turkish pamphlet *Kilikya'nın Esrarı ve Sefaleti* (“The Mysteries and Misery of Cilicia”) under the pseudonym “Bir Adanalı Hay Eridasart” (An Armenian youth from Adana), and addressed to his “vetanperver kardaşlar” (patriotic siblings). Appropriating in Armeno-Turkish the populist rhetoric of the beloved Patriarch Khrimian, Kefsizian also launched into a self-laudatory diatribe painting the Ajapahians as enemies of reform and tools of the derebeys.<sup>65</sup> After later consolidating his power, Kefsizian persecuted the individual Ajapahians to the extent that one of them, Bishop Harutiun, converted to Islam and lived the remainder of his life as Emin Efendi.<sup>66</sup>

The problems at Sis blossomed into conflict with Istanbul. In October 1872 Kefsizian requested permission from the Patriarchate to remove the Catholicosate out of Sis entirely, and instead to somewhere near Marash. This was denied. Kefsizian responded by demanding more. In two separate letters forwarded to the National Administration in January 1873, Kefsizian made four demands: 1) Remove the catholicosate from Sis to somewhere else, 2) secure a monthly salary for the Catholicos of Cilicia from the government, 3) expand the dioceses of Sis, and 4) secure for the

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<sup>64</sup> Izmirlean, 1068-1071

<sup>65</sup> Kiuleserean, 724-726

<sup>66</sup> On Harutiun Ajapahian/Emin Efendi, see Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp. 145-151

Catholicos a position higher than a prelate in the eyes of the Government. These were also rejected and considered as potentially rebellious demands made against Istanbul.<sup>67</sup>

Under the new Patriarch of Istanbul, Nerses Varjabedian, the Patriarchate offered some concessions to Kefsizian in its “Instructions for the Dioceses of Cilicia.” Comprised of eight points, the instructions required Kefsizian to implement finally the Constitution in Cilicia. These points made Sis the intermediary between the prelates in Cilicia and the Istanbul Patriarchate.<sup>68</sup> Copies of the orders were immediately printed and sent to Kefsizian, who simply ignored them.

Kefsizian willfully neglected the dioceses under him for the same reasons as Khachatur in Aghtamar, for such a stand allowed him to concentrate more and more power in his own person. He refused to implement the Constitution, failed to appoint prelates, and even went as far as to claim himself the rightful heir to Sts. Thaddues and Bartholomew. When resisting the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin’s claims that he had undermined Church unity, Kefsizian returned Gevorg IV’s words, pointing out the one constantly calling Sis a *hakator* was in fact guilty of that charge.<sup>69</sup> Kefsizian further defied Istanbul and Etchmiadzin when he elevated a priest to the rank of bishop without first attaining permission from either center.<sup>70</sup>

Consistently finding ways to resist Etchmiadzin’s claim to spiritual supremacy, one of the two bedrocks of Istanbul’s claim to political jurisdiction, Kefsizian now looked to undermine the other. After convening an assembly in October 1880 for the ostensible

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<sup>67</sup> Izmirlean, 1081-1084

<sup>68</sup> *Hrahang Kilikiyoy Vichakats Hamar* (Kostandnupolis: Tpagrutium H. Miuhentisean, 1874) pp. 5-8

<sup>69</sup> Izmirlean, 1177-1178

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 1174



purpose of addressing Cilicia's immediate needs, Kefsizian went to Istanbul for discussions. There, the Patriarchate presented him a set of conditions, demanding he pledge obedience to Etchmiadzin, recite the name of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin during the liturgy, limit the mobility of Cilician clergymen, and bless the Holy Chrism only for Cilician dioceses.<sup>71</sup> Kefsizian claimed he was unable to agree to such terms.

Still in Istanbul, Kefsizian entered into direct negotiations with Varjabedian. In July 1881, Kefsizian finally acquired his *berat* from the Porte, confirming his election. Prior to doing so, however, he had met with the Porte independently of the Patriarchate. During those discussions, he convinced the Ottoman government that as a diocese of Etchmiadzin, the Patriarch was "little more than an untrustworthy Russian agent." In a post-Treaty of Berlin Ottoman Empire, this had special effect. His new *berat* consequently omitted important details from that typically given to a Catholicos of Sis. Notably, the requirement that the "Catholicosate of Sis is subject to the authority of the Patriarchate of Constantinople" had been removed. Sis also now enjoyed the right to conduct certain business directly with the Porte.<sup>72</sup> Effectively creating a second Armenian *millet*, Istanbul could not stand this. If Sis could bypass the political authority of the Istanbul Patriarchate and engage the Porte without the Patriarch's mediation, a new religious and political community would have been formed.

Against the backdrop of Abdülhamit's dismantling of the millet system, Varjabedian managed to leverage his influence to reverse the decision. At another meeting on 30 August 1881, Kefsizian agreed to revert to the old style *berat* after being pressured by the state. For the moment, the millet had been saved.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 1177

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 1255-1260; Sanjian, 245-246

Not rescued, however, was the Istanbul Patriarchate's capacity for brokerage, or the possibility for it to become the hegemonic node in the Ottoman Armenian Church. Khachadur had employed local networks to reinforce his space against the efforts of centralization. Kefsizian, however, succeeded in undermining the two sources of Istanbul's legitimacy, the Ottoman state and the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin. By exacerbating the increasingly tense relationship between Etchmiadzin and Istanbul, Kefsizian put Istanbul in a position where it could not act unilaterally. Gevorg's bull, which had caused the Patriarchate to adopt a more deliberate policy in Cilicia, hampered Istanbul and played an indirect role in toppling Mkrtych Khrimian's reign as patriarch.

Kefsizian also deftly turned the Ottoman state against the Patriarchate. After the war with Russia, certain segments in the upper echelons of Ottoman decision-making bodies began harboring intense mistrust of the Armenian community. By emphasizing Istanbul's subordination to Etchmiadzin, located in the Russian Empire, Kefsizian presented himself as a loyal Ottoman subject. Without the coercive force or political legitimacy the Ottoman state provided, the Istanbul Patriarchate lacked teeth. Kefsizian's space, therefore, was more secure, remaining so until his death.

## **Conclusion**

Varjabedian passed away in 1885, replaced by Harutiun Vehabedian as Patriarch of Constantinople. Kefsizian and Khachadur each reigned until their deaths in 1894 and 1895, respectively.

After Kefsizian's death, the seat at Sis remained unoccupied until 1902. Under Kefsizian, the catholicosate's changing role reflected the Ottoman state's different

approaches to consolidating jurisdictions between center and periphery. The Patriarchate had been charged with breaking the Ajapahian dynasty as a part of government policy towards the derebeys of Cilicia. In this case the millet system created by the Tanzimat reforms proved a powerful tool in expanding the sovereignty of the central state.

Kefsizian succeeded in manipulating not only the Ottoman state's changing approaches to solving questions of legal pluralism and state building, but also the power vacuum created by the departure of the Kozanoğlu on the one hand, and persecution of the Ajapahians on the other. Earlier, the state had treated the Patriarchate as partner in the Tanzimat state, with pronounced social links tying together the Armenian National Assembly and successive Prime Ministers. Under Sultan Abdülhamit II, the millets no longer enjoyed such direct access and instead had to work through the Ministry of Justice. By declaring himself an enemy of the Patriarchate, Kefsizian won the support of a government that had chosen a different method for integrating its non-Muslim subjects. In the first new elections for Cilicia overseen by Istanbul, the assemblies elected Bishop Krikoris Aleatjian the new Catholicos of Sis. As Aleatjian had once been arrested for suspected revolutionary sympathies, the Porte quickly rejected his election. Bishops loyal to Kefsizian then selected one of their own, Hovhannes Kazanjian. The government tried to compel Patriarch Maghakia Ormanian to accept the election, but he refused.<sup>73</sup>

The Patriarchate responded by sending a Cilician bishop named Sahag Khabayian to Sis as a patriarchal deputy in early 1900. The Vali at Adana then received orders from the Porte to install Bishop Giragos Pekmezjian, one of the local bishops, as *locum tenens* with directions to convene an assembly to elect a new catholicos. Ormanian objected,

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<sup>73</sup> Maghakia Ormanean, *Hishatakagirk erkotasnameay patriarkutean* h. 1 (K. Polis: Tpagrutun V. ev H. Ter Nersesean, 1910) pp. 67-68

noting that to do such a thing would constitute the formal recognition of Cilicia as a separate millet by the Ottoman government. The government then deputized members of the conservative Dadian family to convince Ormanian of the election's legality, but to no avail. Finally in 1901 Khabayian was permitted to convene an assembly where Bishop Kevork Yeretsian was elected; after he turned down the post in 1902, the seat went to Khabayian, who ruled until his death in 1939. As Catholicos of Sis, he resumed and normalized relations with both the Patriarchate and Etchmiadzin.<sup>74</sup>

Khachadur lost by winning. Having concentrated so much power in his own person he weakened the political structures of his see to the point that his jurisdictional prerogatives, which he had defended so vigorously from the encroachment of the Patriarchate, had eroded. His failure to maintain any semblance of a hierarchical system that would be able to resort, in theory, to the coercive apparatus of the state limited severely his influence or capacity to move between different, sometimes contradictory, jurisdictions existing within a given space. Unable to care for much of anything beneath him, local notables gradually took the land of the monasteries, with the people suffering the same fate as those of the Etchmiadzin monasteries described by Tevkants in Chapter Two. When visiting in 1893, Lynch compared the monks at Aghtamar unfavorably with those of Varak near Van, emphasizing the stupidity of the former, whom he saw as little more than hoteliers.<sup>75</sup>

Little more than a destination for travelers and pilgrims, Aghtamar ceased to be of any importance. Having ordained no bishops himself out of fear for suffering Bedros' fate, the last remaining bishop of the Aghtamar Order was Hovsep. He left, however, for

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 69-72

<sup>75</sup> On Lynch's visit to Akhtamar, see Lynch pp. 127-136

the monastery at Ktuts on Lake Van in hopes of becoming an Etchmiadzin bishop.<sup>76</sup> With emigration from Aghtamar's dioceses reducing the see's constituency to areas nearest Lake Van, Khachadur's links with Kurdish powerbrokers near Müküs had less meaning, as the sites he brokered were of increasingly disproportionate strength. While the monastic order continued to function on the island, the Catholicosate of Aghtamar effectively ended with Khachadur's passing, its diocese falling under the political jurisdiction of the Vaspurakan (Van) prelacy.

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<sup>76</sup> *Azgapatum*, col. 2988

## **Part Two: The Bishops' Wars**

### **Chapter Four**

#### **Destabilizing Center and Periphery in the Ottoman Empire: Clergymen Between Istanbul and Van, 1840-1869**

In an influential article, Ussama Makdisi raised an issue he described as “Ottoman Orientalism.”<sup>1</sup> Like their nineteenth century counterparts, the Ottomans created their own “Orient,” a space to be saved through a project of modernization under the aegis of the imperial center, Istanbul. In Ottoman historiography, the periphery was the place to be saved. Voiceless and passive, the periphery awaited Istanbul’s intervention to make it legible and rational before the centralizing state.

On its surface, the story makes sense. Istanbul, the capital, had always enjoyed an elevated place in the empire. Politically, its preeminence began to expand with the breaking of the *ayans* in the eighteenth century, on the one hand, and the expansion of the Sublime Porte’s prerogatives in the nineteenth century, on the other. As the Porte’s authority grew, the center began intervening more than ever before in the daily lives of its imperial subjects, in whom Istanbul was inscribing its legitimacy. In some cases, this projection of sovereignty included civilizing missions to save savages and bandits from themselves. Bureaucratically, this expansion of state functions led to an explosion of documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism.” *American Historical Review* vol. 107, no. 3 (2002) pp. 768-798

Housed in the Ottoman Prime Ministry Archives, now located in the Kağıthane district of Istanbul, these official documents reflect the growing presence of the central state in the empire's peripheries. Produced by governors and other state officials representing the center (or, in many cases, weaving a story palpable to superiors in the capital), these tomes of documents normalize the perspective of Istanbul. In an historiography overrun by the practice of document fetishism while also uncritical of the state's assumption of legitimate action, the historical literature works in tandem with state documents to normalize the imagined hegemony of Istanbul. Herein lies Makdisi's challenge to the field.

Despite these warnings, the pervasiveness of the imperial center's agency remains constant, and the relative passivity of the peripheries unproblematically reproduced in major works of Ottoman history. A recent path-breaking book on how the empire managed diversity and flexibility is a case in point. Deploying Ronald S. Burt's conception of social capital in a network setting to analyze mechanisms of imperial control, Karen Barkey offers a new model for understanding the comparative longevity of the last of the gunpowder empires.<sup>2</sup> Arguing that the best model for understanding Ottoman control is that of a "spoke and hub without the wheel," Barkey demonstrates that the empire's peripheries were sites of power connected by social brokers who could bridge center and periphery. Bridging, a lucrative social or economic activity, provided these cultural intermediaries the means by which they could make and shape local iterations of imperial institutions in ways that allowed them to consolidate their positions and defeat rivals. This was the script often played out, be it the success of the Husaynis in

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<sup>2</sup> Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Jerusalem, the Druze Jumblatt family in Mount Lebanon, or the descendants of Bedirhan Bey in Kurdistan.

The piecemeal integration of these elites into the new structures of Ottoman political control meant that they would be unevenly incorporated, differentiated, and segmented. Istanbul, therefore, assumed the role of principal node in this imperial network, and the bridge by which other peripheries would connect with one another. The center ruled in a vertically-integrated hierarchy.

A theorized synthesis of a larger body of problematic Ottomanist scholarship based on readings of state documents, this is the autobiography of empire. Understanding the dynamics of imperial control and the mechanics of diversity requires moving beyond the dichotomy of center and periphery; this is, after all, the promise offered by a reading of empire as network, where the possibility of connections and types of brokerage transcends the historical dictates of a centralizing state. Istanbul's rule was not hegemonic; it was instead contingent on a variety of factors. Normalizing center and periphery, as I will demonstrate below, was a discursive project actively negotiated by empire's subjects.

As a discursive project, however, praxis proved far more difficult than reformers in Istanbul had hoped. Unpleasant realities, as innocuous as simple economic brokerage (the distance of caravan travel between Van and Damascus, for example, was much shorter than a trip from either to Istanbul), or as openly confrontational as Şeyh Ubaydallah's rebellion in 1879, were constant reminders of the connections and networks that linked non-central historical actors together without the permission of Istanbul. The peripheries were far more heterogeneous and integrated than Istanbul would allow itself



to admit. Home to subjects of different ethnicities, confessions, economies, and geographies, the peripheries encapsulated a series of networks and mechanisms that constituted its own cultural space.

This leads to a second point of concern. If state documents normalize the hierarchy and dichotomy of center-periphery, they also privilege the voice and agency of the dominant sociological group in the Ottoman Empire, the Muslim Turks.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, Ottoman history is read as a Turkish enterprise, where the state's rule and legitimacy is a given. Reducing Ottoman historical experience to that of a cadre of officials and one ethnic group means not being able to see how Ottoman society and culture functioned. This is especially problematic when using social capital to analyze the interconnectedness of imperial sites and actors. Consequently, non-Muslims stories remain tangential to the larger imperial experience, and confined to the narratives of parochial national histories. For the *Tanzimat* period, this takes on special significance. As the empire's non-Muslims constituted a significant portion of the total population, the twin projects of modernity and state centralization engaged large swathes of Ottoman society who remain at the margins of the field. Their networks, their connections, their intermediaries, their sites of power were every bit as much a part of Ottoman society as a governor or a military commander.

Bringing those experiences back in, I will argue here that the "spoke and hub" in fact did have a wheel. To do this I will focus largely on Armenian Church institutions and how they functioned in the east Anatolian province of Van. As I have demonstrated in previous chapters, the Armenian Church featured prominently in Ottoman governance. This prominence grew as the millet system was elaborated during the *Tanzimat* period in

the nineteenth century. Reform internal to the Church's administration aimed to standardize governing practices, whereby they would become consonant with imperial forms, and facilitate more interaction between the government and the people. These schemes revealed the limits of millet practices, as they failed to (or, more likely, were not allowed to) account for the ways in which clergymen and monasteries were embedded in a local social ecology with its own cultural norms. The gridded community, legible before the centralizing prerogatives of the Patriarchate, was a fiction. Subsequent legislation and Patriarchal orders in the 1870s reflect how the millet attempted to respond to the inadequacy of its earlier assumptions.

Constructing the center-periphery relationship in the nineteenth century required recreating the contours of social networks, shifting their structures, and changing the culture that informed their construction. Van witnessed numerous ruptures in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1847, the Kurdish lords Bedirhan Bey and Mahmud Han revolted against the Ottoman state. The 1856 Crimean War with Russia included a Caucasian front and the quartering of troops on Armenians in the surrounding countryside. The Church witnessed the Istanbul Patriarchate's attempts to pull local institutions more completely under its control. Contests within the Church elite of Van, with their connections to other powerbrokers who dotted the empire, provide a window for understanding the complexities of the reform program. Armenian priests contested sites of power that had reverberations extending far beyond their own community or its cultural and religious concerns. Herein lies the importance of reading the documentation they left behind as archives for Ottoman history.

Against this backdrop two clergymen waged a struggle that one contemporary called “the thirty year war.”<sup>3</sup> Mkrtich Khrimian and Boghos Melikian both entered the clergy, each eventually rising to the rank of bishop. Each negotiated webs of meaning and networks of power that the central state could not officially see. It is in these “hidden” spaces that they accrued social capital that could then be deployed to change or reinforce political and social structures.

Their battles constituted four distinct phases. The first, 1847-1857, featured early attempts at reform and comparatively little competition between clergymen. 1857-1869 witnessed a distinct increase in the intensity of battles, precipitated in large part by the attempts of Istanbul to extend its control. Upon becoming Patriarch of Istanbul in 1869, Khrimian and his successor, Nerses Varjabedian, not only engaged in a more concerted campaign of centralization through the disciplining of networks, they also sponsored the development of social life through organizations that would usurp public functions originally executed by the clergy. Their successes hurt them during the final period, 1880-1885/1896. As the state changed under Sultan Abdülhamit II, the successful reform within the Armenian community meant a net loss of social capital and an increasingly widening chasm between them and their Muslim neighbors. The final two periods will form the focus of Chapters Five and Six. The first two periods will be covered here.

### **Constituting Armenian Power in and around Van**

Van, an important cultural and political center in Armenian history, was predictably home to Armenian notables in the middle of the nineteenth century. Some of

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<sup>3</sup> A. Terzipashean, *Artsiv ir boynin mej* (Paris: Der Agopian, 1938) pp. 119

these families, such as “the twelve” (*onikiler*) claimed a set of prerogatives dating back to the interludes of Safavid control over the city in the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Generally, they were referred to as “the princes” (*ishkhank*) by the Armenians, and called notables by the British consuls who observed their activities. These notables engaged in a number of different business ventures, with most either dominating the local bazaar, working in finance, or as merchants. Their work in finance funded the *iltizam* system of tax farming, whereby they could (according to one source) realize a five-fold return on their original investment by exploiting the peasantry.<sup>5</sup> Some of them, such as the Hamajians and the Eramians, established offices in Istanbul and Tiflis, which facilitated their access to international trade.

The princes of course translated this financial prominence into social and political power. They did this in four ways. Firstly, they enjoyed access to coercive force. Through their manipulation of the tax collecting system, they wielded the power (through “overzealous” collectors) to intimidate peasants and their village heads. Secondly, they sat on councils at the local government, and enjoyed unfettered access to officials whose ability to rule was predicated on informal networks with local powerbrokers.<sup>6</sup> Major landholding families, such as the Terzibashians, sat on those councils.<sup>7</sup>

Third, they dominated the local Armenian prelate. As the Istanbul Patriarchate attempted to expand its control over the day-to-day activities of all its prelacies, it ordered they institute councils similar to those established at the capital. In a document

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<sup>4</sup> Ervand Ter-Mkrtchean, *Gandzer Vaspurakani* (Boston: Tparan “Paykar”, 1966) pp. 434-435

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See below

<sup>7</sup> Ter-Mkrtchean, 530

dated 24 May 1851, for example, at least eight of the twelve names on a list of council members are identifiable from the upper class.<sup>8</sup> Even as prelates became elected positions, in many cases these councils did the actual selecting.

Finally, they could extend their financial domination over monasteries. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, monasteries and their internal politics formed important sites for Ottoman social power. In the Ottoman system, monasteries were treated as *wakif* (Ar. *waqf*), or pious foundations, in ways not too dissimilar from their Muslim counterparts. As such, their lands were not subject to the same rules of taxation, and became opportunities for the well-to-do to hide money. This was especially true of businessmen with holdings in both the provinces and Istanbul. Beyond simply laundering their earnings—abuse of the system was rampant, to the point that the Sublime Porte created a special department to audit Muslim foundations—the benefactor, or *mütevelli*, controlled the monastery's finances. This was the case with Kaspar Agha Hamamjian, a native of Van who relocated to Istanbul, and controlled the finances of two major monasteries, Lim and Gduts. Being able to pass judgment on whether or not a monastery could do something as mundane as repair a door meant easily being able to prevent the use of funds for the public good. Using the political prerogatives of the monastery to do something such as forwarding complaints against the activities of the well-to-do to either the government, the prelate, or the Patriarchate on behalf of the peasantry was an impossibility. Monastery abbots, who headed the resident monastic orders that controlled

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<sup>8</sup> BN CP 23-1/026 Most notable are Mahdesi Alkhas Agha Terlemezian, Avedis Agha Ayazian, Apraham Boghosian, and Mahdesi Kevork Agha Khaljian. The honorific “mahdesi,” also rendered “mkhsi” in some dialects, is an Armenian corruption of “muqqadasi,” meaning someone who had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

access to membership in the clergy, had to find ways to leverage power against the mütevelli system.

Abbots, easily squeezed by a mütevelli, extended their own influence through their monastic order. The orders by and large “staffed” minor monasteries in the area, putting them ever more in contact with communities living outside the city and its immediate environs. Subordinate to the spiritual jurisdiction of the Van prelate were three major monasteries, the aforementioned Lim and Gduts (located on Lake Van), and Varak, just east of the city. The abbot of Lim, Hagop Topuzian, enjoyed the right to determine who, for example, would head the smaller and less influential monasteries of Medzopay and Skanchelakordz.<sup>9</sup> Predictably, he assigned priests he had himself ordained, as they were more likely to remain loyal and solidify his position against potential challengers. In some cases, these clergymen forged relationships with local powerbrokers, generally Kurdish chieftains. These relationships were sometimes “consummated” when a priest became *kirve* to a chief’s sons, by participating in the circumcision ritual carried out by a Muslim cleric.<sup>10</sup> This all of course provided the mütevelli greater access to even more sites of power. Through their domination of the institution, notables could, through a network of abbots and priests subordinated by financial pressures, project their influence far into the countryside. Monasteries became an easily and cheaply (in terms of social capital) controlled bridge that made the notables an even more important social force. Top-down projects of reform did not foresee the complexity of even a single spoke.

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<sup>9</sup> Matenadaran, Dzeragir (Manuscript) 4180, p. 80 (hereafter M.MS 4180). This manuscript is an unpublished memoir of Van written by Bishop Eremia Tevkants, the son of a notable family that allied itself with the reform movement.

<sup>10</sup> Eremia Tevkants, *Chanabarhordutyun bardzr hayk ev Vaspurakan, 1872-1873 tt. Dzeragire patrastel ev tsanotagrel e H. M. Poghosyane* (Erevan: Haystani GA hratarakchutyun, 1991)

Enterprising abbots could, however, try to exploit their location in this network to enrich themselves.

The political balancing between monastic orders and the wealthy notables who financed community institutions extended to the administration of the prelate, which limited the possibility of reform. Before the Istanbul native Ignadios Kakmajian was appointed in 1859, the prelate of Van came from one of the three major monasteries (Lim, Gduts, or Varak), which simultaneously competed against, while cooperating with, one another. The prelate, like some of the notables, sat on the local council at the government as the ostensible representative of the flock. Coming from the monasteries, dominated by the financial control of the notables, and observed by councils stacked by the wealthy, prelates clearly did no such thing. Clergymen hoping to represent any other interests had to devise strategies for accumulating and leveraging social capital through a manipulation of Armenian and imperial culture. Even then, opportunities were limited.

### **Early Reform**

Writings on Mkrtych Khrimian, many of them bordering on hagiography, assert he brought “light” to the provinces, while simultaneously shaming the decadence of the wealthy Istanbul Armenians, whose patriotism he called into question.<sup>11</sup> He brought a printing press to Van, published the journal *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, spread literacy through the expansion of schools, and preached self-defense against incursions by the Kurds.

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<sup>11</sup> Khrimian championed a brand of patriotism called *hayrenasirutium* (homeland-loving) over that of the more cultural *azgasirutium* (nation or millet-loving). For more, see Gerard J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2004) pp. 51-72

Much of this is, as noted below, an idealized portrayal. And he was hardly the first, having taken a page out of the playbook of Bishop Hagop Topuzian.

According to Eremia Tevkants, an ally of Khrimian and former student of Topuzian, it was Topuzian who first hoped to bring a printing press to Van.<sup>12</sup> Topuzian was born into a modest artisan family in Van in 1800. His mother and brother, who went on to become a goldsmith, raised him. As a youth, he entered the service of a bishop named Kalusd, under whom he received his early education. He appears to have accompanied the bishop to Istanbul at some point. His brother earned enough money to support Hagop's education, allowing him to travel to the St. Garabed Monastery in Mush where he continued his studies.<sup>13</sup>

After learning how to lecture, he returned to St. Garabed as a lay teacher. He spent five years there and won the favor of the top two members of the monastic order, Zakaria Vartabed and Bishop Bedros. Through their sponsorship, he succeeded in his application to join the order at Lim. The order was only too happy to accept a teacher of Topuzian's stature, and arranged for his ordination as a celibate priest by Hovhannes VIII (r. 1831-1842), Catholicos of All Armenians at Etchmiadzin.<sup>14</sup> He did not stay long at Lim, as the Catholicos of Sis, Yeprem II Ajapahian (r. 1822-1833) requested Topuzian come to Cilicia to teach at the Catholicosate.

Topuzian's renown as a teacher won him a number of supporters and the ability to connect sites of power in the Armenian Church. After some time in Cilicia, he went

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<sup>12</sup> M. MS 4180, p. 48

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 43-44. St. Garabed (Çanlıkilise in Turkish), was a major seminary located outside Mush. Also called Glagavank, its cultural significance dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE, when it was (according to legend) established by the Gregory the Illuminator, and was frequented by pilgrims up until 1915.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 45



across the Ottoman-Russian frontier to Etchmiadzin to carry out work for the Catholicos. He then traveled to Tiflis, where he secured donations for the Lim monastery in the form of large tracts of land.<sup>15</sup> His old patron, Zakaria, then recalled him to St. Garabed so that he could resume teaching at the monastery. Thereafter, he traveled to Jerusalem for some time, returning to Mush, before then making his way to Istanbul.

A cleric and teacher that had won the admiration of numerous religious heads, Topuzian enjoyed a pomp that afforded him access to the upper echelons of Istanbul Armenian life. Throughout the nineteenth century, labor migrants from the provinces had filled the imperial capital, working menial jobs and sending remittances back home. By and large, these migrants socialized with one another, and made it a point to attend churches where rumor indicated a good sermon might be read. Topuzian, while in Istanbul, preached at these churches, and began raising money to fund the construction and operation of schools back home in Van. He also frequented the homes of the upper class. All told, he raised 40,000 kuruş, half immediately used to wipe clean the combined debts of Gduts and Lim.<sup>16</sup> The other half went to the treasury of the two monasteries, ostensibly for the building of schools.

While in Istanbul, Topuzian also established a relationship with Hagop Grjigian, the *loğofet* of the Armenian Patriarchate, who was close with the Prime Minister Reşit Paşa. He appears to have gained some support from Grjigian for constructing schools that would be in the city of Van, and not on the islands at the monasteries of Gduts or Lim.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 47

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 48. The best available depiction of labor migrant life is in a work of fiction, Raffi's *Gharib Mshetsi*.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

Upon returning to Van, Topuzian's ability to bridge different sites of Ottoman and Armenian power, which he had so far used for fundraising, demonstrated his political value. When Movses Vartabed resigned as prelate of Van, some championed Topuzian for the seat. Instead, the abbot of Lim, Kapriel Shiroian assumed the post, with Topuzian replacing his position at the monastery.<sup>18</sup> Together, Shiroian and Topuzian opened six schools in Van, one of which was operated by the notoriously conservative Koloz, a teacher whom the notables used to discredit reformers.<sup>19</sup>

Topuzian succeeded in carrying out limited reform, namely the construction of schools. Insignificant on the surface, transforming Church capital into a public good entailed an important paradigm shift. But if he enjoyed such repute, an ability to raise funds (and, theoretically, limit the influence of the notables), and connections to benefactors, political power, and religious sites of power in places such as Istanbul, Jerusalem, Sis, Van, and also Etchmiadzin and Tiflis in the Russian Empire, why was he unable to accomplish more? Even his elevation to bishop in 1861 seems more ceremonial than anything else, despite making him eligible for the position of Patriarch of Istanbul.

Other clerics, such as those discussed in Chapters Two and Three, "spent" their social capital by circulating through sites of power in order to exploit holes in Church claims to jurisdiction. This frustrated local powerbrokers, the Istanbul Patriarchate, and the imperial Ottoman government. Remaining local, Topuzian headed a monastery that

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<sup>18</sup> Tevkants is notoriously bad with to dates. Based on his signature on a letter sent to the mütevelli Kaspar Hamamjian, we know Topuzian had become abbot by 1851 at the latest. BN CP 23-1/025 (Monasteries of Lim and Gduts to Hamamjian, 21 December 1851)

<sup>19</sup> Koloz, who had studied in Jerusalem, was an ally of Sharan Bey, an *oniki* notable. Having earned his position by serving as a private tutor to notable families in Van, he opposed Topuzian's projects. In the 1870s he authored a slanderous attack on Khrimian in defense of Boghos Melikian. See Ter-Mkrtchean, pp. 144-145

was spiritually subordinate to the jurisdiction of the Van prelacy. The monastery's political and social power stemmed in no small part from its ability to exert influence over the prelate; this is why the notables' financial domination of the orders was so important. While Topuzian had the power to mitigate some of those financial pressures, he never challenged or attempted to undermine Shiroian. In the network of local power, he therefore took no steps to make himself a more prominent node. The cultural construction of Topuzian's network lends some answers.

The cultural explanations for Topuzian's decision not to activate his networks, or assume a more entrepreneurial approach, are as follows. Firstly, Shiroian had been a patron. In the culture of clergymen, a patron became a kind of "spiritual father," and enjoyed the right to expect a certain level of obedience from his "son." While Topuzian came to the priesthood late in life, and not as a child ecclesiastic, he still would have been expected to bow to his superiors. Secondly, Topuzian showed little interest in expanding his influence beyond the walls of the monastery, instead deferring to Shiroian to deal with local imperial politics. His lone tool was the threat of resignation, which he deployed on occasion.<sup>20</sup> Connecting to sites outside the Church structure would have provided him the ability to put pressure on a sitting prelate. Topuzian appears to have accepted, if not encouraged, the prerogatives of the notables. In the end, the discipline of the order appears to have led Topuzian to accept things as they were.

The centralizing state imagined that social capital functioned in a top-down model, whereby the individual spokes only interacted with the hub. While the monastery was a site of power, Topuzian's position within the elite of the Armenian Church could

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<sup>20</sup> M. MS 4180, p. 52-53

only be translated into pronounced social capital if he chose to connect that power to other sites. Theoretically Topuzian could do that, but for the reasons outlined above, he could not. To access the local networks that he would have bridged to the center, he needed an intermediary. Consequently, the hub and spoke remained disconnected while others moved about the wheel.

Others, however, did not show the same bashfulness when it came to ruffling feathers, challenging authority, or ignoring accepted cultural norms. One bishop from Van demonstrated how the wheel could spin circles around the hub.

### **Boghos, the Armenian Shaykh**

If Topuzian hesitated to mobilize his position to increase his own social capital, Boghos Melikian did not simply relish the opportunity; he openly and unabashedly delighted in it. Later in life, for example, he used a Lenten sermon to bully and intimidate people who challenged him.<sup>21</sup> When the National Assembly at Istanbul convened for the first time in 1860, its first order of business following a series of largely self-congratulatory formalities was to enter into the record a complaint against Boghos sent from Van.<sup>22</sup>

Called the “*hayanun sheykh*” (shaykh with an Armenian name), Boghos was born in the village Noravank in 1820. In the 1830s, he seems to have been conscripted into an irregular force to fight against Mehmet Ali, and was supposedly captured near Acre.<sup>23</sup> In the early 1840s, he returned to Van, and became a deacon at Lim. This means, most

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<sup>21</sup> “*Armenia*”i *Husharar, Arajin Tari* (Marseyl: Hayeren Tparan M. Portukaleani, 1890) pp. 89-93. The sermon is dated March 31, 1885.

<sup>22</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy* Session I (1860)

<sup>23</sup> FO 78/4432 No. 9 Confidential, Van (13 April 1889) A short biography of Boghos was included in a report on the Armenian community of Van. Mehmet Ali lost to the Ottomans at Acre in 1840

likely, he had some relationship with Kapriel Shiroian, the later prelate of Van discussed above. A British report notes that Boghos accompanied the head of the Lim Monastery, most probably Hagop Topuzian, to Tiflis on secular business—this point is importantly omitted by Tevkants in his long manuscript. In 1850, Boghos was made the abbot of Varak, only to be called to the Van prelacy in 1852. There he served as the *pokhanord*, or vice-prelate, under Shiroian. In the 1850s, he also became the abbot at Gduts. Following the death of Shiroian in 1857, the notables made Boghos the new prelate. Furious, people wrote to Istanbul to complain, but to no avail.<sup>24</sup> Instead, Boghos received the Fifth Order Mecidiye medal, sent by the imperial government in Istanbul.<sup>25</sup> This merely reaffirmed his position.

An 1874 document, *Ambastanutiun Vanay Poghos Vardapetin Vray* (The Accusations of [the people of] Van Against Boghos Vartabed), declares “beginning with his [Boghos’] ordination as a celibate priest... every day, without exaggeration, he has committed one crime or one scandal,” and was the “cause of the moral and material death of the [Armenian] community of Van.”<sup>26</sup> Importantly, the document also notes that it would be “impossible for Boghos to go to [Lim] Anapat or one of the [other] monasteries of Van and not interfere in National issues.”<sup>27</sup> This is because Boghos’ power, unlike that

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<sup>24</sup> M. MS 4180, p. 99-100

<sup>25</sup> BOA A. DVN. MHM 27.100 (1275 AH/1858 CE)

<sup>26</sup> *Ambastanutiun Vanay Poghos Vardapetin Vray* (K. Polis: Tpagrutin Partizpaneian ev Enk, 1874) pp. 4. While there is no author listed, I agree with the Emma Kosdandyan’s argument that the *Ambastanutiun* was written by Garegin Srvantstians. Beyond the occasional snippets of biting sarcasm, some of which subtly mocked Istanbul-based conservatives, the one mention of Topuzian is lukewarm at best, meaning Tevkants could not be the author. Moreover, Srvantstians had been deputized by Patriarch Khrimian to deal with Boghos. Srvantstians, therefore, would have been in the process of compiling all the data presented in the publication.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 5

of Topuzian, existed beyond the official view of the Church or the state. The paucity of documents produced *by* Boghos is a testament to this. Invisibility was a technique for accruing power that could not easily be stripped by a simple order from the Church. Boghos connected sites, bridged structural holes, made himself into an important node in Van, and accumulated a great amount of social capital that he used to enrich himself, protect his allies, and intimidate his enemies.

Boghos' allies forwarded numerous petitions to the Patriarchate, defending him from accusations, celebrating his knowledge of agriculture, and lauding his more pleasant attributes. Complaints against him, which increased in frequency in the 1860s and the 1870s, especially, decried his violence and immoral actions. Appealing directly to the Patriarchate of Istanbul, his own order at Gduts requested his removal as abbot, due to his extensive connections with Kurds, whom he entertained at the expense of the monastery.<sup>28</sup> What exactly did Boghos do, and how did he situate himself in order to get away with it?

Topuzian failed to activate his network to place pressure on the prelate. In this borderland of the empire, Boghos activated his networks to exert influence not only on the prelate, but also governors. He did this four ways, each interrelated: violence against his own flock, cultivating relations with the government, collaborating with Kurdish leaders, and exploiting Church jurisdiction.

### **Violence against the flock**

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<sup>28</sup> CP 23-1/014 The Brotherhood of the Gduts Monastery to the Patriarch of Istanbul (25 September 1860)

The list of crimes in the “Accusations” is long. Boghos married off a woman to a man; a problem, because she was already wed to another. After taking a large bribe, he forced a 20-year-old woman to marry a 70-year-old man. Upon hearing a rumor that a child had stolen a ring and given it to his mother, Boghos, along with his servant (described as a “barbarous Kurd”), kidnapped the child’s mother and beat her.<sup>29</sup> Another time, he forcibly entered a home and attacked a woman in Aliur, a village near Van. When her husband intervened and beat Boghos, Boghos’ posse came, beat the husband to the brink of death, and extracted a 300-kuruş bribe.<sup>30</sup>

Much of the violence noted in the “Accusations” is directed at two groups of people: priests and village heads (*reis*). One case stands out. Yeranos, the headman of the village Daghveran, married a woman while he was traveling for work. Upon returning to his village, the priest Partughimeos, an ally of Boghos, learned of the wedding. As Yeranos was subject to his spiritual jurisdiction, Boghos declared the wedding illegal and the nuptials void. He then had the newlyweds brought to the prelacy in Van, where they were imprisoned. Boghos and Partughimeos (it is implied) raped the woman over the course of several nights, and then took her to another monastery. At the end, they fined Yeranos twenty-five lira for all the “trouble” he had caused.<sup>31</sup>

Terrorizing people with some power made perfect sense. Unsurprisingly, Musa Bey (as discussed in Chapter Six) pursued a similar course of action in the 1880s. Intimidating those who had the institutional means and wherewithal to resist Boghos’ actions gave him greater freedom of action. Had they succeeded in forming and

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<sup>29</sup> *Ambastanutiun*, pp. 31

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 44

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 49-50

connecting their own networks of power, they would have been able to erect a structural social barrier to resist Boghos' activities. With the de facto leadership cowed, the communities remained in a relative shambles. This helped Boghos facilitate his relations with both the notables, who almost always protected him, and the government. In the Ottoman system, a priest was supposed to represent his flock; the notables and tax collectors could not have hoped for a better advocate. Boghos was for them the quintessential cultural intermediary, or fixer. Increasing the costs to others of bridging sites made his social capital that much more valuable.

### **Cultivating Relations with the Local Government**

Disciplining the Armenian community made Boghos indispensable to certain elements. With village headmen too scared to act, and convinced the Church would only create more problems for them should they resist, tax collectors could levy whatever they wanted.<sup>32</sup> Filling the coffers of the state and lining the pockets of bureaucrats ensured neither the coercive power nor the legal apparatus of the state would ever be turned on him. In addition to tax collection, he had other value before the government. Firstly, he could help carry out projects that were not funded. The government tasked him, on one occasion, with overseeing the construction and repair of bridges. Boghos of course forced the local Armenians to perform the work free of charge. This further endeared him to the Timurzade clan, which dominated the local government.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 54

<sup>33</sup> See above. Through probably of Kurdish origin, Hampartsum Eramian claims the Timurzade were in fact of Armenian extraction.



Boghos' influence before the government also derived from a second source: his relations with the Kurdish tribal leaders. The second half of the nineteenth witnessed an increased frequency in contact between the Kurds and the state. Being able to broker between the two was a potentially lucrative activity.

### **Collaborating With Kurdish Leaders**

According to Hagop Shahbazian in *Kiurto-Hay Patmutiun* (Kurdish-Armenian History), the Kurds in and around Van worked through the Armenian Prelacy to carry out business with the government. This ranged from handing over criminals, submitting complaints, or conducting negotiations.<sup>34</sup> Though an idyllic portrait, that some Kurdish tribes tried to negotiate with the government through the mediation of the Armenian clergy is true. The aforementioned *kirve* is an example of the social bonds that could facilitate such interactions. This, more than anything else, is something that Boghos mastered.

Following the suppression of Bedirhan Bey's revolt in 1847, and the subsequent process of delimiting the international boundary between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, nomadic Kurdish tribes increasingly crept northward. This captured the attention not only of Ottoman officials, but also the British consulates dotting Anatolia, who produced detailed descriptions of the tribes' movements and activities. The most powerfully destabilizing force in the borderlands, these tribes moved across either side of the frontier, frustrating the centralizing state, whose view they constantly eluded. Connecting

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<sup>34</sup> Hakob Shahpazean, *Kiurto-Hay Patmutiun* (K. Polis: Tparan "Araks", 1911) pp. 74

with them could be a huge boon to any social entrepreneur in this zone of quasi-sovereignty.

Boghos' connection to the Kurds of the region is important in two respects. While the number of Kurdish tribal leaders he is alleged to have ties with is numerous, the most important are his links with the Haydaranlı tribe. While other tribes, such as the Cibranlı, Modki, Celali, or Hasananlı played a large role in dictating government policies in the region, the Haydaranlı occupied large tracts of land along the border, stretching between Van, Başkale, and to the south.<sup>35</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, the Timurzades settled them in places whence they had evicted Armenians.

The leader of the Haydaranlıs near Van, Ali Ağa, called Boghos "father."<sup>36</sup> After Ali revolted against the government, he fled across the border to Iran. It was only after assurances from the government, conveyed through Boghos, that Ali accepted offers to return to the Ottoman Empire. Thereafter, in the areas controlled by Ali Ağa, a note from Boghos was required for travelers to secure safe passage.

Boghos provided legal and political cover for Kurds who plundered monasteries or stole livestock. This was the case with several different Kurdish beys, but those from Shadakh and Müküs stand out. In particular, Boghos enjoyed fraternal relations with Gül Mehmet, Avdal Bey, Devriş Bey, and others. Related to Mahmud Han, who had revolted with Bedirhan Bey in 1847, these Kurds were implicated in the murder of the Catholicos of Aghtamar, Bedros Bülbül in 1864. Thus, Boghos connected yet one more site back to his source of power.

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<sup>35</sup> FO 195/939 No. 2 Erzeroom (4 February 1869)

<sup>36</sup> *Ambastanutiun*, pp. 24

## Manipulating Church Jurisdiction

Boghos' succeeded in maximizing his place in the social ecology of Van, monastery abbot and occasional prelate, by bridging sites of social power, and allowing his influence to echo across networks. These reverberations reinforced his own position, which formed the basis of his position as a clergyman.

Connecting to Devriş Bey and others allowed Boghos to project his influence into the dioceses of Aghtamar. While not subordinate to the spiritual jurisdiction of either the Van Prelacy or even the Istanbul Patriarchate, Aghtamar was still highly integrated with Armenian Church institutions in and around Van. The monasteries of Lim and Gduts, though now part of Van, had been created by order of a Catholicos of Aghtamar. Several members of either the Gduts of Lim Orders took the boat to the main island on Lake Van to take up positions at Aghtamar.

The connections with these Kurds at the very least, therefore, allowed Boghos to connect at least three different spaces (Aghtamar, Van, the borderlands) without the mediation of Istanbul. More importantly, it provided him access to a new flock and the network formed by Bedros' successor, Khachadur.<sup>37</sup> He also had the opportunity to construct relationships with actors with whom he could later collaborate to resist the Patriarchate of Istanbul. The first, obviously, was Khachadur and his bishops.

Bedros' consecration in 1858 placed him in a weakened position. Under pressure to conduct the ceremony, it was the acting prelate at Van, Boghos Melikian, who falsely granted permission for the process to commence. When Bedros was murdered, the

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<sup>37</sup> On Khachadur, see Chapter Three. Boghos and Khachadur walked the streets of Van together. See Hampartsum Eramian, *Van-Vasporakan* (Agheksandria: Tpagr. Aram Geghamean) pp. 64

Patriarchate deputized two bishops to investigate: Ignadios Kakmajian, the prelate of Van, and Harutiun Vehabedian, the prelate of Erzurum. From the outset, available evidence indicates that Vehabedian took the lead. He returned Boghos to his position as the prelate, much to the apparent chagrin of Kakmajian, who had worked hard to confine Boghos to the islands. When Boghos was sent into internal exile to Erzurum in 1871, it was the still reigning prelate there, Vehabedian who wrote letter after letter to the Patriarchate of Istanbul requesting Boghos be allowed to return to Van (these are what precipitated, in part, the publication of the “Accusations”).

The Aghtamar issue, therefore, gave Boghos access to a more sophisticated network of clergymen, connected him to alternative sites of Church power, and reinforced his position within the clergy. Through his relations with Khachadur, he connected the notables to an even more remote borderland of the empire and the Kurdish tribes that ruled it.<sup>38</sup> He took steps that made him, whether seated at the prelate or not, a principal node in the social web of Van, but able to stretch beyond the province. This proved useful given the rapid changes that would occur over the four decades that comprised the battle between Khrimian and Boghos. Topuzian proved powerless to do anything against Boghos, despite becoming increasingly intolerant of Melikian’s activities. In one case it entailed the Lim monastery losing 30,000 kuruş.<sup>39</sup> Fear of the Kurds, who had become Boghos’ coercive force, prevented an influential clergyman without similar connections from doing anything. This was especially true after Shiroian’s death.

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Three above. The notables of Van funneled large bribes through Boghos to secure Khachadur’s exoneration.

<sup>39</sup> *Ambastanutiun*, pp. 53

For Boghos, Vehabedian, and the Catholicoi of Aghtamar, Istanbul did not dictate the terms of their relationships with one another. A variety of economic, social, and even legal connections bound them together in an integrated network, to which Istanbul remained peripheral. Their interconnectedness with one another and other local forces allowed them to link sites of power without the permission of the Porte or the Patriarchate. In this part of the Ottoman Empire, though incomplete and imperfect, the wheel turned.

Before Shiroian's death, however, Boghos had caught the attention of the Patriarchate. Following the conclusion of the Crimean War in 1856, the notables of Van, along with Shiroian, decided to build a barracks for the troops so that they would no longer have to be quartered on the population. Without consulting the population, they determined that the peasantry would cover the construction costs. As vice-prelate, Boghos personally ensured everyone paid their predetermined share. Those who failed to do so were subject to beatings and rape by the celibate man of God. Boghos had those who complained sent to a local jail.<sup>40</sup>

Still, word reached the Patriarchate and the Supreme Council, who sent two clergymen it trusted to quell the storm. One was Hagop Edesian, a somewhat established bishop from western Anatolia. The other knew Van very well. Mkrtych Khrimian, the eagle of Vaspurakan, had returned home.

### *Hayr Artsiv*

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 35-36

Returning to Van in December 1856, Khrimian was coming home from Istanbul a second time, having first done so in 1853-54 to become a celibate priest and join the order at Varak, following the deaths of his wife and daughter. He was born to an artisan family in Aygestan, a district immediately outside the city walls of Van.<sup>41</sup> He received some formal education before entering the family business as a tailor. His career only began to advance when traveled to Istanbul as a labor migrant in May 1848, where he went in hopes of finding a way to continue his education. Through networks of labor migrants, he eventually found work as a shoemaker in the capital.

For reasons that remain largely unclear, later that year he took a job as a teacher at a girls' school in Hasköy. There, his lectures on Armenia earned him the nickname “the teacher from Armenia” (*hayastantsi varzhapet*). This notoriety helped him access the upper classes of Armenian society in Istanbul. Notably, he developed close relations with the Odians, Ayvadians, and Balian. These families each held positions at both the Patriarchate and the Sublime Porte, which would prove of great use to Khrimian over the course of his career.

Khrimian's route to power, as noted earlier, was a path somewhat similar to Topuzian's. Each came from an artisan family in Van and joined the clergy later in life. Khrimian, however, achieved prominence more for his writing than his teaching. In October 1849, he published his first piece in the Mkhitarist journal *Bazmavep*. This raised his profile in Armenian intellectual circles in Istanbul, Izmir, Europe, and even Van, where Topuzian made sure to keep issues of *Bazmavep* on the shelves at Lim. Thereafter

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<sup>41</sup> Unless otherwise noted, biographical information on Khrimian is drawn from Hayk Achemean, *Hayots Hayrik* (Teheran, 1929).

in 1850, Hovhannes Amira Ayyadian funded the publication of Khrimian's first book, *Hravirak Araratean*.<sup>42</sup>

Boghos Odian, who sat on the Supreme Council, sponsored Khrimian's pilgrimage to Jerusalem later that year. In 1852, the pro-reform block of Armenian officials then appointed Khrimian as part of a mission to Cilicia to survey the condition of Armenians and their institutions under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of Sis. Khrimian was already participating in the project of state centralization.

Khrimian's ordination as a celibate priest occurred in February 1854. Why is not entirely clear. Capitalizing on his fame and the small fortune he had amassed in the capital, Khrimian appears to have been accepted by the upper classes in Van as well. He entered into a business with Mkrtich Agha Terlemezian, a notable. Shortly thereafter, Khrimian went to Aghtamar and entered the clergy. As the Catholicosate of Aghtamar was in a state of disarray, he was greeted by the acting catholicos: Kapriel Shiroian. That the acting catholicos and recent abbot of Lim ordained Khrimian a member of the Varak Order, however, opens up the question of whether or not Istanbul had ordered where Khrimian would go. Within a year, Khrimian was again in the capital.

While there, he began publication of his journal, *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (The Eagle of Vaspurakan). Initial funding for the paper came from many members of the Istanbul elite, including a donation made on behalf of the dispossessed Mkrtich Jezayirlian, who had been former Prime Minister Reşit Paşa's personal banker.<sup>43</sup> Khrimian's writings, in both the journal and *Hravirak Araratean*, indicate an exploration of a new Armenian identity

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<sup>42</sup> Mkrtich Khramean Vanetsioy, *Hravirak Araratean* (Kostandnupolis: Tparan Miuhentisean, 1850) The title page mentions Ayyadian's name prominently.

<sup>43</sup> The donation was a comparatively modest 200 kuruş. *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, No. 1 (January 1858), pp. 14

during a time that he himself worked for the creation of a center-periphery dichotomy. Each journal issue included a “*hayrenasirakan*” (fatherland-loving patriotism) section that usually dealt with an episode of history. Khrimian placed historical and cultural legitimacy in the land of Armenia, while locating political legitimacy in Istanbul. Historical agency, therefore, lied with the people in the provinces. This trope played out through the duration of Khrimian’s career, during which he attempted to extend prerogatives of the central state in the provinces, where a top-down form of social capital had little chance for connecting sites that did not conform to its imagined hierarchy.

This tension was apparent upon his return to Van in late 1857. Khrimian’s ally, Boghos Odian, had sent Bishop Edesian to Van specifically to investigate Shiroian and Boghos. Khrimian meanwhile, went directly to Surp Nshan Church in the center of the city, where he read aloud his instructions from the Patriarchate.<sup>44</sup> The notables interpreted this as a declaration of war. The battle lines were drawn, with Kapriel and Boghos on one side, and Khrimian and the people on the other. Kapriel, Boghos, and the notables could activate any number of networks to mobilize different sites of power against Khrimian. Khrimian, meanwhile, had openly challenged his spiritual father and the notables in a public forum. He had few options: manipulate local culture by the force of his own personality, and finding news ways to broker different sites through the top-down model.

Khrimian later earned the epithet “*hayrik*” (papa), to the point it replaced his surname as a primary identifier. Before that, he was the eagle (*artsiv*). In the pages of *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, he referred to himself as an eagle (and in the third person, no less).

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<sup>44</sup> M. MS 4180, p. 94 Tevkants does not inform us what those instructions actually were.



Ornithological appellations for bishops appears unique to Van: Khrimian was *Hayr Artsiv*, Topuzian a *chnchghuk* (sparrow), Garegin Srvantstians, Khrimian's primary acolyte, a *sokhak* (nightingale), and the murdered Catholicos of Aghtamar Bedros was a *bülbül* (Tr. nightingale). While possibly a reflection of Khrimian's ego, he made clear in the journal that the eagle flew between Vaspurakan (an historical Armenian name for Van) and Istanbul. Local culture provided a semiotics for Khrimian to articulate his role in the Tanzimat state.

Khrimian also enjoyed orders from Istanbul to remove the Varak monastery from the jurisdiction of Van and place it under the direct control of the Patriarchate, with him appointed the new abbot. Using the center, Khrimian again undermined and openly rebuked his spiritual father, Kapriel Shiroian. Edesian, Khrimian's colleague, tried to have Shiroian removed from his post as prelate. Even as they fought against one another, Shiroian continued to view Khrimian as a "blood son."<sup>45</sup> On his deathbed, Shiroian called those closest to him to his side: Topuzian, Tevkants, and Khrimian.<sup>46</sup>

Topuzian wanted to bury Shiroian at Lim, where he had recently served as abbot. Khrimian objected, declaring he should be laid to rest at either Varak or the Prelacy in the city center. Khrimian's true goal, of course, was to conduct the ceremony at a monastery that was not controlled by the notables, and thereby score a victory against them. Shiroian was interred at the prelacy. The smoldering differences between Khrimian and Topuzian, however, went public. Within a year, Khrimian had carried out repairs and renovations at Varak, something Topuzian could only do with permission of the mütevelli. Khrimian also created a seminary that soon eclipsed Topuzian's schools, and his first class in 1859

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 90

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 95

included students who would form the basis of the network he activated while Patriarch of Istanbul (r. 1869-1873) to implement reform throughout Anatolia, namely Karekin Srvantstians, Krikoris Aghvanean, and Arsen Tokhmakhian.<sup>47</sup>

With Varak divorced from the Van prelacy, however, Khrimian was freed from the financial control of the notables and the violence it might entail, though he claimed to have survived an assassination attempt ordered by the wealthy. He therefore enjoyed the ability to make himself a central node through the Church, underwritten by the Patriarchate. His brand of social capital was similar to that of Topuzian's, but Topuzian remained stuck in a web of local power that limited his opportunities for action. Backed by two generations of Odians (which is to say, two generations of Sublime Porte officials), Khrimian could justifiably look to the imperial center and the institution building it implied. Working with Krikor Odian, in 1859 they replaced Boghos with a respected Istanbul clergyman, Ignadios Kakmajian, as prelate of Van. This came after the notables and Boghos had actually succeeded in having Khrimian briefly recalled to Istanbul that same year.

A dearth of detail plagues our understanding of this period, though inferences may be made from context. We know little of Kakmajian. He was sent from the capital, was later ordained bishop,<sup>48</sup> and in 1869 was elected Patriarch of Istanbul, though he died before he could assume the post. Together with Khrimian, they "converted" several notable families over to the reform project, whose sons began attending Varak for their

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<sup>47</sup> Khrimian viewed Srvantstians as his closest and most trustworthy acolyte, and sent him to numerous parts of the empire to implement reform. He was instrumental in the campaign against Boghos and broke local networks of power in Bitlis. Tokhmakhian, who was eventually murdered after spending time in and out of Ottoman prisons for sedition, took over Varak after Khrimian was sent into internal exile.

<sup>48</sup> Khrimian and Srvantstians traveled with him for the ceremony.

education.<sup>49</sup> This came despite earlier attempts to have him removed, on the grounds that he was out of touch with local politics, and understood neither the local dialect of Armenian, nor, importantly, Kurdish.<sup>50</sup> These steps confirm the dynamic of Khrimian's social capital: connecting center and periphery, for him, entailed transforming social structures that had propped up Shiroian and Boghos. Gradually, some of the notables became invested in the projects of the Tanzimat. This, in turn, freed the prelate to pursue its mission as a part of the state apparatus.<sup>51</sup>

In 1862, Khrimian was selected as prelate of Mush where he sat for seven years, leaving briefly for travel to Etchmiadzin in 1868 to be elevated to the rank of bishop. Made the abbot of the St. Garabed Monastery, where Topuzian had studied, he retained the same title for Varak. At St. Garabed, he attempted to do much of the same that he had done at Van. He expanded the school, fought against usury, attempted to broker relations with the Kurds, and petitioned the government on behalf of the people. It was here that he earned the epithet *hayrik*. While he still preferred to use the third person when writing, *hayrik* replaced *artsiv* as his self-selected designation. Moving beyond Van, he was now speaking to larger audience and imagining a larger constituency.

More successful at Van than Mush, Khrimian's method for accruing social capital was the same. He found a way to carve out a site of power. At Van, it was Varak; at Mush, he solidified his position as abbot of St. Garabed by marginalizing monks hostile to him. From that site he took steps to shift local structures in his favor. This allowed him

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<sup>49</sup> By the middle of the 1860s, the Natanians, Tevkants (Der-Sarkisents), Terlemezians, and Kaljians had all come over to Khrimian's side. Members of each family would spend time in jail as political prisoners in the 1880s and 1890s.

<sup>50</sup> BN CP 23-1/009 "The Community of Van to Its Brothers in Constantinople" (12 March 1863)

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter Five

to integrate himself favorably into local networks, whereby he became an increasingly important node. Upon so doing, he then connected his site more forcefully with the center in the top-down fashion imagined by the Tanzimat statesmen. He created the periphery; that he found moral superiority in it should therefore come as no shock. By giving it historical agency, he was engaging the constituency that he imagined. While linking the provinces to the center in the top-down formulation concocted by the reformers, he ensured the construction of the center-periphery dichotomy would be a dialogical process.

### **Conclusion**

In 1869 the National Assembly elected a new Patriarch of Istanbul. After some deliberation, Krikor Odian, the son of Khrimian's patron, Boghos, and future architect of the Ottoman Constitution, excited the delegates upon announcing his preferred candidate. This Ottoman statesman, who enjoyed the complete trust of the Sublime Porte, left the hall shouting "Long Live Odian! Long Live Khrimian!"

As Patriarch of Istanbul, and the recognized head of the Armenians of Turkey, Khrimian enjoyed a privileged position within the Ottoman state, whence he could more actively pursue policies of reform. Having by this time extended his network to include middle- and upper-class families in Van, Mush, Erzurum, and elsewhere, he had made himself a significant node in the constellation of Ottoman and Armenian social networks, and had constructed a base on which to build. His acolytes and allies assumed control of local councils all over the empire; they circulated throughout Anatolia, armed with orders from the Patriarchate and the Porte to "implement the Constitution." Khrimian connected

them all. However, he used his social capital to invest in the building of institutions and the expansion of the Tanzimat state along center-periphery lines; this was the project of Ottomanism, with provincial Armenians its most ardent advocates.

Yet even Khrimian's institutions, as we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, could not overcome the integrated wheel that was the provinces. The theoretical marshaling of the millet was not the practical deployment of the entire Ottoman state. Nor did Ottomanism completely transform the culture of all networks, as it had been doing in the Armenian case. Thus, even while under siege by Khrimian's imposing of the millet system, Boghos staged a rebellion.

Understanding the functioning of provincial society necessitates decentering, or provincializing, Istanbul and understanding the provinces as something other than the center's periphery. Moving past the dichotomy, which reinscribes the privilege of Istanbul's agency in even a bottom-up reading of Ottoman society, allows the historian to see a more comprehensive picture. This in turn makes more visible how power was constituted, what networks connected which sites, and who succeeded in bridging structural holes and how they did it. Measuring social capital to understand mechanisms for ruling and managing difference can only work if we allow a diversity of actors to speak.

## **Chapter Five**

### **From Patriarch to Exiled Subversive: The Limits of Ottomanism as Praxis, 1869-1885**

Writers assert that Bishop Mkrtych Khrimian catapulted to the position of Patriarch of Constantinople on the wave of a unanimous vote by the Armenians National Assembly in the imperial capital. He sprinted to Istanbul, ascended the patriarchal throne, where he was charged with implementing reform for the benefit of the Armenians living in the far-flung provinces of eastern Anatolia. Beneficiary of such a mandate, he could only be foiled by the treachery of the well-to-do in Istanbul who benefited from the social and political distance separating imperial bankers and provincial peasants.

The evidence suggests otherwise. By the time Khrimian became Patriarch in 1869, the Armenian Men of Tanzimat had instrumentalized the capital they had accrued at the Sublime Porte to transform the Patriarchate into an institution that they governed. Following the resignation of Patriarch Boghos Taktakian, the Tanzimat reformers swiftly voted Ignadios Kakmajian, an Istanbul native serving as Prelate of Van, to the position of Patriarch. In his position at Van, Kakmajian had supported Khrimian's early efforts at provincial reform. Kakmajian never claimed his throne, however, as he passed away shortly after the election.

At the 4 September 1869 session of the National Assembly, the Tanzimat reformers inquired about their second choice. Nerses Varjabedian, a native of Istanbul from a family of guildsmen, had come of age in the political culture of Istanbul. Having

trained at the Armash Monastery near Bursa, he was versed also in the conservative tendencies of the clerical establishment. During the center's attempts at exerting its control over Jerusalem, Sis, and Aghtamar, Varjabedian provided nuanced arguments in favor of the reformers, helping to silence traditionalists' opposition. As a bishop ordained by the Catholicos of Sis, however, he was ineligible for the patriarchal seat; that privilege was reserved for bishops of the Etchmiadzin order.

Finally, at the urging of Krikor Odian, an Ottoman statesman with extensive ties to the Porte, the National Assembly considered Khrimian. Having been ordained a bishop by the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin in the year prior, his candidacy did not threaten church law. Odian rallied the representatives seated in the hall, who then erupted in chants of "Long Live Odian! Long Live Khrimian!" Collecting 42 of the 48 ballots cast, Mkrtich Khrimian, the reformers' third choice, was finally elected Patriarch.

Khrimian received news of his election in Mush, where he was serving as both prelate and the abbot of the ancient Monastery of St. Garabed (called Çanlıkilise in Turkish), supposedly established by the founder of the Church of Armenia, Gregory the Illuminator, in the fourth century.<sup>1</sup> It was during his time in Mush that Khrimian earned the epithet *hayrik*, or papa. Leaving the monastery on 3 November, Khrimian was provided a horse and an imperial escort. Leaving Mush for Erzurum, villagers feted him with cries of "long live *hayrik*!" Many brought him bread and salt; those of some means performed the traditional *matagh*, slaughtering a lamb to procure God's favor for the bishop they adored.

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<sup>1</sup> The details of Khrimian's journey to Istanbul are taken from Hayk Achemean, *Hayots Hayrik* (Teheran, 1929) pp. 384-393

A welcoming party comprised of the governor İsmail Paşa, lower-level officials, and Armenian clergy, awaited Khrimian at the outskirts of Erzurum. In the city, a local merchant named Khachadur Pasdrmajian, whose son Karekin would win notoriety for storming the Ottoman Bank in 1896 and then being elected to the Ottoman Parliament in 1908, threw a lavish banquet in Khrimian's honor. Notables, government officials, and merchants of all confessions attended.

Khrimian and his imperial escort continued on their way to Bayburt, where again both Armenians and government officials convened a banquet for him. The same scene played out in Gümüşhane. Finally they arrived in the coastal city of Trabzon. Noteworthy locals welcomed the bishop. He conducted services at the city's main Armenian church, and then went to a dinner organized by a Greek merchant. Thereafter he boarded a steamer dispatched from the capital by Sultan Abdülaziz himself. The local Armenian community serenaded him with cries of "*ketstse hayrik!*" The Greek and Turkish onlookers, probably impressed by the symbols of imperial power, shouted "*zito Khrimian*" and "*yaşasın patrik efendi,*" respectively. The newly elected Patriarch then set off for the place he was fond of calling Byzantium.

On 6 September 1869 the steamer pulled into the Kumkapı district of Istanbul. Sultan Abdülaziz provided a small boat to the Armenian clergy, so they could greet the newly arrived Patriarch on the water, and then help direct the ship to shore. Khrimian was greeted by throngs of Armenians, mostly labor migrants from the eastern provinces, many of who were employed as porters either on the docks or the nearby Grand Bazaar, located near the second hill and within manageable walking distance from the shore. Khrimian disembarked, and later that day held an audience with his old friend and ally,



the aforementioned Krikor Odian. Then on September 7<sup>th</sup>, the Patriarch was given an audience with the Sultan.

Five days later Khrimian made his first appearance before the Armenian National Assembly. Used to negotiating personalities and bartering or charming his way to realizing his goals, Khrimian quickly learned how a representative body could transform what was, for him, a very simple issue, into an hours-long debate. Obligated to take an oath to uphold the Constitution, Khrimian asked that those serving with him also pledge themselves. His oath alone, Khrimian reasoned, would not guarantee the survival of the Constitution; obligating the constituent bodies of the National Assembly, however, could.<sup>2</sup>

Before pitching his request, Khrimian expressed his willingness to do as the National Assembly pleased. Following a long discussion on Khrimian's largely symbolic proposal, even those inclined to the idea had to concede that the absence of any requirement compelling representatives to make a similar oath meant the request would remain unfulfilled. Acceding to the Assembly's demands, Khrimian then marched to the main church at the patriarchate, Surp Astvatsatsin. While the Patriarch was preparing to swear before God, a conservative deputy, Garabed Efendi Panosian, interrupted, demanding Khrimian promise to uphold each and every article of the Constitution. The crowd that had assembled inside the church for the ceremony, consisting of many labor migrants, chided Panosian for daring to speak over the Patriarch. Khrimian's rule was off to an inauspicious start.

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<sup>2</sup> *Atenagrutiunk Azgayin Zhoghovoy* 1860-1870 (Session 32, 12 November 1869), pp. 413

Khrimian took his oath. Before God, he swore his loyalty to the laws and traditions of the Church of Armenia, the *spirit* and principles of the Constitution (as opposed to the precise wording of a living document in the process of being rewritten by the government), and the benevolent Ottoman government, “whose interests are the same as the interests of our nation.”<sup>3</sup> Concluding his oath, Khrimian turned to those assembled. Seeking Panosian in particular, he asked whether or not his words were satisfactory. No reply was forthcoming. Instead, the crowd applauded and began shouting, “long live Khrimian!”

Spirit and principle were two traits for which Khrimian was hardly lacking. Panosian’s challenge would, though, prove a harbinger of things to come. Unnecessary attention to detail and bureaucratic processes racked the imperfect Constitution and its immature governing bodies. Khrimian, the would-be visionary who cultivated his political acumen under occasional threats of death in a part of the empire where formal Ottoman power was sometimes a fairytale, hardly thrived in Istanbul. Exasperated, he resigned from the patriarchate at the 3 August 1873 session of the National Assembly.

Painting himself a country bumpkin was one of Khrimian’s favorite rhetorical devices. His patriarchate saddled with issues specific to administering the community of Istanbul, Khrimian tried emphasizing his provincial roots to refocus discussion on the peasantry of Anatolia. He implored the assembled delegates to return him to the fields of Van and Mush, where he could again enjoy a bit of *tanapur*.<sup>4</sup> In his resignation speech,

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<sup>3</sup> Achemean, 395. The text of the speech is reproduced in Achemean, while the *Atenagrutiunk* only states that “His Grace the Patriarch” took an oath.

<sup>4</sup> *Tan* or *ayran* in Turkish and Arabic, a yoghurt drink popular in the Middle East, is the main ingredient in *tanapur*. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the drink marked someone as a provincial Anatolian.

Khrimian elucidated his many reasons for stepping down. His patriarchate had been besieged by a number of issues, including the succession struggles in Aghtamar and Sis, and the ensuing catholicosal bull that called into question Khrimian's legitimacy. He noted other prominent problems he had encountered, including the expansion of formal relations with the Porte, millet taxes, spreading education, restructuring Church organization in the Ottoman Empire, and better defining prelates' official responsibilities.

After stepping down, Khrimian stayed in Istanbul, where he continued to serve on millet councils. He remained a relatively silent figure over the following five years as his successor Nerses Varjabedian, whom Etchmiadzin had since recognized as a bishop, dispatched the former patriarch and another bishop to Berlin in 1878 to negotiate on behalf of the Ottoman Armenian community at the second round of peace talks that followed the Russo-Turkish War.

For European diplomats, this launched the "Armenian Question." Taken at face value by many historians as a watershed in Armenian history, the Treaty of Berlin hardly factored into the daily lives of provincial Ottoman Armenians. Returning from Berlin with empty hands, Khrimian began delivering his famous, for some infamous, "Iron Ladle" sermon. In it, he described how the Europeans set out a dish. The Bulgarians and Serbs each took their portion. Having only a ladle made of promises put on paper, the Armenians were unable to enjoy the meal; what they needed were the iron ladles the Balkan Christians possessed. The message was painfully obvious: Armenians would have to defend themselves with arms if they ever hoped to better their situation. Khrimian only attracted more unwanted attention. Under constant surveillance, he was sent into internal

exile in 1885, confined to the St. James Monastery in Jerusalem. So ended his political career in his homeland.

### **Nationalism?**

Khrimian's story seems to confirm what many Ottomanists have regarded as a near article of faith for several decades: the Russo-Turkish War was a rupture that propagated nationalism throughout the Ottomans' domains. Built on the back of the Tanzimat reforms, which prepared the non-Muslim communities for nationhood, the war was the event that fractured the multi-ethnic imperial mosaic of peoples, revealing defined ethnies on the precipice of nationhood. For Razmik Panossian, focusing on the Armenian case and Khrimian, in particular, this was one moment in a "multi-local awakening." Through Khrimian, Anatolian Armenians now became the "ground point" of a wider nationalist project buttressed by intellectuals in the west, Istanbul, or the east, in Tiflis.<sup>5</sup> Only by ripping Armenians from their Ottoman context and placing them in a positivist narrative of national progress and modernization can one form such a conclusion.

The historian's search for nationalism and nationalist organizing in the Ottoman Empire is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Antecedents for the explosion of nationalist sentiment are quickly identified. Economics is a usual culprit. The ability of Christians and Jews to outpace the commercial output of their Muslim countrymen helps to explain growing Muslim resentment towards non-Muslims in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which exacerbated social cleavages and reinforced cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) pp. 166-175

boundaries. In fact, “given the vagaries of commerce,” non-Muslims “chose to *revert* to a community based on ethnic and religious ties,” which helped to bind them to emergent national discourses.<sup>6</sup> “Reverting” assumes a preexisting timeless, bounded identity that historical actors could assert at any moment. Identities, however, are socially constructed and historically contingent. The Tanzimat sought, of course, to reorder the social structures within which these contingent identities were produced. For the nineteenth century, reverting could not take place where there was construction. Moreover, historians of the early modern period have demonstrated that such ties were formed to guarantee trust relations while conducting long-distance trade. In fact, many of these relationships forged around markers of identity more narrow than ethnicity. Little here was national in any modern sense of the word.

Reading empire as a series of differentiated networks only provides a theoretically more rigorous reproduction of the search for nationalism. Here, structural cleavages within the empire compelled non-Muslims to develop their own national identities and forge “closure around their communal ties.”<sup>7</sup> As the Ottoman Empire revisited its governing strategies of toleration and managing difference, the non-Muslims’ turn inward was a strategy for navigating the newly rearranged webs of social and economic relations that marked imperial society.

In this view, therefore, it was oppression and discrimination that produced national identities. As we have seen, a character such as Khrimian is practically customized for such a narrative. This approach, however, would misread Khrimian and

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 279. Emphasis mine.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 289

mischaracterize the function of social and political networks in the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat era. Brokerage and closure rarely coalesced or forged overnight. They, like any social identity or process, were the result of hard work by social entrepreneurs.

Brokerage, the act of connecting social sites through vertical or horizontal connections, was predicated on sets of formal and informal practices. These connections, in turn, are reproduced through social actions, constrained or supported by local semiotics. This is where the diversity of imperial society existed. The Tanzimat, specifically its ordering of the millet system as a tool of centralization, redrew the official lines that connected social groups. In cases where it could not implement the gridded system the centralizing policies called for, the state provided select local actors tools to constrain networks that existed outside official purview. Disciplining provincial society and government was no easy task.

Building the millet system was building the Tanzimat, a point not lost on any pro-reform Armenians. Armenians frequently linked the two concepts, as I will show below. The broader project of imperial reform linked the Sublime Porte with Armenians of all social backgrounds, whether in the center or the periphery. For all involved, the projection of Istanbul's control and legitimacy was paramount. Khrimian, therefore, was no ground point in any "multi-local awakening." Rather, as a champion of state centralization, he represented a strong articulation of Ottomanism. Khrimian pursued brokerage in a manner palatable to the state, where Istanbul would always be the dominant node. Why else would Krikor Odian, a high-ranking official at the Sublime

Porte and later author of Mithat's constitution, essentially place Khrimian on the throne in 1869?

It in this context we must read the final sixteen years of Khrimian's public life in the Ottoman Empire. Khrimian, in his various positions, dedicated his political career to projecting the central state's power into the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Forcing formal institutions fully subordinate to Istanbul into those regions, however, brought him into conflict with local networks of power that sought to preserve their privileged position vis-à-vis provincial communities. Khrimian's brand of top-down reform, therefore, necessitated a vertical restructuring of power that would connect, theoretically, a peasant with a bureaucrat from the central state. His project thus confronted horizontally- and vertically-integrated local networks, which presented a structurally resilient barrier to top-down reform. These local networks, within which Armenian clergymen were included, bridged actors and sites of power. Thus, carrying out reform specific to the Armenian Church's administration necessitated untangling and unmixing these networks and making all Church institutions and actors legible to the Istanbul Patriarchate.

In the course of implementing such reform, Khrimian's primary adversary was his old nemesis from Van, the clergyman Boghos Melikian. We must read their contest, and its consequences, as part of larger battle over the Tanzimat in the Ottoman Empire. Doing so will, in turn, provide a new view on the contours of Ottomanism as praxis, its limits, and its durability as a set of socially and culturally produced practices.

## **The Report**

For the Tanzimat officials in the Armenian Patriarchate, part of the appeal of Khrimian was his provincial background. Having initiated some educational reform and helped to construct a handful of schools in Van and Mush, Khrimian enjoyed some cachet. The officials hoped that the bishop would instrumentalize his networks and connections to implement fully the Armenian National Constitution in the eastern provinces.<sup>8</sup> Khrimian, in turn, tried in earnest to bring those same provinces to the center of discussions on reform in the National Assembly.

Throughout the nineteenth century the Patriarchate received petitions and reports from the provinces, requesting intervention with Ottoman imperial authorities. Following the establishment of the Armenian National Constitution and the creation of auxiliary councils under the Patriarch, these requests became the responsibility of the Political Council. While the Political Council enjoyed a great deal of autonomy within the administration of the millet, Khrimian sought to transform the political structures of the millet from being simply a program of reform, to a voice of it.

At Khrimian's behest, the Political Council began preparing a "Report on Provincial Oppression" (*Teghekgir Gavaran Harstharuteants*). Sending an encyclical to all provincial prelates, Khrimian and the political council requested that they submit a detailed report, without exaggerations, listing all recorded episodes of violence or exploitation suffered by their flock. Moreover, they also asked that the prelates express their opinions on how to address the problems.<sup>9</sup> The report was then brought before the National Assembly, first appearing on its agenda in December 1871. Versions of the

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<sup>8</sup> On the Armenian National Constitution, see Chapter One.

<sup>9</sup> *Teghekgir Gavaran Harstharuteants* (K. Polis, 1876) pp. 1 Hereafter, *Teghekgir*



report appeared in the Assembly's minutes. An initial edition was then sent to the Prime Minister, Mahmud Nedim Paşa, on 11 April 1872.

The final document presented to the Prime Minister comprised two parts. The second, totaling 36 of the report's 43 pages, lists descriptions of reports forwarded to the Porte by the Patriarchate, the date of submission, and any response the Patriarchate had received. The list, published in 1876, extends beyond the original compiled in 1872. The introduction, authored by Khrimian, remained in its original form as written in 1872. It reflected both Khrimian's own views, as well as discussions within the National Assembly regarding the wording of the report.

The debate in the National Assembly covered multiple issues. Before being eclipsed by more immediate concerns with the Cilician Catholicosate, the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> sessions of the National Assembly in October 1871 addressed the "cures" originally proposed by the authors of the report, based on the prelates' suggestions. The recommendation that the millet propose that the Porte conscript Armenian soldiers in place of paying the *bedel-i askeri*, which had replaced the *cizye* tax on non-Muslims, formed the most contentious point of disagreement.

The concept of Armenian soldiers was to resolve two problems. Firstly, Armenians were to be relieved of a major tax burden. Taxation, discussed below, constituted a central point of dissatisfaction among Anatolian Armenians. Secondly, conscription would help to realize the principle of equality promised by the Tanzimat. Armenian soldiers' willingness to shed blood for the homeland would put them on par with their Muslim compatriots. Or, at the very least, in the words of one representative, it would be more honorable than falling victim to a Kurd. Perhaps more importantly, the

presence of Armenians with military training in eastern Anatolia would aid in restructuring provincial society by changing the culture of inter-ethnic interactions. Kurdish looters and unscrupulous tax collectors, who constituted the principle source of Armenian complaints, would think twice about stealing from a peasant who knew how to handle a knife or gun.

Eventually the suggestion was tabled. Opposition to conscription came not on traditionalist grounds, but rather economic. Conscription, it was argued, disrupted Muslim agricultural production. Exchanging the *bedel-i askeri* for conscription might bring similar economic stagnation to the Armenian millet. Possibly fearing an exacerbation of the already growing numbers of labor migrants, the proposal failed to make it into the introduction.

Much has been written on Khrimian's role in reimagining Armenian identity in the nineteenth century, sometimes as a cornerstone of nascent Armenian nationalism. *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, the newspaper he started in 1855, posited an Armenia rooted in history, thereby making it a locus of identity in the present. Social relations, however, produce social identities. It is in the introduction to the report where Khrimian articulates clearly his plan to change provincial society and thereby transform the concomitant social structures that ordered those relations, not as a nationalist, but as someone firmly grounded in Ottoman political culture. Khrimian did not simply outline solutions for saving the Armenian community; he prescribed a cure for the whole of the Ottoman Empire.

In the introduction, Khrimian touched on several points. He invoked the principle of equality multiple times and the *Islahat Fermanı* of 1856, in particular. Taxation and tax

collectors, he argued, were the main sources of disorder (*ankargutiunk*, possibly a play on Tanzimat, or “reordering”). Unofficial taxes were a problem, but Khrimian singled out three new tax categories created by the Tanzimat: *bedel-i askeri* (military exemption), *emlak* (property tax), and *temettü* (income tax). Khrimian and the Armenians had no problems with these taxes, per se, but rather the role they served in places “far away from the capital.”<sup>10</sup>

The *iltizam* system of tax farming, and the *mültezims* (tax collectors) themselves, perpetuated the systems of control that Istanbul had hoped to eliminate. Here local notables, who had succeeded in entering formal government offices, dispatched either their sons or servants to collect taxes. Taxes were collected aggressively and excessively. With political power already providing cover, they were free to impose on the villagers. In winter, according to the reports Khrimian was summarizing, they would quarter themselves on a village, demand exceptional care for their horses, beat people, and sometimes even “dishonor the women.”<sup>11</sup>

Insulated from the possibility of prosecution, the notable families then used their coercion to dissuade villagers from filing complaints with imperial authorities. The persistent inadmissibility of non-Muslim testimony in the courts, contrary to the law, only exacerbated the problem. Through these actions, the notables made the *tefrik meclis* one of their prerogatives, rather than a servant of the people.<sup>12</sup>

Khrimian implored the Porte to engage the constituencies imagined by the Tanzimat directly, requesting that orders sent by the center to local governors be

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<sup>10</sup> Teghekagir, 1

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 2-3

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 4

published in official government periodicals. The people would then know when the actions of a government official violated either the law of the land or the will of the Sultan. Perhaps most importantly, Khrimian expressed the need that the *Düstur*, the Ottoman book of laws, be translated into all languages of the empire. This was of paramount importance for the Armenians of the eastern provinces, who largely knew only dialects of Armenian. Access to the law would help to realize the principle of equality, while also combatting the corruption that plagued local officials.<sup>13</sup>

To conclude the introduction, Khrimian returned to the question of the Kurds and other Muslim mountaineers. Just as he had described government officials as being in violation of the Sultan's will, he similarly painted the nomads as disloyal to the government. Beyond occasional acts of rebellion and ruining the economy of loyal subjects, such as the Armenians, they also provided the government neither troops nor taxes. They were, therefore, harmful to the state.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, Khrimian called on the government to disarm the Kurds. He was challenging the Porte to realize the Weberian ideal of monopolizing the legitimate use of violence, and expand the direct control of the central state into the provinces. To this end, Khrimian requested that the government not only increase the number of police in the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 5

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 6. Khrimian blames, in addition to the Kurds and other mountaineers, *derebeys*. Given that the Patriarchate had just helped to crush the Ajapahian dynasty of Cilicia, who had been close allies of the Kozanoğlu family of derebeys that the Porte had recently exiled to central Anatolia, Khrimian was probably hoping the central government would again partner with the Patriarchate to reorganize the administration of the eastern provinces.

region in order to heighten the visibility of the state, but that they also recruit Armenians to the force “as both high and low ranking officials.”<sup>15</sup>

Khrimian’s goal with the report was to use the knowledge he could access in the provinces to transform policy decisions made in the imperial center. Yet, Armenians, in his vision, were to serve on the front lines of Istanbul’s centralizing efforts. There was, therefore, no tension between center and periphery in Khrimian’s imagination, and he was certainly no “middle point.” He and the provincial Armenians he claimed to speak for represented the central state. Constructing that relationship as part of a political and cultural project was his challenge. While Istanbul penned reforms that would ultimately help the people of the provinces, ostensibly based on the recommendations made by Khrimian and those like him, Armenian eyes were to look to Istanbul. The center’s plans could only realize fruition if the Armenians themselves implemented their own reform schemes. To pursue that project, Khrimian turned to his own network of friends, associates, and students.

### **Making Agents, Forging Networks, Spreading the Tanzimat**

The report was not a terminal endeavor; as noted, the Patriarchate added incidents to it until at least 1876. Nerses Varjabedian succeeded Khrimian as Patriarch in 1874. His political program and dedication to the reform program mirrored Khrimian’s. While not the visionary that Khrimian was, Varjabedian knew how to follow rules of decorum, both in the imperial capital and in the Armenian Church.<sup>16</sup> During the period 1869-1885, their

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>16</sup> While Khrimian earned the ire of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, Varjabedian won bulls of support.

two patriarchates attempted the occasionally forceful centralization of the state through the implementation of the Armenian National Constitution in the provinces.

Implementing a formal order of things in an imperial setting, however, required reliance on semi-formal and informal relationships.

Varjabedian came to rely heavily on two priests. Hovhannes Mgrian, a married priest from Istanbul, ran the day-to-day affairs of the Patriarchate whenever Varjabedian became ill. His other close associate was a celibate priest named Matteos Izmirlian. Izmirlian, despite his surname, hailed from the imperial capital. Like Varjabedian and Khrimian, he came from a family of craftsmen. Sent by Varjabedian to dioceses that resisted following the Constitution, Izmirlian also became a Patriarch of Constantinople. Following Khrimian's footsteps, his brand of populism earned him internal exile in Jerusalem; it also later propelled him to the highest church office, Catholicos of Etchmiadzin.

Khrimian likewise relied on Mgrian and Izmirlian. For politically reorganizing the eastern provinces, Khrimian turned primarily to the connections he had worked hard to foster in his native Van. During time as Patriarch he had retained the position of abbot at both the St. Garabed Monastery near Mush and the Monastery of Varak just outside of Van. After stepping down, the Patriarchate removed him from his position at St. Garabed.<sup>17</sup> He continued to oversee Varak from afar and, by installing his allies to key posts, ensured the victories for reform he had won in the 1850s and 1860s would not be

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<sup>17</sup> Matenadaran Izmirlyani Fond 10/83, 10/82 5-12 June 1874, in *Vaveragr Hay Ekeghetsu Patmutedan*, pp. 86-93

reversed.<sup>18</sup> These victories had been won in early contest over centralization; Khrimian turned to the network he had constructed around Varak to implement reform.

Khrimian's first class of students in 1859 was almost exclusively from Van, many of them from families of craftsmen that lived in the Aygestan (Gardens) district, just north of the city walls.<sup>19</sup> Upon joining the school, Khrimian sometimes assigned them new first names. The prospect of entering the clergy necessitated the adoption of a new identity. Students learned a variety of topics, including language, history, and theology. They also learned politics.

Of Khrimian's first class, three students would go on to play prominent roles in provincial reform. Arsen Tokhmakhian, who entered the school at age 16, went on to publish important articles on village life, raise funds for charitable work, and hold the position of abbot in Khrimian's absence later in life. For his work, the Ottoman authorities later arrested him. Subjecting him to torture inside the jail, they reportedly crucified him against a wall. Later, he was murdered, his killer dismembering and incinerating the body. Karekin Srvantstians joined the school at the age of 20. He and Hagop Aghvastian, whose name Khrimian changed to Krikoris, played instrumental roles in implementing reform at the local level. Finally, as discussed in Chapter Four, Khrimian and Kakmajian had swayed some of the notable families of Van to the project of reform. Sons of two families, Eremia Tevkants and Boghos Natanian, would help Khrimian and Varjabedian pursue implementation of the Armenian National Constitution and centralization of the millet.

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Four

<sup>19</sup> Achemean, pp. 263. See also, Tigran Chituni, *Varagay Hobelean: Hishatakaran u Koch Varagay Krtakan Hastatutean Hisnameay Hobeleani (1857-1907)* (K. Polis: Osmaneay Gortsaktsakan Enkerutean, 1910) pp. 13

The Constitution required the election of prelates by the Armenian population of a prelate. As Khrimian noted in the Report on Provincial Oppression, however, elections were rarely conducted properly, becoming instead institutions that reproduced (and even codified) the position of local powerbrokers. In order to ensure that the new institutions of millet control and organization functioned properly, Khrimian and Varjabedian assigned those priests they trusted to the position of *patriarkakan pokhanord*, or patriarchal vicar.<sup>20</sup>

Patriarchal vicars served largely in one capacity. While in some cases they toured Anatolia with wide ranging power, normally they served as temporary prelates. Armed with a bull or encyclical from the Patriarchate and a *ferman* from the Sublime Porte, temporary prelates were given executive authority to implement the Constitution in places where local powerbrokers held excessive sway over the local clergy. Predictably, Khrimian used this procedure to target prelaties resistant to reform.

When called to the Patriarchate, Khrimian left his position as abbot of St. Garabed and prelate of Mush, and installed Krikoris Aghvastian as his replacement. As one of Khrimian's students, Aghvastian's commitment to the clergyman who had initiated him into the Church was socially and culturally reinforced. Aghvastian's appointment ensured that the wealth of St. Garabed, derived from Armenian and Kurdish pilgrims, would be reinvested in the monastery and not laundered by the local notables, as had been the case in the past. Perhaps more importantly, Mush's proximity to Erzurum provided Khrimian more direct access to his friends, as well as the ability to ore closely monitor his enemies.

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<sup>20</sup> It is for this reason some prelates are identified, sometimes incorrectly, as *patrik vekil* (patriarchal deputy) in Ottoman official documents. The proper term for a regular prelate is *murahhas* or, in some cases, *millet başı*.



The Patriarchate had taken steps to remove the prelate of Erzurum, Harutiun Vehabedian in the preceding years; unsurprisingly, complaints against him decreased during Khrimian's reign.

Khrimian entrusted the job of projecting his power in what he considered the most important battlegrounds to Karekin Srvantstians. Khrimian brought both Aghvanian and Srvantstians with him to Mush from Varak. There, Srvantstians assumed control of the newspaper they established, *Artsvik Taronoy*. By 1868 he was traveling throughout the plain of Mush, recording episodes of inappropriate behavior or inaction by Armenian priests who were working in league with local powerbrokers.

His work in Mush took him frequently to Erzurum, where he helped keep Vehabedian in check. He also reinforced Khrimian's presence in Erzurum and Mush, even when his teacher was in Istanbul. While they were trying to remove Vehabedian, the Ballarians, an important local family, remained in contact with Khrimian through Srvantstians.<sup>21</sup> Another Erzurum-based lay reformer, Krikor Artsnian, likewise used his correspondence with Srvantstians to provide Khrimian detailed information on the relationships between local Kurds and Armenian priests.<sup>22</sup> Khachadur Khan Der Nersisian Efendi, a wealthy merchant who represented Erzurum at the Armenian National Assembly, and whose two sons later served the Ottoman government as *muavins* (vice-governor), "kissed [Khrimian's] right hand" through Srvantstians.

Given the insecurity many felt corresponding through the mail, where letters were sometimes opened if they did not disappear entirely, or via telegraph, which was

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<sup>21</sup> Mkrtich Ballarian to Karekin Srvantstians (15 March 1868) in Giud Aghanean, *Divan Hayots Patmutean* (Tiflis, 1915) #27. Hereafter *DHP*.

<sup>22</sup> Krikor Artsnian to Karekin Srvantstians (1 July 1868) in *DHP* #28

completed through government-operated houses, Srvantsiants' physical proximity created a sense of trust for those involved. Sending letters through trusted friends or conveying information and greetings in person afforded people such as the Ballarians confidence their correspondence would remain confidential. Moreover, Srvantsiants' presence meant he could himself verify the veracity of statements expressed by those claiming Khrimian's friendship. Khrimian, therefore, received information he could trust, knowing exactly, for example, which Armenian priests were working with which members of the Kurdish Cibranlı tribe to close a school on the plain of Mush. For someone trying to order society along officially delineated lines, such information was pivotal for knowing how to disrupt nodes of power in provincial society. Most importantly, this knowledge provided Khrimian a tool for ensuring that official state bodies created by the reform program did not reproduce or codify the prerogatives of local powerbrokers. When preparing *takrirs* for the Sublime Porte, he felt he was providing the imperial government those same tools.

### **The Eagle and the Nightingale, *Hayrik* and *Sanik***

Throughout his decades-long career of provincial service and subsequent travel throughout the empire, Karekin Srvantstians became a prolific writer and ethnographer. He was the first to record the *Sasuntsi Davit* epic, and published extensively. In his capacity as an official in the Armenian Church, he wrote most frequently to Khrimian. Occasionally, during Khrimian's four-year reign as patriarch, he addressed the National Assembly and His Holiness the Patriarch; the overwhelming majority of his letters were written to *hayrik*.

If Tevkants could draw the conclusion that Kapriel Shiroian loved Khrimian as his own son, the same applied to Khrimian and his godson (*san*), Srvantstiants. Both Khrimian and Srvantstiants had roots in artisan families from the Aygestan district of Van. This shared social background affixed more meaning and complexity to the usual rules dictating a relationship between a clergyman and his spiritual father. Perhaps Khrimian saw in Srvantstiants, whom he gave the nickname nightingale (*sokhak*), a substitute child, filling the void left by his own deceased daughter. Regardless the reason, the letters Srvantstiants wrote to Khrimian reveal a predictably patriarchal relationship, but one far more intimate than those Khrimian had with others. Consonant with normal rules of letter writing among Ottoman Armenians in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Srvantstiants always uses the formal forms of address, such as the second person plural form, when addressing Khrimian. Thereafter, usually following the completion of the first paragraph, he transitions quickly to the second person singular. This switch is indicative of a familial relationship, noticeably absent in other letters between priests—even those who had formed homosocial “families” within the context of the culture of monasteries.

The closeness of the two clergymen and the trust pervading between them allowed for a frankness of exchange that circumvented the decorum for official correspondence, even though they were in fact pursuing official millet policy. While Khrimian trusted his other comrades from Van, such as Boghos Natanian and Eremia Tevkants, he dispatched Srvantstiants to Van to deal with Boghos Melikian.

### **Warring With Boghos**

As described in Chapter Four, Boghos Melikian was a priest and social entrepreneur who weaved through a complex web of social relations to position himself as a nodal figure in the social ecology of Van and the surrounding areas. His ability to navigate and exploit Armenian Church culture and politics, control segments of the Armenian peasantry, and broker both between rival Kurdish factions and between those factions and the government earned him social capital that made him a powerful actor in Van politics. When able to connect to other sites of official power, generally through unofficial means, he succeeded in spreading his influence beyond the areas immediately surrounding Van and was, for example, able to intimidate merchants as far away as Erzurum. Through his manipulation of these networks, he won the friendship and patronage of many of the Armenian notables of Van, whose social and political prerogatives he defended. Through them, he enjoyed links to moneyed bankers in the capital, who then had influence before the Palace.

The Patriarchate's early attempts at reform, spearheaded by Khrimian and Ignadios Kakmajian, began the process of transforming millet institutions into sites of formal and popular politics. During the 1860s, therefore, Van witnesses the formation of two opposing groups, referred to as "parties" (*kusaktsutiun*): the pro-Boghos faction (*Poghoseank*) and the anti-Boghos (*Apoghoseank*). The anti-Boghos party was also sometimes called the *Khrimeanakanner*, or pro-Khrimian partisans. Through Khrimian's allies, the Odians, the anti-Boghos faction had tried to use the new Constitutional order to remove Boghos in the 1860s. A complaint against Boghos was in fact one of the first issues discussed by the new National Assembly in 1860. The anti-Boghos faction also secured Boghos' temporary banishment later in the decade. Khrimian's ascent to

Patriarch in 1869 entailed, as discussed above, a greater focus by the capital on the provinces. As his reign as Patriarchate of Istanbul began the process of implementing the Constitution and reorienting the locus of legitimacy from local networks to the imperial capital and official sites of power, a showdown with Boghos was a distinct possibility. It was into the middle of this conflict Khrimian sent Srvantstians to implement the Constitution.

The first of Srvantstians' letters to Khrimian from Van in the context of this mission, and available to us, is dated 28 December 1871.<sup>23</sup> In it, he mentions that the monastery at Varak, a symbol of Khrimian's power, was being targeted unfairly for taxes. Subsequent letters convey the greetings of allies and minor details on the convening of constitutional assemblies. Most interesting among these early letters is the overtures made by Sharan Bey to Khrimian.<sup>24</sup> Sharan Bey, who owned the bazar in Van, had been a traditional ally of Boghos. In the 1850s he actually opposed Hagop Topuzian's efforts to build schools in the city. Now, instead of activating networks to resist the presence of the central state, he was using his influence to assist Srvantstians impose it. Likely, an entrepreneur such as Sharan Bey realized how structure and power relations were undergoing shifts, and understood the value of investing in the state. Armenian economic capital had to find new avenues for survival.

While Sharan Bey's move towards the institutions of the centralizing state reflected a growing realization on the part of some Armenians that demographic changes

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<sup>23</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 12/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 28 December 1871) Srvantstians reveals in a 29 March 1872 letter that he had arrived in Van on 3 December 1871 under orders from Khrimian to implement the Constitution (GAT Srvantstyani Fond 23/II)

<sup>24</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 17/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 16 February 1872)

and new governing techniques would alter the social ecology Boghos so expertly maneuvered, Boghos still retained a great deal of power in the 1870s. In response to a question posed by Khrimian about “that old obstacle [to reform],” Srvantstians first mentions Boghos in a 29 February 1872 letter.<sup>25</sup> Srvantstians explains that “since [my] day of arrival” he had heard nothing but “insults and curses from the mouth of Boghos *vardapet*.” Boghos, Srvantstians informed Khrimian, was working against “your Patriarchate and the execution of our office, [and] finally the Ottoman *Tenzimet* and the Armenian Constitution.”<sup>26</sup>

Srvantstians proceeded to enumerate the methods Boghos deployed to resist the Tanzimat. Firstly, he was “of the same blood” as the Timurzades (or Temuroğlus), a notable Turkish family that occupied many positions in the local government. If a village submitted a petition against Boghos, the Timurzades would create problems for those villagers. Much of the Timurzades’ work was financed by three local Armenians: Banirian, Isajanian, and Marutian.<sup>27</sup> Boghos brokered among them. Together they marshaled spiritual and institutional authority, coercion, and capital, to intimidate those who might sponsor the implementation of new state institutions. Though placing legitimacy in the people, Khrimian and the Tanzimat officials in the Patriarchate were trying to orient Armenian politics towards Istanbul; Boghos had the ability to remind them just how far away the central state really was. Srvantstians concluded exiling Boghos from Van was the only real option. He therefore requested orders to that effect

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<sup>25</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 18/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 29 February 1872)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

from both the Patriarchate and the Sublime Porte, and requested that Hagop Khizantsi of the Aghtamar Order be made *locum tenens* prelate.

Boghos' opposition to Srvantstians' attempts at implementing the Constitution grew worse. The pro-Boghos "bigwigs" approached Srvantstians, telling him the creation of new councils and conducting the election of a prelate were responsibilities that belonged to Boghos, the reigning prelate.<sup>28</sup> The anti-Boghos partisans began to grow restless, waiting for the Patriarchate to make a move beyond simply sending a Khrimian acolyte to setup formal institutions. Srvantstians urged the Patriarchate to take immediate steps, as inaction was emboldening Boghos. He recommended Khrimian reassign Krikoris Aghvanian from Mush to Van. Aghvanian, unlike Srvantstians, came from a moneyed family in Van. The other high-ranking clergy of well-to-do background from Van, Eremia Tevkants, was not suggested, as "it would appear [the people] are startled by him."<sup>29</sup>

The rebellion against the Patriarchate, and by extension the Tanzimat state, continued. Allies of Boghos approached Srvantstians, expressing their willingness to go directly to the Sublime Porte on behalf of the embattled cleric.<sup>30</sup> Possibly, they recalled Jerusalem's successful resistance of the Patriarchate in the early 1860s, as discussed in Chapter One. An unnamed Kurdish *el ağası* intimidated a priest named Eghiazar from taking over the prelacy on a temporary basis, despite the fact that both the governor and the Church authorities were on his side; Boghos, for his part, continued to refuse to step

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<sup>28</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 23/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 29 March 1872)

<sup>29</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 25/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 2 May 1872)

<sup>30</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 26/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 24 May 1872)

down.<sup>31</sup> Marutian, Banirian, and Isajanian went continually to the offices of the prelacy to interrupt Srvantstians' work. Meanwhile, Ali Ağa and other highly esteemed members of the Kurdish Haydaranlı tribe entered the city of Van, where they asked everyone they saw whether they were Boghos' enemy or friend. By manufacturing disincentive for investing in the reform project at as many levels of society as possible, the pro-Boghos faction in Van reminded people where power and coercion truly rested. Even as some Armenians defected from Boghos' camp in the hopes of establishing more official sets of relationships with both society and the government, the structure of Boghos' network proved resilient. Reform, however, was the official law, and Boghos' power continued to rest outside it. Srvantstians, therefore, reiterated to Khrimian his plea: make Aghvastian the patriarchal vicar, and send Boghos into exile.

The Patriarchate moved too slowly for Srvantstians. The official *ferman* declaring him patriarchal vicar had yet to be received, which complicated official interactions with the local government; the Constitution Srvantstians was sent to implement was supposed to regulate this relationship. The local governor did, however, take time to express his shock that Khrimian had yet to order Boghos' removal.<sup>32</sup> Srvantstians demanded Boghos be exiled by order of the Sublime Porte, most probably hoping for the strongest possible display of state power.

While waiting for help from Istanbul, Srvantstians' inroads seem to have worried Boghos. Boghos retreated to the monastery on the island of Lim, where he had assumed the position of abbot sometime after 1870. There he could conduct private meetings with his Kurdish allies. Back in the city of Van, Boghos' allies cursed at Srvantstians and his

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<sup>31</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 27/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 5 June 1872)

<sup>32</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 30/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 29 June 1872)



friends in the streets.<sup>33</sup> Finally, victory seemed at hand for Khrimian and Srvantstians, as a *takrir* had been given to the Porte requesting Boghos' expulsion from Van. In response, Boghos' allies stepped up their public attacks on Srvantstians' character in a bid to undermine him.<sup>34</sup>

One of Boghos' allies, the priest Partughimeos, had traveled to Etchmiadzin for an audience with the Catholicos of All Armenians. Catholicos Gevorg II had, of course, just cast a cloud of doubt over the legitimacy of the Constitution the previous year, effectively undermining Khrimian and his projects. Partughimeos returned from the Mother See with a bull; it made no reference, indirect or otherwise, to Boghos. Boghos and his allies had failed on that account. They then invested in news of Istanbul-based banker Simon Bey Maksudian's election to the National Assembly. Reportedly the personal banker of the valide sultan, Boghos' allies believed Maksudian could use his privileged access to power as well as his seat to control Khrimian.<sup>35</sup> Boghos was pulling every lever at his disposal to disrupt Khrimian's rule.

Finally, on 24 August 1872, Srvantstians wrote to confirm receipt of letters from the Porte and the Patriarchate securing Boghos' exile. Learning of the orders, Boghos ran away, only to have the police sent after him, who captured him.<sup>36</sup> By the following week, the governor of Van reported to Srvantstians that he was forwarding a list of Boghos' crimes to the Sublime Porte.<sup>37</sup> Then, as Srvantstians had hoped, Aghvastian was sent to

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<sup>33</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 32/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 13 July 1872)

<sup>34</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 33/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 27 July 1872)

<sup>35</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 34/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 3 August 1872)

<sup>36</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 35/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 24 August 1872)

<sup>37</sup> GAT Srvantstyani Fond 36/II (Srvantstians to Khrimian, 32 August 1872)

Van as a patriarchal vicar, where he would continue the work of implementing the Constitution.

Khrimian and Srvantstians won this stanza. They won not as the “middle point” in a multilocal awakening, but instead as the centralizing state. With Boghos gone, Aghvanean succeeded in convening assemblies, holding elections, and implementing the Constitution. This meant a standardization of official relations between local governors and millet bodies, and millet bodies with the Patriarchate. During the final months of his reign, Khrimian emphasized this point by issuing “Instructions to Provincial Prelates and Administrations for [Conducting] Relations with the Local Government” in 1873. These orders fully articulated the political and spiritual role of a prelate, its codification in Ottoman law and sanctioning by the Sublime Porte, its role before local officials, and its responsibilities to the people.<sup>38</sup> Khrimian and Srvantstians were building Ottomanism within the Armenian community by restructuring relations along the lines of a gridded polity in which Istanbul was the center. It is within those constraints and the assumptions they provided that political culture was being articulated. Subsequent conflict would bear this out.

### **Boghos Comes Back**

Khrimian’s decision to request an order for Boghos’ exile in 1872 from the Sublime Porte was deemed by some as autocratic and in violation of the Constitution. Khrimian was trapped by nuance and details that distracted from the larger conceptual issues he had hoped to pursue. Members of the Religious Council took the opportunity to

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<sup>38</sup> *Hrahang Haraberutean Arajnordats ev Gavaran Varchuteants End Teghakan Karavarutean* (K. Polis: Miuhentisean, 1873)

undermine the Patriarch.<sup>39</sup> Just as the notables of Van had hoped, Maksudian and his fellow conservative, Arakel Dadian, seized the opportunity to revisit Boghos' exile. Boghos returned in 1874, sent back to the Lim Monastery in the northeast corner of Lake Van, with the order not to interfere in millet affairs. Given that the Constitution had stripped monasteries of their political and economic power, this decision appeared to have left Boghos without any ability to influence the new system governing the millet.

Before stepping down in 1873, Khrimian had argued that if the councils were to overturn his decision, Boghos would need to be brought to Istanbul for questioning. The Religious Council demanded that he be tried instead in Van.<sup>40</sup> In 1874, the Patriarchate, at the behest of the Political Council, sent Bishop Harutiun Vehabedian, the still-reigning prelate of Erzurum, to Van.

Vehabedian, a member of the St. James Order at Jerusalem, had previously worked with Boghos. Their collaboration had, in part, led to the exoneration of Khachadur Shiroian, the Catholicos of Aghtamar, on charges of murdering his predecessor. When together in Van, Boghos is supposed to have told Vehabedian that Van was his personal fief (*em timaren*).<sup>41</sup> Moreover, according to Tevkants, Vehabedian was sent also to investigate Aghvanian, as the wealthy of Van had filed many complaints with the Patriarchate against the reigning prelate.<sup>42</sup> Vehabedian promptly dissolved the Constitutional assemblies established by Aghvanian, and made an ally of Boghos, Tateos

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<sup>39</sup> *Hamaratuutiun kronakan zhoghovoy ketronakan varchutean 1872-74 ami ar Azgayin Zhoghovn* (K. Polis, 1874) pp. 9-11

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>41</sup> *Ambastanutiun Vanay Poghos Vardapetin Vray* (K. Polis, 1874) pp. 15

<sup>42</sup> Mesrop Mashtotsi *Anvan Matenadaran Dzeragir* 4182 p. 3 (hereafter M. MS 4182)

Vartabed, a patriarchal vicar.<sup>43</sup> Feeling betrayed by Patriarch Varjabedian, Srvantstians decided to publish anonymously *The Accusations of Van Against Boghos Vartabed* (Ambastanutiun Vanay Poghos Vardapetin Vray).

Khrimian had entrusted Aghvastian and Srvantstians to implement the Constitution in Van, which they did. By 1874, Boghos had reversed their victories. The following year, he took aim at Eremia Tevkants, another of Khrimian's allies. Involving the Catholicos of All Armenians, Boghos reported to the Patriarchate that Tevkants had violated Church law by ordaining two priests without permission. Moreover, the priests he had ordained had already been deemed unworthy by a bishop in the Caucasus in the Russian Empire; the two could only attain ordination by Tevkants' hand following the payment of a bribe.<sup>44</sup> The charges seem only to have inconvenienced Tevkants while realizing no lasting harm. This particular accusation, however, reflected an important change in Boghos' repertoire of actions.

A few years prior, as noted above, Boghos could ask his Kurdish allies to flood the city of Van and intimidate his political enemies. This form of coercion existed outside of the official purview of the state or the millet authorities. Now, however, Boghos attempted to protect his position by working within the official system. By involving the Catholicos of All Armenians, Boghos threatened to exacerbate conflicts over jurisdiction, which had plagued the Constitutional order since its establishment in 1860. The appeal to the Mother See, however, could again call into question the legitimacy of the Patriarchate

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 4

<sup>44</sup> Matenadaran, Katoghikosakan Divan 205/1601 (6 May 1875), as reproduced in Sandro Behudean, khmb. *Vaveragr Hay Ekeghetsu Patmutesan (Girk Zh): Nerses Arkepiskopos Varzhapetean Kostandnupolsi Hayots Patriark (1837-1884 tt)* (Yerevan: Zangak 97, 2002) pp. 135-137

of Istanbul. Varjabedian, unlike Khrimian four year earlier, more adeptly handled the challenge.

The resort to legal pluralism, however, reflects the decreasing importance of Boghos in the social ecology of Van and the search for new forms of social capital. There are three possible explanations. Firstly, reform programs standardized the points of contact between Armenians and the government. The growing presence of the Patriarchate in day-to-day affairs of the Church in the provinces sealed off the structural holes Boghos had previously exploited. Failure to comply could lead to exile, as it had in the past. Secondly, structures shifted during his absence and new relations were forged without his knowledge. He was no longer the social broker he had been in years past. Finally, the 1870s (and especially the 1880s) witnessed the more intense engagement of the Kurds by the government. Boghos' role as an intermediary no longer had the same meaning. The following years point to some combination of the three.

Tateos, an ally of Boghos, had been prelate before in the 1860s but had resigned. Dependent on Boghos for structural support, he failed to win the favor of the flock. He took over the post again in 1874. On 4 July 1876, he resigned the post at Van for a second time. The Patriarchate then sent Tevkants to Van as patriarchal vicar.<sup>45</sup> Tevkants attempted to reject the offer, but to no avail. For the sixth time in his career, Tevkants would hold an official position in Anatolia.

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<sup>45</sup> M. MS 4182 p. 4-5 Importantly, the Patriarchate's orders included the provision that the churches of Van recite Tevkants' name during the liturgy. Srvantstians had complained in 1872 that preachers loyal to (or intimidated by) Boghos refused to recognize his authority during the liturgy. The order for Tevkants' appointment is dated 20 July 1876.

## Forging Closure?

Arriving in Van, Tevkants preached first in outlying churches. He then entered the city, charged with putting an end to the “thirty-year condition of unrest.” Quickly, though, he encountered resistance. Because he was close to Khrimian, Boghos’ supporters wanted nothing to do with him. For reasons unclear, the anti-Boghos party was lukewarm to his presence. Similarly, the local government refused initially to sit him on the local council, in violation of the *Düstur*.<sup>46</sup> These problems with local government officials reflected structural shifts that, while formalizing politics within the millet, were reducing Armenians’ connections with unofficial sites of power. The appearance of closure from imperial society along ethno-religious lines was in fact the bridging and connecting of the Armenian community to official Ottoman government.

Tevkants attempted to make that system work. Beyond struggling with local government officials, he tried to subordinate the rival factions to the office of Prelate and, consequently, the Patriarchate. He used Church institutions to compile episodes of oppression, which he then forwarded to the Patriarchate in hopes of gaining intervention by the Porte. Petitions and reports requested the removal of both the *tabur ağası* and the *el ağası*. Most notably, there were numerous complaints against the Haydaranlı Kurds, who had begun robbing monasteries with some regularity. In addition to attacking Khrimian’s base at Varak, they also stole from the less important Skanchelakordz Monastery, which had been allied to Boghos. Generally, Tevkants painted the movement

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 12

of Kurds along the Iranian-Ottoman border as a principle source of danger for the Armenians of Van.<sup>47</sup>

The changing contours structuring inter-ethnic and state-society relations in Van dictated a course of events surrounding the torching of Van's bazar in December 1876. On the evening of 6 December, a blaze began to spread among the stores of the bazar. Commerce in Van, with the exception of butcher stores, was generally in the hands of the Armenians. Not only did the local government do little to prevent the spread of the fire; it actively encouraged the looting of the marketplace. In the middle of the fire, armed Kurds and regular soldiers appeared and began pillaging the stores.<sup>48</sup> Tevkants entered the bazar, shouting to anyone who would listen to stop, and that "the wealth of [Armenian] society is the wealth of the government!" Doing so earned him a beating at the hands of five or six soldiers.<sup>49</sup>

Harutiun Jangiulian, a native of Van who published his memoirs after the Young Turk Revolution, argues that the fire was an act of arson planned in advance by the local military commander, Mehmet Bey, and the Timurzades.<sup>50</sup> Of the approximately 100 Armenian-owned stores, only three were left untouched by looting. Grocery and butcher shops, owned by Muslims, were not robbed. The Armenians suffering the most losses were Sharan Bey and Kevork Bey Kaljian. Sharan Bey had, of course, begun making overtures to Khrimian in the early 1870s, and would be an open ally of the reform program in 1880s. Kaljian, meanwhile, would spend time in a local jail in the 1880s.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 19-22

<sup>48</sup> Harutiun Chankiulean, *Hishatakner Hay Chgnazhamen* (K. Polis: Kohak, 1913) pp. 17

<sup>49</sup> M. MS 4182, p. 24-30

<sup>50</sup> Chankiulean, pp. 13-14

According to Jangiulian, Mehmet Bey obsessed over destroying the wealth of both Sharan Bey and Kaljian.<sup>51</sup>

While the Timurzades, the Kurds (most probably Haydaranlı), and officials within the police and military had turned a blind eye to the probable arson and subsequent looting, had they not orchestrated the fire in the first place, the governor of Van tried in vain to help.<sup>52</sup> The Armenians held Ziya Paşa and his son Cemil Bey in high regard. Representatives of the centralizing state in their own right, this should come as no surprise. Reform within the millet theoretically incorporated more provincial Armenians into the Ottoman body politic, and subsequently projected the authority of the Patriarchate and the Sublime Porte into Van. Ziya Paşa's interests therefore converged with those of the reforming Armenians.

### **The War and More War**

The repertoires of actions being developed by the Ottoman Armenian community and their Tanzimat institutions continued during and after the Ottomans' war with Russia. The war featured the 1879 annexation of Kars by Russia, the occupation of Anatolia as far west as Erzurum, and the Ottomans suing for peace at San Stefano, near Yeşilköy in modern-day Istanbul. This led in turn to a Treaty of San Stefano, making sweeping concessions to the Russians, which was superseded by the Treaty of Berlin at the urging of European powers hoping to reverse some Russian gains.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pp. 19

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp. 18. Tevkants also writes positively of Ziya Paşa (M. MS 4182 p. 22). He notes that the inability to remove lower-level officials merely emboldened their actions against implementing proper governing institutions.



Consonant with demands for reform of Anatolia, the Ottoman state dispatched Reform Commissioners to the provinces with executive authority to convene assemblies, remove officials, and conduct elections. These were not too dissimilar from Tanzimat clerks who circulated throughout the empire in the nineteenth century, or even the Armenian “examiners” who entered towns and villages to implement the Armenian National Constitution. Likely, Armenians saw the parallels.

British consular reports contain significant details on the Armenians’ interactions with the Reform Commissioners. Drawing up documents in their councils prescribed by the millet system, Armenians submitted their own reform schemes, lists of crimes and perpetrators, and other pleas for assistance. Three general demands emerge: proportional ethno-religious representation based on accurate census data, punishment for crimes, and protections against possible future assaults. Rather than forging closure in the wake of the war, Armenians were repeating Khrimian’s demands from a few years prior in the “Report.” They were still challenging the state to monopolize the legitimate use of violence (and punish those who claimed that right for themselves), extend the capacity of the central state to the provinces, and then also to carve out a space for themselves in a reconfigured imperial society. The war, therefore, did not ignite nationalism or create a rupture between Armenians and Ottoman society. In a moment where uncertainty may have reigned, the Armenians relied on actions socially and culturally proscribed over the preceding years; they fell back on Ottomanism.

While Ottomanism and an increasing investment in the formal institutions of the Ottoman state informed the political world of Armenians, social structure continued to shift around them. In addition to war, Van had witnessed famine and drought. Out of the

disorder created by these in a borderland of the empire, where jurisdictional authority was contested and reproduced daily, a Kurdish Naqshbandi leader named Shaykh Ubeydullah came to the fore.<sup>53</sup> A notable who had been feted upon his entrance to major Ottoman cities in prior decades, Ubeydullah filled a political space the central state could not fill. In 1880, he tested that state's limits.

Shaykh Ubeydullah's revolt failed to carve out a buffer state between the Qajars and the Ottomans. While his forces were largely routed, he did demonstrate the limits of official Ottoman state power in a sensitive part of the empire. The engagement between Kurdish tribes and the official state, which had intensified during the 1870s, entered a new phase in the 1880s and 1890s. Preventing future Ubeydullahs required a different approach to statecraft. Plying them with medals, posts, or tax revenues, legally sanctioning the prerogatives of provincial powerbrokers offered the Ottomans a new means for projecting the image of sovereignty in eastern Anatolia. The most obvious formalization of these practices was the establishment of the Hamidiye cavalry units in 1891. The meaning of the Tanzimat state, therefore, had changed; the Armenians carried on as though it had not. It was into these new political arrangements Khrimian made his return to Van.

### **Concluding Khrimian's Ottoman Life**

Against the backdrop of war, famine, dispossession, and the embers of a nascent rebellion, Khrimian came home for the second time in an official capacity. On 15

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<sup>53</sup> On Ubeydullah, see Sabri Ateş, "Empires at the Margins: Towards a History of the Ottoman-Iranian Borderland and the Borderland Peoples" (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 2006)

September 1879, the assembly of the Van Prelacy, still presided over by Tevkants, elected Khrimian its new prelate. Within one week, the Patriarchate not only confirmed the election, it also charged Khrimian with distributing aid to those starving under the auspices of the Famine Relief Committee.<sup>54</sup> Khrimian set out for Van at the very end of October, and arrived in the vicinity of Van in November. He met with old friends, such as Harutiun Aghvastian, a relative of Krikoris. Upon entering the city, he was greeted by more friends. One, fearing Khrimian might be exasperated from the trip, brought the city's doctor. Khrimian told the doctor "there's nothing wrong with me. His Grace Eremia [Tevkants] is the sick one. He just keeps getting fatter. Can you give something so that he'll get skinny?"<sup>55</sup> An upbeat Khrimian was back in his element.

The episode, just like his march to Istanbul almost exactly one decade earlier, reflected the initial optimism of the work Khrimian was about to undertake. While people in the streets were yelling, "Hayrik has come," Khrimian put together his committee and his administration. The Relief Committee included most of his old friends and students: Kevork Bey Kaljian, Bishop Eremia Tevkants, Setrak Tevkants, Karekin *Vardapet* Srvantstians, Mkrtich Portugalian, and Garabed Terlemezian. As a gesture, he also included Boghos' old allies, Garabed Isajanian and Mkrtich Efendi Marutian. He then made Srvantstians his vice-prelate, charged with conducting most day-to-day affairs of the prelacy.

Khrimian set out to continue the projects of reform to which he had devoted his professional life. Education was, as it had been before, the main project. At Varak, for

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<sup>54</sup> The Famine Relief Committee had been established by the Patriarchate, and worked independently of international and Ottoman imperial relief programs.

<sup>55</sup> Terzipashean, *Artsivn ir poynin mej* (Paris: A. Der Agopian, 1938) pp. 14-15

example, Khrimian and his acolytes established an agricultural school to develop practices that would guard against future drought or famine. As Armenian millet institutions became sites of formal politics and contest of power, different empire-wide Armenian civic organizations came to the fore to try influencing policy decisions. Many of these eventually came under the umbrella of the United Association (*Miatseal enkerutiun*), which coordinated efforts to build Armenian community schools throughout the empire. In Van, the Istanbul-born Mkrtych Portugalian directed these schools.

The millet system's largely successful implementation in the Armenian community created a gridded community subordinate to the Patriarchate in Istanbul. The creation of schools and organizations within these new political and social structures fostered deeper connections between members of the Armenian community. These new connections constituted their own networks and sites. The turn to more ad hoc alliances on the part of the Ottoman state, designed to project the appearance of central state power, failed to provide the requisite bridges between these new sites of power. Armenians had their millet institutions; they had less and less access, however, to the imperial state.

Portugalian and Khrimian appear to have been tone deaf to this new reality. Invoking the spirit of Ottomanism, as head of the Famine Relief Committee in Van Khrimian distributed aid earmarked for Armenians to Kurds. He resumed his friendship with a grandson of Mahmud Han, Mutullah Bey.<sup>56</sup> Portugalian and his acolytes, meanwhile, hosted and organized public speeches, plays, and parades. He invited the British and Russian vice-consuls, whom Khrimian had befriended, to these events. With

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid

the social gulf widening between the Armenian community, on the one hand, and the local government and Muslims, on the other, vibrant Armenian social institutions came to be seen in an increasingly seditious light. Compounding the problem, without the rigorous implementation of the Tanzimat on the local government, there would be no incentive for government officials to seek types of brokerage that could bridge this widening structural hole. The appearance of structural closure on the part of the Armenian community produced the image of an increasingly nationalist political organization. This lens proved inescapable for Khrimian. Fifteen years prior, therefore, these same actions had made him a darling of the Sublime Porte. Now, in a post-Ubeydullah Anatolia and under the sultanate of Abdülhamit II, instead of a servant of the sublime state, Khrimian was viewed as a subversive.

Srvantstians, for his part, had spent most the previous decade on the ground in eastern Anatolia. With a better grasp of the structural shifts that had occurred, Srvantstians advocated a more measured approach to reform. Portugalian demurred. Consequently, a schism appeared among the anti-Boghos party, with factions supporting either Khrimian or Srvantstians. Eventually, in 1882, Srvantstians tendered his resignation from his post as vice-prelate. He submitted it to Khrimian personally. When Srvantstians approached to kiss Khrimian's hand, as formalities demanded of junior clergyman approaching one more senior, Khrimian stopped him, and then "covered his forehead in kisses while drenching it in tears."<sup>57</sup>

Khrimian's problems with the government persisted. Not even his personal friendship with the governor, Hasan Paşa, who had privately expressed the pressure he

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 69

felt from Istanbul to take action against Armenians, could stem the tide. Shifts in Istanbul reverberated in Van. Beyond incorporating Kurdish tribes into the central state's apparatus, the administration of millets had come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice by 1881. Krikor Odian and Servichen had successfully connected the Porte and the Patriarchate through their friendship and collaboration with Ali and Fuat; forging a similar relationship with Cevdet Paşa, one of Abdülhamit II's closest advisers, was not a possibility. The Patriarchate found itself, especially its educational activities, under constant scrutiny by the government. Through a shrewd maneuvering of palace and diplomatic politics, Varjabedian succeeded in providing limited security to reformers such as Khrimian. Varjabedian passed away on 25 October 1884. Khrimian learned of Varjabedian's passing while presiding over an assembly in the Van prelacy. Though mourning the loss of a friend, he likely understood the political ramifications. Interrupting the meeting, he paced the hall in tears, repeating, "Nerses has died... Hayrik has died... Khrimian has died... Varjabedian has died."<sup>58</sup> As far as his political career was concerned, Khrimian was right: one month later, the Patriarchate and the Sublime Porte ordered Khrimian, now seen as a security risk, into internal exile in Jerusalem. Waiting for winter to pass, he left the place of his birth for the final time in April 1885. Seven years later, despite the strong opposition of the Russian government, whom the Ottomans had always suspected him of supporting, Khrimian was elected Catholicos of all Armenians in Etchmiadzin. Making his way to the Caucasus from Jerusalem, he traveled through Europe, bypassing Istanbul entirely.

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<sup>58</sup> Achemean, 571

Before Nerses' death, however, Khrimian had come to understand how social capital now operated at the eastern edge of the Ottoman Empire. Realizing the reform projects for which he had invested so much were now creating more harm for the Armenians than benefit, and that his person, in particular, was garnering the community unwanted attention, Khrimian tried to resurrect former relationships to provide the Armenians some social bridge to local politics. He did this by returning Boghos to the prelacy as vice-prelate.<sup>59</sup> He hoped that Boghos would provide the Armenians of Van some connection to the new arrangements of social and political power that had been established over the preceding years.

Khrimian and Varjabedian spent fifteen years implementing a constitutional order that made the Patriarchate of Istanbul, and consequently the Sublime Porte, the center of Ottoman Armenian politics. This was not, as I have argued throughout this chapter, any expression of nationalism, as everything political consistently sought its legitimation in the imperial capital. Nor did these programs or the actions of Armenians, therefore, constitute closure and a rejection of Ottomanism. Despite their intentions, however, successfully executing these reform programs isolated Armenians more and more from local society and the imperial government. The Ottoman Empire, particularly in the provinces, was a series of delicately constructed interpersonal networks that simultaneously transcended and combined ethnicity and religion. Actors who could successfully navigate these relationships could position themselves as social bridges that bound this provincial society together. Armenian zest for the projects of the central state, however, unmixed the sites of power that were enmeshed in those networks. The

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<sup>59</sup> Terzipashean, 111-119

Tanzimat had promised equality and security within the parameters of a gridded imperial polity; instead, Armenians, as an Ottoman confessional community, were left with far less collective social capital than they had before; unmixed sites meant fewer bridges to other networks. The death of Varjabedian, return of Boghos, and exile of Khrimian appear to have signaled the end of the project of Ottomanism in the Armenian community. Yet, for the Armenians, Ottomanism and the sets of practices they had developed during the Tanzimat period endured—even when dressed in revolutionary guise. It is to that we turn next.



## Chapter Six

### Ottomanism Goes Underground

On 18 January 1896, the provincial government in Van sent word to Istanbul that a high-ranking Armenian priest, a bishop, had been assassinated.<sup>1</sup> The British vice-consul in Van similarly informed his superiors of the murder, which had occurred on Christmas Eve, according to the old calendar used by the Armenian Church in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> An Armenian revolutionary, the bane of the Sultan, was suspected. Only in the memoir of an Ottoman Armenian from Van, published in Alexandria in 1929, do we learn the assassin was in fact a revolutionary, a member of the Hnchakian Party.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the Christmas Eve slaying, survival had defined Boghos Melikian's career. He had endured exile. He had outlasted his nemesis Mkrtych Khrimian. Though Khrimian was by this time Catholicos of All Armenians, Boghos had won in the arena of Ottoman politics, where he had played a hand in Khrimian's banishment from Van to Jerusalem in 1885; the then-reigning Patriarch of Istanbul, Harutiun Vehabedian, had ordered the exile at the request of the imperial government. Vehabedian, a staunch ally of Boghos for over two decades, had long opposed Khrimian and his projects. Though removed from his position as prelate of Van in 1887, Boghos undermined his successor,

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<sup>1</sup> BOA Y. PRK. ZB 17/21 (2 Şaban 1313/18 January 1896), BOA Y. MTV 135/24 (5 Şaban 1313/21 January 1896)

<sup>2</sup> FO 195/1944 "Decypher 30/31 January 1896." FO 195/1944 No. 5 Van, 26 January 1896

<sup>3</sup> Hambardzum Eramean, *Van-Vaspurakan* (Agheksantria: Tpagr. Aram Gasapean) pp. 292

Krikoris Aleatjian, by activating his connections with the local government to implicate Krikoris in revolutionary plots. The cloud of suspicion hung over Krikoris to the point that the imperial government later rejected his later election as Catholicos of Sis. In rebuffing the Armenian reformers and forging alliances with local powerbrokers of all faiths and ethnicities, Boghos played no small role in taming the thrust of the centralizing state and altering the contours of the negotiation between center and periphery in favor of the latter. He survived the efforts of Khrimian's acolytes in the Van Prelacy, using his access to informal sites of power to undermine the Church's administration. In their midst, he had even succeeded in winning promotion to the rank of bishop.<sup>4</sup>

The overwhelming symbolism of Boghos' death is therefore unmistakable. The most reactionary of bishops, murdered on Christmas Eve (while Boghos was on his way to services, no less) by someone supposedly professing the tenets not of the Armenian Apostolic Church, but rather Karl Marx, signaled a clear shift in the locus of Armenian politics and social legitimacy. If, as this perspective would suggest, the onset of Abdülhamit II's reign marked the end of Ottomanism as a political and cultural project, then the Hnchaks' act of putting a bullet in Boghos' body confirmed the rupture between a nationalizing Armenian community, on the one hand, and an increasingly reactionary Ottoman state, on the other. Boghos' crumpled corpse might as well have been the personification of the Ottoman confessional system at this moment of intense polarization. Boghos could not and did not survive this shift.

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<sup>4</sup> Khrimian objected. In a letter to Patriarch Varjabedian outlining his objections, he mused, "perhaps this Boghos is unknown to you?" *Matenadaran Izmirlyani Fond 12/22 (15 September 1880) in Vaveragr Hay Ekeghetsu Patmutedan, Girk Zh: Nerses Arkepiskopos Varzhapetean Kostandnupolsi Hayots Patriark (1837-1884 tt.)* (Erevan: Zangak-97, 2002)

While Boghos' death or its importance has yet to be studied, many historians of the late Ottoman Empire would consider his killing to be emblematic of a broader move by Armenians towards nationalism and designs on secession. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Armenian revolutionaries targeted those they associated with oppressors, namely the well-to-do, informers, and high-ranking clergymen. A failed attack on Patriarch Khoren Ashkian in 1894, for example, was lauded in the revolutionary parties' press.<sup>5</sup> While for those writing from the vantage point of Turkish nationalism, and thereby retroactively projecting the assumed legitimacy of the Turkish nation-state back into the Ottoman past, most any political expression or social action by an Ottoman Armenian is grafted onto a tale of rebellion by ingrate traitors. Thus, something as seemingly innocuous as conversion from the Apostolic Armenian faith to Protestantism is read not as a simple question of belief or perhaps even a critique of Ottoman power structures, but instead as being part and parcel of a broader plot to dismember the empire.<sup>6</sup> Killing a bishop resonates with this narrative.

Though nationalistic historiography offers a customized straw man, it shares an epistemology with a more scholarly brand of Ottoman social and cultural history. Most Ottomanist writings on Armenian activities during the empire's final four decades are based on primary materials produced by Ottoman officials, namely official state documents. Sharing the same pernicious flaw as that of nationalist narratives, much of professional Ottomanist scholarship reproduces and normalizes the views of the Ottoman

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<sup>5</sup> "He who is the enemy of the people must fall... no matter if he is a churchman, a lay *effendi*, a *bey*, or a *pasha*; if he is not diligent, he must die." *Droshak* (May 1894)

<sup>6</sup> See for example Jeremy Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians (1878-1896)* (London: Frank Cass, 1993) and Dilşen İnce Erdoğan, *Amerikan Misyonerlerinin Faaliyetleri ve Van Ermeni İsyamları (1896)* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2008)

state and state officials. Benjamin Fortna, a leading scholar on the Hamidian period, may therefore speak of Armenian insurrections in the 1880s and 1890s, argue they were a reincarnation of events in the Balkans, and then conclude that the Hamidiye Cavalry were formed to deal with this very real threat.<sup>7</sup>

Reliance on Ottoman official documents, and its subsequent reproduction throughout the secondary literature, belies the processes by which Ottoman Armenians increasingly found themselves marginalized by the Ottoman imperial state. Writing from Erzurum in 1883, for example, Maghakia Ormanian, who would later become Patriarch of Constantinople, bemoaned the growing absence of Armenians from posts in the local government, and informed Patriarch Nerses Varjabedian that the local governor was “set that there would be no placing of Armenian officials in the city.”<sup>8</sup> It was, of course, these same officials who penned the reports that constitute the archival holdings of the Ottoman state. Exaggerating Armenian activities in the hopes of landing promotions or other rewards, these local officials oftentimes wrote glowingly of their role in preserving security.

Rather than seeing Ottoman Armenian activists as agents for Ottoman history, this body of scholarship treats them as each a passive vessel, the other, and an object of Ottoman state policy. Not using Armenian-language primary materials merely

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Fortna, “The Reign of Abdülhamid II” in Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey (volume 4): Turkey in the Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 54-55 In addition to engaging in a tangential discussion on demographics (for the purposes, ostensibly, of undermining the Wilsonian principle undergirding imagined Armenian claims to statehood), Fortna also makes the erroneous claim that the Dashnaktsutiun and Social Democratic Hnchakian Party were formed by Ottoman émigrés. He also states incorrectly that the Hnchaks stormed the Ottoman Bank in 1896; it was, of course, the Dashnaks.

<sup>8</sup> GAT Toros Azatyani Fond 11509/XII (15 January 1883) “Ormanian to Varjabedian”

exacerbates the problem. Historians who do use Armenian-language primary sources have therefore, and unsurprisingly, come to different conclusions. The same problem of a national metanarrative, however, plagues this body of literature. Works penned in the idiom of Armenian nationalism champion most any episode of Armenian political expression as part of the canon of national liberation. That the revolutionary parties and their members have played no small role in building the historical literature on this period only exacerbates the problem. Mikael Varandian, a party ideologue who represented the ARF at the Second International, authored the two-volume *H.H. Dashnaktsutian Patmutiun* (History of the A[rmenian] R[evolutionary] Federation), while Arsen Kitur, a prominent Hnchak, wrote the two-volume *Patmutiun S. D. Hnchakean Kusaktsutian, 1887-1962* (History of the S[ocial] D[emocratic] Hnchakian Party). While Kitur's book reproduces some original letters, the majority of available revolutionary party documents have been published in a series of volumes by the ARF.

Scholarship using Armenian-language resources, therefore, must work within the epistemological bounds delimited by the parties themselves, as the echoes of the parties' autobiographies permeate the secondary literature. Given that Caucasian Armenians organized both the Hnchaks and the ARF, their story is often linked strongly to political developments and competing ideologies in the Russian Empire—even when the primary actors are Ottoman Armenians.<sup>9</sup> As both the parties adhered to socialism, in this view, they constitute the nation's entrance into a new epoch. Thus, Louise Nalbandian, whose early work remains widely-cited, connects a seventeenth-century traveler such as Israel

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<sup>9</sup> For an example, see Leo, *Tiurkahay heghapokhutean gaghaparabantiune* (hator 1) (Pariz: Tpagrutian Pahri Eghbarts, 1934) Subsequent work by Soviet Armenian historians follows this trajectory.

Ori with not only feudal rebellions in Persian Karabagh or Ottoman Zeytun, but also with socialists in the late nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Revolutionaries, like Boghos' assassin or the would-be killers of patriarchs, constitute just one more portrait in the pantheon.

Ashot Hovhannisyan<sup>11</sup> and Gerard Libaridian<sup>12</sup> write against this tendency in Armenian historiography. Writing during the Soviet Period in Yerevan, Hovhannisyan generally subordinates the national metanarrative to class struggle through which he demonstrates the disconnect between episodes of Armenian attempts at “liberation.” In a more nuanced approach, Libaridian deconstructs the history of Armenian political thought. In so doing, he identifies changes within the Ottoman Armenian society that initiated the process of placing political legitimacy outside the confines of the millet. This allows him to mark sharp distinctions between, for example, the 1862 uprising of Armenian notables near Zeytun, and socialist revolutionaries. Most important, however, is his contention that the appearance of revolutionary parties, with fully developed programs and meticulously articulated ideologies, identifies the onset of a new and distinct phase in Armenian political thought and organization. Thus, the killing of Boghos would be emblematic of a shift away from Ottoman forms of social engagement, and a move towards something else. The clear boundary between revolutionary and earlier forms of political protest is a useful tonic for revisiting essentialist assumptions of

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<sup>10</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963)

<sup>11</sup> Ashot Hovhannisyan, *Drvagner Hay Azatagrakan Mtki Patmutyan* (2 hator) (Erevan: Haykakan SSR GA Hratarakchutyun, 1957-59)

<sup>12</sup> Gerard J. Libaridian, “The Ideology of Armenian Liberation: The Development of Armenian Political Thought Before the Revolutionary Movement, 1639-1885” (PhD Dissertation, University of California-Los Angeles, 1987)

Armenian unity through time and space, while placing the development of Armenian political thought in a broader trans-imperial and even global context.

Certainly, the ideas put on paper by cosmopolitan Armenian intellectuals in Europe do mark a shift. If, however, we look to Anatolia and the actions of Ottoman Armenians wearing the costumes of revolution, it becomes necessary to consider not just ideas, but also the cultural and political context in which these ideas were appropriated, negotiated, and applied. Whatever ideology to which an Ottoman Armenian historical actor may have claimed to subscribe, including a national flavor of revolutionary socialism, his or her possible repertoires of action were structured by the culture and institutions of the Tanzimat state, and circumscribed by the constellation of sites and networks that constituted formal and informal power in different places throughout the empire. These informed the semiotics of interpersonal exchanges, which revolutionary ideologies attempted to penetrate.

Considering how forms of Armenian social and political organization developed over the course of the last decades of the nineteenth century permits a new vantage point on several questions for Ottoman historiography. The challenge of periodization, especially for the Hamidian period, plagues Ottomanists. Despite Bernard Lewis' early and instructive argument that Abdülhamit II's ascension to the throne did not mark the sharp deviation from the goals of the Tanzimat that many suppose, namely the centralization of the state's administration, the years 1876-78 still constitute a historiographical watershed for most scholars.<sup>13</sup> Most importantly, in this reading, the

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<sup>13</sup> For a recent example of this problem, see Hakan Yavuz with Peter Sluglett (ed.), *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin* (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 2011)

abrogation of the Ottoman Constitution, the proroguing of the Ottoman parliament, and the exile (and later imprisonment and murder) of Mithat Paşa were the death knell of Ottomanism as a political and social project.

In order to resolve this intertwined question of Ottomanism and the Hamidian period, I propose analyzing the genealogy of Armenian political action during the Tanzimat state. I contend doing so will provide a new reading of the Hamidian period, Armenian revolutionaries, the contours of the millet system, and the durability of the Ottomanist project among the empire's non-Muslims subjects. Each "generation" was produced and reared by its predecessor. The diffusion, across time and space, of new idioms and regimes of rule fostered the construction of links and continuities that not only reproduced Tanzimat forms of organization, but also reinforced the Ottomanist milieu in which Ottoman Armenians lived.

### **The First Generation (1844-1857)**

The first Tanzimat generation of Armenians, as discussed in Chapter One, revolved around early reform in the Church administration that helped facilitate the eventual creation of the millet system. The catalyst for this was a dispute over a school in the Üsküdar district of Istanbul in 1838, which exposed nascent tension between the upper-class of Ottoman Armenian society and the guildsmen of Istanbul. As economic changes in the empire mitigated the influence of the more conservative bankers, the guildsmen, as well as bureaucrats attached to the Porte and the Palace, advocated for more influence within the walls of the Patriarchate.



The declining influence of the bankers led to the election of Matteos Chukhajian (r. 1844-1848) as Patriarch of Istanbul. As Chukhajian was an opponent of bankers' influence, it was hoped his election would help paper over differences in the community. He used his brief tenure as patriarch to give more concrete definition to the role of his office, and successfully destroyed the autocratic authority (and, consequently, the prerogatives of the bankers) of the patriarch by introducing two new councils, the Spiritual and the Supreme. Rather than an autocrat dominated by well-to-do bankers, the Patriarch was now an executive presiding over two councils charged with overseeing millet affairs. These councils were ushered in by the Ottoman bureaucrat Hagop Grjigian, and with the blessing of his close associate, the Grand Vezir Reşid Paşa.

Reform carried out during this period was largely elite-driven, inasmuch as Armenians tied to the Porte featured as its engines. The engagement of the middle classes, particularly the guilds, however, indicated a deepening of mass non-elite participation in Ottoman governing structures. As the Armenian community and its new millet institutions became sites of official Ottoman politics, Armenians at all levels of society throughout the empire now had incentive to participate in the projects of the Tanzimat and Ottomanism.

### **The Second Generation: The Constitutionalists (1857-1880)**

The auxiliary councils created by Patriarch Chukhajian, Hagop Grjigian, and the Grand Vezir Reşid Paşa provided the space necessary for an ascending group of Ottoman statesmen to transform the millet and its institutions into tools of the centralizing state. In the imperial capital, Istanbul, a cadre of Sublime Porte-connected statesmen whose

families had participated in the implementation and day-to-day activities of the Supreme Council oversaw these changes. Krikor Odian, Nigoghayos Balian, and Serovpe Vichenian (better known as Servichen Efendi) each came from a family intimately involved in the affairs of the Sublime Porte, the Imperial Palace, or the Armenian Patriarchate, if not all three.

They were in many ways heirs to Grjigian. Grjigian similarly came from a well-to-do family with influence before the government, which he was able to parlay into a career at the Porte and relationship with a future prime minister. Servichen and Balian likewise built on family connections to establish positions at the Porte. Odian's career arc, however, is the most important of the three.

Servichen and Odian both enjoyed cordial relations with Ali and Fuat Paşas, the acolytes of Reşid Paşa, who went on to dominate the Sublime Porte during the 1860s and early 1870s. These alliances provided the framework for building on Grjigian's reorganization of the millet, leading directly to the promulgation of the Armenian National Constitution in 1860/63. Spending much of the 1860s and 1870s as the speaker of the national assembly (*atenapet*), the representative body created by the constitution, Odian shepherded the new millet institutions. This allowed him to deepen his connections with the Porte, which he then used to foster a relationship with Mithat Paşa. Odian would later become a principal architect of the Ottoman Constitution.

The Armenian National Constitution, with its system of prelates and elected assemblies, centralized the Ottoman Armenian community more forcefully around the Patriarchate of Istanbul. Ordering the community in this fashion, while standardizing the relationship between provincial Armenians and local officials, made the constitution a

central tool of imperial reform, and the millet a site of its concomitant politics. Expanding the authority of constitutional rule over the millet throughout the Ottoman Empire, therefore, necessitated engagement with the provinces, and the transformation of provincial Ottoman Armenians into something approximating politically active citizens.

To carry out this project, Odian turned to his old family friend, the clergyman Mkrtich Khrimian. The Odians had sponsored Khrimian in Istanbul while Krikor was still a youth; Krikor then used his position in the millet and the Porte to give Khrimian wide-ranging authority in Van in 1857. It was Odian who provided Khrimian political cover at both the Porte and the Patriarchate when provincial powerbrokers attempted to remove him, and then again in 1869 spearheaded the effort to elect Khrimian as Patriarch of Istanbul.

While the elite-driven reform was predicated on personal relationships, the new governing regimes they enacted still found institutional expression in the Armenian Constitution, which both structured and provided an idiom for reform, reformers, and the unfolding political culture of the Tanzimat, Ottomanism. The diffusion and transmission of these forms and codes occurred within the context of the millet as an Ottoman political community. As part of a program to institutionalize the authority of Istanbul over the entirety of the Ottoman Empire, this required the participation of the provinces. It is in this context we must read Odian's impetus for advocating Khrimian's election to the patriarchal seat.

Links between the imperial center, provincial Armenians, and reform had played out before. Hagop Grjigian had, for example, offered his support to the clergyman Hagop Topuzian when the latter attempted to build schools in Van during the 1840s. Provincial

Armenians already knew to forward petitions or reports to Istanbul in the hopes of winning the intercession of the august sultan or the most holy patriarch on their behalf. The Tanzimat in general, and the constitution in particular, provided non-elites in the provinces the formal opportunity to participate not only in politics, but in the broader project of Ottoman state-building. As an early proponent of state-centralization, Khrimian was a perfect conduit for connecting different sites of power by activating networks, and utilizing those to carry out reform on the backs of the guilds and a nascent provincial bourgeoisie.

Before returning to Istanbul as Patriarch in 1869, Khrimian held different posts in the provinces. As the abbot of the Varak Monastery near Van, he built a school, which enrolled youth from all social backgrounds. Later, as prelate of Mush, he expanded his program of transforming millet institutions into tools for public good. Just as in Van, this placed him at loggerheads with the wealthy that dominated the monasteries and churches, which served as gateways to political power. The documentation produced by Khrimian and his allies reveals cleavages that had opened within the Armenian millet in the provinces, much as they had in Istanbul. As a high-ranking clergyman with pronounced support in Istanbul, Khrimian enjoyed a cachet no one else could. His election as patriarch was designed to use that cachet to make the provinces a source of constitutional rule, as an inextricable part of the reorganized Ottoman state.

Reforming the Armenian millet, however, necessitated reforming all of provincial Ottoman society. Provincial prelates and auxiliary councils, now subject to democratic controls, represented the local Armenian population to the government; they could only function properly or enjoy real power if consonant constraints were placed on the

provincial bureaucracy *in toto*. That project did not unfold in the manner Khrimian, Odian, or even Mithat would have hoped. Trying to do so made Khrimian into a legend among the Armenian peasantry of Anatolia. His most ardent supporters, however, were the craftsmen and merchants in the provinces. In addition to equality, the Tanzimat and its institutions offered security and access to formal power in the form of elected assemblies and government posts. Just as Odian and Servichen held positions that straddled the Porte and the Patriarchate in Istanbul, many provincial Armenian families likewise served in both millet institutions and the local government. Khrimian figured at the center of these newly created relationships, connecting them not only to one another, but also to the imperial capital.

Through his appointments, Khrimian had the opportunity to build links with the individuals who would participate most actively in these new institutions and provide important support to the clergymen charged with “implementing the constitution.” Firstly, his political career began in Istanbul, where he won the friendship of Armenian employees of the Porte. He had gone to the imperial capital, however, as a labor migrant. Unsurprisingly, he made labor migration a trope of his political program. Many of these labor migrants, mostly in Istanbul, but also in Izmir, Adana, and as far away as the United States, began charitable organizations to improve the economic and social life of their home regions, particularly in education.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the number of Armenian

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<sup>14</sup> Male labor migrants traveled together with others from their village, and found work in Istanbul or abroad through other more established migrants. The organizations they formed in the United States not only sponsored education in eastern Anatolia, but also became foundational institutions for the construction of the post-Ottoman diaspora.

community schools in eastern Anatolia ballooned during the second half of the nineteenth century as remittances poured in from Istanbul and elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

Khrimian's first major appointment as a clergyman brought him back to his native Van. The child of a craftsman, he rekindled his relationships with people of a similar background; as discussed in Chapter Four, he also used his new position and influence to win over landowning and merchant families. Thus, members of the Natanian and Tevkants families who joined the clergy became principle actors in carrying out institutional reform throughout the provinces. He also befriended others: the Terzibashians, Terlemezians, Kaljians, Amirjanians and Jangiulians, among others. Those same families, however, took leading roles in the local government, the millet, and in the benevolent organizations and clubs, some of which had been established by labor migrant cash. By the late 1870s, more than twenty such organizations existed in Van.<sup>16</sup>

In 1862, Khrimian was elected prelate of Mush. A small provincial town in the nineteenth century, Mush derived its importance from the very large Armenian population inhabiting its plain. Walking by foot in the snow to Erzurum to advocate for the peasants living on that plain earned Khrimian the nickname *hayrik*. If Van did not constitute the most important provincial town for Ottoman Armenians, Erzurum did. Mush and Erzurum were highly integrated with one another, both socially and economically. Khrimian's position at Mush, therefore, afforded him the opportunity to forge relationships with people in Erzurum. He became close with at least the following

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<sup>15</sup> As of 1834, only 115 schools were operated in the provinces; by 1874, that number had tripled. Before the Genocide, 1,746 Armenian schools were in operation in eastern Anatolia and Cilicia. See Pamela Young, "Knowledge, Nation, and the Curriculum: Ottoman Armenian Education, 1853-1915" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2001) pp. 94-97

<sup>16</sup> Eramean, pp. 118

four families: Pasdrmajians, Ballarians, Der Nersisians, and Nshkians. The Pasdrmajians made their money by providing food to the Ottoman Fourth Army. Writing in 1872, Eremia Tevkants described the Ballarian family as a shining example for the rest of the Armenian community, and made special reference to a then 25-year-old Hamazasp Ballarian.<sup>17</sup> A few years later, Hamazasp was elected as one of Erzurum's representatives to the first Ottoman Parliament. Khachadur Khan Der Nersisian Efendi, a one-time Persian subject, served on the *idare meclis* (provincial administrative council) of Erzurum, and was then elected to the prorogued second session of the Ottoman Parliament. His sons likewise served in the local government. One of them married Agapi Ormanian; her brother, Maghakia, was an Istanbul-born reconvert to the Armenian Church who served as Prelate of Erzurum before becoming the future Patriarch of Istanbul (r. 1896-1908).<sup>18</sup>

In general, these families attempted to help Khrimian and his allies implement the constitution and remove opponents such as Boghos Melikian and Harutiun Vehabedian. Their positions in the local government, access to the Porte, election to high posts, service to the Church, and membership in (and leadership of) local charitable and civic organizations marked them as products of the Tanzimat and Ottomanism. The Tanzimat shaped and structured the political and social culture in which they lived—so, too, would succeeding generations grow in this same culture.

### **Ottomanism Goes Underground: The Third Generation (1880-1896)**

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<sup>17</sup> Tevkants, pp. 40

<sup>18</sup> One of their three children was the Sorbonne-trained Armenologist Sirapie Der Nersessian.

Providing education or aid in the time of famine, charitable and social organizations fulfilled functions generally associated with a state. In the context of Ottoman and Armenian millet social life, these organizations operated as semi-public institutions with an unclear formal relationship with official state bodies. Though their place was ambiguous and unclearly defined, these organizations became sites of politics within the Armenian millet. As the bounds of what constituted legitimate politics changed in the early years of the Hamidian period, these organizations and their leaders were compelled to venture cautiously as they explored the new contours of power. This in turn delineated the space within which Ottoman Armenians could express themselves. This was especially true of Erzurum and Van, where Armenian civic society was especially robust. As a part of the deepening of popular involvement in social and political life, the civic organizations in these two provincial cities provided new access points to millet politics. Given the growing pains of constitutional rule, these politics were sometimes especially contentious.

For the imperial government, patrolling the new spaces of Armenian politics coincided with its responses to Kurdish uprisings and integration of *muhacirs*, Muslim refugees from the Balkans or the Caucasus, and its concomitant new language of state centralization. As Armenian civic organizations and millet institutions pursued politics in the idiom of the Tanzimat, they encountered stiff resistance from the intensification of formal and informal relations between the provincial Kurdish powerbrokers of the east and the Ottoman state, namely the Palace. The Ottoman state, therefore, pursued three intertwined policies for constraining Armenian civic and political life: exile and



imprisonment, diluting the millet's prerogatives, and dissuading Armenians from defending their rights.

The order Khrimian be sent to Jerusalem in 1885, where allies of Harutiun Vehabedian would monitor him, is the most obvious case of exile. It was, however, one example of many. In 1880, before he turned the prelacy of Van over to Khrimian and Srvantstians, Eremia Tevkants confided to the British vice-consul that forces within the local government had been threatening him with exile.<sup>19</sup> In addition to exiling a number of prominent activists involved in civic organizations and the millet administration, the government also imprisoned former members of the *idare meclis* in Van, namely Kevork Bey Kaljian and Harutiun Efendi Terzibashian.<sup>20</sup>

The cudgel of exile or imprisonment was spread to less prominent Armenians as well. Ownership of a songbook or a British newspaper, for example, justified suspicion and government action. Sensing an opportunity for personal gain or the chance to settle scores, some Armenians would provide false information to the authorities, fully aware of the impending overreaction.<sup>21</sup> In official circles, so entrenched was the view of any Armenian activity or political expression as potentially rebellious, that “even officers who have never had anything to do with this Vilayet [Van] have been led to form a too adverse and unjust opinion of them as a set of seditious intriguers.”<sup>22</sup>

While imprisonment and exile targeted political activity in general, the clergy formed a specific target. Khrimian had already been exiled; meanwhile, the government's

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<sup>19</sup> FO 195/1237 No. 18P, Van (14 May 1880)

<sup>20</sup> FO 195/1688 No. 10, Van (4 March 1890) Kaljian (a merchant, whose stores had been burned in the 1876 bazar fire) and Terzibashian (a landlord and leading guildsman) were prominent supporters of Khrimian.

<sup>21</sup> FO 195/1804 No. 46, Erzeroum (12 December 1893)

<sup>22</sup> FO 78/4332 No. 9 Confidential, Van (13 April 1889)

growing distrust of Armenian priests provided Boghos Melikian the opportunity to undermine the prelate of Van, Krikoris Aleatjian, by implicating him in supposedly rebellious activities. This of course invited further problems for the Armenian prelacy at Van. Pressuring, attacking, imprisoning, or otherwise intimidating priests must be seen against the larger backdrop of neutralizing the millet as both a political community and institution.

The Tanzimat and its Armenian Constitution both formalized and standardized the relationship between the millet and the imperial government, while subjecting most positions within the millet to either direct or indirect electoral control. Though civic organizations and official councils afforded laypeople the opportunity for active participation in Ottoman political life, clergymen still occupied the most important political positions. In their capacity as spiritual leaders, they not only enjoyed a certain influence with their flock, but also the ability to more quickly navigate routes to official sites of power. Unsurprisingly, therefore, their official status provided them and their institutions special treatment before the state.

Throughout the nineteenth century, letters to the patriarchate complained of the desecration of churches and monasteries by local Muslims, usually Kurdish tribesmen. During the Hamidian period, unwanted attention came increasingly from the state instead. In 1881, for example, an Armenian priest from Bayazit was falsely accused of murder. After being brought to Van, the government tried, unsuccessfully, to incarcerate him in a regular jail, in contravention of accepted norms. Only after successful protests did the governor relent and allow him to be placed under surveillance at the prelate's

residence.<sup>23</sup> By 1890, however, the government was tossing priests into prisons without so much as feigning concern for prior convention. Not even a clergyman as high-ranking as a prelate could escape, as was the case in Mush in 1893.<sup>24</sup> Browbeating clergymen featured in the broader project of neutering the millet as a political community. Here, the state also began targeting places of worship. In 1890, the government sent investigators to Khrimian's monastery, Varak, on two separate occasions to search for seditious material. In Erzurum, the prelate's residence was subject to occasional inspection by the local government.<sup>25</sup> Beyond the search for an illusory security against a largely imagined threat, action against the Church made its leadership appear impotent before some members of the flock.

Beyond reducing the political power and effectiveness of the Church and its leaders, the state attempted to restrict the millet's authority to questions of religion and personal law only. Transforming the millet into a parochial religious community, the state first targeted the civic organizations, placing restrictions on their activity. According to a document presented to the Armenians of Van in 1881, the Ministry of Justice stipulated that while it was "lawful to hold meetings for religious purposes," it was not permissible to host or conduct public lectures.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, the government simply resorted to shutting down clubs.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the government increased its censorship of Armenian publications, while also moving to place control of Armenian schools under the Ministry of Justice.

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<sup>23</sup> FO 195/1376 No. 15P, Van (29 March 1881)

<sup>24</sup> FO 195/1804 No. 40, Erzeroum (9 November 1893)

<sup>25</sup> FO 195/1688 No.10, Van (4 March 1890) and Decypher Telegram, Erzeroum (21 June 1890)

<sup>26</sup> FO 195/1376 No. 30, Van (27 June 1881)

<sup>27</sup> FO 195/1376 No. 13P, Van (15 March 1881)

Finally, a spate of events in the 1890s signaled a near total reversal of what the Armenians considered the Tanzimat to mean. In 1890, Cevdet Paşa and Abdülhamit exonerated the Kurdish lord Musa Bey. Armenian petitions finally succeeded in bringing Musa Bey, who had committed crimes against the Armenians of Mush (most notoriously the rape and kidnapping of a woman named Gulizar following the murder of her husband), to trial in Istanbul. Despite overwhelming evidence, all charges were dismissed.<sup>28</sup> In so doing, the government sanctioned violence against provincial Armenians. The creation of the semi-regular Hamidiye Cavalry units in 1891 only exacerbated the growing distance between Armenians and Ottoman power, while normalizing violence as a legitimate tool of coercion by semiofficial actors. Then, against the backdrop of massacres, the Ottoman state suspended the Armenian Constitution in 1896, and ordered the reigning patriarch, Matteos Izmirlian, be sent to internal exile in Jerusalem.

Armenians responses to this reshuffling of power varied. As the structural exclusion from official sites of power deepened, many chose migration, either within the empire to Istanbul, abroad to the Caucasus, or to the United States. For the great bulk of them that remained in eastern Anatolia, the limits of their political imagination and boundaries of consequent action remained confined to the Tanzimat forms they had practiced for decades, and over the course of at least two generations. Their politics played out all over Anatolia, most prominently in Van.

### **Political Action in Van**

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<sup>28</sup> For a transcription of the court proceedings, see Musa Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2004)

In 1882, a group of young Armenians in Van held a parade and banquet to celebrate the twenty-second anniversary of the Armenian constitution. Eremia Tevkants presided over the festivities. In order, they toasted the health of the Catholicos of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin, the Sultan, the Patriarch of Istanbul, Khrimian, and the Russian vice-consul, who was present. While the celebration featured participants from each of the major Armenian civic organizations in the city, a different group claimed responsibility for organizing the events.

Members of the Black Cross Society left behind little evidence, with only the memoirs of one of its (probable) founders, Harutiun Jangiulian, providing any insight into the group's activities or organization.<sup>29</sup> Published in Istanbul following the Young Turks' reinstatement of the Mithat Constitution, the memoir does not delve into the specifics of the group's formation, focusing instead on Jangiulian's personal interactions with notable actors. A merchant, he claims a relationship with Khrimian and connections to local government officials. At one point, he and his friends stole money from Khachadur Shiroian, the Catholicos of Aghtamar.<sup>30</sup> Khachadur, known to engage in simony and otherwise abuse his position for personal gain, offered an inviting target. Also allied with Boghos, Khachadur represented the opposite end of the spectrum of millet and imperial politics that the Tanzimat was supposed to have removed.

Jangiulian's failure to provide detailed information on the Black Cross Society is most likely an indictment of the group's relative unimportance in the politics of Van. While links to Khrimian, local officials, and other merchants, as well as the decision to

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<sup>29</sup> Harutiun Chankiulean, *Hishatakner Haykakan Chgnazhamen* (K. Polis: Tparan "Kohak"i, 1913)

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 54-55 On Khachadur, see Chapter Three above.

target the Catholicos of Aghtamar reflected a nuanced understanding of local politics, Black Cross appears on the outside of the larger contests of the time. Given his descriptions of people such as Mkrtich Portukalian, for example, Jangiulian appears as someone pining for a prominent place in the discussions unfolding within the millet.<sup>31</sup> Unsurprisingly, the more established Terzibashians regarded Jangiulian as an insignificant actor.

Black Cross had sought its entrance into formal sites of millet politics through clubs that hosted public lectures. Here, they were immediately outflanked by the more established civic organizations, which oversaw millet affairs. Contention within these groups was consonant with the growing divide between supporters of Khrimian. More conservative were those supporters of Khrimian's most beloved student and acolyte, Karekin Srvantstians. He was joined by a number of notable families who had cut their teeth in Tanzimat institutions and public service, namely the Kaljians, Tevkants, and Terzibashians. Khrimian himself, however, was pulled more in the direction of a teacher from Istanbul now working in Van, Portukalian.

Portukalian, who had worked previously in Tokat, came to Van to assist overseeing community schools. This put him in contact with the Natanians, other close allies of Khrimian, who formally oversaw the region's Armenian schools through the United Society (*Miatseal Enkerutian*). Together, they pressured Srvantstians in a bid to make the millet a more forceful political institution. In 1882, for example, they asked Srvantstians to request the formal release of an Armenian political prisoner. Stressing discretion due to the sensitivity of the request, Srvantstians used informal channels to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 51

secure the release. Dissatisfied, Portukalian and the Natanians began circulating rumors that Srvantstians used his position to imprison opponents.<sup>32</sup>

Because of his visibility, Portukalian became a target of the government and its attempts at neutralizing millet politics. He was exiled to Istanbul the same time that Khrimian was ordered to Jerusalem. Thereafter he went to Marseilles and began publishing his own newspaper, *Armenia*. His association with the Natanians, however, brought them problems. Markos Natanian, the assistant director of the United Society's schools in Mush, was arrested on 18 December 1886.<sup>33</sup> After a review of his correspondence, the authorities arrested several of his friends one year later on suspicion of revolutionary activity. Included among them were Mkrtych Terlemezian, whose family had been allied with Khrimian in Van politics since the 1850s, and the former prelate of Van, Krikoris Aghvanean. All were exiled on 7 April 1888.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, Markos' brother, the celibate priest Boghos Natanian, would die from malnutrition in an Istanbul prison a few years later. The Natanians, Terlemezians, and Portukalian therefore featured prominently in a political world whose institutions and practices were both shaped by the Tanzimat. They would also figure at the center of the creation of a new organization: the Armenakan "party," an outgrowth of the split between Khrimian and Srvantstians.

As Libaridian writes, the Armenakans were not a proper political party. While formed by students of Portukalian in 1887, they did not develop a charter or program

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<sup>32</sup> Eramean, 130-131

<sup>33</sup> Chankiulean, 104

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 105 A document in the Ottoman Archives notes, however, that in April 1887 Terlemezian was exiled to Konya, and Markos Natanian to Yemen. No mention is made of Aghvanean. BOA DH. MKT 1407/54 (1 Şaban 1304/25 April 1887)

until 1895.<sup>35</sup> They instead appear to be a more mature and better-developed version of Black Cross. While Black Cross sought to connect lower-level individuals, such as Jangiulian, in a semiformal yet wholly unofficial organization that could exert some pressure on millet and imperial sites of power, the Armenakans enjoyed more robust connections and more prominent places in millet and imperial governing structures.

Portukalian and his associates, such as Terlemezian, held prominent leadership positions in millet organizations. Even after they left Anatolia, allies such as Khoren Khrimian, the ex-Patriarch's nephew, helped sustain their influence. These positions and relationships connected the Armenakans to formal sites of political power, which they could then attempt to shape. For example, as inheritors of the anti-Boghos mantle, they spearheaded the effort to elect Krikoris Aleatjian as prelate in 1887. Rather than a new political movement, the Armenakans instead represented a new path to fulfilling the old promise of access to Ottoman state power.

In this constellation of relations, Boghos Natanian was perhaps exceptional. Like his brothers, he also survived temporary episodes of exile. Through means that are not entirely clear, however, he succeeded in obtaining the rank of *muavin*, or vice-governor of Van, a sharp contrast with the general trend of removing Armenians from governmental posts during this period. Having established positive relations with each Khachardur Shiroian (the Catholicos of Aghtamar) and some of the Haydaranlı Kurds, he managed to erode some of the bases that undergirded Timurzade political domination of the region. The establishment of the Hamidiye cavalry units, which targeted tribes such as the Haydaranlı, formally redistributed power once again, while legitimizing Kurdish

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<sup>35</sup> Mikael Natanean, *Armenakan Kusaktsutiun: Tsagumen skseal minchev sahmanadrakan ramkavar kusaktsutean kazmutiune* (Gahire, 1990) pp. 42



violence as policy of state centralization. Though this disrupted the Armenakans' attempts to access formal sites of power, the young Armenians in Van were already interacting with a practitioner of a different politics. Many of those same Armenians would soon find new organizational tools for pursuing the political projects of Ottomanism.

### **Revolutionizing Ottomanism or Ottomanizing Revolution?**

Most serious scholarship on Armenian revolutionaries pays much attention to the ideologies of the two main parties, the Hnchakian Social Democratic Party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). The former, founded in 1887 by a group of Russian Armenians studying in France and Switzerland, cut its political teeth among Russian radical groups. Their party name, Hnchak (bell), is the Armenian translation of *Kolokol*, the name of the journal edited by the Russian socialist and populist Alexander Herzen in London and Geneva. The ARF, a Tiflis-based party founded in 1890, similarly blended populism, nationalism, and socialism. For both parties, balancing the contending ideological planks was a difficult juggling act. Of the two, the Hnchaks more adamantly stressed socialism.

My concern, however, is less ideology and political thought, but rather historical actors and the context in which they lived and worked. When the Hnchaks entered the Ottoman Empire, they encountered a Tanzimat political culture that had developed its own sets of practices, institutions, and connections. After attempting to organize failed insurrections in remote parts of Cilicia, where Armenian and Turkmen feudal lords had

reigned just two decades prior, the Hnchaks turned their attention to constructing a political organization in eastern Anatolia.

Their first branch was established in Trabzon. Shortly thereafter, an executive body was created in Istanbul; one of its members was a migrant from Van, the Black Cross Society's Harutiun Jangiulian.<sup>36</sup> The presence of someone with Jangiulian's background in the Hnchakian leadership was no aberration, but rather symptomatic of the party's approach to establishing its presence in the Ottoman Empire. The party tried to build on and incorporate the prior organizations and networks that had grown out of the Tanzimat institutions in the 1880s, and then subordinate them to a central command based in Athens.

In Erzurum, the Hnchaks established a party branch headed by Dikran and Khachadur Gereksian, the Ichkalatsians, and the Nshkians. These were the founding and directing members of the "Defenders of the Fatherland Organization" (*Pashtpan Hayreneats Kazmakerputiun*). Like the Armenakans, the "Defenders" grew out of two different civic organizations, in this case a theater group and an agricultural society.<sup>37</sup> In Van, local Turkish notables frequented the clubs where Portukalian sometimes organized lectures in order to discuss politics; this ceased once he became a suspicious person. Similarly, a military band actually provided the soundtrack to the Erzurum theater group's plays. While each group had an Ottomanist orientation that looked to Istanbul,

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<sup>36</sup> Arsen Kitur, *Patmutiun S.D. Hnchakean Kusaktsutean, 1887-1962 (h. 1)* (Peyrut: Hratarakutiun S.D. Hnchakean Kusaktsutean, 1962) pp. 49-50

<sup>37</sup> Saroukhan [Arakel Sarukhan], "'The Agricultural Society': The First Popular Movement in Western Armenia." *The Armenian Review* 35.2 (1982) pp. 152-164 and H. M. Nshkean, *Arajin Kaytser: Ej me Karnoy Zartonken* (Boston: "Paykar"i Tparan, 1930), 69 In addition to enjoying a relationship with Khrimian, the Nshkians were also close with Patriarch Nerses Varjabedian.

the state took another view. Uncovered by the authorities in 1882, several hundred members of the “Defenders” were imprisoned. Only through the intercession of the local prelate, Maghakian Ormanian, and Patriarch Nerses Varjabedian, were most of the imprisoned granted a release and some form of clemency.<sup>38</sup> In Van, meanwhile, the Hnchaks succeeded in recruiting members of the Natanian family to the party, most notably Garabed.<sup>39</sup>

While the high leadership of the Hnchakian Party hoped to fully integrate Ottoman Armenians into its party structure, it instead prepared the ground for a conflict between two starkly different cultures. In addition to being cosmopolitan elites, the party’s founders were foreign in most every possible way to the Ottoman Empire and even Ottoman Armenians. Instead of transforming the Ottoman Armenian community, or even its membership, into socialists, donning the revolutionary guise became another tool for pursuing the project of Ottomanism. The growing angst of the Hnchaks’ main leader, Ruben Khan-Azat, reflects this.

In a series of letters to Anatolia-based operatives, Khan-Azat expresses his frustration with his subordinates’ failure to stay in direct contact with the party’s central leadership.<sup>40</sup> In an interrogation of a Hnchak conducted by Russian security, the inability of either Khan-Azat or the other principal party founder, Avetis Nazarbekian, to coordinate with Ottoman Armenians is made even more clear.<sup>41</sup> Theoretically, the Hnchakian Party was highly centralized, with provincial actors afforded little to no

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<sup>38</sup> GAT Toros Azatyani Fond XII/11506-11518 (Ormanian to Varjabedian, 25 December 1882-9 April 1883)

<sup>39</sup> Kitur, 271-273

<sup>40</sup> Kitur, 63-64

<sup>41</sup> Hayastani Azgayin Arkhiv-Hasarakan Kagkakakan Pastatghteri Bazhin 1456/1/13 “Pokazaniia Gazarosa Agaiana po delu Gnchakistov” (20 September 1895)

autonomy in decision-making. Reality, however, was generally the opposite. The leadership therefore began sending circulars to its membership, reminding them of the necessity of gaining approval from the central leadership before taking action.

Organizationally, the Hnchaks failed to translate their program into Ottoman. Rather, they found themselves trapped by a politics they did not fully comprehend. The party did not connect its Ottoman members or imagined constituency with the leadership or Russian Armenians in a pan-national movement. Rather, by funding local branches they reinforced local ties, while connecting them instead with other Ottoman Armenians. Thus, just like the Armenakans in Van, they became an Ottoman Armenian organization with no official power that could influence the politics of Ottoman Armenians. This may explain, in part, the election of Matteos Izmirlian as Patriarch of Istanbul in 1894.

Almost predictably, the Hnchaks split. While the Russian core of the party remained, the Ottomans established the Reformed Hnchakian Party (*Verakazmeal Hnchakean Kusaksutiun*). Ostensibly centered on a dispute over the role socialism should play in the party, the break reflected the building tension between the Ottoman and the Russian Armenian party leaders and agents. In the end, the Hnchaks failed to understand either Ottomanism or the Tanzimat institutions in which Ottoman Armenians had received their political education. So thoroughly socialized into these institutions were Ottoman Armenians that even the labor migrants in Massachusetts and Rhode Island who had been organized by the Hnchaks opted to join the Reformed Hnchaks.<sup>42</sup> The Armenakans, too, came full circle, joining the Reformed Hnchaks in 1909. After absorbing other groups, this party was rechristened the Ramkavar Party in 1921.

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<sup>42</sup> GAT Arpiaryani Fond 657

Eventually, it would become closely identified with the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU). After escaping Ottoman security, none other than the Nshkian brothers, the former leaders of both the Defenders of the Fatherland and the Hnchaks in Erzurum, would become founding members of the Fresno, California branch of the AGBU.<sup>43</sup> Ottomanist forms of organization trumped revolution.

While the Russian Armenian founders of the Hnchakian Party, Ruben Khan-Azat and Avetis Nazarbekian, insisted on a highly centralized party apparatus that subordinated Ottoman Armenian operatives to their direct control, the ARF developed a more flexible structure. The party had begun in 1890 as the Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries (*Hay Heghapokhakanneri Dashnaksutiun*), a conglomeration of different groups that at first actually included the Hnchaks. Following the Hnchaks' exit in 1892, the party rebranded itself as the now familiar Armenian Revolutionary Federation. They, too, attempted to build a base in Anatolia.

In making its initial forays into Ottoman territory, the ARF found itself in a contest with the Hnchaks for recruits; only in 1896 would they surpass the latter. While the Hnchaks attempted to build on preexisting networks of actors, the ARF seems to have attempted to remove them in hopes of building their own. In 1891, party operatives murdered Khachadur Gereksian, the main founder of "Defenders of the Fatherland." Soon thereafter, however, the party began following the Hnchak model of accessing established Ottoman Armenian political networks and activists. One of their first operatives in Mush, Mkrtich Sarian, was an official of the United Society and friend of Portukalian. The party then successfully mined Khrimian's old allies. In Van, the ARF

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<sup>43</sup> Nshkean, 11

recruited members of the Terlemezian family. In Erzurum, they enlisted Karekin Pasdrmajian. Pasdrmajian, who assumed the *nom de guerre* Armen Garo, later stormed the Ottoman Bank in 1896, won election to the Ottoman Parliament in 1908, and then served as the Republic of Armenia's ambassador to the United States.

When the Hnchaks tried to incorporate Ottoman Armenian political networks into their party apparatus, they found themselves attempting to subordinate a culture they did not comprehend. Their attempt to revolutionize activists who merely donned the costumes of socialist revolutionary broke the party in two. Learning from the Hnchaks' mistake, the ARF chose instead to Ottomanize their revolution. The culture of Ottomanism served as a structural barrier that ultimately precluded the Hnchakian leadership from connecting to or bridging with provincial activists in a hierarchical organization; the ARF instead embraced Ottomanism.

Firstly, the party afforded its Ottoman Armenian activists greater autonomy of action. Allowing the Ottoman Armenian networks to function as they had previously permitted the ARF greater access to its imagined constituency. Some Ottoman Armenians who had originally joined the Hnchaks, such as the former Armenakan Hrayr Dzhokhkh (Hray the Hell), came over to the ARF where they would have fewer conflicts with the upper echelons of the party hierarchy. Moreover, the ARF's comparatively acquiescent approach to Ottomanism facilitated a deeper entrenchment in Anatolian Armenian culture, as the party enjoyed a better relationship with lower- and mid-level clergy, and also developed a pantheon of heroes immortalized in songs and legends.<sup>44</sup> Finally, the ARF formally recognized the need to allow Ottoman Armenians to pursue Ottoman

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<sup>44</sup> On some of these songs, see Gerard J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2004) pp. 73-85

politics, as they understood it, by forming western (Ottoman) and eastern (Russian) bureaus at the party's second general congress in 1898. Unsurprisingly, they found themselves at the forefront of the Young Turk Revolution and reinstatement of the Ottoman Parliament and Constitution. Just as in 1857, 1863, or 1876, the Tanzimat was the prism through which Ottoman Armenians viewed their politics; by 1908, political actors such as Karekin Pasdrmajian were the heirs of Odian and Khrimian as fourth-generation Tanzimat reformers.

## **Conclusion**

Following Khrimian's exile, Boghos used a sermon during a Lenten service on 31 March 1885 to bully his opponents. Speaking in a dialect of Armenian heavily laced with Turkish, he denouncing his detractors as shameless (*edebisiz*), and challenged them to confront him face-to-face.<sup>45</sup> The decades-long conflict between these two bishops had been a proxy war in the larger empire-wide battle over the Tanzimat and the centralization of the state. Khrimian, the provincial reformer, theoretically enjoyed the backing of the imperial center while Boghos, the quintessential fixer, enjoyed robust connections with provincial powerbrokers that benefited from keeping the center at a healthy distance. In order to win, Khrimian had to implement reform that unmixes sites of power and made Istanbul the preeminent node in all Church networks, which would thereby make the Apostolic Armenian community of the Ottoman Empire legible before the government and rational in its organization. For Khrimian, this entailed cultivating

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<sup>45</sup> "Armenia"i Husharar: A Tarekan (1885-86) (Marseyl: Hayeren Tparan M. Portugaleani, 1890) pp. 89-93

relationships and networks of his own that could undermine the informal relationships that supported Boghos. Khrimian did just that.

Paradoxically, Khrimian's success proved his undoing. With no consonant effort at reforming the provinces on the part of the imperial government, successful Armenian reform unmixed sites of power and left the community with a general loss of social capital. Subsequent repression by the Hamidian regime, which sought to reverse the politicization of the millet, only further marginalized the community. Yet, Khrimian's project had entailed the development of sets of practices and institutions that fostered a change of political culture among many Ottoman Armenians. Even while the community was being divorced from governing and social structures through the successful unmixing of sites, reform within the Church kept Armenian aspirations and political legitimacy focused on the Patriarchate and the Porte in Istanbul. This was true not only for the civic and charitable organizations that came under increased scrutiny and were made into subversives in the eyes of the government, but also the underground and later revolutionary societies that grew out of them.

Ottomanism thus had to become a plank of any political program that sought to speak for the Armenians of Anatolia—a lesson the Hnchaks failed to learn before it was too late. Over the course of multiple decades, Ottomanism and the Tanzimat, in the context of state-centralization, had provided Armenians tools for holding their leadership accountable. This accountability made Vehabedian, Nigoghayos, Kefsizian, and Boghos all legitimate objects of political action. Though Ottomanism went underground, Boghos was no less a target. Killing him was not indicative of a revolutionary rupture with the Ottoman past; it was not even a caesura. It was a novel, albeit extreme, expression of



Ottomanism, as it concluded the fight against one bishop who had resisted reform for decades. Armenians were still building the Ottoman state, whether Abdülhamit cared to admit it or not.

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