

Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı

**Güzin Çaykırın, Erzurum, Van, Bitlis Vilayetlerinde
Ermeni-Kürt İlişkileri (1908-1920), Hece Yayınları,
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Among historians, the centennial of the First World War has brought forth a needed assessment of this conflict's dimensions as regards the Ottoman interethnic relationships, focusing on the identification of new archives, translation of memoirs, and a serious exploration of the war's outcome. That is what Güzin Çaykırın, an Ottomanist in the Turkish military archives in Ankara, has done. In 256 pages of text, complemented with photographs, maps, figures, graphics, tables and appendices, she offers an intriguing and valuable contribution to the growing field of studies of the early twentieth-century Armenian-

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Kurdish relations. The book has contemporary political relevance. Current affairs in the Middle East and Caucasia continue to heighten the significance of the Armenian-Kurdish relationship.

The text consists of a preface, an introduction, four main parts and conclusion followed by twelve appendices. The conclusion is helpful in clarifying Çaykiran's main points and the relationships among them. The lengthy introduction contains a critical account of previous research methods and results, as well as the author's own research approach to the issue. Each part is divided into smaller narrative units identified by subtitles. The number of such units ranges between seven in the shortest part, and seventeen in the longest. Such a choice in the organization of the material and presentation of the analysis enhances clarity.

Part 1, "General Situation of the Erzurum, Van and Bitlis Regions," lays out the geographical location, administrative structure, demographical composition, military position and the socioeconomic conditions of the area. Part 2, "Reflection of the Proclamation of the Second Constitutionalism to the Region and the Events That Affected the Armenian-Kurdish Relations," discusses the general attitudes of the Armenians and Kurds toward the Constitutional Government, organizing of the Armenians and Kurds in the Second Constitutional Period, Armenian-Kurdish relations in the region during the Second Constitutional Period, reform efforts of the Ottoman Government in the region, reaction of the Kurds to the Armenian reforms: Bitlis revolt and Armenian-Kurdish policies of Britain and Russia and their activities in the region. Part 3, "Armenian-Kurdish relations during the First World War (1914-1918)," studies the First World War and the situation of the Ottoman army in the region, the situation of the Russian army and Russian efforts of attrition against the Ottoman army, outbreak of the Ottoman-Russian clashes and the Armenian revolts, Ottoman and Russian practices of enforcing Armenians to immigrate, occupation of Erzurum and Bitlis, the plight of the Kurds and the Bolshevik revolution, the withdrawal of the Russian army from the region and the Armenian massacre of the Muslims. Part 4, "Armenian-Kurdish relations after the First World War," focuses on the Armenian-Kurdish demands following the Moudros Armistice of 30 October 1918, organizing activities of the

Armenians and Kurds in the period of armistice, Armenians and Kurds in the Allied diplomatic processes following the armistice, eastern front operation and the delimiting of the border and the population movements in the region following the armistice.

About half of the text concerns the prewar years, while the rest is evenly divided between 1914-1918 and the remaining years. All sections are highly original and insightful. The author in every part manifests not only a command over the subject matter but a profound understanding of the Armenian and Kurdish positions. Part 3 is the most engaging component in the book, and here the author is at her best (pp.119-177). Çaykiran clearly and successfully articulates two main arguments. First, she points out the role of the Kurdish tribes played in the Armenian relocation of 1915-1916 as an outgrowth of localized competition over land. Secondly, she contends that the Turks alone were not responsible for what happened to the Armenians during the First World War and maintains that Armenian nationalists consistently attributed to Ottoman perception of an Armenian threat to country's security and sovereignty during a period of wartime. In turn, the actions of a small number of nationalists had devastating consequences for the many when Armenians in eastern Anatolia were removed to the southern provinces.

The erudite monograph is arranged along a chronological-thematic line which allows its author to comparatively focus on specific aspects of Armenian and Kurdish existence, to situate their different experiences in their respective historical contexts, and most importantly, to chart their different trajectories as they transformed themselves into the modern citizens at the end of the empire.

The consideration of several books, articles and press accounts in Armenian enriches the discussion. While some may find the lack of Armenian archival sources disappointing, the author more than makes up for that deficiency by a very close reading of the printed matter. However, it is to be mentioned that unfortunately Armenian archives are not yet open for general inspection. Repositories of the Dashnak Party and the first Armenian Republic, kept in Watertown, Massachusetts, together with those of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem and the Catholicosate in Echmiadzin are not available for

general research. They must be more extensively consulted than any of the European archives. Turkey opened the Ottoman archives for academic research more than three decades ago. Armenian archives that remain closed, including those in the United States, should be available for examination by scholars. Openness will foster constructive change by creating an impartial forum to establish a more overall narrative of the Armenian-Kurdish affairs. Historians can benefit greatly from the release and systematic analysis of Armenian records, and the result can be a far greater understanding about the role of Armenian activities in the origins, outbreak and outcome of the Armenian-Kurdish conflict and its aftermath. As a consequence, historians will be in a position to evaluate the period from new perspectives that have been overlooked or deliberately obfuscated.

The present inaccessibility of these files is, of course, a serious obstacle to scholarship which one can only hope will soon be removed. American military historian Edward Erickson, therefore, asks the pertinent question: “Why is it that the Turkish archives are open to scholars today and those of Armenia, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in Watertown, Massachusetts, and the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem closed?”¹

Most historians of Ottoman Armenians and Kurds have confined their researches to on non-Turkish, mainly Armenian and Western sources to secure material for their study, resulting in limited and one-sided depictions. Çaykiran, on the other hand, has based her study on extensive scrutiny of Ottoman manuscript and archival sources in the Prime Minister’s Office Ottoman Archive in İstanbul and the Turkish General Staff Directorate of Military History and Strategic Studies Archive in Ankara as well, enabling her to secure a far more rounded and comprehensive picture than any other study of this sort.

The book includes sixteen maps of the Ottoman Empire and eastern Anatolia, twelve appendices containing original Ottoman reports on the provinces of Erzurum, Van and Bitlis and other relevant documents, copious footnotes, a detailed index and a large bibliography which

¹ Edward Erickson, *Ottomans and Armenians: A Study in Counterinsurgency* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.229.

includes a wide array of archival sources as well as relevant books and learned journals in Turkish, Armenian and English. Most of the maps record the changing political geography of the region, while some document the routes of major military campaigns and road systems. Nine graphics showing the ethnic and religious demographics of the provinces of Erzurum, Van and Bitlis are supplied.

Twelve appendices include “Map Indicating the Population Percentages of Armenians, Kurds and Nestourians in the Regions of Van and Bitlis According to the Subdistrict Divisions”, “ Organizational Outline of the Tribal Cavalry Divisions”, “Bedirhan Abdurrahman Bey’s Article on Armenian-Kurdish Relations Published in the Droshak Newspaper”, “Proceedings of the Chamber of Deputies on the Decisions Taken by the Council of Ministers Regarding the Armenian Reforms (1913)”, “Enver Pasha’s Coded Order on the Measures To Be Taken Regarding the Bitlis Revolt”, “Document on the Flight of the Muslims during the Van Revolt”, “Document on Seyyid Agha’s Raid Made on the Armenian Band in Dersim (29 June 1917)”, “Enver Pasha’s Order Demanding the Inclusion of His Note “I Am Advancing with My Army in Order to End the Vileness Perpetrated Against the Muslims by Armenians Despite Our Guarantees” to His Additional Communication to General Odishelidze (11 February 1918)”, “Report of Vehip Pasha on Massacres Committed by Armenians Against the Muslims (15 May 1918)”, “Document on Some 150 Armenians in Greek Military Uniforms Who Left İstanbul to Join the Armenian Army as Volunteers (26 October 1920)”, “Situation of the Armenian Immigrants Who Are Settled in Adana and Its Vicinity and Their Activities Against the Muslims “ and “Document on Keeping Away from the War Zones of the Male Armenians and Greeks Between the Ages of Twenty and Forty.” These are of great value to everybody interested in twentieth-century Ottoman history.

There is a lot to be benefited from reading *Erzurum, Van, Bitlis Vilayetlerinde Ermeni-Kürt İlişkileri (1908-1920)*, which provides a new look at the relationship between the Armenians and Kurds from the proclamation of the Second Ottoman Constitutionalism in 1908 to the collapse of the Armenian Republic in 1920. First, to be commended is the book’s wide comparative scope; the author draws on multiple

examples of ethnic and religious differences in eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus. Çaykiran's nuanced reading of separatist movements and intercommunal violence should also be commended, along with the book's clear prose and compelling narration. It will certainly stand as a cornerstone for future research on the subject.

The volume, which constitutes a much-needed corrective to the scene, should clearly serve as a central reference work for the increasing number of scholars looking for a detailed history of the early twentieth-century history of Armenian-Kurdish strife. The book will be of particular use to those specialists who have limited access to Turkish archives.

This relatively understudied theme has not yet found its deserved place in the literature, and remain a fledgling field. The current lacuna means that *Erzurum, Van, Bitlis Vilayetlerinde Ermeni-Kürt İlişkileri (1908-1920)* will appeal to both laymen and experts interested in Ottoman and Middle Eastern studies. One hopes that there will an English translation, to enhance its accessibility to a wider audience.