

BOOK REVIEWS

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THE ARMENIAN COMMITTEES' IN PURSUIT OF A GREATER ARMENIA THROUGH DOCUMENTS

(*BELGELERLE BÜYÜK ERMENİSTAN PEŞİNDE ERMENİ KOMİTELERİ*)

Author: Jean-Louis Mattei

Istanbul, Bilgi Yayınevi, 2008, 355 Pages.

In the 19th century states such as France, Britain and Russia have developed policies in line with the interests of the Ottoman state with economical reasons and posed the issue of the “Eastern Question”. They tried to secure their trade routes in their favor by beginning to intervene in the internal affairs of the Ottoman state through minorities. Armenians, who were used as intermediaries, accepted to be the tool of imperialist states in order to establish an independent state with the national consciousness that they acquired. This situation turned out to be a mutual relationship of interest between the imperialist states and Armenians. Armenians, who acquired national consciousness at the end of the 19th Century, took action for independence, and Armenian revolutionary committees began to be established. These Armenian committees initiated revolts and terrorist activities.

French writer and researcher Jean-Louis Mattei demonstrates the activities of the Armenian committees, especially in Bursa, who resorted to violence as of 1890, in his work titled *The Armenian Committees' Pursuit of a Greater Armenia Through Documents*.

The most important aspect of this work is that resources and documents in different languages are used. Mattei, who studied French Literature and Latin, Ancient Greek Languages, speaks Latin, Modern Greek, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Turkish, Armenian, Russian, German, and French. The use of resources in Ottoman Turkish, Turkish, Armenian, Russian, German, and French in this work is important for the objective evaluation of the work.

This book is composed of twelve parts. In the first part entitled “Why this book”, the author explains why he conducts research on Armenians as a French national. According to the author, who was sent to Turkey in 1976 by the French government which allowed educated young people to do their military service abroad. The writer informs that he has questioned the Turkish image in

France; barbarian Turks who slaughtered Armenians. This image has lately begun to change.

Under the heading of the second part “Information on Armenians”, Mattei begins studying the issue by giving brief information about Armenians. He also passes on information about Armenian history on the basis of resources in Armenian. The author emphasizes that the Ottoman Armenians have never been slaughtered even though they lived among Byzantines and Persians and then among Turks, Russians, and Iranians. He also demonstrates that they were religiously independent. Mattei, who compares Greeks and Armenians, indicates that Armenians were not a majority like Greeks were. They were a minority living divided in the East. He also indicates that Russia has supported Armenian nationalism after the 1980s and has played from time to time a negative role in Armenian-Turkish relations.

In the third part under the heading of “Armenians were not slaughtered in the Ottoman city Bursa during the Deportation”, by relying on the documents it is demonstrated that atrocities against Armenians were not carried out. It is presented with documents that Armenians, who were the second minority after Greeks in Bursa, received aid after the earthquake that occurred in 1895. Armenians of Bursa received financial aid in the years when Armenian events began which shows Armenians were not maltreated.

It is explained that Armenians working in silk factories in Bursa, and owners of these factories were under the pressure of some committees such as Hinchak and Tashnak. Mattei, who uses the newspapers *Hüdavendigâr* and *Ertuğrul* published in Bursa, displays the work waged against the Armenian committees through these newspapers’ agencies.

The writer indicates that the the relocation decree could not be totally approved and innocent people had to be punished aside the offenders. The committees are pointed out to be the reason of this fact. In the conclusion of this section, it is explained that the Armenians of Bursa were not slaughtered, and some of them were never subjected to deportation.

In the fourth section entitled “Armenians in the City of Marseille”, Mattei, who is himself from Marseille, gives brief information about this city. Subsequently the historical background of the Armenians in Marseille is examined. It is indicated that there were also Armenians among those who exported silk to Marseille in the 18th century, and at the end of 19th and in the beginning of 20th centuries there were also Armenians who moved to Marseille from the Ottoman state. The writer explains obtaining information about the Armenians arriving in Marseille after the 1920s from the magazine *L’Arc-en-ciel Arménien* and Takavorian’s short story *Armenouche*. The writer expresses that in such works all the Armenians were innocent and puts forth negative aspects of the revolutionary ignored by the Armenian committees. In addition to these, a film by Ashot Manukian entitled *558, Rue Paradis* is analyzed within this framework. The writer, who mentions the “genocide monument” in Marseille,

also draws attention to the “genocide monument” built for Armenians who died in Karabakh.

The researcher, indicating that Armenian propaganda has worked continuously throughout history, gives examples from the Armenian press about this issue. He examined the newspaper *Armenia* as an example from the press. It is shown with quotations from the journal that *Armenia* which was succeeded by *L’Arc-en-ciel Arménien* in 1990, continued the anti-Turk attitude. In this study, some Armenian studies of Marseille and the full interview with the Turkish consul in Marseille Taylan İzmirli was broadcasted in *Escape Arménien* affiliated with the radio station *Radio Dialogue*.

Under the heading of the fifth part, “Armenian Revolutionary Organizations and Parties”, the historical background of groups and committees that waged terrorist acts in Turkey is given. Firstly, the author provides information on the history of the *Armenagan Party*. Secondly, the *Hinchak Party*, which is evaluated as a party that contrasted with chauvinist nationalism and socialism, is examined. The activities of the party, whose program has been given, are proved to be terrorist activities. General activities and propaganda methods of the *Hinchak Party* are explained and the acts of rebellion. The Kumkapı Demonstration and Bab-i Ali demonstration are also dealt with. That the Hinchak Party is a proponent of terror is shown to the reader through excerpts from various resources and documents. In this part, thirdly, information about the *Tashnaksutyun Party* has been given. The writer, who makes assessment by utilizing various resources, expresses that there was a competition between the *Tashnak* and *Hinchak*. The report of Colonel Debeil is given and analyzed about the terrorist activities of *Tashnak*.

Mattei, who refers to the works of Anahide Ter Minassian almost throughout of the study, shows insubstantiality Minassian’s attempt to exonerate the Tashnaksutyun. It is possible to find information about the propaganda agencies such as *Troshak* and *Pro Armenia* here. Another striking issue in this part is the analysis of the Kurdish and Armenian collaboration. Some articles of the accord signed between the *Kurdish Hoybun Society* and *Tashnaksutyun* are provided with comments of the author.

In the sixth part under the heading of “Eastern Incidents”, the Armenian incidents in the East, which had begun at the end of the 19th century and that lasted until the beginning of the 20th Century, assessed. The Eastern incidents of the period are explicated on the basis of the work of V.T. Mayevski titled *Portrait of Van and Bitlis Provinces in Statistics* and the short stories of Avetis Ahorianian. As a witness, the work of Maveyski is considered important. The works of Ahorianian, although written on propaganda purposes, reflects the situation in the East quite well. In addition to these resources, there are references to the works of Anahide Ter Minassian and Chelebian, which are also frequently resorted to other chapters.

In the seventh part entitled “Armenian Propaganda Before and After Deportation” the Armenian propaganda tools are evaluated. The function of Armenian

propaganda is explained by excerpts from the weekly journal *Masis* and the book titled *Nor Knar*. In addition to the translation of the poems, there are also transcriptions from Armenian to Turkish. That there are some minor problems in transcriptions from Armenian to Turkish which stems from the fact that a standard could not be set in while transcribing.

In this part, it is explained how the newspaper *Horizon*, which makes the propaganda of the Tashnak Party, *Matter of Reform, Protest, and The Forgotten Heroes* prepared by Kristopher Mikaelian, *Avazagabedi* of Arman Shidanian and the comic named as *Le Rire* were used as tools of propaganda. In addition to these, the book entitled *Arménie 1900*, which was used as a tool of propaganda after relocation is examined. Another striking issue in Armenian propaganda is the claims of Turkish and Kurdish collaboration against Armenians. The researcher, who shows the negative attitude of Armenians towards Kurds and common activities of Armenians and Kurds that were in contradiction with this, displays that Armenian propaganda pursues a policy of lies and silence.

Under the heading of “Armenian Anti-Revolutionary Epigram: Comrade Panchuni (1909, 1914, 1923)”, the eighth part, the work of Yervant Odian titled *Comrade Panchuni* is examined. The reason this work is examined is that it describes the Armenian committees very well. There was an inconsistency between the policies of the Ottoman state and Odian. However, it is important that Armenian committees of a period are humorously scrutinized with *Comrade Panchuni*. The happening in which the character Panchuni provoked those who worked in factory with his undertakings is being narrated in connection with the Armenian workers who were on strike in Bursa. The establishment of such a connection shows the reality of the story titled *Panchuni*. Through the detailed analysis of the author, it is proved that some Armenian organizations are not innocent.

Under the heading of “Deportation”, which is the ninth part, the committees’ armed clashes with the Turkish soldiers and their harms to the civilians are being told. The decision taken on April 24, 1915 for the closure of the committees is mentioned. Among those who were arrested, the situations of Daniel Varujan and Rupen Sevak are examined. The researcher indicates that all of those who were arrested were not offenders, and there were also innocent people who died aside the homicides. The writer, who indicates that the decision of relocation was taken on 27 May 1915, tells the tragic story of Madam Chukurian under the name of “*Exile at the age of eight*”. Mattei says that the Armenian committees brought about this tragic event.

Additionally, accusations of Yves Ternon and documents of fake Andonian are examined. The researcher shows in documents that the information given by Ternon are false, and the documents of Andonian are fake. The number of Armenians subjected to relocation in the years 1915-1916 and the losses of Armenians are given in this part under the light of some documents.

Under the heading of “An Enemy of Turks: Zoravar Antranik (General Antranik)”, which is the tenth part, the political activities of Antranik Ozanian, who was an

eminent representative of Armenian revolutionary movements, are scrutinized. Information about General Antranik is obtained from the book of Antranik Chelebian titled *General Antranik and Armenian Revolutionary Movement*. It is known that the aim of Antranik was to demolish the Ottoman state and establish a Greater Armenia. Here, the reason of Antranik's stay abroad and his actions in Bulgaria are questioned. The corpse of Antranik famous for his racist attitude was taken from France to Yerevan with an official ceremony in 2000. The researcher urges the reader to ponder on policies of Armenia with information he gives.

Under the heading of "The Pride of Armenians: Kevork Pamukchian and Pars Tuğlacı", which is the eleventh part, the two personalities mentioned that may be mediators for solving existing problems are discussed. It is indicated that Pars Tuğlacı has positive contributions to Turkish-Armenian relations. Pamukchian has also been evaluated in the same way. It is emphasized that the works of these people should be taken into account in research conducted today.

In the conclusion, the author mentions a letter of protest that he sent in correspondence to Bernard Thomas about the Armenian issue in a famous French journal called as *Le Canard Enchaîné*. In addition to this, the bloody events initiated by the ASALA terrorist organization, the dissolution of the U.S.S.R and the establishment of Armenia, are addressed.

Overall, this work entitled as *The Armenian Committees' Pursuit of a Greater Armenia Through Documents* is an important work explaining the activities of Armenian committees starting from 1890, especially in Bursa and France, Armenian propaganda and the events of 1915 by making use of various resources.