

BOOK REVIEW / KİTAP İNCELEMESİ

To cite this book review: Şevval Beste Gökçelik, “Armenians in Maraş and the Zeytun Rebellions”, *Review of Armenian Studies*, Issue 46 (2022): 97-101.

Received: 27.09.2022

Accepted: 12.10.2022

Şevval Beste GÖKÇELİK*

ARMENIANS IN MARAŞ AND THE ZEYTUN REBELLIONS**

(MARAŞ'TA ERMENİLER VE ZEYTUN İSYANLARI)

Book Title: Maraş'ta Ermeniler ve Zeytun İsyancıları

Author: Nejla Günay

Published: Kahramanmaraş, Kahramanmaraş Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, April 2021

Language: Turkish

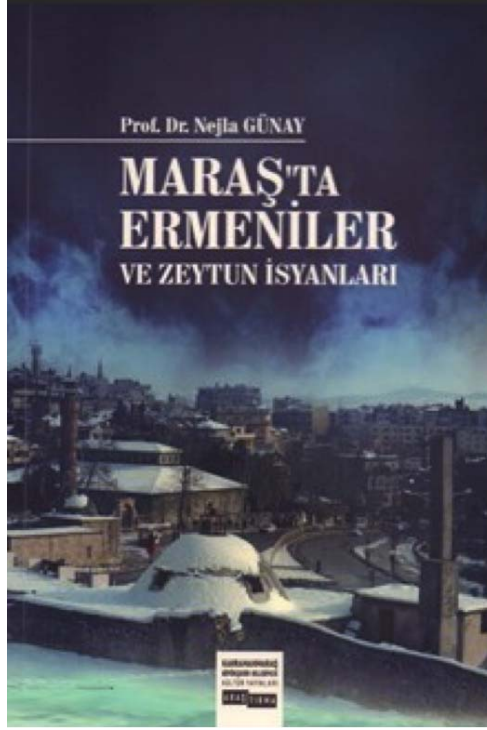
ISBN: 978-605-4996-91-9

Number of Pages: 364

One of the noteworthy places in Ottoman society where Armenians and Muslims lived together and were influenced by each other was Maraş (Marash). Maraş was one of the regions where the Catholic and Protestant missionaries had a strong influence, and these missionary activities resulted in the Armenians gaining their national consciousness. The Armenian rebellions that frequently occurred in the Zeytun (Zeitun)

* ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2706-3450>
Scholar in Residence, Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)

** This is the English translation of a book review by Şevval Beste Gökçelik titled “Maraş'ta Ermeniler ve Zeytun İsyancılarına Dair” that was originally published in the 69th issue of the *Ermeni Araştırmaları* journal. Please see: Beste Ş. Gökçelik, “Maraş'ta Ermeniler ve Zeytun İsyancılarına Dair”, *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Sayı 69 (2021): 219-223.



Township (*Kaza*) of Maraş were largely the product of the missionaries operating in Anatolia. In her book titled *Maraş'ta Ermeniler ve Zeytun İsyancıları* (*Armenians In Maraş and the Zeytun Rebellions*), Nejla Günay deals with the demographic, historical, cultural, political, and economic aspects of the Armenians living in Maraş, and the effects of the missionary activities on Armenians.

Completing her doctoral thesis with her study titled “Maraş Ermenileri” (“Armenians of Maraş”) in 2007, Günay published her thesis as a book in the same year with the title *Maraş'ta Ermeniler ve Zeytun İsyancıları* (*Armenians in Maraş and the Zeytun Rebellions*). The book was also awarded the best book award within the scope of the “Kahramanmaraş Kültürüne Hizmet Ödülleri” (“Awards for Service to the Kahramanmaraş Culture”) in 2012. Günay, who has contributed to the literature with her articles on Ottoman-Armenian, Ottoman-Russian, Ottoman-British relations throughout her academic career, continues to carry out research focusing on Ottoman social structure. Having earned the title of Professor in 2018, Günay continues to serve as a faculty member at the Division of History Education of the Department of Turkish and Social Sciences Education at the Gazi Faculty of Education of Gazi University.

Apart from the Introduction, the book consists of three chapters and draws a very detailed profile of Armenian-Turkish relations with materials obtained from both domestic and foreign sources. The Introduction mentions the geopolitical position of Maraş, its history, and the place occupied by the Armenians in the historical development of Maraş. The Introduction continues by narrating the historical developments concerning Armenian-Turkish relations starting from the 6th century when the Armenians were first settled in Maraş by the Byzantine Empire to Maraş's transition to Ottoman rule.

The first chapter of the book titled “Maraş'ta İdari Yapı, Sosyal ve Ekonomik Hayat” (“The Administrative Structure of Maraş and its Social and Economic Life”) carefully examines the demographic situation of Maraş; the religious, social, and cultural issues that dominated the region; the position of the Armenians in the social structure of Maraş; and the economic situation of the Armenians of Maraş.

A part of the Ottoman Empire's subjects were non-Muslims. They were granted the freedom of religion and conscience, and the right to open their own places of worship. As stated in the first chapter of the book, the Zeytun Township possessed the highest number of non-Muslims in the Maraş Sub-province (*Sancak*). It was this township where most of the Armenian rebellions occurred. Allowed to operate their own churches, schools, and foundations, the Armenians were ironically causing considerable damage to their own institutions because of these rebellions. For example, Armenian churches and schools in Zeytun were badly damaged during the 1896 rebellion, but they were repaired by the Ottoman authorities.

As clearly stated in the chapter, the position of non-Muslims in the Ottoman bureaucracy increased substantially after the proclamation of the 1856 Edict of Reform (*Islahat Fermanı*). Muslims and Armenians were already intertwined in social life at that point. This chapter narrates the similarities of these two communities who were greatly affected by each other, the Armenians' role in the bureaucracy of the city, and their activities in agriculture and animal husbandry, industry, and trade.

The second chapter titled “Maraş'ta Türk ve Ermeni İlişkilerinin Bozulmasının Sebepleri” (“The Reasons for the Deterioration of Turkish-Armenian Relations in Maraş”) deals with the Eastern Question. The author indicates that the Eastern Question was raised because of the Great Powers' desire to further their interests against the Ottoman Empire, the seizure of the Empire's lands in Europe, and the expulsion of the Turks from Europe. In the continuation of the chapter, the author deals with the policies of the Great Powers against the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century and especially draws attention to the missionary activities of these states. The missionaries would settle in the

regions they wanted to exploit, and within the scope of missionary activities, would firstly introduce their culture with the aim of popularizing it and having it adopted. After the Edict of Reform was declared in 1856, Christian missionaries became more influential in the Ottoman territories. In this context, the chapter gives an account of the effects of the methods and activities of Catholic, Protestant, American, German, and English missionaries in Maraş on the Armenians.

These missionary activities resulted in the awakening of Armenian national consciousness. At the same time, these activities disseminated publications and hymns containing revolutionary ideas and installed in the Armenians a sense of hostility against the Turks. The Armenian rebellions and the reaction of the Ottoman Empire to these rebellions were also reflected in a distorted way to the world public opinion through the missionaries. The nationalist movement that gained momentum with the effect of these activities intensified with the emergence of the Serbian revolt in the Balkans. As mentioned in the book, after the independence developments in the Balkans, the Armenians became strongly attached to the belief that they could not gain their independence without resorting violent action. This thought, in turn, would be the catalyst for bloody rebellions.

The second chapter of the book also mentions the revolutionary committees established by the Armenians against the Ottoman Empire. The chapter narrates the formation of the Hunchak and Dashnak committees and many other associations, their aims, and the paths they followed. As the author indicates, these committees adopted terrorism as a method for their actions carried out in the name of Armenian nationalism. Their aims were similar; to establish an independent state, and while doing this, to get Europe's support by spreading the propaganda in the Western world that "Armenian massacres" were being committed in the Ottoman Empire.

The third chapter, titled "Maraş'ta Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinin Bozulması ve Ermeni İsyanları" ("The Deterioration of Turkish-Armenian Relations and Armenian Rebellions in Maraş"), sheds light on the Armenian rebellions in Maraş that brought Turkish-Armenian relations to their breaking point. The chapter focuses on the Zeytun township of Maraş where a significant part of the Armenian events took place. As was done in the Introduction of the book, the chapter firstly mentions the geographical structure and administrative management of Zeytun and thus gives the reader a general perspective about the region.

Zeytun was a region where Armenians had rebelled only 20 years after they had first come under Ottoman rule. Therefore, from the very beginning, it was difficult for the Armenians of Zeytun to accept Ottoman dominion. In this

respect, as a tumultuous region, Zeytun offered the Armenians the opportunity to rebel more easily with the decrease in the number of soldiers in Maraş due to the 1768-1774 Ottoman-Russian War. Afterwards, the frequently rebelling Armenians became stronger with the establishment of the Hunchak and Dashnak committees, resulting in the rebellions gaining momentum. The author also mentions the various reforms made by the Ottoman government after these rebellions. In this context, the government conceded to bold demands such as the reduction of taxes, general amnesty, and the return of arms to the Zeytun Armenians.

The Ottomans, whose attention had shifted to different parts during the war with Russia in 1877-1878, were again confronted with rebellions in Zeytun. This chapter includes letters confirming that Britain played a major role in the rebellion of the Zeytun Armenians. While many people lost their lives in the rebellions that continued unabated, the distrust between the Armenian and Turkish sides reached its peak. While the chapter reflects the story of the confrontation of the two communities living in the same land for the sake of the interests of the Great Powers, it also highlights the rupture of the relations of these intertwined communities.

The events that Günay deals with are chronologically arranged in a way that constitutes the whole book. The author clearly presents to the reader the ups and downs in the Armenian-Turkish relations over the years. Mentioning the geographical, demographic, and historical structures of Maraş and Zeytun both in the initial and subsequent parts of the book clarifies the importance of these regions. The author examines the rebellions of the Armenians in Maraş in detail and uses various documents to support her frequently emphasized argument that the reaction of the Ottoman Empire to these rebellions was relayed to the Western media in a distorted manner by the missionaries. The book successfully explains the reasons for the rebellions that took place in the 19th century, by whom these rebellions were supported, the arming activities of the Armenians, and the aid they received in this process.

The book, which is enriched with both domestic and foreign sources, makes all its stories even more interesting for the reader with the included explanatory tables, visuals, letters, and maps. Nejla Günay, with her book titled *Armenians in Maraş and the Zeytun Rebellions*, presents the historical, social, cultural, and economic existence of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and the rebellions they carried out by focusing on the Maraş region. Günay's book, with its captivating and succinct narrative, makes a great contribution to the literature and will serve as an excellent guide for researchers studying Armenian-Turkish relations.