

**Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014. Pp. xii + 249, 6 figures, 1 map, notes, index. ISBN 978-0-8047-9263-9 Paperback.**

*Shattered Dreams of Revolution* is an outgrowth of Bedross Der Matossian's unpublished 2008 doctoral dissertation drafted at Columbia University. It is about the ethnic politics in post-1908 Ottoman Empire and the stories of Armenians, Arabs, and Jews in the ensuing two years. In 178 pages of text, the book argues that the Young Turk revolution of 1908 raised these communities' expectations for new opportunities of inclusion and citizenship but as postrevolutionary festivities ended, these feelings soon turned to pessimism and gave way to a drastic rise in ethnoreligious relations.

The monograph is thematically rather than chronologically arranged and the descriptive-analytical account is divided into six basic chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapters discuss: "The Euphoria of the Revolution", "Debating the Future of the Empire", "The "Historical Period" and Its Impact on Ethnic Groups", "From the Streets to the Ballots", "From the Ballots to the Groups", "From the Ballots to the Parliament" and "The Counterrevolution and the "Second Revolution"". The two-third of the book concerns the restoration of the Ottoman constitution of 23 December 1876 and the reconvening of the parliament, while the rest is on the 1909 period. The absence of a bibliography diminishes the study's utility as a scholarly resource. Not a single statistical table or chart graces the volume. There is no appendice.

Matossian's approach is realistic and dispassionate; he eschews ideological explanations, but prefers instead to examine the respective strengths and weaknesses of the Ottoman constitutional government and the Armenians, Arabs, and Jews, the stated purposes of their leaders and the factors which have influenced them in their decisions. The author's tone is judicious and nuanced. The study nonetheless has major defects.

*Shattered Dreams of Revolution* heavily relies on the published sources and especially on the contemporary press. It is regrettable that the author did not consult the rich and voluminous files available at the Prime Minister's Office Ottoman Archive in İstanbul and the Turkish General Staff Military History and Strategic Studies Directorate's Archive in Ankara. He might easily have drawn on dozens of files from them. These records are extremely valuable: they contain extensive material on the events in the Ottoman Empire before and after the Young Turk revolution, which provide a broader perspective in assessing Turkish-Armenian-Arab-Jewish relations. Matossian, who reads both Ottoman and modern Turkish, could have used them to supplement, complement, correct, and amplify his findings derived from other sources. One also wonders why he did not use published or unpublished French sources.

Meantime, one cannot but agree with Matossian's statement that "(T)he inclusion of archival documents from the Dashnak Archives housed in Watertown, Massachusetts, would have shed more light on the activities of the ARF [Armenian Revolutionary Federation] in the postrevolutionary period. However, the author was not granted access to this important material after several attempts. It is to be hoped that in the near future all reasonable requests from legitimate scholars to make use of this valuable trove of documents will be approved" (p.204 n27). In contrast to open Ottoman archives, the ARF collections and the archives of the Armenian patriarchate in Jerusalem and Catholicosate in Echmiadzin, are not open to all researchers. The archives of the Armenian patriarchate in Jerusalem is said to have over a half million documents in its own archival collection.

According to Matossian, due to different reasons ranging from its unorganized nature to the lack of professional staff, these archives have not been open to historians.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas there is available a superfluity of unpublished and published Turkish material on which to base a history, the problems in drawing on Armenian sources are very different. Of archival material, which is the life-blood of history, little has been made available. The Armenian documentation is often inaccessible or difficult to get at. In many instances, access is restricted for political or other reasons. Often records have not been adequately cataloged, which also severely limits access for the researcher. Full accessibility to Armenian archives most certainly would be welcome to all scholars interested in the field.

Matossian claims that "(T)he Young Turks were not wholeheartedly committed to constitutionalism. For them constitutionalism was only a means to an end: to maintain the integrity of a centralized Ottoman Empire" (p.3). However, he offers no trustworthy authentic evidence that either corroborates or proves this assertion. By all accounts, during the revolutionary fervor of 1908-1909, the Young Turks proceeded to remove many of the ambiguities of the revived constitution and to establish beyond doubt the sovereign power of parliament. Sultan Abdülhamid II was obliged to take an oath of fealty to the nation and to the constitution. The sultan's veto of legislation was curtailed and was subject to being overridden by two-thirds veto of the Chamber of Deputies. Parliament was authorized to meet on the first of November of each year without formal convocation, and the calling of special sessions was authorized petition of a majority of the members. Ministers were made individually and collectively responsible to the Chamber of Deputies, and the decision of a general election on any issue was declared to be definitive and final. As amended by the Young Turks, therefore, the Constitution of 1876 became a liberal charter of parliamentary government.

Contrary to the author's contention, the Young Turks' version of Ottomanism did not entail "the assimilation of ethnic difference, Ottoman Turkish as the main language" (p.7). The Young Turks had no scheme of Turkifying all subjects of the Ottoman Empire. It was centralization, and not Turkification, that was the government policy. The Young Turks' aim was to modernize the empire. This meant, in contemporary European terms, legal and economic reforms, greater bureaucratic efficiency, a well-armed professional army recruited by conscription, and patriotism (defined in terms of the Ottoman nation).

Matossian says: "The ethnic groups perceived Ottomanism as a framework for promoting their identities, languages, and ethno-religious privileges, as well as an empire based on administrative decentralization" (p.7). In fact, despite the measure of sincerity that lay behind the promises of the Ottoman constitution, and although the Ottoman government continued to speak of "the union of elements," the spread of nationalism among the subject peoples of the Empire ended the ideal of the free, equal, and peaceful association of peoples in a common loyalty to the country. Yorgi Boşo, a Christian deputy from Serfice in the Balkans in the Chamber of Deputies, infuriated the Turks by his ironic remark "I am as Ottoman as the Ottoman Bank."

It is misleading to refer to a "homogenization of Anatolia" on the eve of the First World War (p.178). The removal of some elements from strategically sensitive areas was clearly a war imperative. These relocations were pragmatic actions by a state facing the challenge of insurgency, intending to tighten security in vulnerable zones. The author is on much less solid evidentiary ground

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<sup>1</sup> Bedross Der Matossian, "The Genocide Archives of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem," *The Armenian Review*, Vol. 52, Nos. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2011), p. 22.

when arguing that “this transition, influenced by social Darwinism, was implemented through social engineering” (p.178).

Factual errors are surprisingly few. For instance, Nissim Russo was never an undersecretary of the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior (p.208 n80).

Despite these criticisms, Matossian has provided a thoughtful, and well written addition to the field of twentieth-century Ottoman studies—a work that illustrates the separatist role of the ethnoreligious politics in the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918).

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