

# MASS DESTRUCTION OF ARMENIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE DURING THE HAMIDIAN MASSACRES (1894-1896)

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## Abstract

The policy of destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage in the Ottoman Empire began with the conquest of Western Armenia and has continued until the present day. Over the centuries, Armenian culture, as part of the Empire's Christian culture, has either been destroyed spontaneously, in vast swathes or undergone various manifestations of neutralisation by various Turkish regimes.

The first part of this article will outline the approaches made by Genocide study theorists concerning the origin and definition of the term "cultural genocide" existing until today, including the attempts at revising or even re-naming it. The second part outlines the chronology of Armenian cultural heritage destruction. A detailed description of the policy of demolition of the Armenian cultural heritage during Hamidian massacres as a manifestation of vandalism or cultural genocide will also be presented.

**Key Words:** vandalism, cultural genocide, genocide, Hamidian massacres, Armenian Genocide, cultural heritage, mass destruction, state policy.

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## From the History of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage

The destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in Turkey has been an ongoing practice linked to the respective policies of the Ottoman Sultans, the Young Turk regime and the Kemalist Republic. Armenian culture has been obliterated in the Ottoman Empire since the conquer of Western Armenia. However, the end of the 19th century and especially the entire 20th century saw a massive, consistent destruction of Armenian cultural heritage as part of the genocidal policy implemented against the Armenian population.

The entire process of the destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage could be divided into three phases.

The first, which could conditionally be called the “forced cultural assimilation” phase, covers the period from the 16th to the end of the 19th century when the destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage was spontaneous and limited. This phase could be described as that of the rejection of Christian heritage by the Ottomans in the newly occupied territories and the establishment and dissemination of the Islamic culture. In this phase, the transformation of monasteries and churches into mosques in the historical Armenian regions which took place alongside plundering and destruction, was a demonstration of the rejection of the Christian heritage. Indeed, the Ottoman sultans had previously accumulated great experience by destroying and/or adapting Byzantine churches.<sup>1</sup>

The second phase of the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage took place from 1894 to 1922. This period saw the successive, deliberate and massive destruction of Western Armenian culture by three different regimes: that of Abdul-Hamid, the Young Turks and the Kemalists, accompanied by the physical annihilation of the Armenians. More than this: during this stage, the mechanism of obliterating the entire *urban culture*<sup>2</sup> or of specific Armenian districts was often put into action, particularly in the historic Armenian territories.<sup>3</sup>

The third phase of the destruction of Armenian culture was from 1923 until the present day. One of the obstacles in the way of creating a Turkish national identity by

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1 By the beginning of the 20th century, about 60 valuable Byzantine Christian monuments in Constantinople alone, built from the 4th to the 15th centuries, had been destroyed or adapted, most being turned into mosques. These included St. Sophia Cathedral (Kyuchuk Hagia Sophia), the churches of St. Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii), St. Theodosia (Gul Camii) and the Holy Savior Church in Chora (Kahrie Camii), etc. See A. N. Nikolaev, “Современное состояние памятников Византийского зодчества в Стамбуле” [The Current Situation of Byzantine Architectural Monuments in Istanbul], *Byzantine Chronicle* 7, no. 32 (1953): 146-160.

2 In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the *urban culture* of Western Armenia embraced residential districts, monasteries, churches, bridges, cemeteries, educational establishments, administrative bodies, commercial and trades enterprises, printing houses, workshops, studios, markets, stores, kiosks, taverns, etc.

3 Of the several dozen cities of Western Armenia, the most prominent were Van, Baghesh (Bitlis), Mush, Karin (Erzerum), Yerznka (Erzinjan), Sebastia (Sivas), Kharberd (Harpur), Malatia and Akn, most of which (particularly those near the border) were razed to the ground by artillery fire during the Genocide of 1915. See Seda Parsamyan, «Օսմանյան բանակի ներգրավվածությունը հայկական բնակավայրերի և հուշարձանների ոչնչացման գործում՝ Վանի, Բիթլիսի և Էրզրումի նահանգների օրինակով (1915-1918 թթ.)» [The Involvement of the Ottoman army in the destruction of Armenian localities and monuments: the cases of the Van, Bitlis and Erzerum provinces (1915-1918)], *Etchmiadzin* 78, no. 4 (2021): 66-80; Ibidem, *Etchmiadzin* 78, no. 5 (2021): 105-116.

the Kemalist-Republican regime was the remains, especially in the form of architectural monuments, left by the annihilated Armenians that were scattered all over the country. The Kemalists launched and elaborated a state programme of the destruction of any fact relating to the existens of the Armenians, thus completing the Armenian Genocide. Cultural genocide thus became a vital phase of the Armenian Genocide being a part of the state policy and which have some manifestations in the present republican regime.

## **Cultural Genocide: Theoretical Concepts**

The term cultural genocide was coined based on the term “vandalism,” (and also “barbarity”) proposed by Raphael Lemkin before the coinage of the term genocide at the Madrid conference of 1933.<sup>4</sup> He defined *vandalism* as the destruction of works of art and culture manifesting the “unique genius and achievement of a collectivity,” and *barbarity* as “the premeditated destruction of a national, religious, racial and social collectivity.” Lemkin held that both should be criminalized as international crimes.<sup>5</sup> According to him, the act of “vandalism” might especially have much graver consequences, as the destruction of works of art (conceived by a unique genius) is an irreparable loss not only to the culture of a specific group but also against humanity and world culture.<sup>6</sup> In his view, an attack on the culture of a group is, at the same time, an attack on its spiritual and moral integrity as well as on its national characteristics, without which it cannot survive for long.

Both the crimes of “barbarity” and “vandalism” as defined by Lemkin in 1933 were integrated, about a decade later, into the definition of Genocide, becoming important components of that crime.

Lemkin, by introducing the term *genocide* in his fundamental work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* for the first time in 1944, paid special attention to the problem of the destruction of cultural heritage in its definition.<sup>7</sup> According to him, Genocide is a systematic programme consisting of various actions aiming at destroying the vitally important fabric of ethnic groups with the intention of annihilating them. “The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion and the economic existence of national groups and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.”<sup>8</sup>

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4 Raphael Lemkin, *Acts Constituting a General (Transnational) Danger Considered as Offences against the Law of Nations*, Additional explications to the Special Report presented to the 5th Conference for the Unification of Penal Law in Madrid (14-20 October 1933), at <http://www.preventGenocide.org/lemkin/madrid1933-english.htm>, accessed 28.02.2022.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79-80.

8 Ibid., 79.

Lemkin describes the eight components or techniques of Genocide as being: political, social, cultural, economic, biological, physical, religious and moral.<sup>9</sup> In cultural techniques of genocide, he includes the prohibition of the group's national traditions, language, destruction of cultural values – monuments, archives and libraries, as well as annihilation of people representing the culture and art of the group.<sup>10</sup>

His focus on cultural genocide or the destruction of a group's culture and the importance of its inclusion in the concept of Genocide was greatly conditioned by the Armenian Genocide.<sup>11</sup> Lemkin's perception of the world was shaken, while he was still in his teens, by the Armenian massacres of the 1890s, the Armenian Genocide and the lack of accountability for both events. They later became an important stimulus for the formation and development of the concept of Genocide, including its cultural component.<sup>12</sup> In an article on the Armenian Genocide written some months before his death, he highlighted the fact that during the Genocide in Turkey, the cultural losses suffered by the Armenian people were staggering.<sup>13</sup> The excerpt from Lemkin's commentary to the memoirs of Jean Nalikian, reads: "...the Armenians, as the 'intellectual core of Turkey,' had valuable personal libraries, archives and historical manuscripts, all of which were scattered and perished; churches, monasteries and monuments of historical and architectural value were destroyed."<sup>14</sup>

Cultural genocide, according to Lemkin, may be accomplished in religious and cultural fields predominantly by destroying institutions and objects through which the spiritual life of a human group finds its expression, such as its religious leaders, places of worship, objects of worship, schools and treasures of art and culture. The result of this is the weakening of spiritual cohesion and the onset of the group's disintegration.<sup>15</sup>

However, according to Lemkin, not all cases of the extinction of cultural values should be considered to be genocide. Genocidal actions are considered to be instances of cultural destruction aimed at the deliberate annihilation of a target group. He firstly suggests, distinguishing between the two, that the concepts and boundaries of "cultural destruction" and "cultural assimilation" be studied and understood. Cultural assimilation or integration, which is not genocidal by nature, takes place gradually, unintentionally and constitutes "continuous and slow adaptation of the cultural", conditioned by various

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9 Ibid., 82-90.

10 Ibid., 84-85.

11 Donna-Lee Frieze, "Genos – the human group: how the concept of culture underscores Raphael Lemkin's notion of Genocide," *The Crime of Genocide: Prevention, Condemnation and Elimination of Consequences* (Proceedings of the International Conference held in Yerevan, December 14-15, 2010, MFA of Armenia, AGMI) (Yerevan 2011), 164-171.

12 Peter Balakian, "Raphael Lemkin, Cultural destruction and the Armenian Genocide," *Holocaust and Genocide studies* 27, no. 1 (2013): 58-61.

13 Raphael Lemkin, "Dr. Lemkin, Father of Genocide Convention, Reviews Work Relating to Turkish Massacres," *The Hairenik Weekly*, Vol. XXV, no. 47, 1 January 1959, 4, at <http://asbarez.com/59792/lemkins-hairenik-weekly-article-50-years-later-a-powerful-reminder/>, accessed 12. 10. 2021.

14 Ibid.

15 *American Jewish Historical Society*, Raphael Lemkin Collection, box 6, folder 2, "Genocide as a crime under international law," 2.

internal and external influences. While cultural genocide is not just an act of destruction, carried out violently, swiftly and completely, it is also manifested in the acts of physically or biologically eliminating a group and is part of the intention and plan of the perpetrator to commit genocide.<sup>16</sup>

Lemkin uses the telling episode of the burning down of the famous Jewish Theological Seminary library in Lublin, Poland in 1939 by the Germans as a vivid example of cultural genocide, quoting part of the confession made by a German who participated in it: “For us it was a matter of special pride to destroy the Talmudic Academy, which was known as the greatest in Poland... We threw out of the building the great Talmudic library and carted it to market. There we set fire to the books. The fire lasted for twenty hours. The Jews of Lublin were assembled around and cried bitterly.”<sup>17</sup> In his confession, the German also said: “... their cries almost silenced us. Then we summoned the military band and the joyful shouts of the soldiers silenced the sound of the Jewish cries.”<sup>18</sup> Lemkin points out that with this single episode of the Holocaust, two aspects of the same crime – cultural and physical destruction – underscored, at the same time, the perpetrators’ awareness of their crime, i.e., their intention.

Giving great importance to cultural genocide, he made great efforts to have it criminalised. The two drafts of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide included only three out of the abovementioned eight components of Genocide, viz.

1. Physical (causing the death of members of a group or injuring their health or physical integrity)
2. Biological (restricting births)
3. Cultural (destroying the specific characteristics of a group).<sup>19</sup>

Despite the significance of the issue, however, the inclusion of the cultural aspect, indeed, became a subject of much controversy and opposing views.<sup>20</sup> No matter how essential place cultural genocide occupied in Lemkin’s mind – and he understood the extreme importance of including this term in the Convention – he had to step back from that difficult debate to allow the concept of genocide to achieve the force of law. Even after the adoption of the Convention, the issue of expanding the definition of the term *genocide* in international legal documents to include its cultural aspect has been problematic for decades.

Lemkin’s thesis of cultural Genocide was further developed in later years in the theories put forward by genocide scholars and professionals from varied disciplines studying genocide, who can be divided into two groups.

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<sup>16</sup> Frieze, “Genos-the human group,” 167.

<sup>17</sup> Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, 84-85.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> First draft of the Genocide Convention, prepared by the UN Secretariat, [May] 1947 [UN Doc. E/447]. Ad Hoc Committee Draft: *Second draft of the Genocide convention* prepared by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), meeting between April 5, 1948 and May 10, 1948 [UN Doc. E/AC.25/SR.1 to 28], at <http://www.preventGenocide.org/law/convention/drafts/>, accessed 12.10.2022.

<sup>20</sup> For details, see *The Genocide Convention. The Travaux Préparatoires*, edited by Hiram Abtahi and Philippa Webb (Leiden, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2008).

The first, forming the majority (Leo Cooper, Vahagn Dadrian, Samuel Totten, Martin Shaw, Mohammed Abed, Barry Sautman, Donna-Lee Frieze, Pamela de Condappa and others) argues, like Lemkin, that the cultural aspect of genocide is a constituent feature of any genocidal act and that genocide does not necessarily mean physical annihilation of a group.<sup>21</sup>

The second group of researchers is inclined to insist that the destruction of a group's culture should not be included in the concept of genocide. Israel Charny offers using the term *ethnocide* rather than cultural genocide as a definition of the main processes that prohibit or interfere with the natural cycle of reproduction and continuity of a culture or a nation.<sup>22</sup>

In 1944, Lemkin put forward, as an alternative to the term *genocide*, the term *ethnocide*,<sup>23</sup> with no distinction being made between the two. However, the term "ethnocide" is more often used in contemporary academic literature in a narrower sense, simply to describe cultural genocide.<sup>24</sup>

Political scientist and lawyer Barry Sautman argues that the underlying intention of "ethnocide" cannot have the same value as that of "cultural Genocide," as "ethnocide" does not relate to the physical and biological extermination of a group but is specific to forced assimilation and not the annihilation of an ethnic population.<sup>25</sup> Characteristically *ethnocide* has most obviously been implemented against indigenous minorities in the context of colonial expansion, the creation of nation-states and state development plans.<sup>26</sup>

Dirk Moses, noting the tendency of certain academicians to consider the processes of colonising indigenous people as "cultural genocide", questions whether an equal sign could be put between cultural genocide and physical extermination. Moses insists that there is indeed an interrelationship between the two, but the use of the term genocide should be avoided in cases where there is no attempt to forcibly annihilate a group.<sup>27</sup>

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21 Vahagn Dadrian, "A Typology of Genocide," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 5, no. 2 (1975): 205; Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 15; Martin Shaw, *What is Genocide?* (London: Polity Press, 2007), 66-67; Barry Sautman, "Cultural Genocide in International Context," in *Cultural Genocide and Asian State Peripheries*, edited by Barry Sautman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1-37; Mohammed Abed, "Clarifying the concept of Genocide," *Metaphilosophy* 37, nos. 3-4 (2006): 327; Pamela de Condappa, "Cultural Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Destroying Heritage, Destroying Identity" at <https://ru.scribd.com/document/86679906/Condappa-Cultural-Genocide-in-Bosnia-Herzegovina>.

22 Israel Charny, "Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide," in *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, edited by George J. Andreopoulos (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 84-85, 90; Ibidem, "Classification of Genocide in Multiple Categories," *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, Vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 9.

23 From the Greek *ethnos* (nation) and Latin *cide* (kill). See Lemkin, *Axis Rule in occupied Europe*, 79.

24 One of the first attempts to do this was the declaration adopted by UNESCO in San Jose in 1981, condemning "ethnocide" or "cultural Genocide" as being equivalent to Genocide and defining it as a violation of international law. See UNESCO and the struggle against ethnocide. declaration of San Jose, December 1981, at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000499/049951eo.pdf>, accessed 12.05.2020.

25 Sautman, "Cultural Genocide in International Context," 11.

26 Alison Palmer, "Ethnocide," in *Genocide in Our Time: An Annotated Bibliography with Analytical Introductions*, edited by Michael Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Pierian Press, 1992), 1.

27 Dirk Moses, "Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the 'Racial Century': Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002): 25-26.

According to Martin Shaw, the theory that cultural Genocide differs from genocide involving physical violence is a misunderstanding, as the cultural aspect of Genocide is a part of any genocidal act.<sup>28</sup> He makes a distinction between three aspects:

1. Cultural suppression, denial of a group's culture in the pre-genocide stage;
2. The cultural dimension of genocide for suppression, which is a part of the genocidal process;
3. The unintentional destruction of a group, is when a group is destroyed by disease or famine that is not intentional.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, in the case of the third point, the unintentional destruction of a group's culture will of course proceed, due to the weakening of cultural links within it. This cannot be considered to be cultural Genocide.

Interdisciplinary perspectives on cultural genocide, particularly from anthropology, have shown that cultural genocide is diverse in practice; while not always physically violent in its means or ends, it is closely associated with historical and modern cases of settler colonialism.<sup>30</sup> The term cultural genocide is used, among certain researchers today, to define ethnic assimilation and forms of ethnic cleansing, something that needs future clarification from the international law point of view.<sup>31</sup>

As the various international criminal tribunals with jurisdiction over genocide replicate the Convention verbatim, criminal prosecution for genocide has thus focused on the physical and biological aspects of the crime. Cultural genocide is simply not covered.<sup>32</sup> Without clear wording in international law, the term "cultural genocide" is, at best, used as a political campaigning tool to invite the international community's attention and relevant response to grave violations of cultural rights.

## **The Policy of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Values during the Hamidian Massacres**

The first systematic mass destruction of Armenian cultural heritage was organized during the Hamidian massacres (1894-1896). Abdul-Hamid's policy was aimed at decreasing the numbers and the presence of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>33</sup> This policy was

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28 Shaw, *What is Genocide?*, 66.

29 Ibid., 67.

30 Alana Tiemessen, "Cultural Genocide in Law and Politics," *International Studies*, at <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.762>, accessed 20.09.2023.

31 Elisa Novic, *The Concept of Cultural Genocide: An International Law Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2016), 45-48.

32 David Nersessian, "A Modern Perspective: the Current Status of Cultural Genocide Under International Law," in *Cultural Genocide: Law, Politics, and Global Manifestations*, edited by Jeffrey S. Bachman (New York: Routledge, 2019), 71-74.

33 Robert Tatoyan, «Արևմտահայության թվաքանակի և Արևմտյան Հայաստանի բնակչության էթնիկական կազմի հարցերը XIX դարի 90-ական թթ. կեսերին Հայկական հարցի սրման ժամանակաշրջանում»

also directed against the Armenian culture. under the tyrannical sultanic rule, Armenian monasteries and churches ceased to be mere places of prayer and acted as cultural and educational centres, performing the important function of preserving the nation. In the Western Armenian reality, the Armenian church and the Patriarch heading it were the pivots around which issues of vital importance to the Armenian population were centred. In this sense, the existence of Armenian monasteries and churches in the Ottoman Empire and the extremely important role they played in the work of developing Armenian national and cultural life made them undesirable and they were even seen as dangerous in the eyes of both the Muslim public and the authorities. As noted by Malcolm MacColl,<sup>34</sup> a contemporary British clergyman and public figure, Abdul-Hamid's anti-Armenian policy was, in the first place, a war against the education, culture and faith of Armenians.<sup>35</sup>

Many contemporary documents, reports and, particularly, testimonies of foreign diplomats, prove that the looting and destruction of Armenian cultural values during the Hamidian massacres were carried out as part of state policy, following instructions issued by central and local authorities and at the direct instigation of Islamic spiritual circles.<sup>36</sup> More than this, apart from guiding the regular army and ordinary Muslims, the latter also took an active part in the massacres themselves, each using their particular methods.

Every possible technique was used to establish an atmosphere of impunity and to instill hatred among the broad Muslim masses to increase the extent of the destruction. Anarchy prevailed in Ottoman government circles, while the authorities were instigating fanaticism through their example and behaviour.<sup>37</sup> This was, in particular, an opportunity to loot Armenian property on the spot without any form of punishment.<sup>38</sup> Looting in the cities was carried out by groups specifically created for that purpose.<sup>39</sup>

There are many testimonies concerning the active participation of regular troops in the robbing and destruction of Armenian spiritual-cultural establishments. As Cambon testified, a colonel named Ismail ordered the soldiers to wreck and burn villages during

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[“The Questions of Number of Western Armenians and the Ethnic Composition of the Population of Western Armenia During the Period of the Aggravation of the Armenian Question in the mid-90s of the XIX century”], *Ts'eghaspanagitakan handes* 4, no. 2 (2016): 8, 21.

34 For information about him see: *Rev. Malcolm MacColl and The noblest man whom I ever knew*, Gladstones Library, 5 July 2018, at <https://www.gladstoneslibrary.org/news/volume/rev-malcolm-maccoll-and-the-noblest-man-whom-i-ever-knew>, accessed 12.06.2020.

35 Malcolm MacColl, “The Constantinople Massacre and its Lesson,” in *The Contemporary Review* 68 (1895): 744-745.

36 *Documents diplomatiques. Affaires Arméniennes. Projets de réformes dans l'Empire Ottoman. 1893-1897* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1897); *Documents diplomatiques. Affaires Arméniennes (Supplément). 1895-1896* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1897), includes reports submitted to the French Foreign Ministry by Paul Cambon, French Ambassador to Constantinople, from 1890-1897, in which French diplomats accredited to various regions of the Ottoman Empire describe the Armenian massacres. These reports contain multiple testimonies about the destruction and desecration of Armenian cultural values, specifically concerning monasteries and churches.

37 *Documents diplomatiques*, 34.

38 Arsen Avagyan, *Геноцид армян: механизмы принятия и исполнения решений* [The Armenian Genocide: The Mechanisms of Deceison-Making and Implementation] (Yerevan: AGMI, 2013), 57.

39 Ibid.

the massacre in Sasun in 1894, urging them to do whatever they wanted, as these were the Sultan's orders.<sup>40</sup> The orders were immediately carried out and the soldiers and Kurdish cavalry that had joined them looted and burnt out 48 villages and dozens of churches and schools in the region.<sup>41</sup> Regular army units and gendarmes, openly declaring that they were following the Sultan's orders, actively participated in the destruction of most of the villages of the Gendj (Kinch) district of Mush.<sup>42</sup>

The French Consul in Mersin, M. Summaripa, addressed a written report to Cambon on 12 November 1895, stating that on November 9 of that same year, soldiers and policemen burst into the Armenian church in Misis, trampled on its holy books and desecrated its ceremonial vessels.<sup>43</sup> Cambon wrote, on 13 January 1896, that regular army soldiers created disturbances by desecrating and plundering the Armenian Church in Aghdjagyune (a village in the Djanik district of Trapizon (Trabzon) province) in the presence of the priest, who had been tied up with rope.<sup>44</sup>

Soldiers openly declared, in Sebastia and Kharberd (Harput), that they had orders from the highest authority, which they had followed, to rob Armenians.<sup>45</sup> They joined the Muslim crowd that plundered and destroyed all the villages and their many churches near Tivrik, Shapin-Garahisar, Akn and Arabkir.<sup>46</sup> An *Ararat* correspondent, writing from Van, reported how soldiers and Kurdish groups transported gold and silver dishes, massive bowls, crosses, scepters, crowns, censers, silver or gold-covered gospels stolen from the monasteries and churches in the province to the cities for smelting.<sup>47</sup> Silver items weighing 390 okhas<sup>48</sup> were looted from three churches in Tamzara (a small town

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40 *Documents diplomatiques*, 42.

41 V. Tenisheva, *Позоръ Цивилизации. По поводу турецких дель* [Civilization's Shame. On Turkish Affairs] (St.-Petersburg: B.M Wolf publishing house, 1897), 11.

42 Editorial, «Մշո վիճակը» [“State of Mush”], *Hnchak* (London), Central Organ of Hnchak Party, no. 3, 15 February 1896, 23.

43 *Documents diplomatiques*, 95-96; Félix Charmetant, *Martyrologe arménien. Tableau officiel des massacres d'Arménie dressé après enquêtes par les six ambassades de Constantinople et statistique dressée par des témoins oculaires* (Paris: Au bureau des œuvres d'orient, s. d.), 69. The French cleric Father Félix Charmetant (1844-1921) presented, in this collection, mainly based on information provided by missionaries operating in various regions of the Ottoman Empire, the real picture of the Abdul-Hamid massacres, including the losses and destruction suffered by Armenian spiritual and cultural establishments in 11 provinces of the Empire. Although the information provided by him does not give a complete picture, it is nonetheless valuable. An excerpt from Father Charmetant's report was published in the journal *Ararat* and included data about the provinces of Trapizon (Trabzon), Erzerum, Van, Bitlis, Sebastia and Kharberd (Mamuret ul Aziz). Editorial, «Հայաստանեայց եկեղեցիի Տաճկաստանում» [“The Armenian Church in Turkey”], *Ararat* 2 (1896): 87-92.

44 *Documents diplomatiques*, 195.

45 Editorial, «Կոստրաճներ, նամակ Կ.Պոլսից» [“Massacres, a Letter from Constantinople”], *Droshak*, 1 December 1895, 6-7.

46 *Ibid.*, 7.

47 Editorial, «Տեղեկագիր Վասպուրականի կոստրաճին» [The Bulletin of Vaspurakan Massacre], *Ararat* 12 (1896): 585; and *Братская помощь пострадавшим в Турции армянам* [Brotherly Help to the Aggrieved Armenians in Turkey], Vol. II, Part II (Moscow: Typolithography by K.O. Alexandrov, 1897), 124.

48 One *okha* was equivalent to 1.282 kg.

in the district of Shapin-Garahisar of the Sebastia province) in 1895.<sup>49</sup>

Edwin Bliss, an American missionary and preacher in Aintap, was another eyewitness to the active participation of Turkish troops in plunder and destruction.<sup>50</sup> According to him, Turkish soldiers set fire to many houses, churches, monasteries, schools and shops after looting them, using oil that they'd brought with them.<sup>51</sup> Unable to burn down large stone-built churches, they resorted to other methods; some churches were converted into mosques, others were desecrated and their holy books torn to shreds.<sup>52</sup>

In cities such as Shapin-Garahisar and Diarbekir for example, troops targeted churches, using minarets of mosques as positions to shoot at them from. This tactic was used against the St. Prkich (Holy Saviour) church in Shapin-Garahisar, wounding a large number of Armenians who had found refuge inside it. The priest, Rev. Yeghia, was killed.<sup>53</sup>

The French Vice-Consul in Diarbekir, Gustave Meyrier, witnessing such an occurrence, wrote in his report of 18 December 1895 that he saw, from his window, at 3 p.m. on Sunday, how the soldiers, policemen, Kurds and others jointly opened fire on the Armenian Apostolic Church from roofs and minarets.<sup>54</sup>

Soldiers mainly used artillery, aiming to create as much large-scale destruction in the cities as possible. The St. Gevork church, orphanage and barracks in Marash (Aleppo province) were bombarded by three artillery pieces and the same number of machine guns aimed at them in 1895.<sup>55</sup> Most of the Armenian national establishments around Kharberd, Huseynik and Mezre were destroyed by troops using two batteries of artillery, each of two of guns.<sup>56</sup>

About 1,600 regular army soldiers participated in the plunder and destruction that took place in Arabkir, resulting in the 4 Armenian churches, namely St. Hakob, St. Gevork, St. Grigor Lusavorich (St. Gregory the Illuminator), St. Mariam Astvatsatsin (St. Mary the Holy Mother of God) as well as the prelacy and all the schools in the city being completely looted and burnt down.<sup>57</sup> Even the large number of missionary cultural establishments

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49 Editorial, «Գոտորածներ. Շապին-Գարահիսար» [Massacres: Shapin-Garahisar], *Droshak*, 25 December 1895, 5-6.

50 Rev. Edwin M. Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities: A Reign of Terror: From Tartar Huts to Constantinople Palaces. Centuries of Oppression – Moslem and Christian – Sultan and Patriarch – Broken Pledges Followed by Massacre and Outrage* (Philadelphia: Edgewood Publishing Company, 1896), 444.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 90.

54 Probably a reference to St. Kirakos church, Diyarbekir (*Brotherly help to the Aggrieved Armenians*, 104-105):

55 Krikor Kaloustian, *Մարաշ կամ Գերմանիկ և հերոս Զեյթուն* [Marash or Germanik and Heroic Zeytun] (New York: Kochnak publishing house, 1934), 316.

56 Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 444; Հայերի ցեղասպանությունը Օսմանյան կայսրությունում. փաստաթղթերի և նյութերի ժողովածու [The Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: A Collection of Documents and Materials], compiled by Mkrtich Nersisyan and Ruben Sahakyan (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1991), 121.

57 Antranig Poladian, *Պատմություն հայոց Արաքցիի* [History of the Armenians of Arapgir] (New York: the Arapgir Association of America, 1969), 643-644; Sargis Bakhtikian, *Արաքցիի և շրջակայի գիւղերը* [Arapkir and its Surrounding Villages] (Beirut: Vahagn Publishing House, 1934), 25.

were not spared from destruction. The Euphrates College was also badly damaged, with most of its buildings burnt because of cannon fire.<sup>58</sup> American missionary Elizabeth Latimer testified that, even though officials had previously guaranteed that the safety of the missionaries and the buildings they owned would be ensured, plans had been made for the missionary buildings to be burnt and the missionaries themselves sent away.<sup>59</sup>

Such active participation in the plunder and destruction of Armenian cultural establishments by regular troops, their absolute freedom to carry out those actions and the impunity they enjoyed is, in itself, proof that it had all been organised at the state policy level.

### *The Destruction of Monasteries and Churches*

During the Hamidian massacres, spiritual institutions were destroyed with particular ferocity; the clergy being subjected to torture before being murdered.<sup>60</sup> One of the written reports published in 1896 stated that: “The Muslim mob gave vent to its greatest fury against Armenian monasteries, churches, schools and libraries which have generally become piles of ruins today...”<sup>61</sup>

Manifestations of hatred and bigotry were most pronounced in the desecration and destruction of Armenian spiritual establishments. The role of the Islamic clergy in stirring up anti-Christian sentiments and the sowing of hatred and bigotry towards the Armenians among the masses was very great. The Muslim clergy, preaching in the mosques, exhorted the Muslim population to increase the crimes of looting and destruction as much as possible, pointing out that they had the prospect of being considered worthy of Mohammad’s approbation.<sup>62</sup> Brigands, emerging from the Fatih Pasha Mosque in Diarbekir on 20 October 1895, looted St. Sargis church, killing the clergymen found inside it with particular ferocity.<sup>63</sup> One of the witnesses testifies “...they destroyed the temples (altars – S. P.) and committed abominable desecration there, shot at and tore down the saints’ images, ripped up the sacred books kept in the library and the school, throwing them into the sewers and wells...”<sup>64</sup>

These manifestations of religious fanaticism were frequently accompanied by specific symbolic actions, such as the throwing down of crosses and removal of bells, desecrating

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58 *Յիշատակարան Եփրատ գործի* [Euphrates College Memorial] (Boston: Euphrates College Alumni Association Press, 1942), 12, 118.

59 Elizabeth Latimer, *The Last Years of the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd edition (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1901), 172.

60 *Les massacres d’Arménie. Témoignages des victimes*, Préface de G. Clemenceau (Paris: Édition DV Mercure de France, 1896), 73, 74, 76, 91, 104-105, 108, 110-113, 115, 116, 118, 131, 137, 163, 177, 234-236. This collection of documents includes 34 unsigned eyewitness letters from approximately 20 cities in Western Armenia and Cilicia about the arson, looting and destruction of Armenian monasteries and churches, the murders of the Armenian clergy during the Armenian massacres.

61 The Bulletin of Vaspurakan Massacre: 585.

62 *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 138.

63 Ibid., 140.

64 Ibid.

sacred church items, mocking Christian ceremonies and sacraments and cursing the clergy.<sup>65</sup> The aim was to denigrate the religious sentiments of the targeted ethnic community. The criminals made a demonstration of throwing the bell of the Armenian Church in Huseynik (Kharberd province) down in 1895, rolling it down to the river and throwing it in.<sup>66</sup> The seven churches in the city of Malatia were destroyed after the gospels and prayer books were torn up and the altars desecrated.<sup>67</sup> As Johannes Lepsius<sup>68</sup> reported, the Catholic Church in Erzincan (Yerznka) was turned into a “public latrine”<sup>69</sup> and, on another occasion, criminals tore the silver cross from the cover of a gospel and threw it into a latrine.<sup>70</sup>

The destruction of the Urfa cathedral was similarly accompanied by mockery and gross insults directed at Christians and the Armenian clergy.<sup>71</sup> According to an eyewitness testimony “...some soiled the sacred vessels and others mocked the clerical robes ... One of them pocketed the box containing the relic of the Tree of Life and the golden dove containing Holy Chrism, while another put the archbishop’s crown on his head and clowned about. Some smashed the crosses by treading them underfoot and others jeered, wearing priestly head-coverings and robes.”<sup>72</sup>

The mob, during the massacres that took place in Erzerum in 1895, robbed the churches of St. Gevork in the village of Badishen, Christ the King in Kritchk and St. Astvatsatsin in Artsate, dismantling the icons and ornaments on the altars and the pillars one by one.<sup>73</sup> On September 30 (October 12, new style), dozens of monasteries and churches in the city of Baberd and its surrounding villages were pillaged, defiled with excrement and their sacred books and icons were trampled underfoot.<sup>74</sup>

Armenian monasteries and churches were often used as venues for murder, defiling women or for burning people alive. The desecration of a monument was viewed, by the criminals, as a symbolic sacrificial act, meant to insult the deepest spiritual feelings and traditions of the ethnic community that was subjected to it. The best illustrating of this is the burning down of Urfa Cathedral (in Aleppo province). According to eyewitness testimony, around 3,000 Armenians, mostly women and children, had taken refuge in the

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65 *Les massacres d’Arménie. Témoignages des victimes*, 102; and “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 87-89; and Dr. Johannes Lepsius, *Հայաստանի ջարդերը. գաղտնի տեղեկագիր* [The Massacres in Armenia: A Confidential Report], translated by Michael Shamdanchian (Constantinople: H. Asadourian and Sons Publishing House, 1919), 273.

66 *Les massacres d’Arménie*, 132; *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 120.

67 *Les massacres d’Arménie. Témoignages des victimes*, 77-178.

68 Johannes Lepsius – a German public figure, clergyman and missionary, travelled through Asia Minor in the spring of 1896 and collected testimonies from eyewitnesses of the massacres.

69 Lepsius, *Massacres in Armenia*, 273.

70 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien des victimes*, 70.

71 Aram Sahagian, *Դիւցազնական Ուրֆան և իր հայորդիները* [Heroic Urfa and its Armenian Sons] (Beirut: Atlas, 1955), 360-361.

72 Ibid.

73 Hagop Kosian, *Բարձր Հայք, Կարնոյ գիւղերը* [Upper Hayk: the villages of Karin], Vol. II (Vienna: Mkhitarian Publishing House, 1926), 26, 58-59, 78-79.

74 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 87-88.

cathedral on the afternoon of 29 December 1895. The local Turks gathered in front of it then broke its doors down and forced their way in. Seeing the great number of Armenians inside, they poured oil from containers put in the churchyard onto the building, turning it into a furnace and burning alive the people sheltering in it.<sup>75</sup> Before firing it, the Turkish mob looted the church of its treasures valued at 4,000 Ottoman gold liras, desecrating the icons and demolishing the altars.<sup>76</sup> Gerald Henry Fitzmaurice, Great Britain's Vice-Consul in Constantinople, in his report dated 16 March 1896 sent to his Ambassador, Philip Currie,<sup>77</sup> described the burning of Urfa cathedral as an act unsurpassed, in its atrocious barbarity, by any of the horrors of the Armenian massacres, with its like scarcely being found in history.<sup>78</sup>

It is significant that during and after the Hamidian massacres, such cases of the mass burning of Armenians were described as "Holocaust" in American and European press.<sup>79</sup>

The same method was used to destroy the churches in the villages of Buzsu (Kharberd province), St. Astvatsatsin in Ali-Punar (in Diarbekir province) and St. Touma in Geterpil.<sup>80</sup> In the last case, the Turks failed to break the church door down, so they destroyed the roof by hurling burning logs onto it.<sup>81</sup> In another instance the Turks collected 600 women in the church, separated fifty of the most beautiful of them and left the rest to the mercy of the soldiers and Kurds. The women were killed after they were defiled and the church was destroyed by cannon fire.<sup>82</sup> The correspondent of *Ararat*, detailing the June 1896 massacres in the province of Van, wrote that about 1,000 Armenians, including clergymen sheltering in the monastery of Varag,<sup>83</sup> were massacred without mercy by the local Muslims and the centuries-old monastery with its antiquities was looted and destroyed on the 10 of June of that year.<sup>84</sup>

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75 *Brotherly Help to the Aggrieved Armenians*, 53.

76 Aram Sahagian, *Heroic Urfa and its Armenian Sons*, 411-412.

77 Fitzmaurice, acting on the instructions given to him in March 1895 by Philip Currie, the British Ambassador to Constantinople, personally visited Urfa, Adiyaman, Birecik, Behesni and other localities, notifying the embassy of the massacres of the Armenians through his reports.

78 Ibid.

79 The term *holocaust* is taken from the Greek *holokauston*, which means a burnt offering to a god or immolation. The New York Times published an article describing the Abdul-Hamid massacres, under the title of *Another Armenian Holocaust* on 10th September 1895, at <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D05E5DD113DE433A25753C1A96F9C94649ED7CF>. The well-known missionary Corinna Shattuck, in a letter published in the *New York Times* on 17th February 1896, used the phrase "a great Holocaust" to describe the mass burning of the Armenians who had taken refuge in Urfa cathedral, with the aim of emphasising the role religion had in the tragedy. See "Three Days of Butchery; A Woman Describes the Massacre of Armenians in Ourfa. Not Less than 3,500 Were Killed. Terrible Slaughter in a Church," *The New York Times*, 17 February 1896, 1.

80 *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 118, 142-143.

81 Ibid., 143.

82 Ibid., 51-52.

83 A large medieval monastic complex in the historical province of Vaspurakan, at the southern foot of the mountain of the same name, 10 km northeast of the city of Van. It was also known as *Yedi Kilise* (7 churches). It was the residence of the spiritual leader of Van province.

84 *Brotherly Help to the Aggrieved Armenians*, 120-121.

Armenian cemeteries were also desecrated and destroyed.<sup>85</sup>

The most frequently repeated pattern of erasure of the identities of Armenian churches during Hamidian massacres was their conversion into mosques.<sup>86</sup> Contemporary testimonies to this are provided by the American missionary Frederick Greene<sup>87</sup> and French journalist Henry Barby.<sup>88</sup> The latter wrote reports about the destruction of around 2,500 settlements and the demolition or conversion into mosques of 568 churches and monasteries.<sup>89</sup>

Studies were carried out asserting that, as a rule, it was mostly ancient, stone-built, grand church buildings that stood out in their surroundings and were turned into mosques. The appropriation of Christian churches by changing their nature was also an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of Islam. Conversion of churches to mosques was accompanied by such ritualistic-religious ceremonial elements as the taking down of crosses and removing bells from the former church's bell tower by Muslim clerics reciting the Adhan and the forced public conversion of the Armenian clergy to Islam, etc.

The churches in 12 Armenian villages in the district of Erun (Bitlis province) were, after being desecrated, turned into mosques on October 13 (October 25 new style) 1895. The married priests were forced to wear turbans, their wives were given in marriage to mullahs and they were forced to marry one or two Kurdish women to make the conversion stronger.<sup>90</sup>

Such displays of xenophobia were frequently encouraged or guided by Turkish officials themselves, who sought to serve as examples for the Muslim masses with their behaviour. Thus, one of the organisers of the Urfa Armenian massacre, Hussein Pasha, who had repeatedly sworn that he would have the Adhan recited in the church as soon as it was captured, arrived in person before the attack on the church began early on the morning of 17 December 1895, wanting to be present when his pledge was fulfilled.<sup>91</sup>

Though the policy of massacres and destruction that took place in 1894-1896 was mainly directed against the Armenians, the Assyrians and their ethnic and religious

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85 *Les massacres d'Arménie*, 237.

86 Although the destruction of monuments in the Ottoman Empire in this manner began much earlier (as early as the 16th or 17th centuries as shown in Turkish sources (see *Թուրքական աղբյուրների Հայաստանի, հայերի և Անդրկովկասի մյուս ժողովուրդների մասին* [Turkish Sources about Armenia, the Armenians and other Transcaucasian peoples], translated, compiled and annotated by Aram Safrastyan, Vol. II (Yerevan: ArmSSR National Academy, 1964), 34.)), it continued and intensified during the Abdul-Hamid massacres and gained great impetus during the Armenian Genocide and in the following years. For multiple examples of Armenian churches being turned into mosques in 1895-1896 see *Les massacres d'Arménie*, 62, 74, 82, 106, 110, 221 and Charmetant, *Martyrologe arménien des victimes*, 46-71.

87 Frederick Greene, *Armenian Massacres or the Sword of Mohammed* (Philadelphia and Chicago: International Publishing Co., 1896), 261-262.

88 Henry Barby, *Սարսափի երկրին մէջ. Լուսաւոսկ Հայաստան* [In the Country of Horror: Martyred Armenia], translated by Michael Shamtanchian (Constantinople: H. Asadourian and Sons Publishing House, 1919), 6-7.

89 Ibid.

90 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien des victimes*, 55.

91 Sahagian, *Heroic Urfa*, 359.

institutions were also significantly affected by it.<sup>92</sup> Vladimir Maevski, Russian Vice-Consul in Van in 1895-1899, provided testimony concerning the destruction of Assyrian churches, referring to what he heard from one of the Nestorian Assyrian survivors, Melik Abdisho.<sup>93</sup> During the Kharberd massacres of 1895, the Assyrian Holy Virgin Church was robbed and desecrated and the priest killed for not giving up his faith. Armenian spiritual establishments also suffered the same fate at that time.<sup>94</sup>

Unlike the Assyrians, the Greek population of the Ottoman Empire was spared massacres and destruction. According to Ioannis Hassiotis, this was connected with the fact that Abdul-Hamid wanted to avoid new complications in the relationship with Greece.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, the 1894-1896 Hamidian massacres were accompanied by mass destruction of Armenian monasteries and churches that, after being pillaged and desecrated, were dealt with using the following methods:

1. They were put to the torch, often becoming a gathering place for killings, defiling of women or of burning people alive;
2. They were destroyed by cannon fire or simply torn down;
3. The most prominent stone churches were turned into mosques, thus losing their original role and identity.

These methods of destroying churches prepared the ground for later organised, greater destruction.

### *The Loss of Manuscripts and their Repositories*

The obliteration of Armenian cultural values that took place in 1894-1896 included the destruction of dozens of manuscript repositories and libraries containing unique ancient manuscripts. Indeed, it is almost impossible to have even an approximate idea of the scale of the loss of Armenian manuscripts due to the Hamidian massacres. The reason, on the one hand, is the absence of complete data concerning Armenian manuscripts preserved in the Ottoman Empire, specifically in Western Armenia, in the years preceding the massacres. Nor are there, on the other, any lists of manuscripts and printed books destroyed during the massacres, even by province. The reports describing the massacres, however, are more often concerned with human losses, only briefly mentioning, in passing, the destruction of cultural establishments, the desecration of shrines and, sometimes, how manuscripts were destroyed. Nonetheless, considering the large number

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92 David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2006), 41-43. About 55,000 Assyrians become victims of the 1895-1896 massacres (see Joseph Naayem, *Shall this nation die?* (New York: Chaldean rescue, 1921), 274).

93 Vladimir Maevski, «Несториане Ванского вилайета» [Nestorians of the Van Province], *Известия штаба Кавказского военного округа* [Izvestia of the Staff of the Caucasus Military District] no. 35 (Tiflis, 1913): 10-11.

94 *Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, 122.

95 Ioannis Hassiotis, *The Greeks and the Armenian Massacres (1890-1896)* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

of monasteries and churches looted and burnt down during the Hamidian massacres and the fact that in those years there was hardly a religious establishment that had less than ten or more examples of ancient manuscripts,<sup>96</sup> it is possible to get an approximate idea of the scale of the destruction of those cultural values.

There are many eyewitness accounts, memoirs and reports concerning the destruction of specific manuscript repositories or libraries. Thus, before putting the Urfa cathedral to the torch in 1895, the Turks completely pillaged and destroyed the church's library.<sup>97</sup> The only survivor among the Armenians who sheltered in the Holy Cross monastery of Khizan (Bitlis province) witnessed the destruction of its library of about 1,000 ancient printed books and manuscripts.<sup>98</sup> The Turks also destroyed, during the burning of Marash's St. Gevork church in 1895, thick parchment volumes kept in a repository attached to it, such as a *Haysmavurk* (Synaxarion), Horologion and other ecclesiastical manuscripts.<sup>99</sup> The treasury museum of the monastery of Varag, which also held a collection of Armenian manuscripts, suffered great losses in that same year.<sup>100</sup> According to one report, about 30 monasteries and churches holding precious manuscripts, vessels and ornaments were looted in the province of Van; the stolen movable and immovable wealth of the ravaged monasteries of Narek and Varag alone being worth between 500-1,000 liras: "[we] left remarkable antiquities, old manuscripts and libraries behind, all of which were either pillaged or torn to pieces."<sup>101</sup>

Thus, such unique testimonies, although not allowing the reader to obtain a clear picture of the actual number and extent of the destruction of manuscripts kept in any given repository or museum, show that manuscripts, along with other items of Armenian cultural heritage, were destroyed during the Hamidian massacre years.

### *The Destruction of Educational Centres*

The Hamidian massacres significantly disrupted the natural course of development of Western Armenian educational and cultural life. A government decree published in 1895 closed Armenian schools and prevented them from functioning for over a year in almost every province.<sup>102</sup> The report prepared by priest Ghevond of Trapizon at the request of

96 Suren Kolanjian, «Հայկական կոտորածները եւ մեր ձեռագրական կորուստները» [The Armenian Massacres and Our Manuscript Losses], *Etchmiadzin*, 5-6-7 (1965): 144.

97 *Եղեւիոյ սուկալի դէպքը եւ ողբերգութիւն կոտորածին Եղեւիոյ* [The Terrible Events in Edessa and the Tragedy of the Massacre of Edessa], written by an Edessan Armenian (Shumla: H. Avetaranian Publishing House, 1904), 15-18.

98 Editorial, «Նամակներ պարսկա-տաճկական սահմանագլխից» [“Letters from the Persian-Turkish Border”], *Droshak*, no. 16, 1896, 123.

99 Kaloustian, *Marash or Germanik*, 429.

100 Հայրենագիտութիւն. Վան քաղաք եւ իւր շրջականները [Local History: the City of Van and its Surroundings], Vol. I (Van: Meliksetian Publishing House, 1913), 29.

101 “The Bulletin of Vaspurakan Massacre,” 585.

102 Kapriel Simonian, *Յուշանստեան Պոնտական Ամասիոյ* [Memory Book of Pontic Amasya] (Venice: Mkhitarian Publishing House, 1966), 716-717.

the Catholicos of all Armenians Mkrtich Khrimyan in 1896 noted that Trapizon's eastern villages, which had been making great educational progress, now had only two schools with 90 pupils and two teachers, while all the schools in the villages to the west were closed.<sup>103</sup> Hundreds of educational centres were looted, destroyed and put to the torch in 1894-1896, such as the Kharberd National Central (named after Tlgatintsi) and Smbatian schools, the St. Karapet and St. Stepannos churches and their schools, Kharberd's (Harput's) Euphrates College, the Partevian School in Chmshkatsag, the Gayanian girls' school in Van, the schools in the villages of Anggh and Averak, St. Mesrobian and Nazlian schools in the village of Binkyan (Sivas province) and many others.<sup>104</sup> Dozens of schools were burnt down in the province of Sebastia in November and December of 1895, including those in the villages of Pyurtk, Tarente, Ashoti, Hajikoy and Enteres.<sup>105</sup> The Armenian prelacy in the city of Tivrik was set on fire on November 4 and the adjacent school was turned into an armoury.<sup>106</sup> In some instances, the gendarmes burnt the original school license, thereby eliminating the legal basis for their existence.<sup>107</sup>

Unlike the case of monasteries and churches, not a single report has reached us summing up the losses suffered by Armenian national educational centres, even for the provinces. The data extracted from Matevos Izmirlyan's archive only concern the losses suffered by Armenian Protestant schools, according to which eight schools were destroyed, one burnt and one turned into a barracks.<sup>108</sup>

## **The Effects of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Values: Statistical Data**

Abdul-Hamid's policy of destruction of Armenian cultural values included the Ottoman Empire's 11 administrative units: the six Western Armenian vilayets (Erzerum, Van, Bitlis, Sebastia, Kharberd, Diarbekir), as well as the provinces of Trapizon, Aleppo, Adana, Angora and the sanjak of Izmit. Moreover, the destruction carried out in the abovementioned provinces often covered entire town quarters or villages. According to

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103 Hovagim Hovagimian, *Պատմություն հայկական Պոնտոսի* [History of Armenian Pontus] (Beirut: Mshak Publishing House, 1967), 168-169.

104 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 46-71; Vahe Hayk, *Խարբերդ եւ անոր ոսկեղէն դաշտը* [Kharberd and its Golden Plain] (New York: Kharberd Armenian Patriotic Union, 1959), 389-392, 402-408; "The Armenian Church in Turkey," 91; Manuk Djizmedjian, *Խարբերդ եւ իր զաւակները* [Kharberd and its Children] (Fresno: 1955), 350; Hampartsoum Kasparian, *Չնշխաձագ եւ իր գիւղերը*, [Chmshkatsag and its Villages] (Beirut: Paykar Publishing House, 1969), 247-248; Gevorg Sherents, *Սրբաւայրներ* [Holy Places] (Tiflis: Verichev and Kamenmacher Printing House, 1902), 12, 85-86, 100.

105 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 59-61; "The Armenian Church in Turkey," 90-91.

106 Ibid.

107 Yervant Zartarian, *Պատմագիրք Տիվրիկ քաղաքի* [History Book of the City of Tivrik] (Beirut: Hamaskayin Vahe Setian Publishing House, 1972), 282.

108 Matenadaran – Mesrop Mashtots Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, *M. Izmirlian's personal archive*, list 34, file 14, doc. 615.

Greene, some 2,500 out of 3,300 Armenian-populated settlements in the Ottoman Empire were ruined because of the 1894-96 massacres.<sup>109</sup> The capital, Constantinople, was perhaps the only place where the massacres and destruction did not include the obliteration of cultural values.<sup>110</sup>

Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian, Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, in his work *Azgapatum (National History)*, writing about 1896 and 1908, separated the 1895 massacres into three areas:

1. From Trapizon to Gyumushkhane, Baberd, Dercan, Karin, Basen, Bayazet, Kghi, Kamakh, Erznka, Archesh, Aljavaz, Van, Shatakh, Karchkan, Sgherd, Baghesh, Khizan, Mush and Sasoun;
2. From Samson to Amasia, Marzvan, Eudocia, Sebastia, Nikopolis, Zile, Kesaria, Kharberd, Akn, Arabkir, Edesia, Piregik, Severeck, Balu and Diarbekir;
3. The Cilician diocese: Kyurin, Alpstan, Hadjin, Germanik, Melitine, Adana, Tarson, Mersin, Chokmarzvan, Yenijekale, Aintap, Beria, Iskenderun and Antioch.

Maybe with an excusable exaggeration, he wrote that not one of the specified dioceses or the villages surrounding their central cities was spared from terror. He also informed, that within those boundaries there was not a monastery that remained intact, not a church that wasn't destroyed, desecrated or converted into a mosque; church vessels and ornaments vanished completely, church worship ceased forever; more than half the priestly class was killed, with the remainder escaping [death] by conversion.<sup>111</sup>

Numerous testimonies and reports prove that monasteries and churches, particularly in Western Armenia, suffered significant losses as a result of the Hamidian massacres. Though incomplete, the data presented below are nonetheless important for understanding the extent of the destruction of Armenian national-religious establishments in the six vilayets of Western Armenia.

**Kharberd (Harput) province:** Kharberd is one of the provinces of the Ottoman Empire in which almost all the settlements suffered due to the massacres, looting and despoilation of 1895-1896 and the destruction of cultural establishments took on a wholesale nature. The report by J. B. Hubble, an American Red Cross worker, sent to the founder and president of that same organisation Clara Barton dated 1 August 1896, shows that Kharberd suffered tremendously and that more than 200 settlements were looted or totally destroyed.<sup>112</sup> A letter addressed to the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople dated 14 December 1895 provides the information that the massacre in Kharberd province started on October 10 (old style) with the attack on the village of Berdak (Charsanjak region) and

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<sup>109</sup> Greene, *Armenian Massacres*, 424.

<sup>110</sup> Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 47-70.

<sup>111</sup> Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian, *Uqquyquunnul* [National History], Vol. III (Jerusalem: Srbots Hakobians Publishing House, 1927), 5028-5030.

<sup>112</sup> Clara Barton, *Report. America's Relief Expedition to Asia Minor under the Red Cross* (Washington: Journal Publishing Company, 1896), 67.

spread to the surrounding villages. Armenian national establishments almost everywhere – monasteries and churches – were desecrated and burnt and the priests and teachers were tortured and killed.<sup>113</sup>

One of the few settlements spared from the 1895 massacre in Kharberd province was the city of Akn. Troops were, however, brought from Erznka (Erzinjan) in September 1896 to destroy it. Its upper quarter, including the St. Astvatsatsin church, was completely destroyed.<sup>114</sup> Edwin Bliss reported that calculations were made after the massacres in Kharberd that, in just October 1895 alone, 211 churches, monasteries and schools had been destroyed in the province, of which 108 were in the city of Kharberd and 59 in the surrounding villages, 19 in Arabkir and its surrounding villages, 38 in Akn and its vicinity, 6 in Kapan-Maden district, 13 in Malatia and its vicinity and 27 in the province of Dersim.<sup>115</sup>

According to the data compiled by the American missionary couple Rendel and Helen Harris, 67 churches and Protestant meetinghouses as well as six monasteries were destroyed, desecrated and burnt down in the city of Kharberd and its surrounding villages in 1895.<sup>116</sup>

Father Charmetant reported that, as of February 1896, there was no functioning spiritual or educational institution whatsoever operating in around the 60 villages of the Kharberd diocese.<sup>117</sup> The churches in the villages of Moserik, Morenik, Berdak, Ashushan, Huseinik, Kok, Mekirik, Shintel, Korpe, Darsik, Zortsaruk, Belmishen, Habur, Lichk, Narver, Azni, the monasteries St. Gevork of Sorsor, St. Astvatsatsin of Tade and Holy Saviour in the neighborhood of Akn were all totally looted, destroyed or put to the torch and the church in the village of Ichme was turned into a mosque.<sup>118</sup>

**Van province:** Unlike the holy places in the villages surrounding Van, the majority of which were burnt down and destroyed, the city of Van itself, as well as the district of Moks, suffered relatively little thanks to some people.<sup>119</sup> A primary source provides the information that 125 pillaged and destroyed monasteries and churches were counted in just 8 areas of Van province.<sup>120</sup> It is understood, from the letter written to the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople Matevos B. Izmirlyan by the Catholicos of Akhtamar, Khachatur II Shiroyan, dated 19 December 1895, that after all the monasteries and churches in the Sgherd, Khizan, Mamrtank (Bitlis province) and Shatakh regions

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113 *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 116-117, 119.

114 Arakel Kechian, *Ulŷi lu ulŷughp* [Akn and its Residents], Vol. II (Paris: K. Matikian Publishing House, 1952), 137.

115 Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 445.

116 Rendel J. Harris and Helen B. Harris, *Letters from the Scenes of the Recent Massacres in Armenia* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1897), 146.

117 Charmetant, *Martyrologe arménien*, 64.

118 *Ibid.*, 62-67.

119 The city of Van suffered relatively less thanks to the Circassian chief Emin Bey (Sherents, *Holy places*, 29). The governor of Moks, Mahmud-zade-Beydullah-bey, who left for Van at the beginning of the massacre, returned and prevented the massacres of local Armenians and any destruction (*Brotherly Help*, 123).

120 *Les massacres d'Arménie*, 97-101.

(Van province) were looted, some were destroyed and the rest converted to mosques.<sup>121</sup> According to statistics, based on the incomplete data received, produced by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin regarding the 1895-1896 massacres, 124 villages were looted and destroyed,<sup>122</sup> 8 churches were pillaged and put to the torch, as were 20 monasteries, including those of Narek, Varag, Karmavor, Holy Cross, St. Gregory the Illuminator, Metsop, St. Astvatsatsin of Anggh, Spitak, Lim, Ktuts and others; 33 clergymen were also killed.<sup>123</sup> These statistics, however, are very approximate, as the data on the 24 pillaged, desecrated and destroyed churches in the regions of Karchkan and Aljavaz of the province were not included at all.<sup>124</sup>

**Erzerum province:** There were a large number of churches and monasteries pillaged and destroyed in the province of Erzerum in October-November 1895. Some 36 churches were looted and burnt down in Baberd and its surrounding areas alone in October 1895.<sup>125</sup> The churches in the villages of Ksanta, Blur, Blurak, Bukhti, St. Toros, Neg and Balakhor were all turned into mosques.<sup>126</sup> Some 12 monasteries were robbed and burnt down in the Yerznka (Erzinjan) region.<sup>127</sup> Twenty two churches and two monasteries were completely destroyed in the district of Kghi during the massacres in the Erzerum region that started on 10 October 1895.<sup>128</sup> A short table, presented by Cambon to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, summarised the effects of the massacres that took place in the district of Derjan (Erzerum region) during October and November 1895.<sup>129</sup> According to this table, the Turks broke into the churches in the villages of Bagarich and Khachikoghlu Gom, wounded the priest in the latter and also turned the church in Kyotur into a stable. They looted and burnt down the churches in Piris and destroyed two churches in Karabulagh and Khndzri in Aghater as well. The monasteries of St. Toros and St. David in Espeverek were also destroyed.<sup>130</sup>

**Sebastia (Sivas) province:** The religious establishments in the province of Sebastia suffered significant losses and destruction during the Hamidian massacres. According to a report compiled by the German Consul in Sebastia on 15 December 1896, the number of pillaged churches alone numbered 87; the number of monasteries also destroyed in the province was 5.<sup>131</sup> More than 20 churches were looted and dozens of clerics butchered

121 *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 122-125.

122 In the summary of the statistical data, the number 125 is incorrect (“The Bulletin of Vaspurakan Massacre,” 586).

123 *Ibid.*, 585-586.

124 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 52-54.

125 For the destroyed churches by locality see Editorial, *Բաբերքի գիւղերի տւերումը* [“Destruction of the Villages of Babert”], *Droshak*, 16 January 1896, 15.

126 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 88.

127 Editorial, «Կոստանդնուքի Երզնկա» [“Massacres: Yerznka”], *Droshak*, 1 February 1896, 28-29.

128 For the destroyed churches by locality, Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 50-51.

129 *Documents diplomatiques*, 237.

130 *Ibid.*

131 Editorial, “Չարդերը” [“The Massacres”], *Nor Giank* (London), 15 March 1898, 93.

during the massacres in the city of Sebastia and the surrounding villages in November 1895.<sup>132</sup> The church in the small town of Enteres, with the villagers who were sheltering inside it, was set on fire and burnt down. The churches in Tarente and Ashoti villages were also destroyed by arson.<sup>133</sup> Those in Zimara and Ghazma were turned into mosques after being partially destroyed.<sup>134</sup>

**Diarbekir province:** The district of Balu (Araghana-Maden region) should be singled out in terms of the losses suffered by the Armenian national establishments during the massacres in 1895. According to a report by Rendel and Helen Harris, some 44 churches, 2 monasteries and 37 schools were destroyed and 16 clergymen were killed in just the city of Balu and surrounding villages in 1895.<sup>135</sup> Edwin Bliss reported that some 16 churches, monasteries and schools were destroyed in Balu and its surrounding areas during the 1895 massacres.<sup>136</sup> The four Armenian churches in the city of Balu were looted on October 31 and then converted into mosques, with seven priests being forced to convert to Islam.<sup>137</sup>

**Bitlis province:** Most of the Armenian monasteries and churches in Bitlis province were turned into mosques during the 1895 massacres. Some 12 Armenian churches were converted to mosques, as were 10 churches in the district of Shirvan, while the remainder were razed to the ground during the massacres launched in the district of Erun on 13 October.<sup>138</sup> The churches and monasteries located in the districts of Dere, Sparkert and Khizan in the province of Bitlis were completely looted in August 1895.<sup>139</sup> The monasteries and most of the churches in Sparkert were totally destroyed, the remainder being turned into mosques.<sup>140</sup> The monastery in Mamrtank, as well as that of the Holy Cross in Aparank, the Holy Cross in Siz and the monastery at Tivrushki and most of the churches in Chapaghjur diocese were also converted to mosques.<sup>141</sup>

A noteworthy report, titled “The Collective Note of the Ambassadors of the Six Great Powers” that was submitted to the Sublime Port in February 1896, had a unique statistical table attached to it that summed up the consequences of the Hamidian massacres, which is presented below in **Table 1**.<sup>142</sup>

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132 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 90.

133 Ibid., 91.

134 Ibid.

135 Harris and Harris, *Letters from the Scenes*, 146.

136 Rev. Edwin M. Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 445.

137 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 68; “State of Mush,” 23.

138 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 89.

139 Ibid.

140 Editorial, «Կոտորածներ» [“Massacres”], *Droshak*, 10 April 1896, 86.

141 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 90.

142 Johannes Lepsius, *Armenien und Europa. Eine Anklageschrift wider der Christlichen Großmächte und an das Christliche Deutschland* (Berlin: Verlag der Akademischen Buchhandlung W. Faber & Co, 1896), 238-243.

Administrative area	Looted and destroyed settlements	Looted and destroyed churches	Looted and destroyed monasteries	Churches and monasteries converted into mosques	Slain clergymen
Mamuret ul Aziz (Kharberd)	300	58	3	67	46
Sivas (Sepastia)	350	34	7	0	27
Bitlis (Baghesh)	195	67	7	63	12
Diyarbakir	200	119	1	109	38
Van	825	233	51	82	19
Erzerum (Karin)	267	51	5	7	36
Trapizon	34	0	0	0	0
Ankara	45	0	0	0	0
Adana	25	6	0	0	0
Aleppo	250	2	2	0	13
Izmit	2	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	2493	570	76	328	191

**Table 1.** Statistical table attached to the “Collective Note of the Ambassadors of the Six Great Powers” submitted to the Sublime Port in February 1896

According to the data shown, there were, in 11 administrative units of the Empire, 2,493 settlements, 570 churches<sup>143</sup> and 76 monasteries<sup>144</sup> looted and destroyed, 328 Christian churches were converted to mosques and 191 clergymen, including 12 of high rank, as well as preachers, were brutally killed in 1895. Despite the report only providing a partial reflection of reality,<sup>145</sup> the table nevertheless enables the reader to understand the extent of the looting and destruction by province.

Patriarch Matevos Izmirlian compiled a unique statistical report summing up the losses and damage suffered by Armenian monasteries and churches during the Hamidian massacre years. It states that, of the Armenian Apostolic monuments existing during the specified period, some 791 churches and 85 monasteries were looted, 157 churches

143 The number 568 given as total in the table, as well as in the text in the original is incorrect. See Johannes Lepsius, *Armenien und Europa*, 243.

144 In the original, the number 77 indicated as total in the table, as well as occurring in the text is inaccurate. See *ibid.*

145 Missing, in particular, are the details of the losses suffered by the Armenians in Trapizon, with 13 churches in the city’s surrounding villages looted and ruined and 6 priests killed. It was the same for the Armenian churches and monasteries in the vilayet of Angora and the sanjak of Izmit. The total number of clergymen killed and of Armenian educational institutions destroyed also amount to a considerable figure. (Félix Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 47; “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 87, 70).

and 26 monasteries demolished, 50 churches and 9 monasteries were burnt down and 48 churches and 10 monasteries were turned into mosques. 11 Armenian Protestant meeting houses were demolished, 19 burnt down, 1 was converted to a mosque and 1 turned into a barracks. Four Armenian Catholic churches were looted, two destroyed and one converted to a mosque.<sup>146</sup>

A committee was then created by special order of the Ottoman government to organise a fundraising campaign and use the money raised to build and repair mosques destroyed or damaged in the aftermath of “the disorders that have taken place in Anatolia.”<sup>147</sup> The Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, in his protest note submitted to the Sublime Porte in 1896 in response to that sham act, stated that over 400 Armenian holy places had been destroyed and damaged and that only one mosque, in Arabkir that, being close to the Armenian district, had been burnt down when the houses of the Armenians had been fired.<sup>148</sup> This report by the Patriarch was, however, left unanswered.<sup>149</sup>

Evidence concerning the only mosque to be burnt down during the fire in the city of Arabkir is also to be found in the report published in the newspaper *Hnchak* in 1897, under the title of “The unheard-of massacre in Arabkir,” according to which the three Armenian churches and schools of the city were fired, except for the cathedral and the prelacy which were looted and half-destroyed, “...the city marketplace, with the mosque in the middle, has been burnt down from end to end.”<sup>150</sup>

Thus, the Hamidian massacres were carried out in the 11 administrative areas of the Ottoman Empire, the mass destruction of Armenian cultural and religious buildings in about 2,500 localities, reaching its greatest extent in the six provinces of Western Armenia. It is possible to single out the province of Kharberd specifically, where massacres, looting and destruction indiscriminately engulfed all the province’s localities. Armenian spiritual and cultural establishments were deliberately targeted for destruction, as the monasteries and churches were deemed to be undesirable and dangerous by both the Muslim population and the authorities, given their important role in preserving the Armenian nation. Local Muslims, gendarmes and the regular army were widely involved in looting and destruction, directed and instigated by the central and local authorities and Muslim clergymen, often with the latter’s immediate participation.

The policy of annihilating of Armenian cultural heritage during the Abdul-Hamid massacres fully accords with the definition of vandalism or cultural genocide put forward by Lemkin, as:

1. It certainly wasn’t a process of cultural assimilation and unification or slow adaptation of culture, which is not of genocidal nature

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146 Matenadaran, *M. Izmirlian’s Personal Archive*, list 34, file 14, doc. 615.

147 Editorial, *Նամակ Դոշակ* [A Letter from Constantinople], *Droshak*, 15 May 1896, 100.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.

150 Editorial, «Արարկիրի անլուր կոտորածը» [The Unknown Massacre in Arabkir], *Hnchak*, no. 2, 20 February 1897, 14.

2. It was premeditated and carried out on a large scale over a short period, using force and decisiveness and linked to actions aimed at the physical or biological annihilation of the group.
3. Multiple instances of mass immolation in churches were recorded in 1895-1896. These took place to the accompaniment of dhol and zurna (drums and pipes) in attempts to silence the screams of people being burnt alive by the criminal perpetrators, being striking examples of cultural genocide as determined by Lemkin.<sup>151</sup>
4. These episodes, in their turn, point out the two aspects of the same crime – cultural and physical annihilation – while at the same time emphasising the criminals’ awareness of the crimes they committed, i.e., their intentions.

The abovementioned points prove that the policy adopted was planned and deliberate. The mechanisms used during the Hamidian massacres for the realisation of vandalism and or cultural Genocide were manifested on a much larger scale during the Armenian Genocide.

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<sup>151</sup> See the abovementioned example of the Lublin Jewish Theological Seminary library being put to the torch by the Germans in 1939.

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