

ERNST JAKOB CHRISTOFFEL IN MALATIA: “THE FATHER OF THE BLIND” AS A WITNESS OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE (APRIL 1916 – FEBRUARY 1919)

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Abstract

In January 1909, Ernst Jakob Christoffel and his sister Hedwig settled in Malatia, where he founded a care facility named *Bethesda* for blind individuals and those with visual impairments. By the eve of WWI, *Bethesda* housed more than 80 residents, the majority of them Armenians. Christoffel’s two-year absence beginning in the spring of 1914 proved catastrophic, as during the Armenian Genocide nearly three-quarters of his Armenian wards were either deported or killed. His return in April 1916 marked a crucial turning point – he not only saved the last group of his wards from deportation but also transformed his institution into one of the rare sites of refuge amid the continuing violence.

This article examines Christoffel’s activities in Malatia between April 1916 and February 1919, situating him as a significant yet understudied German witness to the final stages of the Armenian Genocide. It investigates how Christoffel managed to protect his remaining Armenian wards after such a prolonged absence, the dynamics of his interactions with local Ottoman authorities, the strategies he employed to navigate constant threats to both his wards and himself, and the extent to which German diplomatic or missionary networks supported his efforts. Finally, it considers how Christoffel’s testimonies enrich our understanding of German humanitarian involvement and witnessing during the genocide.

Keywords: German missions in the Ottoman Empire; Christian Mission of the Blind in the Orient; Malatia; Bethesda; eyewitness of the Armenian Genocide

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Introduction

The activities of German missions among Armenians in the Ottoman Empire began during the Hamidian massacres, as a response to the atrocities. In February 1896, Ernst Lohmann, the pastor of *Christuskirche* in Frankfurt am Main, published in his newspaper a public appeal – the first call to help Armenian survivors and to collect donations on their behalf in Germany.¹ A similar initiative followed on March 24, 1896, launched by *Kaiserswerther Diakonissenhaus* [Kaiserswerth Deaconess House].² The Kaiserswerth Deaconess House expressed readiness, contingent on sufficient donations, to take under its care the survived Armenian orphan girls at its station in Smyrna, where, on June 29, 1896, the first Armenian orphans found refuge.³ Later, this mission also provided shelter for Armenian orphan girls at its stations in Beirut and Jerusalem.

On July 2, 1896, Ernst Lohmann, Johannes Lepsius, and others founded the *Deutscher Hilfsbund für Armenien* [German Aid Society for Armenia] in Frankfurt am Main, which in the following months took the responsibility to care for the Armenian children in Kharberd (relocated to Mezire in 1897), Van, and Marash, as well as in Constantinople, with the goal of providing care to 400 Armenian children at the initial stage.⁴ More than a decade later, main stations were also established in Mush and Haruniye.

Although at the initial stage, Lohmann and Lepsius worked jointly – in fact serving as the driving force for the newly founded mission in Frankfurt and Berlin – after disagreements, that arose during a Berlin gathering in the autumn of 1896, they eventually parted ways. The German Aid Society for Armenia was renamed the *Deutscher Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient* [German Aid Society for Christian Charity Work in the Orient] and continued to be led by Ernst Lohmann, while Lepsius continued his work within the framework of the *Deutsche Orient-Mission*, which he had founded earlier, in the autumn of 1895,⁵ establishing stations in Diarbekir, Urfa, as well as in Bulgaria and Persia.

During the last months of 1896, two more German missions – *Syrisches Waisenhaus* [Syrian Orphanage] and the *Jerusalemsverein* [Jerusalem Union] – also launched a call for aid to Armenians. These missions sheltered Armenian children orphaned during the Hamidian massacres at their stations in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The Jerusalem Union immediately began constructing an impressive building in Bethlehem, known as the “Armenian Orphanage,” which was completed in the autumn of 1898. Its opening was also attended by German Emperor Wilhelm II and his wife. Nevertheless, due to Turkish

1 “Der Notschrei Armeniens,” *Licht und Leben*, no. 15 (April 11, 1896): 139-140.

2 Evangelisches Zentralarchiv (EZA), 2001/3826, “Herzliche Bitte für die armenischen Waisen,” *Kaiserswerther*, March 24, 1896, 1-2.

3 “Von unserer Arbeit an den armenischen Waisen und Notleidenden,” *Mitteilungen Nr. 141 aus dem Kaiserswerther Diakonissenhause*, no. 141 (1897): 12.

4 Deutscher Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient e.V., ed. *Skizzen und Bilder aus dem Orient* (Dinglingen: St. Johannis-Druckerei, 1899), 54.

5 Johannes Lepsius, “30 Jahre Deutsche Orient-Mission,” *Der Orient*, no. 1 (1925): 11.

obstacles, only 20 Armenian children were able to find refuge there.⁶ The number of Armenian children being cared of in the Syrian Orphanage was significantly higher.

The humanitarian movement formed in Germany in 1896-1897 to aid Armenians who had survived the Hamidian massacres gradually weakened in the following years. The majority of the missions faced a shortage of donations to support Armenians. Both the reduction in funding and Turkish pressures, along with the natural decrease in the number of orphans, as they reached adulthood and left the orphanages, contributed to the declining number of Armenians under the care of German missions. The only exception was the German Aid Society for Christian Charity Work in the Orient, whose number of orphans multiplied, reaching nearly 2,000 on the eve of WWI.⁷ During the two decades, the aforementioned German missions founded orphanages, schools, seminaries, workshops, hospitals, and shelters for widows, and they also undertook efforts to promote Evangelical Christianity.

The final German initiative for Armenians belonged to Ernst Jakob Christoffel, which later acquired an institutional form under the name *Christliche Blindenmission im Orient* [Christian Mission of the Blind in the Orient].

Christoffel's Activities in the Ottoman Empire by 1914

Ernst Jakob Christoffel (1876-1955) first traveled to the Ottoman Empire in 1905 at the request of Professor Georges Godet, president of the *Schweizer Hilfskomitees für Armenien* [Swiss Relief Committee for Armenia],⁸ to lead the Swiss-American missionary station in Sebastia beginning in September of that year and to participate in teaching orphans. During this time, he witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by blind individuals and those with visual impairments in the Ottoman Empire, laying the foundation for his future work dedicated to their care.

In the spring of 1907, Ernst Jakob Christoffel and his sister Hedwig returned to Germany.⁹ After some organizational work in Germany, they returned to the Ottoman Empire at the end of 1908 to focus on helping the blind. As there was no established mission or institution, they worked as independent missionaries (*Freimissionare*), relying primarily on support from relatives in their hometown and a network of benefactors he had cultivated during his study and working years in Switzerland.

Their efforts, which began in 1909, initially focused on caring for the poor in Malatia. They reached out to those in need, making numerous unplanned purchases to alleviate poverty – a generosity that soon exhausted their available funds.

6 "Bethlehem," *Neueste Nachrichten aus dem Morgenlande*, no. 6 (December 1899): 227-229.

7 Friedrich Schuchardt, "Geschäftsbericht," *Sonnen-Aufgang*, no. 7 (April 1913): 99.

8 Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Die Schweiz des Fin de Siècle und 'Armenien,'" in *Die Armenische Frage und die Schweiz 1896-1923*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (Zürich: Chronos, 1999), 137.

9 Sabine Thüne, *Ernst Jakob Christoffel. Ein Leben im Dienst Jesu* (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2007), 27.

However, their work in Malatia began under difficult circumstances. First, Hedwig Christoffel fell seriously ill with typhoid and was bedridden for 71 days.¹⁰ Shortly thereafter, Christoffel also contracted typhoid. During this challenging period, they received significant support from missionary Jensine Oerts, head of the Malatia substation of the German Aid Society for Christian Charity Work in the Orient (*Deutscher Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient*).¹¹

According to Christoffel, the massacres of Cilician Armenians in April 1909 were likely to continue in Malatia as well.¹² He claimed that local Turks and some neighboring Kurdish tribes had already prepared and were ready to act. Furthermore, he reported that a list of influential individuals targeted for elimination had been prepared; his own name appeared third on the list, following that of Mustafa Agha Afizoglu,¹³ the mayor of Malatia. Hedwig Christoffel's name was fourth.¹⁴ Although Christoffel does not specify who headed the list, it can be inferred that it was likely a local Armenian religious leader, a prominent community figure, or possibly another missionary.

In 1913, the station was bolstered by the arrival of Hans Bauernfeind, who married Hedwig Christoffel on October 12 of that year.¹⁵ That same year, Betty Warth, a blind teacher for the visually impaired, joined the station. With support from Swiss benefactors, Christoffel purchased a new building in 1913, where he relocated those under his care – the blind, individuals with visual and intellectual disabilities, as well as some begging children.

The Malatia Station in 1915 and the Return and Activities of Christoffel, 1916-1919

In May 1914, Christoffel returned to Europe to raise funds for establishing a new station in Diarbekir and to expand educational activities in Malatia. However, the outbreak of WWI forced him to remain in Germany longer than planned. During this time, he took on the role of military preacher, a position he held until the end of 1915. He could not return to Malatia until April 1916.

¹⁰ Ibid., 70.

¹¹ Hermann Lörner, ed., *Vom Werden einer Mission* (Wuppertal-Barmen: Aussaat-Verlag, 1948), 6.

¹² Ernst Jakob Christoffel, *Zwischen Saat und Ernte* (Diesdorf [Breslau]: Selbstverlag, 1933), 66.

¹³ Because of his consistent humanitarian attitude toward the “giaours” (i.e., Armenians), Mustafa Agha Afizoglu incurred the hostility of the local Turkish population and was ultimately killed by his own sons. In recognition of the support, he provided to Armenians during the Hamidian massacres, the mayor was awarded the French Légion d'Honneur. During World War I, Mustafa Agha Afizoglu also received the Roter Adlerorden, 4th Class (Red Eagle Order, 4th Class), in recognition of his humanitarian assistance and loyalty to the German Empire. See Ernst Jakob Christoffel, *Aus dunklen Tiefen: Erlebnisse eines deutschen Missionars in türkisch Kurdistan während der Kriegsjahre 1916-1918* (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1921), 28.

¹⁴ Christoffel, *Zwischen*, 66-68.

¹⁵ “Hochzeitsfeier und Aussendung in die Blindenarbeit in Malatia,” *Christlicher Volksbote aus Basel*, no. 45 (November 5, 1913): 358.

Meanwhile, in Malatia, arrests began on 16 April 1915, when approximately 80 prominent individuals, including the Deputy of the Diocese, Pastor Mushegh Ter-Musheghian, as well as other Armenian Apostolic, Evangelical, and Catholic priests, were detained.¹⁶ During Christoffel's absence, Hans Bauernfeind, who assumed management of the station together with his wife, oversaw a significant decline. Owing to poor management, approximately 60 of the station's 84 Armenians were lost. Of the roughly 60 Armenians deported from the station, only three were able to return, while another three survived in other locations, despite the fact that many were blind or otherwise physically impaired.¹⁷ The station's employees, Karapet and Grigor, were also killed. While Karapet's family found refuge at the station, almost all of Grigor's family perished.¹⁸

Bauernfeind attempted to transfer the remaining children to other facilities run by the German Orient Mission and the German Aid Society for Christian Charity Work in the Orient, but he was unsuccessful. Ultimately, on August 11, 1915, the Bauernfeind couple left Malatia to return to Germany,¹⁹ leaving the station under the leadership of two Armenian employees, Makrouhi (an employee of the station) and Khoren (the teacher for the blind). By the time they departed, the station was brought to the brink of complete destruction. According to contemporary accounts, Hans Bauernfeind is among the few German missionaries in the Ottoman Empire whose actions had a markedly negative impact. However, his "Diary [Tagebuch],"²⁰ remains an extremely important primary source regarding the deportations, arrests, killings, rapes, and the atmosphere in the city prior to their departure.

Given these circumstances, at the end of 1915, Ernst Jakob Christoffel applied to the Ministry of Military Affairs for exemption from military service and permission to return to the Ottoman Empire. In Constantinople, he received support from both the German Embassy and the military preacher Siegfried von Lüttichau. Additionally, Enver Pasha secured a letter of guarantee from the War Ministry, allowing him to travel to Malatia.²¹

16 Arshak Alpoyachian, *Պատմություն Մալաթիայի հայրց* [History of the Armenians of Malatia] (Beirut: Sevan Press, 1961), 944.

17 The activities of Hans Bauernfeind will not be presented in this article. For more details about him, see Hayk Martirosyan, *Humanismus und christliche Barmherzigkeit: Geschichte der deutschen Missionen für die Armenier im Osmanischen Reich 1896-1919* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2024), 247-249. See also Tessa Hofmann and Meline Pehlivanian, "Der schlimmsten Orte einer ... Malatia 1915 bis 1918," *AGA Online*, <https://www.aga-online.org/literatur-und-links/texte/malatia/>, accessed 01.05.2025. Apparently, the 700 Armenian children from the Turkish orphanage established in Kharberd for the purpose of Turkification were also killed near Malatia. After some time, they were deported and drowned in the Euphrates River not far from the city. See Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2011), 306.

18 Christoffel, *Aus dunklen*, 16-17.

19 For the last time, Bauernfeind participated in a discussion on Armenian issues at the Orient Conference held in Berlin on 8 October 1915, during which Johannes Lepsius leveled serious accusations against him. Thereafter, Bauernfeind appears to have had no further involvement in Armenian affairs. See EZA (Evangelisches Zentralarchiv), 623/16, Christliche Blindenmission im Orient, Protokoll der Besprechung, 23 September 1916, 2.

20 Hans Bauernfeind, *Tagebuch* (machine-written manuscript, Malatia, 1915).

21 Fritz Schmidt-König, *Ernst J. Christoffel – Vater der Blinden im Orient* (Gießen and Basel: Brunnen-Verlag,

Christoffel's close relationship with military preacher von Lüttichau, who held him in high regard, would later prove crucial. Von Lüttichau described Christoffel in his diary on 24 February 1916: "A truly wonderful person! A Christian, one rarely finds. So clear and transparent, and for that reason, so absolutely natural in his human nature and in his Christian character! We understand each other well and have brotherly respect towards each other."²² It seems that in Christoffel, von Lüttichau found the ideal missionary he had envisioned, embodying the qualities of a true missionary.

On 8 April 1916, after nearly two years of absence, Christoffel returned to Malatia to find the station in a state of crisis. Only the mayor, Mustafa Agha Afizoglu, had made any attempt to support it. Most residents had either been exiled or killed, leaving behind only 30 Armenians, including recent arrivals who had found refuge in "Bethesda."²³ At the time of Christoffel's arrival, orders had already been issued to deport the remaining wards and women, and the station building had been converted into a typhus hospital. Upon his return, Christoffel's first action was to halt the deportation of the children, although they had already been removed from the station. He succeeded in bringing them back, but they were forced to sleep outside for weeks, as the station was still functioning as a field hospital for approximately 150 typhus-infected soldiers.²⁴

Having successfully stopped the deportation of his children and recovered his wards, Christoffel transformed the Malatia station into an oasis of hope. Many individuals fleeing from harems or enslavement by local families found refuge in "Bethesda." However, this humanitarian work deepened tensions between Christoffel and the local Mutasarrif. The latter attempted to have Christoffel arrested by sending an accusatory letter to Constantinople, portraying him as a figure hindering reconciliation between Muslim and Christian communities. He alleged that during a liturgy led by Christoffel—despite the official ban on Christian ecclesiastical ceremonies—Armenians from various backgrounds, including forcibly Islamized individuals, were in attendance. The mutasarrif framed this as an attempt to convert Muslims to Christianity. He also ordered round-the-clock surveillance of the station.²⁵ The intervention of embassy preacher Count von Lüttichau and the German Embassy proved crucial in defusing the serious accusations against Christoffel, ultimately securing the station's continued operation.

As previously noted, Christoffel was highly esteemed by both von Lüttichau and the German Embassy, which offered him substantial support. In 1916, the groundwork was laid for more formal assistance: the embassy advised Christoffel's supporters in Germany to institutionalize their operations in order to gain "necessary diplomatic support"

1976), 19.

22 Siegfried von Lüttichau, *Tagebuchblätter aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (als Manuskript vervielfältigt), 3rd part, vol. 1 (Kirchheim/Teck 1993), 111.

23 Christoffel, *Aus dunklen*, 28.

24 Ibid., 23-25.

25 Christoffel, *Aus dunklen*, 43-46.

from the state.²⁶ As a result, on 3 July 1916, the Christliche Blindenmission im Orient e.V. (Christian Mission of the Blind in the Orient)²⁷ was founded. On 25 September 1916, the mission's leadership sent a formal letter to von Lüttichau, informing him of the institutionalization of their efforts and requesting additional embassy support for the Malatia station.²⁸ Although Christoffel had initially preferred to operate as a free missionary—largely avoiding state support in order to preserve his autonomy—the challenges posed by the Mutasarrif and the existential threat to the station made it clear that the mission could no longer function without diplomatic backing.

Support for Christoffel became even more “visible” to local authorities after Count von Lüttichau's visit to Malatia on 4 July 1916, as part of a two-month tour of the Ottoman Empire's eastern provinces. He remained in Malatia for several weeks, during which Christoffel assisted him and helped him recover from the exhaustion of his journey.

Moreover, after von Lüttichau's intervention, Christoffel began receiving 30 kilograms of grain daily, with payment made in banknotes.²⁹ The problem was that the prices of essential goods had drastically increased in the Ottoman Empire due to the war, while the currency had lost its value. Meanwhile, the number of “Bethesda” wards grew, reaching 170 within four months of Christoffel's arrival, as Armenians fled from harems and Muslim families, seeking refuge in “Bethesda.” Support was also provided to Armenians who remained in the city or returned when possible.³⁰ By the summer of 1916, this increase in expenses was partially mitigated by an unexpected 6,000-mark donation raised by the station's supporters in Germany, Switzerland, and Denmark, which was sent to Malatia through the Dresdener Bank and Deutsche Orient-Bank.³¹

In the fall of 1916, the governor of Malatia was replaced, and Christoffel's relations with the newly official gradually improved. Additionally, Christoffel was able to reclaim some of the station's buildings from the military. The number of Armenians sheltered at the station continued to rise, as many Armenian women and children, previously held by Turkish and Kurdish families, fled to “Bethesda.” Occasionally, their “owners” would come to reclaim them, but Christoffel managed to prevent this.³² Widows with children who could sustain themselves through work at the station also found refuge there. Under these circumstances, the number of people sheltered at the station soon reached 240.³³ Some children, unable to be housed at the station due to local conditions, were placed with Armenian families who had survived in Malatia and had not been deported, with

²⁶ Lörner, *Vom Werden*, 8.

²⁷ EZA 623/16, *Protokoll der Vorstandssitzung des Vereins “Christliche Blindenmission im Orient*, 3 July 1916, 1-2.

²⁸ EZA 623/16, *Brief an Herrn Marinefeldprediger Graf von Lüttichau*, 25 September 1916, 1-2.

²⁹ “Kleinasien,” *Christlicher Volksbote aus Basel*, no. 12 (20 March 1918), 95.

³⁰ EZA 623/16, *Deutsche Blindenmission im Orient: Berichte des Hausvaters Christoffel und der blinden Blindenlehrerin Betty Warth aus dem Blindenheim Malatia vom Sommer 1916*, 1-3.

³¹ EZA 623/16, *Christliche Blindenmission im Orient, Protokoll der Besprechung*, 23 September 1916, 2-3.

³² In “Bethesda,” there were 80 such women. Christoffel, *Aus dunklen*, 28-30.

³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

Christoffel paying for their care and ensuring their safety. The number of Armenians finding shelter in “Bethesda” and receiving support from the station continued to grow in the following months and years.

In the summer of 1917, Hildegard Schuler, the daughter of Christoffel’s eldest sister, arrived in Malatia to assist him. Before traveling to the Ottoman Empire, she had trained in childcare, participated in courses for teaching blind individuals, and learned Ottoman Turkish. Although Hildegard’s arrival was significant support to Christoffel, she passed away in November 1918 at the age of 22, having spent less than a year and a half at the station.³⁴

After WWI ended, under pressure from the victorious Allied powers, England and France, all Germans—including missionaries—were forced to leave the Ottoman Empire. To ensure the continued survival of the station’s residents, Christoffel distributed the wards of “Bethesda” to trustworthy families, compensating them for their care. Only 35 children remained at the station, and Christoffel procured enough grain for the next five months to sustain operations. The management of the station was then entrusted to Khoren, the teacher for the blind, and Makrouhi, the widow of the deceased cook.³⁵ Subsequently, the station was placed under the supervision of employees of the American Board. Later, the American missionaries transferred all of their orphans from Malatia, as well as from Kharberd and Mezereh, to Syria.³⁶

On 9 February 1919, Christoffel, accompanied by several companions and his three adopted children—nine-year-old Heinz, seven-year-old Otto (both Armenians),³⁷ and six-year-old Kurdish Liesel—left Malatia intending to return to Germany. In Constantinople, Heinz and Otto were taken from him, and they were able to reunite with Christoffel only years later.³⁸

On 27 June 1919, Christoffel arrived in Germany after enduring considerable hardships.³⁹ This marked the end of Ernst Jakob Christoffel’s work and the mission for the blind in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁰ The real estate he had acquired over the years in Malatia was lost to him. However, the fruits of his final years of effort remained: “[...] Over the course of three years, until my expulsion, about a thousand Armenians, women, young girls, young men, and children, passed through our house. For all of them, it meant rescue

³⁴ Lörner, *Vom Werden*, 8.

³⁵ Christoffel, *Aus dunklen*, 91.

³⁶ Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide. Turkey’s Destruction of its Christian Minorities 1894-1924* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press 2019), 368.

³⁷ Heinz Dökmeyan was the brother of Grigor, a staff member at the station. He survived the genocide by serving as a shepherd in a Kurdish family. Otto (1912-2006) came from a well-known family in Malatia and was taken in by the station at the age of four in 1916. See Christoffel, *Aus dunklen Zeiten*, 57-59.

³⁸ For a more detailed account of how the two boys were taken from Christoffel and their eventual reunion with him, see Martirosyan, *Humanismus und christliche Barmherzigkeit*, 255-256.

³⁹ Christoffel, *Aus dunklen*, 76-78. See also Schmidt-König, *Ernst J. Christoffel*, 20-22.

⁴⁰ In 1924, during the early years of the Republic of Turkey, Christoffel made another attempt to re-establish himself in the country. However, upon arriving in Constantinople, he was denied permission to travel to Malatia.

from death or something even worse.”⁴¹ This is how Christoffel summarizes his work in his memoirs.

Ernst Jakob Christoffel as a Witness of the Armenian Genocide

Ernst Jakob Christoffel’s testimonies are among the most important sources documenting the later period of the Armenian Genocide (from April 1916 onward) in Malatia. He documented these events as they unfolded, addressing them not only to the German embassy and government institutions but also to church organizations and supporters of the mission in Germany and Switzerland. Excerpts from these letters and reports were published in Swiss newspapers at the time. His letters and reports were not merely testimonies but also urgent appeals for help—efforts to save at least those who had survived and those involved in various jobs. In the spring of 1916, as Christoffel traveled from Constantinople to Malatia, stopping in Sebastia, Eregli, and Caesarea, he wrote to the German Consul Mordtmann on April 1:

[...] In Eregli, I met the last Armenians who had not converted to Islam. From there to here, everything has been radically cleaned up, either through deportation, forced conversion to Islam, or massacre. No Armenian voice is heard anywhere anymore. In Gemerek, thousands were killed. In the area around Yozgat, the populations of six Armenian villages were massacred; everyone, even the infants. On the road, I still encountered several thousand Armenian road workers (*ameli tabúri*), most of whom were also forced to convert to Islam; they were continually pressured to adopt Islam. There is a danger that once these people complete their work, they may also be killed for some reason, just as it is said to have happened in the Ersingan region. Can their lives not be secured? Can nothing be done for the remnants of the people?⁴²

At the end of the letter, Christoffel noted that rumors had spread among both Armenians and Turks that Germans were responsible for these horrors. These were essentially Christoffel’s first testimonies; he had not even arrived in Malatia yet, and what he described was based on what he had seen along the way. He did not hesitate to describe the situation and emphasize the full brutality of the massacres, noting that even infants were not spared. He warned that, most probably, if nothing were done, even the Armenians working on the roads for the Turks would be killed after fulfilling their duties.

⁴¹ Christoffel, *Zwischen*, 121.

⁴² Ernst Jakob Christoffel, *Brief an den Generalkonsul in Konstantinopel Mordtmann*, Siwas, April 1, 1916, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PAAA), Bestand: Botschaft Konstantinopel, Band 100.

Once in Malatia, Christoffel continued documenting the murders, enslavement, and sexual violence perpetrated against Armenians. He addressed particularly painful subjects that were difficult even to record, including various forms of forced child prostitution involving both girls and boys, as well as the forced prostitution of Armenian women. Christoffel also identified individuals who played prominent roles in these crimes, one of the most notorious being “Hamid of Malatia,” a reference to Abdul Hamid II. This individual expanded a weaving and carpentry workshop into a large enterprise using wealth stolen from Armenians and secured certain privileges by supplying the military. Although he had ostensibly “rescued” hundreds of Armenians from exile, they effectively became his slaves, paying an extraordinarily high price for this so-called salvation. As Christoffel wrote, “[...] The women and girls were completely devoted to him, body and soul,”⁴³ describing the brutal conditions under which they continued to live. At times, as many as 700 to 800 people worked for him, the majority of them women and girls.

Christoffel also addressed other sensitive topics in his letters and, especially, in his memoirs. One such issue concerned whether German troops could have intervened to prevent the massacre of the Armenians. He framed the question more directly: “Is Germany—or are individual Germans—actively or passively guilty of the deportation of the Armenian people?” His answer, however, was negative,⁴⁴ apparently because he was not aware of such individuals, although they did in fact exist. Another direct question he posed was addressed to the German Evangelical Church, to which he belonged. He could not understand the behavior, restraint, and inactivity of the Evangelical Church:

[...] There is no doubt that what has been done and is still being done to the Armenian people is the greatest crime in world history. Will the people of the Reformation accept the complete destruction of a Christian nation by a degenerated, inferior race as an accepted fact? Will the German Evangelical Church, which is celebrating its Reformation centenary this year, have no word of protest that a sister church is being destroyed by sadistic fanatics? That would not be German, not Christian.⁴⁵

Such harsh criticism, and especially such vocabulary in this letter written on March 26, 1917, was indeed a rare occurrence in German society at that time.

Another target of Christoffel’s criticism was the European press, particularly German periodicals, including the *Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* published in Leipzig. He remarked: “It almost seems tragicomic when one reads in European

⁴³ Christoffel, *Aus dunklen*, 55.

⁴⁴ Christoffel, *Zwischen*, 113-115.

⁴⁵ Archiv der Christoffel-Blindenmission (Bensheim), Br/1917/1b, “Bericht des Herrn Ernst J. Christoffel, Vorsteher des Blindenheims Malatia über die Lage der Armenier, an Pastor G. Stoevesandt, Berlin,” Malatia, 26 March 1917, 2.

newspapers that the Armenians are the cause of the bloodbath. It is incomprehensible that even a paper like the Leipzig Lutheran Church Newspaper holds this view. Europe is falling for the old, repeated lie that also played such a role in previous massacres. One must not be too surprised; it does not fit into the program of high diplomacy.”⁴⁶

Similar concerns had previously been expressed by the leaders of two other German missionary organizations—the German Aid Society for Christian Charity Work in the Orient (Deutsches Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient) and the German Orient Mission (Deutsche Orient-Mission), namely Ernst Lohmann and Johannes Lepsius—who criticized the distortion and politicization of reporting in certain sectors of the European press, particularly the German press, in accounts transmitted from Constantinople.

In his reports, Christoffel also addressed the possible scale of Armenian deaths during the Armenian Genocide. In a letter written in the spring of 1917 to August Wilhelm Schreiber—a board member of the Christian Mission of the Blind in the Orient (Deutsche Blindenmission im Orient) and director of the German Evangelical Missionary Aid (Deutsche Evangelische Missionshilfe)—Christoffel discussed the human losses suffered by the Armenians up to that point. Schreiber subsequently forwarded the letter to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs without expressing his own views on its contents. Referring to the situation as of March 1917, Christoffel wrote: “The losses of the Armenian people since the beginning of the exile in the summer of 1915 to today exceed 1 million. Some were killed in prisons after terrible torture. Most of the women and children died during the deportation as a result of hunger, epidemics, and murder.”⁴⁷

He then outlines the measures that should be taken immediately to improve the situation. These measures included: the return of forcibly Islamized Armenians to Christianity, the return of Armenian children kept in Muslim families, the return of confiscated religious and educational institutions, compensation for confiscated Armenian property, providing Armenians with the opportunity to leave the country, and allowing Christian religious ceremonies.⁴⁸ Although Christoffel mistakenly identified the summer of 1915 as the beginning of the deportations rather than March of the same year—likely reflecting the chronology in Malatia—it is clear from the measures he proposed that he possessed a strong understanding of the realities on the ground and articulated concrete proposals aimed at rescuing survivors and at least partially restoring their rights.

⁴⁶ Thüne, *Ernst Jakob Christoffel*, 41.

⁴⁷ Johannes Lepsius, ed., *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918: Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke* (Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1919), 353.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 354-355. A number of other Germans also testified to the forced Islamization of Armenians, including Consul Scheubner-Richter in Erzerum, Consul Kuckhoff in Samsun, Consul Dr. Bergfeld in Trapizon, German consular secretary Werth, and Consul Rössler in Aleppo, among others. See Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 292-305.

Conclusion

In conclusion, several key observations can be made regarding Ernst Jakob Christoffel's activities in Malatia. Upon his return, Christoffel succeeded in preventing the deportation of the last group of approximately thirty individuals under his care who had already received deportation orders. His presence provided crucial assistance to survivors in Malatia and its surrounding areas, offering a rare source of hope and refuge at a time of extreme vulnerability. He also managed to reclaim the Bethesda station, which had been seized by the Ottoman authorities and converted into a typhus field hospital, gradually restoring its buildings to their original humanitarian purpose. In doing so, the station became a small oasis of salvation, particularly for Armenian women and children who had escaped from Muslim households and harems where they had been held in conditions of servitude or captivity.

Despite repeated confrontations with local authorities, as well as with Turks and Kurds who considered themselves the “owners” of Armenian women and children and sought to reclaim them, Christoffel was able to assist or rescue approximately 1,000 Armenians, according to his own account. Beyond his direct humanitarian interventions, Christoffel's historical significance lies in his documentation. No other foreign observer appears to have recorded the later phases of the Armenian Genocide in Malatia—from April 1916 onward—with comparable depth and consistency. His reports, correspondence, and later memoirs therefore constitute some of the most significant and detailed contemporary testimonies on the Armenian Genocide in Malatia.

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