



International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies

ISSN: 1829-4405; eISSN: 2738-2931

[Journal homepage](#)

Hasanchelebi: A Killing Station for Armenian Men on the Sebastia Deportation Routes

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How to cite: Robert Sukiasyan, “Hasanchelebi: A Killing Station for Armenian Men on the Sebastia deportation Routes,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 9, no. 2 (2024): 1-17.

Submitted: 24.02.2024

Accepted: 13.10.2024

Published online: 20.12.2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51442/ijags.0058>

HASANCHELEBI: A KILLING STATION FOR ARMENIAN MEN ON THE SEBASTIA DEPORTATION ROUTES

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Abstract

This article investigates Hasanchelebi, a key station on the Sebastia deportation routes, as the principal site for the systematic extermination of deported Armenian men from Sebastia and surrounding regions during the Armenian Genocide. Drawing on Armenian survivor testimonies and corroborating Ottoman documents, the study reconstructs the phases of atrocities, beginning with the plunder and abuse of women and culminating in the mass arrest and execution of men. It highlights the strategic role of Hasanchelebi in the genocidal machinery and demonstrates the unique opportunities provided by Armenian sources for documenting and understanding the Armenian Genocide.

Keywords: Hasanchelebi, Sebastia (Sivas), Armenian Genocide, deportation routes, Ottoman empire, survivor testimonies, massacre sites, killing sites, deportation centers.

This article was submitted on 24.02.2024 and accepted for publication on 13.10.2024.

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Introduction

One of the mechanisms of the Armenian Genocide was the forced deportation of the Armenian population, which uprooted them from their ancestral homeland and led to their systematic annihilation along the routes to the Syrian desert. The Ottoman Empire deployed gendarmes to escort each caravan as a supposed “security measure” accompanying them to their final destinations. Along this route and in the areas between the designated stops, there existed a network of “deportation centers” or “transit stations” where Armenian deportees were held temporarily. These “stations” became sites where deportees were systematically subjected to looting, abduction, rape, and murder, each with its own particular focus. This paper specifically examines the events at Hasanchelebi, a station located at the border of Kharberd (Mamouret-ul-Aziz) and Sebastia (Sivas) provinces.¹ The primary aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive and nuanced representation of the events, reconstructing the circumstances through a systematic and detailed approach. This effort seeks to offer a vivid portrayal of the unfolding situation while showcasing the richness of Armenian sources and the unique opportunities they offer for nearly minute-by-minute reconstructions of the events.

The deportation experience during the Armenian Genocide is primarily documented through the accounts of Armenian survivors, who serve as the only witnesses capable of narrating the full sequence of event from the onset to the culmination of the genocidal process. Unlike perpetrators, who observed and participated in specific stages of the deportations, survivors endured and chronicled the entirety of this harrowing experience. Ottoman sources, on the other hand, tend to emphasize interactions among imperial or provincial elites, often omitting detailed accounts of massacres, deportations in different regions, or the fate of survivors. This makes survivor testimonies particularly significant for understanding the history of the deportations. Armenian accounts offer an indispensable resource, rich in descriptive and factual details about local events. These sources exist in various forms, including archival documents, personal monographs, serialized newspaper publications, *hushamadyans* and collections of survivor testimonies.² A cornerstone source for this study, and one of the earliest comprehensive

¹ An earlier version of this paper was published in Armenian in *Tsêghaspanagitakan handes*, Robert Sukiasyan, «Հասան Չելեբի. Մեքաստիայի տեղահանության ճանապարհի մի կայանի շուրջ» [Hasanchelebi: A Station on the Deportation Route of Sebastia], *Tsêghaspanagitakan handes* 6, no. 2 (2018): 44-61.

² Archival documents - Fonds A. Andonian, - Matériaux pour l’histoire du genocide, Dossier 49 Massacres et déportations à Sébaste, *Ամբաստանագիր-տեղեկագիր Մեքաստիոյ կուսակալութեան* [The Indictment-Report on Sebastia Province], 0177-190v; Unknown author, *Սիւս-Շար-Գրշիւ*, [Sivas-Sharkishla], 0117-134, 0138-0139; Haiganoush Zaratsian, *Սիւս*, [Sivas], 0113-0116; Kassmanian Vartanush, *Պատմութիւն Վարդանուշ Գասսանեանի սիվսսի* [The Story of Vartanush Kassmanian from Sebastia], 0171-0176; Fonds A. Andonian, - Matériaux pour l’histoire du genocide, Dossier 6, Amasia, Bekian Heghine, *Ամասիայի հայ տարագրեալները* [The Armenian Deportees of Amasia], 0001-0013v; Sebul Lusarian, *Մի կեանքի պատմութիւն* [A Story of a Life] (Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, Section of Handwritten memoirs, files 127, 128, 129); Suren Sarkisian, *Պատմութեան կարմիր, սև էջեր, սատանայական գործեր, եղեռնը* [Red, Black Pages of History, Satanic Deeds, the Yeghern] (RA, NAA, Institute of Archelogy and Ethnography, archives of the department of ethnography, folder № 121/2); Aleksandrian Ohannes, *Օհանես Ալէքսանդրեանի հուշերը*

works on the Armenian Genocide, is *Yeghernabadum*.³ This seminal volume is the most detailed account of the genocide in the province of Sebastia, authored by Garabed Kapigian, whose intimate knowledge of the region's social dynamics and political transformations informs the text. As both a perceptive eyewitness and a diligent researcher, Kapigian offers a unique combination of firsthand testimony and analytical rigor. His work provides invaluable insights into the lead-up to the genocide and the atrocities that followed, detailing the events with precision and offering thorough geographical and numerical data. The data presented is cross-referenced with information from foreign eyewitnesses and Ottoman documents emerging from the courts-martials.⁴

Background and Context

Starting in 1913, the Ottoman authorities, under the leadership of Ahmed Muammer Bey, the newly appointed governor of Sebastia province, enacted a series of measures designed to undermine the economic stability and future prospects of the Armenian population in the region.

1915թ. *Եղեռնի մասին* [Ohannes Aleksandrian's Memories of the Yeghern of 1915], (National Archives of Armenia, section 439, f. 3, file 115). Personal monographs - Payladzo Kaptanian, *Յալիսլ [Tsavag]* (New York: Armenia, 1922); Edward Racoubian, *Եղեռնաբաղ իրաներ* [Reaped by Yeghern] (Beirut: Shirak Press, 1968); Papken Injearapian, *Մեծ Եղեռնի շրջանին հայ որբի մը ողիսականը* [An Odyssey of an Armenian Orphan in Time of the Medz Yeghern] (Paris: H. Turabian, 1951). Serialized newspaper publications - Shahan Derderian, *Արիւնի ճամբէս* [My Bloody Road] *Hairenik Monthly* 29, September 1951, 72-78; June 1951, 95-97; Vahan Chookaszian, *Բզրտուած Սեբաստիան* [Destroyed Sebastia], *Eritassard Hayastan* 24, 23 July, 1919; 18 October, 1919. Memory books - Durtad Durtadian, *Յաղթը եւ յաղթեցիները* [*Haght and Haghtetsis*] (Boston: Hairenik, 1959); Kapriel Simonian, *Յուշամատեան պոնտական Ամասիոյ* [Memory Book of Pontic Amasia] (Venice: n.p., 1966); Vahan Hampartsumian, *Գիւղաշխարհ. Պատմական, ազգագրական ուսումնասիրութիւն* [*Village World: Historic-Ethnographic Study*] (Paris: Taron Press, 1927); Collections of survivor testimonies - Verjine Svazlian (ed.), *Հայոց ցեղասպանություն. Ականատեւ վերապրողների վկայություններ* [The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors] (Yerevan: Gitut'yun, 2011); Aram Giureghian, *Մեր սերունդէն դուն ողջ մնաս և մեր վրէժը լուծես* [You, from our Generation Must Stay Alive and Take our Revenge], 188-207; Armenag Giureghian, *Միասին էինք տառապել, անցել Գողգոթայի ճամբան* [We Suffered Together Passing through the Golgotha's Way], 208-220, published in, *Հուշագրական ժառանգություն* [Collected Memoirs] (Yerevan: Research on Armenian Architecture Foundation, 2011); Levon Mesrob, *1915. Աղէտ եւ վերածնունդ* [1915. Catastrophe and Renaissance] (Paris: Araks, 1952); Hagop Kosian, *Աքարի ճամբան (1915)* [The Path of Exile (1915)], edited by Father Boghos Vrt. Gochnanyan and Meruzhan Karapetyan, *Handes Amsorya* (Vienna-Yerevan), 2015, nos. 1-12, 345-483.

³ Kouzhgan Sepastio (Garabed Kapigian), *Եղեռնապատում Փոքուն հայոց եւ նորին մեծի մայրաքաղաքին Սեբաստիոյ* [The Story of Genocide of Armenia Minor and Its Grand Capital, Sepasdia] (Boston: Hayrenik, 1924), an abbreviated English translation of the book by Aris Sevag, Garabed Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum* [Story of Genocide] (New York: Pan-Sebastia Rehabilitation Union, Inc., 1978), and a complete Russian translation by Ter-Davtyan Kparik, Габикян Карапет, *История уничтожения Малой Армении и ее великой столицы Себастиу* [The Story of Genocide of Armenia Minor and Its Grand Capital, Sepastia] (Yerevan: Nairi, 2015).

⁴ Yervant Kassouni, *Քննական ակնարկ «Միջոցների Հերլուտ» 1915-1918 թթ. հայ ժողովրդի ցեղասպանութեան եւ վերածնունդի մասին արձանագրած վկայագրություններուն* [A Critical Overview of Testimonies on 1915-1918 Armenian Genocide and Renaissance by Missionary Herald] (Beirut: M.A.H.A.E.); Guerguerian, Krikor, "03 Captain Fazil Bey III" (2018). *Fazil Bey*. 3. https://commons.clarku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=pd_fazil_bey.

These measures included economic boycotts and the widespread dissemination of anti-Armenian propaganda throughout the province, contributing to the growing belief among the Turkish population that Armenians were a threat to the prosperity of the Turkish community. As World War I broke out, the Ottoman government escalated its actions against the Armenians.

One of the first actions was the conscription of Armenians into the Ottoman army. However, this was accompanied by a strategy to isolate Armenian soldiers by assigning them to labor battalions, thus separating them from their communities and disarming them. These men, once soldiers, were subjected to forced labor under harsh conditions, leading to the death of many. Those who survived the grueling labor would eventually be executed as part of the genocidal campaign.⁵ This period was marked by widespread mistrust of Armenians, which, along with persecution, disarmament, and forced labor, led many Armenian soldiers to desert their posts. Deserters were hunted down, and searches were conducted in Armenian homes, deepening the resentment and unrest within the community.

In the broader context of Sebastia province in the lead-up to the genocide, 1915 was marked by a series of significant events, most notably the assassination of Bishop Sahag Odabashian and the alleged poisoning of Turkish soldiers.⁶ The Ottoman authorities had begun disarming Armenians in Sebastia and implemented harsh punitive measures against those who had deserted the army. These actions neutralized two essential resources: fighting-age men and access to weapons. At the same time, the government engaged in widespread confiscations of Armenian property to support the war effort. In March and April 1915, raids targeted Armenian political party offices, seeking to dismantle any potential resistance and depriving Armenian communities of their leadership. This disarmament process led to further arrests and persecution.

Between May and June 1915, Armenians who had managed to survive the massacres or avoid conscription were systematically targeted, with many being imprisoned. The authorities segregated these men into groups and executed them in secret, effectively eliminating any potential for organized resistance.

Taken together, these actions set the stage for the mass deportations that followed. The order to execute the deportations was communicated to the Armenian population through various channels, including official announcements by the governor and religious leaders, posted notices, and verbal messages from the police and local officials. On July 1, 1915, Governor Muammer met with the leaders of the Armenian Apostolic and Catholic churches, Knel Kalemkarian and

⁵ On February 25, 1915 the Ottoman General Staff released Enver's Directive 8682 ordering removal of all ethnic Armenian soldiers and officers from command posts and headquarters, for a detailed discussion of these events see Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 98; Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: the Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 168; Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and the National Awakening: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 171-173.

⁶ Robert Sukiasyan, «Մահակ վարդապետ Օդաբաշեանի սպանութիւնը օսմանեան և հայկական աղբիւրների լոյսի տակ» [The Murder of Sahak Vardabet Odabashian in the Light of Ottoman and Armenian Sources], *Handes Amsorya* no. 133 (2019), 455-470; Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide. A Complete History* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 431-432.

Levon Kechejian.⁷ During this meeting, he informed them of the government's decision to deport the Armenian population to Mesopotamia and instructed them to share this news with their congregations. Deportation notices were also posted on buildings in major settlements within the province. Additionally, the administrative system facilitated the spread of the announcement, with reports being sent to the city police, who then communicated the information to district and village heads.

In certain areas, such as Gemerek, Karagueul, Tamzara, and the village of Sim Hajjegah town criers publicly announced the eviction order, which was sometimes presented as a royal decree. The amount of time given for preparation before the deportations varied, with notices ranging from just a few hours to several days. For example, in Sebastia, the population was given five days' notice before the first deportation took place on July 5, 1915.⁸

As the deportations approached in Sebastia, Marzvan, and Amasia, the population focused on addressing essential needs like food and clothing. At the same time, they made efforts to discreetly protect their valuables and money. These possessions were hidden in various ways: tucked inside containers, sewn into the edges of blankets, or concealed in children's clothing. The intention was to ensure that at least some of their valuables would remain safe in case of unforeseen events.⁹

The government's deportation orders included a provision to arrange transportation for the deportees. However, this commitment was only partially met, often resulting in either inadequate or no transportation being provided. The deportations were strictly enforced across Sebastia and other towns and villages in the province. In some cases, residents were forcibly removed from their homes, and their essential belongings, including food and clothing, were either stolen or confiscated.¹⁰

The deportations proceeded systematically, district by district. In the city of Sebastia, as Garabed Kapikian reported, a daily caravan was organized from July 5 to July 18, with each caravan corresponding to a specific district. This process led to the forced deportation of most of the city's population, including 5,400 households and a total of 37,000 individuals.¹¹ Although the Protestant Armenians of Sebastia resided in different neighborhoods, they were allowed to be deported together as a group.¹²

The Hasanchelebi Station in the Armenian Deportation System

⁷ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 91.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 101; Aleksandrian, *Ohannes Aleksandrian's memories*, 15v-16; Simonian, *Memory Book of Pontic Amasia*, 655; Armen Marsoobian, *Fragments of a Lost Homeland. Remembering Armenia* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 205.

¹⁰ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 102-103, Kassouni, *A Critical Overview*, 55; Injearapian, *An Odyssey of an Armenian Orphan*, 24; Racoubian, *Reaped by Yeghern*, 56; Durtadian, *Haght and Haghtetsis*, 108; Sarkisian, *Red, Black Pages of History*, 85.

¹¹ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 103-104.

¹² Ara Sarafian (ed.), James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916, Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Falloden by Viscount Bryce* (Princeton: NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2000), 333.

The village of Hasanchelebi and its roadside station were located in the sub-district of Akchadagh, in the northern part of the Malatia district, within the Kharberd province. It was situated approximately 52 kilometers southwest of Arabkir, along the Sebastia-Malatia Road. The village had a population of 200 households, consisting of Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian residents.¹³ It succeeded the *Kotu Han* station, situated at the border of the Sebastia and Kharberd provinces, which was designated as a site for plunder and massacres, primarily targeting men of prominent social status.¹⁴ At Hasanchelebi, however, the primary target shifted to adult men, regardless of their social standing. For the few disguised men, women, and children who survived this phase of deportation, the subsequent stations/killing sites they were forced through were Hekimhan, Hasanbadrig, Kirk Goz Bridge, leading to a major deportation hub - Firinjilar.¹⁵

In the context of deportation routes, Hasanchelebi station was a pivotal station for the Armenians from Sebastia, the city and its surrounding villages, as well as for displaced individuals from adjacent regions. As Raymond Kévorkian rightly notes, Hasanchelebi was chosen as a site for the systematic extermination, with the valley extending from the village being strategically advantageous, nestled between towering mountains.¹⁶ The site became a major part of several key deportation routes.

One of these routes, designated for the Armenians from the city of Sebastia and surrounding areas, began in Sebastia and extended to Tecirhan, Maghara, Kangal, Alacahan, Kotu Han, and, within Mamouret-ul-Aziz, reached Hasanchelebi. It then continued to Hekimhan, Hasan Patrick, Firinjilar, and extended southward.

A second route was designated for the northwest of Sebastia province and its surrounding regions, passing through Samsun, Marzvan, Amasia, Tokat, Sharkishla, Kangal, Kotu Han, and also passed through Hasanchelebi station.

These two routes also merged with a third route that began from Black Sea coastal settlements, such as Ordu and Giresun, extended to Shapinuva, Sushehri, Zara, Hafik, city of Sebastia, and joined the Kangal, Kotu Han route, reaching Hasanchelebi station.¹⁷ As in other stations, Ottoman state, Young Turk party organs, representatives of the Special Organization,

¹³ T. Kh. Hakobyan, St. T. Melik-Bakhshyan H. Kh. Barseghyan, *Հայաստանի և հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան* [Dictionary of Toponyms of Armenia and Adjacent Regions], vol. 3 (Yerevan, YSU Publishing house, 1991), 370; Raymond Kévorkian and Paboudjian P. B., *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire ottoman à la veille du génocide* (Paris: ARHIS, 1992), 391; Unknown author, *Sivas-Sharkishla*, 0124.

¹⁴ Robert Sukiasyan, «Քյոտու Խան. Մերաստիայի տեղահանության ճանապարհի մի կայանի շուրջ» [Kötü Khan. A Station on the Deportation Route of Sebastia] *Ts'eghaspanagitakan handes* 6, no. 1 (2018), 44-61.

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion on the decision-making behind the “resettlement areas” and the situation on the ground, see Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 625–696; Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 125–285; Hilmar Kaiser, *Regional Resistance to Central Government Policies: Ahmed Djemal Pasha, the Governors of Aleppo, and Armenian Deportees in the Spring and Summer of 1915*, *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 12, iss. 3-4, 2010, 173–218; Khatchig Mouradian, *The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Ottoman Syria, 1915–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

¹⁶ Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 440.

¹⁷ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 234-235.

the gendarmerie, local authorities, *chetes* and the local Turkish and Kurdish populations were involved in the actions against the deported Armenians.

The kaymakam of Akchadagh, Vasfi Bey, appointed on 27 March 1914, was dismissed on 23 July 1915 and swiftly replaced by Asim Bey, who remained in office until 12 June 1916. This unexpected change coincided with the arrival of numerous deportation convoys converging on Akchadagh from the north and west. While one explanation for Vasfi Bey's removal could be his perceived lack of zeal in carrying out orders, a more plausible interpretation, supported by Raymond Kévorkian, is that he was removed due to conflicts over the distribution of assets expropriated from deportees.¹⁸ During this period, the commander of the gendarmerie in the district was Ali Chavush, who also directed operations at the Hekim Khan transit station. Among those directly involved in the atrocities at Hasanchelebi were Muhtar Mirza and the merchant Ulashoglu Ibrahimoglu Huseyin. These individuals were responsible for the massacre of the Armenian caravans and large-scale theft of goods. They were also suspected rapists, Huseyin kept an Armenian girl for two months for his pleasure after which he killed her.¹⁹ Burhan Effendi, a scribe at Akchadag, in that capacity went to Hasanchelebi, abducted two Armenian girls whom he abandoned after raping, the girls died.²⁰ The census director at Akchadagh, participated in the acts of plunder and rape of young girls between the Hasanchelebi and Hekim Han stations.²¹ Mahmud Chete was reported to have led deportation convoys and participated in looting and massacres near Hasanchelebi, according to a December 1918 questionnaire issued by Hasan Mazhar, the head of the government commission of inquiry, to Rifat Bey, the police chief of Sebastia. In the same report, another figure, Cherkas Kadir, a *chete*, was accused of transporting significant loot alongside five accomplices. This included 48 sacks full of jewels and one sack containing 30,000 Turkish pounds in gold, taken from Hasanchelebi and Hekimhan to Sebastia, where the valuables were handed over to Muammer.²²

The composition of individuals overseeing and executing the actions at the station suggests that the organization and implementation of these activities involved key state and party actors and, in some instances, as in the case of Sebastia governor Muammer, this even included overstepping state boundaries.

Phase One: Plunder and Violence Against Women

Hasanchelebi was a site that had been chosen for the systematic extermination of all the males in the convoys from Samsun and the sub-districts of the Sebastia province. The advantage of the valley that ran from the village outward was that it lay squeezed between high mountains. Deportees reaching Hasanchelebi were stationed at the foothills of nearby mountains, situated in

¹⁸ Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 418.

¹⁹ Krikor Guerguerian, "03 Captain Fazil Bey III" (2018). *Fazil Bey*. 3, 235, https://commons.clarku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=pd_fazil_bey.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

²² Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 464-466.

a ravine along the riverbank.²³ After the caravans set up camp, groups of villagers, numbering up to a thousand, would enter the ranks of the deportees under the pretense of trade. According to Sebuh Lusararian, the main purpose of these visits was reconnaissance, to identify targets for plunder.²⁴ The villagers were armed with swords, axes, and other metal tools. During this phase of the operations at the station, women and girls became the primary focus. They were warned of an impending massacre and pressured to surrender gold and jewelry in exchange for their survival.²⁵ According to Vartanush Kassmanian from Sebastia's fourth caravan, a pregnant woman named Anna Chatrjian was ordered to surrender her gold, suspecting she might have swallowed it, her abdomen was brutally cut open, yet the gold was never found.²⁶ The process was accompanied by widespread acts of sexual violence and looting targeting women and girls. In an effort to protect themselves from these dangers, women attempted to disguise themselves by smearing dirt, mud, and ash on their bodies. However, their efforts were ultimately in vain.²⁷ These actions of plunder and abuse served a dual purpose: enriching the perpetrators while deliberately depleting the resources essential for the caravan's continued survival.

Second Phase: The Discovery and Arrest of Men

The second phase marked the commencement of the station's primary function: the separation and killing of men. Following orders, all men within the caravan were to be identified and arrested. To achieve this, the gendarmerie collaborated closely with the Kurdish villagers in the area. Acting under the orders and in cooperation with the gendarmerie, armed Kurdish villagers conducted thorough searches of the caravans. According to various sources, they arrested men ranging in age from as young as 8 to as old as 80 and beyond. The perpetrators systematically searched the caravans, forcibly entered tents, and deliberately sought out men.²⁸ To expose hidden men, women were subjected to torture, and under the threat of execution, men were separated from the women.²⁹ Aware of the danger threatening the men, the exiles resorted to various methods of concealment. Women attempted to hide the men under textiles, blankets, carts, and carpets, or sat on top of them to further conceal their presence.³⁰ To deceive the gendarmes and Kurds into thinking their husbands had already been arrested, women would weep conspicuously, which, in some cases, effectively deterred searches.³¹

²³ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 170; Aleksandrian, *Ohannes Aleksandrian's memories*, 22-22v; Racoubian, *Reaped by Yeghern*, 72; Kosian, *The Path of Exile*, 400; Derderian, "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 72; Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 167; Kaptanian, *Tsavag*, 65.

²⁴ Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 167.

²⁵ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 171; Derderian, "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 72; Hampartsumian, *Village World*, 227, 237; Kaptanian, *Tsavag*, 66.

²⁶ Kassmanian, *The Story of Vartanush Kassmanian*, 0171-0172.

²⁷ Derderian, "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 78; Bekian, *The Armenian Deportees of Amasia*, 0008v; Hampartsumian, *Village World*, 227, 234; Kassmanian, *The Story of Vartanush Kassmanian*, 0171-0172.

²⁸ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 178; Derderian, "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 72.

²⁹ Chookaszian, "Destroyed Sebastia," 1919, no. 46.

³⁰ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 177; Derderian, "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 72; Giureghian, "You, From Our Generation Must Stay Alive," 191; Simonian, *Memory Book of Pontic Amasia*, 670; Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 170-171.

³¹ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 178; Simonian, *Memory Book of Pontic Amasia*, 670.

One of the most prevalent strategies employed by men to evade detection was disguising themselves in women's attire.³² Some individuals went so far as to hold small children in their arms, pretending to nurse them, in an effort to enhance their disguise.³³ Through this identity concealment, individuals such as professors Ruben Racoubian, Senekerim Dalyonjian, Hambardzum Bledjian and others survive the station.³⁴

Several memoirs have recorded accounts of men successfully escaping. There are also accounts of men who contemplated escape but ultimately chose not to flee, only to be arrested and executed.³⁵ Accounts also detail men's efforts to evade capture, with many taking advantage of Hasanchelebi's mountainous terrain to hide in the surrounding ravines. However, once discovered by the Kurds, those in hiding were handed over to the gendarmes.³⁶

One of the methods of plunder during this phase was extorting ransom in exchange for refraining from imprisoning the men. For instance, in the case of the caravan at St. Sarkis Church district of Sebastia, as Haiganoush Zaratsian reports, a bribe of five gold liras was demanded for the release of the men and the failure to provide the payment resulted in the threat of imprisonment.³⁷ While there were instances where bribes proved effective, such as when several women bribed a Kurdish *müdir* to secure the release of dozens of men,³⁸ this was not always the case, as the bribe did not always yield the desired outcome.³⁹ In some cases, bribes were deceitfully collected under the pretense of releasing prisoners who, unbeknownst to the payers, had already been executed, a cruel and exploitative scam.⁴⁰ Bribes that fell short of the demanded amount were also insufficient to save the lives of those detained, further underscoring the extortionate and merciless nature of these practices.

Following the separation and imprisonment of the men, there were instances where the rest of the caravan was forced to proceed on its journey.⁴¹ There were also instances where caravans were held for several days, during which searches, arrests, and plunder continued.⁴² The women of the caravan from Sebastia St. Kevork district reportedly heard the cries of men being killed as they left the village. Some attempted to return to their husbands but were prevented

³² Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 198, 200; Derderian, "My Bloody Road," June 1951, 95.

³³ Aguni Sebuhi, *Միլիոնն Վր հայերու ջարդի ամբողջական պատմությունը (1914-1918)* [A Complete History of Massacres of a Million Armenians (1914-1918)] (Constantinople: Hayasdan, 1921), 96; Derderian "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 72.

³⁴ Aguni, *A Complete History*, 96.

³⁵ Kassouni, *A Critical Overview*, 57; Derderian, "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 72-73; Aleksandrian, *Ohannes Aleksandrian's Memories*, 22v-23.

³⁶ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 176; Derderian, "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 75.

³⁷ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 199.

³⁸ Kapigian, *ibid.*, *The indictment-report on Sebastia province*, 0179v; "My Bloody Road," 73; Kassmanian, *The Story of Vartanush Kassmanian*, 0172.

³⁹ Lusarian, *A Story of a Life*, 171; Derderian, "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 72.

⁴⁰ Hampartsumian, *Village World*, 237.

⁴¹ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 178; Giureghian, "You, From Our Generation Must Stay Alive," 191, 212.

⁴² Derderian, "My Bloody Road," September 1951, 72-78; Kosian, *The Path of Exile*, 400-403.

from doing so, those who resisted were killed.⁴³ There is also a documented instance of a caravan resisting and remaining in the village for some time.⁴⁴

Despite the aforementioned exceptions and the unique circumstances of each caravan, it can be asserted that the primary function of this phase was the separation and arrest of men. This process was invariably accompanied by plunder, either directly or through the extortion of bribes.

Phase Three: The Imprisonment and Massacre of Men

The massacre of men from the caravans arriving at Hasanchelebi station as reported by the survivors, was carried out in accordance with an *irade*, an imperial decree, and a *fatwa* issued by the Sheikh-ul-Islam, as stated by the administrator of Hasanchelebi.⁴⁵

The arrested men were imprisoned in buildings located in the village square, where the administrator's office was also situated, overseeing the station's operations. According to testimonies, these included two distinct structures: one resembling an inn and the other a large, rundown barn. According to one survivor, the buildings could accommodate 40-50 people, yet more than 150 men were often imprisoned there at once.⁴⁶ The capacity of the halls and the severe mismatch with the number of people imprisoned created life-threatening conditions, leading to suffocation, fainting, and death. Notably, the buildings, which had been transformed into prisons, were supervised by two unarmed guards.⁴⁷ According to Sebu Luserarian, who was part of the caravan from the Pekmez Sokak district of the city of Sebastia, the conditions of imprisonment for the men were so unbearable that the detainees pleaded for execution, just to be released for a breath of air.⁴⁸ A survivor from this prison told Armenag Giureghian that the men from his group were left without food or water, enduring an entire day on their feet.⁴⁹ There is a recorded case where, in an effort to revive the collapsing detainees, they were taken outside one by one to be given water. Additionally, it is noted that after the detainees were brought outside, they were provided with bread and water.⁵⁰

Instances are also documented of detainees attempting to break down the doors and resist.⁵¹ According to Payladzo Kaptanian, when the number of those who fainted increased, all of them were taken outside and seated against the wall of the prison.⁵² After being detained for some time, the men were taken to be presented to the administrator. Although the gendarmes tried to release the detainees one by one, due to overcrowding and suffocation, the men poured

⁴³ Chookaszian, "Destroyed Sebastia," 1919, No. 46.

⁴⁴ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 181-183.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 186:

⁴⁶ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 180; Aleksandrian, *Ohannes Aleksandrian's Memories*, 22v; Kaptanian, *Tsavag*, 65; Kassmanian, *The Story of Vartanush Kassmanian*, 0172; Luserarian, *A Story of a Life*, 174; Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 326.

⁴⁷ Luserarian, *A Story of a Life*, 171-174.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Giureghian, "We Suffered Together," 212.

⁵⁰ Luserarian, *A Story of a Life*, 173.

⁵¹ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 180.

⁵² Kaptanian, *Tsavag*, 65.

out in a chaotic manner and rushed to the nearby stream (which was actually a latrine) to drink water.⁵³ After the detainees were brought outside, they were taken to a nearby building, the administrative office, where they were required to present themselves to the administrator, surrounded by armed Kurds.⁵⁴ The meeting with the administrator was thought to be the exiles' last opportunity to avoid death, as their fate had already become apparent to them. Seizing this chance, the men pleaded for salvation. In this way, the men of the caravan from Sebastia Pekmez Sokak district were saved. The administrator offered the group leaders, Manug Efendi Hekimian, the supervisor of the National Hospital, his brother Mihran, and several others, to pay a ransom of five gold coins for each individual. As a result of this agreement, 18-20 men were freed through ransom, while another 15-20 men were released without payment.⁵⁵ One such case occurred when, at midnight, supposedly moved by compassion, the administrator of Hasanchelebi village ordered the release of the men and, in return, demanded a ransom, which he was to receive the following day through 2-3 selected Armenians. The exiles, supporting each other, gathered the money and handed it over. However, the following evening, a group of armed Kurds detained them again.⁵⁶

A greater number of pardons were granted to the men of the last caravans leaving Sebastia, this presented as imperial pardons, though it did not extend to certain prominent individuals.⁵⁷ According to the testimony of Hovhannes Aleksandrian, who does not provide specific details of the event, around 50 men from his caravan were released from imprisonment.⁵⁸ After this final opportunity for salvation, under the pretext of relocating the men, they were taken out, bound in pairs, and led to a prearranged massacre site, first through the mountains and then across a plain to the edge of a ravine. This phase of the men's extermination process primarily took place after midnight.⁵⁹ The group was accompanied by armed gendarmes and guard soldiers, and at times, also by armed villagers.⁶⁰ As the group approached the designated location, the accompanying gendarmes fired shots into the air, signaling the Kurds who were lying in ambush and waiting to attack. Following the signal, the Kurds launched their attack, with women also participating in their groups.⁶¹ The groups were led to the edge of the ravine, where they were stripped off naked, stabbed, hacked with axes, shot, looted and finally thrown into the gorge.⁶² During one such case, when 8-10 pairs of young men from Sebastia Pekmez Sokak district caravan were left bound together, a cavalryman in military uniform approached. Calling one of the Turkish-speaking perpetrators over, he reminded him of the order

⁵³ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 181.

⁵⁴ Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 173.

⁵⁵ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 181.

⁵⁶ Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 168-170.

⁵⁷ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 186.

⁵⁸ Aleksandrian, *Ohannes Aleksandrian's Memories*, 23.

⁵⁹ Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 174-175; Giureghian, "We Suffered Together," 212; Kosian, *The Path of Exile*, 401; Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 175; Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 326.

⁶⁰ Kaptanian, *Tsavag*, 66; Giureghian, "We Suffered Together," 212.

⁶¹ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 175, 182; Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 175.

⁶² Sarkisian, *Red, Black Pages of History*, 91-92; Hampartsumian, *Village World*, 223; Giureghian, "We Suffered Together," 212; Kaptanian, *Tsavag*, 66-67; Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 175-176.

to spare the minors. After receiving a promise of conversion to Islam from the young men, he freed them.⁶³

This final phase of the killings lasted 3-4 hours and was accompanied by dismemberment, decapitations, and other extreme acts of brutality. The Kurds who carried out the killings stole even the bloodstained clothing of the victims, wearing them or holding them in their hands as they returned to the village.⁶⁴ According to the literal testimony of a Sebuhs Lusararian, an armed Kurd declared that all the men, as enemies of Islam, should be exterminated, and anyone who paid one or two gold coins, the price of a bullet, would be executed by shooting.⁶⁵ When the women from one of the Kochhisar caravans expressed their desire to visit their husbands and bring them money and food, they were informed that the men had been killed behind the mountain, and the women were beaten and driven away.⁶⁶

There were survivors who escaped the mass killings and those who were severely wounded from axe blows or other forms of torture. These individuals later joined their caravans, through whom we know about these actions in detail. According to survivors, there were also others left behind, severely wounded and unable to escape from beneath the bodies. However, the survivors did not dare to take them along.⁶⁷

A well-documented case of mass detention of women occurred after the killing of the men from one of the Samsun caravans. Around 100 women were gathered and imprisoned in a house, where they were searched and robbed. As with the previously described process, the women were crammed into a small room that was incompatible with their number, without being allowed to attend to their basic needs. A government official offered to release the women from detention if they converted to Islam.⁶⁸ Those who accepted the offer were released, while around 35 individuals who refused, including 6-7 Catholic abbesses, were taken to the ravine to be killed. However, they were not executed, with the justification that they were spared due to the pardon of the Sultan. In exchange for marrying one of the beautiful women of the caravan, the village administrator provided guarantees for the caravan's safe arrival in Malatia.⁶⁹

To give an idea about the scale of the killings that took place at the Hasanchelebi station, we present the available data regarding the number of arrested and executed men. According to Garabed Kapigian, 300 to 500 men were killed from each of the 15 caravans that departed from the city of Sebastia.⁷⁰ From the caravan of the Pekmez Sokak district, which included Garabed Kapigian, 300 people were killed at the station and over 300 from the third caravan of Sebastia. Similarly, as many were killed from the caravan of Sebastia Sari Sheikh district. From the

⁶³ Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 176.

⁶⁴ Kassmanian, *The Story of Vartanush Kassmanian*, 0172; Bekian, *The Armenian Deportees of Amasia*, 0008v; Kaptanian, *Tsavag*, 66.

⁶⁵ Lusararian, *A Story of a Life*, 175.

⁶⁶ Unknown author, *Sivas- Sharkishla*, 0124.

⁶⁷ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 179, 184; Kassmanian, *The Story of Vartanush Kassmanian*, 0172; Giureghian, "We Suffered Together," 212; Sarkisian, *Red, Black Pages of History*, 91; Hampartsumian, *Village World*, 223; Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 326.

⁶⁸ Kaptanian, *Tsavag*, 67-68.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 67-70.

⁷⁰ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 169-170.

caravan of the Mother Church district, up to 500 men were detained, of whom around 300 were killed.⁷¹ From one of Samsun's caravans, in which Pailatso Gabtanyan was deported, over 400 men were arrested and killed.⁷² One unsigned testimony reports that between 100 and 200 were killed from the village of Kochhisar.⁷³ A survivor from Amasia, Heghine Bekian, reports 200 men killed.⁷⁴ At Hasanchelebi station, the wealthy individuals from the city of Sebastia were a special target.⁷⁵ A prominent example of this can be seen in the events that occurred with the caravan from the Mother Church district of Sebastia, which arrived at the station on the first days of August. This district, one of the largest Armenian-populated areas of Sebastia, was home to many wealthy families. The benefactors, priests, teachers, and national figures resided here, and naturally, a caravan from such a renowned district was particularly susceptible to targeted persecution. Approximately 500 men from the caravan were imprisoned, and a ransom of 500 gold coins was demanded for their release, which was paid. Afterward, without waiting for further orders, the caravan set off on its journey. After receiving the money and releasing some of the men, the authorities attempted to arrest the same men again. However, upon seeing that the caravan was already on the move, no further actions were taken at the point. Two to three hours after leaving Hasanchelebi, the caravan was stopped again, and the men were looted and arrested. Many managed to hide. Over 400 men were detained and imprisoned in a nearby building, where a ransom of two gold coins per person was demanded once again. Many paid with money, while others offered valuable items. Afterward, around 100 men were released. The remaining approximately 300 men were killed in the manner previously described and thrown into a nearby gorge.⁷⁶

The events at Hasanchelebi station during this phase were marked by the mass imprisonment and execution of Armenian men, who endured overcrowding, starvation, and inhumane conditions before being taken to prearranged massacre sites. Survivor accounts detail the brutal killings, including shootings, beatings, and looting, underscoring the calculated and merciless nature of this phase of the atrocities.

For the few disguised men, women, and children who survived this phase of deportation, the next stations and killing sites they were forced through, as briefly mentioned earlier in the text, included Hekimhan, Hasanbadrig, and the Kirk Goz Bridge, culminating at the major deportation hub of Firinjilar. Here, a policy was enforced to separate children, with Armenian boys and girls either sent to Turkish orphanages, killed, or abandoned to die. After several days of confinement at this station, the operations resumed in the surrounding mountains and valleys known as Kanli Dere. Here, two Kurdish leaders, Zeynel Bey and Haji Bedri Agha, led the massacre of the surviving men. Meanwhile, women and children were relentlessly abducted,

⁷¹ Ibid., 184-190.

⁷² Kaptanian, *Tsavag*, 66.

⁷³ Unknown author, *Sivas- Sharkishla*, 0124.

⁷⁴ Bekian, *The Armenian Deportees of Amasia*, 0008v.

⁷⁵ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 183-186; Aguni, *A Complete History*, 96; Mesrob, 1915. *Catastrophe and Renaissance*, 272.

⁷⁶ Kapigian, *Yeghernabadoum*, 183-186.

robbed, and raped as the survivors were driven along routes extending from Firinjilar into Mesopotamia.

Conclusion

Based on Ottoman documents and the testimonies of survivors, it is evident that the operations at Hasanchelebi station were meticulously orchestrated under directives from the highest political authorities of the Ottoman Empire. These operations followed a systematic progression, beginning with plunder and violence against women, culminating in the mass arrest and execution of men. This phased approach underscores the calculated nature of the atrocities committed at this transit station. The systematic nature, scale, and outcomes of the actions carried out in Hasanchelebi provide a strong basis to assert that the station served as a central site for the extermination of adult Armenian men from the Sebastia province and surrounding regions.

To facilitate the extermination process and distribute culpability, local Kurdish residents were involved, incentivized by promises of material gain. This delegation of violence not only spread the burden of guilt but also minimized the logistical costs associated with these mass killings. Entrusting the most brutal aspects of the genocide to local actors underscores the regime's reliance on grassroots complicity to achieve its genocidal objectives, reflecting the calculated social engineering employed to incite communal violence.

The atrocities at Hasanchelebi also exemplify the interplay of state control and local dynamics. The coordination between Ottoman officials, local gendarmes, and irregular militias highlights the layered structure of the genocide, where national directives were seamlessly integrated into localized acts of violence. The involvement of community leaders, coupled with systematic exploitation and humiliation, turned sites like Hasanchelebi into emblematic arenas of state-sponsored terror. This study emphasizes also the importance of the survivor testimonies in exposing the strategies and methods employed at Hasanchelebi.

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