

THE PERPETUATION OF STATE VIOLENCE: THE TURKISH ARMY'S INSTITUTIONAL ROLE IN THE MASSACRES OF ARMENIANS IN KARS AND SHIRAK PROVINCES (1920) AS A MANIFESTATION OF GENOCIDAL CONTINUITY

Vazgen Hakhoyan^{*}
Yerevan State University

Abstract

The Ottoman army consistently played a distinct role in the implementation of the Turkish authorities' premeditated genocidal policy against Armenians. Units of the regular Turkish army participated in the forced deportations of Armenians, the destruction of settlements, and mass killings. The Young Turks' policy, guided by Pan-Turkist ideology, aimed not only to annihilate the Armenian people within the borders of the Ottoman Empire but also to eliminate any manifestation of Armenian statehood. This political line was also continued by the Kemalists. The massacres in the Vanand (Kars) and Shirak provinces of the Republic of Armenia in 1920 demonstrate that the violence against Armenians was not limited solely to the years of the Genocide but continued as a perpetuation of the same ideology. Therefore, the actions of the Young Turk and Kemalist authorities against Armenians should be examined not as isolated episodes but within the context of different stages of the same program and ideology. The article demonstrates this connection through the study of archival, field research, and specialized materials. The purpose of the article is to analyze the Turkish authorities' continuous pattern of involving the army in the process of carrying out massacres against Armenians, exemplified by the provinces of Kars and Shirak.

Keywords: *Vanand (Kars), Shirak, Armenians, Ottoman army, Turkish authorities, Pan-Turkist ideology.*

Introduction

The political events of 1920 became a pivotal stage for Armenia and the entire region. Amidst the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the newly forming Turkish authorities, facing external and internal challenges, sustained the logic of the coercive policy applied against the Armenian people. The involvement of the

^{*} Vazgen Hakhoyan is a researcher at the Department of Genocide Studies, Institute for Armenian Studies, YSU.



Turkish army in the mass massacres of Armenians was not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it reflected the state's consistent and systemic approach of utilizing its military structures as a tool for national and religious cleansing.

The Genocide perpetrated by the Young Turk regime during the First World War, which aimed at the complete extermination of the Armenian population, was reformulated by the Kemalist authorities in 1920 into a new political policy. Although the Kemalist movement was being formed as a national-liberation struggle and a movement directed against external powers, its domestic policy continued the same ideological and practical line, which was aimed at the physical destruction of Armenians and other non-Turkic elements.

The examples of the Kars and Shirak provinces attest that the actions of the Turkish army in the autumn of 1920 were not merely within the scope of military operations, but possessed a planned character. The violence, massacres, and deportations carried out in these regions indicate a high degree of state structures' involvement and the fact that the Kemalist leadership, like its Young Turk predecessors, purposefully utilized the army as the principal instrument of its genocidal policy. Numerous facts have been known since the time of the massacres of Armenians organized by Sultan Abdul Hamid II, attesting that the Turkish army was the most crucial force in the annihilation of Armenians.¹

Attempts by the Young Turk Government to Involve the Army in the Massacres of Armenians

The armed forces of the Ottoman Empire were also used against Armenians by the Young Turks. Deep within the Ottoman Empire, Turkish military units and formations, in close cooperation with the police and Kurdish bandit groups, directly participated in the massacres of Armenians. In all instances of massacres and looting that occurred in the Adana province in 1909, soldiers participated very actively, a fact confirmed by hundreds of witnesses and the Adana Investigation Commission.²

Ten days after the first Adana massacres (April 1-4, 1909), three regiments of the Army of Liberty from Thessaloniki entered the city and were stationed on the heights dominating the Armenian quarters. Executing the directives of the Young Turk central committee, the soldiers set fire to the remaining Armenian homes and hospitals, massacring women and children. The Minister of Interior, Hacı Adil, had instructed them to 'spare the foreigners,' implying that the Armenians were

¹ M. Nersisyan, *Hayots' tseghaspanut'yan anherk'eli p'astat'gher* [Irrefutable Documents on the Armenian Genocide] (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2005), 64-67.

² M. Nersisyan and R. Sahakyan, *Hayeri tseghaspanutyunë Osmanyany kaysrut'yunum* [The Genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire] (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1991), 231, 235, 236, 250, R. Sahakyan and K. Khudaverdyan, *Hayots' ts'eghaspanutyunë tasnamyakneri luysi nerk'o* [The Armenian Genocide in the Light of Decades] (Yerevan, 1995), 17-18.

effectively to be slaughtered. The task left unfinished by the local Muslim population was continued by the soldiers³.

Supported by the newly arrived army units, the Turks attacked the completely unarmed and defenseless Armenians, mercilessly killing and burning thousands of people alive.⁴

The units of the 3rd Nizam Corps that arrived in Mersin, which were entirely under the command of Young Turk officers, committed similar atrocities in the provinces of Aleppo and Adana, where many settlements were set ablaze, and the population was literally slaughtered.⁵

On July 15, 1909, Major-General Yudenich, the temporary chief of staff of the Caucasus Military District, noted in his report that as of June 1909, three-quarters of Adana no longer existed; only the Muslim quarters adjacent to the Seyhan River remained intact. The rest of the city (approximately 5 – 6 thousand homes) was a pile of ruins. He then continues: The true culprits and murderers – the authorities and the Macedonian [Young Turk] troops – do not even think of hiding; they have no need to, as they themselves are members of the military tribunals and the investigative commission, and they themselves are now maintaining order in the country where 25–30 thousand Christians were slaughtered by their own hands.⁶

Entering the First World War, the governing circles of the Ottoman Empire hoped to realize the long-held ambition of removing Russia from the Caucasus and creating a Greater Turan by uniting the Turkic-speaking populations of the Near East, the Caucasus, Russia, and Central Asia. On the path to achieving this objective, the obstacle was not only Russia but also the Armenian people, who inhabited the eastern and western sections of Armenia.⁷

In 1915, the population in certain Armenian settlements of the Ottoman Empire, anticipating the threat of massacre, defied the order for forced deportation. Recognizing that the government would not leave them unpunished, they were compelled to resort to self-defense. Against the Armenian settlements that refused the deportation order, the government dispatched army units, gendarmerie formations, and irregular armed groups of the ‘Special Organization,’ which, along with the local Muslim population, carried out the massacres of the Armenians.

³ S. Poghosyan, *Hayots' ts'eghaspanut'yan patmut'yun* [History of the Armenian Genocide]: Vol. 2 (Yerevan: Hayastan, 2009), 136.

⁴ Vahakn Dadrian, *Istoriya armjanskogo genocida* [The History of the Armenian Genocide] (Yerevan, 2007), 234.

⁵ M. Nersisyan and R. Sahakyan, *Hayeri tseghaspanutyunē Osmanyany kaysrut'yunum* [The Genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire], 236.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 236-237.

⁷ A. Kirakosyan, *Haykakan harts'i ev Hayots' ts'eghaspanut'yan hamar'ot patmut'yun* [A Brief History of the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide] (Yerevan: Tigran Mets, 2015), 15.

Units of the Ottoman army were involved in carrying out the massacres of the Armenian population in the zone adjacent to the Russian-Turkish Caucasian front, particularly in Van, Bitlis, and Mush.⁸

Following the self-defense of Van in April-May 1915, and the subsequent entry of Russian forces and Armenian volunteers into the city, the Ottoman army retreated, carrying out massacres in the Armenian settlements encountered along its route. Although gendarmerie units, irregular Kurdish armed groups, and gangs from the 'Special Organization' had been allocated to suppress Armenian resistance in cases of non-compliance with the deportation order, it still proved necessary to involve army units in the perpetration of the massacres. Shortly after the defense of Van, the inhabitants of Bitlis and Mush were slaughtered by certain military units stationed there⁹.

The German officer H. Fierbühler noted that in Van, Turkish troops under the command of Jevdet Bey devastated more than 200 villages and massacred 26,000 inhabitants.¹⁰

Subsequently, the armed forces led by Halil and Jevdet Beys collectively organized the massacre of the Armenian population in Sghert, Bitlis, and Mush.¹¹

The retreating Turkish army, entering the districts of Mush and Bulanık, joined Musa Bey's Hamidiye forces and ruthlessly massacred and devastated the Armenian villages in those districts. Subsequently, uniting with Kurdish tribes, they carried out a horrific massacre in approximately 30 Armenian-inhabited villages of the Hınıs district.¹²

In this manner, the Ottoman government carried out the suppression of self-defense movements in Armenian settlements that had defied the 1915 forced deportation orders, resulting in the extermination of the Armenian population, by involving army units in this effort. The government dispatched army units for these aforementioned operations in cases where the forces of the gendarmerie and armed formations were insufficient.¹³

⁸ A. Basentsyan, 'Osmanyanyan banaki ev ayl zinvað kazmavorumneri koğmic' hayeri ink'napaştpanut'yan č'nşumn u haykakan bnakavayreri voč'nič'ats'umě [Suppression of Armenian Self-Defense and Destruction of Armenian Settlements by the Ottoman Army and Other Armed Formations], *K'ant'eg* 2 (2018), 107.

⁹ Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act, The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (N.Y., Metropolitan Books, 2006), 171.

¹⁰ H. Vierbücher, *What the German Imperial Government concealed from its Subjects: Armenia 1915: The Slaughter of a civilized People at the Hands of the Turks* (Arlington, 2006), 57.

¹¹ Basentsyan, 'Osmanyanyan banaki ev ayl zinvað kazmavorumneri koğmic' hayeri ink'napaştpanut'yan č'nşumn u haykakan bnakavayreri voč'nič'ats'umě [Suppression of Armenian Self-Defense and Destruction of Armenian Settlements by the Ottoman Army and Other Armed Formations], 108.

¹² A. Basentsyan, 'Hayeri k'otorač'nery Bit'lisi nahanğum osmanyanyan banaki ev ayl zinvað kazmavorumneri koğmic' (1915 t'.) [The Massacres of Armenians in the Bitlis Province by the Ottoman Army and Other Armed Formations (1915)], *Lraper hasarakakan gitut'yunneri* 1 (2018): 14.

¹³ Basentsyan, 'Osmanyanyan banaki ev ayl zinvað kazmavorumneri koğmic' hayeri ink'napaştpanut'yan č'nşumn u haykakan bnakavayreri voč'nič'ats'umě [Suppression of Armenian

Subsequently, Turkish judicial bodies, aiming to evade state responsibility, assigned responsibility for the atrocities committed against the Armenians to the 'Committee of Union and Progress' (CUP) party and the 'Special Organization' operating under its command, without uttering a single word regarding the brutalities of the Ottoman army, which was a state institution.¹⁴

The army's role in the massacres of the Armenian population continued during the Turkish military campaigns into Eastern Armenia in 1918 and 1920. The Turkish army not only engaged in warfare against Armenian armed forces but concurrently carried out the extermination of a segment of the East Armenian population and Western Armenian refugees. Following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, Soviet Russia ceded the Kars province to the Ottoman Empire. By seizing Kars and the surrounding villages in late April 1918, Turkish troops massacred thousands of Armenians.¹⁵ In the provinces (districts) of Kars, Kaghzvan, and Ardahan, 117 Armenian villages were devastated.¹⁶

The entire Christian population of Kars province, approximately 190,000 people, abandoned their homes, compelled by the threat of Turkish massacre. Around 120,000 Armenians were left homeless, a portion of whom died from starvation and disease. Hundreds of thousands of people migrated to the districts of Alexandropol, Etchmiadzin, and Yerevan.¹⁷

According to the testimony of one eyewitness from the Ardahan region, the Turks looted several thousand women and children, stripping them even of their underwear, and subsequently dispatched them to Akhalkalak. They marched for one month, suffering from cold and hunger.¹⁸ While the Transcaucasian government had resumed the interrupted Trebizond negotiations in Batumi on May 11, 1918, Turkish troops launched an attack on Alexandropol in the early morning of May 15 and captured the city. Taken by surprise, the population of Alexandropol fled in the direction of Karakilisa. This event was reported to the Catholicos of All Armenians, George V, by the Prelate Vicar of the Alexandropol Diocese, Archimandrite Artak. In the span of one hour, virtually the entire city was evacuated.¹⁹

According to eyewitness testimony, approximately 200,000 people had amassed in the Pambak region on the eve of the Turkish invasion (9,000 from Basen, 4,000

Self-Defense and Destruction of Armenian Settlements by the Ottoman Army and Other Armed Formations'], 113.

¹⁴ Basentsyan, 'Hayeri k'otorač'nery Bit'lisi nahangum osmanyanyan banaki ev ayl zinvað kazmavorunneri kogmic' (1915 t'.) [The Massacres of Armenians in the Bitlis Province by the Ottoman Army and Other Armed Formations (1915)], 12.

¹⁵ A. Poghosyan, Soc'ial-tntesakan haraberut'yunnerë Karsi marzum, 1878-1920 [Social-Economic Relations in the Kars Region, 1878-1920] (Yerevan: Haypet'hrat, 1961), 295-296, 307-308.

¹⁶ M. Karapetyan, Hayastani Hanrapetut'yan banakë (1918-1920) [The Army of the Republic of Armenia, 1918-1920] (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 1996), 94.

¹⁷ A. Poghosyan, Karskaya oblast' v sostave Rossii [Kars Region as Part of Russia] (Yerevan, 1983), 213, 214, 222, Poghosyan, Soc'ial-tntesakan haraberut'yunnerë Karsi marzum, 1878-1920 [Social-Economic Relations in the Kars Region, 1878-1920], 309.

¹⁸ Poghosyan, Karskaya oblast' v sostave Rossii [Kars Region as Part of Russia], 222.

¹⁹ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 57, Inv. 5, C. 178, Sh. 10.

from Kaghzvan, over 60,000 from the Kars region, and over 70,000 from the city of Alexandropol and the villages of Eastern Shirak). This was a colossal mass of people, occupying the stretch from Ghaltakhchi to Mets Karakilisa, a distance of about 40 versts (42.5 km).²⁰

According to official statistics, from May 15 to December, 10,300 people in 122 villages of the Alexandropol district (excluding the district center) perished due to Turkish atrocities. This toll includes 5,086 massacred, 4,660 taken captive, and 483 who went missing. Of those taken captive, 257 returned, the majority of whom died within a few days due to extreme exhaustion.²¹

These data, published in the *Harach* daily newspaper in October 1919 under the editorship and with commentaries by Hakob Ter-Hakobyan (Irazek), a deputy of the Armenian Parliament, were considered to be reduced by almost three times according to G. Khoyetsyan, the diplomatic representative of the Republic of Armenia (RA) in Alexandropol. Already in his reports submitted to the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs in early October 1918, Khoyetsyan wrote that in Alexandropol city and the villages of Eastern Shirak alone, the Turks had massacred approximately 20,000 people and taken another 10,000 captive.²²

11th Division, which included a significant number of Kurdish soldiers, invaded the Pambak region. Following the self-defense of Mets Karakilisa (May 25–28) and the surrender of the Armenian forces, the massacres, killings, and acts of violence against Armenians in this settlement continued for three days under Javid Bey's command, acquiring an official character. The mixed crowd also participated in the massacres alongside the Turkish troops. Within a few days, the fertile district of Pambak was reduced to a pile of ruins.²³

In Mets Karakilisa (currently the city of Vanadzor, the provincial center of Lori Province), over 3,500 people were massacred by Turkish troops; in Qshlagh (currently the Tavros district of Vanadzor city), 200 people were killed, including women and children; in Bzovdal (currently Bazum in Lori Province), over 300 people; in Hamamlu (currently Spitak in Lori Province), 350 people; and in Parni (currently Mets Parni in Lori Province), 150 people. Mass killings were also perpetrated in the villages of Darbaz (currently Darpas in Lori Province), Haji-Ghala (currently Lernapat in Lori Province), Avdibek (currently Tsaghkaber in Lori Province), Nalband (currently Shirakamut in Lori Province), Tapanlu (currently Geghasar in Lori Province), and Vardnav (currently Jrashan in Lori Province).²⁴

²⁰ A. Hayrapetyan, 'Zhoghovrdagrakan gortsent'ats'nern Aleksandrapoli gavarrum 1918t. mayis-noyember amisnerin' (Demographic Processes in Alexandropol District in May-November 1918), "Scientific Works" of NAS RA Shirak Armenology Research Center, no. 21 (2018), 121.

²¹ Ibid., 113.

²² Ibid., 114.

²³ V. Dallakyan and A. Marukyan, Gharak'ilisayi 1918 t'. herosamartë (p'astat'ght'eri yev nyut'eri zhoghovats'u)[The Heroic Battle of Gharakilisa in 1918 (Collection of Documents and Materials)] (Yerevan: YSU Press, 2008), 118–123, 271–272.

²⁴ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 240, Inv. 1, C. 240, Sh. 36.

According to approximate estimates, between 5,000 and 7,000 people were killed during that period.²⁵ The massacres of the Armenian population were conducted in gullies, high mountains, gorges, and trenches, in an attempt to create the impression that the victims had perished during military operations.²⁶

Just as in 1918, in 1920 the Pambak region witnessed the slaughter of thousands of Armenian refugees from the Alexandropol and Kars regions. Following the capture of Alexandropol in 1918, the inhabitants in many cases fled naked and barefoot, reaching as far as Mets Karakilisa. The Turks, blocking their lines of retreat, subjected them to bayoneting both in the valleys and in the forests.²⁷

During the six months of military occupation, approximately 20,000 people were massacred in Alexandropol and the villages of Eastern Shirak and Pambak, while 6,000 perished due to starvation and epidemics. Under various pretexts, 15,000 people were taken captive and driven into the interior of the Ottoman Empire, of whom only approximately 300 to 400 returned. More than 5,000 women and girls were abducted and subjected to rape. Approximately 1,000 women were forcibly Islamized. Many, unable to reconcile with the dishonor, ended their lives by suicide.²⁸

Thus, during the 1918 campaign, the Turkish army inflicted a severe blow upon the Kars province and the Alexandropol district. The Pambak region, in particular, suffered immense damage.

The Perpetration of Massacres Against the Armenian Population in the Kars and Shirak Provinces of the Republic of Armenia by the Kemalist Army

The region had barely begun to recover following the proclamation of the First Republic of Armenia when a new Turkish military campaign commenced, which proved catastrophic for the provinces of Vanand and Shirak. In 1920, massacres were carried out in Kars with the participation of the armed forces led by Kâzım Karabekir. According to various sources, the Turkish massacres in the city lasted from three to five days, and after three days, the Pasha commanded that the city be cleared of corpses.²⁹

All the warehouses, cellars, and hiding places were filled with the corpses of children, women, and youths. There were families from which not a single member had survived.³⁰

Youths hidden in cellars, under beds, and in various other locations were dragged out, taken a few steps away, and either killed or taken captive and

²⁵ M. Nersisyan, *Hayots' ts'eghaspanut'yan anherk'eli p'astat'ght'er* [Irrefutable Documents on the Armenian Genocide] (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2005), 128.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁷ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 240, Inv. 1, C. 240, Sh. 44.

²⁸ Hayrapetyan, 'Zhoghovrdagrakan gortsēnt'ats'nern Aleksandrapoli gavarrum 1918t. mayis-noyember amisnerin' (Demographic Processes in Alexandropol District in May-November 1918).

²⁹ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 2, C. 43, Sh. 32, A. Esayan, "Gharsi aryunot ōrerē" [The Bloody Days of Kars], *Komunist*, no. 47 (1921), 2.

³⁰ Esayan, "Gharsi aryunot ōrerē" [The Bloody Days of Kars], 2.

disappeared. The majority of those concealed in the outskirts of the city were massacred indiscriminately.³¹

The primary site for the massacres perpetrated by the Turkish army in Kars became the ‘Kars Gorge’ (Karsi dzor), where a significant portion of the peaceful Armenian population attempting to flee was slaughtered. Here, the machine-gun fire directed at the unarmed Armenian populace lasted for over an hour.³²

The Turkish army showed no mercy even to women and children. During the days of the massacres and thereafter, women were subjected to violence by the soldiers (askars). Armed Turks entered the homes of Armenians, raped women and girls, and took many with them.³³

Due to the scarcity of primary sources, it is difficult to determine the actual number of people massacred and taken captive in Kars. Some primary sources indicate that the number of the population massacred in Kars province (or *marz*) was 12,000 (predominantly men).³⁴

We believe that this figure is severely underestimated and does not correspond to the reality. According to some sources, the majority of men between the ages of 15 and 60, approximately 30,000, were taken captive³⁵. The majority of these captives were killed en route and in the place of exile. Approximate figures for the number of prisoners and the slain were presented by individual officials and private persons (Aram Lyulikyan, Aram Yesayan, Gevorg Gevorgyants, Vasile Ionescu, Father Khoren Stamboltsyan, and others). V. Ionescu, a Romanian citizen, reported in his letter dated January 27, 1921, addressed to the Plenipotentiary Representation of Soviet Armenia in Menshevik Georgia, that he was taken captive by the Turks on October 30, 1920, and was released a month later, subsequently arriving in Kars. He learned from a Turkish doctor, Nuri Bey, that 8,000 Armenians (women, children, and men) had been killed in the city, but based on his own observations, the number of the slain exceeded 10,000–12,000.³⁶

Father Khoren Stamboltsyan obtained the victim data from Makar Harutyunyan, an employee of the Armenian Commissariat in Kars. Harutyunyan, a native of Nor Bayazet who had long resided in Tbilisi and spoke fluent Georgian, entered Turkish service as a Georgian, acting as ‘supervisor of the work concerning the slain.’ He acquired information about the massacred Armenians, which he subsequently relayed to Khoren Stamboltsyan. According to those data, the number of the slain was 6,270. Information regarding the slain was also relayed to Khoren

³¹ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 57, Inv. 3, C. 511, Sh. 6.

³² Nersisyan, Hayots’ ts’eghaspanut’yan anherk’eli p’astat’ght’er [Irrefutable Documents on the Armenian Genocide] 145.

³³ Karsum, Alēksandrapōlum’ [In Kars, In Alexandropol], Harrach, no. 245 (1920), National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 2, C. 43, Sh. 32.

³⁴ G. Yazchyan, Karsi ankman xorqayin patcharnnerē [The Deep Causes of the Fall of Kars] (Yerevan: Author’s Edition, 2009), 9.

³⁵ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 2, C. 43, Sh. 35, 36.

³⁶ Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 2, C. 33, Sh. 71; C. 43, Sh. 34.

Stamboltsyan by Hakob Chaltikyan, who had been appointed as a corpse collector. Chaltikyan gathered 178 corpses over a period of 15 days.³⁷

Vahe Artsruni, an eyewitness to the events who regularly received information regarding the massacres organized by the Turks in Kars, wrote that Karabekir had previously ordered the use of extreme measures against public mass killings. All fighting-age Armenian men were arrested, imprisoned, and, under the guise of transportation, removed from the city in groups, then massacred and disappeared. Artsruni wrote that the road extending from Kars to Karin had simply been transformed into a cemetery.³⁸

Following the fall of Kars in 1920, the next painful event was the capture of Alexandropol on November 7, where the massacres perpetrated by the Turkish army continued with renewed intensity. Mariam Aslamazyan (born 1907 in Bash-Shoragyal, Kars District, Kars Province), a prominent Armenian painter who witnessed both Turkish campaigns against Alexandropol, wrote in her memoirs: 'Soon the main column of the Turkish army appeared. The Turkish cavalry rode past, and each of those beasts had a spear attached to their saddle, on which were impaled the heads of slain Armenians. Among them, the most horrific sight was the head of an old woman with long gray hair swaying in the wind. The soldiers (askars) were celebrating their victory. The doors and shutters of all the houses remained closed for a long time. The Turks continued to invade every house, breaking down or setting fire to the doors. They demanded girls and took everything they could find. They killed whomever they wanted, whenever they wanted.'³⁹

The First District of Alexandropol province suffered the most, primarily the settlements located on the slopes of the Pambak mountain range. Massacres subsequently continued in the Karakilisa province (district). The population in the section from the Jajur Pass to the Nalband station was subjected to slaughter. While the primary blow during the 1918 Ottoman campaign fell upon the eastern part of Pambak, specifically Mets Karakilisa, the 1920 Kemalist campaign targeted the western part of Pambak. Refugees from Kars and Alexandropol found no safety even in the Karakilisa district, as the Turkish army reached there as well. The Turkish advance guard, moving along the Alexandropol–Karakilisa route, passed through the Pambak territory from Jajur, massacring the Armenian population and devastating and looting the settlements.⁴⁰

On November 15, 1920, the Turkish army carried out a massacre in three Pambak villages: Ghaltakhchi (currently Hartagyugh in Lori Province), Aghbulagh

³⁷ Khoren K'ahana Stamboltsyan, 'Karsi ankumē' [The Fall of Kars], in *Hushagrakan zharangut'yun* (Memoir Heritage), Book 14 (Yerevan, 2011), 139.

³⁸ V. Artsruni, *Hay-Tachkakan paterazmē, Hay Spayut'yunē, Shat'akh* "The Armenian-Turkish War, The Armenian Officer Corps, Shatakh" (Yerevan: Mughni, 2002), 249.

³⁹ Mariam Aslamazyan, *Davtar zhizni. Avtobiograficheskie rasskazy* [Davtar of Life: Autobiographical Stories] (Gyumri: El'dorado, 2016), 17-18.

⁴⁰ 'Hayut'yan vitchakē Alēksandrapōli yev Karsi mēdj' [The Condition of the Armenians in Alexandropol and Kars], *Zhoghovrdi dzaynē*, no. 695 (1921), 3.

(currently Lusaghbyur in Lori Province), and Gharaboya (currently Khnkoyan in Lori Province). In these villages alone, 4,386 local inhabitants were massacred, along with 7,500 refugees from the Kars and Alexandropol regions who had sought shelter there hoping for safety.⁴¹

In 1918, the Turks carried out a similar massacre in the eastern part of Pambak. The majority of Armenians from the Kars and Kaghzvan districts of Kars province had managed to flee to Kars, and following the surrender of Kars, they panicked and reached Alexandropol, and subsequently, Mets Karakilisa. As a result of the Turkish military advance, the majority of these refugees were massacred en route and in the village of Mets Karakilisa.⁴²

It is clearly evident from the accounts of the survivors that in 1920, criminals released from Turkish prisons also participated in the massacres of the Armenian population in the Karakilisa district, alongside the Turkish army.⁴³

This was also the case in 1909 in Payas (a port city in Cilicia), where 500 prisoners released from local jails participated in the atrocities.⁴⁴

These actions became more pronounced in 1914–1915, when, alongside arming the Turkish population, the Ittihadist clubs—which were more influential than high government officials in all the interior provinces—formed gangs composed partly of criminals released from prisons. The notorious Kurdish bandit groups were recruited into the Ottoman army, and they were granted the freedom to attack Armenian villages, loot, kill the men, and abduct the women and girls.⁴⁵

In 1915, irregular Kurdish armed formations also participated in the massacre of Armenians alongside the retreating Turkish army. These formations were stationed in Bulanık, Datvan, and Chukhurkeduk, with 6,000–7,000 men in each location. Compelled to retreat, these groups subsequently organized the massacres in the surrounding villages of Bulanık, Akhlat, Artchesh, Aljavas, Datvan, Urdap, and Bitlis.⁴⁶

Just as in the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian Genocide (*Hayots Mets Yeghern*), Kurds also participated in the massacres perpetrated by the Kemalist army on the territory of the Republic of Armenia in 1920, a fact documented by archival reports and survivor testimonies. Visible parallels exist between the massacres carried out by the Kemalist army in the Vanand (Kars) and Shirak

⁴¹ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 1, C. 124, Sh. 6, 7; Inv. 1, C. 131, Sh. 12; Inv. 2, C. 27, Sh. 85.

⁴² National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 1, C. 134.

⁴³ V. Hakhoyan, 'K'emalakanneri irakanats'rats' zangvats'ayin kotorats'nerë P'ambaki tarats'kum (Širaki nahang) èst akanates-verap'rats'neri ènt'ane'k'an hišoghut'yunneri (1920–1921 t't'). [The Massacres Carried out by Kemalists in the Pambak Region (Shirak Province) according to the Family Memories of Eyewitness-Survivors (1920–1921)], *Journal of Genocide Studies*, 9, no. 1 (2021), 89.

⁴⁴ Nersisyan and Sahakyan, *Hayeri tseghaspanutyunë Osmanyany kaysrut'yunum* [The Genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire], 231.

⁴⁵ Poghosyan, *Hayots' ts'eghaspanut'yan patmut'yun* [History of the Armenian Genocide], 545.

⁴⁶ Basentsyan, 'Hayeri k'otorač'nery Bit'lisi nahangum osmanyany banaki ev ayl zinvað kazmavorumneri koğmic' (1915 t'.) [The Massacres of Armenians in the Bitlis Province by the Ottoman Army and Other Armed Formations (1915)], 14.

provinces of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Genocide. Among the widespread methods of mass killing used by the Kemalist army in the Alexandropol and Karakilisa districts were burning alive, smoke suffocation, and drowning in wells.⁴⁷

In the April 26, 1915, edition of *The New York Times* newspaper, we read: “A young man named Asatour recounts his escape from a well that was filled with corpses. He managed to climb up over the bodies and get out.”⁴⁸

In November 1920, incidents of drowning peaceful inhabitants in wells were not uncommon in the villages of the Karakilisa district. In various settlements of the Shirak province, peaceful inhabitants were confined to pre-selected buildings and either suffocated with smoke or burned alive. This method was also employed in 1915 in the villages of Ali-Zurnan and Aghchan in Mush.⁴⁹

The burning alive of Armenians was widely employed by the Turkish army during the Hamidian massacres as well as the genocidal operations perpetrated by the Young Turk and Kemalist regimes. Philip Currie, the British Vice-Consul in Van, reported on November 15, 1894, that Turkish troops had carried out brutal massacres in Sassoun. In Geliguzan, many young men were tied up – hands and feet – lined up side-by-side, covered with branches, and burned alive.⁵⁰

In another village, approximately sixty young women and girls were confined to a church. Soldiers were then permitted to do with them as they wished, after which all were killed. Kerosene (oil) was used to burn houses with their inhabitants inside. In Bitlis, a soldier recounted seeing a Turkish soldier use a bayonet to thrust a small boy, who was attempting to flee the flames, back into the fire.⁵¹

Just as in Bitlis in 1915, in the villages of the Alexandropol and Karakilisa districts in 1920, inhabitants were confined to large barns filled with straw, the doors were covered with reeds/thatch, and then set on fire.⁵²

Just as in Western Armenia during the *Mets Yeghern*, ritualistic killings and corpse mutilation were carried out in Shirak Province in 1920. Among the most widespread forms of ritual violence were the torture of victims' bodies, particularly the amputation of limbs: cutting off ears, gouging out eyes, mutilating sexual organs, and so forth, methods which were also widely prevalent during the Hamidian and Adana massacres.⁵³

⁴⁷ Hakhoyan, ‘K’emalakanneri irakanats’rats’ zangvats’ayin kotorats’nerë P’ambaki tarats’kum (Širaki nahang) ěst akanates-verap’rats’neri ěnt’anek’an hišoghut’yunneri (1920–1921 t’t’.) [The Massacres Carried out by Kemalists in the Pambak Region (Shirak Province) according to the Family Memories of Eyewitness-Survivors (1920–1921)], 96-99.

⁴⁸ Pogosyan, *Karskaya oblast’ v sostave Rossii* [Kars Region as Part of Russia], 566.

⁴⁹ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 240, Inv. 1, C. 326, Sh. 80.

⁵⁰ Nersisyan, Hayots’ ts’eghaspanut’yan anherk’eli p’astat’gh’t’er [Irrefutable Documents on the Armenian Genocide], 65.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 72-73.

⁵³ H. Grigoryan, Zangvats’nerë yev zangvats’ayin brnut’yunnerë. Osmanyan kaysrut’yan musulman bnakch’ut’yan masnakts’ut’yunë Hayots’ ts’eghaspanut’yanë [The Masses and Mass Violence: The Participation of the Muslim Population of the Ottoman Empire in the Armenian Genocide](Yerevan: Haykarli, 2017), 126–132.

During the brief Turkish domination, the Alexandropol district was being depopulated of Armenians and laid waste. Already by January 14, 1921, Nahapet, a member of the Alexandropol Revolutionary Committee (*Revkom*), attested to those days, noting with astonishment that it could be said ‘we have no district,’ as scarcely 15,000 people remained out of a population of 75,000.⁵⁴

According to the communication report dated May 13, 1921, sent by Communications employee Kostanoshvili to the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of Soviet Georgia, the goal of the operations planned and executed by the Turks was the annihilation of an entire people. Many corpses were only discovered after the departure of the Turks, found in wells, pits, gorges, ruined houses, rivers, and fields.⁵⁵

According to the data compiled by the commission of local authorities, in the Alexandropol district, the Kemalists killed 30,000 men, wounded 20,000, took 18,000 captive, hanged 25, and caused 10,000 to die from starvation. The number of children killed reached 5,000, the wounded numbered 3,000, and those who died from starvation were 10,000. The acts of violence and criminal actions committed against girls were horrific. The Kemalists killed 10,000 girls, wounded 5,000, raped 10,000, took 3,000 captive, and caused 1,000 to die from starvation. Separately, the consequences of the violence committed against women are presented: 15,000 were killed, 10,000 were wounded, 25,000 were raped, 2,000 were abducted, and 5,000 died from starvation. Thus, the Turks were devastating and laying waste to the Alexandropol district of Shirak Province and a part of the Karakilisa district, which remained under their domination.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Thus, through his speeches and testimonies, Mustafa Kemal recognized and condemned the Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire. However, one year after these statements, the Kemalists continued the same genocidal policy against Armenians and Greeks. The Kemalists carried out massacres in Eastern Armenia (1920-1921), Cilicia (1921), and Smyrna (1922). Their genocidal policy extended both within the territories of the Turkish state and beyond its borders.

Thus, successive Turkish regimes have hereditarily continued the genocidal policy of annihilating Armenians, actively involving the army – an institutional structure of the Turkish state – in this endeavor. This fact further demonstrates the responsibility of the Turkish state for this grave international crime perpetrated against the Armenian people. Regardless of the certain differences and specific characteristics between the Mets Yeghern and the massacres of Armenians in

⁵⁴ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 2, C. 43, Sh. 7.

⁵⁵ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 2, C. 169, Sh. 13.

⁵⁶ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 2, C. 169, Sh. 13, 14.

1920–1921, it must be stated that they were linked in the criminal policy planned and consistently implemented by the Turkish authorities.

The massacres carried out by the Turkish army in the Kars and Shirak provinces in 1920–1921 should be viewed within the framework of the continuity of the Armenian Genocide, as successive phases. Thus, the involvement of the Turkish army in the massacres of Armenians not only attests to its direct military participation but also serves as evidence that the Armenian Genocide was a state-planned and systematically organized military operation aimed at the physical annihilation of the Armenian nation from its homeland.

References

1. Artsruni Vahē. *Hay-Tachkakan paterazmē, Hay Spayut'yunē, Shat'akh* [The Armenian-Turkish War, The Armenian Officer Corps, Shatak]. Yerevan: Mughni, 2002.
2. Aslamazyan Mariam. *Davtar zhizni. Avtobiograficheskie rasskazy* [Davtar of Life: Autobiographical Stories], Gyumri: El'dorado, 2006
3. Basentsyan A. “Hayeri k'otorač'nery Bit'lisi nahanğum osmanyanyan banaki ev ayl zinvað kazmavorumneri koğmic' (1915 t'.)” [The Massacres of Armenians in the Bitlis Province by the Ottoman Army and Other Armed Formations (1915)], *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'yunneri* (1), 2018.
4. Basentsyan, A. “Osmanyanyan banaki ev ayl zinvað kazmavorumneri koğmic' hayeri ink'napaştpnanut'yan č'nşumn u haykakan bnakavayreri voč'nič'ats'umē” [Suppression of Armenian Self-Defense and Destruction of Armenian Settlements by the Ottoman Army and Other Armed Formations], *K'ant'eg*, (2), 2018.
5. Dadrian Vahakn, *Istoriya armjanskogo genocida* [The History of the Armenian Genocide], Yerevan, 2007.
6. Dallakyan Victor, & Marukyan Armen. *Gharak'ilisayi 1918 t'. herosamartē (p'astat'ght'eri yev nyut'eri zhoghovats'u)* [The Heroic Battle of Gharakilisa in 1918 (Collection of Documents and Materials)]. Yerevan: YSU, 2008.
7. Esayan A. *Gharsi ariwnot ōrerē* [The Bloody Days of Kars]. *Komunist* no. 47, 1921.
8. Hakhoyan Vazgen. “K'emalakanneri irakanats'rats' zangvats'ayin kotorats'nerē P'ambaki tarats'kum (Širaki nahang) čšt akanates-verap'rats'neri čnt'ane'k'an hişoghut'yunneri (1920–1921 t't'.)” [The Massacres Carried out by Kemalists in the Pambak Region (Shirak Province) according to the Family Memories of Eyewitness-Survivors (1920–1921)]. *Ts'eghaspanagitakan handes* 9 (1), 2021.
9. Hayrapetyan Armen. “Zhoghovrdagrakan gortsēnt'ats'nern Aleksandrapoli gavarum 1918 t. Mayis-noyember amisnerin” [Demographic Processes in Alexandropol District in May–November 1918]. *Scientific Works of NAS RA Shirak Armenology Research Center* 21, 2018, 19–130.
10. Hayut'yan vitchakē Alēksandrapōli yev Karsi mēdj' [The Condition of the Armenians in Alexandropol and Kars]. *Zhoghovrdi dzaynč*, no. 695, (1921).

11. Karapetyan Murad. *Hayastani Hanrapetut'yan banakë (1918-1920)* [The Army of the Republic of Armenia, 1918–1920]. Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2003.
12. Kirakosyan Arman. *A Brief History of the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide*, Yerevan: Tigran Mets, 2015.
13. National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 114, Inv. 2, C. 43, Sh. 32.
14. National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 240, Inv. 1, C. 240, Sh. 36.
15. National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 240, Inv. 1, C. 240, Sh. 44.
16. National Archives of Armenia (NAA), F. 57, Inv. 3, C. 511, Sh. 6.
17. Nersisyan Mkrtich. *Irrefutable Documents on the Armenian Genocide*, Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2005.
18. Nersisyan Mkrtich & Sahakyan Ruben. *The Genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, Yerevan: Hayastan, 1991.
19. Poghosyan Artashes. *Soc'ial-tntesakan haraberut'yunnerë Karsi marzum, 1878-1920* [Social-Economic Relations in the Kars Region, 1878–1920]. Yerevan: Haypet'hrat, 1961.
20. Poghosyan Stepan. *History of the Armenian Genocide: Vol. 2*, Yerevan: Hayastan, 2009.
21. Sahakyan Ruben, & Khudaverdyan Konstantin. *The Armenian Genocide in the Light of Decades*, Yerevan, 1995.
22. Stamboltsyan Khoren K'ahana. *Karsi ankumë* [The Fall of Kars]. Hushagrakan zharangut'yun [Memoir Heritage], Book 14: Yerevan, 2011.
23. Akçam Taner. *A Shameful Act, The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, N.Y., Metropolitan Books, 2006.
24. Vierbücher Heinrich. *What the German Imperial Government concealed from its Subjects: Armenia 1915: The Slaughter of a civilized People at the Hands of the Turks*: Arlington, 2006.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.