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One Hundred Years of Bloodshed: The Extermination of Christians by Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, 1822–1922

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Abstract: This paper argues that the Armenian genocide, the genocide of the Greeks of Pontus and the Greek Catastrophe, and the Nestorian and Assyrian genocide, all of which took place during the late Ottoman Empire, were not isolated historic incidents, but rather different phases of a broader agenda of Christian extermination in Asia Minor. The early 19th-century Ottoman Christian scepticism over the established status quo of the millet system, which had served as a platform of religious conflict resolution and intercultural dialogue but dictated subordination to Islam, was perceived as defiance by Ottoman Muslims, who interpreted the Christian strife for social equality as the loss of their privilege, thus creating bottom-up pressure for violence, resulting in the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the majority of Ottoman Christians between 1822 and 1922.

Keywords: Christian genocide; Greek Catastrophe; Armenian genocide; Pontic Greek genocide; Ottoman Empire; millet system

1. Introduction

This paper argues that the *millet* system in the Ottoman Empire was created to address the need for a taxation and governance arrangement of different communities in a multi-cultural imperial formation. The *millet* system granted each group non-territorial, cultural autonomy on the basis of religious affiliation and therefore served as an archaic platform for interreligious dialogue, as well as provided an outlet for conflict resolution. However, it became obsolete following the Enlightenment and by the early 19th century had lost relevance for Ottoman Christians. On the other hand, Ottoman Muslims felt challenged by the notion of social equality, fearing for the loss of their own privilege, thus created bottom-up pressure for violence, resulting in the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the majority of Ottoman Christians during the last century of the Empire. The Massacre of Chios in 1822, with its unprecedented barbarity, was the first notable incident of Christian genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Ottoman Empire, and it became the blueprint of the swiftness and fervour by which any act of Christian disobedience should be dealt with in the century that followed.

The Ottoman Empire, formally begun in 1299 and very quickly spread its rule over Byzantine lands by sacking important cities one by one, starting with Bursa, which was besieged and starved into submission in 1326, followed by Adrianople[1] approximately forty years later, which also served as the Ottoman capital for a while. It was the raging civil war that forced the Byzantine emperor John VI Kantakouzenos into an alliance with the Ottomans, which enabled them to cross over to Europe. As the Greek chronicle of the time remarked, '*From then on the Muslims began to overrun the Empire of the Christians*' (Greene 2015, p. 22), establishing a new *status quo* on the newly acquired territories and their populations.

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Non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, followers of Abrahamic religions, namely Jews and Christians, were categorised as *ḏimmī*, from the Arabic *ahl aḏ-ḏimmah*, which in English roughly translates as '*the protected people*'. As non-Muslims, who lived in an Islamic state, the dimmis enjoyed a level of legal protection; hence, the word dimmi came to mean 'protected person' in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish. Perceived as the religious *Other*, the dimmis, albeit protected by Ottoman law, were not regarded as equal subjects. For example, they could not testify in a court or have a say on the outcome of a legal case involving Muslims, with very few exceptions based on professional expertise, as in the case of doctors (Fierro 2013). Under the *şeriat*,[2] the dimmis were under the protection of Muslim rulers, provided they accepted their subordination to the laws of the Islamic state and paid the *Jizya*, a special head tax (Aviv 2016). The socio-political life of dimmis in the Ottoman Empire was for the most part determined by the Pact of 'Umar,[3] a set of social rules for non-Muslims in an Islamic state. The Pact was of Arabic origin, but its rules were for the most part also observed by the Ottomans and became the cornerstone of sectarianism in the Ottoman Empire (Masters 2001, p. 22), known as the *millet* system.

It is important to keep in mind that, for the most part, the Ottoman Empire consisted of roughly equal portions of Christians and Muslims and essentially comprised two political geographies, Anatolia and *Rumeli*,[4] which in English translates as 'the land of the Romans', but it actually means 'the land of the (Greek-Orthodox) Christians'. For Ottoman rulers, Anatolia represented the territorial core of the Empire, while *Rumeli* was perceived as the wealthiest region of the two (Gingeras 2016, p. 56). It was this socioeconomic dichotomy of the Ottoman Empire that created the political necessity for a governance and taxation system, which, in combination with the Islamic tradition of the dimmis, created the *millet* system.

The term *millet* derives from the Arabic word *Millah*, which means religious community (Aviv 2016) and essentially was a system of governance and taxation by which the sultans ruled over their imperial subjects by granting each religious community protection and a level of autonomy in return for subordination and a head tax. The *millet* was established on a non-territorial basis, and autonomy was granted on account of religious affiliation, where the religious leader of each community took upon himself the collective responsibility for the actions of his community, as well as acted as a representative of that community to the Ottoman ruler. For example, the Greek Orthodox community (*Rum*[5] *millet*) was represented by the Patriarch of Constantinople, while the ecclesiastical hierarchy acted as *mültezim*, i.e., tax farmers (Bezwan 2020, p. 20). In the same manner, the Catholic, Jewish, and Armenian millets were also given partial autonomy of customs and traditions, as well as the responsibility to collect and distribute taxes (Aviv 2016).

Undoubtedly the *millet* system had many intrinsic flaws, such as leaving no space for secularism, promoting segregation, and enforcing a rigid social hierarchy, which deemed non-Muslims inferior. However, by providing a degree of recognition and cultural autonomy to each community and permitting its religious leaders to act on behalf of the whole, it preserved the faith, culture, and language of each group (Gingeras 2016, p. 24) and its physical and cultural survival. Given the context of the times, it can be argued that despite its flaws, the *millet* system sustained social peace, fostered interreligious dialogue, and provided the essential groundwork for conflict resolution between the different religious groups in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire. However, being an archaic institution, based on the merit of religious law, the *millet* system was challenged by the principles of the Enlightenment on individual liberty, religious freedom, and representative government, and directly clashed with 19th-century modernity that brought forward the dimmis' challenge of their own second-class status. Thereafter, the inevitable attempts for emancipation

were treated as a direct violation of the Law of 'Umar and were answered with violence by both the formal Ottoman administration and the Muslim subjects of the Empire.

The Greeks were the first nation to seek independence from the Ottoman Empire, but also the first of its Christian subjects to suffer genocide and ethnic cleansing. The Greek War of Independence, also known as the Greek Revolution, started in Peloponnese in March 1821 and a year later reached the Aegean Island of Chios, with its inhabitants joining forces with a group of revolutionaries from the neighbouring island of Samos (St Clair 2008, p. 79). In April 1822, the Ottoman *Kapudan*[6] Ali Bey Pasha invaded Chios and, within the next few months, gathered on the island a sizable force of 30,000 men, who were given orders to loot, pillage, and burn the island, as well as kill and enslave its Christian population. Of the entire island's population, approximately 120,000 people, was killed or enslaved, and approximately 20,000 managed to escape, becoming refugees (Cartledge 2020, p. 53).

All infants under the age of three were killed immediately, followed by all males over the age of twelve and all women over the age of forty, apart from those willing to convert to Islam. Younger women were systematically raped and then killed or sold as slaves throughout the Muslim world. It is hard to estimate the exact number of people who were sold as slaves, as many were simply kidnapped and sold off the books by their captors. Ottoman customs authorities issued 41,000 slave certificates, mostly for women and young boys, of which 5,000 were transported to Constantinople[7] and sold at the local slave market at around 100 piastres each. However, the regular slave market was proven too small to accommodate such large numbers; therefore, many of the Chios captives were displayed for sale on street corners or at the fish market. Young boys were forcefully circumcised in public, in groups of forty, and makeshift brothels opened all around the city to capitalise on the influx of Christian women and boys sold as sex slaves in the city. Those resisting their captors were deemed of no commercial value and were immediately killed on the spot, displayed naked, with their severed heads between their legs, left unburied in the streets to rot or be consumed by stray dogs. To prevent any rescue attempts of the captives by the Christian population of Constantinople, Muslim religious authorities mobilised armed mobs to roam the streets, killing any Christians who dared leave their quarters. Sacs of human heads, noses, and ears, part of the Sultan's victory trophies from Chios, were scattered around the streets of Constantinople. The Armenian Patriarch was ordered to instruct his people to avoid all contact with Greeks, and those Sciotes[8] already living in Constantinople were systematically hunted down by armed mobs of Muslims or Ottoman authorities (St Clair 2008, pp. 80–81).

The Chios Massacre and the further atrocities that followed shocked the European public and ignited the flame of Philhellenism[9] in the West, shifting public opinion in favour of the Greek cause for independence. Governments around Europe, such as the Austrian government, which previously regarded the Ottoman Empire and the Sultan as the legitimate sovereign of the Greeks, were now faced with an ever-growing internal political opposition (St Clair 2008, p. 52). Previously, during the time of the Enlightenment, as well as Classicism, in the 17th and 18th centuries, Greeks were associated with their classical, pagan past in the minds of Europeans and sometimes portrayed in the literature as an extinct or even mythical nation. The Chios Massacre brought Greeks to the epicentre of public attention as contemporary Christian peoples and made plainly obvious the double standards by which the Ottoman Empire ruled over its Muslim and Christian subjects, igniting the spark of Christian humanitarianism, particularly in British Protestant groups, and from there to the rest of the Christian world (Cartledge 2020).

Greece proclaimed its independence to the world in 1823, a year after the Chios Massacre, but the Greek War of Independence continued and was marked by many notable massacres of Christian subjects in the Ottoman Empire, motivated more by religious

fanaticism and less by military necessity. The *Destruction of Psara* in June 1824, the *Kasos Massacre* in the same year, and the complete annihilation of civilians, which was poetically named the *Exodus of Messolonghi* in April 1826, are some of the many examples of Christian victimisation in early 19th-century Europe (Pissis 2022, p. 179). Of course, those massacres were but the symptom of a larger issue inherent to Islam and the Ottoman Empire, that of a perception of social hierarchy, which deemed Christians as inferior, apparent both in the Law of 'Umar and the *millet* system. The European backlash to those massacres eventually led to the founding of the sovereign Greek state and the Treaty of Constantinople in 1832. The threat of further disintegration for the Ottoman Empire brought forward a series of administrative and social reforms, between 1839 and 1876, commonly known as the *Tanzimat*. The reforms were part of a larger attempt at the westernisation of the Empire and included the protection of Christian populations against over-taxation, injustice, and broader maladministration. Ironically, this reform further aggravated the antipathy of Ottoman Muslims towards their Christian neighbours, as it challenged the traditional status quo and social hierarchy (Çiçek 2010, pp. 20–21).

In 1838 an attempt to replace the system of tax farming with the employment of former tax farmers as salaried officials brought significant financial difficulties to the Empire and fuelled distrust of the reforms (Findley 1980, p. 161). The Muslim population regarded the reforms as the destruction of the traditional economic ethos of the Empire and the demise of their previously given privileges, perceiving the *Tanzimat* not as progress but instead as the failure of the Sultan to use force. Indicative of this sentiment is the phrase of novelist and representative of the class of the *esnaf*, novelist Ahmed Midhat, who wrote about the reforms: '*the real community is made up of those pure Turks whose hands in peacetime are still on their scimitars*' (Çiçek 2010, p. 21).

Mob violence against Christians became commonplace throughout the Ottoman world during the entire period of the *Tanzimat* reforms. Greeks and Armenians were the usual victims of such attacks that were tolerated, if not encouraged, by the Ottoman authorities, but as this animosity targeted religion rather than ethnicity, Arab Christians were not spared either. Between March and July 1860, European consulates, particularly French and British, in the regions of Syria and Lebanon, reported a series of atrocities against Nestorian[10] and Maronite[11] Christians who lived in those regions. The reports spoke of the looting and burning of villages by mixed groups of military and irregulars, who also sacked churches and monasteries as well as practiced forced conversions to Islam. In particular, twenty-three French consular reports provided the horrific details of the slaughter of children and old people, the rape and abduction of women and young girls, as well as other monstrous acts, such as burying women alive after bathing them in the blood of their children. The reports of the time describe the Ottoman administration's unwillingness to intervene and stop the violence. Survivors of the inland regions, who sought protection from the authorities in coastal cities, were not permitted entry but instead left prey to the irregulars. An eyewitness of the *Massacre of Sidon*, British colonel Charles Henry Churchill, made a report of events, which he described as '*pure butchery*'. In his record, he described how a Muslim mob assembled suddenly and out of nowhere, killing three hundred Christians outside the gates of Sidon. The record offers a detailed account of further crimes against the Maronites and other Christian minorities, such as rape and abduction of women, looting of churches and monasteries, killing of clerics, public humiliation of nuns, etc. The violence against Christians in the region spread from Sidon to Jaffa, Haifa, Acre, Tyre, Tripoli, and Beirut and continued until mid-June when the British and French intervened to stop the killings (Rodogno 2011, pp. 98–99).

The decline of the Ottoman Empire was further accelerated, and despite the reforms, it faced a major debt crisis in the 1870s, which earned it the title of '*the sick man of Europe*'.

The reign of the last Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, was marked by the Ottoman defeat in the war against the Russian Empire, which resulted in the revolt of Armenians and other Christian minorities in the city of Van (DiCarlo 2008, p. 46). At the same time, there was a large influx of Muslim migrants from lost Ottoman territories, fleeing from *Rumeli* to Anatolia as a result of the Balkan Wars, increasing further the socioeconomic pressure in the Empire. In the past, Ottoman authorities addressed the issue of population resettlement and immigration on a reactive, ad hoc basis. However, this time, the pressure of Muslim antipathy towards the Christians, building up from previous decades, had reached a point that there was public demand for the "*cleansing*" of Anatolia by non-Muslims and, in particular, Christians (Akçam 2012, p. 29). Thus, the Ottoman administration orchestrated the systematic extermination of the vast majority of Christians in the Empire, which is often mistakenly examined as isolated incidents distinguished by ethnic background, such as, for example, Armenian, Greek, Nestorian/Assyrian, etc. (DiCarlo 2008, p. 53), while, in reality, what the Ottomans and later Turks attacked was the *dimmi* population of Christian millets. Ottoman Christians were treated as a separatist threat, becoming the object of enmity by both Ottoman-Turkish authorities and Muslim civilian masses (Akçam 2012, pp. 111–13).

The Ottoman Empire was among the last states to join World War I, siding with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian alliance as an enemy of the Allied forces of the Triple *Entente*, fighting against the British, French, and Russian forces. Despite its fiscal troubles that had branded it the sick man of Europe, as well as its defeat in the recent Balkan wars, Ottoman Turkey remained a significant threat to the Allies, being a sizable state of twenty-two million in a strategic geopolitical location, exercising control of shipping in the Black Sea, and ruling the narrows of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Mehmed Reṣad V, Sultan of the Ottoman Caliphate, had replaced his brother Abdul Hamid II as the head of the Ottoman state in 1909. Unlike his brother, who was the absolute ruler of the Empire, Mehmed V ruled with clearly defined limitations, dictated by the CUP's majority in the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies (Trumpener 2003, pp. 337–38). However, as the Sultan of the Ottoman Caliphate, Mehmed V remained a religious authority in the Ottoman Empire, and on 2 August 1914, he declared a Great *Jihad*,[12] proclaiming that Islam is under attack by an infidel enemy, and called on every Muslim to join the fight (Beşikçi 2016, p. 95).

The *İslam Mecmuası* (Journal of Islam), which was released on 19 November 1914, included the *Jihad* proclamation, the call to *Jihad* by the Sultan-Caliph, the relevant fatwas issued by the *Shaykh al-Islām*,[13] as well as a few words from Enver Pasha, the top military commander. As a political move, the declaration of *Jihad* aimed to win the support of Muslims internally, to boost conscript numbers in Anatolia as well as externally, and to create a "fifth column" in Europe, including the British and French ruled Arab territories (Aksakal 2016, pp. 53–54). Pamphlets were released, citing relevant verses from the Quran and Hadith in support of the war against the infidels, but written in a simple language that could be understood by the Muslim masses, appealing to their religious sentiment. The main message of this propaganda campaign was that Islam is under attack by the wicked Christian powers of Europe, such as Britain, France, and Russia, as well as their supporters, urging Muslims to take up arms to defend themselves and their faith (Beşikçi 2016, pp. 97–98). To counterbalance the outcome of such an action, the Allies launched a counterpropaganda, speaking of a '*German-made Jihad*', which was not very convincing as the Ottoman state had a long tradition of utilising religion for military and political purposes, such as the declaration of *Jihad* during the Crimean War of 1853 to 1856 (Aksakal 2016, p. 54).

Following the declaration of Jihad in 1914, the CUP leadership increased its power within the Ottoman Empire and was legitimised to establish the *Teskilati Mahsusa* (Special Organisation), used for covert actions abroad. *Teskilati Mahsusa* was funded by the War

Ministry and was directly reporting to Enver Pasha, but its activities went further than typical secret service missions, having a branch dedicated to the "Turkification" of business and industry within the Ottoman Empire at the expense of its Greek and Armenian citizens (Trumpener 2003, p. 342), who after the formal declaration of *Jihad* by the Sultan-Caliph were othered as a religious enemy of Muslims.

Dehumanised by supremacist rhetoric, which branded them as a disease, being called '*cancer*' and '*microbes*' by their persecutors, Christians were hunted mercilessly in the thirty-year period between 1894 and 1924. This campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing, which aimed at the religiocultural homogenisation of Asia Minor (Anatolia), encompassed rounds of large-scale massacre, systematic expulsions, forced conversions to Islam, and overall cultural annihilation, including the destruction of monuments and sacred spaces. The annihilation of Christians was by design, a result of the deliberate policy of three successive governments, starting with the Ottoman reign of Abdul Hamid II from 1894 to 1896, followed by the CUP, also known as the Young Turks, from 1914 to 1918, and finally the Nationalist regime of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk from 1919 to 1924. However, it should be noted that these policies were enthusiastically supported by the Muslim civilian population, who actively aided and took part in assisting government officials, soldiers, and policemen, executing governmental orders. Muslim clerics, as well as the Turkish-language press, also played an important role in the encouragement of civilian participation in the various acts of Christian victimisation (Morris and Ze'evi 2023, pp. 251–52, 256).

The sense of loss of privilege, which was ever-present in the mobilisation of Muslim masses against Christians during and after the *Tanzimat* reforms, in some cases took the form of social envy, as was the case with Greeks and Armenians in Smyrna and Constantinople, presently Izmir and Istanbul. Non-Muslim minorities in those cities were close to the large European communities of merchants, as they had no cultural restrictions in associating with other westerners. Jews and Christians were fluent in European languages and worked as translators for trading companies and foreign embassies. The favouritism by which the Ottoman courts of law treated Muslims had made European merchants cautious with trading with them, and they instead preferred to partner and trade with non-Muslims (Shirinian 2017, pp. 21–22). The same could be said for the non-Muslims in other provinces, such as the Greeks of Pontos, whose presence in that region and the city of Sinope could be traced as far back as the eighth century BC (Bouteneff 2003, p. 292). It is estimated that before the First World War, the number of Greeks living in the region of Pontos was approximately 700,000, of which less than half survived the 1914–1924 genocide. The majority of survivors fled the region, seeking refuge in Greece and Russia (Vergeti 1991, p. 382).

In those same provinces of Anatolia and the Black Sea, there was also a strong Armenian presence, often neighbours of Greeks in mixed villages, towns, and cities in the region. The Armenians were among the first Christians to be subjected to state-orchestrated systematic harassment by Muslims in the region, as part of an agenda of genocide and ethnic cleansing. During the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the Ottoman state had established units of irregular cavalry, known as the *Hamidiye*,[14] with the sole purpose of victimising Christians and with special focus on Armenians (Kaligian 2017, p. 84). In the absence of official records from the Ottoman Empire and later Turkey, historians have not been able to agree on the exact number of those killed and deported in the period 1894–1924. However, the majority of historians estimate that prior to the First World War, there were approximately one and a half to two million Armenians in the Empire, of which 800,000 to 1.2 million had been deported, and the remaining perished. Even the most optimistic historians agree that at least 600,000 Armenians were put to death during the genocide (Morris and Ze'evi 2023, p. 253).

Sexual violence, as an institutional instrument for genocide, and the existence of rape camps, is a well-documented practice in the case of Armenians and other Christians. The *Hamidiye* regiments that the Young Turks renamed *Tribal Regiments*, were known to systematically use rape to spread fear among the Christian populations. The existence of *rape camps* was not uncommon, but even more commonly, women and young girls were sold as house servants and sex slaves. In some cases, the threat of rape was used to force women into changing their names, renouncing their communities, converting to Islam, and marrying a soldier of the local *Hamidiye*; thus, rape was also used to prevent births within the targeted population and, as such, constitutes a genocidal practice. Often, those forced conversions and marriages were presented as acts of mercy, and usually women who refused were either sold as property or publicly drowned in a nearby body of water. Acts of sexual violence are not easy to document, let alone quantify in reliable numbers, as the fear of stigmatisation prevented victims from reporting them. The case of Trabzon Armenians, however, which resulted in a court-marshal trial in Constantinople between 26 March and 17 May 1919, is one of those rare cases in which the victims of sexual violence, as well as the eyewitnesses of such acts, came forward and testified in a court of law. The Trabzon Genocide, which took place in July 1915, is also one of the best-documented cases of systematic extermination of Christian populations in the late Ottoman Empire, including children and pregnant women, by means of drowning or medically administered poisoning while hospitalised, in addition to starvation, burning, and other monstrosities against approximately 50,000 civilians. The court-martial organised by the Young Turks gave false hope to the Armenian population of the Empire that from there onwards they would be safe and left to live in peace (Aleksanyan 2023).

The ordeals of the Armenians were closely followed and, in some cases, overlapped with those of the Greeks. Prior to Greece entering the First World War in 1917, there were thousands of forced relocations of Ottoman Greeks to Eastern Anatolia, or deportations to Greece, with over half a million people being uprooted. There are tens of thousands of testimonies of hardship and violence, including torture, starvation, rape, mutilation, and abduction, often for the amusement of the military and the irregulars of the *Hamidiye* regiments, who were charged with the task of escorting the civilians to their destination. It should be noted that those marches mostly involved women and children, as well as older men. Younger, physically able men were drafted as labour conscripts, which was practically a death sentence. For example, from those conscripted at Islahiye, less than twenty percent survived, and from the three thousand conscripts of Ayvalik, just twenty-three. On average, the life expectancy in those labour camps was just two months (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, pp. 385–89).

After the Ottoman defeat and surrender in the First World War, David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of the British Empire, supported the Greek territorial claims in Western Anatolia, particularly the region of Ionia. Greeks fought on the Allied side in the Great War, and their territorial claims on the shores of Asia Minor were not unfounded, as Ionia fostered a large Greek population since antiquity. The city of Smyrna, presently Izmir, had been one of the earliest Greek settlements in the region, founded by Aeolians in the 10th century BC (Ascough 2005, p. 7), and retained this character throughout the Ottoman era, commonly referred to as *Gavur İzmir*[15] by the Muslims of the Empire. The Greek administration of Ionia started peacefully in May 1919, with the Greek navy entering its port accompanied by the Allied fleet, and Smyrna remained relatively calm during the next three years. At first, there was widespread fear of a massacre in the Muslim community, which was justified as threats were made by Christians in the city. However, the administration maintained order, and soon life for all communities returned to normal. Unlike the cities, the rural areas of Ionia were tormented by irregulars from both sides,

who terrorised the civilian populations, both Christians and Muslims (Morack 2017, p. 72). The presence of the Greek administration had ignited the Greco-Turkish War, which was fought during the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, between Greece and the Turkish National Movement, resulting in the defeat and destruction of the Greek forces, commonly known as the *Greek Catastrophe* (Kontogiorgi 2006, p. 73). The aftermath of this defeat signified the complete annihilation of the Greek populations of Anatolia, who were treated as potential fifth-columnists by the Turkish national forces; that included both the Ionians of the Western coast and the Pontics in the Black Sea, but also all Christians in the region, such as Armenians and Nestorians (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, pp. 381–85).

Smyrna was seized by the Turkish nationalist army on 9 September 1922, and the violence against the Greeks and Armenians started almost immediately. On 13 September, multiple acts of arson burnt down the Greek and Armenian quarters, killing tens of thousands, the majority of whom were non-Muslims. The origin of the fire is to this day disputed between Greece and Turkey, but it remains an interesting fact that the Turkish newspapers of the time emphatically ignored the fire. Eyewitness accounts pointed to the Turkish military, while Turkish authorities blamed Greek irregulars for committing the *'last atrocity of the war'*. Decades after the fire, Turkish memoirs of the time surfaced, blaming the Turkish army commander Nurettin Pasa (Morack 2017, p. 72).

The origin of the fire might be disputed, but there is a plethora of diverse resources documenting the widespread violence against Christians, which makes it an indisputable fact. The Massacre of Smyrna was, in comparison, as barbaric as the Massacre of Chios one hundred years earlier. The Christian population of Smyrna, primarily Greeks but also Armenians, was killed *en masse* in the most horrific ways. European and American testimonies speak of a complete collapse of order that lasted for days, with looting of property, mass rapes, kidnapping, and murder, in the majority of cases being conducted by Muslim irregulars and civilians, with the Turkish national army refusing to intervene. Europeans and Americans living in the city, which was a hub of international trade, were also fearful of their safety and property, and when they complained about the collapse of order to Commander Nurettin Pasa, they were told that his troops had been promised a free hand. A Western missionary commented on the events, '*I did not know then that a victorious army over here is allowed three days of looting*', and Arthur Japy Hepburn, the US Navy Admiral, commented that '*it was apparent to everybody that order could be restored within two hours if the authorities so decided*' (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, pp. 435–40).

Continuing the plan of Abdul Hamid II, who envisioned an all-Muslim empire, the Young Turks and the nationalist regime of Kemal Atatürk took it a step further and used war as a pretext for the ethnoreligious homogenisation of Anatolia; in their own words, '*free of non-Turkish elements*'. Therefore, the demographic remake of the region was by design and did not happen organically, but rather, it was violently enforced through ethnic cleansing and genocide (Akçam 2012, p. 29). In the thirty-year period between 1894 and 1924, from Abdul Hamid II and the Ottoman Empire to Kemal Atatürk and the state of Turkey, Anatolia's Christian population fell from twenty percent down to two percent, with approximately 2.5 million Christians being killed and several others being expelled (Morris and Ze'evi 2023). Those numbers do not include the Christians lost to massacres prior to 1894, such as the Massacre of Chios, which in 1822 marked the first century of Christian genocide and ethnic cleansing.

2. Conclusions

The rise of the Ottoman Empire in the 14th century, as well as its enlargement in the 15th century, established Muslim prevalence over Christian territories in Europe and Asia Minor, while at the same time it created a new social status quo, in which Christians

were by default subordinates to Muslims. However, *Rumeli*, the Land of the Christians, constituted the wealthiest part of the Ottoman Empire, creating a socioeconomic dichotomy and political necessity for a new governance and taxation system. The *millet* system was created to address this need, granting each community a non-territorial autonomy on the basis of religious affiliation, in return for subordination and payment of a head tax. It can be argued that the *millet* system fostered interreligious dialogue, as the leader of each community could interact with each other, and sustained social peace as it provided the space for conflict resolution between different religious groups.

The Enlightenment and 19th-century modernity challenged all archaic institutions established on the merit of religion and empowered Christians of the Ottoman Empire to challenge their second-class status and demand their emancipation. However, their attempts for independence or social equality were perceived as a challenge by the Muslims of the Empire, who encouraged or aided the Ottoman administration to answer with unprecedented violence. Motivated by social envy and anger over the loss of their own privilege, Sunni Kurds, Turks, Turkmens, Circassians, Yoruks, Arabs, and other Ottoman Muslim civilians assumed a leading role in the persistent extermination of Ottoman Christians, which resulted in the genocide or ethnic cleansing, killing, or displacement of the vast majority. The destruction of the Ottoman Christian population took place by bottom-up demand of the Muslim public as well and was supported by the three subsequent administrations that held office during the period between 1822 and 1922.

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Notes

1 Present day Edirne.

2 Turkish for Sharia, Islamic law.

3 The Pact of ‘Umar, also known as the Laws of ‘Umar, was a treaty between Muslims and non-Muslims, originally enforced during the conquest of the Levant in 637. The treaty included a set of segregationist rules for non-Muslim subjects, which emphasised the social inferiority of dimmis and was progressively abolished in the Ottoman Empire, between 1839 and 1856.

4 *Rumeli* or *Rumelia* (in Greek Ρωμυλία) is the historic name of the region of Southeastern Europe that corresponds to the Balkans. The name is believed to predate the Ottomans as variations of it can be found in all languages of the region, as reference to the Eastern Roman Empire.

5 Translates as Roman in English; commonly used to describe Byzantines and Greek-Orthodox Christians in Ottoman and Turkish resources.

6 Kapudan Pasha (Captain of the Sea) was an Ottoman naval military title, which corresponds to Grand Admiral.

7 Present day Istanbul.

8 People from, or descending from, the island of Chios.

9 Philhellenism derived from Classicism, as a 19th intellectual movement, which advocated for Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire.

10 Nestorian Christians, called *Nasturi* in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish, were followers of a doctrine that set them apart from other Orthodox Christians. Their theological tradition proclaimed that Jesus’ human and divine nature could not be conflated, therefore Mary was perceived as the ‘Mother of Christ’, rather than the ‘Mother of God’. Nestorians have been deemed as heretics by the Mother Church in 431, during the Council of Ephesus, which led to the Nestorian Schism and their anathema in 451. Following their excommunication, many Nestorians left the provinces of the Byzantine Empire and found refuge in Persian territories, establishing the Assyrian Church of the East, hence often referred to as Assyrian Christians. Following many centuries of trouble and persecution, both by fellow Christians as well as Muslims, they retained a small population with an established presence in the plains north of Mosul, such as in the village of Telkayf, but also higher in the mountains of Kurdistan (Masters 2001, p. 46).

[11] The term *Maronite* derives from the monastery of Bayt Marun (House of Maron), built in the 5th century in northern Syria in honour of Saint Maron. Persian and Arab invasions of Syria in the 7th century, forced many Maronites to migrate and seek refuge in the mountainous regions of Lebanon. Originally, Maronites fell under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Antioch, but in the 8th century they decided to elect their own bishop as their ecclesiastical leader, thus making John Maron the founder of the Maronite Church. Also referred to as Jacobites, the Maronite Church remains in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, but their liturgical tradition is preserved in Syriac, a dialect deriving from Aramaic (Moufarrej 2010).

[12] In Turkish *Cihad-ı Ekber*.

[13] Also known as *Sheikhülislam* in Turkish; a honorary title for outstanding scholars in Islamic sciences. The term first appeared in the Central Asian region of Greater Khorāsān.

[14] *Hamidiye* translates in English as *'belonging to Hamid'*, implying the unit's loyalty to the Sultan Abdul Hamid II. It was a light cavalry unit, formed in 1891, modelled after the Cossacks, with the formal purpose of patrolling the Russo-Ottoman borders, but for the most part it was used in shadow operations of genocide and ethnic cleansing. The unit consisted of sixty-four regiments and a total of over 53,000 men, mainly Sunni Kurds, but also Turks, Turkmens, Circassians, Yoruks and Arabs (Kaligian 2017).

[15] Turkish for Infidel Smyrna; referring to the city's large number of Greek and other Christian population. *Gavur* derives from the Persian word *gâvor*, which means infidel. The word Gavur, as well as variations of it, such as *Gawur*, *Gavour* and *Giaour*, was a common slur in Ottoman Turkish for non-Mulsims, particularly Christians. It was widely used in the Balkans and different variations of it can be found in Turkish, Bosnian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Romanian and Greek sources.

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