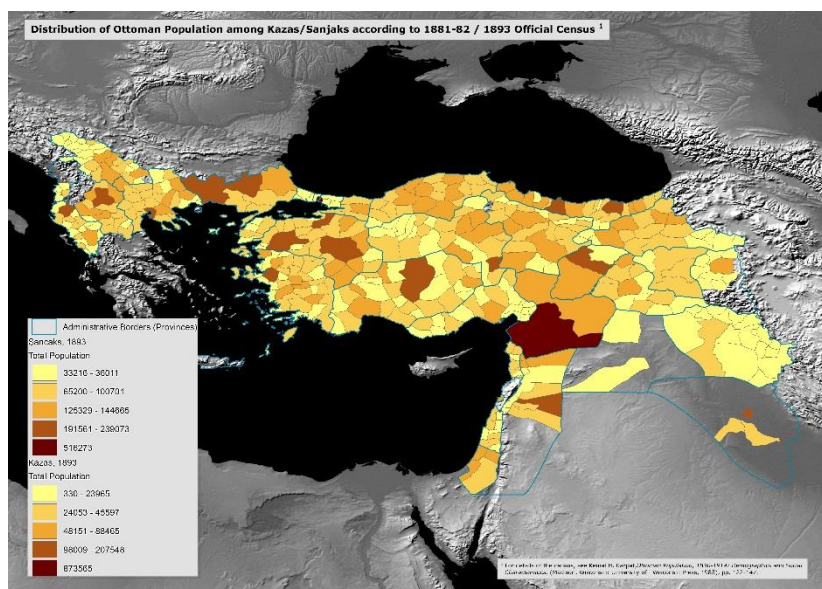


MINORITIES

Russo-Ottoman War 1877-1878

The sensitivity about the destiny of various denominational and ethnic minorities has been somewhat hampered by the very effective politics of memory, which had monopolized the war in order to strengthen a particular national narrative at the end of the 19th century in many of the countries involved. The circumstance that these dominating national narratives have successfully silenced alternative interpretations has made it necessary to especially focus on giving voice to the minorities and emigrants in order to get and disseminate new perspectives on a war that has caused not only new geo-political or regional but also new social and cultural orders in its aftermath. Therefore it is also necessary to stop understanding the war simply as a clash of two great powers struggling for different spheres of influence but to start comprehending the huge implications that the war had on all denominational and ethnic minorities in the multiethnic Russian and Ottoman Empires (which is also one of the reasons why the consortium had initially opted to commonly use the notion “Russo-Ottoman War” rather than the also widespread “Russo-Turkish War”). In order to counter the top-down national narratives and in order to gain a more adequate picture of the war’s consequences, this project stage has had the aim to relativize essentialist national narratives and doctrines, to research various ethnic minorities’ roles in the war and to investigate the situation of denominational minorities in and after the war. The latter makes it essential to point out that while the war was often framed a confrontation of Christianity and Islam; it affected other confessional groups just as much, them being the Jewish population or the Yezidi – a Kurdish religious minority, whose religion includes elements of Judaism, Islam and Nestorian Christianity. This desire for new interpretations and perspectives, combined with a broad spectrum of methodological approaches, has led to a kaleidoscope of insights.



A general look at the nineteenth century mass migrations

MAP: Administrative divisions based on the geo-referenced reproduction of R. Huber's map of Ottoman Empire's administrative divisions according to the yearbook (salname) of 1899. The administrative divisions are revised following Justin McCarthy's listings of sancaks and kazas taken from 1884 – 1885 and 1898 – 1899 salnames as well as the divisions followed in the census. Even though the title of the map refers to the "Ottoman Empire" certain provinces were excluded from the census and therefore lacked a detailed population data at the level of kaza or sancak divisions. The excluded provinces are as follows: Asir and Yemen, Hejaz, Trablusgarb, Bengazi and special administrative or autonomous units such as Egypt, Tunisia, Eastern Rumelia, the Principality of Bulgaria, Crete, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Mount Lebanon and Samos.

Muslim migrations from the Balkans to Anatolia at the 19th Century

The 19th century was the century of demographic mobility in which Rumelia and then Anatolia faced mass migrations due to massive territorial losses. The first wave of these mass migrations was triggered by the loss of Crimea. The Crimean Tatars, Nogais and others were forced to migrate to the Ottoman Empire and mostly settled in Rumelia. The second wave of migrations was triggered by the Russian expansion towards the Caucasus and reached its peak after the incorporation of the Southern Caucasus into the Russian Empire, resulting in the emigration of Caucasian tribes to Anatolia. The third wave was the direct consequence of the Ottoman Empire's defeat in 93 Harbi. The loss of Rumelian lands as well as some parts of Eastern Anatolia meant that both the migrants of the first wave and second wave alongside the new ones flowed into Anatolia. Even though the fourth and the fifth waves were out of this articles' scope, they were interrelated to the former ones to the extent that all of these mass migrations had no expiration date. That is to say, all of these mass migration waves were intermingled as overlapping processes.

The Molokans in the Russian Empire

The Molokans were one of the many Christian sects who lived in Russia during the 19th century, just like the Dukhobors, Mennonites and others. They rejected the participation in war because of confessional reasons. The Russian and Ukrainian ethnologist Nikolaj (Mikola) Kostomarov (1817 – 1885), who studied sectarian groups in the Russian Empire, argued that the beliefs of the Molokans were remarkable and the most interesting ones in comparison to other sects although the Molokans were not a united sect and there were differences among the groups. The Molokans rejected the Holy Trinity as well as the organization of the Orthodox Church. They did not acknowledge any religious hierarchy and institutions. They were also against the admiration of icons claiming that it was not possible to expect salvation from a piece of wood, but only by prayer.

The Molokans didn't approve any luxury in food or in lifestyle. They didn't reject the state power but accepted it only if it didn't interfere with their demands of justice and conscience. They were against every sign of social difference in appearance. For them war was against God's will. They supported people who opposed military service or deserters from the army, avoiding a sin like war participation. The founder of the sect was Simeon Uklein from the Tambov district and his adherents were spread all over Astrachan', Ekaterinoslav and the Caucasus. According to one of the versions about the origin of their name, they were called Molokans because of their milk consumption during fasting. There is another version, saying that the word "milk" in the name meant "striving for spiritual milk".

The Molokans like all other representatives of the Russian sectarian groups were persecuted according to the Russian legislation by both the secular and the religious power as state offenders. During the time of Aleksandr I the attitude towards the Molokans was more tolerant but in 1830 Nikolaj I proclaimed them to be a "harmful" and "dangerous" sect. In the 1830s Nikolaj I ordered the groups of sectarian believers to move to Transcaucasia (i.e. the South Caucasus). According to statistics, 63% from the Molokans and Dukhobors settled in the South Caucasus – i.e. approximately 20,000 people.

In 1849 and on the territory of contemporary Armenia, Molokans founded many Russian settlements: Nikitino (Fioletovo), Voskresenka (Lermontovo), Konstantinovka (Cachkadzor), Elenovka (after 1935 Sevan), Voroncovka (Kalinino), Semënovka and others. The village of Elenovka, founded in 1842 in a place with an elevation of 1,900 meters above sea level, was the biggest one. During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 – 1878 this place played an important role because of its strategic position between Yerevan and the Dilijan Pass on the way to Tiflis (Tbilisi). A military hospital was also arranged at that place as well as a sanitary camp for the recreation of exhausted soldiers. The transportation of hundred wounded Russian soldiers and Ottoman captives was also organized along this route. After the so-called Bajazetskoe sidenie – the siege

of Doğubeyazit's Fortress in 1877 (6 – 28 June 1877) – the Russian soldiers who survived the siege were granted a month of recreation in a camp near Elenovka. About 900 soldiers from the Crimean and Stavropolian units were sent to Elenovka in 1877 and in August 1877 there were already 1,275 soldiers residing there.

The state power relied on the loyalty of the Molokans during the war. As Nikolas Breyfogle writes, in the first half of the 19th century the Russian emperors developed a policy of "toleration through isolation". Sectarians like the Molokans should be tolerated, but only if they were physically separated from the Orthodox Russian society in order to prevent them of spreading their religious ideas. Some of St. Petersburg's administrators also believed that the Caucasus peoples were dangerously violent (especially the so-called "mountaineers") and that they would confront the generally pacifist sectarians, forcing them to use weapons.

In 1874 Russia introduced the conscription – a common military service. The conscription presented religious groups, who opposed military service like the Mennonites, Dukhobors and Molokans, with new and much more difficult conditions. The introduction of a military service made the Mennonites prepare to leave Russia. The Russian government sent General Éduard Totleben for negotiations. As a result of this, it was decided to permit Mennonite conscripts to undertake an alternative forestry service instead of the obligatory military service.

During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 – 1878, the Mennonites – as they had already done during the Crimean War – again helped in caring for sick and wounded Russian soldiers. They collected money, clothes and other objects and arranged a Mennonite Hospital in Gal'bštadt (Halbstadt, today Moločansk in Ukraine). After the war, their representatives went to Simferopol' to greet Emperor Aleksandr II on behalf of the Russian victory. But despite of the compromise in respect to the conscription, many of the Mennonites preferred to emigrate to the United States and Canada, fearing that they could be mobilized into the army. During the Russo- Ottoman War of 1877 – 1878, the sectarian Dukhobors and Molokans, who lived in the Caucasus region near the Caucasus front, also supported the Russian side despite of the persecutions: they organized the care for sick and wounded soldiers and prepared rusks for the Russian army. Some of the activities including baking rusks, transporting goods, renting houses and others were paid for. As a result of this participation the Dukhobor societies received a lot of money – over half a million rubles, which is how the wealth of their community increased. From their religious point of view they later considered this indirect participation in the war 1877 – 1878 a "forced sin", which however – once admitted by them – had led them to betray their principles.

Yezidis in the Yerevan Gubernia (Province) after the Russo-Ottoman War (1877 – 1878)

Yezidis professed their special religion – sharfuddinism, which was a synthesis of sun worshipping, elements of Christianity, Islam and other religions.

The Yezidis call their religion in different ways: shafradin, yezidizm, shams, sun worship. On the territory of modern Armenia the Yezidis live in Yezidi or mixed villages around the towns of Armavir, Aparan, Talin, Echmiadzin, Masis, Artashat and Ashtarak. These are areas suitable for livestock breeding – the traditional livelihood for the Yezidis and Kurds as a whole. Yezidis are also present in the cities of Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Abovyan, Dilijan, Stepanakan and Tashir. Census data since 2001 show that 42,139 people officially live in Armenia. This represents 1.3% of the population and makes them the largest ethno-confessional minority.

The history of the Yezidis (ezidi; Yezidis; self-designation “ezdi”) is directly related to the history of the Kurdish community. It will suffice to note that according to one version, the Yezidi community has separated from the Kurdish community, and another one states that it has



developed in parallel with it. However, the bulk of the Yezidis speak the “Ezdiki” language classified by linguists as a dialect of the Kurdish language “Kurmançî”.

One of the most disputed issues is what kind of people are professing Yezidism as a religion? Are they a part of the Kurds, identifying themselves as “Yezidis” by religion or are the “Yezidis” an



The image of Malaki-Taus – angel-peacock

ethnic group practicing that very religion? The “Kurdish” thesis about the Yezidis is supported by the Russian and Soviet ethnography and historiography and there it is defined as a “name of a part of the Kurds”.

There is another trend – the Yezidis are regarded as an independent ethnicity, different from the Kurdish one. Supporters of this view pay attention to the differences in culture, customs, everyday life, and also on the history of the relationships of these two communities – the military conflicts between Kurds and Yezidis (eg. from 1832 – 1833, 1892, 1914 – 1916). There is a thesis supporting

that it is the Yezidis that were the subethnos, from which the modern Muslim Kurds “detached” themselves in the seventh century. Interestingly, the post-Soviet Kurdology already supports this trend and so in the “Great Russian Encyclopedia” („Bol’shaja Ros-sijskaja ènciklopedija”) of 2007 it can be read that the Yezidis are not an ethno-confessional Kurdish community; they are named a “separate independent people in northern Iraq”. Both of these ideas have supporters among the Yezidis themselves. In a recent research done by Tork Dalalyan about identification processes among the Yezidis in Armenia, the definition of the “population of the Kurmanji language” is used to avoid what he called “the ideological commitment to address the problem of the determination of the Kurdish and Ezidi identity”.



The Temple in Lalish

Yezidis in the South Caucasus and the Yerevan Province

The origin of the Yezidi community in the Southern Caucasus dates back to the conquest of the region by the Russians. When the Russian army withdrew from Anatolia after the 1828 – 1829 war, some Yezidis were permitted to move to the province of Yerevan. In the 1830s, during a period of ethnic turmoil in Ottoman Anatolia, a number of the Yezidis escaped across the border. In 1855, a Russian army report identified a Yezidi settlement of some 340 souls in the Sardarabad district in Eastern Armenia. There was also a historical Muslim Kurd migration into the Southern Caucasus, strongly motivated by economic factors.

Political instability in the Ottoman Empire in the early 19th century was one of the reasons for the early migrations of Yezidis into the Russian Empire after Russia's acquisition of territories in the Southern Caucasus. The first territories that Russia received in the Southern Caucasus were the result of the annexation of the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kaxeti in 1801. Over the following decades, Russia extensively incorporated territories south of the Caucasus mountain range. These territories were divided into a system of provinces, known as gubernia. Yezidi migrations from the Ottoman provinces of Van, Kars, Doğubeyazit and Surmali to the Caucasus began after the 1828 – 1829 war (as a result of the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenčaj, when Yezidi tribes were first allowed to settle in this region). In 1855, a Russian army report identified a Yezidi settlement (340 souls) in the Sardarabad district in Eastern Armenia. During the Crimean War (1855) the Russian army included a Yezidi military unit as part of the Aleksandropol' division.

The Yezidi community in Yerevan province was primarily formed as a result of the Crimean War (1853 – 1856) and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 – 1878. John Guest has described the first Yezidi settlement within the borders of modern Armenia around Alagyaz and Sadunts – around 260 households in the eight villages of the Yerevan province in 1869. As a consequence of the 1877 – 1878 war between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, about 3,000 Yezidis were resettled in the Aleksandropol' district. Thus the total number of the Yezidis in the Yerevan province in 1879 rose to around 8,000.

Several years earlier, in 1874 the governor of the Yerevan province was asked to rule on a request from the religious leaders of the Sunni Moslems, that they should be allowed to collect tithes from the local Kurds. When he learned that most of the Kurds in his province were Yezidis, he declined the Moslems' request and initiated an "ethnographical-juridical survey" of the Yezidis that ultimately ran to 65-pages when eventually published in 1891 by the Caucasian branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. The author of the study completed in 1884, was the Armenian jurist Solomon Adamovič Yegiazarov.

In the summer of 1877 Russian forces commanded by General Arshak Ter-Gukasov captured Doğubeyazit and advanced into the Eleşkirt plain. A few weeks later the threat of an Ottoman counter-attack obliged Ter-Gukasov to retreat. Many civilians followed him into safety across the border. Among them are around 3,000 Yezidis led by Ali-Beğ. After the war they were resettled in the Aleksandropol' district.

Throughout 1878 the efforts of the Russian authorities in Yerevan province aimed at accommodating the Armenian and Kurdish-Yezidi migrants and the establishment of a Russian citizenship for them. A special committee was created ("Committee for helping the migrants from Turkey"). In the summer of 1878 the Yerevan squad arrived in the Yerevan province with Russian troops (1,856 families of Armenians and Yezidis). After the fall of Doğubeyazit some of the families went back.

Expatriates in Yerevan Gubernia – 1878

<i>Uezd</i>	Number families settlers	Number settlers
SURMALI		
Armenians	235	1,710
Yezidis	24	240
ECHMIADZIN		
Armenians	888	3,984
Yezidis	16	146
Aleksandropol'		
Greeks	39	234
Armenians	44	342
Yezidis	65	471
YEREVAN		
Armenians	12	120

NEW BAYAZET		
Yezidis	27	177

Total:

Greeks	39	234
Armenians	1,179	6,156
Yezidis	132	1,008

In the reports of the Aleksandropol' district's (uezd) chief to the Yerevan governor, the trend is indicated from the beginning of 1879 to the return of the majority of the settlers. One of the reasons, as it is evident from the complaints of migrants from the villages Alapars and Solak, is that they had no livelihood and that they were not given land for cultivation in the upcoming spring. At the beginning of February 1879 there were only 82 families in the Aleksandropol' uezd – "Yezidi Kurds who want to settle and engage in farming and do not have the intention to move to Turkey".

The Armenian state archive contains family lists of household residents in all uyezds of the gubernia – the name of the household head and the others in relationship to him, sex and age. Some of the lists also describe the property in their possession (oxen, cows, sheep and possessions). One of the reports of the Surmali uezd's chief to the Yerevan governor indicates the difficulties of the administration to control the movement of settlers (33 families) , who „due to the severe winter and lack of food are scattered over different villages. Some are willing to settle where the government sends them but the majority of the settlers wants to go to the Kars region because of the climate there, which mostly corresponds to their livelihoods.”

The next migration wave was after 1879, lasting until 1882, when the Sipki tribe of the Yezidis moved westwards from the Ottoman held Doğubeyazıt area to the Kağızman district in the province of Kars, recently ceded to the Russians. Within a few years, they had established 14 villages inhabited by 1,733 people. The imperial census of 1897 enumerated a total of 14,726 Yezidis. The next census of 1912 shows that the number of Yezidis in the Southern Caucasus had risen to some 24,500. John Guest reveals the following demographic dynamics of Yezidis in the region:

By the beginning of 1912 their numbers had risen to 24,508 – over 17,000 in the province of Yerevan, 2,000 around Tiflis and over 5,000 in the province annexed in 1877. Four years later the Yezidi population in South Caucasus was shown as 40,882; most of the increase was in the annexed provinces.

In 1918 was the last wave of migration among Yezidis in the Southern Caucasus. They joined the civilian refugees in Armenia in villages on the southern slope of Mount Aragats, abandoned by Kurds and Turks.

Later Armenia was also the centre of Kurdish "cultural production" in the Soviet Union. Kurdish printing in the Soviet Southern Caucasus began in 1921, when a primer using the Armenian alphabet was issued from Echmiadzin. In 1929 a new Kurdish script using the Latin alphabet was introduced. Kurdish schools, teaching a full curriculum in Kurdish language (with the exception of the teaching of Armenian), were opened. In the 20s of the 20th century the Armenian Yezidis were considered a group separate from the Kurds by the Soviet government. From 1936 until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the regime referred to them as "one and the same ethno-linguistic group, separated only by religion".
