

TRANSLATION/ÇEVİRİ

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THE ARMENIAN REVOLT IN VAN: INSIGHTS FROM MILITARY HISTORY DOCUMENTS*

(ASKERÎ TARİH BELGELERİNE GÖRE
VAN'DA ERMENİ İSYANI GÜNLÜĞÜ)

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Abstract: *Due to its geographical location, Van was a province bordering Iran and in close proximity to Russia in the north. Additionally, the provincial center had one of the highest Armenian populations among the settlements of those lands. Consequently, the geographical location and population factor facilitated the easy organization of Armenians in Van. When the First World War broke out in the Ottoman lands, the Armenians in the province initiated a mass revolt. The revolt initially started in various parts of Van in December 1914 and spread from the surrounding areas to the city of Van. On 20 April 1915, Armenians began the revolt in Van proper by opening fire on Muslim neighborhoods. Fierce battles between the Armenians and Ottoman troops lasted for 26 days. During these battles, numerous Muslims were massacred. According to archival documents, the massacre committed by Armenians in the center of Van on May 17, 1915, was unprecedented in history. From 17 May until the evening of 18 May, the massacre of Muslims continued, and many Muslims who were unable*

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to escape from Van were brutally slaughtered with axes and saws. Finally, on 20 May 1915, Russian detachments entered Van. As a result of the occupation, approximately 100,000 Muslims from Van became refugees and started migrating towards Bitlis. In this study, the daily progression of the revolt initiated by the Armenians in the city of Van will be examined, shedding light on military history documents (war reports), and the impact of this revolt on both Muslims and Armenians will be revealed. The primary sources of the study will be the documents belonging to the Department of Archives and Military History of the Turkish Ministry of National Defense, Armenian documents, and various studies in the literature. These mentioned sources will be analyzed using a comparative method.

Keywords: *Van Province, Armenian Committees, 1915 Van Revolt, 24 April 1915, Armenian Relocation and Resettlement, 1915 Events*

Öz: *Van, coğrafi konumu itibariyle İran'a sınır ve kuzeyden Rusya'ya yakın bir vilayetti. Ayrıca vilayet merkezi, Ermeni nüfusunun en yoğun olduğu yerleşim yerlerinden biriydi. Dolayısıyla coğrafi konum ve nüfus faktörü Ermenilerin Van'da kolayca teşkilatlanmasına olanak tanımıştı. Bunun bir sonucu olarak da Osmanlı topraklarında Birinci Dünya Savaşı başladığı zaman vilayet dâhilinde bulunan Ermeniler topyekûn isyan etmişti. İsyân ilk olarak Aralık 1914'te Van'ın çeşitli bölgelerinde başlamış ve çevreden Van şehrine doğru yayılmıştı. Nitekim Van'da 20 Nisan 1915'te Ermeniler, Müslüman mahallelerine ateş açarak isyanı başlatmışlardı. Ermenilerle Osmanlı birlikleri arasında 26 gün şiddetli müsademeler olmuştu. Bu müsademeler sırasında Müslümanların birçoğu katledilmişti. Arşiv belgelerine göre 17 Mayıs 1915'te Ermenilerin Van merkezde tatbik ettikleri bu katliamı tarih işitmemişti. 17 Mayıs'tan 18 Mayıs akşamına kadar Müslümanlara yönelik sahne-i kıtal devam etmiş ve Van'dan kaçamayan Müslümanların birçoğu baltalar ve testerelerle parça parça edilerek katledilmişti. Neticede 20 Mayıs 1915'te de Rus müfrezeleri Van'a girmişlerdi. İşgalle birlikte Van'dan yaklaşık 100.000 Müslüman da mülteci durumuna düşerek Bitlis istikametine göçe başlamıştı. Çalışmada Ermenilerin Van şehrinde başlattıkları isyan, askerî tarih belgeleri (harp raporları) ışığında gün gün ele alınacak ve bu isyanın Müslümanlar ve Ermeniler üzerindeki etkileri ortaya konulacaktır. Çalışmanın ana kaynaklarını, Milli Savunma Bakanlığı Arşiv ve Askerî Tarih Daire Başkanlığı'na ait belgeler, Ermenice kaynaklar ve literatürde yer alan çeşitli çalışmalar oluşturacak ve söz konusu bu çalışmalar, mukayese yöntemiyle analiz edilerek çalışma ortaya konulacaktır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Van Vilayeti, Ermeni Komiteleri, 1915 Van İsyanı, 24 Nisan 1915, Ermeni Sevk ve İskânı, 1915 Olayları*

Introduction

The first organization of the Armenians in Van was the Union of Salvation, founded in 1872 in the Varagavank (Monastery of Varag) by Khrimian Hayrig (Mkrtich Khrimian)¹. Operating under the slogan “Liberty or Death”, the Union of Salvation soon spread its influence in Van and its surrounding. Karapet Nshikian, one of the members of the organization, sent a letter to the Russian Caucasus Governor-General in May 1872, requesting Russian assistance and the opening of a Russian consulate in Van. At the same time, political propaganda against the Ottoman Empire began to be carried out with the newspaper called *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (The Eagle of Van) published in the Varagavank during this period.² In 1878, a group of Armenian youth founded the Black Cross Society for “protecting defenseless Armenians against Turks and Kurds”.³

With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 (*93 Harbi*), organizations such as the Union of Progressives, the Society of Arms-Bearers, and the Political Association were established in Van. The efforts of the Russian Consul in Van, Armenian-born Konstantin Gamsarakan, and Khrimian Hayrig serving at the Varagavank were effective in the establishment of these organizations.⁴ In 1885, the Armenakan Party⁵ was founded in Van by the teacher Mekertich Portukalian. The party, which was democratic and liberal, organized the Armenian revolt in Van in 1896 with the Dashnaks.⁶ Social Democrat Hunchakian Party, founded by Caucasian Armenians, aimed to establish an independent Armenian state by organizing Armenians living in Eastern Anatolia, Russia, and the Iranian border.⁷ Likewise, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-Dashnaktsutyun) party carried out revolutionary actions by arming the people for an independent

1 In 1858, Khrimian came to Van from Istanbul, where he opened a boarding school at the Varagavank and continued to publish *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, which he had previously been publishing in Istanbul. Source: Teodik Teodoros Lapçincıyan, *Baskı ve Harf: Ermeni Matbaacılık Tarihi*, çev.: S. Malhasyan ve A. İncidüzen (İstanbul: Bırzamanlar Yayıncılık, 2012), p. 110.

2 Dilek Akgümüş, “Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında Ermeni Ayaklanmaları”, *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları*, C 12, S. 23, 2013, p. 24.

3 Among its founders was Mekertich Portukalian. Source: Jean-Louis Mattei, “Mıgırđıç Portukalyan ve ‘Armenia’ Gazetesi (Terörizmden Şüpheli İlimliğa)”, *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi*, S. 42, 2012, p. 53 ; Afşin Burak Umar, *Ermeni Devrimci Federasyonu (Taşnaktsutyun) Kısa Tarihi*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İstanbul 2014, p. 33-34.

4 He first became the Armenian Patriarch of İstanbul and then the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Catholicos. Umar, *op. cit.*, p. 25, 35.

5 It is noteworthy that the Armenakan Party, unlike other Armenian organizations, used the name “Armenia”, which was used in ancient times for the Eastern Anatolia region. Considering that the *Armenia* newspaper began to be published in Marseille, the party may have been influenced by the Western world’s efforts to attribute the region to Armenians.

6 Umar, *op. cit.*, p. 36

7 Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi* (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1987), p. 431.

Armenian state.⁸ According to the Armenian writer Hagopian, these were organizations striving for Armenian sovereignty against oppression.⁹ Van was the main center of these organizations in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ In other words, “the province of Van was the most important field to be examined in order to understand the Armenian movement and the spirit of *komitacılık* [engaging in the activities of the Armenian revolutionary organizations].”¹¹

In conclusion, the main reason for the organization of Armenians in Van was its border with Iran and its proximity to Russia from the north. In this respect, the Armenian revolutionary committee members identified three routes to easily transport arms and ammunition from the Iranian border to Van. The starting points of these routes were Russia and Iran, and the destination was Ottoman territories. On these routes, the Armenian committees were able to transport arms and ammunition as well as recruit members for their committees. Therefore, through these routes, Russian and Iranian Armenians could easily establish contact with the Van Armenians.¹²

As can be seen, Van had been a center of organization for the Armenians since the 19th century. As a result, they revolted against the Ottoman state during the First World War, one of the most difficult times for the Ottoman Empire. When the First World War began in 1914, the Armenian committees decided at the Dashnaktsutyun’s (ARF) 8th Congress in Erzurum that they would side with Russia depending on the course of the war.¹³ In line with this decision, ARF, in line with the directives it received from Russia, had published the Instructions for Personal Defense, which served as a guideline for organizing the Armenian revolt in Van.¹⁴ In this context, Armenians, under the leadership of the Dashnaks Aram Manukian, Ishkhan, and Arshak Vramian¹⁵, armed

8 Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası* (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1983), p. 133.

9 U.S. Յակոբեան, Թրքահայաստանի Կորուստը [The Lost of Turkish Armenia], Տպարան Մեղակ, Պեղրուք 1967, էջ 152; Güzin Çaykiran, *Erzurum, Van, Bitlis Vilayetlerinde Ermeni-Kürt İlişkileri (1908-1920)* (Ankara: Hece Yayınları, 2021), p. 57.

10 Milli Savunma Bakanlığı Arşiv ve Askeri Tarih Daire Başkanlığı Arşivi (ATASE) BDH-2820-69-2-54.

11 Orhan Turan, “Van’da Bir İngiliz Konsolos Vekili: Bertram Dickson’ın Taşnak Cemiyeti Üzerine Değerlendirmeleri”, *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi*, S. 65, 2020, p. 137.

12 Hasan Oktay, “Ermeniler ve Van İhtilal Örgütü (1896-1915)”, *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi*, S.5, Bahar 2002, <http://www.eranen.org/index.php?Lisan=tr&Page=DergiIcerik&IcerikNo=301>, accessed March 28, 2021.

13 BDH-2811-26- 28 (18 Eylül 1914); Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi, c. 31/S.81, 1982, s. 61 ; Kemal Çiçek, “VIII. Taşnak Kongresi: Ermenilerin Karar Anı”, *I. Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri ve Büyük Güçler Sempozyumu Bildiriler Kitabı* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2014), p. 69.

14 Justin McCarthy, Esat Aslan, Cemalettin Taşkiran ve Ömer Turan, *1915 Van’da Ermeni İsyanı*, çev.: Batuhan Yoğun (İstanbul: T&K Yayınları, 2018), p. 198.

15 Mevlüt Yüksel, “Amerikan Board Misyonerlerinden Elizabeth Freeman Barrows Ussher’in Mektuplarında 1915 Van Ermeni İsyanı ve Osmanlı Kayıtları”, *Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, S. 67, 2020, p. 572-573.

themselves in Van and its surroundings and began to prepare for the revolt.¹⁶ This preparation was put into action when the Russians started their offensive against the Ottoman lands from the Eastern Front (Caucasus Front) on 1 November 1914¹⁷ and on 20 December 1914, there Armenians started a general revolt in the Karçikan (Reşadiye) and Gevaş districts of Van.¹⁸ The revolt then grew further and spread to the townships of Şatak (Çatak), Havasor, Timar, and Erçek.¹⁹ Meanwhile, on 20 December 1914, a meeting took place between the Russian Tsar Nicholas II and the Etchmiadzin Catholicos Gevork V. The Tsar asked the Catholicos which territories they demanded.²⁰ Therefore, it can be considered that this meeting, which took place at the beginning of the revolt, may have triggered the Armenian revolt in Van.

This study discusses the revolt of the Armenians in Van in 1915. There are various studies on this specific Armenian revolt. Unlike the other studies however, in this study, the revolt that took place in the center of Van is narrated on a day-by-day basis within the framework of military history reports. Thus, it is hoped that the difficulties faced by the 3rd Ottoman Army (which was at war with the Russians on the Eastern Front) against the armed Armenian gangs will be better understood. The main source of this study is the military reports kept on the Eastern Front during the First World War. The study also utilizes Armenian sources and other studies on the subject.

The relevant Ottoman documents have been translated into modern Turkish [and thus English for this translation] as much as possible for a better understanding of the revolt. During the translations, no modern equivalents could be found for some of the place names mentioned in the revolt in and around Van. Therefore, a question mark has been placed next to some of the place names.

The Armenian Revolt in Van: 20 April-17 May 1915

In April 1915, there were approximately 10,000 Armenian rebels in Van.²¹ Many of them were deserters from the army and were well organized²² under

16 BDH-528-2061-22-10.

17 *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekâtı*, c. 2 (Ankar: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993), p.101.

18 BDH-4-23A-5.

19 BDH-2820-69-3-1, 18, 33

20 Nejla Günay, "Rusya'nın Osmanlı ve İran Topraklarındaki Ermeniler ve Kürt Aşiretleriyle İlişkisi", *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi*, S. 56, 2017, p. 68.

21 McCarthy et al., *op. cit.*, p. 227.

22 BDH-2820-69-3-1 ; Çaykırın, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

the guidance of Aram Manukian.²³ The Ottoman military presence in Van consisted of a total of 1,650 gendarmerie and military units. As can be seen, these forces were quite inadequate against the Armenian rebels. This was because the 3rd Ottoman Army in the region was at war with the Russians. The Armenian revolt began on 20 April 1915.²⁴

“20 April 1915: The revolutionaries, most of whom were deserters and acting in an organized manner, started shooting at the Muslim neighborhood and police stations. The committee members at the gate of Hamid Ağa Barracks were killed. The wires of Başkale-Havasor (Gürpınar)-Mirmurtal-Reşat? [telegraph line] were cut.

20/21 April 1915: Fighting intensified on all sides. A sap²⁵ placed under the barracks through the passages opened from the Armenian quarter to the Hamid Ağa Barracks was detonated, causing only the walls of the barracks to crack. The platoon in the barracks could no longer take shelter there²⁶ and had to leave. The revolutionaries occupied the barracks.

21 April 1915: The firing continued fiercely all over the city, the main condition in the city was that Muslims were concentrated in the district and the revolutionaries were trying to seize the castle as it has a position that mostly dominates the city. 800 Armenians, selected from among the committee members, attacked the fortress to take possession of it, but the attack collapsed in front of the fortress. The Armenians in the Bağlar district were relatively more concentrated than the Muslims there, so they attacked the Muslim households. They managed to march on the Muslim houses and destroyed them with their inhabitants. In addition, it was observed that the roads outside the city were fortified by the revolutionaries in the places deemed necessary to prevent the entry of detachments coming from outside.

21/22 April 1915: The revolutionaries destroyed Muslim houses with bombs, and burned and destroyed many Ottoman offices such as the Public Debt Commission, the Post, the Tobacco Reji and many others. A unit of 30 men from the gendarmerie detachment in pursuit on the Havasor side managed to enter the city. The 700 revolutionaries gathered in the village of Gürzot, located between Muradiye (Bargiri) district and

23 Սերգեյ Վարդանյան, “Վանը Միջնադարից Մինչև XX. Դարի Սկիզբը [Van from the Middle Ages until the 20th Century]”, *Պատմա Բանասիրական Հանդես [Journal of History-Philology]*, 3, 2010, էջ 30 ; McCarthy et al, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

24 BDH-528-2061-23-10; BDH-528-2061-23-11 ; Çaykiran, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

25 The extension of a trench to a point beneath an enemy's fortifications.

26 BDH-528-2061-23-11.

Timar subdistrict, were beaten back by the Muradiye district governor. A fierce battle went on between the rebels on the Erçek side and the detachment coming to Muradiye and Saray. There were 20 soldiers martyred and wounded in the city today.

22 April 1915: The firing continued fiercely all over the city. The revolutionaries were constantly being reinforced from the villages²⁷ outside the city. It has been understood that the weapons in the hands of the revolutionaries are small Turkish rifles, Russian field guns and a large number of bombs. It has also been investigated that they are manufacturing cartridges, as they have consumed a lot of ammunition in the continuous battles. An artillery detachment was allocated among the Kuva-yi Inzibatiye (gendarmerie forces) and abandoned cannons were utilized. In this way, the offensive of the revolutionaries could be relatively stopped. A Russian cavalry detachment advanced on the village of Akgiz? north of Saray. The battle on that side continues. A strong enemy²⁸ detachment advanced along the roads near the Iran/Kotur Strait, apparently in pursuit of a plan to transfer Armenian gangs from both sides to Iran/Kotur. The Turkish detachment of 700 men in the vicinity of Kotur retreated a little.

23 April 1915: Fighting continued in the upper and lower town. In the inner city, the force captured a few houses from the revolutionaries. A gendarmerie force of 100 men from Başkale arrived at the center. The district governor of Muradiye, who was on his way to the center with a nearby detachment from the Timar subdistrict, advanced against the revolutionaries who had gathered in Kasmalı Gediği? and occupied the area and arrested them. Some of the rebels who had attacked Muslim villages in the Erçek subdistrict were driven away. It was observed that Armenian gangs inside Iran were pressuring all sides of the border to cross to Van.²⁹

24 April 1915: Fighting continued all over the city. Rebels blocking the road on the Van-Saray route and at Hoş Gediği? near Van were dispersed by detachments sent from Saray and Van. It was understood that the committee members, who were under pressure from Havasor, gathered around Şatak, occupied and fortified the dominant areas and were threatening the central town, and that side was in danger. The detachment sent from Hizan to Gevaş via Karkar River was fired upon by about 100 Armenian revolutionaries in front of the villages of

27 BDH-528-2061-23-12.

28 The term “enemy” in the reports is not used for Armenians, but for Russians.

29 BDH-528-2061-23-13.

Hududyis? and Tap?. As a result, the revolutionaries were defeated in a battle.

26/27 April 1915: Fighting continued in the city. The forces seized a few houses from the revolutionaries. Many deceased people were seen in the captured houses. The victims could not be identified. According to their hats and clothes, they appeared to have come from Russia. Since Van's buildings are made of mudbrick, cannon balls [easily] penetrate them. When the outer part of the house was destroyed, it was defended by opening crenellations underneath. There was very little ammunition left in the force. The ammunition sent had not yet arrived. Therefore, the rebels were attacking the upper neighborhood where they gathered and the trenches they dug in front of Ereğ Mountain. Some of the revolutionaries who came from Havasor and attempted to enter the city were besieged in Nurgüh Gedigi? and 49 of them were killed in the battle that took place within 24 hours.³⁰ Others managed to escape. Our detachment, facing an enemy detachment of 1,500 men, mostly cavalry, advancing in Kotur River, withdrew to Razi Strait? after a two-day battle. The detachment in pursuit in the Erçek district was sent to reinforce the detachment in Kotur. An Armenian gang of 50 horsemen who attempted to enter the border at Karadere were driven away after 3 of them were killed.³¹

28/29 April 1915: For a day or two, operations were carried out in the inner city. Attempts were made to encircle the rebels on the Ereğ Mountain side. There were 173 wounded and 60 martyrs in the battles that took place in the city so far. Detachments dispatched from Bitlis and Gevaş fought with the rebels in the villages of Narek, Pagan and neighboring villages of Gevaş and 8 of the ringleaders of the revolutionaries were captured dead. A detachment dispatched from Pervari via Özim to the Müküs subdistrict was exposed to fire from Özim residents and occupied Özim, which was a shelter due to its steep terrain. Moving forward from Kotur River, the enemy continued its offensive. After dispatching Armenian gangs inland, they returned. Pursuit detachments were sent from Kotur to follow³² these gangs. The detachment sent from Muradiye to the Timar subdistrict, defeated about 150 rebels and approached within a distance of four hours to Van. The First Expeditionary Force, which was sent to Iran via Mosul against the Russian force attacking in Iran, reached Dilman. Russians fortified the

30 BDH-528-2061-23-14.

31 BDH-2820-69-3-64(65).

32 BDH-528-2061-23-15.

hills to the east of Silloköyü?. It is understood that some forces are advancing to the Hantahtı area.

30 April/1 May 1915: Fighting continued in the city. Two houses blown up by rebels did not cause any damage as Turkish units had already been evacuated. Only a soldier who was trying to find a sap was martyred. A few more houses were also invaded. The village of Sinike?, east and near the city, was occupied. Rebels who tried to cut off transportation to Van by occupying some points with commanding locations on Van-Bitlis Road were eliminated. The detachment went against the rebels gathered in the river north of Ereğ Mountain and killed 20 of them. Rain and snow prevented the detachment from moving.

2/3 May 1915: Fighting continued in the city. The revolutionaries in the upper neighborhood were dispersed. Turkish detachment advancing to Sinike village took over 15 houses. During the offensive in the Haçboğan neighborhood, the site was seized. This resulted in 23 martyrs and 27 wounded. Fighting continued in the villages of Gevaş district. The detachment sent to Şitak (Çatak) entered Şitak after successfully capturing the site and killing 41 revolutionaries in an attack against the rebels who had settled in fortified positions on Vaviran Mountain (Çeper Mountain).³³

4/5 May 1915: Fighting continued to a minor degree in the city and became very fierce around Bağlar. As a result, several houses were taken over. There were 19 martyrs and 23 wounded. An Armenian gang of 42 men, who were reported to be in Kos Village? of Havasor subdistrict, was surrounded by detachments and 30 of them were killed. The rebels who attacked the church in Gürzot village of Muradiye district were surrounded by the detachment. In the battle that lasted for three days, the rebels fled, 14 of them survived. The rest were eliminated. The detachment suffered two martyrs and 14 wounded.

6/7/8/9 May 1915: Fighting continued in the city. First Expeditionary Force and Mobile Gendarmerie Division fortified the ridges extending east from Hantahtı. Russian forces south of Iran/Hoy advanced. Russian detachments reinforcing Armenian gangs from the Muradiye direction advanced towards Khoy. Armenian gangs advancing from Karadere to the border were supported by strong Russian detachments. Armenian gangs wandering from the Diyadin side moved inland in the direction of Erciş under the protection of the Russians.³⁴ 22 of the rebels who were

33 BDH-528-2061-23-16.

34 BDH-528-2061-23-17.

expelled from the villages of Şuşatı? and Kobatı? around the town of Van and gathered ammunition in the Yedikilise (Bakraçlı village) area were killed and the rest disappeared around Ereğ Mountain. These rebels, who were cut off from the interior, are being pursued. As the bombs inside the church caught fire, part of the church blew up with the rebels in it. Erzurum and Erzincan mobile gendarmerie battalions sent from Erzurum and the *cebel* squad reached Van.

10/11/12 May 1915: Fighting continued in the inner city, in the Bağlar area and in the Ereğ area. In the city, 11 houses were captured with great difficulty, and 15 were martyred and 45 wounded. The enemy is advancing from Karadere to the border. The enemy that advanced to the Saray frontier occupied the villages of Koçkan Ulya and Suğla. The enemy advancing from Kotur with a battalion of infantry and a cannon is moving towards Razi ridges. The First Force Expeditionary left the Van Gendarmerie Division against the enemy and moved to Van on 12 May 1915, following the Becirga?-Gevaş-Başkale route. This was because the Russians were approaching Van from several directions and the rebels were resisting them in Van.

13 May 1915: The situation in Van has become critically dangerous. Evacuation has become compulsory. The Russians and Armenians who entered the central town of Van in gangs are still resisting in the central town. Today, the sick and wounded and some of the families of officials and residents abandoned all their belongings and 20 boats were sent to Tatvan and some to Havasor.³⁵ In order to secure the road to Gevaş, a battalion of infantry with one cannon was sent from Van to the direction of Gevaş and captured the Şivegah? ridges. A division of 150 cavalry was sent to Tamisli Gediği? in the Timar subdistrict. An enemy detachment advancing from Abaga (Çaldıran) occupied Bargiri (Muradiye). An enemy detachment of three battalions of infantry and two divisions of cavalry advancing from Gürşaman continued its advance. The cavalry entered the center of Muradiye, captured the Bezirmahir (Bendimahi?) bridge in the evening, and their line of retreat was confirmed by several villagers of the *Geylan Haydaranlı* tribe who were *subjected to a terrible massacre*. The enemy, who advanced from Karadere and occupied Koçkan, advanced only his own forces.

14 May 1915: There were minor clashes with the rebels in the city today. The enemy cavalry occupying Bezirmahir bridge was following the street in the direction of Van. The enemy detachment that occupied Gürzot last night left the village three hours later.

35 BDH-528-2061-23-18.

15 May 1915: Fighting intensified in the city. Several houses occupied by rebels in Bağlarbaşı were destroyed by artillery fire. In a combat between the detachments and a gang of 32 men at Tut Stream?, south of Erek Mountain, the gang was completely destroyed.³⁶ Two battalions of infantry and two divisions of cavalry of the enemy were following the Canik-Van route. Today in the evening, an attempt was made in the area around Canik. Earlier on, a battalion of infantry and a division of cavalry advancing from Gürzot crossed in the direction of Derecik at 8:30. The enemy detachment heading towards Abaga from Karadere arrived at Noşar (Sağmal village). Faced with this situation, the central province decided to withdraw towards Hoşab since it was not possible for the detachments to stand against the rebels.

16 May 1915: The enemy is approaching Van from two sides. Thousands of Muslims from Van, including children, women, men, old, and disabled people, walked overland in the direction of Hoşab. The Van-Hoşab Route took a disastrous turn. Mothers, helpless to bear them in their delicate arms, were willing to destroy their lungs with exhaustion in order to save their dignity from the monsters. Exhausted from walking, elderly and disabled men and women departed this life on the side of the road. Starving girls whose feet were swollen from the disasters caused by the long migration, mothers with frantic voices, old people in despair, children with desperate looks asking for help, who were exhausted from walking in this tragedy, who no longer had the strength to drag their shattered and torn feet, and in short, the catastrophe exposed to these people who were walking towards death³⁷ is beyond description and imagination. After the Van government and the Muslims dispatched a detachment to secure the road to Gevaş, all forces decided to withdraw on 17 May 1915. The enemy attacked two battalions of the gendarmerie brigade in Havasor. The commander of the First Expeditionary Force ordered the withdrawal of the aforementioned battalions to Çoh?, but most of them came to Gevar.

17 May 1915: Detachments evacuated the central province of Van. The revolutionaries were not aware that Russian offensive units were reinforcing Van. The revolutionaries knew that this movement was a plan for Turks to flee, and burned down the entire Muslim neighborhood so that they would be left completely without a place to return to. They destroyed and devastated everything with bombs. Some helpless Muslim men and women who remained in Van were cut to pieces with axes and saws. Even those who took refuge in the American orphanage could not

36 BDH-528-2061-23-19.

37 BDH-528-2061-23-20 ; Çaykiran, *op. cit.*, p. 140-141.

save themselves from the tragedy and brutality. On 17 May 1915, Armenians committed this massacre in the central town of Van, which history has never heard of. On 19 May 1915, this scene of massacre continued until the evening. On 20 May 1915, Russian detachments entered Van. After that, the gangs attacked³⁸ and the chase and annihilation of the people began. The First Expeditionary Force was able to reach the south of Lake Van through long wanderings and mountains. The Russians took great advantage of this Armenian insurrection and invaded the Muş Plain and reached in front of Muş with their troops. Meanwhile, they advanced from the south of Van to the Bitlis Strait. Therefore, with these actions, the Armenians caused the destruction of a Turkish corps (...?), the invasion of two provinces such as Van and Bitlis, and the 3rd Army to carry out a very long and very large operation against the Russian forces, which were behind a large part of the 3rd Army, which was the result of the right flank operation that started in mid-June (1915). Some of the Armenian villages of Van obeyed the government and condemned this action. For example, the letter sent to the province³⁹ by the community council on behalf of the inhabitants of the village of İskele, near Van, is a good example of the attitude and behavior of the government towards its obedient people and the attitude of the people who were not affiliated with the [Armenian revolutionary] committees.”⁴⁰

According to daily reports, after 26 days of fierce battles, 1,854 Armenian committee members had been killed. The Ottoman military losses were 140 martyrs and 282 wounded. According to the Armenian writer Martirosyan, 70 Armenians were wounded and 58 were killed.⁴¹ According to Sahakyan, 350 Armenian *fedais* [revolutionary fighters] were killed and about 1,000 Ottoman soldiers lost their lives.⁴² Again, according to the reports, Van was not sufficiently reinforced by the Ottoman troops. Some of the troops were fighting against Russian forces, while others were busy suppressing the Armenian revolt in the villages of Gevaş, Şatak and Tımar subdistrict. Therefore, this situation not only created a security weakness in the center of Van, but also divided the strength of the Ottoman troops in two.⁴³ During the revolt, the troops dispatched

38 BDH-528-2061-23-21.

39 BDH-528-2061-23-22.

40 Report submitted to the Deputy Commander-in-Chief under the name *Van İhtilali Ahiri* after the Van rebellion. BDH-528-2061-23-23.

41 Յ. ՏէրՍարգիսիոսեան, *Մեծ Ղէպէրը Վասպուրականում 1914-1915 թուականներին* [Major Events in Van between the Years 1914-1915], Արարատ, Երևանի, 1917 <http://www.digilib.am/book/2100/2550/19999/Մեծ%20ղէպէրը%20Վասպուրականում%201914-1915%20թուականներին>, accessed June 1, 2023.

42 Ռ.Օ. Սահակյան, “Վասպուրականի Հայության Գոյամարտը 1915 թվականին [The Armenian Struggle in Van in 1915]”, 1995, [http://hpi.asj-oa.am/5236/1/1995-1\(19\).pdf](http://hpi.asj-oa.am/5236/1/1995-1(19).pdf), accessed February 12, 2020.

43 Akgümüş, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

from other regions could not reach Van on time. If one pays attention to the daily reports, it will be understood that Ottoman troops were dispatched to the region only by the middle of the rebellion. Ammunition was insufficient as well. In addition, many of the Armenian committee members were army deserters, which meant that the rebels had military experience.

Indeed, many Ottoman Armenians, who were supposed to defend their lands against the Russian invasion, instead handed over the key to the city to the commander of the Russian Caucasus Army, General Nikolai Yudenich. In return, the administration of the province was given to Armenian Aram Manukian.⁴⁴ However, in July 1915, when the Russians began to withdraw⁴⁵ from Van, Russian General Yudenich ordered the Armenians in and around Van to migrate to the Caucasus. Accordingly, approximately 150,000-200,000 Armenians from Van and its surroundings were forced to migrate to the Caucasus, primarily to Yerevan. During this migration, 50,000 Armenians lost their lives due to disease and starvation and 40,000 Armenians lost their lives due to Kurdish attacks on the migration caravans.⁴⁶ Also, with the occupation of Van, 102,808⁴⁷ Muslims became refugees. These refugees were gathered in Diyarbakır and sent to Urfa, Antep and Adana.⁴⁸

Towards the end of August 1915, the Russians regained control of Van, but gave the administration of the province not to Armenians but to Russian General Pavel Voronov.⁴⁹ Therefore, after the Van revolt, the Armenians of Van were expelled both from the lands they lived in and from the administration of Van. Upon the outbreak of the revolt in Van, the Ottoman Empire decided to shut down the Armenian committees on 24 April 1915 and arrested their members. Moreover, when Van was occupied on 17 May 1915, the Ottoman Empire decided to relocate some Armenians and their families from the battlefields and resettle to the provinces of Aleppo and Mosul on 27 May 1915 in order to ensure the security of the Eastern Front.⁵⁰ Afterwards, this transfer

44 ՏերՍարսիբրուսեան [Ter Martirosyan], 1917, <http://digilib.aa.am/book/2100/2550/20052/Մեծ%20ղեպերը%20Վասսարսիբրուսեանի%201914-1915%20թուականներին>, accessed June 1, 2023.

45 On 5 August 1915, Russian troops withdrew from the center of Van to Erçek, and Cevdet Bey, the governor of Van, arrived in Van from Mamuratülaziz on 10 August 1915. BDH-2827-99-4.

46 Nejla Günay ve Güzin Çaykiran, “Rusların 1915 Yılında Van Vilayeti ve Çevresinden Ermenileri Kafkasya’ya Göç Ettirmesi”, *Gazi Akademik Bakış Dergisi*, C 14, S.27, 2020, p. 141.

47 Erol Kaya, “I. Dünya Savaşı’nda Erzurum Mültecileri”, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Milli Mücadele’de Erzurum*, C.I, Y. Aslan ve T. Başak (Editörler) (Erzurum: ER-VA Yayınları, 2019), p. 97.

48 *Askerî Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, S.31/81, Aralık 1982, p. 229.

49 Ռ. Սահակյան, “Միլիցիայի Կազմակերպումը Վանի Նահանգում (1915 թ. Հոկտեմբեր – 1916 թ. Սեպտեմբեր) [Militia Organization in the Province of Van (October 1915 - September 1916)]”, *Պատմա-Բանասիրական Հանդես*, 2, 2018, էջ 49, <https://artsakhlib.am/2019/09/05/միլիցիայի-կազմակերպումը-վանի-նահանգ/>, accessed May 2, 2021.

50 *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri 1914-1918*, C. I (Ankara: ATASE Yayınları, 2005), p.127-133.

activity spread to many provinces of Anatolia because, according to an Ottoman report, *with the possible fall of the Dardanelles Strait, a firing line position in Bursa or Erzurum would extend to Sivas. In such a situation and in the event of an offensive in the Black Sea, the position of Konya would be no different from that of Erzincan.*⁵¹ Therefore, a situation that could occur in any part of the country possessed gravity and impact that could affect every part of the country.

Indeed, with the Van revolt, the Ottoman Empire changed its attitude towards the Armenian committees and the Armenians who aided and abetted them, and began to take serious measures against any activity that could jeopardize the territorial integrity of the state.

Conclusion

The Eastern Front in the First World War was undoubtedly one of the most active fronts with the greatest losses. And the rupture of this front started with the occupation of Van by the Russians. When the Russians occupied Van, they temporarily gave the administration of the city to Armenians. But this was very brief. Accordingly, the Armenians in Van were forced by the Russian to migrate to the Caucasus and Russian officials were appointed to the administration of Van. On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire observed how the Armenian revolutionaries jeopardized the territorial integrity of the state with the Van revolt, and responded by closing down the Armenian revolutionary committees and arresting their members. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire had decided to relocate the committee member Armenians with their families to the southern provinces of the state and to resettle them there. As can be seen, the large-scale revolt started by the said Armenians in Van also changed the Ottoman state's attitude towards the Armenian nation. When the daily reports are taken into account, the severity of the revolt is revealed to have been significant.

In conclusion, those Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Empire who were part of the joyful demonstrations and the ringing of bells in churches while the Russian troops were occupying Van were, in truth, responsible for starting the process of their people saying farewell to Anatolia after the revolt in Van.

51 BDH-528-2061-20-2.

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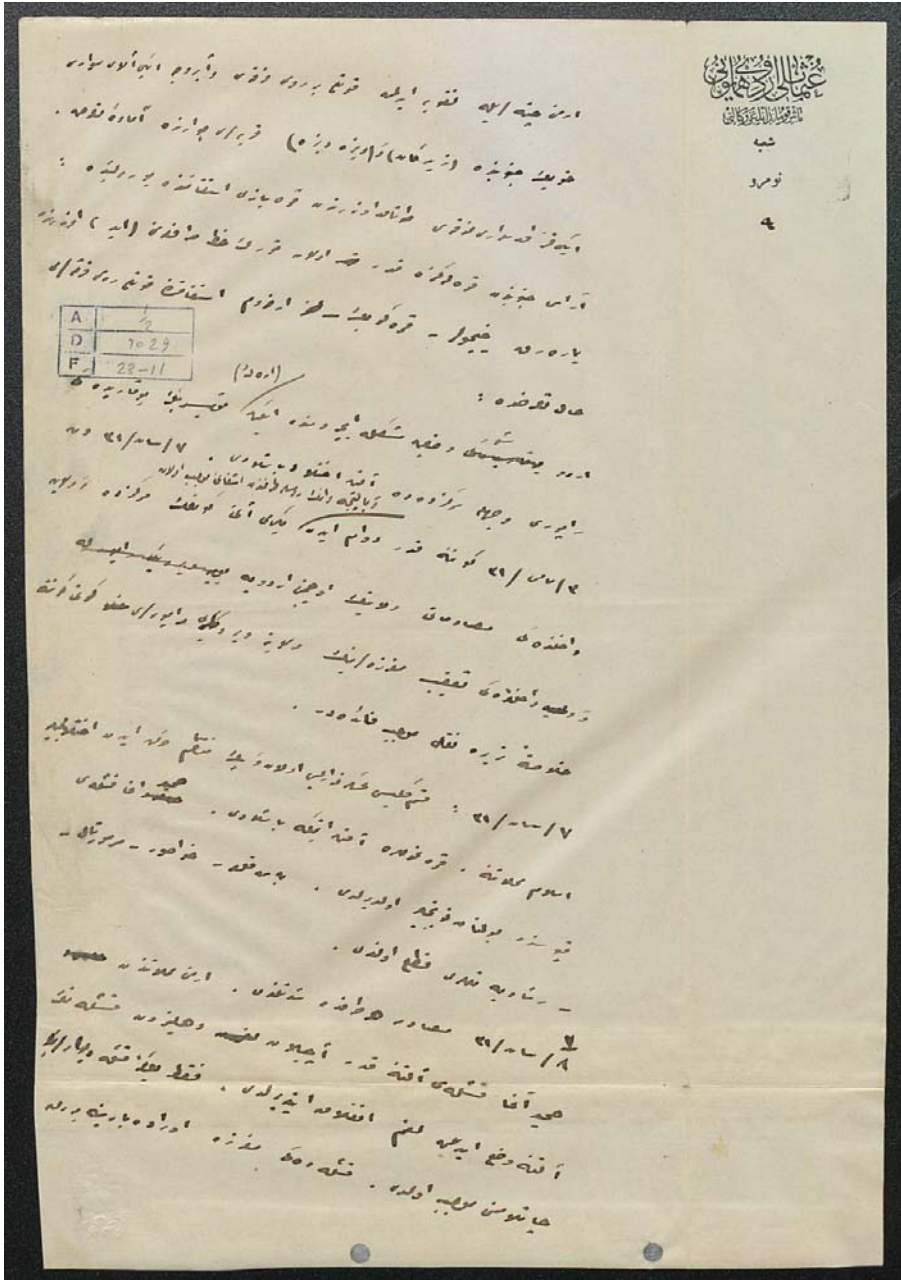
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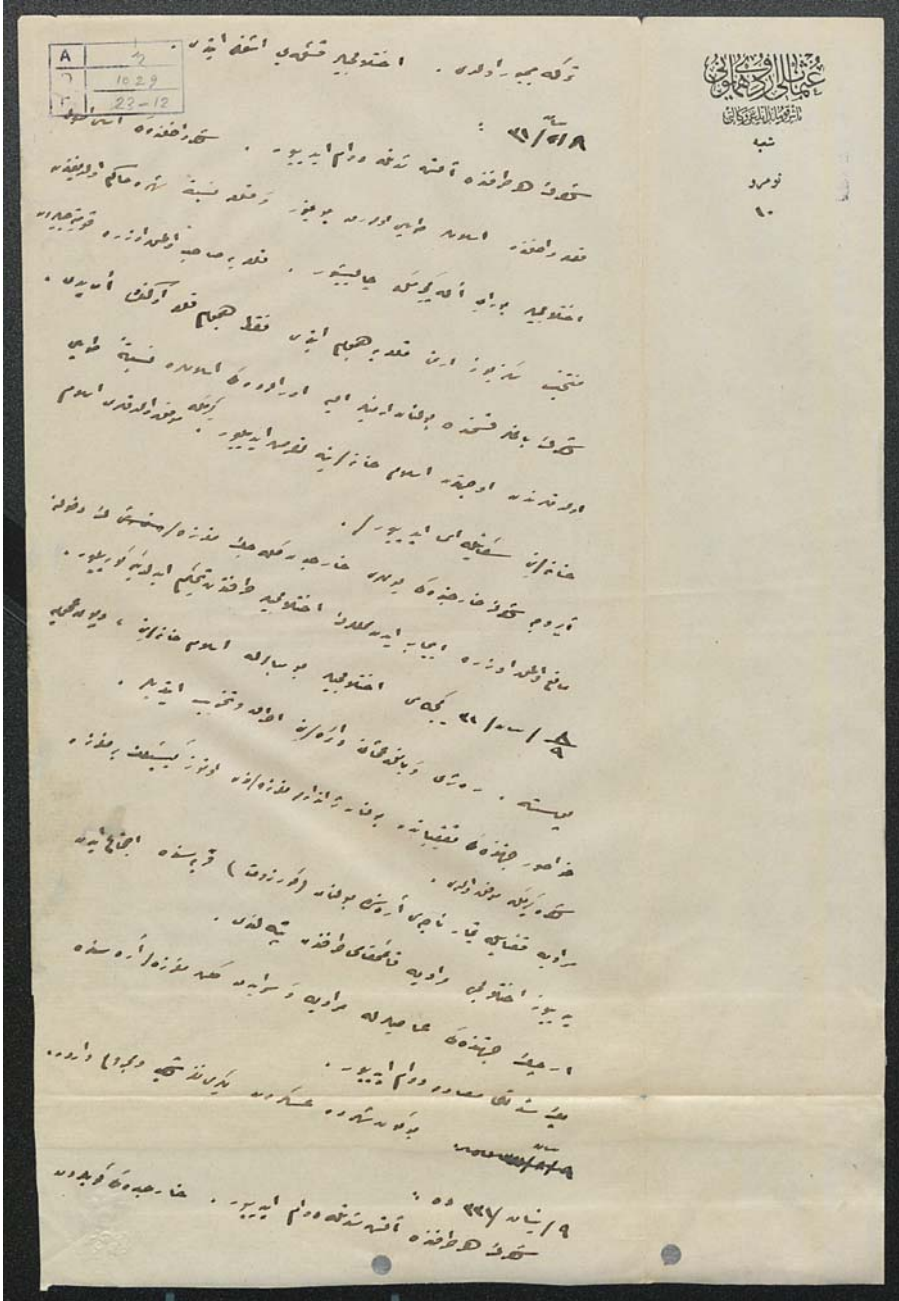
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APPENDIX

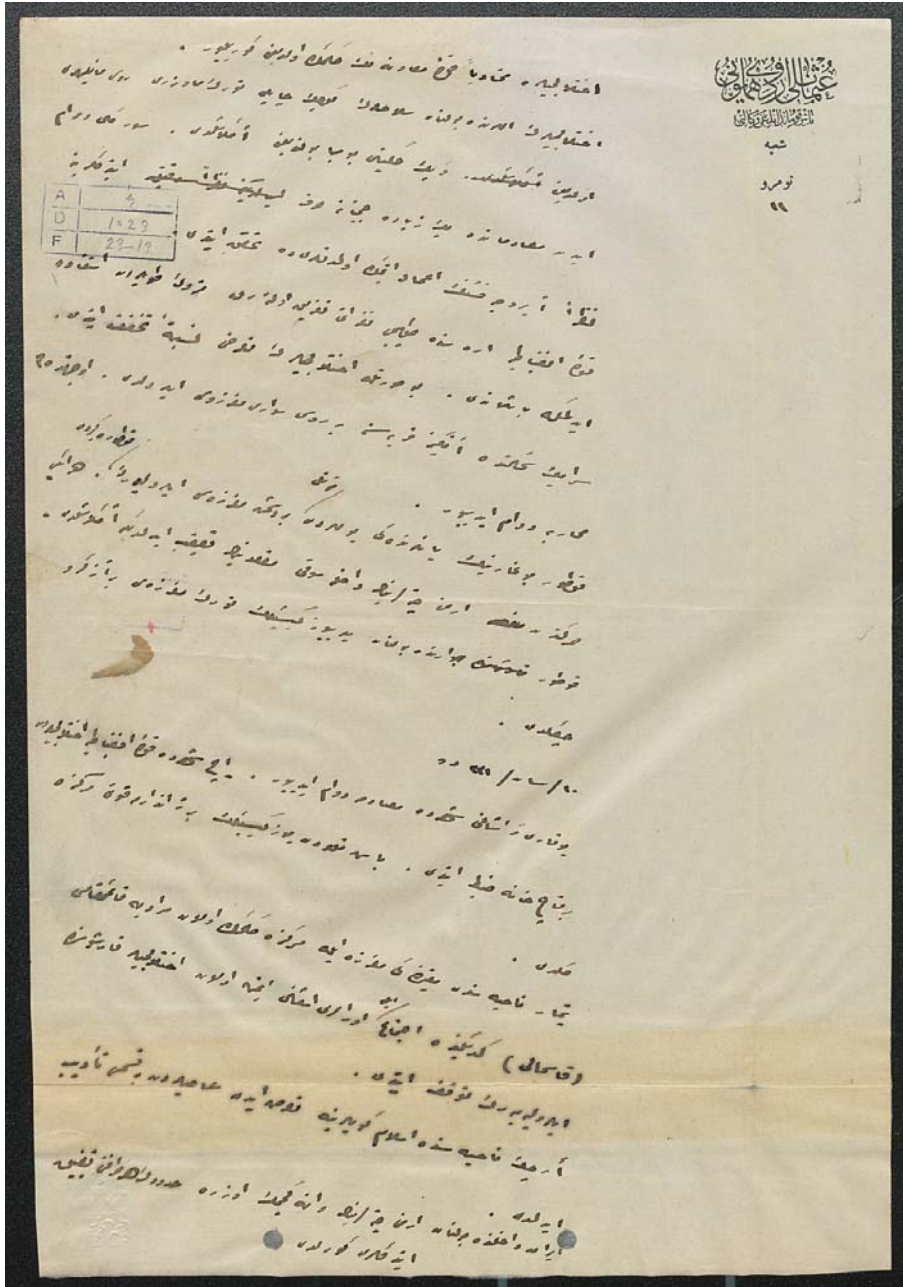
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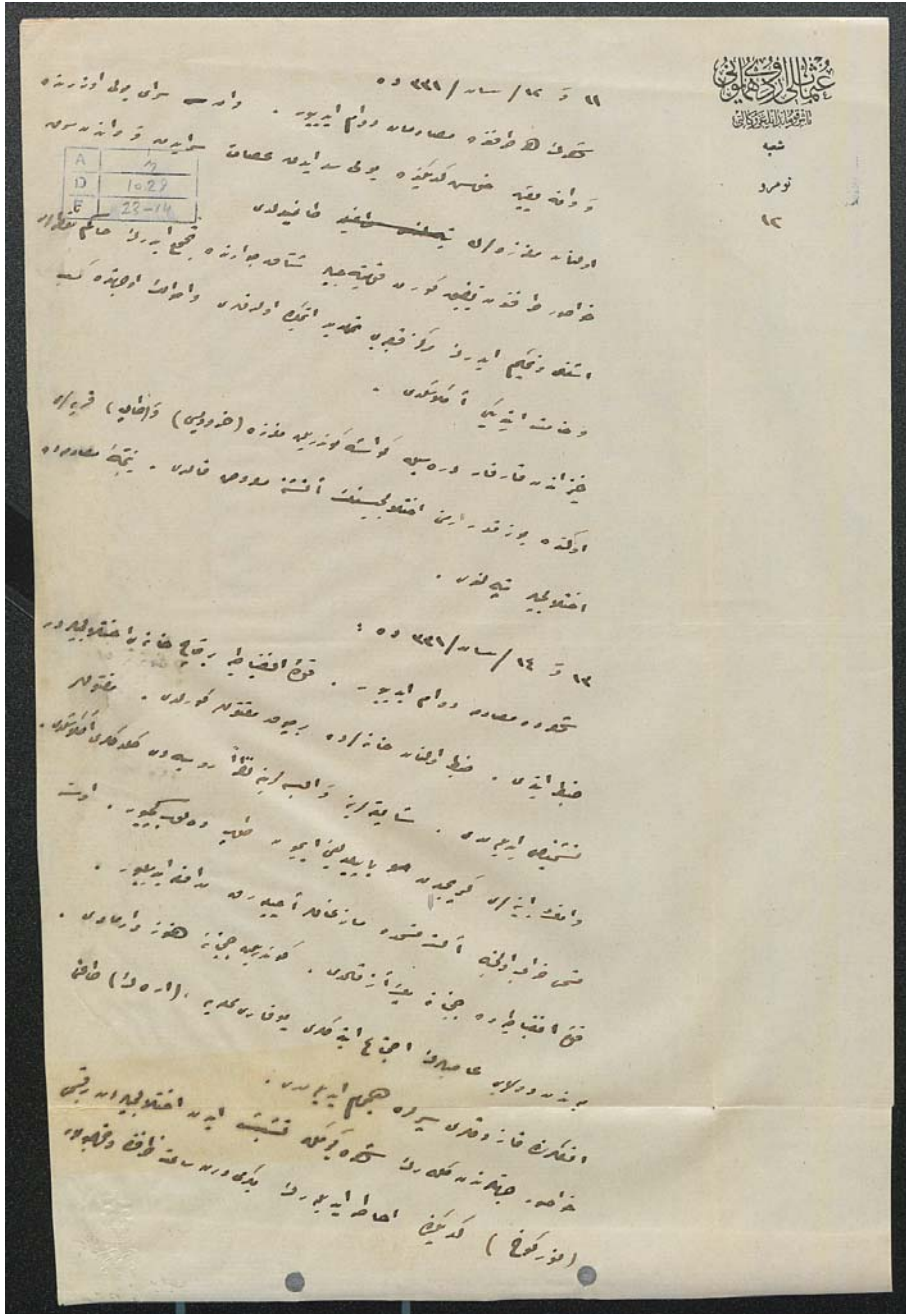
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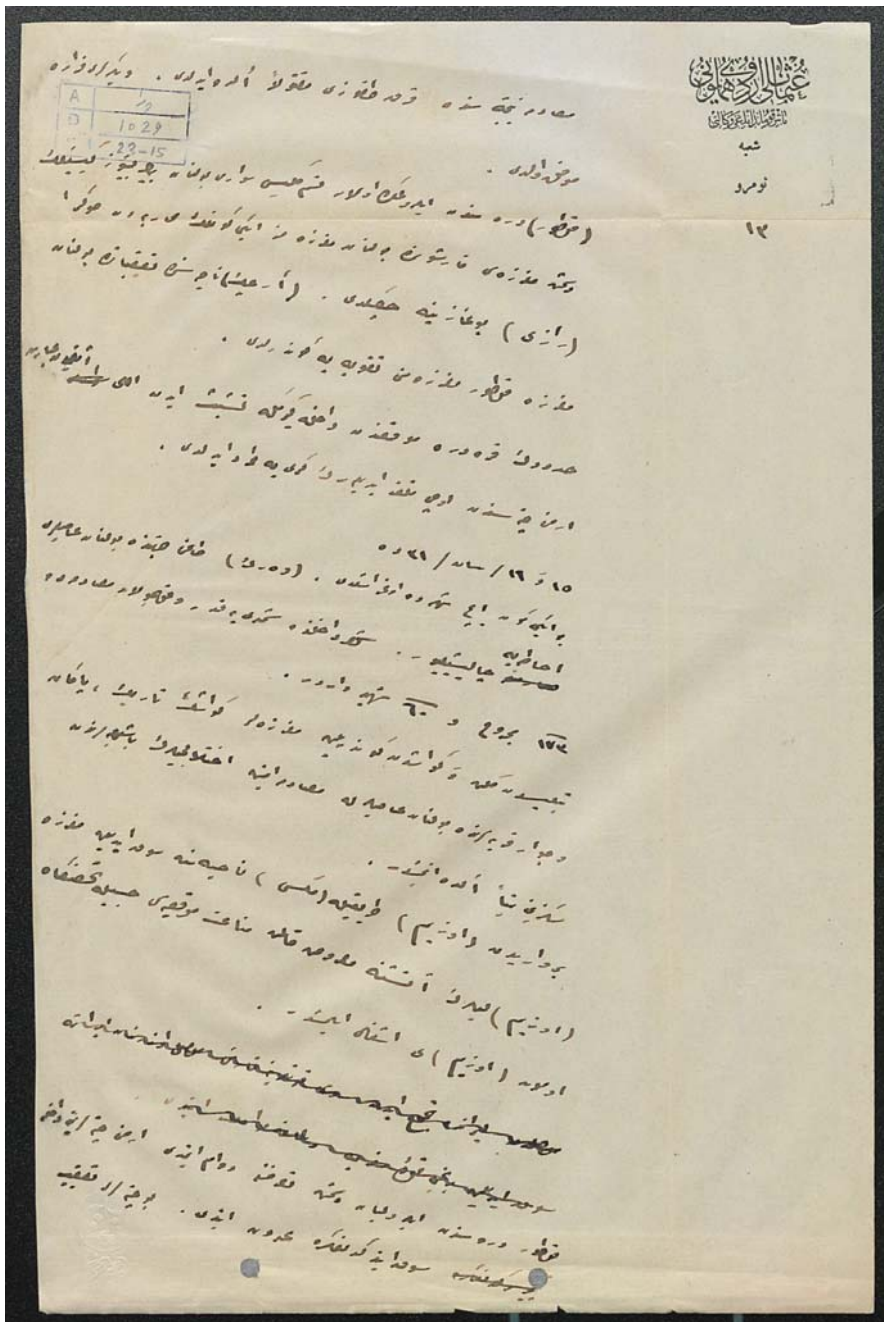
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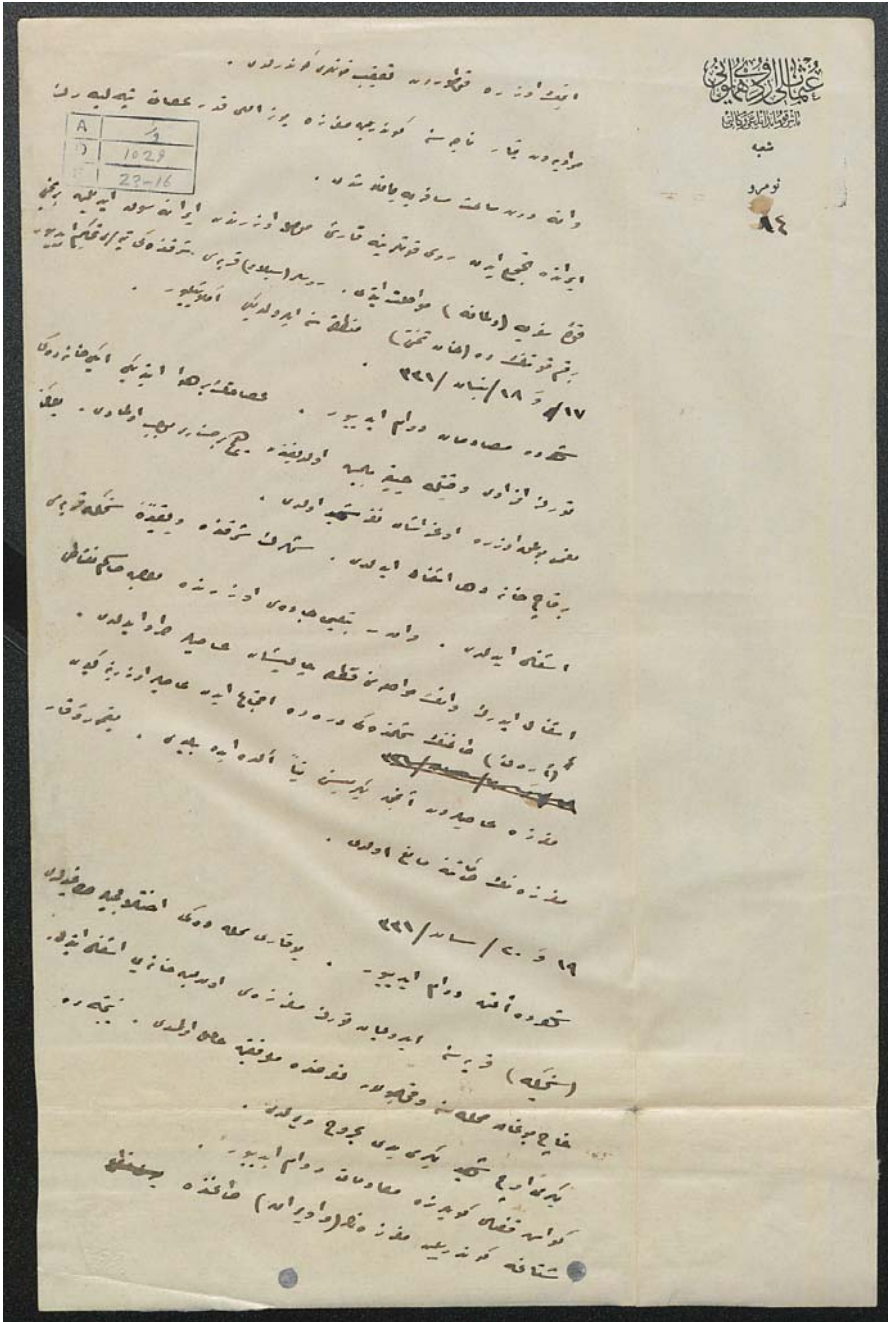
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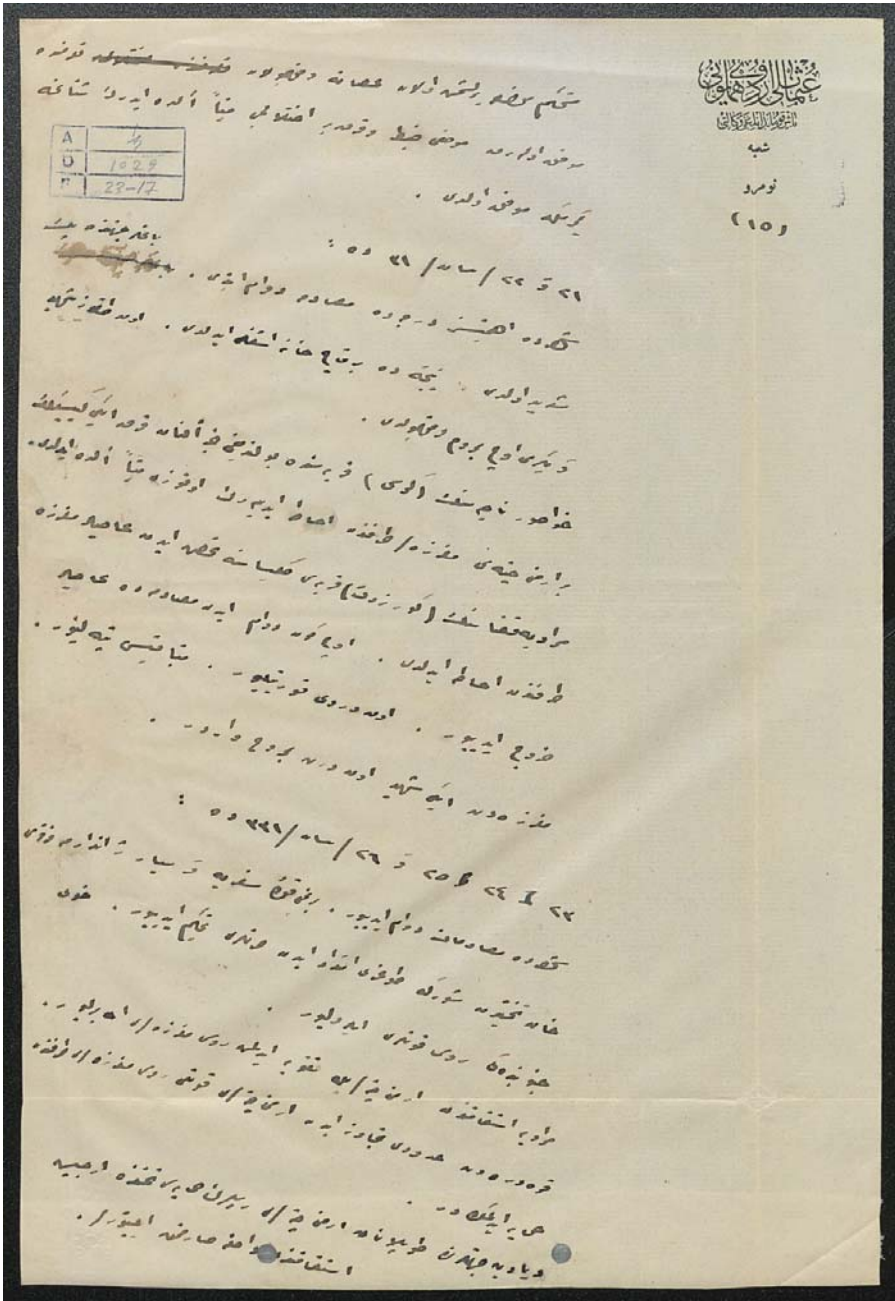
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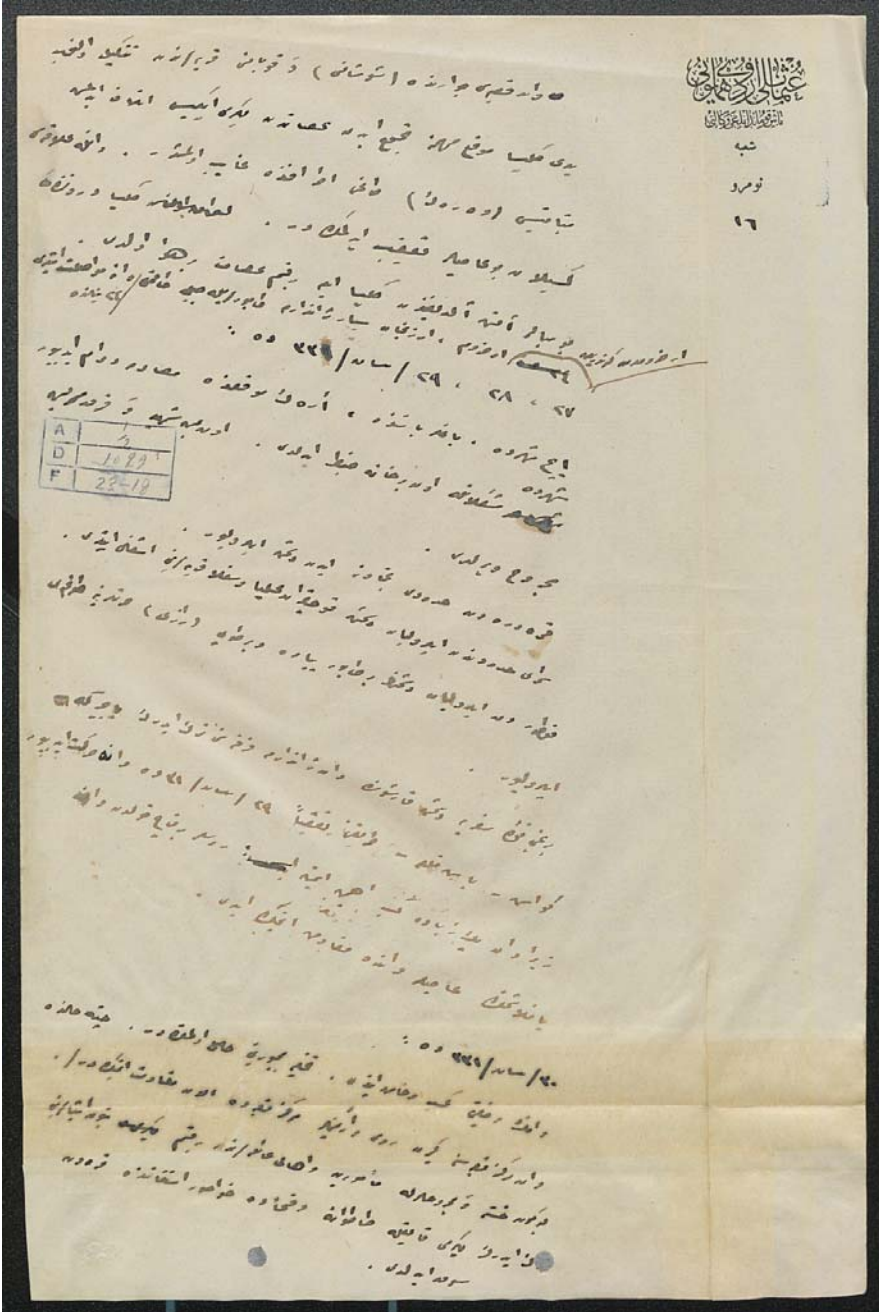
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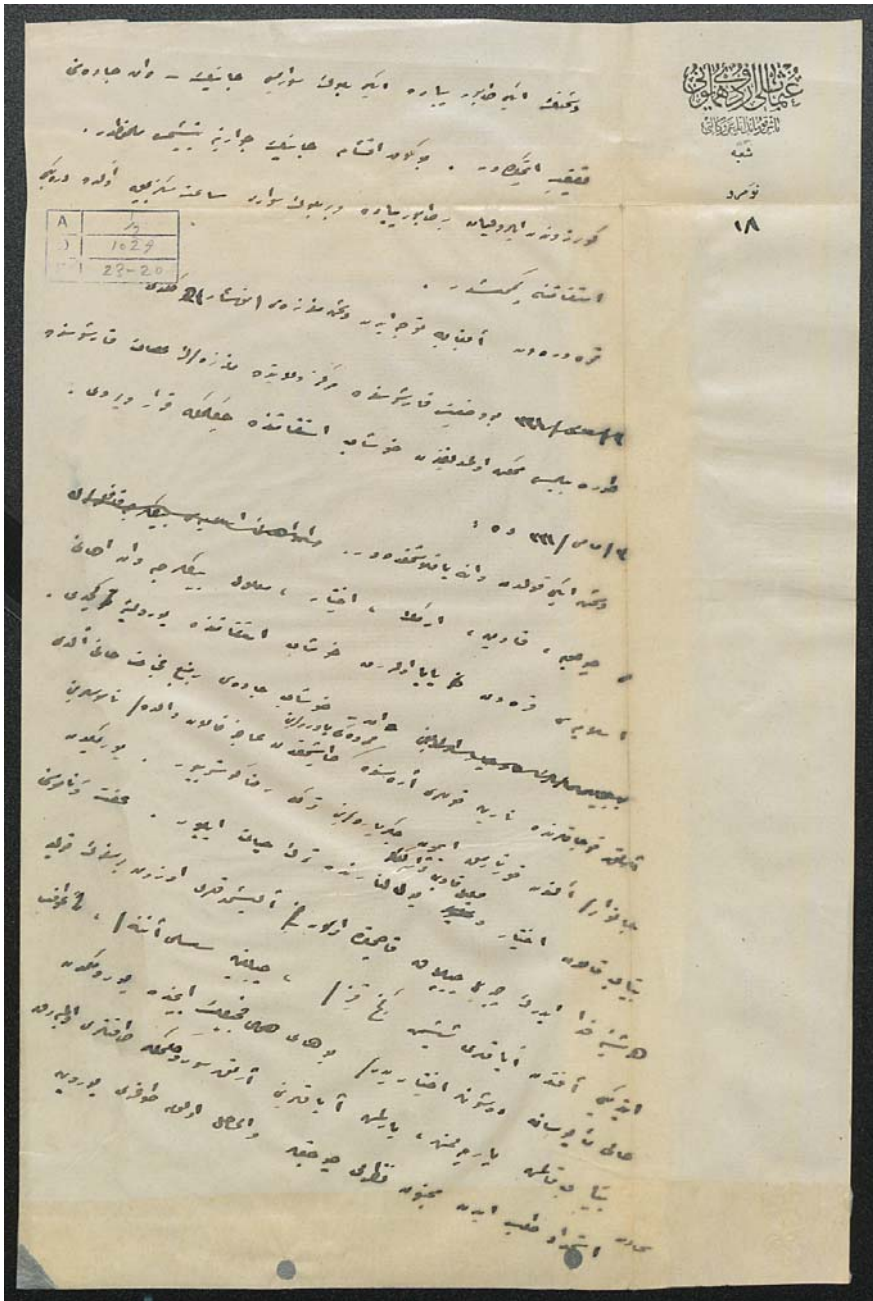
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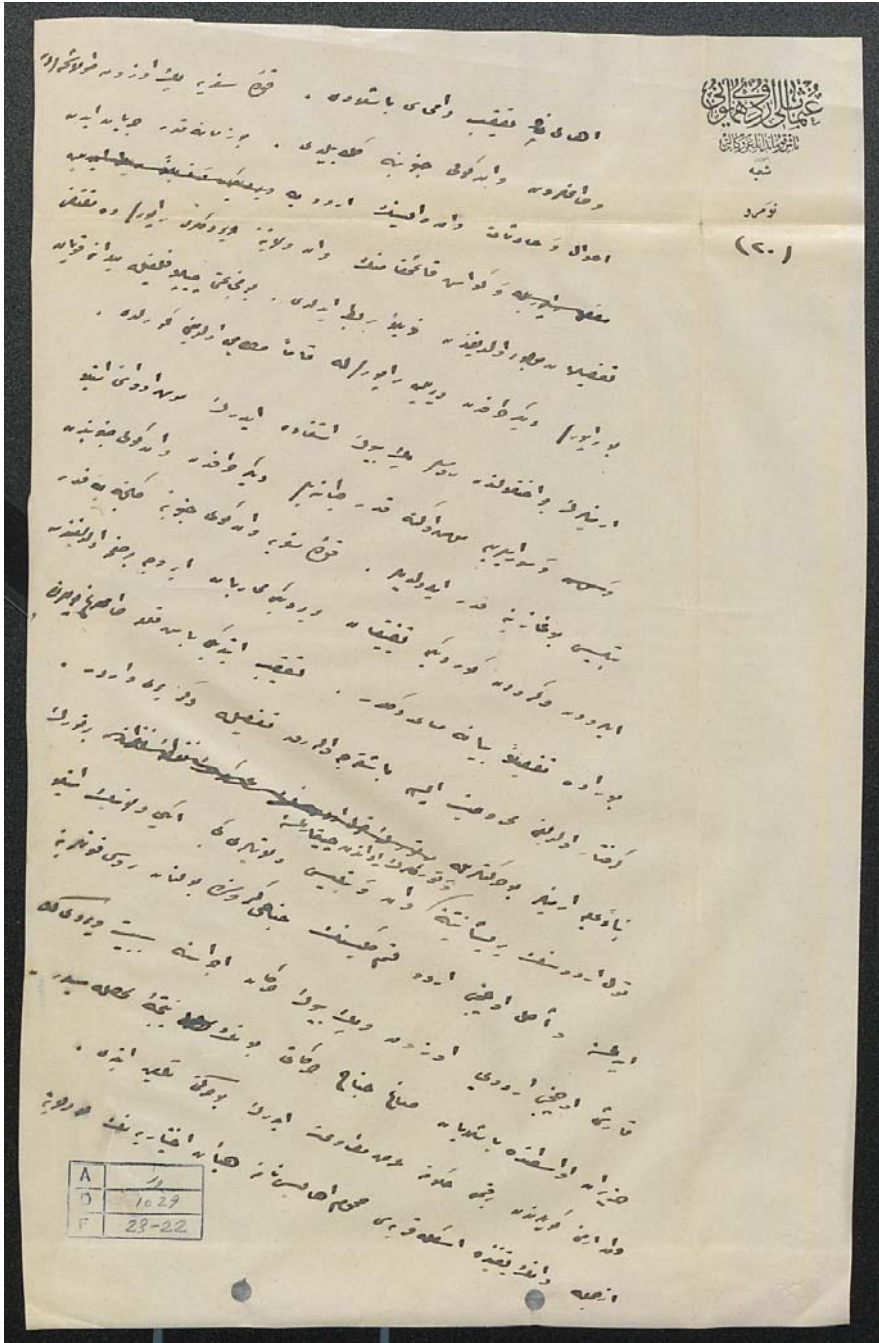
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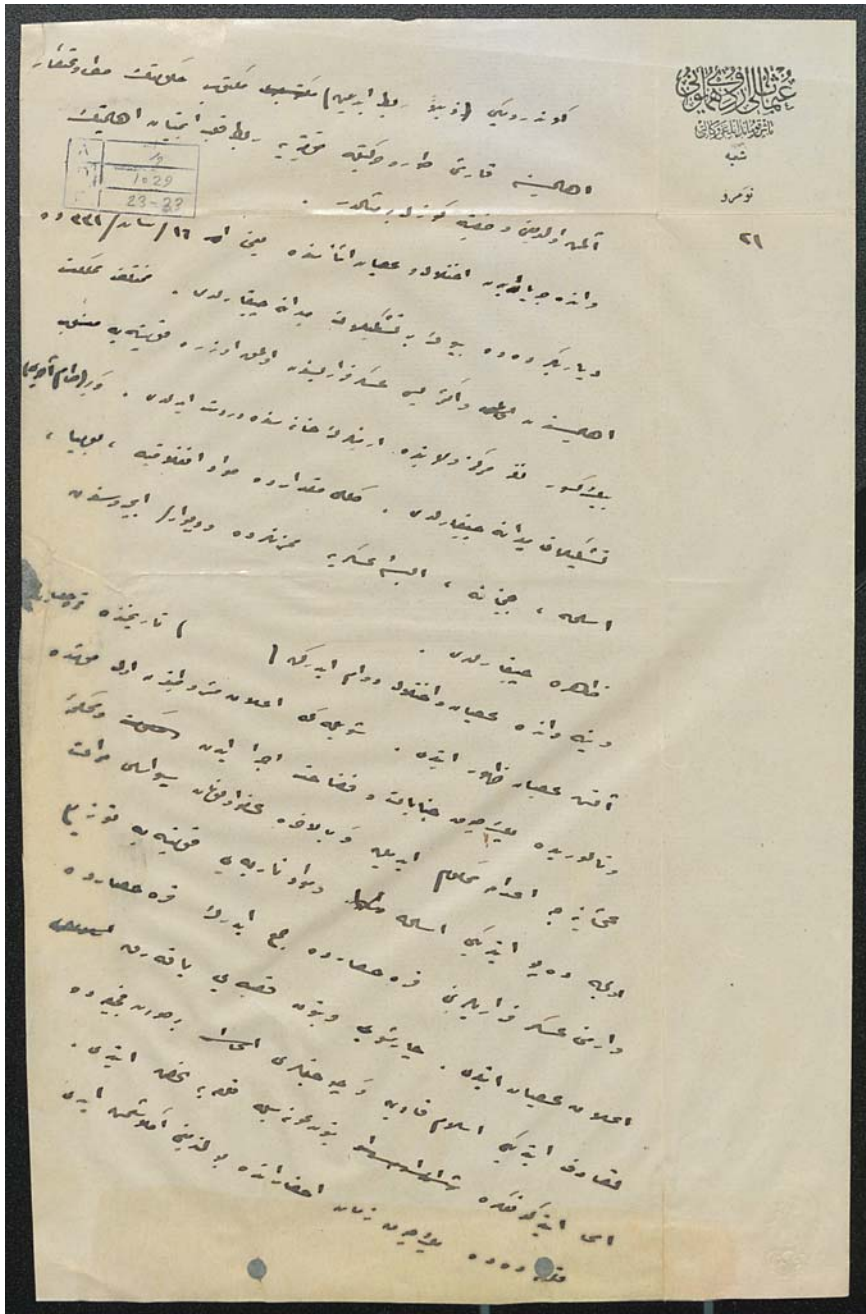
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