

## RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŐTIRMA MAKALESİ

**To cite this article:** Serap Bozpolat Ayan, “An Armenian Revolutionary from Istanbul to Marseille: Kaspar Nalbandian”, *Review of Armenian Studies*, Issue 48 (2023): 109-126.

**Received:** 18.08.2023

**Accepted:** 29.11.2023

# AN ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY FROM ISTANBUL TO MARSEILLE: KASPAR NALBANDIAN

(İSTANBUL'DAN MARSİLYA'YA SİVASLI BİR ERMENİ İHTİLALCİ:  
KASPAR NALBANDIAN)

Serap BOZPOLAT AYAN\*

**Abstract:** *Sivas, one of the six provinces (Vilayat-i Sitte) important for the Armenian community living in the Ottoman State due to substantial numbers of Armenians inhabiting the region, became one of the important centers of the Armenian revolutionary movements in the Empire. The Hunchakian and Dashnaksutiun Parties were active in the region by establishing branches, and the members of Armenian political organizations from Sivas soon came to operate outside the province as well, in a very wide geography extending to the rest of the Ottoman lands and beyond. Kaspar Nalbandian, the subject of the present study, was one of these Armenians.*

*Making extensive use of archive documents, this study covers the pursuit of Kaspar Nalbandian, a member of the Armenian opposition to the Ottoman State, beyond the borders of the Empire. In this context, the study attempts to provide insights into the functioning of the state mechanisms on these issues, and to present the journey of an Armenian individual to offer glimpses on the Armenian movements in the era.*

**Keywords:** *Ottoman, Armenian, terror, crime, fugitive*

\* ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2146-6988>  
Lecturer at Sivas Cumhuriyet University  
Email: serapbozpolat@gmail.com

**Öz:** *Sivas, yoğun Ermeni nüfusu ve Ermeniler açısından büyük öneme sahip olan Vilayat-ı Sittenin bir parçası olması sebepleriyle Osmanlı dönemindeki Ermeni devrimci hareketlenmelerinin de önemli merkezlerinden birisi olmuştur. Hınçak ve Taşnak cemiyetlerinin bölgede şubeler kurmak yoluyla etkin oldukları düşünüldüğünde, Sivaslı Ermeni komitecilerinin de sadece Sivas sınırlarında değil, Osmanlı ülkesini ve haricini kapsayan oldukça geniş bir coğrafyada etkin oldukları sonucu kendiliğinden ortaya çıkacaktır. Çalışmaya konu olan Kaspar Nalbandian da bu Ermenilerden birisidir.*

*Bu çalışma arşiv vesikaları ışığında Osmanlı Devleti'ne muhalif Sivaslı bir Ermeni olan Kaspar Nalbantyan'ın nezdinde bir suçlunun ülke sınırlarını aşan takip sürecini ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın hem devlet mekanizmasının bu konulardaki işleyişinin gözlenmesine katkı sağlaması hem de dönem içerisindeki bireysel Ermeni hareketlenmelerine bir örnek teşkil etmesi amaçlanmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Osmanlı, Ermeni, terör, suç, kaçak*

### Introduction

The subject of this study is Kaspar Nalbandian, an Armenian revolutionary/anarchist from Sivas in the last era of the Ottoman Empire. The study is based on the archival documents pertaining to Nalbandian and aims to give an example of individual Armenian mobilization against the Ottoman state through a cat-and-mouse game from Sivas to Marseille in the relevant period. In addition, a small light is hoped to be shed on the functioning of the state mechanism in these matters. Moreover, alongside the general uprisings and prominent names, the stories of individuals whose names have not been mentioned in the sources so far will help us in coming up with new approaches to the details of the subject. Each new name and event will contribute to the completion of our knowledge about the functioning of the Ottoman state as well as the Armenians of the era.

Available documents on Kaspar Nalbandian universally mention Nalbandian's involvement in the Occupation of the Ottoman Bank. Yet, Nalbandian's name does not come up in the archive documents from the date of the incident, nor does it come up in published studies on the Occupation<sup>1</sup> or the memoirs<sup>2</sup> covering the era. Even more interestingly, all the archival documents in which Nalbandian's name is mentioned are from 1906 –ten years after the incident.

At this point, some brief information about the Occupation of the Ottoman Bank would be helpful:

### A Brief Story of the Occupation of the Ottoman Bank

From the second half of the Nineteenth Century onwards, Armenian nationalists, with the incitement and support of European states, Russia in particular, began to revolt in many regions of Anatolia. Towards the end of the century, they decided to carry out an action in Istanbul that would cause a splash in the world, and to bring about a de facto intervention of European powers in the Ottoman Empire. They made their plans to achieve these goals. The Ottoman Bank was chosen as the target of action, as most of its personnel were European nationals. The Bank was to be raided and occupied, with bombs to be exploded in many parts of Istanbul at the same time. Thus, the conspirators expected that the European states would intervene in the Ottoman

---

1 Fikrettin Yavuz, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Ermeni Terörü: 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Publications, 2015) ; Şahin Doğan, "Rus Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını", *SUTAD*, December 2020/50, 341-355 ; Hülya Eraslan, *Osmanlı Bankası Baskını'nın (1896) Osmanlı Ermeni Basınında Ele Alınışı*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Gazi University, Institute of Social Sciences, (September: 2016).

2 Atilla Tuygan, *Osmanlı Bankası Armen Garo'nun Anıları* (Istanbul: Belge Publications, 2009).

Empire with the reflex of protecting their own subjects, and the Ottoman Armenians would gain their physical protection.

In line with the plans, the militants mobilized on the morning of August 26, 1896. The attacks started around 1 pm. The Ottoman Bank was raided and occupied by armed militants carrying sacks of bombs and taking everyone inside hostage. 31 people were involved in the occupation. Simultaneously, bombs started to explode in various neighborhoods of Istanbul. The commotion was bigger than expected. As the occupation continued, a communiqué was prepared to be sent to European embassies in Istanbul. As a first response, Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II accepted the mediation of Maximov, the first interpreter of the Russian Embassy, and negotiations began. In the end, even though many innocent lives were lost and the bank building suffered substantial damage, the militants' demands were granted and they were allowed to leave Istanbul freely. The 17 surviving militants were taken from Istanbul to Marseille on the French cruise ship Gironde.<sup>3</sup>

### Who was Kaspar Nalbandian?

On February 16, 1906, according to the letter sent by the Ottoman Consulate General (*Başşehbender*) in Marseille to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nalbandian's physical characteristics were as follows: He was twenty-nine years old. His height was approximately one meter and sixty-nine centimeters. He had black hair with a narrow forehead and dark eyes. His nose and mouth were of medium size while his face was long. His complexion was pale, and he had a full black beard.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, according to the information provided

3 For detailed information on the Occupation, see: *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni İsyancıları (1896-1909)*, III (Ankara: T.C. Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Publications, 2009), pp. 3-45 ; Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol IV. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Publications, 1995), pp. 143-145 ; *Ermeni Komitelerinin A' mâl ve Harekât-ı İhtilâliyyesi*, Ed. Erdoğan Cengiz (Ankara: Başbakanlık Publications, 1983), pp. 25-26 ; Yavuz, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Ermeni Terörü...* ; Doğan, "Rus Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını", 341-355 ; Hülya Eraslan, *Osmanlı Bankası Baskını'nın (1896) Osmanlı Ermeni Basınında Ele Alınışı*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Gazi University Institute of Social Sciences, September 2016 ; Selami Kılıç, *Osmanlı-Ermeni İhtilâfi ve Sonuçları* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Publications, 2017), p. 42 ; Davut Kılıç, *Osmanlı Ermenileri Arasında Dinî ve Siyasî Mücadeleler* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Publications, 2006), p. 190 ; Yılmaz Öztuna, "Ermeni Sorunun Oluşturduğu Siyasal Ortam", *Osmanlı'nın Son Döneminde Ermeniler*, Ed. Türkkiye Ataöv (Ankara: Kültür, Sanat ve Yayın Kurulu Publications, 2002), p. 55 ; Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin Siyasî Tarihçesi (1877-1914)* (Ankara: Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001), p. 74 ; Necmettin Alkan, "Ermeni Teröristlerin Osmanlı Başşehri İstanbul'daki Saldırıları ve 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını (ABD'deki 11 Eylül Saldırılarıyla Bir Mukayese)", *Türk Yurdu*, May 2006 - Year 95 - Issue 225 ; Levent Ürer-Asuman Kutlu, "Algının Çerçevesinde: İngiliz Basınında 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını", *Bilig Spring 2023/Issue 105*, pp. 79-97 ; Necmettin Alkan, "Alman Basınına Göre Osmanlı Bankası Baskını ve İstanbul'da Ermeni Terörü", *Ermeni Araştırmaları II. Uluslararası Ermeni Kongresi*, Ankara, Turkey, 2004 ; Gürçan Çilesiz, *İstanbul'da 30 Saatlik Kaos: 26 Ağustos 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını ve Ermeni Katliamı* (Istanbul: Belge Publications, 2015).

4 Ottoman Archives of the Presidency of the Republic (BOA), Dahiliye Nezâreti Tesrî-i Muamelât (DH.TMIK.M), 215/49, 5

by the Consulate General in Liverpool a day later, upon arriving in Marseille, he shaved both sides of his beard and left only on his chin covered by his beard.<sup>5</sup> In another letter sent from the Ministry of Police to the Ministry of Interior on August 29, 1906, Nalbandian was described as “about thirty-five years old, of medium height, almost physically built, with a swarthy long face, dark auburn hair, a large and pointed beard, an open forehead, hazel eyes and a sharp gaze that attracted attention”.<sup>6</sup> Obviously the two descriptions do not belong to the same person. It seems that the authorities did not have a precise description of Nalbandian.

The investigations also culminated in various documents containing a short biography of Kaspar Nalbandian. According to information provided, Nalbandian, a member of the anarchist groups, was originally from the Akdeğirmen neighborhood of Sivas. His father was Kalost Nalbandian, son of Kirkor. He studied at the local Jesuit school for three years, then worked as a grocer’s apprentice for a few years. In 1893, when he was twenty years old, he came to live in Istanbul with his father, who was a janitor at the German-Israelite School near the Şişhane Police Station in Beyoğlu. After three years there, he was involved in the Occupation of the Ottoman Bank in 1896. During the incident he injured his arm while throwing a grenade. After the dust settled, he was taken out of the bank with his co-conspirators and deported.<sup>7</sup>

### Searching for Kaspar Nalbandian

The first document mentioning Kaspar Nalbandian, sent to the Ottoman Ministry of Interior on February 11, 1906, bearing the signature of Grand Vizier Ferit, reports that Nalbandian traveled to Liverpool with a passport obtained from the Iranian Consulate in Plovdiv. Nalbandian had applied to the Iranian Consulate there and received his passport visa to travel to the United States, but according to the latest information, he was in Marseille. Therefore, it was stated that his behavior and actions there would be monitored by the Consulate General in Marseille in line with the letter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that the results would be reported. Moreover, the letter requested a photograph of him be obtained and sent to the Ministry of Police, and that if he came to the country, he should be immediately captured in accordance with the Sultan’s will which was to be announced to the relevant authorities.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, on February 12, 1906, the Commission for Accelerated Action

---

5 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 14

6 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 74

7 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 48 (29 April 1906); BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 51 (23 May 1906); BOA, Hariciye Nezareti Siyasi (HR.SYS), 2787/6 (29 January 1906), BOA, Hariciye Nezâreti Londra Sefareti Belgeleri (HR.SFR.3), 560/45, 4 (23 May 1906)

8 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 2

and Reform sent a letter to the province governorships of Aydın, Edirne, Salonica, Ioannina, Iskodra, Hudavendigar, Aleppo, Trabzon, Kastamonu, Adana, Beirut, Sivas, Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Diyarbakır, as well as the governorates of Catalca, Izmit, Biga, and Jerusalem, informing them about Nalbandian and demanding necessary action.<sup>9</sup>

On the same day, the Consulate General in Marseille wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, providing detailed information about Nalbandian's situation. The letter read as follows:

“Upon receiving a telegram from the Ministry regarding a person named ‘K. Nalbandian’, I began to make any inquiries within means, with a view to exposing Nalbandian and keeping his behavior under surveillance. Indeed, I learned that a person with this name has been residing in a cheap hotel since February 1st. Nalbandian does not receive newspaper reporters or anyone else at the hotel. I have been keeping Nalbandian under observation in order to understand with whom he has contacts with and what he is doing. Nalbandian registered himself in the hotel book as ‘Nalbandian Jorji [George]’ from ‘Lausanne’ [Switzerland]. Every day he leaves the hotel at the same time, walks around the city, goes to the Greek coffee house frequented by people from Ottoman and Greek lands, eats at a small restaurant adjacent to this coffee house, and visits several times a day the Armenian hotel where poor Muslims and Armenians passing through Marseille stay. I am keeping a close eye on this hotel, which is a hotbed for some notorious people, and I am waiting for legal grounds to intervene. Most of the Muslims and Armenians I have mentioned above are originally from Harput and are just some individuals who are on their way to America without passports. Since no letters to a ‘Nalbandian’ were delivered to the hotel, my efforts to obtain one of his letters have been fruitless. Nalbandian does not know that he is under surveillance, but he is extremely cautious. That he is broke is evident from his inability to pay for his room. I think he is waiting for some money to arrive, to continue his journey. Nalbandian is often seen with ‘Arotion Mukazian’, originally from Samsun, who poses as a traveling merchant. Although ‘Nalbandian’ told the owner of the hotel he was staying at that he was on his way to Russia, according to my intelligence, he intends to go to Bulgaria. However, in the event of any change in his activities and movements, I will inform you of the situation. Moreover, when he leaves this place, I will telegraph his destination. And if I succeed in taking a photo of Nalbandian, I will submit it immediately.”<sup>10</sup>

9 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 3

10 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 15; BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 6

It did not take long for new information to follow this letter. According to the information provided in the letter sent by the Consulate General in Marseille to the Ministry of Police just four days later, on February 16, 1906, Nalbandian departed for Batumi on the French Pake Company's ferry called "Sirkas". Another letter sent on the same day by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Interior repeated existing information, adding that a telegram was sent to the Consulate General in Batumi, requesting surveillance of Nalbandian's behavior and actions, and asking for confidential reporting of the matter to the local government in Batumi for necessary measures to be taken.<sup>11</sup> An encrypted telegram sent by the Commission for Accelerated Action and Reform to the province governorships of Aydin, Edirne, Salonica, Ioannina, Iskodra, Trabzon, Adana, Kastamonu, and Aleppo, as well as the governorate of Biga informed them about the issue, demanding due diligence in line with the will of the Sultan.<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, the Consulate General in Liverpool gave the news of Nalbandian having left for Bulgaria after staying in Marseille for a while.<sup>13</sup>

Apparently, the confusion about Nalbandian's whereabouts continued. Five days later, on February 21, 1906, upon the arrival of the ferry Sirkas in Biga, in accordance with the Commission's letter dated February 16, 1906, the Governorate of Biga sent an "extremely urgent" encrypted telegram to the Ministry of Police. According to the telegram, Nalbandian of Sivas did not land in Biga, but a person matching Nalbandian's description was found to be on the ferry with three of his friends, and the ferry departed for Istanbul at around 3 pm.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, since the ferry was not expected to stop there for long and was expected to proceed towards the Black Sea, the Ministry was asked to write a letter to be delivered personally to the Commission, so as to notify the provinces once again through encrypted communications.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, this investigation not only sought to locate Nalbandian based on physical surveillance, but also to obtain information about the passport he used on his trip. But, once again, there is no clarity on this issue, just as the description of Nalbandian and the route remained murky. Indeed, in a telegram dated February 16, 1906 sent to Tevfik Pasha from Ziya Bey, the Consul General in Marseille, it was reported that the Russian Consul did not issue a visa on the passport the Armenian in question obtained under a false name, and that his photograph could not be obtained. Yet, in a document sent as an attachment to the letter dated February 21, 1906, it was stated that Nalbandian

---

11 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 8

12 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 9

13 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 14 (17 February 1906)

14 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 10/1

15 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 10/2

had a visa issued on his passport by the Russian Consul and boarded the ferry under a false name, adding that this passport had a clear photograph of him. Despite this, there is no record of such a photograph.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, the ferry, which was believed to be carrying Nalbandian, continued on its way. On February 22, 1906, in his reply to the relevant letters of the Ministry of Interior, Şefik Bey, the Minister of Police stated that the ferry Sirkas of the French Pake Company, which had Kaspar Nalbandian from Sivas along with three of his Armenian friends among its passengers, arrived in Istanbul that day, but Nalbandian did not get off the ferry. According to the information provided by the Minister of Police, Nalbandian's main purpose was to encourage Armenians in Russia to emigrate to Ottoman lands. For this purpose, he traveled from America to Marseille and from there he boarded this ferry to Batumi. A special officer was secretly placed on the ferry in order to apprehend Nalbandian as soon as he disembarked at one of the ports the ferry was to visit, and Trabzon Province and Canik District governorships were notified about the matter via encrypted telegram. Thus, Nalbandian was to be tracked not only in the ports but also on the ferry. The ferry left for Batumi at 1:30 am.<sup>17</sup>

All the information provided up to this date was then forwarded by the Commission for Accelerated Action and Reform to the Grand Vizier's Office, on February 26, 1906.<sup>18</sup> This can be taken as an indication that the Grand Vizier's Office was taking the issue quite seriously.

Upon being notified on February 22, 1906 about the situation, the Governorship of Trabzon Province, on February 26, 1906, sent an encrypted telegram by Reşad, the Governor of Trabzon, reporting that one of the friends of Kaspar Nalbandian was a person by the name of Agop of Muş. This person was actually Kandil, son of Agik, from Akçan village in Muş province. Kandil was also among those involved in the Occupation of the Ottoman Bank, and together with his friends Kaspar, Agop, Artan, and Arhanik, they fled to their province of birth, either by land or by small boats hugging the coast, after disembarking in Batumi.<sup>19</sup>

A telegram sent by the Consulate General in Batumi to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on February 28, 1906 contains details about Kaspar Nalbandian's passport and the pseudonym he used. According to this telegram, in addition to a passport that had been obtained in Sofia, Nalbandian had an Iranian passport issued in the name of "Avedis Nikogos" by the Iranian Consul in

---

16 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 11

17 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 12

18 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 13

19 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 16



Marseille and a visa issued by the Russian Consulate in the same city. He entered Batumi with this passport. Upon request, the Iranian Consul in Batumi stated that he could not hand Nalbandian over, but could detain him for fifteen days on bail. Arriving from Trabzon on the same ferry, the special officer reminded the Consulate General in Batumi that the detention of Nalbandian was a requirement of the Sultan's will, whereupon the Consul General requested the issuance of the necessary orders for him.<sup>20</sup>

Again, in his letter dated February 28, 1906 to the Interior Ministry, Foreign Minister Tevfik Bey provided updates on the current situation and noted that Nalbandian might go to Bulgaria as reported from Liverpool and pointed out the necessity of due investigations in Bulgaria.<sup>21</sup> In a letter he sent a day later, he stated that since Nalbandian was an Ottoman subject and a native of Sivas, the relevant consulate was notified about the need for Nalbandian's handover by the Iranian Consulate, and dispatch to Trabzon.<sup>22</sup> Trabzon Province was also informed about the situation and asked to take Nalbandian under protection when he arrived in Trabzon, followed by reports on his situation.<sup>23</sup>

However, the Iranian Consul in Batumi declared that he could not hand over Nalbandian unless he received orders from the Iranian Embassy in Petersburg.<sup>24</sup> In response, required orders were issued immediately, and Ottoman Ambassador in Petersburg met with the Iranian Chargé d'Affaires as the Iranian Ambassador was in his homeland. As a result of this meeting, the Iranian Charge d'Affaires promised to send a telegram to the Iranian Consulate in Batumi to deliver Nalbandian and send him to the Iranian Consulate in Trabzon.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, Foreign Minister Tevfik Bey reported that Nalbandian was under the patronage of an Armenian committee, that the leaders of the Committee frequently met with him, that the Embassy in Batumi, the Iranian Consulate and the Batumi local police had been threatened many times due to the investigations sustained, and expressed his reservations by pointing out that Nalbandian's presence in Batumi and establishing contact with the subversives would cause new problems.<sup>26</sup> He also reported the entire process in detail to the Grand Vizier's Office on March 7, 1906.<sup>27</sup>

---

20 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 17

21 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 18

22 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 19

23 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 20 (3 March 1906)

24 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 22

25 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 21 (3 March 1906)

26 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 22

27 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 29

### Failure to Find Kaspar Nalbandian

A telegram sent from Trabzon on March 5, 1906 contained new and striking information obtained as a result of the investigations. As can be recalled from previous correspondence, it was known that Nalbandian was on board the Pake Company's ferry Sirkas and that a special officer was even stationed on board. However, now, according to Reşad Bey, the Governor of Trabzon, the person on the ferry was not the real Kaspar Nalbandian, but his brother Avedis, while the real Kaspar was a school teacher in Lausanne, Switzerland. Although the person in question was requested to be handed over to the Consulate, the only measure that could be applied was to have him detained by the Iranian Consulate on cash bail for a period of 15 days, due to his possession of a duly issued passport. It was stated that his photograph should be obtained immediately so that it could be possible to determine whether the passport belonged to him or not, within the said time frame.<sup>28</sup>

While all this correspondence was going on, it seems that the letter dated March 3, 1906 from the Consulate General in Liverpool had either not yet arrived or had been overlooked. According to the Consul General in Liverpool, although the letters Nalbandian sent from Marseille reported that he was to go to Batumi, he had actually reported that piece of information in order to keep his actual destination secret, and his actual destination was Bulgaria, as previously stated in a letter dated February 17, 1906. The person who was going to Batumi was another Armenian activist named "Shahinian". Shahinian traveled with Nalbandian from Liverpool to Marseille, and it is possible that they exchanged passports.<sup>29</sup> This information from Liverpool was reported to the Ministry of Interior by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 11, 1906. The Consul General in Batumi was also notified about the situation.<sup>30</sup>

It is now clear that it was not Kaspar Nalbandian who traveled to Batumi on the ferry Sirkas. But the question of the identity of that traveler was to occupy the relevant authorities for a long time to come.

On March 13, 1906, a reply letter from the Consul General in Batumi to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided very detailed information. The letter read as follows:

"The person who arrived in Batumi on the ferry Sirkas with an Iranian passport issued in the name of Avadis Nikogos was in fact Avadis Nalbandian. This was confirmed by two Armenians, one of whom, Yegenoglu Migirdich, said that he got acquainted with Avadis

---

28 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 24, p.25

29 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 26, p.27

30 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 32, p.33

Nalbandian in Egypt and now recognized him completely. Avadis Nalbandian had a permission slip signed by M. Nalbandian authorizing the itinerant merchant Avadis Nikogos to sign certain documents and issue receipts on behalf of M. Nalbandian. Avadis Nalbandian also told many people that his brother Mardros has been running a school in Switzerland and that he intended to take Armenian children from the Caucasus to that school, for them to receive an excellent education, and even Yegenoglu Migirdich offered to entrust his son to him. According to the information I have received, he came to Batumi with no money other than two French gold coins and was welcomed well and given money by the Armenian committees. Nalbandian was accompanied by Vartan of Kichi and Kandil of Muş during his voyage to Batumi. Likewise, these mischief-makers, who had Iranian passports, traveled to Tbilisi. The Iranian Consul detained Avadis Nalbandian here for fifteen days, at the end of which time, having received no orders, let him go, whereupon Avadis left Batumi for Tbilisi. The Iranian Consul admitted that he had no doubts about Avadis Nalbandian's identity, but stated that he was obliged in good conscience to protect Avadis Nikogos because his passport was apparently legal. Until that day, the Iranian Consul had not received any orders from Petersburg. It was reported by the Governor of Trabzon that the necessary orders were given to Sivas Province, for the dispatch of a photograph of Avadis Nalbandian, in order to prove his identity."<sup>31</sup>

On March 31, 1906, a letter from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Police provided information about the existing correspondence up to this date, and mentioned a relevant letter from Sivas Province. The original manuscript is not available, but as far as the information provided in the subsequent letter from the Ministry of Interior, the said letter from the Governorship of Sivas Province provided the description and identities of two of the Nalbandians, Kirkor and Mardiros, who were elsewhere at the time, along with a photograph of Mardiros, who was the brother of the Nalbandian Pastor Ferdinisi of Sivas, and who at the time was a French instructor at the "Arame Lisan" school in Lausanne, and stated that the other one had fled to Egypt some time after the Occupation of the Ottoman Bank, and that the wanted Nalbandian could be this Kirkor, son of Kalost. In addition, based on the previous letter from Trabzon Province, in which it was reported that Kaspar was in Switzerland, Kaspar's resemblance to Mardiros mentioned in the letter from Sivas Province was pointed out and the launch of a detailed investigation was requested, accompanied with the request to take action in accordance with the Sultan's will, in line with the results to be obtained.<sup>32</sup>

---

31 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 35

32 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 25

It seems that the questions and possibilities about Kaspar's identity and whereabouts were only increasing. Naturally, all relevant authorities in a vast geography were trying to find a solution to this issue. For example, on April 2, 1906, the Ambassador in Petersburg requested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to order the Consul in Batum to send his kavass to Tbilisi in order to determine whether the person being pursued in Tbilisi was indeed a wanted person.<sup>33</sup>

This request from Petersburg was conveyed by Foreign Minister Tevfik Pasha to the Grand Vizier's Office on April 3, 1906. In addition, Tevfik Pasha advised the Embassy in Tehran to make an attempt before the Iranian Vizier of Foreign Affairs. The subject of the recommendation was to request the Iranian Consul in Tbilisi to hand over Nalbandian, who was likely to be in Tbilisi, to the Consul there.<sup>34</sup>

On the same day, a detailed report by the officer who had boarded the same ferry with the person believed to be Nalbandian was included in the letter sent from the Minister of Police to the Ministry of Interior. In fact, it had already been concluded that the person on the ferry was not Kaspar. Nevertheless, it seems that the possibility could not be ruled out completely. In fact, although the report is detailed, it contains more information about other Armenians on the ferry, who are believed to have been in contact with Nalbandian, than about Nalbandian himself. Accordingly, Migirdich, son of Senekerim Bakkalyan, also known as Harharyan from Sivas, who had sailed to Samsun on the ferry Sirkas, met Nalbandian on the steamer. Serkiz, who had been taken on board for Sivas, did not disembark in Samsun and when he was found hidden in the engine room of the ferry when it arrived in Trabzon, he was handed over by the captain to the French Consul, and then detained by the local government. After reaching Batumi and staying there for a few days, receiving the letters he was expecting from Jorj (George), also known as Kigork, from Malatya, Nalbandian left for Marseille. But then he and Kigork intended to go to Batumi together again. In addition, three other Armenians, Ohannes (son of Hani from Kabakçı village of Kigi District), Kandil (also known as Ogo, son of Agich from Akcan Village of Mus), and Sinpat (from Kars) were found to be on board the ferry. Of these, Serkiz and Migirdich were to be reported to the Trabzon Province Governorship and Canik District Governorate that they would be traveling to Sivas with their documents, while the need to conduct a detailed investigation was to be communicated to their respective localities.<sup>35</sup>

On the one hand, the pursuit of Nalbandian continued on the assumption that he was then in Tbilisi, and attempts were made with the Iranian Consulate for

---

33 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 36-37

34 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 38

35 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 39

his delivery. On the other hand, the reply received from the Consulate General in Tbilisi revealed the futility of all these efforts; the reported person was not in Tbilisi.<sup>36</sup>

Every possibility was pursued, but Nalbandian could not be found. Nevertheless, the search was kept going, meticulously. A letter by the Ministry of Police to the Ministry of Interior on April 29, 1906 stated for the first time the reason for Kaspar's trip, and thus for these persistent searches. In the document, it was stated that the fact that the suspect traveled from Bulgaria under another name to Batumi via Marseille and Istanbul, and served the purpose of making subversive attempts and entering the country, and even if this was not possible, to follow the subversive attempts closely. It was added that in the case it was not possible to secure the handover of the suspect to the government, he would try to enter the country by finding an opportunity, and for this reason, it was necessary to continue the pursuit by the consulates.<sup>37</sup>

As stated in the letter dated May 21, 1906 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Grand Vizier's Office, the search for Nalbandian remained fruitless. The investigation nevertheless continued in full swing. Since most of the Armenian subversives were in the cities of Yerevan and Elizavetpol (Ganja) at that time, the Consul General in Tbilisi appealed to the Iranian Consul General to advise the Iranian Consuls in Yerevan and Elizavetpol to carry out investigations to ensure the discovery of Nalbandian. However, Nalbandian was reportedly not in Yerevan or Elizavetpol. Meanwhile, the Consulate continued with investigations in other parts of the Caucasus as well. The goal was to ensure the immediate capture of the suspect and his delivery to Trabzon, if he could be located.<sup>38</sup>

While this correspondence traffic continued, measures were also taken about the possibility that Nalbandian might travel to other countries outside this region, and the Foreign Ministry notified all embassies of the Ottoman Empire from London to Colombo with orders to be careful.<sup>39</sup>

The letter sent on May 30, 1906, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Musurus Pasha, the "Ambassador of the Turkish Empire to London"<sup>40</sup> noted

---

36 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 43

37 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 48, 64

38 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 54-55

39 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 58

40 I Stefanaki Musurus Pasha (1840-1907) was the son of the famous Kostaki Musurus Pasha. In 1860, he was appointed as the Second Privy Secretary to the Ottoman Embassy in London, under the patronage of his father. In 1868, he was promoted to the position of the First Secretary at the same embassy. He served as the Ambassador to Rome between 1880-1885, as the Governor of Samos between 1896-1899, and as the Ambassador to London between 1902-1907. He died in 1907.

the possibility that Nalbandian might go there in line with some intelligence received, requesting Musurus Pasha to be cautious, and not to issue visa to his passport under any circumstances in case the suspect went to the United Kingdom.<sup>41</sup> After receiving this order, Musurus Pasha carried out the necessary correspondence with the relevant consulates. On June 9, 1906, in his letter addressed to the Turkish Consul General Azaryan Efendi, he wrote the following:

“Mr. Consul General, I would like to draw your attention to a situation concerning a person named Gasbar Nalbandian, based on a report from the Ministry. I advise you to refusing to issue a visa to this person, originally from Sivas, who was exiled from the Empire and sent to Marseille, and who obtained an Iranian passport under another name (Avadis Nikogos), should he apply to your embassy under this name. I would like to ask you to take certain precautions to prevent this person from escaping from your custody.”<sup>42</sup>

Signifying the lengths Ottoman officials went to find Kaspar Nalbandian, correspondences were made even with the other side of the world. On July 13, 1906, Mohamed Macan Markar Efendi, the Consul of the Ottoman Empire in Colombo, responded to Musurus Pasha’s letter by stating that Nalbandian did not come to his office under the name mentioned or under any other name and that he would always observe the instructions given in the memorandum.<sup>43</sup>

Going back to talking about Europe, such correspondence were not limited to the one sent to London, as a similar letter was sent to the Embassy in Rome on the same day. In his reply, the Ambassador in Rome stated that he had notified the consuls in Italy about the situation, but asked for a detailed description of the suspect and, if possible, a photograph of him in order to obtain faster results.<sup>44</sup>

The replies received from the Embassy to Serbia and the Embassy to Bulgaria, to the letters sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Serbia and Bulgaria requested an investigation by the Ministry on whether the description of the person who traveled to Sofia with some friends in previous January and who met with Bulgarian and Armenian subversives, who contacted and acted in concert with Serbian subversive Georgovich, and who was later learned to bear

---

41 BOA, HR.SFR.3, 560/45, 3

42 BOA, Documents of the Consultation Chamber of the Legal Counsel to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (HR.HMS.İŞO), 229/57, 1

43 BOA, HR.SFR.3, 560/51, 1

44 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 61

the name Avadis, as a forty-five year old man of medium height, with black hair and beard matched the description of Avadis Nikogos or not.<sup>45</sup> As a result of the investigations carried out in this direction, it was stated that although the description of the persons in question was similar, the person in question could not be the wanted person since there was a 13-year age difference.<sup>46</sup>

In the letter sent to the Foreign Ministry from the Embassy in Paris, it was stated that the passport issued to “Nalbandian” by the Iranian Consul in Marseille was issued upon presentation of an Iranian passport issued by the Iranian honorary merchant representative in Sofia. In view of the seriousness of the matter, the ambassador warned the consul not to issue such documents to Armenians who had never been Iranian subjects.<sup>47</sup>

Again, the letter dated July 14, 1906 sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Embassy in Petersburg, stated that there was no Avadis Nalbandian or Avedis Nikogos in Baku, according to the information obtained from the Baku Police Directorate.<sup>48</sup>

In the letter sent from the Ministry of Police to the Ministry of Interior on July 7, 1906, it was pointed out that Nalbandian might have entered the country under another name due to the fact that he could not be captured and his location could not be determined, and it was requested that investigations be carried out with the utmost care and seriousness in all relevant provinces as well as –just in case– in Batumi, Tbilisi, and other parts of the Caucasus by appropriate and safe means, to reveal his whereabouts and to take the necessary action.<sup>49</sup>

The correspondence regarding Nalbandian continued repeatedly until September 4, 1906, but to no avail. A serious effort was made to find Nalbandian; he was searched for in the country, in the Caucasus, in the Balkans, in Europe, and even as far away as in Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Although some clues were obtained from time to time, no photograph of him could be obtained, no precise information about his description could be obtained, nor could he be located. The fact that Nalbandian could not be found despite all these efforts and such extensive communication may suggest that he used a different name than his real name and the pseudonyms mentioned in the documents. On the other hand, it can also be assumed that he was protected by the Armenian revolutionary committees, as indicated in several documents. In

---

45 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 58/2, 60

46 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 67-68

47 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 69

48 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 70

49 BOA, DH.TMIK.M. 215/49, 64

fact, judging by the suspicious attitude of the Iranian consuls, it is possible that Iran was acting as a patron to the Armenians and thus Nalbandian, to some extent.

### **To Conclude**

In 1896, after the major terrorist attack that was the Occupation of the Ottoman Bank, which had extremely serious consequences, the perpetrators were not only left unpunished, they were released without even being questioned. Whatever the reason, this was a sign of major weakness for the Ottoman Empire. Was the fact that one of the names implicated in the incident being sought with so extensive efforts virtually all around the globe -almost exactly 10 years after the incident, an attempt to salvage the reputation the Ottoman state? Unfortunately, despite the intelligence provided by its state organizations, the Ottoman Empire was incapable of either protecting its officials or catching the criminals. Furthermore, the fact that even a single Armenian revolutionary -Kaspar Nalbandian- was able to skillfully evade the Ottoman authorities in this way can be considered as an ominous sign of the dire developments that awaited the Ottoman Empire in the near future. The Ottoman authorities' failure to find and apprehend Nalbandian was in stark contrast to the Armenian revolutionaries' Operation Nemesis soon after the First World War. In this operation, Armenian revolutionaries were able to locate and assassinate high-ranking Ottoman officials in many places.

Returning to the focus of the study, ultimately, it is not known whether Kaspar Nalbandian was involved in any other incident against the Ottoman Empire, of which he was a subject, whether he acted together with the Armenian committees, or whether he lived as a fugitive on his own. But what is known is that Nalbandian has taken his place in history as one of the dozens of fugitive Armenians who committed crimes against the Ottoman Empire in its last decades (and who extended their activities to other lands as well) and who were sought with great effort, but probably never caught.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 1. Documents from the Ottoman Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye

**Accelerated Procedures at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DH.TMIK.M)**  
215/49, s.2 – 74

**Political Documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (HR.SYS)**  
2787/6

**Documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Embassy in London (HR.SFR.3)**  
560/45  
560/51

**Documents of the Consultation Chamber of the Legal Counsel to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (HR.HMS.İŞO)**  
229,57

### 2. Published Documents

*Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni İsyancıları (1896-1909)*. III. Ankara: T.C. Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Publications, 2009.

*Ermeni Komitelerinin A'mâl ve Harekât-ı İhtilâliyyesi: İlân-ı Meşrutiyet'den Evvel ve Sonra*. Ed. Erdoğın Cengiz. Ankara: Başbakanlık Publications, 1983.

### 3. Research and Investigation

Alkan, Necmettin. "Alman Basınına Göre Osmanlı Bankası Baskını ve İstanbul'da Ermeni Terörü". *Ermeni Araştırmaları II. Uluslararası Ermeni Kongresi*. Ankara: 2004.

Alkan, Necmettin. "Ermeni Teröristlerin Osmanlı Başşehri İstanbul'daki Saldırıları ve 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını (ABD'deki 11 Eylül Saldırılarıyla Bir Mukayese)". *Türk Yurdu*. Year 95 - Issue 225. (May 2006).

Çilesiz, Gürcan. *İstanbul'da 30 Saatlik Kaos: 26 Ağustos 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını ve Ermeni Katliamı*. İstanbul: Belge Publications, 2015.

- Doğan, Şahin. “Rus Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını”. *SUTAD* 50 (December 2020): 341-355.
- Eraslan, Hülya. “Osmanlı Bankası Baskını’nın (1896) Osmanlı Ermeni Basınında Ele Alınışı”. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Gazi University, Institute of Social Sciences. September 2016.
- Karal, Enver Ziya. *Osmanlı Tarihi*. IV. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Publications, 1995.
- Kılıç, Davut. *Osmanlı Ermenileri Arasında Dinî ve Siyasî Mücadeleler*. Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Publications, 2006.
- Kılıç, Selami. *Osmanlı-Ermeni İhtilafı ve Sonuçları*. Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Publications, 2017.
- Münir Süreyya Bey. *Ermeni Meselesinin Siyasi Tarihçesi (1877-1914)*. Ankara: Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001.
- Öztuna, Yılmaz. “Ermeni Sorunun Oluştığı Siyasal Ortam”. *Osmanlı’nın Son Döneminde Ermeniler*, Ed. Türkkaya Ataöv, 41-62. Ankara: Kültür, Sanat ve Yayın Kurulu Publications, 2002.
- Tuygan, Atilla (çev.). *Osmanlı Bankası Armen Garo’nun Anıları*. İstanbul: Belge Publications, 2009.
- Ürer, Levent ve Asuman Kutlu. “Algının Çerçevenmesi: İngiliz Basınında 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını”. *Bilig*, Issue 105 (Spring 2023): 79-97.
- Yavuz, Fikretin. *Osmanlı Devleti’nde Ermeni Terörü: 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Publications, 2015.