

ATTILA ORBÓK AND ARMENIANS*

(ATTILA ÓRBOK VE ERMENİLER)

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Abstract: *Hungarian author and journalist, Dr. Attila Orbók, took an action against the activities of Armenians in Hungary against Turks. Orbók explained the behind scenes of Armenian problem, Armenian insurrection and the role of Great Powers in the Armenian insurrection to the Hungarian people and statesmen in his book that he wrote for this purpose in 1916. Thanks to this book which Orbók had printed in his expense in Budapest, 1916, the opinion of Hungarian people related to Armenian problem changed. For this reason, the Orbók's book is one of the important primary sources that are issued related to the Armenian problem which is looked at with the eye of an western author.*

Key Words: *Dr. Attila Von Orbók, Armenian Question, Turk, Hungarian, Budapest.*

Özet: *Macar gazeteci yazar Dr. Atilla Orbók, Macaristan'daki Türk karşıtı Ermeni aktivitelere karşı harekete geçti. Orbók 1916'da Ermeni sorununun arka planını, Ermeni isyanını ve "Büyük Güçlerin" Ermeni isyanındaki rolünü Macarlara anlatmak için yazdığı kitabın da açıklamaktadır. Orbók'un kendi imkânlarıyla 1916'da Budapeşte'de bastırduğu, bu kitap sayesinde Macar halkının Ermeni sorununa karşı bakış açısı değişmiştir. Bu sebeple, Orbók'un kitabı, Ermeni sorununa bir batılı yazarın bakış açısından, en önemli birincil kaynaklardan birisidir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dr. Atilla Von Orbók, Ermeni Sorunu, Türk, Macar, Budapeşte.*

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1. Introduction

In 1898, around thirty thousand Armenians existed in the Transylvania region of Hungary. However, all of these Armenians had become Hungarianized by losing their ethnic and religious identities¹. The Minister of Finance and Commerce serving within the Hungarian Government were of Armenian origin². In relation to the “*Armenian Question*”, the Armenians living in Hungary have carried out several unsuccessful attempts against the Turks³. But, these anti-Turkish activities of the Armenians have set Hungarian Turcophile comrades into motion.

2. Dr. Attila von Orbók

Hungarian journalist and author, Dr. Attila von Orbók⁴, was born in Pozsony on 17 September 1887 and died in Budapest on 5 September 1964. Orbók had PhD on Law in Kolozsvár University of Hungary, and lived in Munich, then in Paris and worked in Sorbon University. Orbók was the reporter of the daily newspaper, *Magyarország* published in Budapest from 1912 until the First World War in Paris. He became the press attaché of Hungarian Embassy in Bern from 1918, and was deputy between 1920 and 1922. He had worked in the jobs from 1927, except in daily newspaper and literature magazines. He became the director of foreign policy department in the daily news paper, *Függetlenség* (Independence) from 1933. He became the member of *Kisgazda* (Countryman having the Small Property) Political Party and worked in the press department after 1945. Then, he was charged in the redaction of *Regény Újság* (Novel Newspaper)⁵. The works of Orbók, who wrote many theatre plays, are as follows; *A tünemény*, 1922 (Phenomena), *Párizs élete*, 1927 (Paris

1 After Hungary gaining independence in 1867, Hungarian nationalism had increased in the country and the idea of making everything Hungarian had developed. In 1868, learning Hungarian in schools had become mandatory. Some communities of the nations living in Hungary which possesses a population of 17 million have become Hungarian to only be appealed. From 1881 until 1896, 14.090 individuals have obtained Hungarian names. (Prime Ministry of Ottoman Archives, HR. SYS (Foreign Minister's Political Division Record), File: 166, No. 2).

2 It is the translation of the official letter numbered 17, sent on 10 February 1898 by the Prime Ministry. (Prime Ministry of Ottoman Archives, HR. SYS, File 166, No. 2; István Lázár, *Transilvania A Short History*, Edited by: Andrew L. Simon, English translation by: Thomas J. De Kornfeld, Published in 1997 by Corvina Books Ltd. p.133)

3 For the activities of Armenians in Hungary against the Turks see: Yücel Namal, *Macaristan ve Ermeni Meselesi (1878-1920)*, Truva Yayınları, 1st edition, İstanbul 2010, p. 44-48)

4 For more information about Orbók's book, see: Yücel Namal, “*A Booklet Regarding the Armenian Question in Hungary*”, (Translated by Gizem Sökmensüer), *Review Of Armenian Studies*, No: 22, April 2011, Pp. 203-219.

5 *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*, Második Kötet L-Z, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1969, s. 319-320.

life), Erdély mosolya, 1940 (Erdely's Smile), Hotel központi fűtés nélkül, 1940 (Hotel without Central Heating), Bársonyszék, 1943 (Ministry's Chair or Velvet Chair), Az Isten kertje, 1944 (God's Garden), Tom Sawyer megszökik, 1959 (Tom Sawyer Runaway).

3. The Book of Orbók related to Armenian Problem

One of the Hungarians taking action against anti-Turkish activities conducted in Hungary regarding the Armenian question has been Dr. Attila Von Orbók. In 1916 in the capital city of Hungary Budapest, Orbók has written the booklet entitled "The Truth on the Armenian Riot Based on Original Official Information Obtained by the Ottoman Government Concerning the Riot of the Armenians against the State" "(Az Igazság Az Örmények Forradalmi Mozgalmáról, A Császári Ottomán Kormányának Az Örmények Államellenes Mozgalmáról Beszerzett Eredeti Hivatalos Adatai Nyomán)"⁶.

Orbók has written this booklet in order to explain the truth regarding the Armenian question and the "seditions" of England and Russia to the Hungarian public who were unaware of the Armenian riots in Turkey. In 1916, Orbók has published this booklet with his own financial means and has distributed it to Hungarian statesmen, journalists and the public free of charge. The Ottoman Government has shown gratitude to Orbók for his booklet which he had written to enlighten neutral Catholic public opinion on the relations of the Ottoman Government and the Turkish people with Armenians and their behaviors towards them and also to serve Turkish-Hungarian friendship⁷.

Orbók has explained his purpose for writing this booklet as follows⁸:

"I, a sincere advocate of Turkish-Hungarian friendship, have regretfully witnessed that some oppositions in Austria-Hungary and Catholics in particular, without knowing the real truth of the situation, foster some unpleasant ideas regarding the behavior of the Turkish Government and Turkish nation towards Armenians. Even more, I have received the news that one of our political parties would give a motion of censure in the Assembly due to the Ottoman Government's supposedly unpleasant

6 Dr. Attila Orbók, *Az Igazság Az Örmények Forradalmi Mozgalmáról, A Császári Ottomán Kormányának Az Örmények Államellenes Mozgalmáról Beszerzett Eredeti Hivatalos Adatai Nyomán*, Budapest 1916, Renyi Karoly Kitapevi and Yayinevi, Budapest, IV, Vigado-Utca 1; Prime Ministry of Ottoman Archives, HR. SYS, File. 2883, no.21, lef. 7.

7 Prime Ministry of Ottoman Archives, *DH.EUM.2.ŞB(Dáhiliye Nezareti Emniyeti Umumiye 2nd Department)*, File. 26, No.13.

8 Prime Ministry of Ottoman Archives, *HR. SYS*, File 2883, No. 22, Attachment: 1.2.3.4.5.6.

policy towards the Armenians. I regard this situation with regret since it will not only impede Turkish-Hungarian friendship, but will also constitute a threat towards the bond of brotherhood existent between the two relative nations which I mostly attempted to display the truth about in my article I published in order to fully safeguard the interests of my nation since the Balkan war. Therefore, I find it an imperative mission to eliminate these unpleasant ideas which have arisen and explaining to Hungarian general opinion (public opinion) the approach adopted by the Turkish Government and Turkish nation towards the riots carried out by Armenians...”

In his booklet, Orbók has expressed that the Ottoman Government has displayed goodwill towards the Armenians and have provided them with privileges by trusting them. Moreover, he has added that the Armenians constitute the “elite” class of the Ottoman society and works in high-status positions in public services (Undersecretariat, Ministry) .

4. Armenians in Ottoman according to the Orbók’s Book

In his booklet, Orbók has expressed that the Ottoman Government has displayed goodwill towards the Armenians and have provided them with privileges by trusting them. Moreover, he has added that the Armenians constitute the “elite” class of the Ottoman society and works in high-status positions in public services (Undersecretariat, Ministry)⁹. Under these conditions, the Armenians have easily preserved their own churches, built their own schools, and maintained their own language and traditions under Ottoman

administration¹⁰. However, the Armenians have failed in appreciating these privileges and favors and on the opposite, have taken every opportunity to create disturbances within the state and to disrupt its peace with other states¹¹.

The Armenian committees, regarding the goodwill of the Ottoman Government towards the Armenian riots more as a weakness, have accelerated their activities. All efforts of Armenian committees were directed towards creating an independent Armenia with the support of the UK, France, and the Russian

9 As an example, Orbók has mentioned Armenian Gabriel Noradungyan, the Foreign Minister of the Ottoman State in 1914 and Oksan Efendi as the leader of postal services. Orbók, p. 12; For extensive information on the Armenians serving in the Ottoman Empire see: Nejat Göyünç, *Osmanlı İdaresinde Ermeniler*, Gültepe Yayınları, İstanbul 1983; Mesrob K. Krikorian, *Armenians In The Service Of The Ottoman Empire 1860-1908*, Routledge&Kegan Paul, London 1977; Y. G. Çark(Rahip), *Türk Devleti Hizmetinde Ermeniler 1453-1953*, Yeni Matbaa, İstanbul 1953.

10 Orbók, *Ibid*, p. 12.

11 Orbók, *Ibid*, p.13.

Empire. In order to obtain this goal, they have not refrained from anything which would lead to the Ottoman Empire's decline and collapse. The Armenians, who have always gained the support of the Allied Powers, have strived towards assisting them with all their efforts and weapons, for the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and its allies¹². Before the Ottoman Government had decided on entering the First World War, the Armenian committees had already begun preparing and closely observing the tide of events. The activities carried out by Armenians during this period are the following¹³:

- Forming Armenian gangs
- Spreading the riots
- Setting traps on the path used by the Turkish Army during their retreat and committing massacres

In the report No. 63 report that was sent to the Russian Consul Charikov in Bitlis on 24 December 1912, the following significant information was present concerning the Armenian Committee and particularly the activities of the Dashnak organizations¹⁴: “The Dashnak Committee makes great effort and exerts their authority in order to gain Armenian public opinion for the benefit of Russia. The point in question is that the community acts with determination to provoke the conflict between Armenian and Muslim elements and therefore, to ensure Russia's intervention and the occupation of the country with the aid of the Russian forces. Dashnak members use different equipment for this purpose. This way, they strive towards creating disagreements between the Muslim population and Armenians and planting seeds of fear and disintegration within the country. The Armenians in the city and village together with their religious leaders display endless sympathy towards Russia. The stance of Dashnaks and their commitment to Russia is the result of the instructions of the central committee in Istanbul”.

Notwithstanding, the Ottoman Government had knowledge of this information and was already aware of this intrigue carried out behind their back. Yet, until mid-April 1331 in Hegira (1915) when a riot broke out in Van, they still refrained from taking measures against Armenians based on this justification and also from the legitimate use of the weapon of revenge. A couple of months before this crisis erupted, Enver Pasha had warned the Armenian patriarch that

12 Orbók, p. 18.

13 Orbók, p. 19.

14 Orbók, p.21-22.

if the Armenians carry out initiatives to provoke riots, since the country lacks sufficient gendarmerie and soldiers to ensure security, they will be forced, for the security and peace of the country, to eliminate all riots before they increase and will take all firm measures for this purpose¹⁵. Speaker of the Parliament has also warned Armenian deputies present in Armenian committees. Therefore, Armenian minorities have received the news from both churchmen and leading politicians that any kind of illegal action will create depressing consequences. However, despite all warnings, Armenians have not suspended their rebellious activities. A majority of Armenian youngsters being called upon under the Turkish flag to fulfill their military service have refrained from performing their duty and have joined the Russian Army. Therefore, they have stood by the enemy's side in order to fight against their own nation. These young Armenians were slaughtering Muslims living in the villages on the borderline. Under the influence of these events, Armenian minorities residing in different regions of the Empire have followed the chain of riots and have become courageous enough to provoke their cognates to rebel¹⁶.

In his booklet, Orbók has provided many examples of the riots caused by Armenians. Several of these are the following: At the end of 1914, Armenians have carried out an armed attack against the gendarmerie in Muş and Kızan and have cut off transportation and the telephone lines between Van and Bitlis. Armenian gangs comprised of army deserters and bandits have attacked the government office in Zeytun¹⁷ and sought to slaughter the Muslim population regardless of women or children. Ottoman offices during their investigations in Kayseri (Cesarea) in Armenian-owned lands have found bombs, ammunition, weapons, confidential documents, codes to read the letters, instructions for rebellious gangs and many more significant evidences in cemeteries, schools and churches. It has been proven that the priest has been the leader of this unlawful and anti-government movement and the culprits have admitted that the bombs and weapons found were for the independence

15 Orbók, p. 30.

16 Orbók, p. 31.

17 The Zeytun (Süleymanlı) events, with a declaration of mobilization on 3 August 1914, Armenians of Zeytun appeal to officials to establish an "*Armenian regiment*" and when their request is rejected, Armenians rebel and start slaughtering. First, they have robbed and murder on 30 August 1914, 100 unarmed Andirins who had disbanded and returned to their villages. Then, they have killed some individuals from the Besenli Village, but around 60 of the gangs have been captured with their weapons. Around 800 Armenian gangs taking action again in February, have cut off Maraş's telegraph lines and have attacked the military barracks and the government office. The gendarme commander and 25 gendarme soldiers have been martyred, while 34 of them have been injured. Moreover, many Muslims have been killed by Armenian gangs in various areas of Maraş. At the end of these events, 713 rifles, 12 shotguns, 12 mauser rifles, various bombs, 70 animals and 61 bandits including the Armenian priest and many documents belonging to the committee have been found. (Azmi Süslü, *Ermeniler ve 1915 Tehcir Olayı*, Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü Yayın No: 5, Ankara 1990, p. 71-72.)

of Armenia. On 11 March 1331 (1915) at the Armenian monastery in Teke located at the upper part of the city of Zeytun, an Armenian gang has laid an ambush for the gendarmerie. The rebels have slaughtered the commander and the escort gendarmerie¹⁸.

Armenians have continued their rebellious activities within the field of operation of the Ottoman army. Moreover, Armenian rebels have all of a sudden attacked the city of Karahisar-ı Şarki¹⁹ on June 1331 (1915) for no reason at all and have burnt one fourth of the Muslim population there. Eight hundred rebels have closed the city fortress and have not wanted to even hear the “paternal advice and kindly worded proposals” of Ottoman officials. Here, the Armenians have killed 150 people, including the gendarme commander. On the same date during the investigations of Ottoman officials, a large number of hidden bombs and weapons have been discovered in Izmit, Adapazarı and Bahçeçik²⁰.

In his booklet, Orbók has evaluated the riots created by Armenians on Ottoman territories in which they lived together peacefully: “During the implementation of these measures, some have deplorably made many abuses against Armenians and victims based on brute force have taken place, but it was not possible to avoid these separate events no matter how depressing it was. A very deep and just anger had awakened among the Muslim population towards Armenians who were citizens of their own nation and who conducted riots and treasons, while they were to own a debt of gratitude to the country for being able to benefit from the blessing of legal equality”.

In his book, Orbók states that the Armenian riots, presented by Media of Allied and neutral powers as if a “religious” struggle is taking place on Ottoman territories, carries a “political” aspect; the Armenian minority, constituting 1.5 million of the Ottoman Empire which has a total population of thirty million, has cooperated with the enemy upon the provocation of Russia and the Allied Powers and has risen in rebellion against its fatherland of four hundred years.

5. Armenian Problem and Great Powers according to Orbók’s Book

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18 Orbók, p. 32.

19 Şebinkarahisar which is a district of Giresun.

20 Orbók, p. 34.

territories, carries a “political” aspect; the Armenian minority, constituting 1.5 million of the Ottoman Empire which has a total population of thirty million, has cooperated with the enemy upon the provocation of Russia and the Allied Powers and has risen in rebellion against its fatherland of four hundred years. Therefore, the Armenians have aimed at creating an independent Armenia by regaining their independence with the support of external powers²¹. The truth is that the Allied Powers have encouraged the Armenians to revolt by appropriately putting the deceiving vision of an “independent Armenia” inside their heads, while the only purpose was for the civil rebellions to leave the Ottoman army in a difficult position. Orbók has also expressed in his book that the role of Russia, which he described as the “rolling ruble”, has been significant in these riots²². Moreover, Orbók has pointed out that the news and allegations of Western public opinion that Turkey is following a policy of annihilating the Armenian minority are lies entirely lacking any foundation²³.

The origin of the Armenian riots dates back to 1870 and the Armenian organizations of today have been established in those years through the financial and moral support of Russian foreign policy²⁴. In order to take advantage of the religious struggle, Russia has utilized Turkish hostility existing among the Armenians in Turkey as a political instrument for many years²⁵. The Armenians, who have been provoked by rebellious organizations in Russia, have created a bloody riot in 1892 in the region of Sason. Between 1893 and 1894, the riots have started again²⁶ and through priests possessing a Slav mentality, Armenians have appealed to Russia for external powers to intervene in the internal affairs of the Ottomans²⁷. Orbók says that the official declarations of western statesmen are quite persuasive about what kind of support the Allies provided to Armenians and how they encouraged Armenians²⁸. The statements and correspondences in this context are the indisputable evidences. One of those evidences is the call of insurrection of the Russian Czar to Armenians.

21 Reliable statistics do not exist on the number of Armenians in Turkey. According to the research of France, 1,150,000 Armenians live in the Turkish Empire. On the other hand, a Russian source states that this number is 2,5 million. German scholars nearly unanimously indicate that the number of Armenians has reached 1,5 million. One must calculate the most possible number lying between these two extreme amounts. (Orbók, p. 8.)

22 Orbók, p. 39.

23 Orbók, p. 39.

24 Orbók, p. 8.

25 Orbók, p. 8.

26 Orbók, p. 9.

27 Orbók, p. 16.

28 Orbók, s. 19.

During the World War I, the following idea has been dominant among Armenians: “All Armenians living dispersedly in the world must now put all their efforts in supporting the success of Allied Powers. The allies of Germany (Austro-Hungary, Ottoman Empire) are doomed to be destroyed; time has come to be born again. For this to be to our advantage, Armenians must strive”²⁹. The Allied Powers have taken advantage of every opportunity to convince the Armenians to rebel and therefore, to constrain the Turkish army within the country³⁰. In his book, Orbók has stated that especially when he has examined the Armenian riots, he has discovered that Russia and the UK have been the ones provoking the Armenian community in Turkey to rebel and have been the organizers of the Armenian riots.

6. Conclusion

The book, “Facts about Armenian Insurrection”, written by the Hungarian intellectual, Orbók, has a significant impact on changing the opinions against Turks related to the Armenian problem both in Hungarian and Western societies. After publishing this book, the Turkish-Hungarian friendship in Hungary became deeper. Orbók’s book is a confession by a Hungarian intellectual that Turks are blamed unjustly in the Armenian problem. Orbók manifests that the Armenian problem is not a religious problem, but emerges as a political issue in his book. In addition, he states that this political issue also emerges due to encouragement by United Kingdom and Russia the Armenians to insurrect. Orbók tells that the Armenians in Ottoman were the elites in the society and held the senior offices such as ministry in the state administration. However, despite of such tolerance and privileges, Armenians betrayed the Ottoman, revolted throughout Anatolia and killed their Turkish neighbors. Therefore, the book of Orbók that he wrote one year after the Armenian relocation, is very important.

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29 Orbók, p. 26.

30 Orbók, p. 29.

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ATTACHMENTS

Tiszteletpéldány.

**AZ IGAZSÁG
AZ ÖRMÉNYEK
FORRADALMI
MOZGALMÁRÓL**

**A CSÁSZÁRI OTTOMÁN KORMÁNYNAK
AZ ÖRMÉNYEK ÁLLAMELLENES
MOZGALMÁRÓL BESZERZETT
EREDETI HIVATALOS
ADATAI NYOMÁN:
ORBÓK ATILA DR.**



BUDAPEST, 1916.
RÉNYI KÁROLY KÖNYVKERESKEDÉSE ÉS KIADÓVÁLLALATA
BUDAPEST, IV, VIGADÓ-UTCA 1.

Attachment 1: The cover of Orbók's booklet entitled "*The Truth on the Armenian Riot*". (Dr. Attila Von Orbók, *Az Igazság Az Örmények Forradalmi Mozgalmáról, A Császári Ottomán Kormányának Az Örmények Államellenes Mozgalmáról Beszerzett Eredeti Hivatalos Adatai Nyomán*, Budapeste 1916, Rényi Karoly Könyvkereskedése És Kiadóvalla, Budapest, IV, Vigado-Utca 1.)