

Les Francs-Maçons Arméniens et la Constitution de l'Arménie ottomane, Constantinople 1863 de Onnik Jamgocyan. París: Les Editions du Bosphore, 2017. 279 páginas. ISBN: 9782956039402.

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Written by the historian Onnik Jamgocyan this book has 13 chapters, prefaced by an introduction that narrates essential events of the past– as well as a range of short biographies on outstanding personalities in the history of the Empire from the Eighteenth to the Nineteenth century. Its novelty is the study of Armenian history from 1850 to 1880 and the involvement of the Armenian Freemasons in the drafting of organic laws of the Armenian nation in 1863.

In the first chapter, thanks to the prosopography used throughout, it also analyzes the impact freemasonry had on the Armenian community, especially among the sons of that middle-high classes that had been sent to Europe to study and were a part of the large group of Armenians who served the Ottoman government.

The second chapter is about the extraordinary story of the Armenian school founded in Paris, its facts and characters who would later gain notoriety among the Armenian people.

In the third chapter, the issue of the Freemasons within the Armenian community is investigated with more depth after a brief account on the entry of masonry in the empire; on its key players who strengthened the engagement of the Armenians in the lodges. As stressed by the author, the research was complicated due to the scarcity or sketchiness of his sources.

The following chapter describes the lodges acting under the English Masonic aegis in the major cities of the empire these ranging from the Oriental lodge to the English orbit. The author puts emphasis on the Dekran lodge, founded at the behest of ambassador Henry Bulwer in 1864 and active until 1894, it reunited the most authoritative members of the city's Armenian community.

The sixth chapter then focuses on the attendance of lodges that were dependent on the Great East of France. Numerous Armenians were welcomed from upper classes into lodges

from the *Etoile du Bosphore* to the *Union d'Orient*. A pivotal figure amid masonry and the community was Serovpé Aznavour. Another player in the fate of French Freemasonry in the Ottoman Empire was the attorney Louis Amiable, appointed to write the Turkish translation of the ritual to give non-Armenian members the chance to follow with ease masonic works.

A very special outcome was the Ser lodge¹, whose foundation cannot be assumed as a mere consequence of the inner gap between the Armenian members and the Venerable Master Amiable; the seventh chapter is focused on the entire history of this lodge's thirty years of activity. This Ser lodge is closely related to the drafting of the 1863 national constitution of Armenia and how its members Feroukhkhan Bey and Stefan Pacha Aslanian, were both involved in the drafting Armenia's national constitution.

On the eighth chapter we come to the heart of the book, through its pages we try to understand if indeed the Masons of Armenian origin had a preponderant role in the drafting of the laws of the Armenian nation of 1863. Going in stages, the author resumes the work of a group of Armenians who founded different social bodies, such as the Hamazkiats organization in 1846, the Armenian Charitable Society in 1860.

The first board is merely cultural and is the first recognized expression of a fraternal union between Armenians. Two years after its establishment, the association had more than six hundred members, albeit encountered the hostility of a prelate Hassoun, who often threatened members of the most terrible consequences, from the interdiction of sacraments to the ban of burial in the community cemetery. On community cultural activities - as the publishing of books in Armenian - the youngsters who wrote or published aimed to reform their own language to make it closer to the juvenile generations.

Another influential organization was the Charitable Society of the Armenians shaped up on the universal Israelite alliance and whose aim was the assistance to the Armenians based in Asia Minor. The last sections alight on the historical reconstruction of the steps leading to the organic law of the Armenian nation, also passing through the events qualifying the chronicle of the community. From the public events to the internal attack against the power of the patriarchs, guarding the Armenian people not just from the religious point of view. Even at this juncture masonry played its role since its tenet on severance of temporal from spiritual powers.

The Constitution of the Armenian saw several drafts, one of 1857 (proclaimed in 1860), but was short lived. In 1863, the ultimate version was released, consisting of 99 articles enshrining the rules of the community. The elections were held in August 1863, according to the existing policies only 3600 people could vote. In the end, 80 deputies were elected, among whom 31 were freemasons thus the volume proposes an interesting list. The second half of the Nineteenth century is historically a very dense period for the Armenians: on one hand the drafting of organic laws, drawn out by the most influential names of the community and on the other the presence of a new generation of intellectuals contending power to the patriarchs. And here

1 Emanuela Locci, *Il cammino di Hiram. La massoneria nell'impero Ottomano* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2013), 23-24; Thierry Zarcone, *Mistiques, Philosophes et Francs-Maçons en Islam* (Paris: Ifea, 1993), 202.

freemasonry is disclosed since many of the innovators were masons.

Last, the text shows an engrossing study on the Armenian community, its history and freemasonry within it.

In some passages the author takes for granted the reader's knowledge of many historical facts, which would not be necessarily the case of most of them. Moreover, the numerous biographies, on the one hand give to acknowledge some outstanding Armenian characters in the history of the Ottoman Empire, while on the other makes it can stilt the reading. Related lists and graphs are also very useful. On the sources, they are diverse and present bibliographic contributions in Armenian, French, English and Turkish, as well as mainly English archival items.