

The First Ottoman-Turkish History of the Armenians

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Context

Rıza Nur (1879-1942) was a physician, professor, politician, and publicist. According to Andrew Mango, he was also “a man of violent passions, and a racist nationalist” and is “most remembered as one of Atatürk’s main detractors.”¹

He graduated from the military medical school and worked as a doctor and teacher at the Faculty of Medicine in Istanbul until 1908, when he decided to pursue a political career. After the restoration of the constitution in 1908, he was elected to the parliament at the age of 29 and became its youngest member. Being supportive of the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (The Committee of Union and Progress, CUP), he soon joined the opposition liberal party (*Osmanlı Ahrar Fırkası* – Ottoman Liberal Party, September 1908–April 1909). Accused of playing a role in the 31 March Incident – the conservative counter-coup of 1909 –, he fled to Egypt but returned shortly afterwards. Rıza Nur was a founding member of another opposition party, the *Hürriyet ve İ'tilâf* (Freedom and Accord Party, 1911). After the coup d'état of the CUP leaders Talât, Cemal, and Enver, in January 1913, the party was forbidden and Rıza Nur was arrested and finally exiled. He lived in Switzerland, France (where he married), and Egypt, before returning to Istanbul after the armistice in October 1918, and was again elected as a member of the Ottoman parliament for Sinop.²

Rıza Nur began to work on his “History of the Armenians” (*Ermeni Tarihi*) in the autumn of 1914 in exile in Cairo and continued to work on the draft until May 1918.

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¹ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk* (London: John Murray, 2001), p. 553.

² The short section on Rıza Nur’s biography is taken from Yavuz Köse, “Vienna is a treasure to Us’: Vienna and the Austro-Hungarian Empire as Role Models for the Late Ottoman Empire”, *Comparative* 32, 3/4 (2022) (Special Issue “The Ottoman Empire and the “Germensphere” in the Age of Imperialism”), pp. 395-411.

However, some sections of the work concerning later events between the years 1919 and 1923 were added either in Turkey or when he was in exile in France (from 1926), most probably during his stay in Lausanne between November 1922 and July 1923, when he was part of the Turkish delegation. In Lausanne, he also assigned one of the Turkish secretaries to prepare the fair copy of his draft, which the author sold, together with other manuscripts, to the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin in 1935 (with a blocking period until 1960). The manuscript is now kept under the title Ms. or. quart 1934. The copy is written on white paper with 258 sheets (some pages are blank) and contains the original pagination (508 pages). In addition, it includes a bibliography of around 30 French titles and “*plusieurs ‘Histoire ottoman’*” written in Latin script, as well as a separate manuscript table of contents in French. The format of the work, bound in Alexandria, is 24 x 16.5 cm. The pages contain 19 lines written in blue ink in *riḳā*. The preface transcribed here is an autograph.

Unlike his twelve-volume “History of the Turks” (*Türk Tarihi*, 1924-1926), which he worked on at the same time, *Ermeni Tarihi* was never published. Rıza Nur planned this work as a prelude to a series on the histories of non-Turkish peoples. In his preface, he states that he also wanted to compose a work on the Greeks and Arabs. He aimed to educate Turks about the intentions of these peoples, whose goal was to “exterminate the Turks” (*Türk’ü yok etmek*). The author saw his work as a patriotic service to empower Turks with knowledge and thus provide them with the appropriate arguments to “defend their rights.” This justificatory work, ultimately designed to deny the Armenians any right to exist in Turkey, is the first monographic work in Ottoman-Turkish to date that focuses exclusively on the history of the Armenians.

Keywords: Rıza Nur, 20th century, Ottoman Armenians, genocide, history of Armenians, Turkish nationalism

Transcription

[3] *Başlangıç*

Yurdumuzda bizimle oțuran, sayıları bize nisbetle pek az olan bir țaqım milletler vardır ki millî da`vâlar ve hevâlarla ikide bir Türk `aleyhine kalkınırlar. Türk'i yok etmek [itmek], yerine oțurmak isterler. Bunun için ileri sürdükleri sebep ise Türk ahâliden, devletinden zulm gördükleri, Türk idâresiniñ bozuğ olduğu ve kendilerinde târîhî bir hağ bulunduğı huşûsdaki iddi`âlarıdır.

Biz Türkler henüz bu milletleri târîhleriyle, diğere şüretlerle hiç tedkîk itmemişiz. Tanımıyoruz. Bugünkü hâlleri, hareketleri nedir bilmiyoruz. Onlarıñ da`vâlarının târîhî bir hağka dayandığını hağkındaki sözlerine inanıyoruz. Onlara inanmasağ bile onları te`yîd eden [iden], yalnız te`yîd değil himâye ve teşvîk eden [iden], hattâ sâde bunlarda değil, bu mes`eleleri kendi siyâsî ve iktisâdî menfa`atleri için hiç yokdan ihdâs etmiş [itmiş] olan Avrupaya inanıyoruz.

[4] *Türk bu iddi`âlarıñ boşluğunu öğrenirse kendi hağkını daha iyi müdâfa`a ider. İşte bu mülâhazalar bu milletleri țañitan eșeriñ birinci derecede vațanî hîdmetlerden olduğunu gösterir. İşte bu sebebledir ki büyük harb zamânında bu eșeri yazdım. Kezâ Rûmlar, `Arablar diye de böyle birer eșer yazmağ fikrindeyim.*

*Mayıs 1918, Mıșrû'l-Kâhire
Doğtor Rızâ Nûr*

Translation

[3] *Beginning*

Some nations live with us in our homeland, whose numbers are tiny in comparison to ours, and they are always turning against the Turks with national matters and claims. They wish to exterminate and replace the Turk. The reason they propose this is their allegations that they are oppressed by the Turkish people and state, that the Turkish administration is corrupt, and that they have a historical right.

We Turks have not yet studied these nations in terms of their history and other aspects. We do not know them. We do not know what their present conditions and activities are. We believe their words that their claims are based on a historical right. Even if we do not believe them, we believe in Europe, which not only supports them but also protects

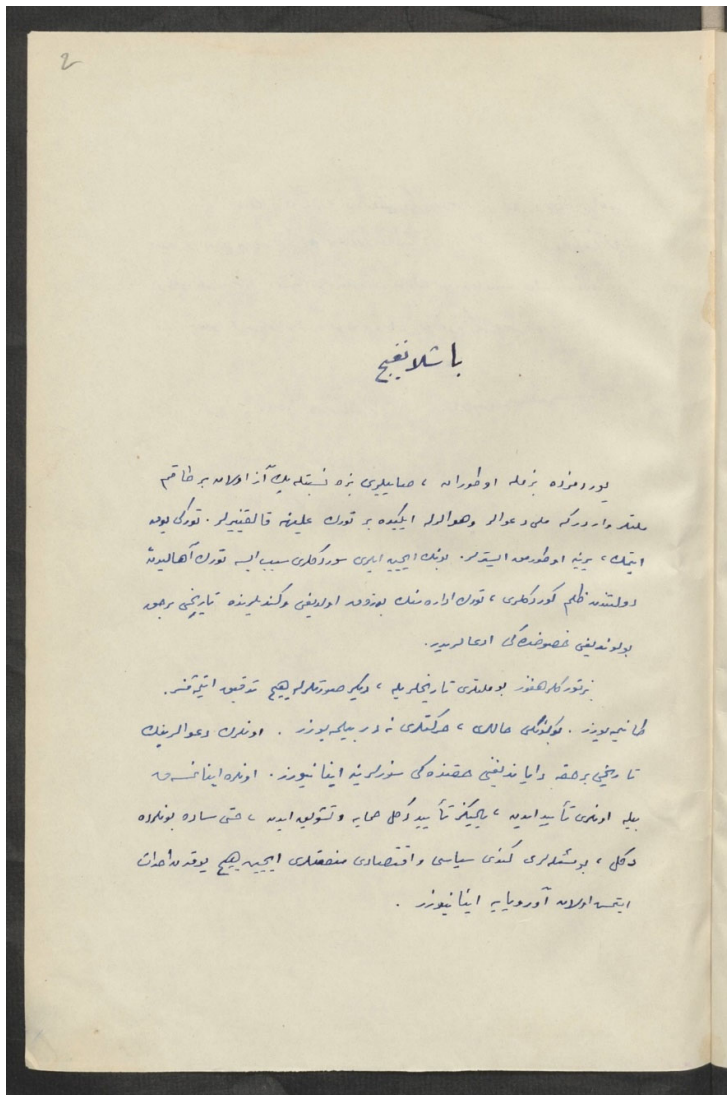
and encourages them, and furthermore has created these issues out of nothing for its own political and economic interests.

[4] If the Turk learns the futility of these claims, he will be better prepared to defend his own rights. These considerations show that the work introducing these nations is a patriotic service of the first degree. That is why I wrote this work during the Great War, and I have been thinking about writing such works on Greeks and Arabs as well.

May 1918, Cairo

Doctor Rıza Nur

Facsimile



تورک بواجارک بو سلفتی اوکره نیرم کندی صفی زاهالی مدافع
 ایدر . ایتیه بو مدافع ایچ بوملندی طانیاً اترک برنجی درجه درجه وطنی همتلردر
 اولدنی کوستیر . ایتیه بوسیلیم درکه بویوک حرب زمانده بواتیری ما یوزیم .
 کذا روملر ، عربلر دیرره بویولم بید اتر ما یوزیم فلانکیم .

دوقونق صلیف
 مایی ۱۹۱۸ هرالقاهره

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