

Hans-Lukas Kieser. *Der verpasste Friede: Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der T rkei, 1839-1938.* Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 2000. 533 pp. CHF 68.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-905313-49-9.



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State-Building and Mass Murder in Eastern Anatolia: A New Approach

The prospect of publishing a book on the history of Eastern Anatolia during the nineteenth and twentieth century is to a certain degree a dangerous proposition. It is a topic beset by political, historical, and methodological minefields. This subfield of Ottoman and Turkish history is made dangerous by two vexing contemporary issues: firstly, the debate over the genocidal intent of the Ottoman government to remove Armenians (as well as many others) from Eastern Anatolia and secondly, the rise of Kurdish nationalism and the outbreak of civil conflict in the Republic of Turkey. In regards to the fate of Armenians during the First World War, most scholarly works rarely venture beyond the immediate origins of the deportations and massacres (namely the rise of Armenian nationalism and the wartime policies of the Young Turk government). Kurdish historiography tends to dig deeper for the roots of Kurdish nationalism and the war waged by the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). Yet the history of Kurds tends to be a homogenizing process, one that de-emphasizes the linguistic, geographic, political, and sectarian divisions among the various Kurdish communities of the Middle East. Hans-Lukas Kieser, in his masterful work, *Der verpasste Friede* (The Lost Peace), of-

fers a new comparative model for approaching these two historical themes and paints a very provocative picture of Eastern Anatolia between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Kieser's study transects the period of modern Ottoman reform and Anatolia's immediate transition from imperial territory to nation-state. It is a history grounded in the interaction between Western missionaries (largely American, French, German, and Italian) and local communities in the provinces of Urfa, Harput (now in the modern Turkish province of Elazig) and Van. It is a study that juxtaposes two competing forces of reform in Eastern Anatolia. The main force was that of the Ottoman imperial government, which worked vigorously to incorporate and consolidate centralized control over this portion of the empire. This effort was in part undermined by the work of Western missionaries, who committed themselves to the development of human rights, education, and social services in districts throughout Anatolia. Kieser argues that the both of these respective forces possessed two discrete constituencies, the former focusing on the Sunni Muslim population of Eastern Anatolia

and the latter concentrating on the various non-Muslim (such as Armenian) and heterodoxical Muslim (namely the Alevi) groups of the region. The sum result of these competing influences was not only the intensification of the state's drive towards radical reform and consolidation, but the creation of new political, economic, and social rifts in the provincial communities of Urfa, Harput, and elsewhere. These imperial and provincial tensions led to an ever-escalating campaign of violence by the Ottoman government which culminated in the deportations and massacres of Armenians during the First World War.

Kieser's greatest contribution to the field is his ability to place the violence of the First World War in the context of the Ottoman reform movement. He rightly points out that the "Ottomanist" regime promoted by successive governments contained an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, the imperial government attempted to promote a new regime of equality among Muslims and non-Muslims in order to incorporate the entire Ottoman population into its reform agenda. In other words, Istanbul's declaration of Muslim and non-Muslim parity was an attempt to stave off separatist tendencies in the empire by requiring everyone to fulfill the obligations of Ottoman citizenship. However, particularly with the ascendancies of Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Young Turks, the state continued to promote the primacy of Sunni Muslims as the most favored constituency of the empire. Western missionaries exposed and exploited this contradiction by extending their services to non-Muslims and heterodoxical Muslims. While the activities of these missionaries did represent (both nationally and locally) Western imperial interests (a tangent stringently argued by Jeremy Salt), Kieser portrays American, French, and German missionaries as genuinely concerned with the welfare of non-Sunni Muslims in Eastern Anatolia.[1] Kieser argues that missionaries were a positive force in the commu-

nities in which they resided, particularly in the realm of education and agriculture. Nevertheless, by offering alternatives that catered to Armenians, Alevis, and other groups alienated by the state's drive towards imperial consolidation, missionaries helped to foment a confrontation between non-Muslims and the Ottoman state (as well as their local Sunni allies). It is out of this confrontation that the violence of the First World War took on imperial (the deportations and executions undertaken by the Young Turks) and local (the use of Kurdish tribesmen in perpetrating the deportations and executions) dimensions.

In terms of methodology, *Der verpasste Friede* is an excellent balance between local and imperial history. By concentrating on such localities as Harput or Van, Kieser brings a needed degree of specificity to our understanding of the regional patchwork that is Eastern Anatolia. Through the local lens, we are able to see how Ottoman imperial policy and missionary activity distinctively shaped the interactions of the diverse populations of Eastern Anatolia (this is most interesting in the case of the alliances formed between Armenians and Alevi Kurds in the region of Dersim, outside of Harput). Kieser is able to do this through his expansive use of archival sources (including Ottoman, American, German, Italian, and French records). One can only lament that this work has yet to be translated into English so that it may reach a much wider audience. *Der verpasste Friede* is a critical contribution to the field of Ottoman and Middle Eastern history and an essential read for those interested in evolution of peoples of Eastern Anatolia.

Note

[1]. Jeremy Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians, 1876-1896* (London: Frank Cass, 1993).

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