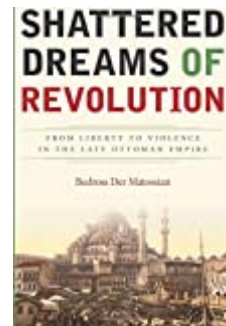


Bedross Der Matossian. *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014. 264 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-9147-2; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-9263-9.



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Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire

Shattered Dreams of Revolution by Bedross Der Matossian attempts to challenge the existing scholarship on the Ottoman constitutional revolution of 1908, which the author says is split into two main trends: one which views the revolution as a factor in the decline of interethnic relations in the empire and another which romanticizes the revolution as a period of positive projects including modernization, political reforms, and economic growth, abruptly ended by the outbreak of the First World War. Der Matossian tells the story of the shattered dreams of several ethnic groups in the empire after the constitutional revolution: Armenians, Jews, and Arabs. The choice to use the term “ethnic” rather than “national” group is well justified, as Der Matossian is borrowing the concept of “ethnic boundaries” from social anthropology, showing that despite diversity inside of these groups, they shared strong and common bonds within their ethnic boundaries. Based on a variety of sources, including Ottoman and Western material, and, above all magazines and newspapers produced by the various communities, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution*

successfully shows the opportunities and challenges that arose for the ethnic groups. The work is divided into six chapters that follow the chronology of the revolution, showing how events were experienced by the various communities. Although Der Matossian intends to examine the Armenians, Jews, and Arabs of the empire equally, he focuses mainly on the Armenians, less on the Jews, and considerably less on the Arabs.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to the festivities in the provinces celebrating the revolution. Der Matossian argues that the participation of nondominant groups in the festivities demonstrated their loyalty to the new regime. His analysis of space, symbolism, and language shows how minority communities tried to prove their commitment to the revolution: religious and secular spaces became centers of revolutionary festivals and speeches. Loyalty to the nation became apparent through the theme of brotherhood which was echoed throughout most of the minority press, and in particular in the Armenian press. Der Matossian, far from taking a romanticized view of the postrevolutionary festivi-

ties, immediately highlights the divisions and contradictions amongst the various groups, which become even more evident in chapter 2 with the examination of the political discourse and the debates surrounding key terms like *freedom* and the future of the Ottoman state. The struggle to create an Ottoman identity based on universal principles was evident in the press, which also struggled to preserve the particular features of every community. It was, however, the emerging Turkish concept of *millet-i hakime* (the ruling nation) asserting the superiority of the Turkish element that cast a shadow on the dreams of the revolution.

Chapter 3 is a micro-study of the impact of the revolution on the ethnic groups: among the Armenians and Jews of the empire a struggle emerged between the supporters of the ancien régime and those who supported the revolution, but more importantly over the election of new religious leaders that would represent the ideals of the revolution. Interestingly, Der Matossian, while presenting the debate over Zionism among the Jews of the empire, underlines that Zionism was not always understood as a separatist project, nor was it accepted by the majority of the Jews living in the empire. The analyses of the Arab provinces is rather superficial; however, the author is right that making generalizations about the impact of the revolution on these provinces would be misleading. Nevertheless it is clear that the politics of the notables was threatened by the revolution, but ultimately was not defeated.

Chapters 4 and 5 are a solid and detailed discussion of the electoral process in the run-up to the first competitive elections in the Ottoman Empire. These two chapters are a great contribution to the study of the constitutional revolution of 1908 as Der Matossian shows how ethnic groups established electoral committees in an attempt to unify their various political currents before the first mass political performance in the Middle East. A number of deputies representing the ethnic groups were elected—some were satisfied with the results, like the Jews and the Arabs; less satisfied were the Armenians. The election sanctioned the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) as the real winner of this political competition. At the same time, it was becoming apparent that the CUP and ethnic groups could not agree on a number of issues, including religious institutions and above all edu-

cation. The dilemma afflicting these groups was to display loyalty while at the same time protecting the interests of their groups. According to Der Matossian, before the counterrevolution of 1909 the Armenians were very active in parliament, particularly in the debates over the restriction of public gatherings, which they understood as a potential restriction of their political activity.

The last chapter is dedicated to the counterrevolution of 1909 and its suppression. Der Matossian suggests that the counterrevolution was a complex event that was not just the expression of religious fanaticism, but a multi-actor, multivocal event that eventually led to the demise of the dreams of the revolution. Since the constitution represented a chance for the ethnic groups to become relevant actors in the political process, the counterrevolution was a major blow; however, Der Matossian stresses that the response of the ethnic groups was not homogeneous. Members of the various groups participated in the suppression of the counterrevolution, although their actions were less decisive than the military operations undertaken by the CUP. Der Matossian, in this final chapter, takes some time to discuss the Adana Massacres of 1909, suggesting that by then the dreams of the revolution were already shattered; ethnic tensions were on the rise and becoming violent. After the counterrevolution, the CUP restricted the liberties gained by the ethnic groups in the constitutional revolution: the preservation of the empire took precedence over the values of the constitution. Der Matossian is right to say that the dreams of the revolution were shattered, not only by the CUP after the counterrevolution, but by the contradictory dynamics of the revolution itself, and nationalism—seen as an epidemic by many—was not contained by the constitution.

Shattered Dreams of Revolution is a compelling work on the Ottoman revolution of 1908 and its shortcomings. Though Der Matossian focuses more on the Armenians than the other ethnic groups—the Jews and the Arabs—this work must be commended for presenting a fresh picture of the revolution as a key event that needs to be more fully studied for its repercussions on the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This is a work that cannot be ignored by those studying late Ottoman history and in particular how nationalism impacted the empire's subjects. It is a pity there is no bibliography at the end.

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