

Mkrtich Khrimian as an Ottomanist? Disputing a Growing Trend
in Armenian Historiography

Mıgırdıç Kırmıyan Osmanlı mı? Ermeni Tarih Yazımında Yükselen
Bir Eğilime Eleştirel Bakış

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Abstract

Mkrtich Khrimian (1820-1907), long recognised as a foundational figure in Armenian nationalism, also held prominent, influential religious and political roles within the Ottoman Armenian community. In recent years, however, a growing and increasingly visible trend in historiography has emerged that reinterprets Khrimian as an Ottomanist mediator and a committed proponent of Tanzimat reforms. This reinterpretation, rooted largely in his institutional engagements and interactions with the Ottoman state, portrays him as a conciliatory and adaptive figure working deliberately within the imperial framework. This article critically engages with this significant historiographical shift, reassessing Khrimian's rhetoric and activities

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through a close, careful reading of his sermons, writings, and political actions—most notably the widely referenced and symbolically charged “Iron Ladle Sermon”. It argues that Khrimian’s ideological orientation aligns more closely with Armenian nationalist aspirations and sentiments than with Ottomanist ideals or reformist agendas. Drawing on a wide range of primary sources, including *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (a periodical edited by Khrimian), archival documents, and recent scholarship, the article highlights the nationalist content embedded in Khrimian’s discourse and explores the broader historical implications of his legacy. By challenging the emerging narrative that casts Khrimian as an Ottomanist figure, this study offers a historically grounded and analytically reflective reappraisal of his ideological trajectory.

Keywords: Mkrtych Khrimian, Armenian Nationalism, Ottomanism, Historiography, Iron Ladle Sermon, Armenian Church.

Öz

Ermeni milliyetçiliğinin sembol isimlerinden biri olarak kabul edilen Mıgırdıç Kırmıyan (1820–1907), Osmanlı Ermenileri arasında hem dini hem de siyasi alanlarda önemli ve etkili roller üstlenmiş bir din adamı olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ancak son yıllarda tarih yazımında artan bir şekilde görünürlük kazanan ve Kırmıyan’ın Osmanlı düzeniyle ilişkilerini temel alarak onu Osmanlıcı bir arabulucu ve Tanzimat reformlarının savunucusu olarak nitelendiren yeni bir yaklaşım ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu yeni yorum, büyük ölçüde Kırmıyan’ın Tanzimat reformlarının uygulanmasına yönelik olumlu bir tutum sergilediği iddiasına dayanmakta ve onu imparatorluk yapısı içinde uzlaşmacı ve uyumlu bir figür olarak sunmaktadır. Bu makale, söz konusu bu yeni yaklaşımı eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla ele alarak Kırmıyan’a atfedilen Osmanlıcı kimliği derinlemesine sorgulamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, Kırmıyan’ın söylemleri, yazıları ve faaliyetleri, özellikle milliyetçi çağrışımları güçlü olan “Demir Kepçe Vaazı” üzerinden yeniden değerlendirilmektedir. Makale, Kırmıyan’ın ideolojik yöneliminin Osmanlıcılıktan ziyade Ermeni milliyetçiliği ile örtüştüğünü öne sürmektedir. Bu kapsamlı analiz, Kırmıyan’ın editörlüğünü yaptığı ve yayımladığı *Artsvi Vaspurakan* dergisinde yayınlanan çeşitli yazılara, arşiv belgelerine ve güncel akademik literatüre dayanmaktadır. Kırmıyan’ın söylemleri ve eylemleri, dönemin siyasi ve toplumsal bağlamı içinde yeniden değerlendirilmektedir. Makale, onu Osmanlıcı bir arabulucu olarak tanımlayan yaklaşımı eleştirel bir biçimde sorgularken, aynı zamanda Kırmıyan’ın tarihsel rolünü daha bütüncül ve temellendirilmiş bir perspektiften ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mıgırdıç Kırmıyan, Ermeni Milliyetçiliği, Osmanlıcılık, Tarih Yazımı, Demir Kepçe Vaazı, Ermeni Kilisesi.

Introduction

In the mid-19th century, the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire found themselves at a pivotal historical juncture. A subset of Armenian intellectuals, particularly among the clergy, had emerged as prominent figures of the time, demonstrating a profound sense of readiness and foresight regarding the imperative of striving for an independent –or at the very least, autonomous– Armenia. Among these was Mkrtich Khrimian, a prominent leader within the Armenian Apostolic Church. Underlining the degree to which Khrimian distinguished himself from his intellectual peers over his lifetime, Catholicos of all Armenians, Vazken I, evoked and adapted Victor Hugo’s famous quote in 1957 to proclaim that “every Armenian has two fathers, his own and Khrimian Hayrig”¹. This assertion underscores the deep reverence and importance accorded to Khrimian in the Armenian collective consciousness, which has elevated him to the status of a revered symbol of the Armenian people.

As an esteemed spiritual leader, publisher, educator, and devout patriot, Khrimian Hayrik has been the focus of numerous studies on Armenian and Ottoman history, including several biographies written in Armenian that highlight his exceptional role as a historical figure². The past fifty years have seen the publication of several new and original scholarly studies on Khrimian, especially since the 2000s. *Hay Zhoghovrdi Patmut’yun*, for example, offers a distinctive portrayal of this renowned cleric³, while Khrimian’s most comprehensive and extensive biography was authored by Kostandyan in 2000⁴. A burgeoning body of scholarly literature addressing Khrimian Hayrik has particularly begun to emerge in recent years. Within the Turkish academic sphere alone, Yavuz’s MA thesis offers a comprehensive

- 1 Diana DerHovanesian, “The Worlds”, *Hayrig, a Celebration of His Life and Vision on the Eightieth Anniversary of His Death (1907-1987)*, A Publication of the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, New York 1987, p. 45. The term “Hayrig” or “Hayrik”, an affectionate diminutive of “*hayr*” (meaning “father”), was widely attributed to Khrimian by the Armenian community for his compassionate dedication to his people. Agop J. Hacikyan, Gabriel Basmajian, Edward S. Franchuk, Nourhan Ouzounian, *The Heritage of Armenian Literature*, Vol. 3, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 2000, p. 236.
- 2 For a critical evaluation of his biographies and studies, see. Nora Bairamian, “Beyond the Iron Ladle: Education, Gender and Economic Independence in the Work of Mkrtich Khrimian ‘Hayrik’”, *Armenian Review*, Vol. 57/No. 3-4, (Fall-Winter 2021), pp. 29-37.
- 3 *Hay Zhoghovrdi Patmut’yun (History of the Armenian People)*, Aghayan Zh. P., Barseghyan Kh. Hovhannisyana A. G., et al., ed., Vol. 6, USSR Academy of Science, Erevan 1981.
- 4 Emma Kostandyan, *Mkrtich Khrimian, Hasarakakan-K’aghak’akan Gortsuneutyunē (Mkrtich Khrimian: His Socio-Political Activities)*, Zangak Publishers, Erevan 2000.

exploration of Khrimian's biography based on Ottoman archival materials⁵, while his select articles delve into specific aspects of Khrimian's life and work⁶. Focusing on the role of religion in Turkish and Armenian nationalism, Tekkoyun's MA thesis also examines Khrimian's life and career⁷. Additionally, several scholarly works, in both Turkish and English, evaluate Khrimian Hayrik within defined thematic frameworks. For example, Güllü discusses Khrimian's role and patriarchate term while presenting the history of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul in his 2015 book⁸. Likewise, Cora examines Khrimian's engagements as pertinent to the social and economic history of Erzurum/Karin in his 2016 doctoral thesis⁹. Among these various works, Richard Antaramian's PhD, completed in 2014¹⁰ and published in 2020, is particularly notable¹¹. In this book, Antaramian critically reassesses traditional approaches to the history of late Ottoman Armenians and the development of Armenian nationalism. He offers a fresh perspective that challenges established academic narratives, focusing extensively on the life of Khrimian Hayrik and portraying him as an "Ottomanist mediator". Over the past decade, there has

- 5 Fikrettin Yavuz, *Ermeni Katogikosu Mıgırdıç Kırmyan ve Ermeni Meselesindeki Rolü* (*The Armenian Catholicos Mkrtich Khrimian and His Role in the Armenian Question*), Sakarya University Institute of Social Sciences, Unpublished MA thesis, Sakarya 2004.
- 6 Fikrettin Yavuz, "Ermeni Kimliği'nin İnşasında Bir Patrik Portresi: Mıgırdıç Kırmyan" (*Constructing Armenian Identity: A Portrait of Patriarch Mkrtich Khrimian*), *Sakarya Üniversitesi SBE Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi*, Vol. 2/No. 1, Sakarya 2007, pp. 257-289; Fikrettin Yavuz, "Bir Din Adamının Ermeni Cemaatine Çağrısı: Kırmyan ve Demir Keççe Vaazı" (*A Clergyman's Call to the Armenian Community: Khrimian and the Iron Ladle Sermon*), *Sev ve İskân Kanunu'nun 100. Yılında II. Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri ve Büyük Güçler Sempozyumu*, 6-8 Mayıs 2015, Vol. 2, Erzurum 2015, pp. 825-836; Fikrettin Yavuz, Zeynep İskefiyeli, "İstanbul Ermeni Patrikhanesi'nin Berlin Kongresi'ne Gönderdiği Heyetin Avrupa'daki Faaliyetleri" (*The Activities of the Berlin Delegation of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul in Europe*), *Belleten*, Vol. 84/No. 299, Nisan 2020, pp. 357-399.
- 7 Ali Tekkoyun, *The Role of Religion in the Formation of Nationalism, Two Case Studies: Turkish and Armenian Nationalisms*, (MA thesis). University of Utah Department of Languages and Literatures, Unpublished MA thesis, Utah 2011.
- 8 Ramazan Erhan Güllü, *Ermeni Sorunu ve İstanbul Ermeni Patrikhanesi (1878-1923)* (*The Armenian Question and the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul (1878-1923)*), Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 2015.
- 9 Yaşar Tolga Cora, *Transforming Erzurum/Karin: Social and Economic History of a Multi-Ethnic Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Chicago Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Unpublished PhD thesis, Chicago 2016.
- 10 Richard, A., Antaramian, *In Subversive Service of the Sublime State: Armenians and Ottoman State Power, 1844-1896*, Published PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan 2014.
- 11 Richard, A., Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire, Armenians and the Politics of Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2020.

been a notable increase in studies that cite Antaramian, echo his arguments, or contextualize similar figures within a broader framework. A prominent example is Dzovinar Derderian's doctoral dissertation, which, inspired by Antaramian, examines four figures from Van—Khrimian, Srvandzhtians, Tevkants, and Topuzean—and similarly characterizes Khrimian. In her analysis, she portrays him as a reformer, asserting that his activities were carried out not only in Van but also throughout the Empire¹². This influence is evident in recent scholarship, suggesting that the interpretation of Khrimian as an Ottomanist mediator or reformer has become a widely accepted approach¹³.

Khrimian's historical portrayal in both Armenian and Turkish historiography has been characterised by a shared narrative that predominantly emphasises his nationalist character. Indeed, while Antaramian roots Khrimian's identity in Ottomanism, this presents a divergence from prevailing nationalist narratives. This article delves into the enduring legacy of Mkrtich Khrimian, examining his pivotal role as both a prominent Church leader and an influential political figure. By comparing perspectives within Turkish and Armenian historiography, this study explores the two diametrically opposed views that Khrimian should be primarily viewed as either an Ottomanist or a nationalist.

Before delving into the specificities of Mkrtich Khrimian's contributions and the diverse interpretations of his legacy, it is crucial to clarify the core terms that underpin this discourse—nationalism and Ottomanism. Understanding these concepts within their historical context not only facilitates a deeper comprehension

12 Dzovinar Derderian, *Nation-Making and the Language of Colonialism: Voices from Ottoman Van in Armenian Print Media and Handwritten Petitions (1820s to 1870s)*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Michigan 2019, p. vi-vii, 35. See also: Dzovinar Derderian, "Mapping the Fatherland: Artzvi Vaspurakan's Reforms Through the Memory of the Past", in Vahé Tachdjian, ed. *Houshamadyan, Ottoman Armenians: Life, Culture, Society*, Vol. 1, Houshamadyan, Berlin 2014, pp. 144-169; Dzovinar Derderian, "Shaping Subjectivities and Contesting Power through the Image of Kurds", *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics*, ed. Ali Sipahi, Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian, Publisher: I.B. Tauris 2016, pp. 91-109; Dzovinar Derderian, "Orders and Disorders of Marriage, Church, and Empire in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Armenia", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2024, 56, pp. 75-90.

13 İpek K. Yosmaoğlu, "Conclusions: Ottoman Armenian Revolutionaries and the dilemma of deliverance through violence", *To Kill a Sultan: A Transnational History of the Attempt on Abdulhamid II (1905)* ed. Houssine Alloul et.al, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2017, p. 247-264; Talin Suciyan, *Outcasting Armenians Tanzimat of The Provinces*, Syracuse University Press, New York 2023; Varak Ketsemanian, *The Armenian Constitutional Order in the Late Ottoman Empire: From Reform to Crisis*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Princeton University 2022.

of Khrimian's actions and ideologies but also enhances our grasp of the broader socio-political dynamics of the period. Nationalism, in this context, refers to the ideological movement promoting the self-determination and political autonomy of a distinct group, where "self-determination" is not used in its post-World War II legal sense, but rather denotes a broader aspiration for communal autonomy and national self-expression. This manifested distinctly among various ethnic entities within the Ottoman Empire, while Armenian nationalism, influenced by European ideas, sought cultural preservation and, for some, political autonomy or independence¹⁴. On the other hand, Ottomanism was a reformist concept aimed at creating a cohesive Ottoman identity that transcended ethnic and religious divisions, promoting equality and unity in response to the empire's internal crises and the external pressures of nationalism¹⁵. Armenian elites and the broader community responded to Ottoman policies intended to unify various ethnic and religious groups in diverse ways. Whereas some segments of the Armenian population, particularly those with reformist inclinations, expressed enthusiastic support, believing in the potential for genuine equality and reform within the Ottoman framework, others, especially revolutionaries, were far more sceptical, viewed Ottomanism as a strategic ploy designed to suppress their aspirations for autonomy or independence¹⁶. It is important to acknowledge, however, that a commitment to Ottomanism and allegiance to one's ethnic or religious identity were not inherently in conflict with one another. It is certainly possible to identify historical figures who demonstrated a firm commitment to both Ottomanism and their ethnic identity¹⁷. However, the case of Khrimian does not appear to be one that can be appropriately evaluated within this particular framework.

14 Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*, Hurst & Company, London 2006, pp. 188-223; Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1993.

15 For an in-depth analysis of the ideological underpinnings of Ottomanism, see. Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 2000.

16 For insights into the non-Muslim's perspectives on Ottomanism, see. Danold Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, pp. 188-192; Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities: Armenians, Greeks, Albanians, Jews, and Arabs, 1908-1918*, University of Utah Press, Utah 2014, pp. 10-42.

17 For example, Christine Philliou explores the life of Stephanaki Vogorides, a Phanariot Greek diplomat and politician, to illustrate how different Ottoman subjects negotiated their loyalty to the Ottoman state while maintaining their ethnic or communal identities. See. Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles and California 2011.

Before addressing whether Mkrtich Khrimian should be characterised as a nationalist or an Ottomanist, examining his brief biography is essential. This biographical overview provides the necessary context to understand the evolution of his thoughts and actions within the socio-political milieu of the time. By tracing Khrimian's early life, education, and key experiences, we can gain insights into the influences that shaped his ideological stance and subsequent role in Armenian and Ottoman affairs. This contextual foundation is crucial for an analysis of whether Khrimian's legacy aligns more closely with the tenets of nationalism or Ottomanism.

1. Khrimian's Formative Years and Ecclesiastical Rise

Mkrtich Khrimian, baptised "Little Mgrdich", was born on 4 April 1820 in the *Aygestan* (Bağlar) quarter of Van, near the *Hanguysner Surp Asdvadzadzin Church* (Dere Kilisesi). His father passed away during his childhood¹⁸. While Lynch describes Khrimian's family as affluent, involved in Crimean trade (reflected in their surname)¹⁹, Ottoman archives present a more modest portrayal, suggesting pastoral roots²⁰. Despite these discrepancies, his formative experiences, including education under his uncle and five or six years as a weaving supervisor, shaped his multifaceted perspectives and future impact on Armenian society²¹. Khrimian's informal education took place in parochial schools on the islands of Lim and Ktuts on Lake Van and later at *Varak Monastery*, where he studied classical Armenian, history, and ecclesiastical literature²². His marriage in 1845 to Mariam, daughter of Hovannes Sevifgen, marked a significant turning point. The union, in line with Armenian custom, produced a daughter, Takuhi²³. However, the tragic loss of

18 T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler (OBE), (20 Aralık 1893-25 Ocak 1894), Vol. XVII, İstanbul 1989, No. 36/117; Shoghik, Voskian, "Mkrtich' Khrimyani kyank'y, mankararzhakan lusavorakan gortsuneut'yuny" (The life and pedagogical enlightening activity of Mkrtich Khrimian), *Etchmiadzin*, Official magazine of the Holy Etchmiadzin Mother See of the Catholicosate of All Armenians, Vol. 63/No. 10, 2007, p. 98.

19 H. F. B., Lynch, *Armenia Travels and Studies*, Vol. I, London 1901, p. 239.

20 BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Tahrirât-ı Enebiye ve Mâbeyn Mütercimliği (Y.PRK.TKM.), 25/1, 02 Za 1309 / 29 Mayıs 1892.

21 Lynch, *ibid*, Vol. I, p. 239.

22 BOA, OBE, Vol. XVII, No. 36/117; Voskian, *ibid*, p. 98.

23 BOA, OBE, Vol. XVII, No. 36/117; Rubina, Perroomian, "The Heritage of Van Provincial Literature", *Armenian Van Vaspurakan*, ed. Richard Hovannisian, Mazda Publishers, California 2000, p. 134.

both his wife and young daughter deeply affected him and influenced his future endeavours²⁴.

According to Peroomian, Khrimian's brief marriage was followed by extensive travel, partly to evade military conscription²⁵. After journeying through eastern Ottoman regions and a pilgrimage to Echmiadzin, he arrived in Istanbul in May 1848. Initially aspiring to further his education, he instead worked as a cobbler before becoming a teacher at a girls' school in Hasköy. His impassioned lectures on the Armenian homeland earned him the titles "Hayastantsi Varzhapet" and "Vanetsi Varzhapet"²⁶. Determined to visit Jerusalem, Khrimian saved diligently for a pilgrimage, which further cemented his status within Armenian literary circles. By 1852, he had gained recognition among Istanbul's Armenians, granting him access to elite networks, including prominent families like the Ayvadians, Odians, and Balian. These connections, particularly with the Odians, proved instrumental in his later involvement in Ottoman public affairs²⁷. Khrimian also undertook assignments for the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul. In late 1852, he travelled to Cilicia to research the Catholicosate of Sis, teaching at the Catholicosate monastery during his visit²⁸. Returning briefly to Istanbul, he later returned to Van in 1853, where he paid homage at the graves of his wife and daughter. This act of devotion led to his dedication as a spiritual guide for his people²⁹.

Grieving the profound loss of his family, Khrimian turned to spirituality, deciding to pursue a religious vocation³⁰. On 14 February 1854, he was ordained as a priest by Bishop Kapriel Shiroyan at *Akdamar Monastery* on Lake Van, becoming a *Vartabed*³¹. His tenure in Van, marked by enthusiasm and a close rapport with his community, was eventually marred by tensions with colleagues, prompting his

24 Lynch, *ibid*, Vol. I, p. 239.

25 Peroomian, *ibid*, pp. 134-135.

26 Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, p. 121; Vağarşap, Seropyan, "Hrimyan, Mıgırdıç", *Yaşayanları ve Yapılarıyla Osmanlılar*, Vol. I, YKY, İstanbul 1999, p. 568.

27 BOA, OBE, Vol. XVII, No. 36/117, Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, p. 121.

28 Vağarşap Seropyan, "Hrimyan, Mıgırdıç", *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. IV, Tarih Vakfı: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, İstanbul 1993, p. 91; Ara Caprielian, "Khrimian and Cilicia", *Hayrig, a Celebration of His Life and Vision on the Eightieth Anniversary of His Death (1907-1987)*, A Publication of the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, New York 1987, p. 51.

29 Peroomian, *ibid*, p. 136.

30 BOA, OBE, Vol. XVII, No. 36/117.

31 Seropyan, *Yaşayanları...*, p. 568.

return to Istanbul³². There, Khrimian became a preacher for the Patriarchate, residing in Üsküdar and gaining renown for his eloquent, patriotically charged sermons³³. Recognising the influence of the press, he launched the periodical *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (*The Eagle of Van*) in June 1855³⁴. However, weary of city life, he returned to Van in late 1856, establishing a printing press at *Varak Monastery*, where he resumed the periodical as its abbot³⁵.

In 1861, Khrimian was reassigned to *Sourp Garabet Monastery* in Muş, where he fostered a vibrant intellectual environment akin to Varak³⁶. He launched another periodical, *Artstvik Tarono* (*The Eagle of Muş*), and established a school to educate local youth. His efforts earned him appointment as Bishop of Muş by Kevork IV of Istanbul in Echmiadzin in 1868³⁷. While Khrimian contended with challenges in Muş, internal discord within Istanbul's Armenian community led to the resignation of Patriarch Bogos Taktakian II. In August 1869, Khrimian was elected as the 71st Armenian Patriarch of Turkey by the General Assembly³⁸. This position granted him significant influence within the Armenian community and a critical role in advancing its interests.

2. From the Patriarchate to the Catholicosate

During his tenure as Patriarch in Istanbul, Khrimian became widely admired for his philanthropic initiatives, which included fundraising for Armenian hospitals, churches, and other charitable institutions³⁹. These efforts reflected his deep concern for the welfare of Armenians, particularly those in the provinces. He saw addressing their hardships as a moral and political imperative, repeatedly emphasising this priority in his public addresses. Armenian historian Sarkissian notes that Khrimian demonstrated an unyielding resolve to tackle these issues “either fairly or otherwise.”⁴⁰ His speeches during his candidacy for the Patriarchate

32 BOA, OBE, Vol. XVII, No. 36/117, Voskianian, *ibid*, pp. 101-102.

33 Seropyan, *Yaşayanlar...*, p. 568, Lynch, *ibid*, Vol. I, p. 240.

34 Seropyan, *Dünden Bugüne...*, p. 91.

35 Peroonian, *ibid*, p. 137.

36 BOA, OBE, Vol. XVII, No. 36/117.

37 Seropyan, *Dünden Bugüne...*, p. 91.

38 Seropyan, *Yaşayanlar...*, p. 568.

39 BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Arzuhal Jurnal (Y.PRK.AZJ), 22/99, 11 Ra 1310 / 3 Ekim 1892.

40 A. O. Sarkissian, *History of the Armenian Question to 1885*, the University of Illinois Press, Illinois 1938, p. 38.

revealed a clear vision: “Do not regard me solely as the Patriarch of Istanbul; rather, I represent Armenia’s afflictions and wounds. While I am unfamiliar with the strategies employed by my predecessors in presenting Armenian grievances to the Sublime Porte, I intend to pursue a more efficacious course of action”⁴¹. This bold rhetoric signalled a departure from previous approaches, focusing on a more active engagement with the Sublime Porte on behalf of Armenian grievances.

Despite his popularity among many Armenians, Khrimian’s agenda and assertive style alienated some amiras, who viewed his actions as dangerously provocative. When their warnings were ignored, they boycotted assembly meetings, further escalating tensions. Their opposition angered Khrimian, who reportedly vowed to confront them individually and stated that “You will see! I will make the amiras know their place, and I will deal with each one of them individually until I destroy them”⁴². By late 1873, realising that securing their support was impossible, he resigned as Patriarch, announcing his decision to the Armenian National Assembly. Following his resignation, he was appointed as a preacher at *Surp Krikor Lusavoriç Church* in Kuzguncuk⁴³, where he also continued his literary and intellectual pursuits while closely monitoring developments regarding “the Armenian Question”⁴⁴.

The conclusion of the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War brought the Armenian Question to international prominence. The Treaty of San Stefano included provisions for Armenian protection, but concerns over Russian territorial gains prompted its revision at the Berlin Congress⁴⁵.

41 Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi (Armenians in History and the Armenian Question)*, Belge Yayınları, İstanbul 1987, pp. 176-177.

42 Levon Panos Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri Tarihi (History of the Armenians in Turkey)*, IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2003, p. 558.

43 Scropeyan, *Yaşayanlar...*, p. 568.

44 The “Armenian Question” refers to diplomatic and political issues concerning the rights and treatment of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For a comparative analysis, see. Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire: An Anthology of Historical Writings, 1878-1914*, University of California Press, California 1967; Kamuran Gürün, *The Armenian File, The Myth of Innocence Exposed*, İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2007.

45 For various aspects of the War and the Treaty of Berlin, see. *War and Diplomacy, The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and Peter Sluglett, The University of Utah Press, Utah 2011.

Aware of the considerable interests at stake, Patriarch Nerses formed a delegation led by former Patriarch Khrimian to attend the Berlin Congress⁴⁶. Khrimian, selected to lead the Armenian delegation, prepared extensively for the Congress, travelling to major European capitals such as Rome, Paris, and London to lobby for support. In Berlin, he engaged in intense discussions with international diplomats, advocating for Armenian reforms. However, the Congress's final treaty clauses fell far short of expectations. Upon returning to Istanbul, Khrimian delivered an impassioned sermon at Kumkapı, eloquently articulating his disappointment. Using the metaphor of a “paper ladle,” he lamented the Armenians’ lack of tangible power to secure their rights, a message that resonated deeply within the community⁴⁷.

In December 1879, Khrimian was appointed Bishop of Van, where he actively sought to implement the reforms promised at the Berlin Congress⁴⁸. Through persistent correspondence with European powers and the Russian Tsar, he highlighted the “oppression and maltreatment” faced by Armenians and urged intervention. Initially, his appeals were directed to the Russian Tsar⁴⁹, followed by subsequent communications to the Queen of England, seeking intervention⁵⁰. Between 1879 and 1885, Khrimian’s activities in Van, including his perceived connections with revolutionary groups, attracted Ottoman scrutiny. In response, the authorities transferred him to Jerusalem. However, Khrimian ultimately relocated to Echmiadzin, the spiritual centre of the Armenian Church⁵¹.

In 1891, following the death of Catholicos Maghar, Khrimian was elected Catholicos of All Armenians with overwhelming support⁵². As Catholicos, he tirelessly fundraised for Armenian communities, advocating for their welfare

46 For further information, see Yavuz, İskefiyeli, *ibid*, pp. 357-399.

47 Yavuz, “Bir Din Adamı”, pp. 825-836.

48 Yavuz, “Ermeni Kimliği”, p. 273.

49 George, A., Bournoutian, *Russia and the Armenians of Transcaucasia, 1797-1889, a Documentary Record, Annotated Translation and Commentary*, California 1998, p. 448.

50 FO. 424/132, *the Earl of Dufferin to Earl Granville*, Memorandum communicated by Armenian Patriarch, No. 88, p. 118.

51 Yavuz, “Ermeni Kimliği”, pp. 274-275.

52 For further information, see Ali Arslan, “Eçmiyazin’de Krimyan’ın Katogigos Dönemi ve Osmanlı-Eçmiyazin İlişkilerinin Bozulması” (Khrimian’s Tenure as Catholicos in Etchmiadzin and the Decline of Ottoman-Etchmiadzin Relations), *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, No. 37, İstanbul 2002, pp. 27-44.

and rights. His efforts were particularly focused on resisting Tsar Nicholas II's Russification policies, which included confiscating Armenian Church properties. Despite numerous appeals, Khrimian was unable to secure an audience with the Tsar to address these grievances. Seeking alternatives, he approached Sultan Abdulhamid II, requesting the relocation of the Catholicosate to the Ottoman Empire. However, the Sultan declined, advising Khrimian to "maintain his current position" in Echmiadzin⁵³. Khrimian's approach reflected his belief that the Ottoman Empire, despite its challenges, posed a lesser threat to Armenian identity than Russian policies.

Visiting Khrimian in the final days of his life, the renowned Armenian poet and writer, Avedik Issahakkian, noted that, "Hayrik is ailing; his time is short." Khrimian passed away on 29 September 1907. Reflecting on this encounter later, Issahakkian remarked, "While he may have been in the company of eminent individuals, to his people, he was above all a cherished paternal figure, known affectionately as Hayrik"⁵⁴. Khrimian had become distinguished not only as a literary luminary but also as a multifaceted servant of the Armenian community. Assuming roles as varied as educator, author, poet, clergyman, bishop, Patriarch of İstanbul, and Catholicos of all Armenians, one of his most remarkable traits was his nationalism.

3. *Hayrik's Armenian Nationalism*

Armenian writer William Bairamian asserts that "[b]efore the revolutionaries, there was Hayrig"⁵⁵, highlighting Mkrtich Khrimian's foundational role in fostering Armenian nationalism. His influence is widely acknowledged within both Armenian and Turkish historiographies, which consistently recognise Khrimian as a pivotal figure in the development of Armenian national identity during the 19th century. This period saw Armenian intellectuals, including poets, writers, and clergy, drive a social awakening influenced by broader nationalist movements, with Khrimian at the forefront⁵⁶.

53 BOA, Sadaret Mektubi Mühimme Kalemi Evrakı (A.MKT.MHM.), 699/5, 12 Ş 1321/3 Kasım 1903; BOA, Yıldız Sadaret Hususi Maruzat Evrakı (Y.A.Hus.), 460/22, 04 Ş 1321/26 Ekim 1903.

54 Ara Baliozian, "Khrimian Hayrig (1820-1907)", *Hayrig, a Celebration of His Life and Vision on the Eightieth Anniversary of His Death (1907-1987)*, A Publication of the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, New York 1987, p. 32.

55 William Bairamian, *Iron Ladle by Khrimyan Hayrig*, <https://thearmenite.com/2014/03/iron-ladle-khrimyan-hayrig/> (accessed: 20.06.2024).

56 Suny, *ibid*, p. 10; Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of*

Armenian historiography often portrays Khrimian as a key figure in cultivating Armenian collective consciousness and advancing nationalist thought⁵⁷. Nalbandian identifies him as the precursor to Armenian revolutionary organisations,⁵⁸ while Panossian underscores his influence on political thinking and the evolution of Armenian nationalism⁵⁹. Libaridian highlights Khrimian's shift from abstract nationalism to a more populist approach, connecting him to the broader liberation movement⁶⁰. These perspectives frame Khrimian as a symbol of both intellectual leadership and grassroots activism within Armenian society⁶¹.

Turkish historiography similarly acknowledges Khrimian's impact, though interpretations are often more critical. Uras describes him as a fervent advocate for the Armenian Question, collaborating with rebel leaders and emphasising rebellion⁶². Gürün presents Khrimian as a vocal proponent of Armenian autonomy⁶³, while Kocaş positions him as instrumental in preparing the Armenian rebellion movement⁶⁴. These examples highlight that many scholars view Khrimian as a precursor to the revolutionary movement or see his activism within the broader context of national identity formation and the struggle for autonomy. In addition to such perspectives, the last years have seen the emergence of a new viewpoint on Khrimian's role and legacy. A departure from established interpretations, this innovative perspective has emerged from contemporary studies on Armenian history. When scrutinised in light of existing scholarship, as well as Khrimian's actions and rhetoric, it offers further insight into Khrimian Hayrik's true historiographical significance.

Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century, University of California Press, Los Angeles 1963, pp. 57-58.

57 Richard Hovannissian, a prominent Armenian scholar, contextualises his activism within the sphere of national identity formation and articulating demands for autonomy – a prevalent perspective on Khrimian in Armenian historiography. Richard Hovannissian, *The Armenian Question*, pp. 203-238.

58 Nalbandian, *ibid*, p. 58.

59 Panossian, *ibid*, p. 141, 167.

60 Gerard, J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State*, Routledge, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey 2004, p. 59.

61 Aghayan, *ibid*, p. 132.

62 Uras, *ibid*, pp. 115, 422-423.

63 Gürün, *ibid*, p. 80.

64 Şadi Kocaş, *Tarih Boyunca Ermeniler ve Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri (Armenians Throughout History and Turkish-Armenian Relations)*, Altınok Matbaası, Ankara 1967, p. 124.

4. Nationalist-Separatist Cleric or Ottomanist Mediator / Proponent of Ottoman Integration?

A novel scholarly perspective on Khrimian, diverging from the above nationalist narratives, examines this significant figure through the framework of Ottomanism. Antaramian, the main proponent of this approach, challenges conventional interpretations by presenting Khrimian as an advocate of *Tanzimat* (reorganisation) reforms⁶⁵. He argues that Khrimian aligned with Ottoman state authorities seeking to centralise governance and extend influence to provincial regions. According to Antaramian, Khrimian perceived *Tanzimat* policies as a solution to the challenges faced by provincial Armenians, including pressures from local Muslim power brokers and Armenian clergy. By gaining the support of Armenian bureaucrats and reorganising communal institutions, Khrimian is depicted as a vanguard of the Ottoman reform program. Most notably, Antaramian suggests that Khrimian incorporated local knowledge and culture into an “Ottomanist repertoire of action,” reflecting his strategic approach⁶⁶. This so-called repertoire included imperial centralisation and legitimacy structures intertwined with religious, ecclesiastical, and provincial political semiotics. Antaramian elaborates that Khrimian and his clerical allies positioned the Armenian Church as a scaffold for imperial bureaucracy during the 19th century, using Ottomanism as a framework to achieve this. He identifies amiras as key collaborators with the Ottoman government and argues that Khrimian developed strategies rooted in imperial politics, focusing on the central state’s authority. These strategies, as Antaramian explains in somewhat abstract terms, involved “imperial ideology (centralization) and legitimacy structures, the entwined semiotics of religious politics (and its ecclesiastical and liturgical expressions) and provincial culture”⁶⁷. His analysis attempts to clarify these ambiguous and challenging concepts through his scholarly works, in a bid to render them tangible and comprehensible to his readers. Derderian adopts a

65 The Tanzimat Reforms were a set of legal and administrative changes introduced throughout the Ottoman Empire in the mid-19th century. They were designed to modernise the State’s institutions and promote equal rights for all citizens. For further information, see Halil İnalçık, “Tanzimat Nedir? (What is Tanzimat?)”, *Tanzimat: Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, (Tanzimat: The Ottoman Empire in the Process of Change)*, ed. Halil İnalçık and Mehmet Seyitdanlıoğlu, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2011, pp. 29-57.

66 Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, pp.19-20.

67 Richard A. Antaramian, “Confessionalism, Centralism, Armenians, and Ottoman Imperial Governance in the 18th and 19th Centuries”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 54/No. 2, 2022, p. 322.

similar stance, showing how the discourses of clergymen such as Khrimian affirmed Istanbul's centrality while shaping national sentiment. She argues that Khrimian's efforts served both to shape "affective notions of the patria and the nation" and to render Istanbul "the centre of power"⁶⁸.

Antaramian further posits that Khrimian's provincial familiarity provided a unique advantage in aligning with centralisation efforts. He suggests that Khrimian's writings in *Artsvi Vaspurakan* prioritised land and agency, empowering inhabitants and assigning them an active political role within the centralising framework⁶⁹. Nalbandian, however, contends that *Artsvi Vaspurakan* simultaneously contained nationalist rhetoric. For instance, articles include terms like "revolt" and messages advocating resistance against oppression, which contradict the Ottomanist discourse Antaramian attributes to Khrimian⁷⁰. The journal's content, published after its establishment in Van in 1858, reflects nationalist expressions between the lines. Phrases such as "If you don't help your nation, what is another nation for?" and "The love of the nation is dear" emphasise national loyalty and unity, subtly promoting nationalism⁷¹. Additionally, it is referred to oppressive forces as a "dark gang," implicitly criticising Ottoman authorities and calling for collective action. These elements reinforce themes of national awakening and resistance, encouraging Armenians to unite against perceived injustices⁷². Notably, the journal featured articles that called for unified action, reinforcing a sense of national consciousness and collective responsibility⁷³. One notable article, *The Prayer of the Old Women of Van*, dated 1862-63, explicitly calls for "freedom for the Armenian nation", highlighting Khrimian's advocacy for Armenian liberation⁷⁴. Another piece discussing the "re-sewing of the national attire" metaphorically symbolises the revitalisation

68 Derderian, *ibid*, pp. 246-247.

69 Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, pp. 124-125.

70 "Let us stop crying, let us be courageous, and let us fight ...we are not chickens, we are also men and children of men ... Let us wipe our tears, not shed them ... Those that cried, cried and passed on. They were the old. We must follow the new." Nalbandian, *ibid*, p. 54.

71 *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, Hayrené turs/Away from Armenia, 1858, no. 9, p. 249.

72 *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, Zogovrtagan tbrots/Folk School, 1861, no. 3, p. 70.

73 *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, Hayastanahayr yev Hayere/Father of Armenia and the Armenians, 1861, no. 3, p. 87.

74 *Our Father, Who art in Heaven...God, save this sinner, God forgiving, God merciful...Take not fear from the mind, shame from the face...May You cure all those in despair; then cure us...Our Mother, Mother of Christ, I call upon you. Help things go well with our migrant gharibs...May bread be cheap, water abundant, rain plentiful...love and unity among the Armenian leaders, freedom to the Armenian nation. God, glory onto You. I have put my hope upon You. Our Father...* Perroomian, *ibid*, p. 134.

of Armenian nationalism⁷⁵. Such language and imagery indicate that Khrimian promoted the preservation and restoration of Armenian identity, diverging from the Ottomanist framework. References to maintaining national symbols and culture suggest that Khrimian viewed nationalism as a living and dynamic force, rather than a relic of the past.

While Khrimian appeared to engage with Tanzimat reforms to advance education, cultural empowerment, and political organisation for Armenians, his ultimate aim seems to have been a form of Armenian self-determination—understood here as mentioned above, not in its modern sense, but rather as a quest for increased communal autonomy and national self-expression within or beyond the Ottoman framework. The opportunities provided by Tanzimat reforms may have been utilised as a platform to further nationalist goals, demonstrating the limitations of Ottoman reformism in addressing the growing momentum of nationalist movements in the 19th century.

As mentioned earlier, one of Khrimian's notable qualities was his progressive approach in establishing the school in Van and fostering the education of his students. While his status as a progressive is unquestionable, there is a compelling argument against identifying him as an Ottomanist, as no evidence suggests that the teachers he trained or the students graduating from his schools adhered to Ottomanist ideals. Examining the profile of his most prominent student and assistant, Garegin Srvandzians, provides valuable insight. In 1862, during the Zeytun uprising, Srvandzians authored a lengthy article titled *Let's Begin Our Work Again*. In this piece, he celebrated the courage of the people of Zeytun, urging them to persevere and remain steadfast in their struggle. He expressed the belief that everything should be sacrificed for the nation, with the hope that the nation would always hold such sacrifices in high regard. He also encouraged Armenians to persist in their efforts, even in the face of adversity, asserting that their perseverance would ultimately lead to success⁷⁶. Such statements reveal no alignment with Ottomanist thought but instead reflect a clear nationalist perspective. This interpretation aligns with assessments of Khrimian's own nationalist outlook. He has been described as embodying the spirit of his time,

75 "Will the Armenian national flag always remain in antiquity? - No, no. but in order to sew the dress of the national renewal again, a hand is needed, a designer is needed, a person is needed, a commitment is needed, it needs to be repaired". *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, Hayreniken turs ktanvats martots çare/ The speech to those found outside the homeland, 1862, No. 8, p. 230.

76 Peroomian, *ibid*, pp. 139-140.

representing a new, resolute determination within the Armenian community. His influence extended to educating a generation of young Armenians eager to participate in their nation's struggle for freedom, a movement that eventually contributed to uprisings and the emergence of political parties⁷⁷. These elements collectively affirm the nationalist dimension of Khrimian's ideology, distinguishing it from any Ottomanist alignment.

Likewise, an examination of the trajectories of students graduating from the educational institutions Khrimian founded highlights that many subsequently organised revolutionary committees and became involved in endeavours of armed resistance. According to Peroomian, these schools trained a generation of "future intellectuals" to assume the leadership of educational and cultural life in Vaspurakan. When "Ottoman maltreatment" became unbearable, these intellectuals spearheaded secret self-defence groups, organising the struggle for the betterment of Armenian life. Among them were prominent leaders of emancipation and revolutionary movements, such as the Tevkants brothers, Khoren Khrimian, Mesrop Papazian, Panos Terlemezian, Poghos Natanian, and Mkrtich Terlemezian (Avetisian)⁷⁸. These individuals were notable Armenian nationalist figures during the 1880s and 1890s. Avetisian, for instance, was one of the founders of Armenekan, the first Armenian revolutionary political party⁷⁹. The nationalist character of Khrimian's publishing activities and the students he mentored are unequivocal. Perhaps Khrimian's most renowned association with nationalism, however, is his famous sermon before the doors of Kumkapı Church in Istanbul.

5. Evaluating the Impact of the Iron Ladle Sermon on Armenian Nationalism

Khrimian Hayrik's legacy is chiefly built on his famous speech, variously referred to as the "Sermon on the Sword", the Iron Ladle Sermon or similar⁸⁰. For many historians, the Treaty of Berlin and Khrimian's subsequent speech marked a turning point in how Ottoman Armenians would advocate for and organise

77 Nalbandian, *ibid*, p. 54.

78 Peroomian, *ibid*, p. 139.

79 Nalbandian, *ibid*, pp. 98, 100.

80 Bairamian, "Beyond the Iron Ladle", p. 24.

themselves⁸¹. This seminal sermon, delivered at the Patriarchate upon his return from the Berlin Congress in 1878, is the focal point for the nationalist ethos attributed to Khrimian Hayrik, as Dasnabedian describes it, one of the early signs of the coming revolution⁸². Symbolically laden, this address is widely regarded as a nationalist manifesto, resonating as a clarion call to action. To contextualise it within its broader historical continuum, the 1880s witnessed the nascent formation of organizations primed to undertake armed resistance in alignment with Khrimian's vision, while the 1890s bore witness to the eruption of armed insurrections, epitomising the fruition of his ideological impetus.

Addressing the Armenian people directly, Khrimian recounted his experience at the Congress, where he had hoped to secure support for the Armenian Cause. He described the scene at the Congress vividly, likening the distribution of concessions to a cauldron of *harissa* (a traditional porridge), with representatives of larger nations wielding their “iron ladles” (or weapons) to claim their share. As delegates from Bulgaria, Serbia, and other regions boldly used their swords to claim their portion, Khrimian found himself armed only with a petition, which proved insufficient in the face of political realities where weapons spoke louder than words. He lamented the absence of Armenian warriors from Zeytun, Sassoun and other regions, emphasising the need for strength and self-reliance in achieving liberation. The end of his sermon is perhaps his most famous incitation:

“Fellow Armenians, you have certainly well understood what weapons could have accomplished and what they do accomplish! Thus, my dear and blessed Armenians, hailing from the provinces, when you return to the Homeland, as a gift to your friends and family, take them each a weapon. Buy weapons upon weapons –and then buy more. Before all else, place the hope of your liberation upon yourself. Give your mind and arms strength– a person must depend on himself in order to be saved”⁸³.

81 For example, Adalian states it was a turning point in Armenian political consciousness. Rouben Paul Adalian, *Historical Dictionary of Armenia*, Second Edition, Historical Dictionaries of Europe, No. 77, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham Toronto Plymouth, UK 2010, p. 447.

82 Hratch Dasnabedian, “The ARF Record: The Balance Sheet of Ninety Years”, *Armenian Review*, Vol. 34/No. 2 (134), June 1981, p. 119.

83 For the full version and various translations of the sermon, see. Ara Caprielian, “Lessons of the Iron Ladle”, *Hayrig, a Celebration of His Life and Vision on the Eightieth Anniversary of His Death (1907-1987)*, A Publication of the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, New York 1987, pp. 23-24; Vardan Arami Parsamyan, *Istoriya armyanskogo naroda, 1801-1900 gg.*, (History of the Armenian People, 1801-1900) Erivan 1972, pp. 291-292; Khrimian Hayrig: The Paper

Later, Khrimian emphasised that the congress conveyed a clear message: strength dictates rights, politics is ineffective, and justice lies at the edge of the sword. He urged Armenians to embrace iron, asserting that their salvation could only be achieved through strength and determination⁸⁴. Building on this point, Khrimian further urged Armenians to recognise the power of weapons in securing their rights and advocated that they arm themselves upon returning home, thereby highlighting the importance of self-defence and self-determination. He concluded by stressing the necessity for Armenians to rely on themselves for their salvation and liberation.

Antaramian offers a reinterpretation of Khrimian's Iron Ladle sermon, challenging its traditional portrayal as a nationalist call for armed rebellion, territorial secession, and alignment with European powers. He argues that this view oversimplifies the complexities of Armenian political dynamics and Khrimian's nuanced stance on violence. According to Antaramian, the sermon emphasised the Armenians' aspiration to acquire arms for self-defence, a theme Khrimian had previously addressed during his tenure as Patriarch in his *Report on Repressions in the Provinces*⁸⁵. While Antaramian frames Khrimian's advocacy for armament as consistent with centralisation efforts, scholars like Koushagian and Payaslian highlight a shift in Khrimian's ideology. They argue that after the Treaty of Berlin, Khrimian transitioned from supporting reforms to endorsing armed revolutionary nationalism, moving away from incremental strategies to champion national independence⁸⁶. This ideological evolution underscores the complexity of Khrimian's trajectory, raising questions about the alignment of his early stance on self-defence with his later nationalist objectives.

Khrimian's expressions of sentiment, as elucidated by Ara Baliozian, resonate significantly: "Until when are you going to be butchered like sheep by the savage and ignorant Kurds? You are man! You have a pair of hands. Do you think you can

Ladle, *Window view of the Armenian Church*, Vol. I/No. 2, Spring 1990, p. 15; Bairamian, *Iron Ladle by Khrimyan Hayrig*, <https://thearmenite.com/2014/03/iron-ladle-khrimyan-hayrig/> (accessed 20.06.2024).

84 Parsamyan, *ibid*, p. 292.

85 Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, p. 135.

86 Torkhom Koushagian, "The Character and Spirit of Khrimian Hayrig", transl. Aris Sevag, *Hayrig*, p. 47, Simon Payaslian, *History of Armenia From the Origin to the Present*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2007, p. 119.

have freedom without blood? Freedom will not be given to you as a gift”⁸⁷. These words, underscored as they are by a fervent emphasis on independence, indicate a deeper aspiration for armed acquisition that goes beyond mere self-defence. Such pronouncements must be contextualised as characteristic of Khrimian’s nationalist ethos – a characterization echoed by many Armenian scholars. Indeed, Libaridian portrays Khrimian not solely as a proponent of imperial centralisation but also as a staunch advocate for the nationalist aspirations of his people. He states that throughout Khrimian’s career, beginning as founder and editor of *Arđsvi Vaspurakan* in 1858, and long before he came to be known as *Hayrig*, Khrimian had made occasional references to the need for Armenians to become armed. In 1861, he thought that the spirit of the times invited people to undertake revolution⁸⁸.

Khrimian’s own retrospective reflection on the sermon, articulated nearly a decade later, lacks clarity regarding the true nature of his call to arms. Seeking to address any confusion surrounding his sermon by denying any responsibility for activities it may have inspired, particularly those of the Hnchakian movement, Khrimian declined to elaborate on his intended message. Instead, he opted to clarify what his metaphorical language did not signify. In his address, Khrimian expressed his belief that nations often need to forcefully assert themselves to make their voices heard and gain recognition. However, he emphasises that he did not advocate for the Armenian people to achieve liberation solely through armed uprising or violence⁸⁹. In short, Khrimian’s message in the sermon was intentionally vague, leaving room for interpretation.

While Khrimian refrained from explicitly elucidating his stance on arms, his interactions with revolutionary committee members sympathetic to armed resistance indicate a tacit alignment with such sentiments. These affiliations ultimately resulted in heightened scrutiny and his exile to Jerusalem. Moreover,

⁸⁷ Baliozian, *ibid*, p. 27.

⁸⁸ Gerard J. Libaridian, *The Ideology of Armenian Liberation: The Development of Armenian Political Thought Before the Revolutionary Movement (1639-1885)*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles 1987, p. 162.

⁸⁹ “I know that I am accused often and that my name is often mentioned in connection with that sermon... Khrimian is still convinced that no nation can make its voice heard without force. But Khrimian did not say that it is possible to have the Armenian people rise up and free itself from oppression with a couple of shishkane, chakmakhli or sürmeli guns; he did not say that it is possible to bring the Ottoman Empire to its knees or with a couple of demonstrations have the bastard European diplomacy side with the Armenian people”. Libaridian, *The Ideology of Armenia*, pp. 165-166.

insights from government reports of Khrimian's conduct shed light on his disposition towards armed struggle. One such report⁹⁰ claims that Khrimian was observed circulating throughout the capital, urging and inciting people to armed action. He advocates acting against oppression, implying that the shooting of Derviş Pasha (*aide-de-champ* and senior advisor to Abdulhamid II) would serve as a symbol of rebellion, criticising people's lack of foresight and suggesting that those who follow his advice will be blessed.

Other narratives surrounding Khrimian's engagements with pro-armament Armenian revolutionaries also cut against assertions positing him as an advocate for Ottoman centralisation. For example, his harbouring of three Russian Caucasian Armenians subject to Ottoman surveillance for suspected involvement in "subversive activities" at his residence in Üsküdar, and his "clandestine participation" in an Armenian revolutionaries' meeting in Beyoğlu, precipitated a notable shift in the State's perception of him⁹¹. These incidents culminated in Khrimian's subsequent exile to Jerusalem⁹². Later, in 1896, as the revolutionary and military efforts of the Dashnaks were starting to gain momentum, Khrimian began to openly support the revolutionary movement as seen in a letter to the Armenians of Van on September 20, 1896, which solidified his alignment with nationalist causes⁹³. His statement in this context further underscores his nationalist sentiments: "Although your losses are great and your martyrs numerous, know ye my sons that without blood the freedom of your nation and the welfare of your people cannot be achieved"⁹⁴.

90 The report states that "The former Patriarch Khrimian would wander around the market, cafes, the tea shop in Bahçekapı, and the former money changer Kulaksız's shop in Galata, and other places until maybe one in the morning, sitting and conversing with the provincials, stirring them up, saying the following: 'What's the use of killing one or two people! Can't you see who should be targeted? If we knew who would come, we could have said to you, "Hey, kids, shoot a bullet into Derviş Pasha's chest.'" The gates of the afterlife were wide open for all of you. You have courage but no foresight. Those who come afterwards will uncover their heads and receive their blessings.'" BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Adliye ve Mezahib Nezareti Maruzatı (Y.PRK.AZN.), 4/43, 29 Z 1307/16 Ağustos 1890.

91 BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Zabtiye Nezareti Maruzatı (Y. PRK. ZB.), 7/9, 20 Ca 1308/1 Ocak 1891; BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Arzuhal Jurnal (Y. PRK. AZJ), 17/96, 10 S 1308/25 Eylül 1890.

92 BOA, OBE, Vol. IX, No. 85/219.

93 He wrote that "The appearance of political parties among you is an example of the rebirth of the historical houses of our nobility, while the Dashnaksoutune Party is the new Armenian Knighthood. Its pioneers have shown themselves to be true knights in Vaspourakan and elsewhere. Rise, rise, Armenians, join this new Armenian knighthood, take heart ...". Dasnabedian, *ibid*, p. 121.

94 Dasnabedian, *ibid*, p. 126.

The reception of Khrimian's image in later nationalist movements further illustrates how he has been reinterpreted far from the framework of Ottomanism. According to Payaslian, following the Russian confiscation of Armenian church properties, the church—particularly under Khrimian's leadership—welcomed the activism of revolutionary parties, especially the Dashnaksutiun⁹⁵. Many scholars emphasise Khrimian's influence on the evolution of Armenian nationalism. Nora Bairamian notes that political entities such as the Ramkavar and Dashnak parties appropriate his image to validate their ideological positions and attract support. Of particular interest is the case of ASALA, a terrorist organisation that strategically mobilised Khrimian's legacy to justify its violent tactics. The group's publication, *Hayastan*, frames Khrimian's rhetoric as part of a militant tradition, portraying him as a symbol of resistance. Similarly, *Azadak*, the newspaper of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, situates Khrimian within the broader discourse of Armenian revolution, highlighting his views on rebellion alongside other intellectual figures⁹⁶. While these appropriations do not constitute direct historical evidence of Khrimian's intentions, they illustrate the extent to which his legacy has been detached from the ideals of Ottomanism and reimagined within nationalist narratives. That such groups have persistently referenced Khrimian suggests not a simple continuity, but rather a meaningful shift in how his figure is remembered and politically mobilised—one that challenges the idea of Khrimian as a consistent Ottomanist actor.

Considering the interplay of Khrimian's rhetoric and actions, it becomes evident that his contributions cannot be neatly categorised into a single ideological framework. However, by examining the consistent nationalist themes in his words and deeds, it is clear that to classify Mkrtych Khrimian as a nationalist, both his rhetoric and actions must be considered. In his speeches and writings, Khrimian frequently used terms such as "nation" and "homeland," emphasising the importance of Armenian identity and self-determination. He sacralised Armenian territory, linking religious and national identity to the land, and promoted education as a key tool for strengthening national consciousness. His focus on cultural renewal within the Armenian community further supports his nationalist vision. Politically, Khrimian advocated for Armenian rights at events like the Berlin Congress and supported revolutionary movements, signalling his alignment with nationalist aspirations.

95 Payaslian, *ibid*, pp. 121-122.

96 Bairamian, "Beyond the Iron Ladle", pp. 25-29.

Rather than relying on a single piece of evidence, his consistent promotion of Armenian autonomy across his body of work points to a broader nationalist agenda. By evaluating both his words and deeds, it becomes clear that Khrimian's legacy is deeply rooted in Armenian nationalism.

Conclusions

Mkrtich Khrimian's legacy has been subject to various interpretations in both Armenian and Turkish historiography, reflecting the complexities of his historical role and ideological stance. While Richard Antaramian's assertion of Khrimian as an "Ottomanist mediator" provides a novel perspective, it fails to align with the broader trajectory of Khrimian's rhetoric and actions. Antaramian's characterization of Khrimian as a proponent of Ottoman centralization and reform is challenged by substantial evidence pointing to Khrimian's alignment with Armenian nationalist aspirations. By framing Khrimian's engagement with Tanzimat reforms as a calculated strategy to empower the Armenian community, rather than a genuine commitment to Ottoman integration, his actions emerge as fundamentally nationalist in orientation.

Throughout his career, Khrimian consistently prioritised the self-determination and cultural preservation of the Armenian people. His publications, such as *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, demonstrate a clear nationalist rhetoric, advocating for unity, resistance against oppression, and the revitalisation of Armenian identity. The themes of national awakening, collective action, and self-reliance evident in his writings and sermons stand in stark contrast to the Ottomanist framework proposed by Antaramian. Moreover, his iconic Iron Ladle Sermon, often cited as a nationalist manifesto, underscored the necessity of strength and self-reliance in achieving Armenian liberation - a message that inspired revolutionary movements and further solidified his status as a nationalist leader.

The trajectory of Khrimian's students and followers provides additional evidence of his nationalist influence. Many of those educated under his guidance became leaders of revolutionary movements and contributors to the Armenian struggle for autonomy. Figures such as Garegin Srvandztiants and other prominent revolutionaries drew inspiration from Khrimian's teachings, advocating for resistance and the pursuit of national freedom. Such outcomes are incompatible with the notion of Khrimian as an Ottomanist, as they reflect a legacy deeply rooted in nationalist ideology.

Furthermore, Khrimian's active support for revolutionary committees in his later years and his alignment with movements such as the Dashnaksutiun reveal an ideological shift that firmly embraced nationalist aspirations. His rhetoric sacralised Armenian territory and linked national identity to the land, reinforcing the foundational elements of Armenian nationalism. The appropriation of Khrimian's image by nationalist organisations, including the ARF and ASALA, further attests to the resonance of his nationalist ethos within the collective Armenian consciousness. If Khrimian were genuinely an Ottomanist, such groups would not have so readily adopted his legacy to further their causes.

In conclusion, Mkrtych Khrimian's contributions and ideology are best understood within the framework of Armenian nationalism rather than Ottomanism. His persistent advocacy for Armenian rights, cultural renewal, and self-determination, coupled with his influence on revolutionary movements, underscores his alignment with nationalist objectives. While Antaramian's reinterpretation offers valuable insights into the complexities of Khrimian's engagements with Ottoman reforms, it ultimately fails to account for the broader nationalist themes that define Khrimian's legacy. By examining both his rhetoric and actions, it becomes evident that Khrimian was not an Ottomanist mediator but rather a fervent advocate of Armenian nationalism.

Author Contributions

Conceiving the Study	Author-1 (%60) - Author-2 (%40)
Data Collection	Author-1 (%60) - Author-2 (%40)
Data Analysis	Author-1 (%60) - Author-2 (%40)
Writing up	Author-1 (%60) - Author-2 (%40)
Submission and Revision	Author-1 (%60) - Author-2 (%40)

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Ethical Statement/Etik Beyan

It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were complied with during the preparation of this study and all the works referred are mentioned in the bibliography./Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

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