

THE ARMENIANS OF AINTAB: THE ECONOMICS OF GENOCIDE IN AN OTTOMAN PROVINCE



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ABSTRACT

One cornerstone of the wartime campaign against Armenians in the Ottoman Empire was the confiscation of their properties and wealth, which were subsequently transferred to Muslim elites and used in reshaping the domestic economy as well as covering wartime expenses. These were among the radical practices of the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) regime aimed at nationalizing the economy. First, many businesses and properties were transferred to state institutions. Second, a lesser but substantial number of firms were transferred to “reliable” Muslim individuals and social institutions. More significant than the transfers themselves was the fact that these extraordinary measures were based on a set of laws, regulations, rules, and decrees that created a legal basis for a more systematic campaign against the movable and immovable properties of Armenians. In this capital transfer, we see that genocide also created the circumstances to enable “the complete fulfillment of the established policy of ethnic domination through expropriation.” Economic dispossession was far from a process carried out “from above” by means of the simple execution of CUP orders. If the process of the economic exclusion of Armenians is to be described fully, a regional historical analysis is necessary. This talk will explore how the process of economic destruction directed at the Armenians of Aintab—present-day Gaziantep, thirty-five miles west of the Euphrates and twenty-eight miles north of today’s Turkish-Syrian border—was implemented. Shifting focus from state to society, thereby prioritizing the local roots of a mass violence in the making, this work will highlight the crucial role played by local elites and provincial notables, actors who prospered in the new social stratum through the acquisition of Armenian property and wealth.



Nazaretian family, 1880s.
Mihran Minassian Private Collection.

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