

Hakob S. Anasian

THE TURKISH FÜTÜVVET AND THE ARMENIANS

As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ottomans employed various forcible means to Turkify their Armenian and other non-Turkish subjects. One of these means was the so-called *devşirme*, a system whereby the Turkish authorities would periodically round up Christian boys throughout the Ottoman Empire and train them in Islamic traditions, with a view to filling the ranks of the Janissary forces; others were also trained to hold the highest imperial offices.¹ The French historian Théodore Lavallée claims that, during the course of three centuries of Ottoman rule, no fewer than five million Christian lads had been forcibly Islamized and Turkified.² It is known that on occasion Christian girls also were rounded up in large numbers for the Turkish harems, and records of such incidents are found in the chronicles of Dawit' Baghishets'i³ and Grigor Kamakhets'i.⁴

Also customary was the Ottomans' use of forcible measures for the Islamization of individuals, as amply attested in the collection of documents published by Hakob Manandian and Hrach'eay Acharian.⁵ Suffice it to say that the Turks employed various pretexts to force any individual to adhere to the Islamic religion and, in the event he failed to comply, he would be subjected to all manner of torture or even execution. As Grigor Kamakhets'i has claimed, the Turks considered it an act worthy of heavenly reward "to force Christians to abjure Christ and accept the law and religion of Muhammad"; they also considered it "a divine act to torment through a variety of tortures and to burn with fire" those who refused to comply.⁶

Paul Ricaut, an English diplomat who in the 1660s had served as attaché to the British ambassador in Constantinople, writes that the Turks would employ "countless machinations" to Islamize non-Muslims.⁷ These are chronicled in numerous Armenian and non-

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