

educated Hamshentsis are well aware of their origin. They even consider themselves Armenians and are interested in finding out more about this identity.<sup>4</sup>

Characteristically, the Hamshen Armenians escaped the Genocide and before that the Hamidian massacres of 1894–96<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ruben Melkonian is an Armenian scholar of Turkish studies at the State University of Armenia, Yerevan. For this interview, see Melkonian, “Kan hamshentsiner,” *Hanrapetakan* 7 (2007).

<sup>5</sup> It all began in 1894 in Sasun, a mountainous region where a large population of Armenians lived in villages. Armenians of Sasun refrained from paying extra taxes to Kurdish aghas, who extracted “tribute in kind” in return for not raiding and ransacking the villages. Despite years of paying these taxes, Armenians had not been spared sporadic attacks by nomadic Kurds of the surrounding areas. In the summer of 1894 a resistance was put up and the tax collectors and Kurdish attackers were driven away. A large Turkish military battalion was sent from nearby Bitlis to help tighten the siege of the Armenian villages. After a month of resistance, running out of food and ammunition, the population and the fighters surrendered to the army and the Kurdish irregulars. In spite of promises made by the army commander not to harm the unarmed population, their surrender was met with brutal looting, rape, torture, and murder. An estimated 5,000 people were killed. The government labeled the incident an “uprising” and used it as a pretext to punish the entire Armenian population by extending the brutality throughout the Ottoman Empire. During two years of widespread massacres, more than 100,000 Armenians were killed, hundreds of towns, villages, and city-quarters were ruined and burned, many Armenians fled the country, and many were forcibly converted to Islam. Many scholars believe that these pogroms marked the beginning of the implementation of a policy of extermination of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire, which culminated in the Genocide of 1915. For a detailed account of the 1894–96 massacres, the role of Armenian revolutionary bands, and the intervention of foreign powers, see Hovannisian, “The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire” (1997).