

THE QUESTION OF KHARPUT

I

Origin and Statement of the Question

As originally presented at the Peace Conference, the claims of the Armenians of Turkey comprised, roughly, the so-called six Armenian Vilayets, namely Erzerum, Van, Bitlis, Diarbekir, Kharput and Sivas, with the Vilayets of Trebizond in the north and Adana (Cilicia) in the south. When the terms of peace with Turkey began seriously to be considered, however, and it became evident that this Armenia was not destined to emerge from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians and their partisans in the United States exerted themselves to save what they could of Greater Armenia. Especially since the San Remo Conference, and since the President's acceptance of the responsibility of delimiting the Turco-Armenian frontier, has a systematic pressure been brought to bear upon the White House and the State Department, in an attempt to induce the President to extend his action beyond the limits set in the San Remo invitation and in the Treaty of Sèvres. This pressure has been exerted chiefly by representatives and partisans of

Turkish Armenia, and has tended in the main toward influencing the President to include within the boundaries of the Armenian State, if not the entire Vilayets of Mamuret-ul-Aziz (Kharput) and Diarbekir, at least the Sandjaks of Dersim and Kharput, together with a portion of the Sandjak of Arghana.

The more important of the documents bearing on this situation are the following:

I. A memorandum of January 15, 1920 (File No. 860J.01/178), to the Secretary of State from Dr. Garo Pasdermadjian, Diplomatic Representative in Washington of the Armenian Republic, indicating among Armenian desiderata the Sandjaks of Dersim and Kharput.

II. A memorandum of May 1, 1920 (860J.01/247), to the same from the same, requesting the Vilayet of Kharput.

III. A telegram of May 4, 1920 (860J.01/251), to the Secretary of State from Boghos Nubar Pasha, President of the Armenian National Delegation in Paris, representing the Armenians of the former Ottoman Empire, and from Mr. Avetis Aharonian, President of the Delegation of the Armenian Republic to the Peace Conference, claiming the Sandjak of Kharput.

IV. A despatch of August 20, 1920 (860J.01/336), to the Secretary of State from the American Embassy in Paris,

transmitting a letter to the President from Boghos Nubar Pasha and Mr. Avetis Aharonian on the boundary question, together with two memoranda and a number of accompanying documents. The leaders of the Armenian delegations in Paris petition the President to include the Kharput area in Armenia, a suggesting that the western and southern boundaries "be drawn to correspond with the boundaries of the former province of Erzerum." Reversion to the boundaries of the Vilayet of Erzerum, as it existed in the first half of the 19th century, would permit the inclusion in Armenia of the city and plain of Kharput, as well as the entire valley of the Chorckh River to its mouth near Batum. In fact, it is suggested that the Armenians would be willing to renounce certain portions of the four Vilayets, and notably the western part of the vilayet of Trebizond, in exchange for the above-mentioned districts.

V. A memorandum by Major-General J. Bagratuni, Chief of the Armenian Military Mission to the United States (760J.6175/15) submitted May 22, 1920, to the Secretary of State by the Appointed Armenian Minister, recommending the inclusion of the Sandjaks of Dersim and Kharput and that part of the Sandjak of Arghana traversed by the valley of the Upper Euphrates (Murad Su).

VI. A memorandum of May 5, 1920 (860J.01/266), to the Secretary of State from the Honorable James W. Gerard, Chairman of the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia, claiming for Armenia "all territories east of the Euphrates River."

VII. A memorial to the President and to the Secretary of State (860J.01/311), presented July 21, 1920, by a delegation representing the United Educational and Benevolent Societies of Harput, Armenia, calling upon the President to include the Province of Kharput, "as well as all the other Armenian provinces", within the frontiers of the new state.

VIII. "Observations Regarding the Boundaries of Armenia" (860J.01/313), by Reverend Ernest W. Riggs, President of Euphrates College, Kharput (under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) and Temporary Secretary and Treasurer of the Armenia America Society, New York, submitted July 24, 1920, to the President and to the Secretary of State. Mr. Riggs suggests that the President recommend to the signatories of the Treaty of Sèvres the attribution to Armenia of Kharput, as well as of various localities in the Vilayets of Sivas, Diarbekir and Adana.

IX. A letter of August 28, 1920 (760J.6715/16) to the President from representatives of the Armenians of the city and Province of Diarbekir, who in a mass meeting

held at West Hoboken, New Jersey, on August 22, resolved to appeal to President Wilson "to include their city and province within the boundaries of the New Armenian Republic."

In addition to the documents listed above, a large number of letters and telegrams has been addressed, both to the President and to the Secretary of State, by individuals, organizations and mass meetings, calling for the inclusion of Kharput within the frontier to be delimited by the President.

It may be added, finally, that an unofficial intimation has been conveyed to the Committee drawing up this report, by representatives in America of the Armenian Republic, to the effect that what their Government chiefly wishes to secure is the Plain of Kharput, lying in the loop which the Euphrates here makes to the west, together with a suitable corridor via the valley of the Murad Su into the Vilayet of Bitlis.

II

Arguments in Favor of Including Kharput within the Boundaries of Armenia.

The data adduced by the above documents in support of their main contention, namely that the whole or a part of the Vilayet of Kharput should be included within the President's terms of reference, may be summarized as follows:

1. Historical Data.

Kharput is historically a part of Armenia Major and was long included in the Turkish Eyalet of Erzerum or Ermenistan (Document IV: Memo. to the President, pp. 2, 3, 4).

Kharput is one of the six so-called Armenian Vilayets of the former Ottoman Empire, so recognized in at least four international instruments signed since 1878 (VI, p. 3; VII, p. 1).

Diarbekir is historically Armenian, the seat of Tigranes the Great (IX, p. 1).

2. Cultural Data.

Kharput has long been an important Armenian cultural centre. There are in the province 2 Armenian colleges and 27 Armenian high schools, besides 2 French schools, one German school, and the American Euphrates College (whose original name of Armenia College was suppressed by the Turks). The students of these foreign institutions "are exclusively Armenians," as well as the doctors and lawyers of the province-which has supplied 75% of all the teachers and clergy of "Armenia". "Of the 360 villages and towns of the Province of Kharput not a single one is without a church, a monastery, or a cemetery whose inscriptions and crosses attest to its Armenian origin" (VII, pp. 1,2).

3. Ethnological Date.

Kharput has always been recognized as a predominantly Armenian province.

It is an Armenian-speaking district. 40% or 40-45,000 of the Armenians in this country come from Kharput. There is now, within the boundaries of the Armenian Republic and in the territory east of the Euphrates in Turkish Armenia, as Armenian population of about 1,700,000, as against a maximum of 750,000 Moslems of various races (VI, pp. 3, 4).

In 1914, according to Dr. Pasdermadjian, the Province had a population of 168,000 Armenians, as against 102,000 Turks and 95,000 Kurds (II). These are the figures given by Documents IV and VII, taken from "La Question Arménienne" by Marcel Léart, 1913, and from the Orange Book of the Russian Foreign Office, 1915. But the Sandjak of Malatia is not included, while the total is increased by 5000 Syrian Christians and 80,000 non-Moslem Kizilbashis.

It is claimed that in the Vilayet of Diarbekir the Armenians also predominate. The statistics of the Armenian Patriarchate at Constantinople for 1912 are as follows (IX, p. 1):

Moslems

Turks	45,000
Sedentary Kurds	30,000
Nomadic Kurds.....	25,000
Total.....	100,000

Christians

Armenians.....	105,000
Miscellaneous.....	60,000
Total.....	165,000
Miscellaneous non-Christians.....	31,000
Grand total.....	296,000

4. Economic data

Kharput, economically, is the richest region of Armenia. The Sandjak of Kharput is an exceptionally rich agricultural region (IV, Notes for Peace Conference, No.3, p. 1). The mineral wealth of Armenia is available only along the edge of the central plateau, where the immense lava crust has been broken by seismic disturbances (IV, Memo. to the President, p. 5).

"Kharput is in minerals, and therefore, desired by Europe (II).

"Armenia would be insufficient in the ... economic sense, if the Districts of Erzerum, Trebizond and Kharput were to be excluded from it." "We believe the reason for the objection raised by the European Powers to the inclusion of ... Kharput in Armenia is that ... the rich silver mine of Keban-Maden is situated in the District of Kharput" (VI, p. 3).

"The entire commerce, agriculture and industry of Kharput were in the hands of the Armenians. The bankers

and artisans were exclusively Armenians. The most intelligent, industrious and capable element of the population was the Armenian... Without the rich and fertile provinces of Kharput, Sivas, Diarbekir and Cilicia, which abound in a coal, iron, silver, and other minerals, Armenia would be a barren mountainous country, deprived of the necessary means to become a strong self-sustaining country" (VII, pp. 1, 2).

"Industrially the Armenians are even more the predominant element in the city of Diarbekir... The Armenian Republic economically needs the Province of Diarbekir. It should not be deprived of the rich copper mines of Argheny (Arghana), nor of the fertile soil and great water power along the Tigris River" (IX, p.2).

5. Geographic Data.

Kharput is geographically a part of the central plateau of Armenia (IV, Notes to Peace Conference, No. 3, p. 1; Memo. to President, pp. 4, 5, 6; Geographic Appendix by Z. Khanzadian).

6. Strategic Data.

Perhaps the most convincing of the arguments presented in the documents cited is set forth by Major-General Bagratuni. First stating that Erzerum is the central and most essential point of the Armenian plateau, the nodus of its trade routes and the strategic key of eastern Asia Minor,

he goes on to say that "the Sadjak of Kharput is the gateway to ... the Armenian Plateau. The ... natural barrier of Armenia, - the line of defence of the Armenian Taurus Mountains - is intercepted by the Murad River, which cuts through that barrier in the vicinity of Kharput and opens the way to the Armenian Plateau. Kharput has always been the point from which have started all attempts of invasion from the west... In order to assure the defence of the Armenian plateau, it is essential to include in Armenia those mountain chains, which encompass Armenia in the neighborhood of Kharput between Chimish-Gezek (Dersim), Kharput, and Palu (Arghana). Otherwise, the southwestern frontier of Armenia will be exposed to the Turkish menace" (V; also IV; Notes to Peace Conference, No. 1).

III

Arguments Against Including Kharput within the
Boundaries of Armenia.

It will be readily admitted that the Armenian contention, considered in the abstract, is in the main well grounded. Insofar as the question may be regarded as still open to discussion, however, candor requires it to be pointed out that the more cogent of the foregoing arguments are by no means unanswerable.

A. If Kharput is an important cultural centre for Armenians, it is no less so for the Turks and other Moslems. The Medressehs of Kharput, or Mohammedan schools of theology and law, rank second only to those of Constantinople. According to the French authority Cuinet. there were 45 of these institutions in the Vilayet in 1891, 28 of them being in the Sandjak, with 22 primary schools.

B. The pre-war population of Kharput was, according to all available figures, predominantly Moslem.

According to Consul L. A. Davis, whose long report of February 9, 1918, is on file in the State Department (867.4016/392), the total population of the vilayet in 1914 was about 500,000, of whom some 150,000 were Armenians. Mr. Davis does not give the source of his

information, nor does he furnish figures per Sandjak. He states however that "the city of Kharput was largely Mohammedan, but in Mamuret-ul-Aziz (Mezreh) and the country around it, nearly half the inhabitants were Armenians". This estimate, presumably, would apply to the Sandjak or to the Kaza of Kharput.

The population estimates for the Sandjaks of Kharput and Dersim, as compiled by the two authorities most relied upon by this committee, are tabulated below in comparison with the estimate of the Armenian Delegation at Paris. The latter, as previously stated, is based upon the Orange Book of the Russian Foreign Office, 1915, and Marcel Léart's "La Question Arménienne," 1913.

Armenian Delegation

<u>Sandjaks</u>	Turks	Kurds	Kizilbashis	Misc. Christians	Armenians
Kharput					
Dersim	102,000	95,000	80,000	5,000	168,000

Cuinet (1891)

<u>Sandjaks</u>				Greeks	
Kharput	139,956	20,950	88,800		45,348
Dersim	15,460	12,000	27,700	650	8,170
Totals	155,416	32,950	116,500	650	53,518

David Magie
(American Peace Delegation)

<u>Sandjaks</u>	Turks	Kurds	Misc.	Armenians
		Kizilbashis	Christians	
Kharput	130,000	c.100,000	1,500	80,000
Dersim	10,000	c. 50,000	500	27,000
Totals	140,000	150,000	2,000	107,000

According to all three of these authorities, the Armenians were before the war in a minority in the Sandjaks of Kharput and Dersim as compared with the combined Moslems. According to Cuinet this is also the case in the Kaza of Kharput, which very nearly coincides with the minimum desired by the Armenian military advisers. Cuinet's figures for this Kaza are as follows:

Turks.....	57,000
Kurds.....	8,000
Kizilbashis.....	18,000
Armenians.....	25,340
Greeks.....	650

But to connect this Kaza with the vilayet of Bitlis it would be necessary to detach a portion at least of the Sandjak of Arghana, in the vilayet of Diarbekir. Magie's figures for this Sandjak, used by the American Peace Delegation at Paris, are as follows:

Turks	}	
Kurds		
Arabs		110,000
Armenians		34,000
Syrian Christians		6,000

Here again, however, the Armenians were largely outnumbered before the war, and now are in a hopeless minority. From a strictly ethnological point of view, it would therefore appear inadvisable to add to Armenia a frontier region containing so great a majority of Turks and Kurds. To include both Sandjaks would accentuate the numerical inferiority of the Armenian. To include the plain of Kharput alone, with its eastward corridor, would cut off the important Kurdish district of Dersim from the rest of Kurdistan, creating discontent and unrest on the borders of this Armenian enclave.

C. While it may be conceded that before the war the greater part of the commerce and agriculture of Kharput was in the hands of the Armenians, the same cannot be claimed today. But even if it were, the fact remains that the economic outlet of Kharput does not follow the course of the upper Euphrates or of the Kara Su into the vilayets of Bitlis and Erzerum. The main line of communication between Kharput and the sea is by way of Sivas and Amasia to Samsun, which will be Turkish territory according to the Treaty of

Sèvres. Other channels strike southward to Diarbekir and Mesopotamia or to Marash and Cilicia. But the character of the country and the altitude of the Armenian plateau, making the roads to the north and to the east at all times difficult and in winter well-nigh impassable, have discouraged the flow of traffic in that direction. This fact is recognized in two of the documents cited in the first section of this Appendix: tacitly in No. VI (page 2, paragraph 3) and explicitly in No. VIII (page 2, paragraph 1). If Kharput were added to Armenia, accordingly, the province would be obliged to change all its habits of trade. And the onus of this experiment in running counter to geographical and racial lines of least resistance would fall upon the Turkish and Kurdish majority, who would not thereby be rendered more contented with their new status.

D. The strategic argument put forth by Major-General Bagratuni (V) in favor of attributing Kharput to Armenia is in certain respects sound. Kharput is, geographically, the westward buttress of the Armenian plateau, and it is the most advantageous point at which armies may be massed for an advance either upon Erzerum or upon the region of Lake Van. The argument appears to be based, however, upon considerations, which are not strictly concerned with the defence of Armenia. The first is the possession of the rich plain of Kharput, with its uncontested Armenian traditions. The second may well be a natural desire to

establish a bridge between Armenia proper and Armenia irredenta beyond the Euphrates. The possibility of making an arrangement with the French whereby those portions of the Armenian provinces of Turkey under their control may in some way be saved for Armenia has more than once been mentioned, and is alluded to in No. VI of the documents cited above (page 2, paragraph. 2 and 3)*.

In case the Armenians actually decide to renounce Tireboli and Trebizond out of consideration for the Pontic Greeks, the strategic advantages of holding Dersim will largely disappear, while there would be distinct disadvantages in holding Kharput alone. But although Kharput may be geographically a part of the Armenian plateau, and is the point whence diverge the main land routes into Armenia, it is an outlying spur of that plateau, and those routes traverse defiles and passes farther to the East, the loftiest of which will lie within the confines of Armenia proper. In view of the unfavorable ethnological situation of the new state, however, not to speak of other difficulties by which the Armenians will be faced, it may be argued with equal if not greater force that the strategic position of Armenia will be stronger if she has shorter interior lines to defend, with room behind them in which to deploy her forces. Moreover it must be kept in mind that if the projected Armenia

* The Tripartite Convention of August 10, 1920, between Great Britain, France and Italy, includes Kharput in the French Area of Special Interest.

exists at all, it will be primarily because the Turks have submitted to the Treaty of Sèvres. And in that case the threat of invasion from the west will be greatly diminished. For not only will the Turkish army be reduced to a maximum of 50,000 men (Articles 152 and 155 of the Treaty), but the distribution of those forces will be strictly supervised by the Allied Commission of Control (Articles 156, 157 and 200), while the security of Armenia will be further safeguarded by the establishment of demilitarized zones.

E. If there were no other argument against the inclusion of Kharput within the boundaries of Armenia, there remains one which in the opinion of the Committee making this report is conclusive. This is that President Wilson has accepted, without reservations, the invitation extended by the Supreme Council of the Principal Allied Powers to arbitrate "the question of the frontier to be fixed between Turkey and Armenia, in the Vilayets of Erzerum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis." No part of the Vilayets of Mamuret-ul-Aziz, in which Kharput lies, or of Diarbekir, is included in the commitment of arbitration. The Draft Treaty stipulating these conditions had already been handed to the Turks when on May 17th the President's acceptance was telegraphed, without further conditions, to Paris. On

August 10th the Treaty was finally signed at Sèvres, no change having been made in the clauses relating to Armenia. According to a telegram of August 18th from the Embassy in Paris (No. 1572), the Armenians did not officially enter objections to any of the terms of this Treaty. While the Treaty was being drafted, however, they had endeavored to secure the insertion of other terms respecting indemnities, Cilicia, and Kharput.

IV

Conclusion

Turkey, Armenia, and the Principal Allied Powers have put their formal signature to the terms within which it is understood the President is to act, and the President has agreed unconditionally to act within those terms. It is therefore the sense of the Committee making this report that the President, however sympathetically he may regard the Armenian claims to Kharput, is not now free to extend his action beyond the limits of the four vilayets of Van, Bitlis, Erzerum and Trebizond. Nor, in these circumstances, is it necessary for the President to make special provision with respect to an economic outlet on the Mediterranean, since the Black Sea is the natural outlet of the four Vilayets.

If the principals concerned choose to make rearrangements between themselves, they are of course at perfect liberty to do so. The most the President can do, having once accepted the limit of the four Vilayets, is to indicate the advisability of a friendly understanding between the High Contracting Parties, possibly on the basis of purchase or of a territorial exchange. But even this would not seem desirable or proper, in view of the fact that if territorial exchanges are feasible they will in any case be effected, and that at no earlier time was the question of Kharput raised by this Government.

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