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Reshid, Mehmed

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Reshid Şahingiray, *Mehmed* (Reşid Şahingiray, Reşid Bey)
Ottoman governor of Diyarbekir, physician, Committee of Union and Progress official
Born 08 February 1873 in Caucasus, Russian Empire
Died 06 February 1919 in Istanbul, Turkey

A founder of the Committee of Union and Progress, Dr Reshid excelled during World War I as a proactive governor of Diyarbekir. He was responsible for exterminating most Christians, including Assyrians. Although a typical top official under Interior Minister Mehmed Talat, he did not, in contrast to others, succeed at transitioning to the Kemalist single-party regime.

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Background

Born in the Russian-administered Caucasus on 8 February 1873, Mehmed Reshid Şahingiray (1873-1919) always carried a family name, in contrast to Muslim-born Ottomans. His family fled from Russian domination in 1874, emigrating to the [Ottoman Empire](#) and settling in Istanbul, where the young Mehmed was brought up and educated. During his studies at the Military School of Medicine, he joined classmates to found a conspiratorial club, which finally took on the name of *Committee of Union and Progress* (CUP). In 1894, he became assistant to the German professor [Ernst von Düring](#) (1858-1944) at the hospital of Haydarpaşa, but was arrested and exiled to Libya in 1897 due to his

CUP membership. He was a doctor in state service for ten years in Tripoli, where he married the daughter of a military officer who was also an exile.

A Zealous Executioner

After the Young Turk Revolution, Dr Reshid served first in the army, before transferring to civil administration. He became district governor of İstanköy (province of Archipelago), then of Hums (province of Tripoli, Lebanon), Kozan (province of Adana), and Lazistan (province of Trebizond). The temporary anti-CUP government removed him from office in September 1912. He became a governor again only together with the establishment of a CUP single-party regime in summer 1913, and was henceforth a zealous executioner of his superior Mehmed Talat Pasha (1874-1921), the powerful minister of the interior and dominant party leader.

Immediately after the [Balkan Wars](#), Talat appointed Dr Reshid as the district governor of Karesi in the Aegean province of Balıkesir. At Karesi, he was one of the protagonists of the violent expulsion of Greek-Orthodox Ottomans (*Rûm*) from the Aegean coast in spring 1914. His patriotic fervour was now expressed through large-scale anti-Christian actions. His *Notes from Balıkesir*, written before action,^[1] contain a blend of social envy, [nationalistic](#) aversion, and ethnoreligious class struggle together with the will to demographically Islamise the whole region. He was angry to see that Ottoman Ayvalık was “a Greek [Yunan] city. The city is extremely prosperous, very ordered, the houses are very pretty. But the inhabitants are generally *Rûm*.” He was satisfied that “in Edremit a national and a commercial sentiment has awakened, and a rivalry against the Christians has arisen.” He proposed to bring Muslim migrants, Muslim policemen and Muslim administrators to the region. Finally, a year later, he prided himself on having removed the *Rûm* without facing major protest.^[2]

After the successful *Rûm* removal, Talat promoted Dr Reshid to the rank of a *vali* (province governor) and offered him, on 19 July 1914, the charge of “secretary general of the inspectorate of the provinces of Van, Bitlis, Diyarbekir and Mamuretülaziz”, while commending his devotion, capabilities and efficiency.^[3] The international reform agreement for Eastern Asia Minor, signed on 8 February 1914, foresaw two powerful inspectors from [neutral](#) countries to control a process of reform, designed to implement the egalitarian participation of all religious groups in regional politics, and establish a functioning rule of law. “Fortunately, the First World War started,” as a young colleague in Talat’s administration put it in retrospect, “and prevented the implementation of that harmful [reform] project.”^[4]

On 13 August 1914, Dr Reshid was named *vali* of Diyarbekir, but served first for short times as a *vali* of Basra, a vice *vali* of Baghdad, and a *vali* of Mossul. In Diyarbekir, finally, he proactively attacked and exterminated the Ottoman Christians in his province right from late March 1915, when he arrived, and also targeted the Yezidis. He implemented, first, a general purge of Armenian employees in the local administration. On 16 April, his forces surrounded the Armenian quarter, searched the houses, [raped](#) and plundered, and arrested several hundred men—thus anticipating

Talat's general measures of 24 April 1915. A strike force of about thirty mainly Circassians that had already served him in Karesi formed the core of his security forces and was joined by the local gendarmerie and a militia under Mustafa Cemilpaşazâde, a prominent member of the local CUP. Talat wired Reshid 500 Ottoman pounds for this troop, which became the main instrument to [kill most Armenians](#) and a majority of other Christians in the province of Diyarbekir in spring and summer 1915.^[5] In line with his [Social-Darwinist](#) anti-Christian mind-set and the general religious polarization in the East, he largely included the Assyrians in the repression and argued against a “door of conversion” through which victims could be saved.^[6] He claimed to have “removed” 120,000 Armenians from his province.^[7]

Final Years

Dr Reshid served for a year in Diyarbekir. From 26 March 1916 to 27 March 1917, he was *vali* of Ankara, but was ousted due to involvement in (or protest against) widespread corruption related to the army procurement service.^[8] He returned to Istanbul with his family, and started to import perfumes. Arrested on 5 November 1918, shortly after the [Mudros armistice](#), he escaped, aided by friends, but the police of the Istanbul government, which prosecuted war criminals, managed to retrace him. On 6 February 1919, he shot himself in the head. Later, the Turkish parliament (*Türk Büyük Millet Meclisi*) in Ankara assigned his family a pension for his “services to the fatherland”.^[9]

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Section Editor: [Pinar Üre](#)

Notes

1. ↑ Balıkesir Notları [Notes of Balıkesir], in: Bilgi, Nejdet (ed.) / Reshid, Mehmed: Mehmed Reshid, [Şahingiray]. Hayatı ve Hâtıraları [Mehmed Reshid, his life and his memoirs], Izmir 1997, pp. 65-76.
2. ↑ Reshid, Hayatı ve Hâtıraları 1997, p. 22.
3. ↑ Talat's letter of 19 July 1914 is partially quoted in Reshid, Hayatı ve Hâtıraları 1997, p. 22.
4. ↑ Tankut, Hasan Reşit: Doğu ve Güneydoğu Bölgesi Üzerine Etno-Politik Bir İnceleme [An Ethno-Political Inquiry into the Eastern and Southeastern Region], in: Bayrak, Mehmet: Açık-Gizli, Resmi-Gayriresmi Kürdoloji Belgeleri [Open or Secret, Official or Non-Official Documents of Kurdology], Ankara 1994, p. 219.
5. ↑ Kaiser, Hilmar: The Extermination of Armenians in the Diarbekir Region, Istanbul 2014, pp. 149-169.
6. ↑ Reshid to Talaat, 25 June 1915, BOA, Ottoman State Archive, Istanbul, DH. ŞFR. 477-14.

7. † Reshid to Ministry of the Interior, telegram of 18 September 1915, in: Armenians in Ottoman Documents (1915-1920), Ankara 1995, p. 105.
8. † Talat Pasha's telegram of 22 March 1917, quoted in: Reshid, Hayatı ve Hâtıraları 1997, pp. 30-31.
9. † Bleda, Mithat Şükrü: İmparatorluğun Çöküşü [The Collapse of the Empire], Istanbul 1979, p. 61.

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