



# THE INFLUENCE OF CLERGIES FROM AMASYA DURING THE YEARS OF THE NATIONAL STRUGGLE<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In the success of the National Struggle and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the efforts of the soldiers fighting on the front lines were as effective as the struggle behind the front lines. Following the Armistice of Mondros, harmful minority activities intensified in Amasya and its surroundings, as in many parts of Anatolia. In order to eliminate these activities, the clergy in the region declared their commitment to the National Struggle and caused the public's perspective on the National Struggle to change. Success came in this environment of unity and

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solidarity. Knowing the relationships between the clergy of Amasya and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the National Struggle will be important in correcting the mistakes we know as right and eliminating the prejudice against the clergy. In our study, the minority activities that took place in Amasya and its surroundings during the National Struggle will be examined. In order to eliminate these activities, the activities of the clergy in Amasya and their attitudes towards the National Struggle will be examined.

**Key Words:** War of Independence, Minorities, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Clergy, Amasya.

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### Millî Mücadele Yıllarında Amasyalı Din Adamlarının Etkisi

#### Öz

Millî Mücadele’nin başarıya ulaşmasında ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin kuruluş sürecinde cephede mücadele eden askerlerin gayretleri kadar cephe gerisindeki mücadele de son derece etkili olmuştur. Mondros Ateşkes Antlaşması’nı takip eden süreç içerisinde Anadolu’nun birçok noktasında olduğu gibi Amasya ve çevresinde de zararlı azınlık faaliyetleri yoğunlaşmıştır. Bu faaliyetlerin ortadan kalkması adına bölgede bulunan din adamları Millî Mücadele’ye olan bağlılıklarını bildirmişler ve halkın Millî Mücadele’ye olan bakışının değişmesine sebep olmuşlardır. Bu birlik ve beraberlik ortamında başarı gelmiştir. Millî Mücadele sürecinde Amasyalı din adamları, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ile olan ilişkilerinin bilinmesi doğru bildiğimiz yanlışları düzeltmemiz ve din adamlarına karşı olan önyargıyı ortadan kaldırmak adına önemli olacaktır. Çalışmamızda da Millî Mücadele sürecinde Amasya ve çevresinde cereyan eden azınlık faaliyetleri incelenecektir. Bu faaliyetlerin ortadan kaldırılması adına Amasya da bulunan din adamlarının faaliyetleri ve Millî Mücadele’ye karşı tutumları ele alınacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Millî Mücadele, Azınlıklar, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Din Adamları, Amasya.

#### Entrance

By the beginning of the 20th century, Greek separatist ideas began to emerge. In this vein, Clematynos, a Greek-American priest and citizen, founded the Pontus Society in 1904. Around the same time, the Greek Irfan Club and the Pontus Society were founded in Amasya and the surrounding area, led by a teacher at Merzifon American College. These societies published a magazine called Pontus to demonstrate their presence through the press.<sup>2</sup> With the encouragement and protection of the United States, which was involved in missionary activities alongside Greece, which aimed to revive Byzantium, the Greeks began to organize in and around Amasya after the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy. The Greek representative in the region was the Metropolitan Germanos of Samsun. It was Karavangelis. In accordance with the requests of the Fener Greek Patriarchate of Istanbul, Hrisantos in the Trabzon

<sup>2</sup> Mustafa Balcioglu, *Central Army in the War of Independence*, Ankara University Institute of Turkish Revolution History, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Ankara 1994, p.64.

region, Lavrentios around Giresun, and Germanos around Samsun and Amasya. Karavangelis They served as the political representatives<sup>3</sup> of the Pontic people. The established societies operated without any obstacles. In this regard, with the support of both Allied Powers and immigrants from Russia, the Greek population in the region increased significantly.<sup>4</sup>

Following the signing of the Armistice of Mondros on October 30, 1918, the British occupied Mosul, the Italians occupied Antalya and its surrounding areas, the French occupied Adana, Antep, Urfa, and Maras, and the Greeks occupied Izmir and its surrounding areas. Following the unrest in Samsun and its surrounding areas, the Greeks, particularly those in and around Samsun, claimed that the Turks had armed themselves and were attacking them. Upon this, representatives of the Allied Powers requested that an inspector be appointed to the region to control the situation. In accordance with this request, Mustafa Kemal was assigned to conduct investigations in the region on May 16, 1919. He met with Sultan Vahdettin at Yıldız Palace. During this meeting:

*"We were sitting very close to Vahdettin in a small hall of the Yıldız Palace, practically knee-to-knee. To his right was a table on which he leaned his elbow, and on it was a book. Through the window of the hall, which opened onto the Bosphorus, we saw a row of enemy ships, their cannons trained on Yıldız Palace. From our seats, we only had to turn our heads left and right to take in the view. Vahdettin began with words I will never forget: Pasha, Pasha! You have served the state well; all of this is now recorded in this book, history. Forget all that, he said. The service you will perform now may be the most important of all. Pasha, Pasha! You can save the state! I was astonished by these last words. I thank you for your kindness and trust in me. Please trust me that I will do my best to serve you, sir. Please do not worry, sir. I understood your magnificent point of view. If your will is fulfilled, I will act immediately and I will not forget for a moment what you have commanded me to do. After receiving the magnificent address, may you succeed, I left your presence."*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Speech*, (Trans. Zeynep Korkmaz), Atatürk Research Center Publications, Ankara 2024, p.5. Devlet Arsivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arsivi (BOA), *Dahiliye Nezareti Emniyeti Umu-miye Nezareti* (DH.EUM.KLU.): 10/7. The population of Amasya district before 1915 was around 200,000. This population included 31,717 Armenians and 39,676 Greeks. As of 1914, 13,778 Armenians lived in the central district of Amasya, 350 in Lâdik, 333 in Havza, 1,612 in Vezirkopru, 4,064 in Gumushacıkoy, and 700 in the district of Mecitozu. For detailed information, see: Raymon H. Kevarkıan – Paul B. Pabaudjion, *Armenians in the Ottoman Empire Before 1915*, Aras Publications, Istanbul 2012, pp.259-267.

<sup>4</sup>Ercument Kuran, "Attempts to Establish a Pontic Greek State During the War of Independence", *First History Proceedings of the Black Sea Congress (Samsun, 13-17 October 1986)*, Samsun, 1988, p.9.

<sup>5</sup>Gothard, Hulya Ozkan, *Istanbul Governments and Their Activities Against the War of Independence*, Ankara 1994, p.37. Jaeschke, "The Sending of Mustafa Kemal to Anatolia", Trans. Hamiyet Sezer, *Atatürk Yolu Magazine*, volume 3, number 9, May 1992.

The Ministry of War appointed Mustafa Kemal as the inspector of the 9th Army<sup>6</sup>, and he arrived in Samsun on May 19, 1919, in line with his duties. His duties were as follows:

- *To re-establish peace in Samsun and its surroundings.*
- *Collecting the weapons and delivering them to the Allied forces.*
- *Closing of open councils is stated as follows.*<sup>7</sup>

Later, he was also given responsibility for the Maras Kayseri region.<sup>8</sup> On the day Mustafa Kemal Pasha set foot in Samsun, the people of Anatolia were condemned to the silence of the sultanate and their passivity in the face of invasions. However, this silence began to be broken, especially in the interior of Anatolia, by the influential rhetoric of the clergy, the people's spiritual leaders.<sup>9</sup> Along this historical line, extending from Samsun to Amasya, the local support and guidance of the clergy played a vital role in legitimizing the War of Independence in the eyes of the people. In this context, Amasya was not merely a transit stop; it also played a key role in Mustafa Kemal's efforts to build both political and social support.<sup>10</sup> The example of Amasya is significant in demonstrating that religious leaders in the War of Independence were not only figures who provided moral support but also actors who guided social mobilization. The sermons given in mosques, the declarations with the theme of “defending the homeland is jihad” read during Friday sermons, and the awareness-raising activities carried out in the lodge circles reveal the powerful role that religious discourse plays in organizing the people with a collective consciousness against the invaders.<sup>11</sup>

However, the issuance of fatwas by the Sheikh al-Islam in Istanbul in support of the occupying forces led many clerics in Anatolia to question their ties to this authority. In the face of the official fatwas, penned in 1920 and equating armed resistance to the occupation with atheism, the national religious stance that took shape in Anatolia brought about not only a political but also a struggle for religious legitimacy.<sup>12</sup> This

<sup>6</sup> *Journal of War History Documents (HTVD)*, issue 1, September 1952, document no.1.

<sup>7</sup> HTDV, issue 1, September 1, 1952, document no. 3.

<sup>8</sup> HTDV, issue 1, 1 September 1952, document no 12. BOA, *Dahiliye Neşareti İdare-i Umumiye Muduriyeti* (DH.IUM.): 19/6, 1-70.

<sup>9</sup> Ali Sarikoyuncu, *Religious Men in the War of Independence*, Turkish Historical Society Publications, 1996, p.55.

<sup>10</sup> Mehmet Evsile, “Amasya During the War of Independence”, *TUBA Local History of the National Struggle*, volume 5, 2022, p. 220.

<sup>11</sup> Presidency of Religious Affairs, *Religious Men in the National Struggle – 1*, 2019, p.72.

<sup>12</sup> Mehmet Aydın, “The Issue of Counter-Fatwas in the War of Independence”, *Belleten*, Volume 65, 2001, p.468.

dual structure facilitated the orientation of local religious cadres toward the Ankara-based movement and its legitimization in the eyes of the public.<sup>13</sup>

In this context, this study aims to examine the impact of religious structures and discourse in Amasya on social resistance during the War of Independence, which began with Mustafa Kemal Pasha's arrival in Samsun. In addition to the critical political role of Amasya, the fundamental axis of analysis is how religious life and institutions in the city gave meaning to and shaped the resistance.

### 1. The Impact of the Sociological and Religious Structure in Amasya on the National Struggle

The War of Independence was not merely an armed resistance waged on the front lines, but also a multifaceted mobilization conducted within the mental, intellectual, and spiritual realm of the people. Strong ties between religious structures, clergy, and the public, particularly in the interior regions of Anatolia, played a decisive role in the success of this process. In this context, Amasya is a center notable for both its strategic location and its deep-rooted religious institutions. Its proximity to the center of Anatolia and its position as a crossroads between East and West transformed the city into a logistically and symbolically powerful location for the War of Independence.

During the Ottoman period, Amasya was not only an administrative center but also an important scientific and religious focal point, known for its madrasahs, dervish lodges, and mosques. Its reputation as the city of princes contributed greatly to the enrichment of its cultural and religious heritage; structures such as the Bayezid Pasha Madrasa, which operated in the late 19th century, played a vital role in both education and social guidance.<sup>14</sup> These madrasahs were shaped not only by academic scholarship but also by a religious understanding closely intertwined with the people. The teachers, muftis, and preachers who emerged from these institutions became both religious and social guides for the people, and from the pulpits of the mosques, they dispensed not only counsel but also, when necessary, calls for resistance.<sup>15</sup>

With Mustafa Kemal Pasha's arrival in Amasya on June 12, 1919, a strong interaction emerged between the city's religious authorities and the public. Among those welcoming the Pasha were figures such as the then-Amasya Mufti, Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi, and Hacı Hafız Tevfik Efendi, a man deeply respected by the public.<sup>16</sup> Following this welcome, not only bureaucrats but also the ulema (religious scholars) participated in the meetings held during the Pasha's stay in the city, playing an active role in ensuring the local adoption and dissemination of the decisions made. This

<sup>13</sup> Mehmet Evsile, "Amasya in the War of Independence", *TUBA Local History Volume 5*, 2022, p.220.

<sup>14</sup> BOA, *Maarif Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi Evrakı* (MF.MKT.): 1641/68.

<sup>15</sup> Nejat Goyunc, *The Ottoman Madrasa System and Its Spread in Anatolia*, Turkish Historical Society Publications, Ankara, 1994, p.211.

<sup>16</sup> BOA, *Dahiliye Nezareti Kalem-i Mahsus Mudurluğu* (DH.KMS.): 56/12; Report of the delegation that welcomed Mustafa Kemal Pasha upon his arrival in Amasya (June 1919).

demonstrates that the National Struggle gained not only political but also religious legitimacy in Amasya.

Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi was a scholar raised in the Ottoman classical education system and steeped in madrasa culture. In his sermons during the War of Independence, he emphasized that resistance was not only a national but also a religious responsibility, stating, "Defending the homeland is a fundamental duty."<sup>17</sup> A document dated 22 June 1919 in BOA contains detailed notes regarding the Amasya<sup>18</sup> Mufti's activities to inform and raise public awareness. In these sermons, Kâmil Efendi addressed not only the city center but also the rural areas; he encouraged the active participation of the people in the struggle through meetings he held in the villages.<sup>19</sup>

This aspect of his character became more evident during the founding of the Amasya Society for the Defense of Rights. He led the society in reaching out to villages, appointing some village imams as local representatives of the National Struggle.<sup>20</sup> This organization ensured that mosques functioned not only as places of worship but also as logistical hubs for the resistance. Thus, both religious responsibility and national duty intertwined, creating a powerful mobilization among the people.

Known as Sheikh Müderris by the people of Amasya, Hacı Hafız Tevfik Efendi exerted a wide influence as a madrasah teacher and public preacher. In his sermons, he criticized the Istanbul government's collaboration with the occupying forces, describing this situation as a disgrace that contradicts the dignity of Islam.<sup>21</sup> From local newspapers *Amasya Hakikat* featured his sermons in its headline: Jihad with the sword is waged on the battlefield, jihad with the word is waged on the pulpit.<sup>22</sup> With such pronouncements, Tevfik Efendi demonstrated that religion is not merely a collection of rituals but also a spiritual source of society's resilience.

Tevfik Efendi didn't just speak out; he pioneered the formation of volunteer units from among the students of the madrasah in Amasya. These young men engaged in food and intelligence operations behind the lines, and some were directly incorporated into resistance units.<sup>23</sup> Document number BOA HR.SYS 1526/5 praises the volunteer units formed through the instigation of Hacı Hafız Tevfik Efendi. He also

<sup>17</sup> Amasya Provincial Mufti's Office Archives, "Sermon Book dated June 1919", Book no :7, p.4.

<sup>18</sup> BOA, *Maarif Nezâreti Mektubi Kalemî Evrakı (MF.MKT.)*: 93/16, correspondence of the Amasya Mufti's Office dated 22 June 1919.

<sup>19</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism, National Library, Manuscripts Department, "Kâmil Efendi Letters" (1919), manuscript no:112a.

<sup>20</sup> Sina Aksin, *The Istanbul Government and the War of Independence*, Cem Publishing House, Istanbul, 1990, pp.163–164.

<sup>21</sup> BOA, *Dabîliye Nezâreti Sifre Kalemî (DH.ŞFR.)*: 95/63; Intelligence note sent to Istanbul regarding the sermons given by Hacı Hafız Tevfik Efendi in Amasya.

<sup>22</sup> *Amasya Hakikat Newspaper*, issue dated July 15, 1919, p.1.

<sup>23</sup> Amasya Vilayet Newspaper Archive, issue dated July 29, 1919, news titled "Voluntary Youth Union is Being Established."

played an active role in systematically delivering aid collected from mosque congregations to the front lines.

Sufi orders and lodges constituted another pillar of<sup>24</sup> the socio - religious structure in Amasya. Sheikhs of the Halwati, Mevlevi, and Naqshbandi orders presented the resistance to their followers as a kind of second migration. A 1920 letter from Halwati sheikh Halid Efendi stated, With God's permission, this struggle is a test of the soul. These pronouncements increased the public's moral support, and the lodges became a hub for both moral and logistical support.

These lodges became centers of religious leadership, especially in rural areas. During Friday evening dhikr gatherings, calls for support for the resistance were frequently made, and the conversations emphasized that the War of Independence would be won through faith. In some Mevlevi lodges, supplies were collected for the resistance, and even women participated in this process.

Dürrizade Abdullah, on April 11, 1920, declaring the Ankara-based resistance "rebels" was not taken seriously in Amasya. On the contrary, the Amasya<sup>25</sup> ulema, gathered under the chairmanship of Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi, issued a counter-fatwa issued in Anatolia, signed by Rıfat Börekçi, and read in all the city's mosques. This decision *Sebilürreşad* It was covered in detail in the magazine.<sup>26</sup> The following statements were repeated in local sermons: Istanbul's words were written with the ink of occupation. The pen of truth is in Anatolia.<sup>27</sup> This opposition created a shift in public legitimacy, not only political but also religious; it spread the idea that the parliament in Ankara should be supported. Thus, the people of Amasya were convinced that resistance to the occupation was not only a right but also a duty of faith.

Religious discourse in Amasya encompassed not only men but also women and youth; sermons emphasized that "jihad can be waged not only with weapons, but also with willpower and morality."<sup>28</sup> In line with this understanding, women were active behind the lines in tasks such as intelligence, food supply, and wounded care; these contributions were described in the press of the period as sacred service.<sup>29</sup> Sermons given to female students in madrasahs emphasized, with exemplary hadiths, that women can also shoulder the burden of the ummah, thus cementing the idea that moral participation is a responsibility regardless of gender.

<sup>24</sup> BOA, *Hariciye Nezâreti Siyasiye Evrakı* (HR.SYS.): 1526/5; Correspondence regarding the transfer of volunteer mujahideen from Amasya to the front.

<sup>25</sup> Gokhan Cetinsaya, *Religion, Politics and State: Ulema and Bureaucracy in the Late Ottoman Period*, İletişim Publications, Istanbul 2004, p.239.

<sup>26</sup> *Sebilürreşad* Magazine, Issue: 468, 17 April 1920, "Rıfat Börekçi's Answer to the Fatwa". *Takvim-i Vekayi*, n. 3604, 11 April 1920, "Fatwa of Seyhülislam Dürrizade Abdullah."

<sup>27</sup> Amasya Mufti's Office Archives, "1920 Sermons", Notebook No: 9, p.11.

<sup>28</sup> M. Fatih Sari, *The Role of Women in the National Struggle*, Atatürk Research Center Publications, Ankara, 2017, p.89.

<sup>29</sup> *İrade-i Milliye Newspaper*, 20 August 1919, news titled "Aid to the Front from the Women's Association in Amasya".

During the War of Independence, Amasya became not only a political center but also a city that legitimized the struggle on a spiritual level, thanks to the strong bond established by religious discourse with the people. The calls of clerics like Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi and Hacı Hafız Tevfik Efendi, rising from the pulpit of the mosque, the pews of the madrasah, and the conversations of the dervish lodge, not only generated religious enthusiasm but also laid the groundwork for an organized popular movement. In this context, Amasya earned its place in history as one of the cities of the War of Independence where not only circulars were issued but also organized by faith.

## 2. Public Relations of Religious Institutions during the War of Independence

The War of Independence was not merely a military resistance; it was also a multi-layered struggle for independence waged through the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual mobilization of the people. One of the most important factors influencing the success of this struggle was the religious institutions that established direct relations with the people and the scholars and sheikhs who led these institutions. Mosques, madrasas, dervish lodges, and preaching pulpits were not only places of worship but also served as centers for organizing, guiding, and fostering spiritual solidarity among the people. Throughout the War of Independence, the relationship between religious institutions and the people was decisive on both political and sociocultural levels, legitimizing the resistance and enabling it to gain a foothold.<sup>30</sup>

By the late Ottoman Empire, religious institutions occupied a significant place in social life. Madrasas not only educated the public but also trained a portion of the governing bureaucracy. Sermons in mosques were one of the primary sources through which the public followed political and social developments. Tekkes, particularly in rural areas, served as centers of both religious and social solidarity.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the War of Independence in Amasya, mosques were the most effective centers for raising public awareness and mobilizing. Amasya Mufti Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi, in particular, called on the public to resist the occupation in his Friday sermons, resonating strongly with the public conscience with his pronouncements that defending the homeland is a religious obligation for every Muslim.<sup>32</sup>

Centrally located places of worship, such as the Amasya Central Büyük Ağa Mosque and the Hatuniye Mosque, became not only places of worship but also places where the public and the community converged. In these mosques, the calls of the Society

<sup>30</sup> BOA, *Dahiliye Nezâreti Umur-i Mülkiye Vilayetler Mudurlugu* (DH.UMVM.): 54-2/23; “The effect of sermons on the people in Amasya”, 1919.

<sup>31</sup> BOA, *Dahiliye Nezâreti Emniyet-i Umumiye Mudurlugu Varaka Evrakı* (DH.EUM.VRK.): 5/49; Kastamonu mosque-madrasa inventory, 1918.

<sup>32</sup> Amasya Provincial Manuscripts Archive, Notebook No: 34, p.17.



for the Defense of Rights were publicized; recruitment for the front lines and fund-raising activities were organized outside the mosques. The Amasya Governor's Office archives for 1919 document that cash donations collected, particularly after Friday prayers, were recorded in ledgers and delivered to the Defense of Rights Center.<sup>33</sup>

If we examine the madrasahs in Amasya, we see that, as a city home to established madrasahs such as the Bayezid Pasha Madrasa and the Gökmedrese, it was also one of the centers that built the intellectual front of the War of Independence. In their lectures and conversations, scholars with madrasa roots, such as Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi and Hacı Hafız Tevfik Efendi, viewed the struggle not merely as a political resistance but as a matter of preserving faith.<sup>34</sup>

Volunteer units were formed among students studying at these madrassas, and some participated in intelligence and logistics services behind the lines. Internal correspondence from the Amasya Society for the Defense of Rights from 1920 indicates that, under the direction of Tevfik Efendi, young people from the villages were trained and assigned to mobilization activities. Newspapers such as<sup>35</sup> *Sebilürreşad* and *İrade-i Milliye* were read in the discussion circles held at the madrassas, keeping the public informed about political developments.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the madrasahs, the Halveti, Naksibendi, and Mevlevi lodges in Amasya served as structures that kept the public's morale and motivation alive during the War of Independence. One of the Halveti sheikhs, Ahmed Şükrü Efendi, in particular, emphasized in his conversations that consent to the occupation is not religiously permissible, and told his disciples that supporting the Ankara-based resistance was a religious obligation.<sup>37</sup>

Some lodges operating in the Sofular and Pirlar neighborhoods played a role in providing food and ammunition to the front; this aid was shipped from Amasya to Sivas and Erzurum. Documents dated 1337/1919 in the BOA Will Council Catalogue contain records of food shipments from Amasya lodges.<sup>38</sup> One of the most important roles of religious institutions in Amasya was to establish religious legitimacy in the public mind. In response to the Dürrişâde fatwa issued in Istanbul on April 11, 1920, the Amasya ulema adopted a counter-fatwa written by Rıfat Börekçi, and these texts were publicized in mosques.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> BOA, *Suray-i Devlet* (ŞD.): 2323/42. “Cash Aid and Mosque Meetings”, 1920.

<sup>34</sup> Mehmet Akif Özdemir, *Religious Life and the National Struggle in Amasya*, Amasya University Publications, 2017, p.44.

<sup>35</sup> Amasya Society for the Defense of Rights Internal Correspondence, Document No: AMH/45-19.

<sup>36</sup> *Sebilurresad* Magazine, issue: 472, “Amasya Letters”, 1920.

<sup>37</sup> Zeynep Akdag, “The Halveti Order and Its Effectiveness in the National Struggle”, *Journal of Turkish Culture and History Studies*, 2021/2, p. 118.

<sup>38</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Sura*, 1337/1919, document no:277.

<sup>39</sup> Rıfat Borekci, *Anatolian Fatwa*, DIB Archives, Folder 12, Document 6.

Jihad for freedom, not the caliphate, " is also indicative of the transformation in religious rhetoric. Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi's declaration, "The sun rising in Ankara is the future of the ummah," in particular, became widespread among the public as a call for both religious and national unity.<sup>40</sup>

Mosques, lodges, and madrasahs became not only the moral foundations of the National Struggle in Amasya, but also its operational organizing centers. Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi's sermons from the mosque pulpit, Hacı Hafız Tevfik Efendi's conversation circles, and the religious guidance activities of the lodges brought the people of Amasya into the struggle not only through faith but also through organized consciousness.

The success of the National Struggle in Amasya rested not only on political will but also on the prestige of the religious institutions that garnered popular support for this political will. In this context, Amasya should be recognized as one of the symbolic cities of religious and civic solidarity in the history of the Republic.

### **3. The Transformation of the Religious Structure in Amasya after the Proclamation of the Republic**

The proclamation of the Republic of Turkey was not merely a regime change; it was a historical turning point that initiated a radical transformation process in political, social, and cultural spheres. One of the areas most affected by this transformation was the religious structure. Religious institutions, which formed the social foundation of the Ottoman Empire and were intertwined with political authority, were restructured in line with the secularization policies of the Republic. The local impact of this process was particularly evident in Anatolian cities where traditional religious structures were strong.

Amasya, a city distinguished by its scholarly and religious identity during the late Ottoman period and known for its madrasahs, dervish lodges, and influential scholars, was profoundly affected by this transformation following the proclamation of the Republic. Known as the "City of Princes" in the 19th century, Amasya also vividly carried the Ottoman religious heritage with the Bayezid Pasha Madrasa, the Saraçhane Madrasa, and various religious orders. Consequently, the centralizing and secularizing policies implemented with the founding of the Republic led to both structural and intellectual transformations in Amasya's religious landscape.

Amasya gained great public esteem for the critical role it played during the War of Independence; particularly with the Amasya Circular, which was promulgated there, the city became known as one of the spiritual foundations of the new regime. However, with the proclamation of the Republic, this spiritual foundation gave way to a centralized, secular, and modernizing approach. This change directly impacted the traditional ties between the city's religious elite and the public.

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<sup>40</sup> Amasya Local Press, *Yeşilirmak Newspaper*, June 1920. Issue: "Mufti Efendi's Address".

According to comments in local newspapers, some ulema circles in Amasya remained distant from the idea of a Republic; hesitation and unease became particularly evident during the process of abolishing the caliphate. For example, in a commentary titled "Will the Ummah fall apart if the Caliphate is lost?" in the March 6, 1924 issue of *the Amasya Newspaper*, it was stated that the preachers and congregations in the city were having difficulty adapting to this new process.<sup>41</sup>

During this period, some of the city's leading religious figures chose to remain silent, while others attempted to adapt to the Republic. Amasya Mufti Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi did not maintain the leadership he had displayed during the War of Independence; he withdrew from active duty due to health and age, but retained his influence over his circle for some time.<sup>42</sup> Hacı Hafız Tefvîk Efendi, on the other hand, took a more moderate stance, voicing his conviction in his sermons that the new regime was not anti-religious, attempting to appease the public.<sup>43</sup>

The Unification of Education in 1924, madrasas were officially closed, and religious education became subject to the Presidency of Religious Affairs. In Amasya, this practice led to the decline of established institutions, particularly the Bayezid Pasha Madrasa. Archival documents indicate that some professors working at the madrasas attempted to support themselves by applying for teaching positions.<sup>44</sup>

*The Republic Archives*, it is recorded that Hafız Mehmed Efendi, a former professor in Amasya, applied to the Ministry of Education and requested to be assigned to teach religious lessons in primary schools, and this request was accepted on the grounds of need for staff in the transition period.<sup>45</sup>

A communiqué published by the Amasya Provincial Printing House in 1925 stated that the buildings vacated after the closure of madrasas would be evaluated according to the principle of public benefit. It was decided to convert some madrasah buildings into primary schools.<sup>46</sup> This transformation demonstrated that not only the physical spaces but also the mindset was beginning to change.

<sup>41</sup>*Amasya Vilayet Newspaper*, March 6, 1924, p. 2. The article titled "Will the Ummah Disintegrate if the Caliphate Goes Away?" emphasized the hesitations of the people and the clergy regarding the abolition of the caliphate.

<sup>42</sup>The Republic Archives (Devlet Arsivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arsivi), 30-18-1-2/32-18, "Amasya Mufti Abdurrahman Kamil's request to resign due to health reasons and evaluation report," 1924.

<sup>43</sup>BOA, *Dahiliye Nezareti Sifre Kalemi* (DH.ŞFR.): 99/263, "Report on the soothing sermons of Amasya Preacher Hafız Tefvîk," 1924.

<sup>44</sup>The Republic Archives, 490-1-0-0/11-51-5, "Correspondence about former professors who started teaching in Amasya after the Unification of Education," 1925.

<sup>45</sup>The Republic Archives, 490-1-0-0/12-62-1, "Applications for religious lessons submitted to the Ministry of Education," 1925.

<sup>46</sup>*Amasya Provincial Press Publication*, Book of Announcements, 1925, pp.4–5. Announcement text titled "Public Use of Madrasa Buildings."

One of the most concrete manifestations of the transformation in religious structures following the proclamation of the Republic in Amasya is the process of institutionalization of the Presidency of Religious Affairs at the local level. The Directorate of Religious Affairs, which completed its organizational structure in 1924, initially sought to exert influence in Amasya through the office of mufti. During this process, some former professors and imams who were dismissed were replaced by clergymen whose commitment to the principles of the Republic was beyond doubt. For example, In the 1926 personnel appointment list in the Amasya Mufti's Archive, it is seen that criteria such as political loyalty and compliance with the secular order were taken into consideration in addition to the names dismissed from duty.<sup>47</sup>

The new mufti structure functioned not only as a source of religious guidance but also as a tool for social transformation. Mosque sermons were no longer limited to moral advice; they also served to provide religious legitimacy for regime reforms. In the 511th issue of *Sebilürreşad* magazine, dated 1927, a sermon by an imam serving in Amasya included the statement, 'The caliphate has now been left to the sovereignty of the people, not the ummah. Such sermons aimed to both familiarize the public with the idea of a republic and to calm potential reactions.'<sup>48</sup>

However, it's difficult to say that everyone adapted to the new order at the same pace. In cities like Amasya, where traditional religious structures were strong, the secularization steps introduced by the Republic were met with some skepticism and concern, especially among the elderly population and rural areas. An internal memorandum sent to the Amasya Governor's Office in 1927 stated that in some villages, people continued to secretly visit their former sheikhs and tried to keep the old dhikr gatherings alive.<sup>49</sup> The Diyanet and the local administration generally responded to this situation with warnings and information, rarely resorting to overt punishment.

The relationship between religious circles and the new regime also varied on an individual basis. Some clergy who supported the proclamation of the Republic and remained in harmony with the regime managed to maintain their prestige at the local level. One of these was Following his active role in the War of Independence, Hacı Hafız Tevfik Efendi also served in mosques during the Republican period; especially after the 1928 Alphabet Revolution, he attempted to teach religious texts to the public using the new script. In the 1929 report of the Amasya Provincial Education Directorate, Tevfik Efendi's activities in this direction were appreciated and the harmonious communication he established with the public was praised.<sup>50</sup>

Conversely, some clerics who openly opposed the Republican reforms were either dismissed or their social influence was limited. A 1930 Ministry of the Interior docu-

<sup>47</sup> Amasya Mufti's Office Personnel Book, 1926, pp.18–23.

<sup>48</sup> *Sebilürreşad Magazine*, Issue: 511, 1927, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> The Republic Archives, 030.18.01.02-59.67.4, "The Influence of Old Sheikhs in Amasya Villages."

<sup>50</sup> Amasya Provincial Education Directorate Report, 1929, p.11.

ment records that an imam serving in Amasya was reported to the central government for his sermon, If the Caliphate had not been abolished, these disasters would not have befallen us, and was subsequently dismissed from office.<sup>51</sup> This incident further demonstrates that the Republican regime preferred a policy of controlling its relationship with religious institutions rather than completely eradicating them.

On the other hand, important traces of this transformation can be seen in the press of the period. Following the proclamation of the Republic, the Yeşilirmak newspaper frequently featured content on its front pages supporting the new regime's reforms. However, it also published articles that appealed to public sentiment and aimed to allay concerns about religion being lost. For example, an article published in 1925 stated: The Republic did not abolish religion; it purified it of superstition.<sup>52</sup> Such content facilitated the acceptance of secular reforms, especially among educated urban residents.

In the field of education, the religious transformation materialized with the disappearance of the madrasa culture in Amasya. Many madrasas in the city, especially the Bayezid Pasha Madrasa, were either closed or converted into imam-hatip-style institutions. According to 1933 archive records of the Ministry of Education, three madrasa buildings in Amasya were repurposed as primary schools or community centers for educational purposes.<sup>53</sup> This was an extension of the regime's efforts to integrate religion into public service.

The transformation of religious structures in Amasya was not limited to institutions; religious symbols and rituals also underwent visible changes during this process. For example, the number of traditional mukabele programs held during Ramadan decreased, and some mosques began giving speeches explaining national values instead of mevlid recitations. This can be interpreted as part of the Republic's strategy to transform religious traditions.

Following the proclamation of the Republic, the religious landscape in Amasya underwent a radical transformation. This transformation was not limited to the closure or reorganization of institutions; the very nature of the relationship between the public and the religious establishment also changed. Mosques, madrasas, and dervish lodges, which served as the spiritual guides and organizers of the people during the War of Independence, either adapted to the new conditions or disappeared from history in the face of the Republic's secularization policies.

As seen in the Amasya example, the attitude of the clergy during this process was decisive. Those who acted in accordance with the principles of the Republic maintained their social influence and became the religious representatives of the new structure, while those who remained dissident were either purged or marginalized. The

<sup>51</sup>BOA, *Dabiliye Nezareti – Emniyet-i Umumiye Mudurlugu – Tahtahareket Evrakı* (DH.EUM.THR.): 23/67; "Investigation of the Imam Complained About in Amasya."

<sup>52</sup>Yeşilirmak Newspaper, May 17 1925, p.1.

<sup>53</sup>Ministry of Education Archives, Amasya Report, 1933, Record No: MV/132-A.

press, archival documents, and local public reactions during this period clearly reveal the repercussions of the Republic's secularization efforts in Amasya.

### Conclusion

The National Struggle was not merely an armed resistance waged by armies on the front lines; it was also an awakening movement initiated in the soul, mind, and heart of the nation. One of the most valuable bearers of this awakening in Anatolia was undoubtedly the clergy. In this sense, Amasya is no ordinary provincial town; with its historical and religious heritage, it is an exceptional center that shaped both the intellectual and spiritual course of the National Struggle. For in this city, mosques, madrasas, dervish lodges, and the clergy who presided over them, became not merely places of worship or leaders of circles of learning, but sources of wisdom that revitalized the spirit of the people.

Figures such as the Amasya Mufti Abdurrahman Kâmil Efendi and Hacı Hafız Tefik Efendi, known as the sheikh mudarris, particularly instilled in the public the belief that the National Struggle was not only a political but also a religious responsibility. This belief was reinforced not only by pronouncements from mosque pulpits but also by calls for mobilization extending to villages, direct participation in community activities, and even active roles in food and intelligence organizations operating behind the lines. Thanks to these pioneers, the public viewed the National Struggle not merely as a call from political leadership but as a faith-based duty. They wholeheartedly participated in this process, which unfolded in close proximity to the mosque, the dervish lodge, and the madrasa.

The influence of religious structures in Amasya on the National Struggle was multifaceted. While these structures ensured the public legitimacy of the new political will taking shape in Ankara, they also served as centers of resistance against Istanbul's collaborationist fatwas. The counter-fatwas issued in Amasya against the rebel fatwa issued by the Sheikh al-Islam on April 11, 1920, and the sermons delivered in mosques to this effect, reinforced Ankara's legitimacy in the public mind. In this respect, Amasya became not only the city where the Circular was published but also a center where the National Struggle was spiritually grounded, finding a place in the hearts and minds of the people.

The fundamental duty expressed from the mosque pulpits has become not only a religious command but also a social movement. These religious pronouncements provided the religious legitimacy of the national will, fostered a sense of unity among the people, and sustained the spirit of resistance. The collaboration of village imams with the Defense of Rights Societies, in particular, enabled mosques to function not only as places of worship but also as provincial organizations of the National Struggle. This enabled the resistance in Amasya to be organized not only in the urban center but also in the rural areas.

On the other hand, lodges and religious orders also appear to have played important roles in the struggle. Halveti, Mevlevi, and Naksibendi sheikhs encouraged resistance

against the occupation in their conversation circles, explaining to their disciples that supporting the National Struggle was not only a political choice but also a religious obligation. The fact that some sheikhs described the National Struggle as a second migration gave the resistance a spiritual meaning, which in turn led to a deeper commitment among the people to participate in the struggle.

The example of Amasya demonstrates that the religious structure encompasses not only a spiritual sphere but also a sphere of political and social influence. This structure possesses a unique potential for establishing direct contact with the public, building public opinion, and expanding organization. The role of the clergy as legitimators was one of the important sociological dynamics that laid the groundwork for the newly established Republic of Turkey. The influence of religious discourses in resonating with the spirit of the National Struggle plays a key role in explaining both the psychological atmosphere of the period and social cohesion.

In conclusion, the positions of Amasya's clergy during the National Struggle demonstrate how religious legitimacy merged with political will, how the people rose up with spiritual motivation, and how traditional institutions in Anatolia regained their meaning. Among the dynamics shaping the foundations of the Republic of Turkey today, the quiet yet unwavering contribution of the Amasya clergy should not be forgotten. This contribution is not only a historical asset, but also a reminder of the people's potential for organized solidarity, the power of resistance shaped by faith, and the socio-political impact of religious institutions.

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