

## **A Martyr of the Multicultural Ottoman Theatre: The Ottoman-Armenian Legacy of Mardiros Mnagian (1912–1920)**

### **Abstract**

On May 12, 1912, the Varyete Tiyatrosu in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district hosted a seminal event in the annals of Ottoman theatre: the first official jubilee honoring the Armenian actor and director Mardiros Mnagian for his half-century of contributions to the empire's theatrical arts. This event preluded the 1914 establishment of Darü'l Bedâyi, the inaugural Turkish theatre, by Turkish Muslim intellectuals and the Istanbul city government. While Mnagian's role as principal drama instructor at Darü'l Bedâyi's was proof of his initial import to the institution, he was not immune to politically motivated exclusion. His abrupt dismissal on July 13, 1915, speaks to the larger shadow of the Armenian Genocide, which removed Armenian talent from the burgeoning Turkish theatrical scene. After his dismissal, Mnagian dedicated his remaining years to nurturing new Armenian theatre troupes, leaving an indelible mark on the cultural landscape until his death in 1920.

Mnagian's life and career, often overlooked by scholars, present a compelling study of an individual navigating the dual facets of an Ottoman-Armenian identity within the theatrical realm. This research aims to delve into Mnagian's intricate identity interplay, dissecting how he balanced and projected his Armenian and Ottoman personas in his theatrical pursuits.

Such an inquiry not only resurrects Mnagian's obscured legacy but also illuminates the dynamics of cooperation and the subsequent dominance of the Ottoman-Turkish community over the Ottoman-Armenian community in the cultural sphere. Mnagian's contributions transcended communal lines; he was not only a seminal figure in Western-style Armenian theatre but also, as his name suggested, a martyr in the evolution of Turkish theatre. His life and death bridge cultures in a textured narrative of service and unity, underscoring the multifaceted role he played in shaping the theatrical heritage of the Ottoman Empire.

**Key words:** Ottomanism, Turkification, Ottoman-Armenian Theatre, Mardiros Mnagian, Ottoman Theatre

### **1. Introduction**

On Sunday, May 12, 1912, the Varyete Tiyatrosu (Variety Show Theatre) in the Beyoğlu district in the Ottoman capital Istanbul hosted an extraordinary celebration of Ottoman theatre. The Ottoman state held the first-ever official jubilee for an Armenian actor and director, Mardiros Mnagian, for his fifty years of service to the empire's theatre.<sup>1</sup> Mnagian (1837–1920) was critical to the development of west-

1 Nuri 1912.

ern-style theatre in the late Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> As an actor, director, translator, and teacher, he produced and performed plays across the Ottoman Empire, Khedivate of Egypt, and Tbilisi – the center of Russian theatre in the Caucasus.<sup>3</sup> He worked with multiple theatres in Istanbul and translated more than fifty plays into Turkish from Greek, Russian, Italian, and English.<sup>4</sup> The jubilee recognized Mnagian's indispensable role in promoting and safeguarding the western-style Ottoman theatre through the darkest days of government oppression and censorship during Sultan Abdülhamid II's rule (1876–1908, known as the Hamidian period). The Ottoman theatre was a unique and transient institution that only existed during Mnagian's lifetime. It was a multi-cultural theatre in contrast to the monocultural theaters of before and afterwards, and the Ottoman theatre had a uniquely multicultural disposition in terms of both expression and audience.

Mnagian's life and career have been neglected by historians of the late Ottoman Empire. This article will discuss Mnagian's Ottoman-Armenian identity as a critical component of the Ottoman theatre and explore how he navigated his identities within and throughout a turbulent theatrical sphere. This essay argues that Mnagian's 1912 jubilee coincided with two state policies in the Ottoman Empire: Ottomanism and Turkification. In 1912, we can see both the celebration of Mnagian's and the theatre's 'Ottomanness,' as well as the tensions of Turkification that would eventually lead to Mnagian being excluded from the project of modern Turkish theatre. It will do this by examining Mnagian's 1912 jubilee and the debate over the future of the Ottoman theatre, the subsequent movement to establish a Turkish national theatre in 1913 and 1914 respectively, and Mnagian's death and funeral—which served as a final convocation for the multicultural Ottoman theatre community.

Before briefly addressing the position of Mnagian and the Ottoman theatre in Turkish historiography, it is essential to analyze the language of the Ottoman sources and the political and social context in which they were written.

- 2 Mardiros meaning 'martyr' was born to poor family in Haskoy, Istanbul. He started work at the age of 13 as a miller's assistant. He was supported by his teachers and the church board who nurtured his affinity for theatre, culminating in his inaugural stage performance in 1857. Mnagian's birth year remains a subject of uncertainty. His tombstone in the Şişli Armenian Cemetery indicates 1836, whereas Mnagian himself cited 1837 in 1901. Contrastingly, during his jubilee in 1912, the year was recorded as 1839. These inconsistencies are possibly attributable to the concurrent usage of multiple calendar systems. Nonetheless, this article opts to reference 1837 as Mnagian's birth year.
- 3 In Turkish sources his name is also written as Manak Effendi, Mınak Efendi, Mınağyan, Manakyan Effendi, Mınakıyan, and Mösyö (Monsieur) Mnak. In this study, Mnagian's name, which is originally written in Armenian as Մարտիրոս Մնակցան, will be transliterated by following the Library of Congress romanization rule. With this principle, all Western Armenian names will be transliterated from their Armenian origin.
- 4 Şarasan 2008.

## 2. Methodology and Historiography

Mnagian developed his career during the Tanzimat period of Ottoman state reform and centralization, and the promotion of *Osmanlıcılık* (Ottomanism). *Osmanlıcılık* promised security, prosperity, brotherhood, justice, and tolerance between Muslims and non-Muslims in the empire; and most significantly, it fostered Ottoman patriotism. In practice, this did not mean that Armenians shed their identity for an Ottoman one, but it did mean that non-Muslims felt a sense of belonging and patriotism to their ‘fatherland.’ This patriotism was not necessarily loyalty to the political leadership of the Ottoman state but was connected to the land of their birth.<sup>5</sup> However, Ottomanism was not a ‘clearly formulated political doctrine but a term freely interpreted by intellectuals.’ After the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) came to power in 1908 (in a period known as the Second Constitutional Period, 1908–1918), the idea of Ottoman citizenship was closely connected to Turkism and Islamism.<sup>6</sup>

Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals often used the term ‘Ottoman’ interchangeably with ‘Turk’ and ‘Muslim.’<sup>7</sup> They also made a clear distinction between *Osmanlı* (Ottoman) theatre and Ottoman performers and Armenian theatre: Armenians in the Ottoman theatre were referred to as ‘Ottomans,’ and called *hemşehri* (our compatriots),<sup>8</sup> while Armenians performing in the Armenian theatre for an Armenian audience were called Armenians.<sup>9</sup> When discussing the need for a Turkish national theatre in the Ottoman Empire, they used the phrase ‘*tiyatromuz*’ (our theatre).<sup>10</sup> This construction of ‘our theatre’ as separate from the Ottoman theatre in the eyes of Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals is critical to the analysis provided in this study. The CUP’s goal was to ‘increase the influence of *millet-i hakime*’ (dominant ethnoreligious community), namely, the Ottoman-Turks. The CUP’s objective was to make the different groups of the empire ‘common Ottomans’ who would gradually lose sight of their previous ethnic and religious identities.<sup>11</sup> This process is often called Turkification. However, Turkish nationalism, or Turkification, did not supplant Ottomanism. Rather under the CUP government, Turkification policies redefined the context of Ottomanism, focusing on the dominant Turkish rather than the Islamic element of the majority Turkish-Muslim population.<sup>12</sup>

The term ‘Turkish theatre’ was sparingly used, generally reserved for a national theatre driven by the Ottoman-Turkish Muslim elite. Nonetheless, in Mnagian’s eulogy, his contributions were recognized within the framework of ‘Turkish theatre,’ reflect-

5 Vezenkov 2009, 47–77.

6 Vezenkov 2013, 241–71.

7 *ibid.*

8 Nuri 1912; Suleymân 2005.

9 Orfi 1920, 15.

10 Ertuğrul 1918.

11 Şekeryan 2023, 1–48.

12 Ülker 2005, 613–36.

ing the complexities of ethnic and national identity in the performing arts of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup>

The modern, Turkish-language multi-cultural Ottoman theatre was seen as an antidote to the *tulûat* theatre of the Ottoman masses. *Tulûat* was a synthesis between the traditional Ottoman *ortaoyunu* and modern western theatre. *Tulûat* performers would borrow topics from plays in Western theatres and then alter them to suit the traditional theatre style with its improvisational acting. The Turkish-Muslim elite considered *tulûat* theatre to be cheap, low-class, vulgar, and lacking in any educational value.

In 1914, Dar'ül Bedâyi-i Osmânî (The Ottoman House of Fine Arts) was inaugurated as the first Turkish theatre, backed by Turkish Muslim intellectuals and Istanbul's municipal funding. This institution marked a departure from the Armenian-led western-style theatre that had flourished since the 1860s, which had catered to both Ottoman Armenian and Turkish audiences. Historically, Ottoman Muslim elites had sought to integrate Turkish artists into Armenian-managed Turkish theatre. Mnagian and Hagop Vartovian (1840–1902), collaborators at Gedikpaşa Theatre, played a critical role in cultivating a modern Ottoman-Theatre. Their work was integral in harmonizing Turkish and Armenian theatrical traditions, creating a unique cultural synthesis within the empire's performing arts scene.

Vartovian (also known as Güllü Agop) holds a distinguished position in Turkish theatre historiography, recognized as the pioneer actor and director in the realm of Turkish theatre, adopting Western styles. He was a part of a significant shift where Armenian theatre companies, initially focused on translating Western plays and presenting Armenian historical narratives to their community, began to embrace Turkish plays.<sup>14</sup> This strategic shift aimed to engage a wider demographic in Ottoman Istanbul.<sup>15</sup> Crucially, Gedikpaşa Theatre and Vartovian's endeavors are seen as seminal because Vartovian's incorporation of Turkish plays into the repertoire facilitated the active engagement of Muslim Turkish intellectuals in the theatrical sphere.<sup>16</sup>

13 And that both Armenian and Turkish actors claimed him as theirs. *Temâşa* 1920.

14 Armenians' theatrical tradition date back to medieval times. The Mkhitarist Congregation, founded by Abbot Mkhitar (1675–1749) in the Ottoman Empire and later split between Venice and Vienna, was instrumental in fostering an Armenian literary renaissance (Չարթօւթ/Żart'önk') and the promotion of theatre. The Mkhitarists' unique contribution includes plays written in Armeno-Turkish and vernacular Armenian, reflecting a commitment to cultural authenticity and linguistic realism in character portrayal. Armenian protégés of the Mkhitarist tradition established many of the early theaters that Mnagian and Vartovian came up in. See Aslanian 2016; Güllü 2008, 37; Manok 2013, 53; Zekıyan 2013, 18–36.

15 Güllü 2008, 37.

16 Vartovian's theatre would become a prominent institution for the Young Ottomans, government ministers, and reformers such as Namık Kemal (1840–1888), Ebüzziya Tevfik (1848–1913), Ali Suavi (1839–1878), and Şemseddin Sami (1850–1904). These Ottoman intellectuals became members of the theatre's committee and were responsible for the Turkish repertoire of the theatre. Namık Kemal's famous play '*Vatan Yahut Silistre*' (Moth-

The historiography of Ottoman theatre within Turkish scholarship often marginalizes Mnagian's role and the demise of its multicultural essence, favoring a narrative that espouses a Turkish-centric origin. This perspective is largely informed by seminal texts by Refik Ahmet Sevengil (1903–1970) and Metin And (1927–2008), whose works, despite their historical distance and Turkish nationalist sentiment, remain fundamental in the study of Ottoman and Turkish theatre. Their scholarship is respected for its comprehensive methodology, which incorporated contemporary documents, eyewitness accounts, and personal correspondences with the era's dramatists.<sup>17</sup> However, their analyses were viewed through a prism of Turkish nationalism, and by treating Armenian theatre as a separate entity they effectively negate the inherently multicultural and multi-ethnic fabric of Ottoman theatrical tradition.

An important anecdote can be found in a recent study of Mnagian's life and career in the Ottoman Theatre by Nesim Ovadya Izrail. Izrail is a prolific researcher who utilizes Armenian sources to flush out a much more holistic view of Mnagian's life and career in the Ottoman theatre. He has taken the corpus of literature left to us by Sevengil and And, revitalizing and enhancing it with careful research. This marks the first modern examination in Turkish of Mnagian's life and contributions.<sup>18</sup>

Noteworthy among the limited publications about Mnagian from the 1960s in Yerevan is the work of Hagop Chololian, known as Siruni, an Istanbul-born journalist, political activist, poet, and editor-in-chief of the Dashnak newspaper *Azadamard* in 1912.<sup>19</sup> In 1966, Siruni contributed a reflective piece on Mnagian to a Soviet Armenian art journal.<sup>20</sup> Remarkably, Siruni, despite his harrowing experiences as a genocide survivor in Soviet Yerevan, managed to empathetically engage with the Ottoman-Turkish nationalist narrative of the 1908–1918 period, offering a unique and compassionate perspective. His writings provide not only a historical overview but also a nuanced analysis of Mnagian's jubilee and enduring legacy.

Comprehensive English-language scholarship that specifically addresses the final epoch of Ottoman theatre during the second constitutional period remains scarce.<sup>21</sup> Although researchers such as Defne Çizakça and Elif Baş have investigated the period encompassing Vartovian and Gedikpaşa, their work does not predominantly concentrate on the role of Armenians during the declining phase of the Ottoman theatre from 1908 to 1923.<sup>22</sup>

erland or Silistra), which promoted the 'Turkish nation,' was performed in Gedikpaşa Theatre. It continues to be celebrated today as the first play performed in Turkish by a Turkish playwright in the Ottoman Empire despite its Armeno-Turkish predecessors.

17 See: And 1971, 1972, and 2004; Sevengil 1961, 1968, and 2015.

18 Izrail 2023.

19 Hagop Chololian, known by his pen name Siruni, was a member of the Dashnak party. He escaped arrest on April 24, 1915, and spent years hiding in Istanbul until the end of World War One. Cheterian 2020.

20 Chololian 1966, 40–6.

21 For a general survey of Ottoman theater history see: Faroqi and Öztürkmen 2014.

22 Baş 2020), 7–29; Çizakça 2016, 197–232.

A notable exception is Ayşe Kadioğlu's insightful analysis of the renowned Ottoman-Armenian actress Eliza Binnēmējian. Kadioğlu contends that the transitions happening on stage in Istanbul – a milieu of multilingualism and cosmopolitanism shifting into an environment of intense nationalism – mirror the broader Turkification policies that characterize the Ottoman Empire's decline. Her work critically appraises the early successes of the cosmopolitan Ottoman theatre in 1912, juxtaposing them against the backdrop of the Armenian genocide that ultimately extinguished this vibrant cultural era.<sup>23</sup>

This investigation agrees that the Ottoman Theatre originally thrived as a multicultural entity but posits that the marginalization of Armenians during the late Ottoman era was a deliberate act. The concept of cosmopolitanism, often associated with this period, is critically reassessed here. Contrary to perceptions of an inclusive cosmopolitan ethos, it is argued that Ottoman-Muslim intellectuals were primarily focused on bolstering the dominant Turkish faction, utilizing Armenian contributions without truly aiming for cultural amalgamation.

This study seeks to enrich the existing historiography surrounding Ottoman-Armenians like Mnagian in the late Ottoman Theatre. It offers a detailed analysis, reinterpreting the shift from a multicultural Ottoman theatre to a more homogenous Turkish theatrical landscape. Mnagian is spotlighted as a seminal figure who, until 1914, symbolized the unity and shared legacy of both Western-style Armenian and Turkish theatres.

### 3. Mnagian's Jubilee

Mnagian's 1912 jubilee not only celebrated the achievements of the Ottoman theatre but also its perseverance through Sultan Abdülhamid II's authoritarian rule. Mnagian was revered for his resilience in maintaining theatrical arts amidst the stringent censorship of the era. Yet, the tributes by Ottoman journalists to Mnagian were tinged with unease, as they anticipated the transformation of the multicultural Ottoman Theatre into a distinctly nationalist Turkish Theatre under the CUP government's influence. This essay contends that Mnagian's 1912 jubilee marked a pivotal juncture, encapsulating the dual state ideologies of Ottomanism and Turkification within the Ottoman Empire. The year 1912 embodied both the commendation of Mnagian's and the theatre's 'Ottomanness' and the burgeoning pressures of Turkification. These forces were set to pivot the trajectory of modern Ottoman theatre, from one of inclusivity and diversity to a path that would eventually sideline Mnagian, a figure once central to its fabric.

Krikor Zohrab, an ARF-aligned member of the Ottoman parliament in Istanbul,<sup>24</sup> gave the opening speech in Armenian. He emphasized that Mnagian was a symbol

23 Kadioğlu 2021, 3–32.

24 Zohrab was arrested in June and subsequently murdered in July 1915. Altintas 2018; Üngör 2011.

of unity and solidarity that connected the two communities.<sup>25</sup> Mnagian was awarded the *Maarif Nişanı*, a medal of mastery, commissioned by Sultan Mehmed V (Mehmed Reşad) – the first time an actor was awarded a medal by a sultan.<sup>26</sup>

The ceremony continued with short messages of congratulations and gratitude from Turkish and Armenian speakers, and letters from the South Caucasus praising Mnagian were read aloud.<sup>27</sup> Eliza Binnēmējian, a rising star of the theatre,<sup>28</sup> gave a speech about Mnagian's role in preserving, promoting, and innovating the Ottoman theatre and as a master teacher to all in the Ottoman theatre community. The final speech was from Mnagian. He began by acknowledging that all the blessings and applause should be for the theatre and not for him. He emphasized his pride to have kept the stage alive despite the censorship and restrictions that the theatre suffered for thirty years during Abdülhamid II's period of autocratic rule, and stated that he was carrying on the responsibility he had inherited from Vartovian. Mnagian concluded by saying that he had preserved and brought the theatre this far, and now he was leaving it to the nation. The audience applauded and cheered, 'Long live the homeland, long live Sultan Mehmet Reşad Khan, long live the Ottoman Empire, long live the army!'<sup>29</sup> This display of Ottoman patriotism was natural for Mnagian and his audience and represented the unity and brotherhood of the multicultural Ottoman theatrical community in 1912.

It was reported in the Ottoman-Turkish press that Eliza's speech had been written by Cenâb Şehâbeddîn, an Ottoman-Turkish physician, playwright, and poet.<sup>30</sup> However, despite the involvement of some Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals in the jubilee, Mnagian was bitterly disappointed and distressed that so few Ottoman-Turks had attended, this despite its multilingual and multicultural celebration of his achievements in the theatre.<sup>31</sup>

Coinciding with the jubilee, a commemorative album was released celebrating Mnagian's half-century of dedication to the theatre. This bilingual publication featured content in both Ottoman Turkish and Armenian, symbolizing the multicultural essence of Mnagian's career. Central to the album are nineteen photographs of Mnagian, encapsulating his enduring legacy. The manuscript, spanning twenty-four pages, is evenly divided between the two languages.<sup>32</sup> A linguistic analysis of the vocabulary and structure indicates that the Turkish section of the manuscript was translated from the Armenian version. However, the translation into Turkish was not a direct, word-for-word rendition but rather an edited adaptation of the Armenian original.

25 *Tanin* 1912, 3.

26 Osmanlı Arşivi (İ.TAL). 78–42. 1912.

27 Madat 1943, 54.

28 Kadioğlu 2021, 3–32.

29 Izrail 2023, 309.

30 *Tanin* 1912.

31 Chololian 1966, 46.

32 *Mnakyan* 1912.

In the Spring of 1912, a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic album and jubilee supported by the Ottoman Sultan and parliament represented the ideals of the brotherhood and prosperity promised by Ottomanism. Crafted, written, and published by Armenians, the album was nevertheless aimed at a broader Ottoman demographic, presumably the same diverse audience that frequented Mnagian's theatre. However, this emblematic display of Ottoman ideals did not obscure the reality for patriotic Ottoman-Armenians like Mnagian, who were acutely conscious of their subordinate status within the sociopolitical fabric of the Ottoman state.

A precursor to the album was a succinct two-part autobiographical feature on Mnagian, published in the *İkdam* (Effort) newspaper in Turkish in December 1901. Authored upon his colleagues' request,<sup>33</sup> the articles chronicle his life and the inception of his theatre, Osmanlı Dram Kumpanyası (The Ottoman Drama Company), up until the 1880s.<sup>34</sup> The parallels between the anecdotes and narratives in *İkdam* and the album suggest that the newspaper articles served as a foundational reference for the album. However, a second contributor, likely Siruni, also interviewed with Mnagian for its creation.<sup>35</sup> Mnagian shared anecdotes about how he navigated Hamidian censorship. He adeptly tailored his scripts, meticulously excising politically sensitive content, including direct historical commentary and words like *'adâlet'* (justice), *'ihtiyâr'* (elderly), and *'burun'* (nose) – the latter a subtle allusion to Sultan Abdülhamid II's distinctive feature. In instances where script adjustments alone didn't suffice, Mnagian resorted to outright bribery.<sup>36</sup>

In the album, Mnagian tactfully steered away from explicit political discourse, expressing a preference for dialogues centered around art and creative pursuits.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, a profound insight into his ideology and cultural navigation within the Ottoman milieu emerged in response to an inquiry from his Armenian peers. They questioned his choice to translate Western plays into Turkish rather than Armenian, perceiving a bias towards Turkish language productions.<sup>38</sup> Mnagian's answer was quintessentially 'Ottomanist' and revealed his multicultural identity, his understanding of his place in the Ottoman world, and his ability to navigate it for the betterment of both the Armenian and Turkish communities. He said it was essential to support

33 Üstün 2021, 172–82.

34 Mnagian 1901.

35 Siruni recounts that he published a book on the occasion of the jubilee. Chololian 1966, 46; Moreover, while the Turkish version is uncredited, the Armenian version has the initials of two authors, 'H' and 'O.' So 'H' could be for Hagop, Siruni's given name. *Mnakyan* 1912, 12.

36 He said that at times he paid twenty Lira a day, which is difficult to calculate into modern economics, but was certainly a ruinous amount. *Mnakyan* 1912, 9.

37 *ibid.*, 12.

38 In fact, he worried that his support for Ottoman-Turkish theatre would come at the cost of his relationship with his own Armenian community. He asked, after the jubilee, according to Siruni with tears in his eyes, if the Armenians hated him 'for leaving the Armenian stage?' Siruni assured him that the Armenians were 'always proud' of Mnagian. Chololian 1966, 46.



the dominant Turkish community first, and then look to the condition of the Armenian nation. If the Turkish nation was not enlightened first, the Armenian community would suffer.

There is more need for the enlightenment of ideas and thoughts of the dominant constituents. We need to work on this thought. The peace and happiness of the other constituents depend on the enlightenment of the dominant ones.<sup>39</sup>

This sentiment was not a new revelation for Mnagian in 1912. A similar quote can be found in an interview Mnagian did with a Turkish newspaper in 1908. Yervant T'olaian quoted Mnagian's opinions about working in the Turkish theatre in Yervant T'olaian's memoir.<sup>40</sup> In the interview, Mnagian explained why he focused on Turkish theatre.

By serving the Turkish theatre and the Turkish people, my goal has been to spread the love for theatre among our Turkish compatriots. Suppose we only serve the Armenian theatre by keeping/leaving our Turkish compatriots behind in this field. In that case, it will be harmful to us, as Nasreddin Hodja said, 'to cut the branch that you are sitting on' [*Bindiğin dalı kesmek*]. All people should help each other to reach the highest level of civilization.<sup>41</sup>

On the one hand, these quotes demonstrate Mnagian's own conception of his Ottoman-Armenian identity. He had internalized an understanding of Ottomanism; he was not part of the dominant Turkish-Muslim majority in the empire. He helped promote and advance Armenian theatre, serving as a teacher and mentor to many Armenian thespians. On the other hand, he trained and mentored many Turkish Muslims who would become the giants of the early Turkish theatre. It was not a contradiction for Mnagian to serve the interests of both the Armenian and Ottoman Turkish communities. By supporting the dominant element of the empire, he advanced the progress of the Ottoman nation, maintained good terms with his Turkish compatriots, and advanced the needs of his own Armenian community. This was a multicultural negotiation of the realities of the Ottoman state; he was protecting his community by supporting the dominant *millet*. Mnagian did not state this as a political act, rather his intention was to connect and educate both communities through the art of theatre. The sentiment was shared and mirrored by his Turkish colleagues. They too thought that Armenians had a vital role in Ottoman-Turkish education and progress in the Ottoman Empire.

The jubilee generated abundant discussion in the Ottoman theatre press about Mnagian and the Ottoman theatre. The discourse praised Mnagian's indispensable

39 *Mnakyán* 1912, 12.

40 Yervant T'olaian, penname Gavrōsh (1883–1937) was an Istanbul Armenian actor, director, journalist, and the founder of the satirical newspaper *Gavrōsh*. He was arrested and deported on April 24, 1915, along with other Armenian intellectuals, the event that traditionally marked the beginning of the Armenian Genocide. However, he survived, and later wrote a memoir, *Gavrōsh-namē*.

41 T'olaian 2019, 422–4.

role in protecting and promoting Ottoman theatre during the period of the Hamidian autocracy and deliberated his place in the future. In 1912, Darü'l Bedâyi had not yet been established, but both Turkish and Armenian intellectuals were clearly aware of a movement to establish a Turkish theatre. Therefore, for those who supported a multicultural Ottoman theatre, Mnagian was a clear symbol of its success. Furthermore, to build a mono-cultural Ottoman-Turkish theatre without Mnagian and Armenians would be to remove a key pillar of the theatre. This foreboding was felt not just by Armenian intellectuals, but also by Turkish intellectuals who were reformers and early advocates of Turkish language and literature, some of whom, in a few years, would be considered the forefathers of modern Turkish nationalism.

*Tëotig*, an Armenian almanac published in 1913, showcased the significant figures of Armenian theatre, starting with Mnagian. The section ended with a quote translated into Armenian from an article written in 1912 by the Turkish actor, playwright, and journalist İbnureffik Ahmet Nuri (1874–1935) praising the importance of Armenians to the Ottoman theatre and criticizing the Ottoman state for not continuing to support the Armenians in the Ottoman theatre.<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting that this Armenian publication used a Turkish writer to support its argument to an Armenian audience, but it spoke to the multi-ethnic nature of Ottoman discourse in the Second Constitutional Period prior to the Armenian genocide. Likewise, Turkish writers and intellectuals like Nuri focused on the promotion and defense of the multicultural Ottoman theatre in the face of the growing movement to create a distinctly Turkish theatre. Just as they praised Mnagian for chaperoning the Ottoman theatre from the despotism of the Hamidian government, they now wished to escort the Ottoman theatre through the emerging Turkification of the CUP government.

Nuri's original article *Tiyatro ve Maarif* (Theatre and Education) published in *Zekâ* (Intelligence) was dedicated to Mnagian's jubilee, which Nuri likely attended. Opening with a critique aimed at Ottoman (Muslim) writers, Nuri lamented the government's negligence in harnessing theatre as a tool for national education. He underscored the pivotal role of Mnagian in this context, positioning him as a central figure in the cultivation and development of the theatre, not just as an artistic space but as an educational institution vital for the nation's enlightenment and progress.

We have a 74-year-old Mnagian, the most stoic and self-sacrificing of our Armenian compatriots who established theatre in our country [...] The last words Mnagian said to those who congratulated him that day is as follows: 'I have brought the theatre to this level up to this age; I have been able to preserve it to this extent; I leave the rest to the nation.' I would say: You are right, the great artist! But the nation is in dire need of theatre: Our Armenian compatriots founded the theatre in our country, so let them do their best to keep it going!<sup>43</sup>

42 Labdjindjian ["Tëotig"] 1913.

43 Nuri 1912.

Nuri, an advocate for the development of an Ottoman-Turkish theatre – a vision taking shape since 1908 – expressed concern that this evolution might marginalize Armenians like Mnagian, rather than harnessing their contributions.

Nuri lauded Mnagian as a distinguished Armenian *hemşehri* to the Turkish community, emphasizing Mnagian's tenacious stand against the oppressive regime of Abdülhamid II and his pivotal role in safeguarding 'our' modern Ottoman theatre from obliteration. Nuri also credited Mnagian with rescuing 'our' youth from the vulgarity of *tulûât* theatre and criticized the Ottoman Ministry of Education for their lack of support. The nation passionately desired a theatre, wrote Nuri; 'our Armenian compatriots established the theatre in our country, and they should continue to support it.' Nuri condemned the Ministry of Education for not valuing theatre as a means of educating the nation, insisted that Mnagian and Armenians were critical to this role. He highlighted that the Ottoman state celebrated Mnagian while simultaneously neglecting the opportunity to entrust the nation's theatrical education to him.<sup>44</sup> Nuri's argument was subtle, supporting Mnagian and the continued role of Armenians in the Ottoman theatre. Rather than overtly accusing the Ottoman state of efforts to Turkify the theatre, he subtly alluded to it, emphasizing the significance of Armenian contributions to the educational fabric of the Ottoman (Turkish) nation.<sup>45</sup>

According to Nuri, Mnagian's Ottoman Drama Company was the preeminent western-style Ottoman theatre established after 1908.<sup>46</sup> His perspective was not just theoretical but grounded in personal collaboration, having seen Mnagian stage one of his own plays in 1910. Mnagian's theatre was revered by numerous Turkish intellectuals as the premier platform for showcasing their passions.<sup>47</sup> Nuri was dismayed over the Ottoman state's failure to capitalize on this invaluable cultural and educational treasury for the development of a national theatre.

The author and playwright Şehâbeddîn Suleymân (1885–1921) wrote an article honoring Mnagian's jubilee and his fifty years of contributions to the Ottoman theatre. 'Master Mnagian is one of those tireless bodies and tireless souls with his unbreakable will' wrote Suleymân. He admired Mnagian's success as an Armenian and venerated the Armenian community for bringing modernity to the Ottoman theatre. He argued that the Ottoman state had 'poisoned' the arts, and it was only the 'Armenian element' that could resist this 'poison' and create painting, music, and theatre.<sup>48</sup> Suleymân was the chief author and editor of the Ottoman-Turkish periodical, *Rûbab* published by the Ottoman-Turkish *Fecr-i Âti* (Dawn of the Future) literary movement.<sup>49</sup>

44 *ibid.*

45 Sevengil later irritably took Nuri's praise of Mnagian and Armenians as an attack on establishing a Turkish national theatre (Sevengil 2015, 593).

46 Nuri 1912.

47 Chololian 1966, 42–3.

48 Suleymân 2005.

49 *Rûbab* (February 7, 1912–May 28, 1914) was published by members of the short-lived (1909–1912) but important *Fecr-i Âti* movement which promoted Turkish writers, helped spread Turkish language and literature, and established connections with Western writers

Suleymân wrote that it was Mnagian who rescued the Ottoman-Turkish masses from their love of *karagöz* (Shadow theatre) and *tulûat*. He had managed to get the masses to give up on the banal and 'dirty' *karagöz* and *tulûat* performances and instead enjoy modern western-style Ottoman theatre. In his praise of Mnagian, Suleymân made a broader observation that modern western-style Ottoman theatre was a gift from the Armenian community. He wrote, 'The theatre, the actual theatre, is the heirloom of the Armenians, who are the most active, the most intelligent, the most innovative, and the most distinguished organ of the Ottomans.'<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Suleymân argued that the general progress and westernization of the Turkish people should be credited to the Armenians: 'In the peace and tranquility of the Turkish nation's future, it is the Armenian eyes that have opened to see the sun rising on the horizon of the West.'<sup>51</sup>

These statements of Suleymân's were a direct appeal in support of a multicultural Ottoman theatre. Armenian influence sparked progress in the Ottoman theatre, and this historical analysis functions simultaneously as a *raison d'être* for continued Armenian involvement in advancing the Ottoman nation. The study argues that Suleymân's audience was Turkish, and he was arguing that Armenians were not only valuable, but loyal to the Ottoman-Turkish majority. To prove this, he quoted Mnagian's very words about supporting the dominant constituents from the jubilee album to demonstrate Mnagian's love for his *memleket* (homeland), and especially his love for the Turks:

The enlightenment of the dominant constituents is much needed; we should work for this. The prosperity and happiness of other constituents depend on the enlightenment of the dominant constituents.<sup>52</sup>

This support for Armenians like Mnagian was a clear synthesis of Ottomanism interpreted by Suleymân. Whether or not Suleymân and Mnagian had the same interpretation and understanding of the implications of Ottomanism, they certainly shared in a belief of a multicultural Ottoman society in which the attributes of the minority were seen as a benefit to the majority in a multi-ethnic nation.

These statements are significant as Suleymân was a vital member of a Turkish linguistic modernization society in the Ottoman Empire and is today remembered and celebrated as an important contributor to the Ottoman reform movement and the development of modern Turkish literature. The more significant point was that he acknowledged that Armenians had introduced an entirely new form of performance and entertainment in the Ottoman Empire for the Turkish Muslim population. Prior to this, the primary form of theatre entertainment for the masses was *tulûat* and *orta-*

and literary movements by translating and publishing important works of Western literature. The movement was also involved in the theatre and *Rûbah* published reviews and theatre criticism. Sagaster 2021.

50 Suleymân 2005.

51 *ibid.*

52 Suleymân wrote that he 'transferred the words' (*nakl etmek*) of Mnagian. Suleymân 2005.

*oyunu* performances. Ottoman intellectuals were highly critical of *tulûat* companies for being ordinary and lacking art, talent, and aesthetics.<sup>53</sup>

This criticism of *tulûat* theatre by Ottoman reformers was more than just a moral or artistic criticism; Ottoman reformers believed that this type of theatre was a barrier to modernization and westernization. Commentators bemoaned *tulûat* performances of Victor Hugo's plays, claiming that he would be twisting and turning in his grave to see his work so butchered. The Ottoman intelligentsia was mortified imagining Westerners judging and evaluating them after watching plays performed by *tulûat* companies. It was an embarrassment for the culture of a great metropolitan center like Istanbul to be portrayed in such a way.<sup>54</sup> This was why the Armenian contribution to Ottoman theatre and culture was praised: Ottoman elites saw Armenians not as the purveyors of low forms of mass entertainment like vaudeville in other countries, but as the founders and innovators of modern western-style theatre in the Ottoman Empire.

#### 4. The Turkification of the Theatre

The Turkification of the theatre would start in the Osmanlı Donanma Cemiyeti Tiyatrosu (Ottoman Naval Society Theatre) based on the model put forward by Turkish intellectuals like Nuri and Süleyman. It was a Turkish theatre designed to educate the Ottoman-Turkish masses by drawing upon the resources, expertise, and prestige of Mnagian. Darü'l Bedâ'i, which opened in 1914, cut out Mnagian by recruiting a French theatre auteur to furnish the reputation of the new theatre. The former theatre shut down in 1915 with the onset of the Armenian genocide, while Darü'l Bedâ'i survived World War One, the Armenian genocide, and the fall of the Ottoman Empire to become the national theatre of the Turkish Republic.

Cemiyet theatre was one of the first attempts to create a distinctly Turkish theatre, but it was founded with a vision that saw Armenians as an integral part of that effort. Cemiyet theatre's structure and purpose served as a blueprint for Darü'l Bedâ'i.<sup>55</sup> However, Darü'l Bedâ'i was a significant departure from the multicultural ethos of Cemiyet theatre. Where Cemiyet theatre was founded and led by Turks, it leveraged Armenian knowledge and prestige in its mission to educate the Ottoman-Turkish nation. Whereas Darü'l Bedâ'i intentionally broke from the multicultural Ottoman theatre and its Armenian element in its mission to educate the dominant constituency.

Following the establishment of the Second Constitution in 1908, various charity foundations were established for the benefit of the Ottoman army and state, like Osmanlı Donanma Cemiyeti founded in 1909 by volunteers from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and it was organized to provide financial aid to the Ottoman Navy.<sup>56</sup> In 1913, Osmanlı Donanma Cemiyeti Tiyatrosu was created to increase

53 Sevengil and Önal 1998, 166–9.

54 Kâzım 1918.

55 Kerem 2011, 92.

56 Aysal 2020, 104.

financial support for the Ottoman Naval Society and to expose Western-style theatre to a Turkish Muslim audience. The Cemiyet theatre established its own committee of Turkish representatives with the explicit goal of taking the first steps in the Turkification of the Ottoman theatre. One of the most significant steps the institution took to Turkify the theatre was to remove French and Armenian from the theatre flyers and print them only in the Turkish language.<sup>57</sup>

This was a significant departure from the norms of Ottoman theatre brochures. An example of this can be seen from a year before (1912) in a pamphlet from Yeni Osmanlı Tiyatrosu Madam Binemeciyan Kumpanyası (The New Ottoman Theatre, Madame Binnēmējian's Company), the theatre bill for the play *Kösem Sultan* (written by the aforementioned Süleymân) was advertised in French, Armenian, and Greek on one side and in Turkish on the other side.<sup>58</sup>

Even though the theatre's founding committee were all Turkish, Mnagian was assigned as the general director and instructor of this new Turkish theatre. He gathered and brought into Cemiyet theatre many of the preeminent actors he had worked with and trained. These included important Turkish actors like Ahmet Fehim, Muhsin Ertuğrul, Raşit Rıza, and well-known Turkish writers such as the previously discussed İbnüreffik Ahmet Nuri and Hüseyin Suat. However, many of those recruited were famous Armenian actors and actresses such as Vahram Papazian, Yervant T'olaian, Eliza (Eliz) and Zabel (Madame) Binnēmējian, and Knar Svajian. In fact, the majority of those appointed to the Cemiyet theatre came directly from Mnagian's own Osmanlı Dram Kumpanyası (The Ottoman Drama Company).<sup>59</sup> The institution was active until the Ottoman Empire joined World War I and was formerly dissolved during the period of deportation and arrests of the Armenian intellectuals after April 24, 1915, and the start of the Armenian Genocide.

Selami İzzet Sedes (1896–1964) was a prolific author who started his career as an Ottoman playwright and journalist. Reflecting on the beginning of the Turkish theatre, he argued that it must be dated to 1914, the year Darü'l Bedâyi was founded. He emphasized that the Cemiyet theatre was nothing more than a reconstruction of Mnagian's company, with almost half of the theatre composed of Armenian actors. According to Sedes, although the theatre began to be structured with the consciousness of establishing a Turkish national theatre, the staff that formed the base structure of the theatre were Armenian. In this case, it could not be accepted as the beginning of the history of Turkish theatre. Cemiyet theatre was an institution run by an association of Armenians and Turks, but it was not a 'Turkish theatre'.<sup>60</sup>

57 Although advertisements were still printed in French and Turkish. OSM 812.3.

58 ILCAA. *Osmanlı Tiyatro Afışları Sergisi*.

59 Kerem 2011, 92.

60 Sedes 1938, 7.

The policies of Cemiyet theatre aligned with those of Nuri and Suleymân, who wanted the Turkish theatre to be supported by Armenians.<sup>61</sup> The theatre's promotional materials were written in Turkish and proudly celebrated Mnagian's involvement by featuring an image of him situated in this 'Turkish' theatre.<sup>62</sup> These pamphlets represented a unique synthesis: a Turkish national theatre that promoted progressive policies and education as part of its mission,<sup>63</sup> and prominently included a portrait of Mnagian next to its mission statement.<sup>64</sup>

Darü'l Bedâyi was the final step in establishing a national theatre with a Turkish identity. In 1914, Istanbul's governor, Cemil Pasha chose to invite the famous French actor, theatre manager, critic, playwright, and director, André Antoine, to conduct the establishment of a state theatre. The internal politics and finances of Darü'l Bedâyi are too complex to cover in this study, but the Ottoman state provided Darü'l Bedâyi an annual grant of 3000 gold Lira.<sup>65</sup> From the perspective of the Ottoman Muslim elite who established Darü'l Bedâyi, it made sense to recruit a Frenchman rather than appoint a native Ottoman-Armenian to the post. By neglecting native Ottomans in favor of a westerner, two goals were achieved. First, for Ottoman modernists, France was seen as the pinnacle of western progress and culture, so having a Frenchman guide their new national theatre gave it creditability. Second, by recruiting an outsider, the monopoly of Ottoman-Armenians in the theatre could be broken.

Mnagian did not react well to the recruitment of a foreigner. He expressed his feelings in a strikingly bitter comment:

They did not see me, but they went and brought a Frenchman instead of me while everyone knows that I can do much better than what Monsieur Antoine could have done and for a much cheaper price. But what can I do? My name is Mardiros, not Antoine.<sup>66</sup>

Mnagian's anger and resentment towards Darü'l Bedâyi is understandable, as many of the men who organized and led Darü'l Bedâyi were his students and mentees. Less than two years earlier, they had praised him and called him indispensable, but now in the senior years of his life, rather than be given a capstone to his career, he was being pushed aside for a foreigner.

And Mnagian was not alone in his frustration. After reporting Mnagian's rejoinder, T'ölaian cataloged the reactions of many prominent purveyors of the Istanbul theatre. Most comments were made in jest, as was appropriate for T'ölaian's satirical

61 Siruni argued that there were two groups of Turkish intellectuals. One class that tried to 'liberate' the Turkish stage by following Mnagian who was 'engaged in this supreme effort,' and a second class of Turkish intellectuals who worked to 'distort' Mnagian's plan for a conservatory. Chohollian 1966, 42–3.

62 *İBB Atatürk Kitaplığı*. OSM 812.3; Sevengil 2015, 595.

63 Kerem 2011, 90–1.

64 And 1971, 49; *İBB Atatürk Kitaplığı*. OSM 812.3.

65 And 2004, 122.

66 T'ölaian July 5, 1914.

pages.<sup>67</sup> But there was no doubt that most, including T'ōlaian, were seriously offended at Antoine's hiring. The next day T'ōlaian published an open letter criticizing the decision and imploring Antoine to listen to Mnagian. He wrote that Antoine should work with Mnagian to 'establish the Ottoman Theatre.' He concluded his letter sardonically, noting that as it was published in Armenian, there would be no way for Antoine to read it.<sup>68</sup> Yet, the essence of his message was received: Antoine approached Mnagian to advise him on the recruitment of actors and actresses for the theatre. The two wound up meeting regularly to discuss and exchange ideas during the early days of Darü'l Bedâyi,<sup>69</sup> and their collaboration lasted until Antoine was forced to return to France with the outbreak of World War One.

It is thought-provoking that Mnagian, the only artist in the history of Ottoman theatre deemed worthy of a jubilee, and who introduced and developed western theatre to the Ottoman Empire, was sent away with so little by the Dârü'l Bedâyi administration. Just like the fate of Osmanlı Donanma Cemiyeti Tiyatrosu and many other Armenian theatres, Mnagian's dismissal in 1915 was connected to the state repression of Armenians in Istanbul after the April 24 start of deportations and the Armenian Genocide. Up until that point, the vision of an Ottoman national theatre was a collaborative endeavor, revolving around the empire's Armenian subjects. However, after 1915, it can be observed that the construction of a national theatre became more mono-national and Turkified. This transition can be observed in how Mnagian was identified by his Ottoman-Turkish 'brothers' in the final years of his life. He was a respected theatre authority but was no longer an Ottoman compatriot; he was an Armenian and a minority in a rapidly Turkifying state.

## 5. Death and the Illusion of Unity

Mnagian passed away on February 18, 1920, at his home in Kadıköy, Istanbul. The funeral brought together a theatre community that had been for years divided by war, genocide, and foreign occupation. There were actors from Darü'l Bedâyi and actors from the Armenian Drama Company; both gave eulogies during the funeral.<sup>70</sup> A photograph published in *Temaşa* (Performance) showed the massive crowd of the public, actors, authors, and directors--both Turkish and Armenian--gathered side by side to pay their respect to the maestro. It was one of the last portraits of a multiethnic, mul-

67 These included the famous comedian of Komik-i Şehir Kel Hasan, actor and the owner of Milli Osmanlı Operet Kumpanyası (The Ottoman National Operetta Company) Arshag Benlian, Knar Svajian, Zabel Hēkimian, Eliza Binnēmējian, and the famous Ottoman-Armenian Kanto singer Peruz Hanim (Perus Terzakyan), T'ōlaian July 5, 1914.

68 T'ōlaian July 6, 1914.

69 Hovhannisyan 1969, 247.

70 Sevengil 2015, 595.



ticultural theatre.<sup>71</sup> The image serves as both a memento of grief and a proud farewell to an auteur who united multiple cultures with the reach of his art.<sup>72</sup>

Following Mnagian's death on February 18, 1920, *Temâşa* dedicated the front cover and many pages of its March 1, 1920, issue to Mnagian's funeral. Mnagian was represented as a *müceddid* (innovator) who had sacrificed his whole life for the 'Turkish' theatre. In their tribute, the writers of *Temâşa* wrote that Mnagian had been a 'poor artist, who had not been able to work and live in full prosperity, and that he was being remembered with the appreciation and the sorrow of the Sultanate.

This great innovator of theatre, who sacrificed his whole life for the life of Turkish theatre, has been extinguished from the material world of existence today, but he has been born into the spiritual world of existence, which is ruled by young hearts. This was proved by the shining eyes and sincere words spoken at his funeral.<sup>73</sup>

*Temâşa* represented Mnagian as an innovator and pioneer of Turkish, not Ottoman, theatre. This was a noteworthy statement. Prior to this, Mnagian was always associated with Ottoman theatre, but here he was called a father of Turkish theatre. Whether this was deliberate or an unconscious association between the former teacher Mnagian and his Turkish students is unknown. However, future Turkish theatre critics and historians would struggle with how they labeled Mnagian in their analysis of the Ottoman theatre. They vacillated in their classification of Mnagian, sometimes attributing him as either the innovator of Armenian, Ottoman, or Turkish theatres.<sup>74</sup>

In 1920, Mnagian was still respected as a father of the Ottoman theatre.<sup>75</sup> However, he was slowly being distanced from the Turkish theatre. This trend was amplified after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of a new Turkish national state in 1923 in which both Ottoman and Armenian identities were othered in the new Turkish Republic. Vahram Papazian one of the most distinguished celebrities of the Armenian theatre attended Mnagian's funeral and documented this confluence. Istanbul-born Papazian left Istanbul at the peak of his career, survived the Armenian genocide, fled to Russia, and continued his acting career in various cities of the South Caucasus, including Baku, Tbilisi, and Yerevan. He was widely known as the Shakespearean actor of his time.<sup>76</sup> 'I was in Istanbul that day,' wrote Papazian years later:

71 *Temâşa* 1920.

72 Aytemiz 2013, 322–41.

73 *Temâşa* 1920, 2.

74 While Sevensil tried to minimize and obfuscate, Mnagian's legacy, other scholars grappled with how to properly integrate Mnagian into Turkish theatre history. For example, Baha Dürder struggled with the formulation of Mnagian's identity. He found it convenient to formulate Mnagian's identity as 'Ottoman citizen = Turkish national.' In short, according to Dürder, Mnagian was a Turk. See: Dürder 1966, 239–40; Sevensil 2015, 592.

75 Orfi 1920, 15.

76 Hovannisian and Payaslian 2010, 447.

I don't know how it happened today; at that time in Istanbul, it might have been considered more possible to ride a donkey, but cooperation between a Turkish imam, an Armenian, and a Greek priest was utterly impossible. Mnagian made this impossible possible. Turks and Armenians, Greek Orthodox and Catholic, Jewish and Calvinist clergy all gathered around his coffin. After the funeral prayer, in the courtyard of the Armenian Church, they took the master artist, who was more than eighty years old, to the grave and buried him in an interfaith mass funeral.<sup>77</sup>

Upon Papazian's return to Istanbul in 1920, he encountered a city starkly transformed. Once a vibrant metropolis, Istanbul now bore the scars of war and occupation, its rich multicultural fabric frayed by the ravages of genocide and the surge of nationalism. Yet, amidst this altered landscape, through Mnagian's life and death he saw the unity of the Ottoman theatre community. He saw that artists, actors, writers, directors, and auteurs could be united by art.

This poignant and nostalgic reflection contrasts sharply with the stark realities of 1914. The ambition of the Ottoman-Turkish elite to cultivate a distinctly Turkish stage faced a significant dilemma: the finest thespians, those essential for realizing this vision, were all integral parts of Mnagian's theatre and 'fed by its traditions.' The modern Ottoman theatre was infused with Armenians. It was this awareness that prompted the Ottoman-Turkish elite to recruit a foreigner, André Antoine to create *Dârû'l-Bedâyi*.<sup>78</sup> However, in 1918, a writer in *Temâşa* criticized *Dârû'l-Bedâyi* for not making progress. The author compared *Dârû'l-Bedâyi* to Mnagian's theatre, which was – in contrast – being actively 'rehabilitated.' The Armenian Drama Company, born as it was out of Mnagian's pre-war theatre, had been reformed and was touring with legendary actors like Vahan Shahinian and Harut'iun Aleksanian – actors who had been excluded from *Dârû'l-Bedâyi* because they were Armenian. *Dârû'l-Bedâyi*, on the other hand was seemingly static.<sup>79</sup> The implication was clear: in the post-war period, Mnagian's theatre was rebuilding and thriving while the Turkish theatre was floundering. In separating Mnagian's legacy from the Turkish Theatre, his Armenian identity was promoted over his Ottoman identity.

## 6. Conclusion

This essay contends that Mnagian's 1912 jubilee encapsulated the confluence of Ottomanism and Turkification within the Ottoman Empire. This duality: a celebration of Mnagian's and the theatre's 'Ottomanness,' and the emergent strains of Turkification, ultimately led to Mnagian's exclusion from the modern Turkish theatre. Mnagian's vision for an Ottoman-Turkish theatre, inclusive of the dominant Turkish constituents and supportive of the subordinate Armenian community, resonated with Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals who valued the richness of a multicultural theatrical landscape. Yet, when

<sup>77</sup> Papazian 1957, 79.

<sup>78</sup> Chololian 1966, 42–3.

<sup>79</sup> *Temâşa* 1918, 6.

this vision reached its zenith in 1912, a contrasting paradigm advocating a monocultural – Ottoman – subsequently Turkish theatre, began to gain ascendancy.

Despite his lifelong dedication to the theatre, Mnagian's life was marked by a persistent struggle for financial stability. The jubilee, aimed at securing a retirement fund for him, and the meek endowments from Darü'l Bedâyi, fell short of providing him a comfortable retirement. Mnagian's life was a testament to his unwavering commitment to the theatre, a journey that contemporaries like Nuri, Suleymân, and Muhsin Ertuğrul recognized as a form of martyrdom.

While Mnagian's sacrifices were acknowledged and revered during the final chapters of his life and in posthumous tributes, his legacy, and the rich tapestry of the multicultural Ottoman theatre he represented rapidly receded from the collective memory. Figures like Muhsin Ertuğrul came to be celebrated as the patriarchs of Turkish theatre, overshadowing Mnagian's profound contributions. Thus, while his life was marked by a relentless dedication to the theatrical arts, the narrative of Mnagian and the multicultural legacy of the Ottoman theatre he embodied would be forgotten.

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