Although her life was connected to major historical events and she was personally acquainted with a variety of significant contemporaries, Hayriye Melek remains practically unknown, even in feminist circles. The present article seeks to understand her involvement both in feminism and in the communal/national cause. We also examine the dialectical relation between these two spheres, which we may understand as intertwined or as distinct. This study is an attempt to introduce this figure, to give the reader a sense of her life and works.

Hayriye Melek was born in the 1890s in Hacıosman, a village situated between the port of Bandırma and the city of Balikesir in the Manyas region of northwest Anatolia. Hacıosman was a village of muhacir Circassians, one of thousands of Anatolian villages inhabited by immigrants driven from the northwest Caucasus in the 1860s. It was somewhat unique in belonging to the Oubykhs, a tribe whose noted pugnacity and resistance in wars against Russia in the nineteenth century was a factor in its complete expulsion. The tribe settled in three regions of Anatolia: İzmit-Sapanca; Samsun, in the Pontic littoral; and Manyas. The Oubykhs of Manyas often settled in existing Turkish villages or towns, forming separate neighborhoods; Hacıosman, however, was among the smaller number of villages that they founded outright.

As a tribe, the Oubykhs possessed a hierarchical social structure with nobles, free men, and slaves. Hayriye Melek belonged to a well-known

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1 My thanks to Anastasia Falierou, Emre Öktem, Nikos Sigalas, and Özgür Türesay, without whose assistance this article would not have come to light.

2 Sefer E. Berzeg, *Kafkas Diasporası’nda Edebiyatçı ve Yazarlar Sözlüğü* [Dictionary of authors and writers in the Caucasian diaspora] (Samsun: Kafkasya Gerçeği, 1995), 125. In his note (125), Sefer Berzeg puts the year of birth at 1896, though this seems improbable when one takes into account the fact that Hayriye Melek began to publish in women’s reviews in 1908–1909.
noble clan, the Hunç, who were founding members of the village. Hayriye Melek’s father, Kasbolat Bey, belonged to the generation expelled from the Caucasus, and he mobilized Circassian horsemen in the Manyas region to form a voluntary auxiliary unit against the Russians during the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877–1878. This mobilization demonstrates the influence of the family among the Circassian immigrants.

As members of the elite class the family possessed slaves and extensive lands; these gave the family the material means to educate the subsequent generation, and Ali Sait, Hayriye Melek’s half-brother, was able to enter Harbiye military school in Istanbul. Hayriye Melek was one of the few Muslims who studied at the Catholic girls’ school of Notre Dame de Sion in Istanbul. The young girl already knew several languages and dialects of the northwest Caucasus, and attending the school gave her an education in French. Little is known of her years in school. She seems to have had some psychological or emotional problems but was blessed with a rich imagination and possessed a strong, somewhat rebellious character, reminiscent of heroines in the novels of Pierre Loti.

Melek’s first works appeared in Méhasin, an illustrated review (September 1908–November 1909), and in the women’s press that blossomed after the Young Turk revolution in 1908. Here she published at least five

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4 Saadet Özen, Yüz Elli Yılın Tanığı. Notre Dame de Sion [A hundred-fifty-year testimony. Notre Dame de Sion] (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2006). The first requests from Muslim families to enroll their children in the school date from 1857; but it was not until 1886 that the first Muslim students were accepted. They remained very few until 1908: 2 of the 46 who enrolled in 1886; 1 of 33 in 1890; 2 of 37 in 1900; 1 of 63 in 1906. They were exempted from mass and religion classes and their schooling was sometimes much shorter than that of the other students. The lag between the first requests and the enrollment may be due to the fact that the nuns were afraid of possible accusations that they were proselytizing among Muslims.
5 She attempted suicide as an adolescent. This was communicated to me by Zeynep Aksoy, who is studying Circassian associations of the Second Constitutional monarchy at Bosphorus University. To get an idea of Hayriye’s idiosyncrasy, look at the three chapters in Münver Bir Türk hanım Ressam Naciye Neyyal Hanemefendi’nin Mutlakiyet, Meşrutiyet ve Cumhuriyet Hatıraları [Souvenirs of absolutism, Second Constitutional monarchy and Republic by an intellectual Turkish painter, Naciye Neyyal Hanmeefendi] (Istanbul: Pınar Yayınları, March 2000), 216–249.
7 One cannot exclude the fact that certain of her works were published under a pseudonym.