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Francis H. Leslie, Urfa, and the Events of 1915

Abstract

Reverend Francis H. Leslie (1877-1915), a missionary of the American Board (ABCFM), was stationed in Aintab and Urfa at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1911, he was put in charge of the works, begun by Corinna Shattuck (1848-1910) in Urfa. He was also appointed as an American consular agent for the region for a short time in 1915. During the Armenian uprising in Urfa, it is claimed that he was held hostage by Armenians in the mission premises from September 29 to October 15 to defend themselves. After the suppression of the uprising, he was called to the Government House and interrogated many times, and the government confiscated the money and valuables left under his supervision throughout that time. Fearing for his life in a depressed state, on October 30, 1915, he committed suicide by ingesting poison (carbolic acid, phenol). This study is on the writings and role of Francis H. Leslie before and during the Armenian uprising in Urfa.

Keywords: *Francis H. Leslie, American Board, Urfa, Armenians, 1915 Events, Ottoman Empire.*

Francis H. Leslie, Urfa ve 1915 Olayları

Öz

Amerikan Board (ABCFM) misyoneri Rahip Francis H. Leslie (1877-1915), yirminci yüzyılın başında Antep ve Urfa'da görev yaptı. 1911 yılında Leslie, Corinna Shattuck (1848-1910) tarafından Urfa'da başlatılan çalışmaların ve Amerikan misyonunun başına getirildi. Ayrıca 1915'te kısa bir süre için bölgeye Amerikan konsolosluk temsilcisi olarak atandı. Urfa'daki Ermeni ayaklanması sırasında, kendilerini savunmak için 29 Eylül-15 Ekim tarihleri arasında Amerikan misyon binasında Ermeniler tarafından rehin tutulduğu iddia edilmektedir. Ayaklanmanın bastırılmasından sonra Hükümet Konağı'na çağrıldı, birçok kez sorgulandı, ve bu süre boyunca gözetiminde olan para ve değerli eşyalara hükümet tarafından el konuldu. Bunalıma girerek 30 Ekim 1915'te zehir (fenol) içip intihar etti. Bu çalışma, Francis H. Leslie'nin Urfa'daki Ermeni ayaklanması öncesive esnasındaki yazışmaları ve ayaklanmada oynadığı rol hakkındadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:*Francis H. Leslie, American Board, Urfa, Ermeniler, 1915 Olayları, Osmanlı Devleti.*

Introduction

This study concentrates on the Protestant mission work in the Ottoman Empire by using the archival documents of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), also known as the American Board. These documents consist of visual and textual materials of American missionaries and details of their daily lives and the communities they work in. With its Protestant nature, the American Board viewed the entire world as its mission field. This Boston-based organization was founded in 1810 and chartered in 1812 in Massachusetts, US. Its primary aim was to spread the *Gospel* and provide altruistic labor by sending its missionaries abroad. Board missionaries arrived in the Ottoman Empire in 1820 and explored Anatolia, the Middle East, and the Balkans. They documented their activities and discoveries to inform the home office and the American public.

Initially, the Board missionaries had the idea of introducing Protestant beliefs to everyone, but soon they realized that they could only work on Armenian and Greek communities of the Ottoman Empire and ended up creating a new Protestant community. The missionaries settled in Armenian-populated areas and established schools and churches there. Intending to expand their work in Anatolia, they transferred their center from Izmir to Istanbul in 1854. American Board institutions grew in number by the mid-nineteenth century. Therefore, in 1860, the American Board divided its work in Anatolia into three separate units, namely the Western, Central, and Eastern Turkey Missions, to be more effective. The Central Turkey Mission, formerly the Southern Armenia Mission, had the largest Protestant population of the three mission territories in Anatolia. This study focuses on American Board's activities in Urfa station by considering the Francis H. Leslie's works before and during the Armenian events of 1915.

1. Francis H. Leslie and the Missionary Activities in Urfa

Francis Hayes Leslie was born in Northport, Michigan, on October 20, 1877. He studied in art schools in Chicago and Cincinnati. Leslie received a preaching license and was invited to join the Congregational Church in Niagara, North Dakota,in 1905. However, he felt the need for additional education and was able to graduate from Fargo College and study there in 1911 while proselytizing in the area (Memorial record, #17204). *The Missionary Herald* (1911, p. 566) reported that "his varied experiences" have equipped him for a specific role. The periodical claimed that there was a chance that the mission might designate him to Urfa, the location where the late

Miss Corinna Shattuck organized industrial work for the orphans after the events in 1895 and opened the School for the Blind with Mary Haratounian in 1902 (Çoban Döşkaya, 2021).[1] As expected, Leslie was assigned to Urfa and sailed from New York for Turkey on October 28, 1911, with Reverend J. C. Martin and his wife. They arrived in Aintab on November 27, 1911. The *Missionary Herald* ("Letters from the Missions," 1912, pp. 132–133) quotes Rev. Martin's account of their arrival to Turkey and first observations as follows:

"Early in December, Mr. Leslie and I proceeded to Oorfa [Ourfa/Urfa], whence we returned last Saturday, just in time to be home for Christmas and to escape the winter storm, which has continued ever since the last day of our journey. While in Oorfa, we sought to assist as much as we could those who had been left in charge of the station, and also to get a grasp of the work as it is being carried on in its various departments. We carefully inspected the machine shop, the shops in the market, the needlework department - which at the present time gives employment to 2.500 women - the farm twenty-five miles distant from Oorfa, the orphanage, the school for the blind, kindergarten, day schools, and churches. After seeing this extensive plant, we felt more than ever the need of a permanently located missionary for this district. Mr. Gracey and his native assistants deserve great praise for what they have accomplished, but the burden is too heavy for them alone. The plan at present is for Mr. Leslie to go to Marash for some months to give himself entirely to the study of the language."

After settling in Aintab, Leslie sends Enoch F. Bell in Boston a letter (February 1, 1912, Reel 671). He updates him on his activities in Maraş (Marash), where he studied Turkish grammar lessons. He also mentions the help he gets from a native speaker from the Turkish garrison. He recalls Corinna Shattuck's work in the field by narrating an incident demonstrating her influence. He mentions the activities in Urfa and names the work there as intriguing. He especially emphasizes boys' industrial work, their training in the shops, and the influence of religious education at the orphanage and school for the blind. He also shares his belief in industrial works' aid in converting Muslims to Christianity and its importance in the country:

[1]Corinna Shattuck trained women, girls, and later boys in different forms of industrial work. Afterwards with the help of George Gracey of Belfast, Ireland, she started systematic work with the boys (Peabody, 1915, p. 139).

"The need for industrial development in this country is great. The people are so desperately poor that they have no time, strength nor means for the appreciation or practice of the higher things of life. It seems to me that industrial training, done in the spirit of Christ is going to be one way of interesting the Moslems [Muslims] in Christianity. I believe that the industrial work in Oorfa can be used as a means of evangelism as well as education. It is at the present time an effective example of the Christian spirit of progress put into daily practice."

Through industrial projects, Leslie aims to establish cordial relations with Arabs and influence their religious beliefs. He also values the German missionaries' friendship in Urfa and Maraş in the letter.

In his second letter to Bell (May 24, 1912, Reel 671), Leslie discusses several crucial aspects of the Urfa mission and the need for industrial growth in Turkey:

"The more I see of Turkey the more I believe that industrial work is a needed form of Mission work in this country. The people are not merely a hundred years but are a thousand years behind the times industrially and they have no industrial initiative of their own. Moreover, the form of education which they have been receiving gives them wrong views of life unless supplemented by something of a more practical nature."

Leslie (May 24, 1912, Reel 671) continues to emphasize the significance of industrial work in Turkey as a form of missionary activity. He believes that the populace is industrially far behind and lacks the initiative for progress. Leslie draws a parallel between the requirements of the Armenians and those of African Americans, stating that both groups require education to comprehend the importance of practical skills in serving and glorifying God. Leslie proposes expanding the industrial work in Urfa into an industrial boarding school for boys, catering to pupils of varying abilities. In addition, he discusses the need for agricultural education to enhance cultivation techniques. Concerning the farm purchased by Miss Shattuck, Leslie conveys concern over the lack of a secure title and the property's remote location. He intends to sell the property and purchase a smaller parcel closer to the city. Leslie also elaborates on the locust problem in the region and the government's interest in their extermination technique in the letter. He observes that the locals oppose their efforts because they believe God sends the locusts. Leslie addresses the industry of women's handkerchiefs, emphasizing its educational and evangelistic value. He

disagrees with Soghomon Knadjian Efendi's proposal to privatize the industry, arguing that it should remain under the control of the mission to maximize its impact on women. He views the industry as an opportunity to teach people ethical and effective business practices. Leslie concludes by discussing the deteriorating conditions in Urfa due to the conflict, unemployment, and severe weather.

Leslie underscores the urgent need for a mission residence in Urfa in his letter to James L. Barton (July 22, 1912, Reel 671).[2] According to him, missionaries resided in unsanitary and inadequate conditions, sharing space with schools and industrial facilities. The letter requests Barton's assistance in swiftly bringing the issue to the attention of the appropriate committee. In addition, Leslie mentions the efforts to raise money for a Memorial Hall in honor of Miss Shattuck, which will be used for school and YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) meetings.

"The need in Ourfa for a mission residence is great. There is no residence. We missionaries have to live in rooms in connection with the shops of the industrial school, the offices, and the native schools. Here are industrial shops, schools, offices, and churches all huddled together in one most inconvenient, insanitary, and indiscriminate mass and in such a way that it is no fit place for any family to live in, and the missionaries have to sandwich themselves in between these rooms wherever they can find a pigeon-hole vacant. (...) We are trying to raise money for a Memorial Hall to honor the memory of Miss Shattuck, the building to be used for schools and the YMCA meetings. As the people of Ourfa are most desperately poor, so poor that they are now bringing their young children to us and begging us to take them into the orphanage to keep them from starving, we shall have to raise most of this money in America, England, and Switzerland."

After reporting the impoverished condition of the Urfa population, Leslie (July 22, 1912, Reel 671) shares his thoughts that the ongoing war in the Balkans will soon end, which has negatively impacted Turkey's economy and left many unemployed, the spread of cholera in

[2] Reverend James L. Barton (1855-1936) entered Hartford Theological Seminary. He applied for overseas service and came to Harpoot, Turkey. He became the president of Euphrates College, Harpoot, in 1892. After seven years, he returned to the United States and became the foreign secretary of the Board. After World War I, he became one of the architects of Near East Relief, a relief organization established following the Armenian relocation, in which they raised funds by spreading news against the Ottomans and about how Armenians were oppressed during relocation.

neighboring cities. He updates Barton on the construction of the Baghdad Railroad and makes a casual observation about the extreme heat in Urfa compared to Barton's location in Boston.

In another letter to James L. Barton (October 7, 1912, Reel 671), Leslie requests a three- to four-month furlough from the mission to return to the United States and get married. Leslie explains that his fiancée will not travel to his current location due to her parent's objections.

Leslie, in his other letter to Barton (January 29, 1913, Reel 671), advocates for the continued employment of George. F. Gracey of Belfast, Ireland, emphasizing his exceptional qualifications and contributions to the mission. In this letter, he also describes the success of Gracey in developing the industrial and educational aspects of the mission as well as his engagement with the local churches.

In his letter to Enoch F. Bell (March 3, 1913, Reel 671), Leslie expresses his gratitude and acknowledges the Prudential Committee's decision to cover his travel expenditures from the United States to Urfa and to grant him a three-month leave of absence while maintaining his salary. Leslie emphasizes the increasing interest of indigenous Christians in the mission's work for Muslims. He informs Bell that the situation in and around Urfa has remained tranquil since the outbreak of the Balkan War.

In his letter to James L. Barton (March 6, 1913, Reel 671), Leslie expresses his gratitude for the assistance in presenting his request to the Prudential Committee regarding his impending trip to the United States. He appreciates the committee's generosity. He describes the existing school buildings as dilapidated, half-underground, damp, and gloomy and encloses a copy of the appeal they sent to various Americans requesting support for the construction project. He explains that beginning construction would be economically beneficial.

Leslie discusses Urfa's urgent need for funding and seeks support from the Board in his letter to Enoch F. Bell (June 9, 1913, Reel 671). He explains that the mission's work in Urfa has been underfunded and emphasizes the significance of Urfa, which is located in a predominantly Muslim region. He highlights the vast number of Muslim communities close to Urfa compared to the limited number of Christian and mixed-population villages. Leslie implores Bell to carefully evaluate the urgent need for a house in Urfa and support the necessary funding. The letter also requests financial support for the Urfa industrial school, established by Miss Shattuck in 1902.

Leslie's letter to Bell (June 9, 1913, Reel 671) describes various industrial works taught at the school, such as shoemaking, carpentry, and ironwork. He describes the five workshops within the industrial school and their reputation for producing high-quality work, attracting customers from other cities and abroad. He notes that the growth of European trade and the presence of the Baghdad railway will further enhance the school's business and potentially make it self-sufficient. In the letter, he also emphasizes that the actual value of the industrial school lies in its educational impact rather than its commercial success. He suggests that the native community should provide and equip the academic department with structures and equipment, while the mission would take responsibility for the industrial department, which is already equipped in the existing industrial school.

During his time in Urfa, Leslie draws a map of the Central Turkey Mission for the *Missionary Herald*, illustrating its expansive field and challenging terrain (Field Notes, 1912, pp. 362–363). In one of his reports, Leslie (1913, pp. 323–324) describes the diverse population of Urfa and the adjacent villages. He notes that most of Urfa's population was Muslim, with a sizeable Christian minority. In addition, he emphasizes Armenian Christians' interest in evangelizing Muslims and forming a personal workers' band dedicated to engaging with Muslims and disseminating religious literature.

In another letter to Bell (August 8, 1913, Reel 671), Leslie updates him on his travel intentions and recent activities. He also informs Barton (August 30, 1913, Reel 671) about his travel to the US. In the fall of 1913, he made a short visit to the USA to marry Elvesta Louise Thomas (1885-1979), who was formally appointed. They married on September 10, 1913, and returned to Urfa on November 25, 1913 (Memorial record, #17204).[3]

[3] Elvesta L. Thomas was also born in his hometown Northport, Michigan. She graduated from Olivet College in 1908. She was a member of the Congregational Church in Northport since she was twelve, and she taught mathematics for five years at a high school in Petoskey, Michigan, before her marriage in 1913 (Birge, 1936, p. 32; Leslie to Barton, October 7, 1912, Reel 671). She left Urfa in the early summer for Aintab and gave birth to their daughter [Elizabeth Louise Leslie Seager] in a hospital there on June 30, 1915. In the years following her husband's death, she was reappointed to Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1923 and worked as the mission treasurer's assistant. She retired in 1955 and died in her birthplace Northport on January 24, 1979. Her daughter, Elizabeth, worked as the "staff of the Y.W.C.A. (Young Women's Christian Association) Service Center in Istanbul" (Birge, 1936, p. 32).

In a letter to Barton (September 8, 1913, Reel 671), Leslie emphasizes the significance of securing Gracey's position, citing his years of devoted service. Leslie concludes by expressing gratitude for the Board's and its officers' generosity. In another letter, Leslie informs Bell (October 10, 1913, Reel 671) that they are leaving for Boston that morning through Delaware, Ohio, and New York and anticipate arriving in Boston around the sixteenth, with their ship scheduled to depart on the nineteenth. He updates Barton (November 6, 1913, Reel 671) on their travel to Turkey. He provides information about their voyage and specific difficulties, like missing their planned trip.

When the newly wed couple arrived in Urfa, Leslie wrote another letter to Bell (December 29, 1913, Reel 671), indicating that they intended to transmit a copy of the industrial report once it had been printed. He argues that the Armenian Protestant Church in Urfa is thriving under the capable leadership of Reverend Soghomon Akkelian, who is described as well-educated, progressive, and an outstanding organizer. The letter informs Bell that George F. Gracey has suffered a nervous breakdown and has been advised to recover and be relieved of his duties. Gracey has been sent abroad for several weeks to facilitate his recovery.

In Urfa, Leslie was running a school for the blind, a boys' industrial school, and an orphanage, besides his work in the church. He acknowledged the significance of industrial training within the region and emphasized the importance of teaching skills and assisting the local population in producing essential goods. In his report for 1913 ("Wheat Raising at Oorfa," 1914, p. 270), Leslie highlighted the success of the mission's wheat production, which not only supported the orphanage and school for blind students but also generated an excess for sale. Leslie believed that such training empowered individuals and contributed to sustainable development over the long term.

Francis H. Leslie wrote a letter to Board's Prudential Committee (December 29, 1913, Reel 671) to express appreciation for their generosity in providing the money for constructing the missionary residence in Urfa. He also shared missionaries' thoughts on purchasing approximately eight acres of land on the city's outskirts. He reported that acquiring the property would be a valuable investment for the future and asserted that the real estate values in Urfa were rising rapidly.

2.Francis H. Leslie and World War I

After the outbreak of World War I at the end of July, Leslie provides an update on the situation in Urfa in his letter to Barton (August 8, 1914, Reel 671). In the letter, he describes the recent annual meeting and conveys his admiration for the skilled and devoted native helpers. He explains the need for additional funds to conclude the construction of the missionary residence in Urfa. He discusses the rising cost of living in the country and emphasizes the need for the missionaries to increase their income by cultivating gardens and raising livestock. Leslie also mentions obtaining instructions from Consul Jackson of Aleppo, and they were advised to "avoid remote places and stay in large cities and sailing ports."

In another letter to Barton (September 14, 1914, Reel 671), Leslie discusses the building estimates for the missionary residence in Urfa. He emphasizes that they are not seeking to build a temporary shelter but a permanent house. In addition to that, he expresses his concern about the ongoing communication difficulties caused by the European conflict. Despite its reputation for being "savage" and "fanatical", Leslie reports that Urfa has been relatively calm and quiet compared to neighboring cities in the past month or six weeks.

A few months after the outbreak of war, Leslie writes to Barton (November 23, 1914, Reel 671):

"Do not worry about us, as there are no signs of danger to us Americans, and we will take no unnecessary risks. We will not desert our post without good reason; but if danger actually threatens, we will try to reach a place of safety before it becomes too late. If you receive a letter with the heading <u>AMERICAN MISSION</u> thus underlined, that means that there is a message on the other side of the paper that will appear by heating over a lamp."

This message reemerges in a note written to Fargo College (December 24, 1914, Reel 671). Leslie repeats the exact tactic of secret communication and writes the note below to be transmitted to a friend whose name is not given:

"Turkey at war with Triple Entente. Strict censorship on all outgoing mail established. If you receive any letters from me written with lead pencil on one side of paper only, heat the blank side of the paper over lamp and secret letter will become visible."

In his letter to Barton (October 6, 1914, Reel 671), Leslie continues reporting on the situation in Urfa. The letter reflects the challenging financial situation faced by the mission, the impact of the war on local businesses, and the struggles of the dismissed workers. It also highlights the attempts to protect their resources and assets from requisition by the government. Leslie informs Barton about the conditions regarding the grain taken from their villages. He expresses confidence that the Turkish government will not interfere with the work of American institutions in Turkey.

Leslie updates Barton (October 24, 1914, Reel 671) about the war conditions in the region. He describes how, despite their objections and appeals, the government confiscated their wheat and barley for the army. He mentions that the German missionaries are struggling in their hospital with only one native specialist. Also, Leslie explains that due to the conflict and military laws, they could not pay the workers and had to cease construction. He asserts that due to a lack of funds, the school for blind students had to turn away many new pupils.

A month after, Leslie writes another letter and a detailed report (November 23, 1914, Reel 671). In this report, he claims that during the war, officers not only took from the well-to-do but also entered the houses of the poor, seizing their food supplies for the winter. He underlines that the conscription of young men in the country has had a detrimental effect on missionary work, as many of their trained native workers have been taken away. For him, this situation impacted the schools, as many teachers and students have been conscripted, most of whom are orphans without homes to return to. He also emphasizes that the outbreak of war between Turkey and the Triple Entente powers has once again halted their industries and created significant hardships for the workers.

Leslie highlights the dire state of the Turkish army, noting that nearly one-third of the soldiers are improperly clothed and underfed. He also mentions that four regiments have been sent from Urfa, and more are being recruited. He claims that some recruits are “handcuffed, chained together, and forced to the front like slaves.” Regarding rising tension in Urfa, he writes (November 23, 1914, Reel 671):

“A German who is living here, and who was formerly a missionary, has been making stirring speeches to the Moslems, telling them that the cause of the war was that the powers of the

Triple Entente had been intending to partion Turkey among themselves and that Germany had begun the war to protect Turkey from such a fate. Most of the Moslems favor Germany and most of the Christians favor France, England, and Russia. This German, Herr Eckart, has been telling the Armenians that they will surely bring another massacre upon themselves if they do not stop speaking against Germany, and has been talking likewise to the Turks. Needless to say that this attitude and conduct on his part has intensified the feeling between the Christians and Moslems. But so far there has been no such thing as disorder in our city nor trouble of any kind."

Leslie emphasizes that the war has had a significant impact on the region. Business is stagnant, and industries are paralyzed. However, food prices have dropped because individuals with stocks of grain and provisions are attempting to sell them before the government requisitions them. He also notes that prices of the imported goods were rising daily, while native goods had remained stable or even had decreased in price. Leslie provides an update on the status of their industrial school, mentioning that the shops are still operational, however, not at full capacity. He anticipates a challenging year ahead as there are insufficient men to sow the fields for next year's crop, leading to a potential shortage, and reports that the wheat is currently priced at less than twenty cents per bushel (November 23, 1914, Reel 671).

He mentions that in Urfa, the streets are patrolled by soldiers at night to prevent any outbreaks or trouble. He points out that the city remained calm. He argues that there appears to be no immediate cause for alarm or danger in staying in Urfa and adds that larger cities along the coast have experienced more trouble and disorder than smaller interior cities. He also gives information about the German Mission Hospital in Urfa (November 23, 1914, Reel 671).

At the beginning of 1915, Leslie writes to Barton (January 4, 1915, Reel 671) that he could not send letters written in English for several weeks but now could write "in what they call the American language." He explains that they must leave the letters unsealed and continues by giving information about the conditions in their region. He notes that they do not face significant danger and that their city has no disturbance or disorder. He portrays the local officials as being friendly towards them and enabling them to continue their lines of work, except for the handkerchief industries, which have been closed since August 1, 1914. Leslie notes that although economic

conditions across the country reflect the effects of war, with one exception, all the shops in their industrial school were able to conclude the year without a deficit. In the letter, he acknowledges that the present conditions are unfavorable for evangelistic work among non-Christian races. He is grateful that the pastors have been spared from military service.

Regarding the cost of living, Leslie continues his letter (January 4, 1915, Reel 671), asserting that native foodstuffs are cheaper than usual. However, he also reports that the prices of imported articles are high and continue to rise. He mentions that they often find native alternatives for certain imported goods, and since they did not come to the country expecting to rely heavily on American or European products, they do not find it overly burdensome to go without many of these items.

As WWI progresses, Leslie encounters difficult circumstances in Urfa. In an article in the *Missionary Herald* ("War Conditions in the Heart of Turkey," 1915), he acknowledges the tense atmosphere in the city due to its history of the deaths of missionaries' relatives. Leslie describes the effects of the conflict on various facets of life, including the seizure of resources and the disruption of economic activities. In addition, he emphasizes the desertions within the Turkish army and the difficulties Muslims confront. The blind pupils are making educational and vocational training advancements, and their perseverance is inspiring. Despite the obstacles presented by the ongoing war and the economic hardships encountered by the local populace, the missionary works in Urfa had a significant impact. Leslie has been engaged in numerous facets of the mission's operations.

Leslie acknowledges the lack of recent updates in his letter to Barton (April 12, 1915, Reel 671). He mentions that although business is not as busy as peacetime, they are still operating and plan to remain in their current location until prosperity returns. He notes that the handkerchief industrial work has been closed since August of the previous year. However, the other lines of work they engage in continue and are even better than anticipated. He explains that they cannot engage in touring due to the uncertain times, as they are the only missionary family in Urfa and cannot leave. Regular church work in Urfa and its surrounding areas is ongoing. He notes that the churches in the region are showing a more profound spiritual interest, with eleven individuals joining the first church at Easter, all through confession. He emphasizes that among the new members, six are

young men, two of whom are college graduates and teachers in high school. He says this influx of young men into the church has positively impacted the young Armenians with atheistic tendencies.

In the letter (April 12, 1915, Reel 671), Leslie also discusses the ongoing work of their boys' industrial school. He asserts that due to a significant decrease in orders for articles they produce, they could not increase the number of students as planned for the current year. He expresses concerns that they may have to send some of their best students away before they complete their training due to financial constraints at the orphanage. Francis H. Leslie provides updates on various aspects of their missionary work in Urfa. He mentions that the attendance in the academic department of the Industrial High School and the Girls' High School has increased compared to the previous year, despite raising the tuition fee. In the letter, he also discusses the school for the blind, stating that they have the same number of students as the previous year.

In his writing to Prudential Committee (April 12, 1915, Reel 671), Leslie expresses that the Urfa station gratefully acknowledges their generous completion of the appropriation for the double missionary dwelling in Urfa. He asserts that they will build a house for missionaries to live in Urfa. He reports that the building, about half complete, is being built of stone and is in a six-and-a-half-acre field beautifully situated a short distance outside the city and within easy access from the present mission compound.

In the first year of the war, Leslie was heavily engaged in various industries, caring for diverse individuals. Specifically, they were involved in the industrial sector, where they oversaw the employment of over 2,000 women and girls who crafted handkerchiefs. These handkerchiefs were primarily sold in England, but due to trade disruption, this crucial source of income was abruptly halted (Memorial record, #17204).

Leslie and his wife pursued their mission in Urfa despite the difficult conditions caused by the conflict. As reported in the *Missionary Herald* ("As Matters Stand in Oorfa," 1915), Leslie assures the recipients that the American missionaries in Urfa are not in imminent peril. He discusses the confiscations by government officials and the effects of the conflict on the industrial sector, including the shutdown of the handkerchief manufacturing industry. However, Leslie emphasizes the perseverance of the churches in Urfa, highlighting the congregation's increased spiritual interest

and the positive influence of young Armenian males who have joined the church. In addition, he discusses the ongoing efforts of the boys' industrial school and the School for the Blind, despite the difficulties posed by declining orders and financial constraints.

In one of his letters to Barton (July 3, 1915, Reel 671), Leslie draws attention to the importance of assisting subjects of Western European countries who were interned in Urfa. The missionary work has involved providing for their needs and acting as a medium to pay their monthly allowances through the American consuls. Due to the increasing number of interned individuals, it became necessary for Leslie to have official standing to prevent misunderstandings and suspicion. Consequently, Henry Morgenthau, the US ambassador to Istanbul, cabled the State Department to have Francis H. Leslie appointed as the American consular agent at Urfa. The Ottoman Empire has accepted the appointment, although the necessary formalities with the local authorities are pending until the governor's return (DH. ŞFR, 477/60).

Leslie explains that the situation's urgency did not allow time to seek permission from the Board or receive a reply from their colleagues in Aintab. Therefore, he has provisionally accepted the appointment, subject to the approval of the Board. He assures that he will immediately resign if the Board declines the approval. Given the unusual circumstances and needs, Leslie believes the appointment will facilitate their work without interfering with the missionary work. He believes the appointment will bring more advantages than disadvantages to regular missionary work. The letter requests the Board to appreciate the situation, as he cannot provide more detailed information. He expresses confidence in the missionaries' sober judgment and hopes the Board will approve the appointment. He clarifies that he has no ambitions in the consular line and would not accept the appointment if it compromised their missionary work. Leslie assures the Board that he will accept and abide by the Board's decision, regardless of the outcome. He mentions that he will send a comprehensive report on the missionary work of his station for the first six months of the year when he can write more fully (July 3, 1915, Reel 671).

Urfa's political landscape added another layer of complexity to Leslie's mission in Urfa as both a missionary and consular agent. Leslie initially believed that Armenians should accept the demands imposed on them by the Turks, but as events unfolded, he revised his opinions (Jernazian, 1990, p. 51). Leslie was caught in the crossfire of conflicting political ideologies (Kieser, 2000, p.

469). Amidst the chaos, Leslie warned Consul Jackson in Aleppo, emphasizing the imminent danger in Urfa (Meier, 2022, p. 156).

3. Francis H. Leslie and the Urfa Events of 1915

The year 1895 could be considered the commencement of the 1915 Urfa events. After the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, the Treaty of Berlin stipulated the status of several nationalities subordinate to the Ottoman Empire (Khan, 2011). European nations could intervene in the Ottoman Empire's internal politics and promote separatist rebellion movements within the state due to the reform plans imposed on the non-Muslim subjects of the empire by European nations. Armenians received support from Russia under the Treaty of San Stefano and from European nations under Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty. According to this article, the Ottoman Empire agreed to make arrangements in favor of Armenians in the cities known as six provinces (*vilayet-i sitte:* Erzurum, Van, Harput, Sivas, Diyarbakır, and Bitlis) and agreed to ensure the security of Armenians in the region. These two agreements laid the foundation for the events of the following decades (Kasparian, 2003, p. 7).

As indicated by İlhami Yurdakul (2016, p. 139), the tension between Armenians and Muslims escalated. The events of 1895 were sparked by the assault on an Ottoman police station by Armenian groups. The Muslim population's concern over the activities of Armenian gangs escalated into clashes on December 29, 1895 (Yurdakul, 2016).

According to İlhami Yurdakul's (2016) estimate, based on the documents in the Ottoman archives, the loss of life in the events in Urfa was between 700 and 800 people. However, in missionary writings (Çoban Döşkaya, 2019), the number of people who died in the events was reported as 3.500. This situation was carried to the headlines of newspapers, unfounded allegations were spread to the world public opinion, and the issue was brought to the international arena (Yurdakul, 2016).

After the events of 1895, Armenian committees and gangs continued to organize. After the WWI outbreak, the government decided to relocate Armenians living in certain regions, as the Armenian uprisings in the Ottoman territories jeopardized general security (Halaçoğlu, 2002). Urfa was one of the regions where the resettlement of Armenians was planned. However, it was in Urfa

that the Armenian uprisings broke out most seriously. The causes of the 1915 Urfa events were similar to those of 1895: The propaganda of the Armenian Church and nationalists, the overt or covert support of European states, the patronage and support of separatist movements by German, Russian, British, and American missionary organizations in the region, and the idea of independence among Armenians. In addition to these reasons, one can also mention the uneasiness that the Armenian relocation, which the Ottoman Empire decided to carry out in order to ensure public order and the security of the front line, created among the Armenians living in Urfa (Aslan, 2021).

Regarding the 1915 Urfa Events, Talat Pasha submitted a detailed report to Sultan Mehmed Reşad. Ergünöz Akçora (1990) analyzed this report and summarized the Armenian preparations for an uprising in Urfa:

"1. To form armed units from deserters and communists from Zeytun, Sason, Bitlis, Antep, Diyarbakır, and Maraş regions.

2. To carry water, bake bread, and provide food.

3. Giving lectures, singing anthems, and performing plays.

4. Establishing worker associations, adjusting working hours, and organizing boycotts.

5. Taking care of the sick and wounded, treating them, and giving courses in nursing.

6. Making cartridges, cleaning rifles, teaching weapons to school students, procuring weapons from neighboring provinces through wealthy Armenians and consuls, with the help of deserters and tribe members."

The first sparks of the 1915 events in Urfa appeared in early August. The Armenians were asked to surrender their weapons (Meier, 2022). They even manufactured large quantities of bullets and cannons from large water pipes in the blacksmith shop of the American missionary premise, where Leslie was in charge (Cengiz, 1983) They, however, only gave up a small portion of their weapons, explosives, and ammunition. Most of the weapons surrendered were broken or outdated. The Ottoman authorities, who were aware of the activities of the armed gangs, ordered them to be neutralized. The situation in Urfa deteriorated rapidly, culminating in a violent clash between Armenian gangs and the Turkish authorities (Morris & Ze'evi, 2019). Several police officers and

gendarmes were murdered in an ambush organized by Armenian gangs. Clashes broke out and soon moved to the city center (Özşavlı, 2011).

Following the events of August, Father Soghomon instructed Mıgırdiç, the head of the Armenian gangs in the region, to start the uprising in Urfa. Mıgırdiç divided the Armenian neighborhoods in Urfa into sections. Houses were fortified for the conflict. On the night of September 29, shots were fired into the air from a house in the Armenian neighborhood. Mıgırdiç's aim in this action was to ambush Ottoman soldiers and police officers who arrived the next day to investigate the area. Events unfolded as Mıgırdiç expected. The soldiers who had come to the neighborhood to investigate the incident were killed by gunfire from the ambush. On Mıgırdiç's orders, bells were rung in Armenian churches, signaling the uprising (Özçelik, 1986). Mutasarrif Ali Haydar Bey wrote a letter to Mıgırdiç and tried to calm the events, but Mıgırdiç rejected his request. At the time of the uprising, there were between 60 and 80 soldiers and policemen in Urfa. Mutasarrif Ali Haydar Bey laid siege to the neighborhood where 2.000 Armenian rioters were. Several attempts to raid the Armenian neighborhood to suppress the rebellion were unsuccessful. Many people lost their lives in the raid attempt. The Mutasarrif held off the Armenian rioters until reinforcements arrived (Özşavlı, 2011).

Fahri Pasha, Deputy Commander of the Fourth Army, and his troops arrived in Urfa on October 5, 1915. On Mıgırdiç's orders, Armenian gangs organized an attack as the soldiers entered the city. Their main objective was the destruction of two cannons, which were crucial for the successful completion of the siege. Although the gangs specifically targeted the cannons, the attack was thwarted after a short period of chaos. Fahri Pasha met with Mıgırdiç, demanding a peaceful settlement and their surrender. Mıgırdiç, however, rejected Fahri Pasha's offer. The siege that started on October 5 continued until October 15. During this time, the Ottoman forces sent intermediaries to surrender the city without bloodshed. However, Mıgırdiç did not accept this and threatened to kill Armenians who wanted to surrender (Aslan, 2021). Leslie found himself in an increasingly precarious position as he, along with seven other Westerners, was taken hostage by the Armenians (Morris & Ze'evi, 2019).

The rebellion was quelled on October 15, 1915, but the Armenian gangs had built undergrounds and continued their attacks. It, therefore, took until October 29 to clear the city of rebels. One of the reasons for the prolonged siege was the Armenian gangs' capture of the American Board's orphanage in Urfa. There were civilians inside the building who had nothing to do with the uprising. The presence of civilians in the building and diplomatic reasons made the intervention difficult. The structure and location of the building also made it possible to intervene only with artillery fire. The Ottoman Empire peacefully took over 600 women and children inside the building at the end (Aslan, 2021; Bayraktar, 2007).

Following the suppression of the uprising, those who participated were sanctioned. The Armenians living in Urfa were transferred to different cities to ensure their security, maintain public order, and prevent possible conflicts that might occur after the uprising (Aslan, 2021). As the director of the Urfa orphanage, Francis H. Leslie was accused of involving in the whole process and was arrested on October 17, 1915 (DH.ŞFR. 493/148).

Talat Pasha reports the following about Leslie (Akçora, 1990):

"Missionary Leslie directed the orphanage at the American Compound near Tel Futur [Tılfındır] in Urfa. The compound had a forge and many other departments. The Armenians made great use of the facilities of this compound and used it to politicize the current rebellion and make foreign intervention possible.

This person [Leslie] joined the Armenians during the rebellion and even led the rebellion himself. A few days after surrendering with the Armenians in the compound, he drank poison to commit suicide out of remorse and left behind a suicide note.

(...) The giving of the American flag from Leslie's establishment [American Board] to the rebels and the collection and safekeeping of [Armenians'] money and jewels by this person is conclusive evidence of foreign participation [in the rebellion].

The phrase "Armenian Revolution = Ermeni İhtilali" in the last part of the suicide note written by Missionary Leslie is an important confession and a valuable document that proves that Armenians organized the rebellion."

The pressures of his responsibilities and the deteriorating situation resulted in a mental breakdown and subsequent despair (Kieser, 2010). Leslie faced multiple trials for his alleged involvement with the rebels who took control of the strategically important American Board premises. The overwhelming impact of the "extrajudicial killings" and the "distressing circumstances" left him unable to overcome the situation, leading to his tragic decision to end his own life (Georgeon & Dumont, 2018). Although the *New York Times* (1915, November 13) spread the news of his death as "A Missionary Poisoned: The Rev. F. H. Leslie of Michigan Killed at Urfa", official reports indicated that Leslie ultimately took his own life, succumbing to the unbearable burdens he faced. His close friend Jacob Künzler (1921), a Swiss missionary, wrote a chapter on Leslie's death, recounting his witnesses and memories in his memoir.

The Ottoman authorities insist that Leslie participated in the Armenian insurrection and even commanded it personally (HR.SYS, 2876/2, no. 9). The turbulent circumstances in Urfa took a toll on Leslie's mental well-being. In his letter to A. R. Hoover (November 20, 1915, Reel 505), Dr. Shephard shares his observations on Leslie's' mental health as follows:

"Leslie had undertaken to look after the belligerents interned in Oorfah - 400 of them for our Consul in Aleppo. This work and worry added to his already heavy burdens, together with great emotional stress was too much for him. He became depressed and finally it took the form of melancholia with fixed delusion, and he committed suicide by taking carbolic acid, on October 30. His poor wife is nearly heart broken. And we are all of us in deep sorrow over it."

In his other letter to W. W. Peet (November 19, 1915, Reel 505), Dr. Shephard states:

"I got back last evening from a four day's stay in Oorfah. Our work there is at a standstill, Mr. Leslie's death occurred October 30. He was insane, melancholia with fixed delusions, and committed suicide by carbolic acid poisoning. I will get all particulars to you by first opportunity."

Mr. Stevens, one of the British prisoners interned at Urfa, testified that he visited Leslie frequently at the church house to distribute relief funds for interned belligerent prisoners, numbering some hundred. He claims that their friendship developed quickly during this period. He argues that Leslie was captured by the Turkish regulars and imprisoned for over a week and reports that the experience left him a broken man, and upon release, he led a solitary existence for a few

weeks. He describes their last interaction as follows: ("Statement of R. Stevens regarding Mr. Leslie", June 11, 1920, Reel 505)

"Chancin to meet him the Armenian chemist's one afternoon, I exchanged a few words with him, and his last words to me were: "I feel bad, Stevens. I wonder where my wife is. Give the man a Long Goodbye. You know my country has deserted me, and I have no hope left." With that, he left me abruptly and slowly dragged himself up the hill to his room, followed by a guard."

As seen above, Leslie expressed his despair and lack of hope to his friend, feeling abandoned by his country. Stevens believes that his death could have been prevented if he had received assistance from his government and utters, *"He [Leslie] was not able to cope with the terrible responsibilities with which he was hampered. His post required a man of iron nerve, great physical endurance, and a trained mind…"* ("Statement of R. Stevens regarding Mr. Leslie", June 11, 1920, Reel 505).

According to the Ottoman archival documents, in a telegram sent by the Urfa administration to the Security Directorate on October 30, 1915, Leslie committed suicide by ingesting phenol, as determined by a medical examination conducted by German physicians (DH.ŞFR, 495/35). In a note found on his body, Leslie stated that no one was liable for his death, that he obtained the substance he used to commit suicide from the mission building, and that he did not participate in or intervene with the Urfa revolution but was dragged into the events (DH.ŞFR, 57/255).

"My Last Statement

No one in Ourfa is in any way responsible for my actions except myself, especially the family of Herr Kunzler and Herr Eckart. They are not involved in anything I have done. That which I drank I brought from the building of the former Mission. I am not implicated in the Armenian Revolution but was drown under by it.

(Signed) F. H. Leslie" (Akçora, 1990, p. 399; see Appendix 4)

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the missionary work of Reverend Francis H. Leslie in Urfa during the early 20th century. Leslie, an American Board missionary, played a significant role in the American mission in Urfa after Corinna Shattuck and witnessed the Armenian uprisings in the region during World War I. In the Ottoman Empire, the American Board focused on the Armenian and Greek communities, establishing schools and churches in Armenian-populated areas. Leslie's assignment in Urfa was influenced by the achievements of Corinna Shattuck, who had organized industrial work for orphans and opened the School for the Blind in Urfa. Leslie insisted on encouraging the industrial work in Urfa, recognizing its potential as a means of evangelism and education. He believed that industrial training carried out in the spirit of Christ could help interest Muslims in Christianity and promote progress in the region. Leslie also emphasized the importance of agricultural education and the need for practical skills to improve the lives of the local population.

Throughout his correspondence with colleagues and mission officials, Leslie highlighted the challenges and needs of the mission in Urfa. He advocated for constructing a mission residence, better living conditions for missionaries, and additional funding for various projects. Leslie's letters reflect his dedication to the mission's work and his deep concern for Urfa's "impoverished" population. Leslie also shared updates on the war conditions, including the confiscation of resources by the government, the impact on local businesses, and the conscription of workers, which affected the mission's operations and schools. Despite the hardships, Leslie expressed gratitude for the support received and reports on the continued efforts and positive outcomes of the missionary work, such as the increased spiritual interest in the churches and the perseverance of the blind students in their educational and vocational training. Towards the war's later stages, Leslie's role expanded as he became the American consular agent in Urfa, assisting interned individuals from Western European countries. Leslie's letters gave information about the complex political landscape in Urfa, where he navigated conflicting ideologies and sought to protect the interests of the mission amidst the turmoil.

The events of 1895 and 1915 in Urfa were marked by tensions between Armenians and Muslims, fueled by various factors. The Treaty of Berlin and subsequent agreements granted

Armenians certain rights and protections, leading to increased nationalist sentiments and separatist movements. European nations and missionary organizations supported Armenians, further contributing to the volatile situation of clashes, uprisings, and armed conflicts between Armenian gangs and Ottoman authorities.

The events of 1895 in Urfa were triggered by an assault on an Ottoman police station by Armenian groups, escalating tensions between the Armenian and Muslim populations. The number of casualties during these events remains disputed, with differing accounts in Ottoman archives and missionary writings. In the years following 1895, Armenian committees and gangs continued to organize, and with the outbreak of World War I, the Ottoman government decided to relocate Armenians in certain regions, including Urfa, due to concerns about their uprisings. The causes of the 1915 Urfa events were similar to those of 1895, including propaganda, foreign support, and the idea of independence among Armenians. The Armenian gangs in Urfa initiated the uprising in September 1915, leading to a prolonged siege and clashes with Ottoman forces.

The uprising in Urfa was eventually suppressed, and the Armenian residents were transferred to different cities for their security and to maintain public order. In 1915, Francis H. Leslie, the director of the American mission in Urfa, played a crucial role in the 1915 events in Urfa. Thus, he was accused of involving the Armenian rebels, assisting them in occupying American mission premises, and even commanding the resistance there. He attentively monitored the Armenians' situation in the region since he was a Board missionary. Tragically, Leslie's life came to a tragic end. The government seized the properties and funds under his supervision, adding to his distress. With sadness and anxiety that his government had left him alone and fearing for his life, Leslie committed suicide on October 30, 1915.

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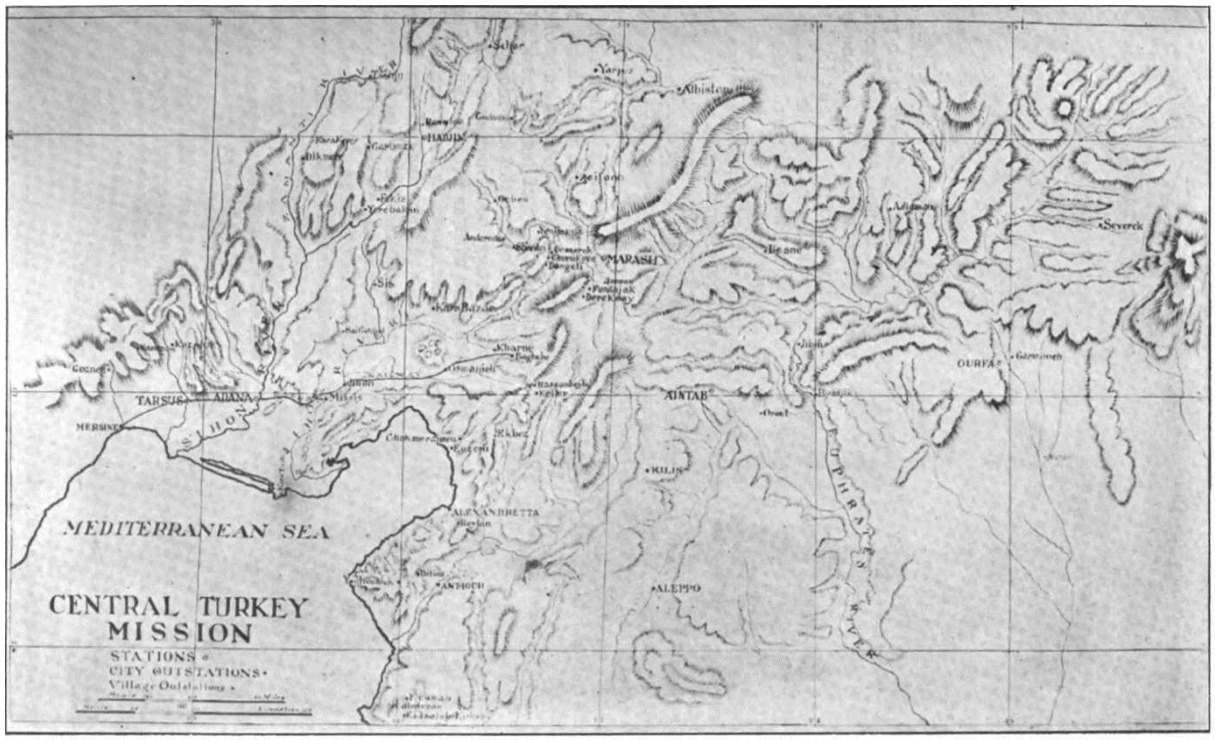
Appendix 1: Francis H. Leslie in Arab Dress



(Ekinci & Asoğlu, 2017)

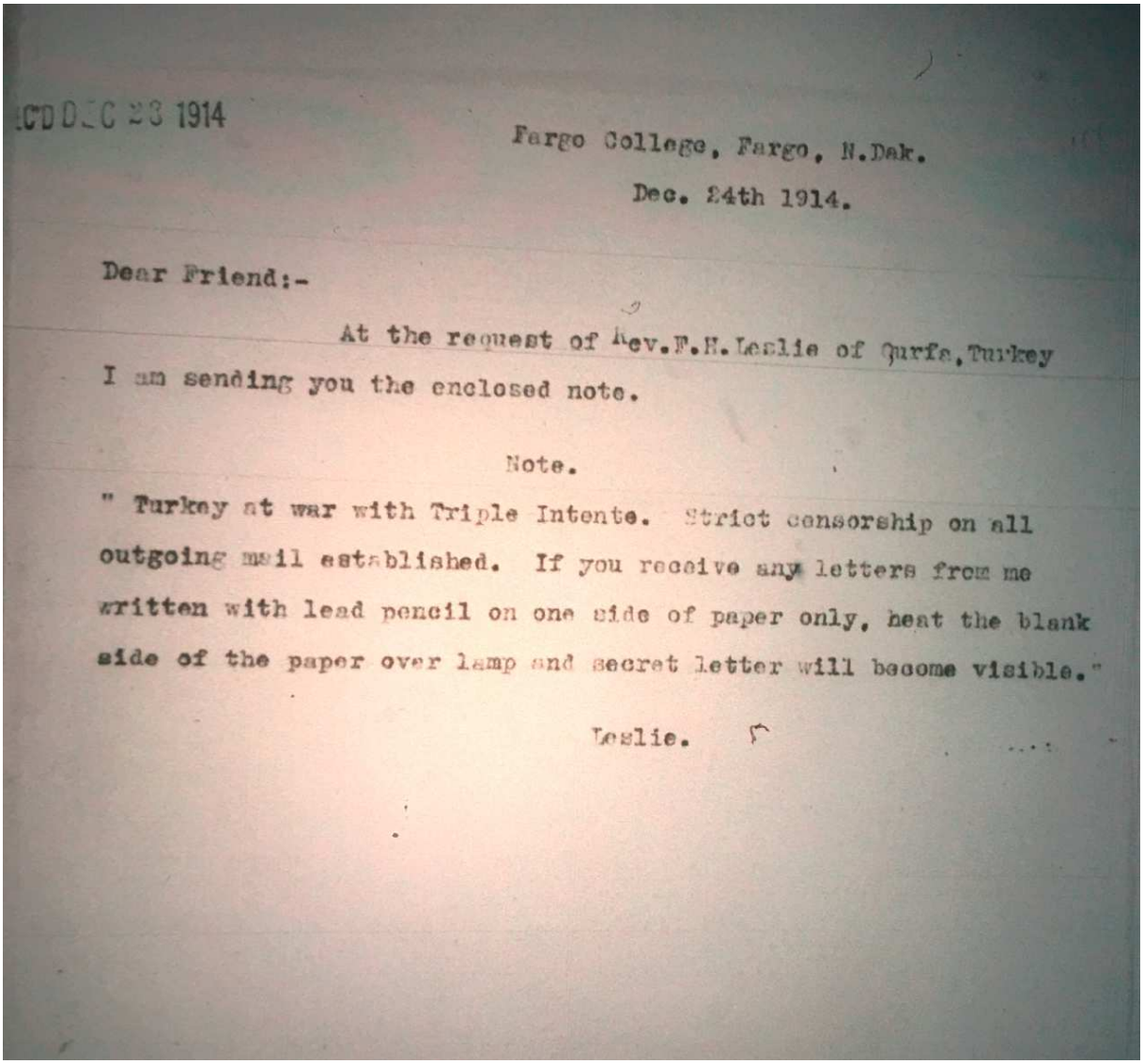
Appendix 2: Francis H. Leslie's Map of Central Turkey Mission



ONE OF THE AMERICAN BOARD'S FOUR MISSION FIELDS IN TURKEY

(Field Notes, 1912)

Appendix 3: Francis H. Leslie's Secret Method of Communication



RCD DEC 23 1914

Fargo College, Fargo, N.Dak.

Dec. 24th 1914.

Dear Friend:-

At the request of Rev.F.H.Leslie of Qurfa,Turkey I am sending you the enclosed note.

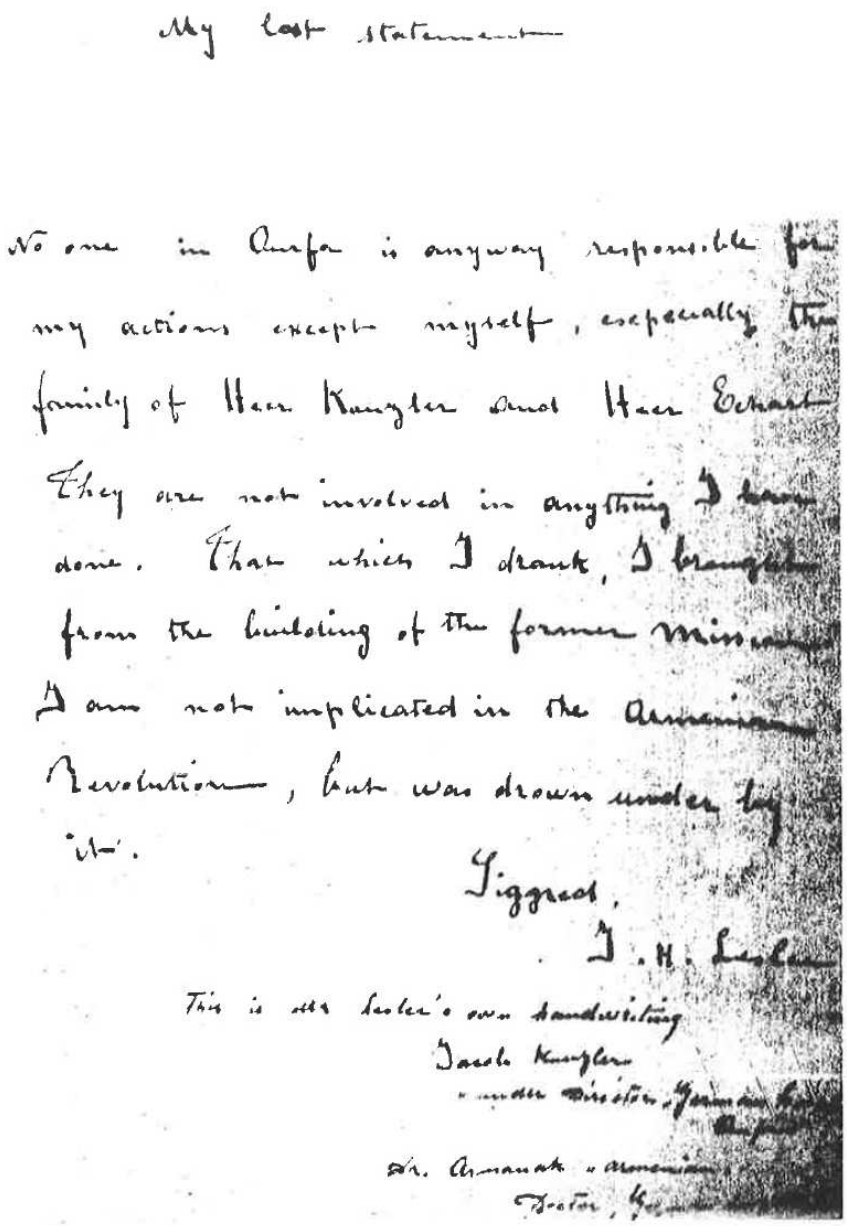
Note.

" Turkey at war with Triple Intente. Strict censorship on all outgoing mail established. If you receive any letters from me written with lead pencil on one side of paper only, heat the blank side of the paper over lamp and secret letter will become visible."

Leslie.

Leslie to Fargo College. (December 24, 1914).Reel 671.

Appendix 4: Francis H. Leslie's Suicide Note



My last statement

No one in Ourfa is anyway responsible for my actions except myself, especially the family of Heer Kuegler and Heer Echart. They are not involved in anything I have done. That which I drank, I brought from the building of the former Mission. I am not implicated in the Armenian Revolution, but was drown under by it.

Siggred,

J. H. Lesler

This is Mr Lesler's own handwriting

Jacob Kuegler

under Director, German [illegible]

Dr. Armanak, Armenian Doctor, [illegible]

(Akçora, 1990)