Non-Muslim Neighbors and Sheikh Ubeydullah’s Uprising
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In this paper, I aim to question the established wisdom regarding the relationship between Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nehri and his non-Muslim neighbors in the Lake Van region. Generally, the existing scholarship on Kurds seeks to explain the Sheikh’s 1880 uprising as a reaction to the creation of a possible Armenian state. Yet, there is no credible historical evidence to support such a view, it is, at best, based on speculations. Neither British nor Ottoman documents nor the Sheikh’s own writings suggest anything to validate this common perspective. On the contrary, there is an ample evidence pointing to the Sheikh’s positive views on his non-Muslim neighbors. Not least because he was eager to win hearts and minds of Armenians or Assyrians rather than mobilizing the Kurds against them. It becomes also apparent that he was cognizant of the fact that in order to garner any European support, he needed a good relations with non-Muslims in the shared region. Hence, in this paper I will argue that portrayal Sheikh Ubeydullah’s uprising as nothing but a reaction to the Armenian aspiration for statehood is unpersuasive.