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EDITED BY RICHARD G. HOVANNISIAN

9(566)
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THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE



HISTORY · POLITICS · ETHICS

The Armenian Genocide

History, Politics, Ethics

Edited by

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Foreword

Governor George Deukmejian

St. Martin's Press New York

Notes on the Contributors

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Vahakn N. Dadrian is Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York, Geneseo. Among his many publications on the Armenian Genocide are three monographs: 'The Naim-Andonian Documents,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 1986; 'The National and International Law Aspects of Mass Murder,' *Yale Journal of International Law*, 1989; and 'The Documentation of the Armenian Genocide in Turkish Sources,' in Israel Charny (ed.), *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review*, Vol. 2 (1991).

Clive Foss is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, where he also teaches a course on the history of genocide. He has published several books on Byzantine history, based on archaeological work in Turkey, and has studied and written on ancient Armenian coinage.

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Annette Höss is a PhD candidate in the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Vienna, Austria. Her dissertation research is on the genocidal massacres of the Armenians as evidenced in the Turkish court-martial proceedings after the First World War.

Richard G. Hovannisian is Holder of the Armenian Educational Foundation Chair in Modern Armenian History and Associate Director of the G. E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has published several books and many articles on Armenian, Caucasian, and Near Eastern history and has appeared frequently in the media on issues relating to the Armenian people.

Robert Melson is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Purdue University and founder and former chairman of the Jewish Studies Program. He has written on the topic of racial and communal conflict. His book, *Revolutionary Genocide: On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust*, is being published by the University of Chicago Press (1992).

Donald E. Miller and **Lorna Touryan Miller** have published several articles and are writing a book based on in-depth oral history interviews with survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Donald Miller is Associate Professor of the Sociology of Religion at the University of Southern California and the author of *Writing and Research in Religious Studies* (1991) and *The Case for Liberal Christianity* (1981). Lorna Miller is the Director of Office of Creative Connections (outreach program) of All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena.

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Roger W. Smith is Professor of Government at the College of William and Mary, where he teaches political theory and the comparative study of genocide. He is the co-author of *Guilt, Man and Society* (1971) and is a contributing editor of the international newsletter, *Internet on the Holocaust and Genocide*. He has written widely about the nature, history, and prevention of genocide.

Foreword

The following is an excerpt from Governor George Deukmejian's remarks at the International Conference on the Armenian Genocide:

I have been given the honor of welcoming all of you to this, the International Conference on the Armenian Genocide. The conference, which brings together scholars from around the world, could not have come at a better or more critical time.

As you know, more and more people are becoming aware of that horrible page in history known as the Armenian Genocide. Here in California, there have been many ongoing efforts to increase this awareness. For example, in furtherance of a resolution passed by the California Legislature, during every one of my years as governor, I have issued an order proclaiming April 24 as a Day of Remembrance. This day honors the memory of those one and a half million innocent Armenians who were brutally and systematically massacred by government authorities in the waning years of the Ottoman Empire.

We have also been concerned that our state's young people learn the facts about this tragic occurrence. Recently, the California State Board of Education has included study of the Armenian Genocide, along with other gross human rights violations, in the History-Social Science Framework. Unfortunately, there are only limited educational materials on the subject. That is why competent, professional research is so important. The world community is entitled to thoroughly researched and documented facts so that no one can dispute the stark reality of the Armenian Genocide.

It was not just witnesses from the countries of the Allied Powers who observed and wrote about the genocide. While individuals such as Great Britain's Lord James Bryce and France's Henri Barby offered gripping accounts of Turkey's genocidal efforts to eliminate their Armenian problem, so did representatives of Turkey's own allies.

Researchers have found, for example, that the German Ambassador to Turkey, Baron Hans von Wangenheim, wrote in 1915:

It is obvious that the banishment of the Armenians is due not solely to military considerations. Talaat Bey, the [Turkish] Minister of the Interior, has quite frankly said . . . that the Turkish Government intended to make use of the World War and deal thoroughly with its internal enemies, the Christians in Turkey, and that it meant not to be disturbed in this by diplomatic intervention from abroad.

Wangenheim's observation was corroborated by his successor, Count Paul von Wolff-Metternich, who said that Turkey's goal was to 'resolve its Armenian question by the destruction of the Armenian race.'

The scholarly effort in which many of you are engaged is of utmost importance. For Armenians who lost parents, grandparents, and other relatives in the awful tragedy, the vivid memories of that dark era provide sufficient proof that the genocide remains a cold fact of history. We also realize, however, that the English writer Samuel Butler was correct when he said, 'God cannot alter the past, but historians can.'

And this is precisely what is being attempted by some present-day Turkish officials and certain revisionist historians. They assert that documents confirming the massacres are forgeries and that contemporary reports by Western observers were nothing but wartime propaganda. Further, they claim that military necessity, not the slaughter of an entire race, was the real motivation. In essence, they deny that there ever was such a thing as an Armenian Genocide.

The universal realization that Turkey committed a horrible and heinous crime extended to friend and foe alike. Vital evidence such as this, uncovered through months and years of hard work, serves a dual purpose. It both reveals the true nature of the tragedy that befell the Armenian people and keeps pressure on the Turkish government to admit the premeditated role that its predecessors played in this racially and religiously motivated holocaust.

We owe it to all those who perished on those burning desert sands many years ago to ensure that the world always remembers what happened. We should thank God that we live in a land where we have the freedom of speech and inquiry that will guarantee our ability to make sure that the world does not forget.

In the report that established the Smithsonian Institution, it

was said that, 'To furnish knowledge is the greatest benefit that can be conferred upon mankind.' That is the purpose of this conference. There will be important scholarly presentations ranging from evidence and analyses of the genocide itself to its aftermath and to ethical issues. This conference will demonstrate that, despite the violence done to the Armenian people, knowledge can be more powerful than force. By learning more about what happened to the Armenians, we may help to prevent such unconscionable crimes in the future.

I would like to commend Dr Richard Hovannisian for organizing this important symposium and to thank the Angelo and Sofia Tsakopoulos Fund for its generous support of this event.

George Deukmejian
Governor
State of California

Introduction: History, Politics, Ethics

Richard G. Hovannisian

Within a decade the Armenian Genocide will belong to a previous century. The last of the survivors and eyewitnesses will have passed from the scene, and the disappearance of the Armenian people from their historic homelands may simply be added to the long list of calamities with which history is replete.

Since collective memory dims with the passage of time, it may seem unusual that increasing attention is being focused on the Armenian cataclysm. Spearheading this movement are survivors and their descendants, human rights activists, and scholars and teachers. The second and third generation of postgenocide Armenians, now scattered throughout the world, feel a sense of urgency as the event becomes progressively more remote in time. They demand international recognition of the genocide and acts of contrition by the Ottoman Empire's primary successor state and the sole beneficiary of the individual and collective patrimony of the Armenian people. Human rights advocates use the Armenian Genocide as an object lesson about the failure to confront and punish the crime, and some among them seek legal remedies for the continuing trauma and injustice associated with that failure. Teachers in increasing numbers are introducing the difficult subject into the curriculum and educational framework. Moreover, thorough scholarly examination of the Holocaust has stimulated comparisons with the Armenian experience, which is often regarded as a model, even a rehearsal for the efficient mass destruction of Jews and other groups by the Nazi regime only one generation later. Multidimensional investigation of the Armenian Genocide has now begun, and this volume brings together studies that address historical, political, comparative, literary, and ethical issues.

There is, of course, no single accepted definition of genocide. Some writers and activists use the term flexibly to include intercommunal massacres, pogroms, and indiscriminate killings such as those in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Naga-

saki during the Second World War. By contrast, many scholars and survivors of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust tend to draw tighter, less encompassing definitions. Their concern, whether openly voiced or not, is that the significance of these primary examples of genocide in the twentieth century will be diluted by the inclusion of other atrocities, which, however terrible, are not comparable in scope and enormity with the Armenian and Jewish experiences. Even in these two clearcut cases, some scholars and survivors rank and qualify the tragedies in order not to impinge upon the uniqueness of the particular cataclysm. On the other hand, there are both Armenian and Jewish scholars who have taken a broad approach and pioneered comparative investigation. Clearly, the bounds in the study of the phenomenon of genocide are neither fixed nor firm.

The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide lists five acts, any one of which intentionally perpetrated against a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group would constitute genocide:

1. Killing members of the group.
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

It is significant that in the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust all five categories apply, except possibly the final point in the case of Jews because of Nazi racial ideology.

Scholars have started classifying instances and types of genocide from antiquity to the present. These studies examine the preconditions for genocide, the genocidal processes, the profiles of perpetrators and victims, and the range of reactions and results. In the Armenian case, characteristics include a plural society with marked racial, religious, and cultural differences and tensions; the traditional legal and socioreligious inferiority of minorities and subject peoples; espousal by the dominant group of a belief system that emphasizes its nobility and destiny and the alien and exploitative nature of the elements to be

extruded; a period of radical transition to a new geopolitical order during which the regime decides to eliminate one or more groups that pose real, potential, or perceived threats; the mobilization of state power and the military establishment to ensure achievement of that objective; and the seizure and retention of the economic resources and the destruction of the cultural foundations of the dispossessed people. Between the Young Turk revolution in 1908 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, extreme Turkish nationalism triumphed over multinational Ottomanism. Government and party merged as the Young Turk dictatorship created the 'Special Organization' to supervise execution of the measures to be taken against the Armenians. Even in a land as little developed as the Turkish Empire, the use of technological advances such as the telegraph allowed for unprecedented coordination in the execution of the genocidal process.

When the Armenian Genocide began in April 1915, certain international rules and customs of war existed to protect non-combatants and civilian populations. Ironically, those regulations did not extend to domestic situations and a government's treatment of its own subjects. This shortcoming was officially addressed by the Nuremberg trials and the Genocide Convention following the Second World War. It is nonetheless relevant that at the outset of the Armenian Genocide, the Allied governments then at war with the Ottoman, German, and Austro-Hungarian empires labeled the atrocities as a 'crime against humanity' and pledged to hold the Turkish government responsible collectively and individually. Long before Raphael Lemkin coined the word 'genocide' in 1944, its essence was captured in terms describing the Armenian decimation as 'holocaust,' 'inferno,' 'race extermination,' and 'murder of a nation.'

The commitment of the Allied Powers to punish the architects of the Armenian Genocide receded before geopolitical and economic considerations following the First World War, and even the courts-martial set up by the new Turkish government were soon discredited and ceased to function. With few exceptions, the organizers of and participants in the genocide lived out their natural lives without any form of punishment, retaining the goods and properties of their victims. More than one Turkish industrial scion today is heir to a family fortune founded on the enterprises of dispossessed Armenians. In contrast with the

aftermath of the Holocaust, there was no redemption, no compensation, no contrition. Instead, the world seemed to succumb to prolonged amnesia, compounding the agony of the dispersed survivors. In a thoughtful essay, Terrence Des Pres has written:

National catastrophes can be survived if (and perhaps only if) those to whom disaster happens can recover themselves through knowing the truth of their suffering. Great Powers, on the other hand, would vanquish not only the peoples they subjugate but also the cultural mechanism that would sustain vital memory of historical crimes.¹

The enormous energy Armenians have expended so that the world would know 'the truth of their suffering' and the growing scholarly interest in the genocide have produced a strong backlash from the Turkish government, special-interest groups, and committed revisionists in a heavily-financed campaign of rationalization, refutation, and denial. In this phase, however, a new strategy has been developed. Unlike earlier absolute and unconvincing denials of wholesale massacre, the emphasis now is on plausible explanations and appeals to a sense of fair play and a willingness to hear the other side of a misunderstood issue. The resulting publications, declarations, and advertisements, many refined by public relations firms and sympathetic holders of advanced academic degrees in the West, take a relativist approach. They assert that all humanity suffers in wartime and that the unfortunate Armenian losses were not inordinate when compared with the suffering of Turks and other peoples of the Ottoman Empire. Concurrently, deniers of the Holocaust point out that German casualties eclipsed Jewish losses and that the alleged war against the Jews under the cover of a world war is a hoax.

The revisionists resort to the manipulation of population statistics in order to minimize the number of Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire and thereby the ultimate number that could have perished. The Armenians, they say, died primarily of famine and disease, not because of a premeditated plan of annihilation. The apologists cloud the issue further by pointing to intercommunal conflict between Armenians and Muslims and equating the situation with the ongoing intercommunal strife in Lebanon. They fail to note, however, that in 1915 all the resources of the Turkish government, including the entire military