

VERJINÉ SVAZLIAN

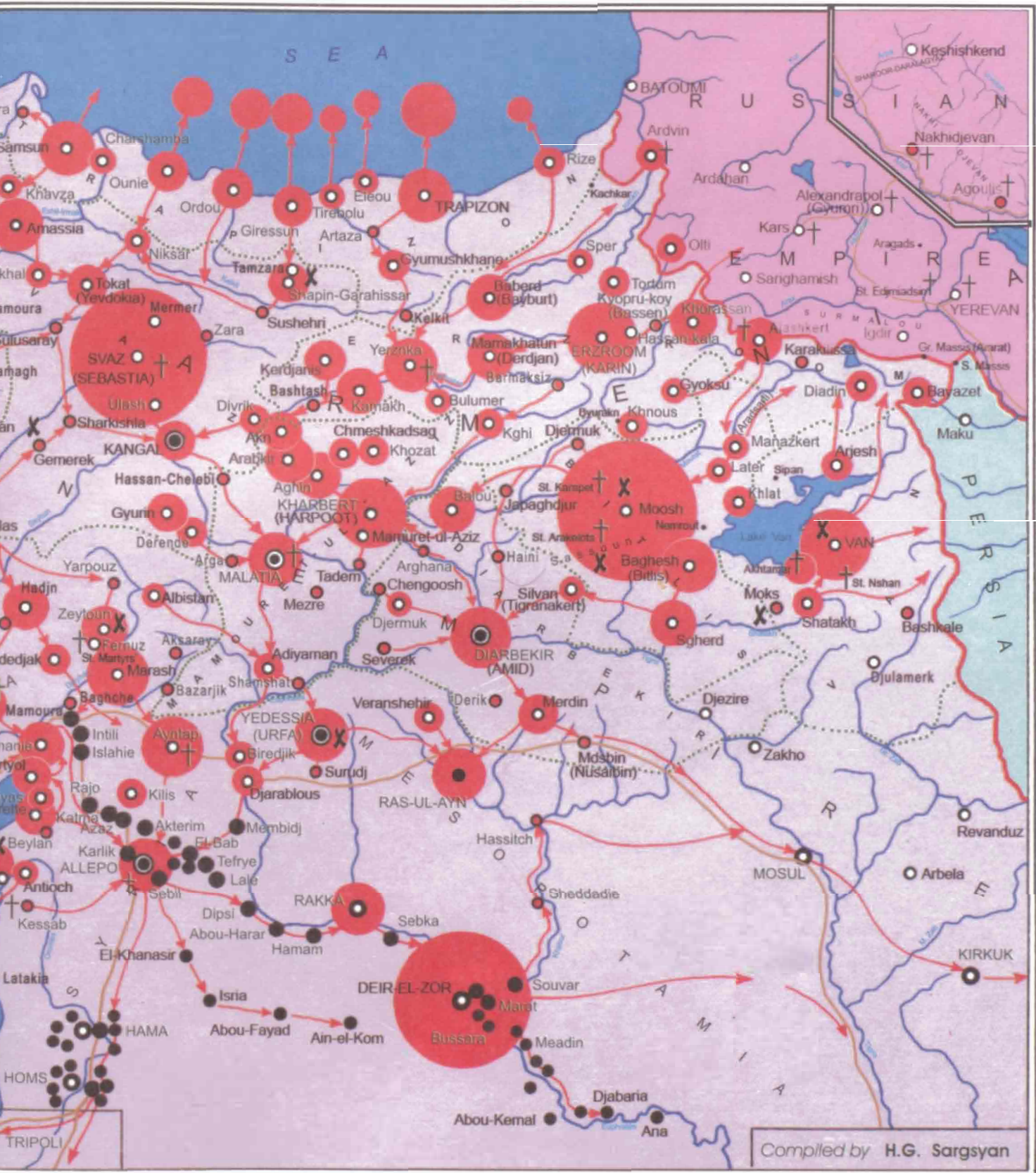
THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

TESTIMONIES
OF THE EYEWITNESS SURVIVORS

THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE IN THE



THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE (1915-1923)



*Dedicated to the Memory of the
Innocent Victims of the
Armenian Genocide*

ՀԱՅԿ - Ի Քրեական
Ընթերցանական

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in memory of their beloved parents, who had miraculously survived the Armenian Genocide.

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VERJINÉ SVAZLIAN

THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE:
TESTIMONIES OF THE EYEWITNESS SURVIVORS

Printed by decisions of the Scientific Councils
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and
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SVAZLIAN VERJINÉ

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2011, 848 pages, 53 typographic units + map + DVD.

The present work includes the primary-source popular oral testimonies of historical nature, the memoirs, the narratives, the Armenian- and Turkish-language songs (700 units) written down, audio- and video-recorded by the author from the eye-witness survivors of the Armenian Genocide deported from Western Armenia, Cilicia and Anatolia and resettled in Armenia and in the various countries of the world. The tragic life episodes fallen to the lot of the Western Armenians, as well as their noble and righteous struggle to protect their elementary human rights for living are presented in this academic study on the grounds of historical and ethnographical data. The collection is supplied also with notations of the historical songs, summaries in English, French, German, Turkish, Russian and Armenian languages, documentation on the eyewitness survivors and their testimonies, a glossary, commentaries, thematic, toponymic, ethnonymic indexes and an index of personal names, photographs of the eyewitness survivors of the Armenian Genocide, a map showing the deportation and the Genocide (1915-1923) perpetrated against the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

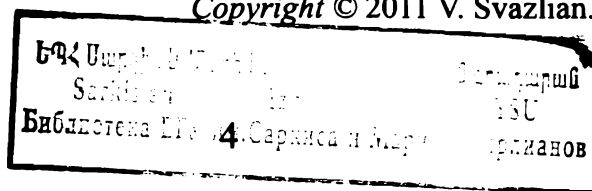
At the end of this volume you will find a digital video disk (DVD), which is the English version of the Armenian documentary film "*The Creed of the Svazlian Extended Family*." The film represents the nation-devoted and Fatherland-devoted activities of the three consecutive generations of the author's extended family in the 20th century.

The volume is intended for historians, politicians, diplomats, lawyers, sociologists, psychologists, economists, folklorists and the broad sections of readers interested in ethnography.

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FOREWORD

The present study comprises the oral testimonies and songs (700 units) directly recorded from the generation that survived the Armenian Genocide; they have been recorded with great patience and devotion over the course of more than 55 years by Verjinn Svazlian, Doctor of Philological Sciences.

This work is of great historical and even political value and significance. It includes numerous memoirs depicting the harrowing scenes of the Armenian Genocide and the popular Armenian- and Turkish-language songs expressing the sufferings of the victims in the desert of Deir-el-Zor in Mesopotamia. These tragic reminiscences are most impressive.

An enormously laborious and gratifying work has been undertaken to save and perpetuate the unique memoirs and songs depicting the tragic and heroic history of the Western segment of the Armenian nation, of those who survived the Armenian Genocide (who are no longer alive) from the danger of fading memory and eternal oblivion.

These materials are actually the most important historical documents for reproducing, in a live popular language, the shocking scenes of the greatest tragedy of the Armenians.

In this study, the author has skillfully conjoined her rich and diverse materials with actual historical evidence, and these materials have become popular, original documents certifying, substantiating and detailing the historical truths. It should be noted that the author is the first to put into scientific circulation the aforementioned materials woven about the Armenian Genocide, particularly the popular memoirs and the Turkish-language songs.

The work is enhanced with various indexes, the photographs of the survivors, map of the Armenian Genocide and, most importantly, the Turkish-language songs are accompanied by their English translations, which greatly facilitate their comprehension.

The cited memoirs of the eyewitnesses and, especially, the Turkish-language songs are equivalent in value to historical documents, for they not only allow the reader to correctly understand and grasp the tragic history of the Armenian nation of that period, but they also support, to a great extent, the defense of the Armenian Case and, in particular, they refute the distorted and revisionist accounts of that history, as written by Turkish and pro-Turkish historians.

SARGIS HARUTYUNIAN

Academician of the
National Academy of Sciences of the
Republic of Armenia



Doctor of Philological Sciences, ethnographer Verjiné Svazlian
writing down the tragic memoirs and songs
narrated by the Genocide survivor, Mariam Baghdishian (b. 1909, Moussa Dagh)

The present volume was compiled and completed by writing down (also tape-recording and video-recording), word for word, fragment for fragment the original 700 testimonies and the historical study of this volume, during a period of more than 55 years.

I express my deep gratitude to those who miraculously survived the Armenian Genocide and who, while heroically facing cruel circumstances in life, retained in the abysses of their memory and communicated to me what they had seen and remembered. Thus, they have saved from a total loss the collective historical memory of the Armenian nation with a view to present it to the world and to the righteous judgment of mankind.

V. S.

INTRODUCTION

The Armenian Genocide, as an international political crime against humanity, has become, by the brutal constraint of history, an inseparable part of the national identity, the thought and the spiritual-conscious inner world of the Armenian people.

As the years go by, interest toward the Armenian Genocide grows steadily due to the fact of the recent recognition of this historical evidence by numerous countries. However, the official Turkish and the pro-Turkish historiographers try, up to the present day and in every possible way, to distort the true historical facts pertaining to the years 1915-1923, a fatal period for the Armenian nation.

Numerous studies, collections of documents, statements of politicians and public officials, artistic creations of various genres about the Armenian Genocide have been published in various languages, but all these colossal publications did not include the voice of the people: the memoirs and popular songs narrated and transmitted by eyewitness survivors who had created them under the immediate impression of the said historical events. These memoirs and songs also have an important historico-cognitive, factual-documental and primary source value. Inasmuch as the Armenian nation itself has endured all those unspeakable sufferings, consequently, the nation itself is the object of that massive political crime. And, as in the elucidation of every crime, the testimonies of the witnesses are decisive, similarly, in this case, the testimonies of the eyewitness survivors are of prime importance; every one of them has, from the juridical point of view, its evidential significance in the equitable solution of the Armenian Case and in the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

I started this work as early as 1955, when it was not possible to speak explicitly about the Armenian Genocide in Soviet Armenia, when the exiled repatriates, the eyewitness survivors miraculously rescued from the massacres were living in fear of being unjustly accused and deported anew. At that time, I was a student at the Yerevan Khachatour' Abovian Pedagogical University. Despising the difficulties of all kinds and conscious of the historico-scientific and the factual-documental value of the materials associated with popular oral tradition, I followed the call of my Western-Armenian blood in the beginning and acted on my own initiative. Later, starting from 1960, I continued my work under the patronage of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia (being engaged, at the same time, in other scientific research works). In **Armenia**, under the scorching summer sun and in the icy winter cold, I went on foot, from district to district, from village to village, searching and finding eyewitness survivors miraculously rescued from the Armenian Genocide. I approached them tactfully, without diverting their attention with irrelevant questions, and let them freely express their immediate impressions. I wrote down (and also tape-recorded) the

* The Library of Congress system of transliteration has been used for the phonetic transcription of the Eastern Armenian proper names:

ա>a	դ>d	ե>e	ժ>zh	խ>kh	փ>h	ճ>j	ց>n	չ>ch	ն>r	ւ>ɾ	ւ>v	օ>o
բ>b	ե>e	ը>e	ի>i	ծ>ds	ձ>dz	ւ>m	շ>sh	պ>p	ս>s	ր>r	փ>p	ֆ>f
գ>g	զ>z	թ>t	լ>l	կ>k	ղ>gh	յ>h, y, -	ո>vo, o	շ>dj	վ>v	գ>ts	ք>k	յա>ia, ya

bewildering memoirs, the impressive stories and the diverse historical songs, which they narrated and sang. [Svazlian 1984, 1994, 1995]

Subsequently, by making use of the possibilities provided by the directorate of the Museum-Institute of the Armenian Genocide of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (NAS RA) founded at Dsidernakaberd (Yerevan), in 1995, I have continued the work started, not only by writing down and tape-recording, but also by video-recording (operator: Galoust Haladjian) the memoir-testimonies and songs of historical character (Armenian and Turkish-language) narrated by the eyewitness survivors. [Svazlian 1997a, 1997b, 1999]

Writing down word for word, I have included also the memoirs of the eyewitness survivors kept at the Memoir, Diary, Audio and Video Funds of the Archives of the Museum-Institute of the Armenian Genocide of NAS RA, which the said survivors themselves had committed to paper with a view to bequeathing them to the coming generations.

I have not overlooked and included also the memoirs narrated by the eyewitness survivors of the Armenian Genocide, video-recorded on the territory of Armenia in 1989 by a group of scientists under the leadership of the former scientific worker of the Department of History and Culture of the Armenian Diasporan Communities of NAS RA, Doctor of History, Noubar Chalemian and the cooperation of Salbi Ghazarian (USA), Sargis Keshishian (Syria), Vahan Gyurdjian, Aram Grigorian, Ghoukas Hakobian. While performing that work, they had assumed as a basis the questionnaire "The Programme of Oral History" compiled by the Zorian Institute (USA). However, both the above-cited video-tapes and the tape-recording of the memoir narrated by the daughter of the martyr of the Armenian Genocide, the lawyer-writer Grigor Zohrap, Dolores Zohrap-Liebmann (made by N. Chalemian in New York, in 1989) had not been deciphered and put into scientific circulation.

Meanwhile, I have had the opportunity to make recordings, besides Armenia, first, during my personal short-term trips abroad, then also while my participations in international conferences in **New York, San Francisco** (1979), **Athens** (1984), **Los Angeles** (1990), **Istanbul** (1996, 1997). In Istanbul and at the Armenian National St. Prkich (Savior – Arm.) old-age nursing home there I had the opportunity to record more than 40 testimonies and other oral materials. [Svazlian 2000a]

In 1999, when I was invited to make a report at the International Scientific Conference of the Institute of Oriental Languages (INALCO) in **Paris**, organized by Dr. Anahit Donabedian, I was able to acquire over 10 testimonies from the eyewitness survivors. Meeting a few days later, the American-Armenian survivor, Sargis Saryan (b. 1911, Balou) in one of the exhibition-rooms of the Louvres Museum, I wrote down on the spot his memoir-testimony and took a photograph of him just there.

All these, coupled with the other memoirs-testimonies, narratives and songs of historical nature written down, audio- and video-recorded by me in the past and ensuing years (600 units), have been patiently deciphered word for word, studied and included in the voluminous edition "*Hayots Tseghaspanutiun. Akanates veraprogneri vkayutiunner*" ("*The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors*") (in Armenian). [Svazlian 2000]

In the subsequent years, too, I continued the work I had started.

In 2001, following my report at the International Symposium "Armenian Constantinople" organized by Prof. Richard Hovhannissian at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I had visited the "Ararat" Armenian National old-age nursing home in **Los Angeles**, and wrote down there testimonies of the eyewitness survivors of the Armenian Genocide and other materials.

In 2002, Doctor Nora Arissian from **Damascus** (Syria) sent to the Archives of the Museum-Institute of the Armenian Genocide of NAS RA memoir-interviews video-recorded from Arab-Bedouin eyewitnesses living in the deserts of **Deir-el-Zor, Ras-ul-Ayn and Rakka**, of which I have deciphered 5 in translation and included in this volume.

In the spring of 2005, I was invited to the International Annual Congress of the Canadian Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences, held in the town of London (Ontario, Canada), where I made a report in French on the theme of "*The testimonies of the eyewitness survivors as a factor in the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide*" in the session of "Translated Memory and the Language of Genocide," organized by Dr. Sima Aprahamian and Dr. Karin

Doerr, from Montreal Concordia University, and dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of the Jewish Holocaust and the 90th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. In those days I had the opportunity to visit also **Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal**. Not only I made reports in the various local universities, delivered speeches before the foreign ambassadors and the Armenian community circles of those towns, but I had also the chance to write down popular testimonies from eyewitness survivors and to acquire testimonies written down in their hands in the past.

In the autumn of 2005, I was invited to **Beirut (Lebanon)** to deliver reports at the International Conference organized by Dr. Ara Sanjian on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the foundation of the Haygazian University. I gave lectures also in the Armenian borough **Aynjar (Lebanon)** and in **Aleppo**, visited **Kessab** and **Deir-el-Zor (Syria)**. There, at the Museum of the Saint Martyrs' Church complex, I saw the relics of our innocent martyrs, as well as my books on the Armenian Genocide in different languages, as vivid testimonies of our victims. [Svazlian 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f]

In 2006, I was invited to Egypt to deliver my address on the 24th of April to the Armenian communities of **Cairo and Alexandria**. I visited also the Karapet agha Apikian Armenian National old-age nursing home of the "Aydsemlik" Women's Association in Cairo and there I wrote down the memoirs of the still-alive eyewitness survivors and got memories written down in their hands in the past.

In 2007, I was invited to **Salzburg (Austria)** to make a report on the theme of "*The Armenian-Turkish cultural relations according to the Armenian popular Turkish-language songs*" at the International Conference entitled "Cultural, Linguistic and Ethnological Interrelations in and around Armenia," organized by Dr. Jasmine Dum-Tragut. In those days, I received also an invitation from **Avignon (France)** to take part in the events dedicated to the Armenian Case (organizer: President of Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations of Europe Alexis Govciyan), where I gave a lecture in French language on "*La mémoire des survivants comme irréfutable témoignage historique du Génocide arménien*" ("*Testimonies of the eyewitness survivors as historical irrefutable documents of the Armenian Genocide*"). In those places, too, I have tried to collect some popular materials.

In 2008, following my report at the International Symposium "Moussa Dag, Kessab, Deurtyol" organized by Prof. Richard Hovhannissian at the University of California, **Los Angeles (UCLA)**, I had the possibility of visiting also **Fresno** and to get closely acquainted with that one-time densely Armenian-populated community, to visit the local Armenian National old-age nursing home and also to record there the narratives of the eyewitness survivors of the Armenian Genocide and of their subsequent generations, as well as other ethnographic materials.

Thus, I have written down in all these places the testimonies and songs of historical character (Armenian and English), communicated by the eyewitness survivors and by the representatives of the following generations, as well as I have acquired the hand-written authentic documentary testimonies the survivors had committed to paper before their death.

So that the number of the popular primary source-testimonies increased in 10 years by 100 units, and the total number of testimonies amounted to 700 units, which are included in the present volume, by a new numeration.

The widespread regional character of the first-hand testimonies written down, audio- and video-recorded from the eyewitness survivors of the Armenian Genocide, as well as the putting for the first time, into academic circulation of Armenian and Turkish-language historical songs provide grounds to conclude that such a research work, by its nature, its qualitative and quantitative characteristics, is unique both in Armenia and the Diaspora.

During the 55 years of my ethnographic activity, I came to the conclusion that the started work has no end, and, if it were possible to continue, that number would grow even more, since that is a never-ending process. Many audio- and video-records are still in Armenia and in various Armenian Diasporan communities, and there are many families, who would like to include the hand-written testimonies in the past, by their relatives, in the present volume, since there is not a single Armenian family, who has not suffered human and material losses as a consequence of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire and has not preserved tragic memories and reminiscences banked up in its historical memory. For that reason, the theme of the Genocide raises its voice and roars in the blood of the Armenian people...

The original texts, the audio- and the video-tapes of the popular materials assembled in this volume are kept at the archives of the Museum-Institute of the Armenian Genocide of NAS RA.

The present work is composed of two parts:

Part One

HISTORICAL STUDY

- I. The Genre and Typological Peculiarities of the Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors**, where the genre, thematic and the typological peculiarities of the historical popular memoirs, narratives and songs are defined.
- II. The Course of the Armenian Genocide According to the Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors**, where the whole course of the Armenian Genocide is presented on the basis of historical facts and the testimonies, communicated by the eyewitness survivors, as the people remembered and narrated it.

Part Two

HISTORICAL PRIMARY SOURCES (700 units):

- I. HISTORICAL MEMOIR-TESTIMONIES (315 units)** are classified in the volume according to the historical course of the Armenian Genocide and the birthplace of the eyewitness survivors, which are arranged in order of their birth dates:
- II. HISTORICAL NARRATIVE-TESTIMONIES (70 units)** are arranged according to their thematic contents;
- III. HISTORICAL SONG-TESTIMONIES (315 units)** are presented in separate subsections according to their thematic contents:
 - 1. Songs of Mobilization, Arm-Collection and of the Imprisoned;**
 - 2. Songs of Deportation and Massacre;**
 - 3. Songs of Child-Deprived Mothers, Orphans and Orphanages;**
 - 4. Patriotic and Heroic Battle Songs;**
 - 5. Songs of the occupied Homeland and of the Rightful Claim;**
 - 6. Notations of the Historical Songs.**

The volume is supplied also with:

- **Summaries** in English, French, German, Turkish, Russian and Armenian;
- **Abbreviations;**
- **Documentation on the Eyewitness Survivors and their Testimonies**, where, according to the serial and successive numerations of the sections and subsections of the popular materials, information is provided about the nature of the given testimony (handwritten, audio- or video-recorded), the archival fund-number, language, survivor's name, surname, birth-year, birthplace and recording place of the material, year of the recording;
- **Glossary**, where the incomprehensible and foreign words present in the text are explained;
- **Commentaries**, where information about the historical characters and events is given;
- **Indexes:** a. **Thematic Index**, b. **Index of Personal Names**, and c. **Toponymic and Ethnonymic Indexes;**
- **Photographs (288 units)** of the eyewitness survivors of the Armenian Genocide and of the representatives of the following generations according to their birth-year and birthplace;
- **Map** – representing the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923) realized in the Ottoman Empire;
- **Contents** – according to the headings of the book.