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TESSA HOFMANN

ARMIN WEGNER

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ARMIN T. WEGNER: WRITER, EYEWITNESS UND PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

Among the photographs identified as pictorial documents of the Armenian Genocide those of the German writer, Armin Theophil Wegner, are of outstanding importance. Having their own technique and style, these "images that horrifiy and indict" can easily be distinguished from others and they form, together with photographs of different origin and Wegner's publications on the Genocide, a unique unity of texts and pictures, often illustrating each other.

Wegner: The Man

Wegner was born on October 16, 1886, in the West German town of Wuppertal-Elberfeld as a son of a high ranking civil servant. He was well travelled, if war and emigration can be considered as a kind of travelling. The First World War brought him to Poland, Constantinople, Iraq, the Nazi regime drove him to exile in England, Palestine, Switzerland and Italy, while his work as a travel writer led him, between 1924 and 1929, to England, Denmark, France, Austria, Spain, Palestine, Russia, the Transcaucasus, Iran and Egypt. His life, both personal and political, had been linked with the tragedies of the Armenian and, more closely, the Jewish nations, for whom Wegner risked his life on several occasions. He had been married to Jewish women, the poetess Lola Landauer and the artist Irene Kowalewska. His appeal "For Germany" of April 11, 1933, addressed to the Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler, was a courageous reaction to the Nazi "Boycott of the Jewry". Wegner's anti-war activities led, after a denunciation, to his arrest in August 1933, followed by torture and imprisonment in seven jails and three concentration camps until December 26, 1933. In spring 1936 Wegner took the firm decision never to return to his German homeland, not wishing "to touch the hands of this people which committed such unspeakable crimes to my Jewish brothers" (1). He kept his word and died in Italian exile on May 5, 1978.

Wegner's lifelong commitment deserves the appreciation of Armenians and Jews. Nevertheless, he was not a hero in the traditional sense of the word. His complex, ambiguous and contradictory character combined virtues like his strong desire for justice and peace, with failings, among them his proneness to pathos, dramatization and vanity. He was well aware of his handsome appearance - tall, slim, with noble features - and liked to strike an attitude, both in his literature and his portrait

photographs. In a letter from Baghdad, dated February 25, 1916, he wrote to a lady friend:"You should see me in my moss-green tunic with purple velvet revers and silver trimming, when I enter the hospital in the mornings (...)" (2).

Like many Germans of his generation, Wegner was not brought up as a homo politicus. Although he knew and understood from personal experience that the deportation of the Armenians was meant as an instrument of annihilation, he agreed to lecture on an invitation of the "German-Turkish Society for the Enlightenment of the People" on January 26, 1918, in Breslau. This was one of numerous institutions established in Germany during the First World War to propagate the idea of German-Turkish military alliance and political friendship between the two nations. On this and other occasions Wegner showed his slides and photographs, taken in 1916 in the Mesopotamian concentration camps, at the same time confirming the official Turkish version that the deportation of the Armenians had been a reaction to their alleged treason in the border provinces of Van and Erzurum. He went so far as to add:"The Turkish government does its best to relieve the misery of these homeless people in distributing food among them" (3). Johanna Wernicke-Rothmayer, Wegner's secretary in Rome between 1960 and 1965 and later his biographer, explained this statement in her thesis as the result of political pressure and personal egotism. But even Wegner's opportunism was obviously not sufficient for the President of the Breslau Turkish-German Society. As Wegner told decades later, in 1972, to another scholar, that President took revenge in filing a court case against one of Wegner's books - "Das Antlitz der Städte" ("The Face of the Cities"; 1917) - which was consequently banned for alleged "immorality" (4). The confiscation of this book of poetry was still not enough. Wegner was in danger of being sent to the front for active military service, a fate he had so far successfully escaped. He was lucky once again in being employed by the Institute for Oriental Studies, Berlin, where he worked on the editorial staff of its journal "New Orient" ("Neuer Orient"), an official propaganda medium of the German Foreign Office. By now, he was obviously discouraged enough to fulfil the duties demanded of him and wrote numerous conformist articles, commentaries and reviews for this journal (5).

Only after the German revolution of November 1918, when military censorhip was lifted, did Wegner come out with his own opinions. The best known result of this new phase was his "Open letter" to the President of the USA, Woodrow Wilson, first published on the occasion of the Paris Peace Conference on February 2, 1919, in the journal "Die Frau der Gegenwart", then on February 23, 1919, in the "Berliner Tageblatt" In this appeal the author pleaded for a just and lasting solution of the Armenian problem which he saw in the unification and independence of Eastern and

Western Armenia, including Cilicia. About the same time he published a programmatic article in the "New Orient", titled "The Remodelling of our Near East Policy", in which he demanded support for the new born Armenian national state as German reparation for the damage caused to the Armenians (6).

Wegner, the War and the Armenian Deportees

Wegner was only nine years old when he learnt for the first time about the persecution of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: in a newspaper on the family's dining table he read about the slaughter in Erzurum of October 30, 1895, when approximately 400 Armenians had been killed. As he later recalled, that article made a lasting impression on him (7).

But it was not on behalf of the Armenians that Wegner set out for Turkey; it was rather for adventure and excitement in what for him was an unknown and exotic country. After taking his doctoral examination as a scholar of law, Wegner had no further excuse to escape the fate of an ordinary German frontline soldier, except to become a volunteer hospital carer at the front. His career was brief. After a few months service in sanitation units in Poland he was decorated with the Iron Cross medal (second class). His mother saw to it that he served under presumably easier conditions than in Poland: being a friend of Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz's wife since her youth, she wrote to her friend, who established Wegner in a Red Cross unit, destined for Constantinople. During summer and autumn of 1915, Wegner witnessed, as an ordinary member of this "sanitation mission" the campaign at the Dardanelles. Further patronage came from Field Marshal Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz Pasha (1884-1916), a friend of Wegner's uncle. When Wegner returned from a holiday in November 1915, von der Goltz ordered him to become a member of his staff, together with five officers. Corresponding to his new function, Wegner was given the rank of a "sanitation second lieutenant" and accompanied the 6th Ottoman Army under von der Goltz on its Baghdad mission. Wegner enjoyed the company of the old commander. He neither objected to nor even mentioned the anti-Armenian prejudices of von der Goltz. On the contrary, he recalled with delight his company in Aleppo where Wegner, the Field Marshal and other high ranking members of the German society used to meet in the drawing room of a German lady:"and who, seeing us gathered there, would have imagined that there were Armenian corpses lying just outside the city's gates and that we were situated in Asia" (8).

Von der Goltz, who died in Baghdad on April 19, 1916, as one of many victims of epidemic typhus, was deeply mourned by Wegner, who had nursed the dying man for about one week. Deprived of the Field Marshal's protection, Wegner met "malice

and defamation" in the army. On his return from a holiday trip to the ruins of Babylon, he was ordered on July 26, 1916, to work in the "cholera barracks" of Baghdad, degraded to an ordinary sanitation soldier. Often in favour of slightly embroidered interpretations of his life's misfortunes, Wegner later explained the degradation and the "death sentence" of work among the cholera infected as a reaction to his dissident, pacifist points of view, while in his letters of those days he was more exact, reporting home personal troubles with superiors who obviously took revenge for alleged lack of respect and the erotic success of this good-looking, dandyish young man: one German officer felt offended that Wegner had not saluted according to the officer's rank, who was at that time dressed only in pyjamas, while another felt jealous watching Wegner on a walk with a beautiful lady. One day, Wegner discovered a secret order to the medical superintendent of the military hospital: "W. must be kept so busy that he will not feel any desire to walk the streets of Baghdad." (9)

Later, Wegner explained his return from Baghdad to Germany in October 1916 as compulsory, and a reaction to his letter of May 16, 1916. This letter, intercepted by military censorship, had been written under the impact of the death of Wegner's brother in the war and the arrival of maltreated and malnourished British and Indian prisoners of war at Baghdad, who had survived the defeat of the British at Kut-el-Amara: "Arabs had put clay jugs with water before the front doors, but the Turkish soldiers chased away the Indians, who were parched with thirst" (10). The letter ends as an open protest against German responsibility for the deaths of thousands of British and French sailors, torpedoed by the German navy:"these are the blood dripping trophies, which a much-beloved Germany has triumphantly fixed to the buckle of her belt like the countless scalps of a Red Indian!" (11). Whether this letter, published in Germany despite military censorship in his mother's journal "Die Frau der Gegenwart" might have caused Wegner's premature recall to Germany or not remains an open question. The version which Wegner repeated since January 1919 says it did. But earlier on May 25, 1916, he wrote, after a new infection with typhus, to a lady friend:"I prepare my return. No word, no emotion sticks to me, strong enough to keep me inside these walls. (..) the hearts for whose sake I travelled through this desert, have deserted me, and nothing was left to me than to prepare their beds for their dying. Still I recall the eyes of the old Field Marshal fixed on me (...)" (12). Therefore it seems more likely that Wegner returned of his own volition. But back in Constantinople in November 1916 the "authorities" put obstacles in his way. Wegner was arrested by soldiers of the German Ottoman Military Mission and interned until his departure, characterized by Wegner as both delayed and compulsory. (13)

If there had been political motives for Wegner's misfortune during the Baghdad mission of the 6th Ottoman Army, they were caused by his pacifism rather than by his interest in deported Armenians. To understand this, one has first to understand Wegner's worldview during the First World War. Like many of his contemporaries, Wegner entered the war with illusions and high expectations, seeing it as the turning point of a new era. He believed for a short time in the "holiness" of the German army and saw Germany's enemy Russia as a "country of total unculture" and Russian prisoners of war as "dirty, profligate and full of bestial instincts" (14). His work in Poland, where he experienced the war "in its most horrible form", soon cured him of such nationalistic prejudices. During his stay in the Ottoman Empire he became a sworn pacifist:"I, Armin Wegner, swear by God, the Almighty and Allknowing (...) that I shall never and nowhere kill a man. Never shall I train a cannon or a rifle on my foreign brethren. God help me!" (15). Wegner now believed in the community of all living beings, and everything and everybody was of equal importance and worth his attention and compassion: his German comrades, the British prisoners of war, starving Armenian deportees, wounded Turkish soldiers, his young Arabian servantboy, maltreated donkeys and hungry cats. It is difficult to discern which events left the decisive influence on Wegner's revised world view. While in Mesopotamia, it might have been the typhus epidemic which he called "the revenge of the Armenian people whose rotting bodies cover every road of the desert" (15). Not only did Wegner nurse the dying, among them von der Goltz and his beloved Jewish superior, Dr. Oberndörfer, but suffered himself from malaria, dysentery and typhus. Next to this personal experience with indiscriminate epidemic death was his undoubted horror at the deportation of the Armenians. He met the deportees twice, on his way from Aleppo to Baghdad in late November 1915, and during his return to Constantinople nearly a year later, in October 1916. In his letters and diary entries he mentioned them most times, as nearly all foreigners did during the First World War, as "refugees", a euphemism caused by military censorship which denies the fact of compulsion. But he knew the truth. The first published letter in which Wegner gave a description of the deportees is dated "Ras-el-Ain, November 26, 1915" (Wegner's spelling), its style being typical of Wegner's agitated prose in the expressionist fashion of the day:

"I felt never so alive as in these days, despite all the surrounding misery. For all roadsides are occupied with mourning and starving figures of Armenian refugees, and our souls started an aching running the gauntlet through this whimpering, screaming, begging hedge with thousand pleading hands reaching for us.

Just now, writing these lines, I have returned from a walk through the camp. From all sides hunger, death, sickness and desperation screamed at me. The odour of excrements and putrefaction arises. Out of one tent there came the whimper of a dying woman. A mother, recognizing me as a member of the sanitation army from the purple revers of my tunic hurried towards me with raised arms. Taking me for a physician she clung with her last energy to me, the poorest, who carried neither bandaging material nor medicaments.

But this is nothing compared to the horrible sight of the daily increasing group of orphans. At the border of the tent town they have dug holes for them into the earth, covered with rugs, under which they sit, head to head, boys and girls of every age, neglected, animal-like, starved, without food and bread, deprived of any human support, pressed to each other, shivering from the night's coldness, keeping a tiny piece of gleaming wood ash in their stiffened hands, hopelessly trying to get warm. Their yellow hair is uncut, their faces become clotted with dirt and tears. Others lay dying. Their eyes were fathomless and hollow from suffering, and although they stared silently they yet seemed to bear the most bitter reproach against the world on their faces. Yes, it seemed as if destiny had placed all horrors of the world at the entrance to this desert, in order to demonstrate to us once again what the future held for us. Dismay took possession of me, therefore I left the camp with my heart beating, and although I walked level ground my head was swimming, as if the ground was collapsing on both sides.

The valleys of all mountains, the banks of all rivers are full with these camps of misery. Over the gaps of the Taurus and Amanus runs this enormous stream of an expelled people, of these hundreds of thousands of cursed, breaking against the foot of the mountains to become less and less, pouring into the ravine in immeasurable convoys. Where? Where? This is a road without return. And I follow them with my eyes on a road which I shall walk myself, thinking with an unusual and peculiar emotional firmness: these follow their destiny, now do you follow your own!" (17).

Wegner as a writer on the Armenian Genocide

The quotation above shows the limitations of Wegner as a writer and especially as a writer on genocide. The reason lies not only in what could be just a lack of talent, but rather in the methods of expressionism and its philosophical counterpart, the vitalism. Both focussed on the personality of the writing individual, whose emotions consequently became the organizing centre of the universe. Wegner mentioned the deportees only in relation to his own emotions, not for their own sake.

Meeting a nation on its way to death certainly is a tormenting experience, in particular, if one has no means and influence to help in a more active way than Wegner could and did. He was not a talented organizer like the Swiss German Jakob ("Papa") Künzler who saved the lives of thousands of Armenians. Nor was he a gifted documenter like Dr. Johannes Lepsius, who knew how to convince by well assembled facts. The way Wegner knew was to appeal to emotions by pathos and passionate exaggeration.

His letters and diary entries of the years 1915 and 1916 were obviously planned for publication since the beginning (18). But only in 1919 could the diary-like collection of letters be published, entitled "The Road without Return: a Martyrdom in letters." The subtitle indicates once again Wegner's proneness to a highly dramatized self-absorption. Although degraded and once arrested, Wegner was at that time not a martyr, nor could he identify his own fate with that of the Armenians. He met them during the last stage on their long march to death, while he was on his way to alleged adventures or to a more secure life in his homeland. But in a universe centred around the expressionist author's ego, even horrors like war and genocide exist only in relation to the author's permanent search for extreme or ecstatic emotions.

Having neither Turkish nor Armenian and lacking most of the time an interpreter, Wegner must have found it difficult to communicate with the deportees. In his letters they bear no individual faces, but remain an anonymous grey mass of suffering people, with two exceptions: One was the Armenian priest whom Wegner mentioned in his diary entry of October 15, 1916 as "Père Arslan Dadshad" from the camp in Meskene:

"When evening falls, I sit with the priest Père Arslan Dadshad at the open door of his tent, and they tell about their sufferings; about the 800 families of the town they left, about the many thousands whom he had buried in the desert, among them 23 priests and one bishop. They look at me accusingly. 'But you are German', they say, 'and an ally of the Turks... that means you yourselves had wanted it this way.'

I lower my eyes. What can I answer in order to prove they are not right? From a pocket of his cassock the priest takes his cruxifix and when covering it devoutly with kisses I cannot resist, taken by emotion, kissing this cross myself, being the witness of so many griefs and sufferings.

I look at the smoking tents and the bright moon, arising over the shadowy ravine. This is all so homelike and pleasant, that for a moment I can pretend to imagine a more peaceful scene. Women in gathered up slips and opened blouses set out for a little evening walk. One hears the screams of playing children. But then again I hear their frightened, exploring voices: whether I had met Armenians in the cities at the Euphrates? 'We are going to die, we know it.' He points out at his tattered cassock: 'Une fois j'étais un prètre, maintenant je suis un mouton, qui va mourir'" (19).

The other exception was the 13 year old "boy Manuel" from Alexandrette (Iskenderun), whom Wegner had met earlier in a "completely neglected dirty camp" near Rakka: "I liked his well shaped, still strong body, his candid face. I intended to take him into our car, in order to take him with me to Germany" (20). Thus Wegner planned to give his mother a "new son" after the recent loss of Wegner's brother in the war. But in vain he tried to persuade the Arab guardian of the camp to let Manvel go. When even bribing did not help, Wegner had to leave, with the promise to discuss the matter with Hakki Bey, "the director of the settlement" at Aleppo. But Hakki Bey did not receive Wegner. While visiting a Turkish steam bath in Konia on October 28, 1916, Wegner remembered Manvel for the last time:

"Again the bath attendant spreads a new towel over me. A pleasant feeling relaxes all limbs. But falling half asleep I see once again the bare sunburnt feet of the Armenian boy which have walked so many miles. His dark eyes look up to me questioning ... Manuel will die in the desert. I have never seen him again" (21).

What seems to be Wegner's strongest personal involvement for an Armenian deportee has a parallel episode in the same book: "before reaching Ana", notes Wegner in his diary on October 2, 1916, "I had bought for ten piasters a little black lamb. Already three days I carry it around and enjoy the greatest delight keeping it on my lap, petting it during our drive". Four days later he noted:"today our little lamb was slaughtered. I had christened it Mona Lisa, and it used merrily to bleat and frisk about our resting places" (22).

While reflecting on Manvel's fate in the Konia bath Wegner took the decision to write a book which "has to count among the most cruel what has ever been written about human misery" (23). Many Armenians expected Wegner to write his "opus magnum" on their Genocide. But this novel, which should be entitled "The Expulsion or Generations Pass By" (another suggested title being "Shadows Against the Sun") remained unfinished (24), despite all encouragement and support that Wegner got

from Armenians. He explained his failure by the fact that Franz Werfel published his famous novel "The Forty Days of the Musa Dagh" (1934) earlier than he could.

Up to now, only two novels on the Armenian Genocide have emerged, both in German and written by German speaking Jews, who as members of a victimized nation possessed a greater empathy for the theme than any German author could have. Werfel's "Forty Days" read like a prophecy of the forthcoming holocaust, with an Armenian protagonist as the author's alter ego, while Edgar Hilsenrath's "Story of the Last Thought" (1989) had been written against the background of personal experience with the holocaust. Therefore it is certainly not by pure chance that these two Jewish authors were able to write their novels, whereas the German Wegner remained silent. His literary estate dedicated to the Armenian Genocide is fragmentary and relatively small: besides the already mentioned "Road Without Return" (1919) he published a book of sketches written during his stay in Turkey ("In the House of Bliss" - "Im Hause der Glückseligkeit"; 1920) and, under the title "The Boy Hussein" ("Der Knabe Hussein", 1921), four so called Turkish novellas. Two of them deal with the persecution of the Armenians: "The Storming of the Womens' Bath" is set in Erzurum in 1895 at the time of the slaughter under Abdul Hamid II, an event which had so deeply shocked Wegner as a boy. Despite a detailed description of an orgy of Turkish bloodlust, this story suffers from a sentimental and entirely untypical happy-end: Lutfi, the son of the cruel Vali (gouvernor) of Erzurum, falls in love with the beautiful Armenian widow Sirpuhi, hence trying to save her. "The Banker" tells the story of the Armenian Onigk Karribian (Wegner's spelling) from Baghdad, publicly executed by hanging. Rereading these novellas and sketches one cannot but agree with the statements of the scholar Martin Rooney: "The events described in Wegner's stories convey impressive pictures of war and violence. But misery, pillage, torture, cruelty, executions, perishing soldiers, slaughters of defenseless people and other episodes do not serve any higher function nor lead us somewhere. The reading of these stories conveys to the reader rather the impression of complete pointlessness and powerlessness of the individual. (...) Here the disposition of human beings to terror, horror and barbarism is demonstrated as if Wegner had intended to illustrate a word of the prophet Mohammed, used as the motto to his Turkish novellas: 'Indeed, man is a witness against himself'"(25).

The key-word to characterize Wegner's prose on Turkey, the war and the Genocide is "pictures". To catch a transitory atmosphere and emotion certainly was one of Wegner's greatest talents and made him in the 1920s a popular travel writer. The same talent made him a good photographer, too.

Wegner, the photographer and collector

Among Wegner's literary estate, preserved in the Schiller National Museum and Literature Archive at Marbach am Neckar, is a rather neglected collection of glassplates and negatives taken or reproduced by Wegner at different periods of his life. "During all of my life I have been a hamster", Wegner described himself as early as 1915 (26), using the German expression for a collector. But unfortunately he left no, or only cursory captions to the many photographs he took after his arrival in Turkey. The best references to answer the question when and where these photographs were taken are found in his books "Road Without Return" and "In the House of Bliss". The illustrations of some later editions were possibly drawn after the model of Wegner's photographs (27).

It is uncertain whether Wegner photographed Armenian deportees on his march from Aleppo to Baghdad in 1915. As quoted above he visited their camps in Mesopotamia already at this time, but did not mention any photographing. The situation was different in October 1916 when Wegner travelled the same route back home. On October 19, 1916, Wegner, again in Aleppo, noted in his diary:

"In the last few days I have taken numerous photographs. They tell me that Jemal Pasha, the hangman of Syria, has forbidden the photographing of the refugee camps on the pain of death. I carry these images that horrify and indict hidden under my cummerbund. In the camps of Meskene and Aleppo I collected many petitions, which I have hidden in my knapsack, in order to bring them to the American Embassy in Constantinople, since the postal service will not deliver them. I do not doubt for a moment that I am thereby committing an act of high treason, and yet the knowledge of having helped these most wretched people at least in a slight respect fills me with a feeling of greater fortune than could any other deed" (28).

It is uncertain, too, whether Wegner was aware earlier of the danger which lay in his act in contempt of Jemal's prohibition. It might well have been that he learnt about it only during his stay in Aleppo and his visit to the "German nurses" at the two German orphanages of this city. Specifically, nurse Beatrix Rohner seemed to have supported Wegner in his interest in the Armenian deportees: "I started to record their fates, while nurse Beatrix assists me as an interpreter" (29).

It is uncertain, too, whether Wegner, lacking an interpreter earlier, photographed other camps than Meskene and those near Aleppo. According to his diary he had visited camps at Maden, Tibini, Abu Herera (October 11, 1916) and Rakka, before he arrived in Aleppo. Thirteen of the photographs located at Marbach show the

hardships of the deportees' everyday life: their makeshift tents, made from rugs and other fabrics and scarcely being enough to protect them from the sun or the cold, the gathering of roots or wood, primitive cooking places, women doing their wash at the Euphrates. The Armenians on these pictures move freely in front of the photographer what might be explained by the presence of Beatrix Rohner, a person well-known to the deportees. On some photographs one can even make out Wegner's long shadow cast over those photographed, indicating that the photographs were taken in the late afternoon.

Three photographs show a burial, two of them an Armenian priest at the burial ceremony. Was he the "Père Arsian Dadshad" from the camp at Meskene, mentioned in Wegner's entry of October 1916? Another photograph with the corpse of a starved youth near to an entrance may be related to Wegner's entry of October 11, 1916, at Abu Herera:

"The last corpse? When we enter the deserted karavanserai, full of dirt and odour, he lies at the open door. The starved figure of an 12 year old Armenian boy. With hair yellow as straw, the body nothing but skin and bone, hands and feet like clubs. When I go to the river I find many graves, countless sites of old fires. Is this the end of a horrible and cruel hunt?" (30).

Four photographs show deportees en route, mostly women and children, thus supplying evidence for the fact that the deportees in the majority had been women, children and the elderly. One photograph with a young Armenian mother in a mountainous region has a striking human quality. On her back she carries the heavy load of her personal belongings and her infant girl, whose hand she holds in a movingly tender and protective gesture. Is she the woman Wegner addressed in his sketch "To an Armenian Mother"?

How many photographs of Armenians did Wegner take in all? Certainly not hundreds, as rumour has it, but dozens, as Wegner told the germanist Martin Rooney in 1972 (31). But their exact number cannot be clarified. Except for those photographs of his collection, which without any doubt were made by Wegner himself in and near Aleppo during October 1916, or earlier, in more distant camps the origins of others remain obscure. It is possible that Wegner photographed corpses of starved Armenians or deportees en route. But in lack of further information one has to query this assumption. Undoubtedly his photograph collection contains, as a third category, photographs of different origin which Wegner had reproduced for lectures or other purposes. To this category belong portrait

photographs of the Young Turkish leaders Talaat, Enver and Jemal, but also the photograph of Armenian orphan girls from the Urfa orphanage of the German Orient Mission, founded by Dr. Johannes Lepsius (32).

A once much discussed photograph of the Wegner collection shows the naked corpses of starved people of both sexes. A German publication of the postwar era attributes it to supreme commander and infantry General von Falkenhayn (33). There the image carries the cursory caption, "Famine victims in Mossul". The text of the book makes no further reference to it, but only mentions in a general way a terrible famine in Mesopotamia, specifically in Baalbek and Beirut.

When Wegner held a public slide lecture in Berlin in March, 1919, on the persecution of Armenians in Turkey, he presumably showed this photograph. The German nationalist press critized him severely, both for this and for critical comments on the role of Germany during the Genocide. One anonymous critic wrote:"The pictures were so grim - fifty or sixty corpses piled on top of one another - that the director (of the cultural society "Urania"; T.H.) removed the worst ones for being too inflammatory (...). Moreover, what is worse is that there was falsification: the pictures are not at all photographs of starved Armenians. Rather, they portray Arabs in Baghdad who died in the great famine at the end of 1916. In addition, the photographer, who is now in Germany, stole the pictures - from whom, no one knows. Perhaps Mr. Wegner can provide the information." (34)

Do these uncertain images show starved Arabs or Armenians, and where and when were they taken? In Mossul, Baghdad, or somewhere else? Despite the many questions, which in this respect remain open, one is inclined to the view that these photographs are related to the Armenian Genocide. In the morally strict societies of the East, one would only leave the dead of a marginalized, despised, and persecuted group to lie in such a degrading state of nudity.

Likewise difficult to answer is the origin of five photographs showing people publicly executed by hanging, in one case a man and a woman. All bear a sign around their neck proclaiming their "crime", usually "treason against the fatherland" and "collaboration with the enemy" which could simply imply the selling of bread to nationals of the Entente states, as in the case of the Greek of Tekir Dagh (Rodosto), described by Wegner in his sketch "The Hanged". Except for the hanged couple all executed wear white shrouds, the typical Oriental burial dress. The nationality of the executed and the places of execution are uncertain. One photograph with two hanged men (out of a group of several others?) was taken in a city with tramway

rails. Execution by hanging, following a military court trial, was above all applied to "Arab nationalists" in Syria, but seldom to Armenians who were generally killed without any formalities. A known exception had been the hanging of 20 Armenians in the Beyazit Square of Constantinople in early June 1915, all being members of the Armenian Hntchakan Party. At the time of their death Wegner was in the area, working in a military hospital at Rodosto, and might have photographed the episode (35). That he used his camera in Constantinople during his stay in 1915 becomes clear from several photographs in his collection, not related to the Genocide. One shows a man feeding a group of hungry street cats and may relate to Wegner's sketch "The Cats of Tchanakale". His literary reaction to the public executions which he might have witnessed while in Constantinople or even Mesopotamia, is, except for the "Hanged", the novella "The Banker".

Unfortunately, Wegner's photograph collection is no longer complete. An earlier publication of 1925 (Copenhagen) contains, for example, several photographs given as documents "from Armin T. Wegner's collection" (36). When, how and how many of these photographs vanished one cannot say. Apparently, a part of Wegner's collection was lost when he was arrested in 1933 or shortly thereafter during his emigration.

The remaining collection at Marbach is valuable enough, being next to the Near East Relief collection the most comprehensive and oldest collection of pictorial documents on the Armenian Genocide, although some glassplates are already broken and the negatives are beginning to decay. Preservation of photograph documents is not the main concern of the Schiller National Museum and Literature Archive which concentrates on literary estates. But A.T. Wegner's pictorial estate supplies evidence for the most tragic period in Armenian history and belongs to the Armenian nation. It should be eventually handed over to this nation for preservation and study.

NOTES

1) Letter to Gabriele Tergit, March 6, 1953, quoted from: Rooney, Martin: "Weg ohne Heimkehr": Armin T. Wegner zum 100. Geburtstag. Eine Gedenkschrift. Bremen 1986, p. 64

2) Wegner, Armin T.: Der Weg ohne Heimkehr: Ein Martyrium in Briefen. 2nd ed. Dresden: Sibyllen-Verlag, 1920, p. 63

3) Wernicke-Rothmayer, Johanna: Armin T. Wegner. Gesellschaftserfahrung und literarisches Werk. Frankfurt/Main; Berlin, 1982 (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 1, Deutsche Sprache und Literatur. Vol. 503), p. 145, note 70

4) Rooney, Martin: Leben und Werk Armin T. Wegners (1886-1978) im Kontext der sozio-politischen und kulturellen Entwicklungen in Deutschland. Frankfurt am Main: Haag und Herchen, 1984, p. 248 f.

5) ibid., p. 253

6) Wegner, Armin T.: Die Neugestaltung unserer Orientpolitik. "Der Neue Orient", IV. Band, 1918/19, Nr. 3/4, p. 101-104

7) Wegner, Armin T.: Die Verbrechen der Stunde, die Verbrechen der Ewigkeit. Hamburg: Rotbuch-Verlag, (without year), p. 173 f.

8) Wegner, Armin T.: Der Weg ohne Heimkehr, ibid., p. 32

9) ibid., p. 118

10) ibid., p. 95

11) ibid., p. 98

12) ibid., p. 86 f.

13) Preface to Wegner, Armin T.: Der Weg ohne Heimkehr, ibid.

14) Quoted from Rooney, Martin: Leben und Werk, ibid., p. 200

15) Wegner, Armin T.: Der Weg ohne Heimkehr, ibid., p. 175 f.

16) ibid., p. 65

17) ibid., p. 18 f.

18) Rooney, ibid., p. 214

19) Wegner, Armin T.: Der Weg ohne Heimkehr, ibid., p. 165 f.

20) ibid., p. 163

21) ibid., p. 172

22) ibid., p. 155

23) ibid., p. 171

24) Parts of the manuscript which is preserved at the Schiller National Museum and Literature Archive at Marbach habe been published, for example "The Boy Atam".

25) Rooney, Martin: Leben und Werk, ibid., p. 231 and 237 f.

26) Wegner, Armin T.: Der Weg ohne Heimkehr, ibid., p. 53

27) For example, the photograph of a Greek, hanged 1915 at Tekir Dagh (Rodosto) for alleged high treason. Wegner described the incident in his sketch "The Hanged". A publication of 1926 contains a drawing, obviously inspired by this photograph. See Wegner, Armin T.: Das Zelt. Aufzeichnungen, Briefe, Erzählungen aus der Türkei: Eine Auswahl. Berlin: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1926., p. 75

28) Wegner, Armin T.: Der Weg ohne Heimkehr, ibid., p. 169 f.

29) ibid., p. 169

30) ibid., p. 161 f.

31) Rooney, Martin: "Der Weg ohne Heimkehr", ibid., p. 24

32) This photograph had been first published in 1903 in the annual of the Orient Mission. See Hofmann, Tessa; Koutcharian, Gerayer: "Images that Horrify and Indict": Pictorial Documents on the Persecution and Extermination of the Armenians from 1877 to 1922. In: "Armenian Review", Spring/Summer 1992, Vol. 45, No., 1-2 /177-178, p. 174

33) "Yildirim". Deutsche Streiter auf heiligem Boden. ed. Dr. Steubrer. Oldenburg, Berlin, 1922. (Schlachten des Weltkrieges in Einzeldarstellungen bearb. u. herausgegeben im Auftrage des Reichsarchivs, Vol. 4), p. 49

34) Wie gegen Deutschland gehetzt wird (How they conduct a smear campagin against Germany). "Vaterländische Arbeit", Berlin, October 25, 1919, quoted from Rooney, Martin: "Weg ohne Heimkehr", ibid., p. 69

35) See Hofmann, Tessa; Koutcharian, Gerayer, ibid., p. 94

36) Benedictsen, Aage Meyer: Armenien et folks liv og kamp gemmen to aartusinner. Med kort og billeder. Copenhagen: Danske Armeniervenner, 1925

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