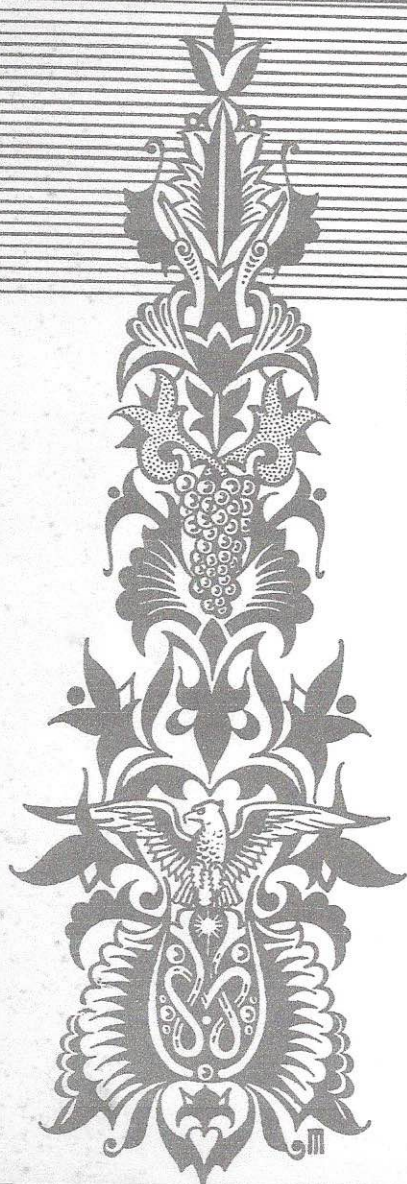


the ARMENIAN REVIEW



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AN EXCHANGE

I.

Turkish 'Falsifiers' and Armenian 'Deceivers': Historiography and the Armenian Massacres

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GWYNNE DYER

ANY HISTORIAN who has to deal with the last years of the Ottoman Empire will sooner or later find himself wishing desperately that the air could be cleared on the subject of the Ottoman Armenians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and especially the deportations and massacres of 1915. Armenians, the victims of a national trauma comparable in this century only to that of the European Jews, cannot stop remembering, and the conviction that the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians was the unprovoked result of cold-blooded calculation by the Turkish Government is largely accepted in Europe. The almost unanimous Turkish reaction has been to try to forget the whole episode, and when that becomes impossible to seek complete justification for the whole episode, and when that becomes impossible to seek complete justification for the holocaust in allegations of wholesale disloyalty, treason and revolt by the Ottoman Armenians in the gravest crisis in the history of the Turkish nation — allegations wholly true as far as Armenian sentiment went, only partly true in terms of overt acts, and totally insufficient as a justification for what was done.

Just in the past few years some Turks have begun to deal fairly openly with the Turkish measures in 1915, and to admit that they were a gravely disproportionate response to the provocation presented. Ahmed Emin Yalman's recent memoirs (1) for example contain a relatively frank and balanced discussion of the events themselves and of faults and responsibilities in them. Likewise the American Armenian historian Richard Hovannisian has succeeded in treating the massacres of 1915 in considerable detail without losing his respect for evidence, and utters the usual charges that they were the fruition of a deep-laid, satanic plot with much less than the usual conviction (2). But these are isolated exceptions: the great majority of Turkish and Armenian historians remain frozen on this issue in the attitudes their predecessors had already adopted by 1916. The succeeding years have

provided much diversion to attract public attention elsewhere, but still the barrage of accusations and counter-accusations rolls on, no longer in the foreground of public debate but conducted with undiminished vigour in terms entirely unchanged over half a century. And every once in a while the old bitterness flares again into life, as it did recently in California with the murder of the Turkish Consul and Vice-Consul there by an Armenian, and in France shortly afterwards with the recall of the Turkish ambassador as a 'gesture of disapproval' at the unveiling in Marseilles of a monument to the memory of '1,500,000 Armenians who were victims of a massacre in 1915 under the orders of the Turkish Government.'

An article which appeared in the September 1970 issue of Purnell's part-work *The History of the First World War* entitled 'Genocide in Turkey' is probably representative of the information on the Armenian tragedy that reaches the (thoroughly uninterested) European public. In it the author, A.O.Sarkissian, claims that at least one and a half million Ottoman Armenians lost their lives in the deportations and massacres of 1915-16 as a 'direct result of a carefully-laid plan', and throws in for good measure the customary additional accusation that Hitler had taken this as his model. More usefully Sarkissian's article prompted a lengthy response by Salahi R. Sonyel one of the younger generation of Turkish historians, in *Bellesten* in January 1972 (3), and so provided us with an up-to-date example of the stance of the Turkish historical profession on the issue.

Sonyel concedes that there were 'some deportations and mutual Turko-Armenian massacres in Anatolia'. 'A French investigation carried out in 1920', he goes on to state, 'came to the conclusion that the Turkish people and soldiers behaved generally in a correct way towards the deported (Armenians), but that some 500,000 perished as a result of their armed rebellion against the Ottoman state, of the war in which they took part, of privation caused by the war in primitive regions, of sickness, exhaustion following long marches, immediate changes of climate, and of attacks by marauders upon rich convoys... The Turks are estimated to have lost over 1,000,000 people owing to similar causes.' Both in seizing upon this rather curious report by Commandant Larcher, virtually the only contemporary non-Turkish investigator to exonerate the Turks in the matter, and in dragging in the irrelevant, because subsequent, large-scale slaughter amongst the Muslims of eastern Anatolia, Sonyel is following a well-established tradition amongst Turkish apologists.

His principal argument is also familiar. He quotes a careful selection of documents from various provenances to prove that a general rising of the Armenians was planned for 1915 (the Turkish equivalent of the standard Armenian accusation of a premeditated Turkish plot for genocide). Some of these documents, especially those from British sources, are published for the first time by Sonyel, and are quite interesting. All they prove, however, is that numbers of Armenians, especially abroad, were actively disloyal and seeking the support of the Allies (unsuccessfully) for a general rising at an appropriate moment, and that certain specific Ottoman Armenian deputies in the Meclis and the representatives of certain specific localities (especially Zeytun) were in communication with the Russians and planning a revolt. Sonyel with some justice attributes the proclamation of the Deportation Laws to Ottoman alarm over Armenian outbreaks—although except for Van these were few and small—and again, in my

opinion, rightly points out that there was at that stage no intention of genocide. He adduces as proof of the latter an Ottoman Government document dated April 28, 1915 (captured by the British in Palestine in 1918) ordering the arrest of active members of Dashnak and Hnchak committees and the closing down of these organizations, but specifically cautioning against applying the order in 'a form which might result in mutual massacre of Moslem and Armenian elements.' But he neglects to quote any of the other documents from the same British haul which show the later development of Ottoman Government intentions through 1915 towards a policy of extermination. The people to blame for the Armenian losses which did occur, according to Sonyel, were convicts released from prison to escort the Armenian convoys, because of a shortage of military manpower, and the local Kurds.

The 1915 unpleasantness thus explained, the writer passes on rapidly to the more salubrious ground of 1918-20. In examining the mutual and reciprocal massacres of Turks and Armenians which took place in the Transcaucasus in these years, his general pattern is to seek to disprove, with documents where possible, allegations of Turkish massacres of Armenians, but to accept instantly claims of Armenian outrages against Muslims, 'substantiating' them often by quoting the protests of the aggrieved Muslim party. Thereafter he loses even his manner of scholarly detachment, quoting with approval a selection of American relief experts who had low opinions of the Armenians, one describing them as 'robbers, deceivers and fools' and another as 'professional beggars, thieves and liars...utterly debased, incapable of helping themselves, unwilling to help one another, and entirely lacking in gratitude.'

Sonyel's extreme partisan stance is more obtrusive in his use of language than of facts. His conclusion, though offensively phrased, is partly defensive at least in essence, as far as it goes: 'Despite the so many shortcomings of the Armenian people...they had enjoyed the best fruits of Ottoman society until a minority of alien, self-seeking, sanguinary and adventurist terrorist leaders decided to convert them into pawns in the power game, by allowing their wires to be pulled by foreign powers for their own ulterior purposes...Nevertheless to hold all the Turkish nation responsible for the Armenian tragedy, and to overlook the irresponsible actions of these powers, and of certain Armenian leaders, who were the chief culprits, is a travesty of justice.' He at least understands historians' methods and makes use of them where it is to his advantage.

One finds little as scholarly even as Sonyel in the general run of Armenian historiography on the subject. Representative of American Armenian 'scholarship' (with a very few honourable exceptions) we may take two articles from the many on the topic which appear in the *Armenian Review* (4). They sound scholarly, but are capering caricatures of the historical method, complete with footnotes giving the author's disbelief of some claim as conclusive proof of its falsehood. There is scarcely ever any adequate provenance given for 'documents'—they are often taken from some Armenian newspaper published in the 1920's or 1930's, which in turn attributes them at one or two further removes to some reliable source, such as 'Armenian officers in the Turkish Army'. The deafening drumbeat of the propaganda, and the sheer lack of sophistication in argument which comes from preaching decade after decade to a convinced and emotionally committed audience, are the major handicaps of Armenian historiography of the diaspora

today.

The longer article of these two, for example, is mostly based on the highly improbably anti-CUP tract written in exile by the opposition journalist Mevlanzade Rifat, *Türk İnkilabının İc Yüzü* (Aleppo, 1929) (5). Rifat, who is continually referred to by Kazarian as Melvan Zade and advertised as a member of the CUP 'General Council', included in his book the minutes of supposed secret meetings of the Unionist leadership in 1915, and a translation of these makes up the bulk of Kazarian's article. Though the subject of these meetings is purportedly the organization by Enver, Talat and their colleagues of murder gangs to carry out the massacres, and would be grim if in the least believable, it is in fact a hilarious article thanks to the combination of Mevlanzade Rifat's melodramatic imagination and Kazarian's atrocious translation. At one point in the 'transcript' Hasan Fehmi is made to interrupt the discussion to state: 'Being transported unto Almighty God, I would like to introduce a few beautiful principles of my own. The law of the Shariyat permits the extermination of the malignant... I say that, since we have seen nothing but harm from the Armenians... without further piddling, the killing of Armenians, provided not one of them shall be left alive, is a religious duty...' Kara Kemal (whose principal contribution to the conversation hitherto has been repeated ejaculations of 'Perish them all') bursts out in approval: 'Long live, long live, Khodja Effendi. Do you see, brethren, our most worthy Sheikh-ul-Islam?'.

During the 1960's it became possible at last for Soviet Armenian historians to discuss the subject of the Armenian massacres with some freedom, but the results have been depressingly similar (6). In English the outstanding exemplar of the new Soviet work is E.K. Sarkisian and R.G. Sahakian, *Vital Issues in Modern Armenian History: A Documented Exposé of Misrepresentations in Turkish Historiography* (Watertown, Mass., 1965); the fact that it has been translated by American Armenians and published by *Armenian Studies* will give an indication of its approach. It has all the weakness of Soviet historiography in overflowing measure and none of its strengths—one would have to go far to find a richer blend of polemic, distortion, ideological cant, exaggeration, vituperation and illogic. It no more merits serious historical criticism than the propaganda flysheet one is handed on the street corner.

The fact that hardly any historians other than Turks and Armenians busy themselves with work on the origins and development of the Turkish-Armenian enmity and its ghastly outcome in 1915, given that neither the Turks nor the Armenians approached the subject as historians, has led to a curious situation. There have been perhaps as many as a thousand books and articles published on the subject (most of them admittedly in the first decade after the event) and new contributions continue to appear very frequently, but there has been little new and respectable research which serves in any way to illuminate the many unlit corners of the issue since the few useful document collections published in that first decade. The inspiration for this reflection, and for this review, is two recent books by Armenians on this bitter subject, both dealing primarily with the years 1915-1922.

To be fair, Abraham Harutunian's book (7) is not a history but a memoir. Though the author and his entire immediate family came through it all unharmed, they lived in Maras in 1915 and saw (in his case experienced) the horror of the deportations at first hand. Having spent the rest of the war in precarious hiding,

Harutunian was then present for the Nationalist rising in Maras in 1920 and, having survived that, escaped with his family to Izmir only to be caught there by the entry of the victorious Nationalist army and the subsequent burning of the city. It is therefore unsurprising that he should be a bitter and unforgiving man.

Hartunian's book is a valuable document, revealing equally in its matter-of-fact account of his experiences, and in its display of that quality of blind self-righteousness, raised almost to the level of an art form, which was as fatal to the Ottoman Armenians as the meddling of the European Powers and the enmity of the Turks. In his account of the events of March-August 1915 leading up to the deportations from Maras, for example, he recounts the mass resistance to conscription of the Armenians of Zeytun (now Süleymaniye, then overwhelmingly an Armenian town and area) in March of 1915, the armed resistance to the Turkish Army by some of the young men of the town, and the clashes, killings and deportations there through April, May and June. He himself, the pastor of the small but influential Protestant Armenian community of Maras, had to destroy some of his private papers hurriedly when Ottoman soldiers came to search his house in this period. He wrings much irony from the fact that among the papers he had to destroy because the Turks might have found them to be 'just' causes for suspicion were a photograph showing the leaders of the Armenian resistance at Zeytun in military garb and a long printed poem he had written extolling their victories over the Turks. I must say that they seem to me just cause for suspicion in a country at war.

One is sick with pity at the fate of the helpless, harmless columns of Armenians being driven savagely to their deaths through the latter part of 1915, and Hartunian's description are shockingly vivid. But one is naggingly aware at the same time that he would not be greatly troubled if it were Muslim refugees suffering this fate. For example, in referring to the prolonged resistance of Armenian guerillas in the village of Fundejak, containing about 1,500 Armenians, after the Zeytun deportations had been accomplished, he mentions casually and without any hint of disapproval that in preparing for resistance to the Ottoman Army the Armenian military leaders 'disposed of about sixty Turks living in the village' (p. 58). Throughout he displays a complete unwillingness ever to see Armenian actions as provocative, or Armenians as anything but wholly innocent victims.

Hartunian, as befits a man of his time and background, wrote in an antique missionary style, with Biblical quotations and prayers on every page. To the extent that he was representative of the Ottoman Armenian leadership of the time it is most significant that he was aggressively Christian and determinedly ignorant of Islam and of his Muslim fellow-countrymen. He writes of 'blood-thirsty and savage Moslems' moved 'who knows with what satanic superstition.' 'The Turk', he says, 'does not know the meaning of compassion, love, pity.' Writing of the immediate aftermath of the World War in Maras, when some few Muslims had announced their conversion to Christianity, presumably to curry favour with the occupying power, he claims that 'the hour for the Christianization of the Turks had arrived', had it not been for the treacherous behaviour of the Christian nations of the world (p. 127). And finally, like many men who try to dignify the disasters that befell them and their works by attributing them to malevolence rather than incompetence or chance, he lapses into utter absurdity: 'I believe the French army came to

Turkey to camouflage the annihilation of the Armenians by the Turks' (p. 104).

Hartunian's memoirs have a certain value, as a sampler of the opinions and attitudes of a leader of a small but very important portion of the Ottoman Armenian population. They have been published apparently with a much simpler aim: the furtherance of the propaganda war against Turkey. The publisher's blurb proclaims: 'The premeditated, ruthless, official campaign by the Turkish government and army to exterminate Turkey's Armenian minority—which began in 1895—ground relentlessly through twenty-seven years and 2,000,000 deaths', etc.

Marjorie Housepian in *Smyrna 1922* (8) has set out to write a history of the destruction of Izmir (Smyrna), and has achieved both more and less than this. In her use of American consular records and Admiral Bristol's private papers she reveals quite a lot that is new, at least in detail, about the activities and attitudes of Bristol and the government he represented in Turkey during the whole of the occupation period. But since the great bulk of her sources are American or Armenian the treatment of the central topic—the destruction of Izmir—narrows down rapidly to an account of the experiences of the Armenian minority in the city, and of the efforts, often praiseworthy, of American consular and military personnel there as contrasted with the 'malevolent' Bristol.

Long before that, systematic prejudice has begun to affect the usefulness of the book. Consistently, in its treatment of the Greek Anatolian adventure, the emotional tone of the book entirely overlooks those whose country had been invaded, and who were the minorities who had cooperated with the invader wholeheartedly. Housepian seems almost completely without understanding of the origins and purposes of the leadership of the Nationalist movement she speaks scoldingly of the British Colonel 'Rawlison's admiration for the old fellow' (Kâzim Karabekir!) as though he were some grizzled and aging bandit and not a thirty-six-year-old staff officer. Her attitude to the Nationalist movement as a whole is one of regret that the petty concerns of the Entente powers prevented them from stamping it out as they should have done.

Housepian begins with the seemingly obligatory quick gallop through the history of Anatolia from the dawn of time to 1914, ending with the Young Turks 'resolved to do away with the Armenians and to confiscate their properties. More disciplined and better organized than their predecessors, they were content to wait for the opportune moment to present itself...' One is then offered the standard Armenian account of the deportations and massacres and a somewhat garbled summary of the period 1915-1919 before reaching the meat of the book. The author is on unfamiliar ground in this part of the book, and it shows on every page. Not just facts, but even names come out wrong: at the outbreak of the First World War, we are informed, '...the oil interests, whose agents scurried around the Mosul, were a mixed crew that included the British government, the German Deutsche-Bank, and the Royal Dutch Schell' (*sic*)

The quality of the book improves somewhat hereafter, though the errors persist. Housepian gives an extended account of Admiral Bristol's activities as the American High Commissioner in Turkey, and interprets his 'pro-Turkism' as motivated solely by a powerful desire to secure openings for American investment, especially oil (with which industry he had extensive contacts), and to guarantee these investments by obtaining an American mandate for all of Turkey. Hence he

was anti-British, anti-Armenian, anti-Greek. The portrait, based on the Admiral's own papers, is perhaps a bit overdrawn, but fundamentally it rings true. Having thus set the stage for her explanation of the Izmir events, the writer then brings us rapidly up to the actual catastrophe in the city.

The last half of the book is taken up with a very detailed account of the destruction of the city by fire, and is given form and colour by the extensive use of eye-witness accounts (including that of Hartunian, above) and interviews with Armenians and American servicemen who were there. Housepian makes a convincing case for the involvement of Turkish regular soldiers in the fairly wholesale massacre which took place in the Armenian quarter in the days after the Turkish army entered the city, and in setting the fires there which spread to consume the entire central area. What is not proved, though Housepian assumes it without a shred of evidence, is that this was Turkish policy and not just disorderly soldiery. My guess—only that—is that there was a clear determination on the part of the Turks to clear the minorities out of Izmir, as indeed out of all Turkey as far as possible; that there was probably not an intention of massacre but rather a deliberately loose rein on the troops, who were understandably aggrieved by what they had seen on the way to Izmir, and for the most part peasant boys in a city for the first time, bound to loot unless under the most stringent control; finally, that the aim of the loose rein was to provide pressure to hasten along an evacuation of the minorities by the Entente powers whose ships were in the harbour. This would have provided a neat solution to the situation, the Turks not even having to make a formal demand for the removal of people who were after all Ottoman subjects. But the Entente powers for their various reasons would not cooperate; nor would Admiral Bristol for his. Even so it is almost impossible to accept without documentary evidence the writer's claim that there was an official Turkish intention to burn their own second largest city to the ground.

Housepian's account of the eventual grudging Allied agreement after the fire to an evacuation of the minorities (except the men of military age, whom the Turks kept as prisoners and marched into the interior, whence fewer than half ever returned), and of the subsequent politicking over the appropriate degree of outrage to express at the events in Izmir, is perhaps her strongest and most original work. Her thesis is that the majority of the senior American officials, under Bristol's influence, deliberately avoided rousing Turkish hostility to America by first pretending that the savage events at Izmir were not taking place, and afterwards by maintaining that they had not been of any large scope, while only Consul Horton, on whom she relies most heavily, struggled against them. It is probably true; surely the loss of life was far greater than Bristol's reported 2,000 dead, though probably not as high as the 100,000 Housepian accepts.

There is throughout the work an unpleasantly dualistic approach to massacre: Muslim massacres of Christians are a heinous and inexcusable outrage; Christian massacres of Muslims are, well, understandable and forgivable. Referring to the killings of Turks in the villages round Izmir at the time of the Greek landings, Housepian can only praise the Greek community leaders who went about counselling restraint: 'That [order] could be so restored was nothing less than a miracle when one considers the persecutions which the Greeks had so recently suffered.' The trail of death and devastation left by the Greek armies and refugees in their flight to the coast in 1922 is dismissed in a single sentence: 'Now the

defeated Greeks, in their panicked flight through a deserted land, set the torch to their own villages, killed and maimed some of the Turkish inhabitants, and took to the roads.'

There is some useful scholarship in parts of this book, though the author could have done much more with British and French sources, if not Greek and Turkish. Furthermore the standard Armenian prejudice is visibly at work, though not blatantly, throughout the book, filling the logical gap in a train of argument and making the provision of proof for a claim seem unnecessary to the author, putting the reader off what may be a perfectly-reasonable statement by the use of emotional language. At the end the old exhortations of hatred are brought out uncloaked. The author makes a passionate appeal not only against the verdict of history on Izmir, but against the fact that 'most British and American experts on modern Turkish history continue to overlook the shortcomings and to extoll the virtues of Turkey's emergent nationalism under the Young Turks and Mustafa Kemal', who is compared obliquely with Hitler. She explicitly inveighs against the defeat of the missionary and liberal 'Gladstonian idea that the Turks were just a scandal who ought to be liquidated', and its replacement by a more balanced view less governed by traditional Christian loyalties, the sort of conversion A.J. Toynbee confessed to in *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey* after he had spent some time with the Turkish Red Crescent and seen the other side of the atrocity story. Hatred of this sort is a luxury that an historian simply cannot afford.

Why go on at such length, and in such a wealth of negative detail, merely to demonstrate something so obvious as that Armenians and Turks are incapable of approaching the subject of their mutual clashes dispassionately even at this remove? Because the great majority of those dealing with the subject are and will continue to be either Turkish or Armenian, due to the language demands, and, more importantly, the sheer disinclination of historians of other nationalities to become entangled in the question with the accompanying danger of annoying one of the parties and losing access to historical sources. One consequence of this is that most of the historiography which is being produced on Turkish-Armenian clashes is biased and unreliable; another is that it is almost entirely derivative.

The protagonists have long since fixed on the outlines of the arguments most favourable to their respective positions of injured innocence, and quite rightly the partisans on both sides see little advantage in pushing original investigations further. There are partial exceptions like Sonyel and Hovannisian, but the more usual product is a restatement of the same tired arguments, spiced perhaps with fresh invective but based on a selection from the same common stock of widely variant statistics and bald assertions of fact—a selection infrequently made with an attempt at balance and assessment, but more normally by both sides with malicious forethought. When has there last appeared a serious and innovating discussion of the development of the Armenian-Turkish conflict to the end of 1915, let alone a full-length study using the documentary sources (especially Turkish or Armenian) which have become available since the original compilations?

I have criticised many more Armenians than Turks in this review, mostly because the Armenians, being the more injured party, and more conscious of their injury, write a great deal more about it. But it is the Turks, controlling most of the unexploited sources from which the history of the conflict could be written, who have the greater responsibility for writing it. In doing so they will have to admit to

themselves that things got very badly out of hand in the East in 1915, that the government subsequently took an utterly reprehensible decision to compound the crime rather than live with the consequences, and that a great wrong was done. Armenians, too, if they are to begin writing a truer history of the tragedy, will have to give up some cherished and sustaining myths. Although I must admit that there are precious few signs to hand that indicate that these transformations are occurring, sooner or later the time must come. In the meantime the surprisingly widespread assumption that the Armenian massacres of 1915 and their near and distant origins have been 'done', as least insofar as the broad canvas is concerned (though there may remain some detail to be filled in here and there,) ought to be abandoned. On closer inspection the foundations of this assumption turn out to be composed largely of rubbish.

European historians, certainly, would now mostly agree on the wide extent of Armenian disloyalty to the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, and also on the relatively narrow compass of the overt acts of treason and revolt. They are perhaps rather less united in shedding the old propagandistic view of the CUP leaders as savage dictators ruthlessly exploiting a long sought opportunity for a much desired genocide. Closer to the truth, I think, is that there was a genuine though mistaken, belief among Ottoman leaders in Istanbul that there was a deliberate and coordinated Armenian uprising in the East, with Empire-wide ramifications. Further, that this belief originated in such unrelated events as the formation of Armenian volunteer corps in the Russian Army and the participation in them of Ottoman Armenians; the insistence by the Ottoman government on the application of conscription to the Armenian community, which until recently had been exempt, and the passive and eventually the armed Armenian resistance to this in some areas, especially Zeytun in 'Cilicia'; the casual savageries inflicted by Kurdish tribesmen or Armenian bandits in the course of robberies, which not only rose in numbers in the conditions of insecurity in a war zone, but also gained a new communal significance in the tense atmosphere; and, finally, the inexcusable but probably unsanctioned tyranny of Cevdet Bey, the Vali of Van, which drove the Armenians of that city to revolt. All this occurred before Istanbul made any move.

When more work is completed on the period I believe that historians will come to see Talât, Enver and their associates not so much as evil men but as desperate, frightened, unsophisticated men struggling to keep their nation afloat in a crisis far graver than they had anticipated when they first entered the war (the Armenian decisions were taken at the height of the crisis of the Dardanelles), reacting to events rather than creating them, and not fully realizing the extent of the horrors they had set in motion in 'Turkish Armenia' until they were too deeply committed to withdraw. As for the complicity of ordinary Turks with their leaders, hatred and revenge and blind panic were the motives for the behaviour of the Ottoman army and the Muslim population of eastern Anatolia in the Armenian massacres, scarcely creditable motives, not ones an Armenian is likely to forgive, but common enough in all nations and even understandable in the Turkish situation in the East in 1915. The 'final solution' attempted by the slaughter between Turks and Armenians down to 1922, grew out of those original decisions in early 1915, the history of which is yet to be written.

FOOTNOTES TO DYER

1. Ahmed Emin Yalman, *Yakin Tarihte Görduklërim ve Gecirdiklerim*, c. I (1888-1918), Istanbul, 1970, 326-34.
2. Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918*, London, 1967, 40-57.
3. Salahî R. Sonyel, 'Yeni Belgelerin Isigi altinda Ermeni Tehcirleri—Armenian Deportations: A Re-appraisal in the Light of New Documents', *T. T. K. Belleten*, c. XXXVI, No. 141, January, 1972, 31-69 (Turkish and English).
4. Navasard Deyrmenjian, 'An Important Turkish Document on the "Exterminate Armenians" Plan', *Armenian Review* 14:3 (1961), 53-55; and Haigaz K. Kazarian, 'Minutes of Secret Meetings Organizing the Turkish Genocide of Armenians', *Armenian Review* 18:3 (1965), 18-40. I have selected these articles to discuss as they are cited by Ulrich Trumpener in *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914-1918* (Princeton, N.J., 1968), 203, note 11, in support of Armenian claims, which he largely accepts, that the extermination of the Armenians in the eastern vilayets was an unprovoked and preplanned measure of the Turkish government.
5. For information on this Kurdish intriguer and on the origins of his frequently-quoted book (which appears to have been partly sponsored by Dashnaktsutun) see my reply to Mr. C.J. Walker in the correspondence section of *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. IX, no. 3 (Oct. 1973), 379-82.
6. For a full bibliography of Soviet publications on the subject in the 1960's see Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, Vol. 1, 1918-1919, Berkeley and London, 1971, 13, note 21.
7. Abraham H. Hartunian, *Neither to Laugh nor to Weep: a Memoir of the Armenian Genocide*, translated by Vartan Hartunian. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968. Distributed in the U.K. by HARQ Publications, Pp. 206. 3.30 pounds.
8. Marjorie Housepian, *Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City*. London: Faber and Faber 1972. Pp. 275. 3.50 pounds. The publishers unhappily are guilty of contributing to the spread of a most undesirable fashion whereby references are not only hidden safely away in a single clump at the end of the book, but worse are identified only by a page number and a half-line of quoted text. In reading the text one has no idea whether a statement is being supported or not.

II.

Objectivity and the Historiography Of the Armenian Genocide

GERARD J. LIBARIDIAN

IN A RECENT ISSUE of *Middle Eastern Studies* Gwynne Dyer has attempted to assess current literature on the deportations and massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I. The essay, "Turkish 'Falsifiers' and Armenian 'Deceivers': The Historiography of the Armenian Massacres"(1),

criticizes Armenian and Turkish historians for transgressions against scholarship and objectivity, and suggests that the task of "Clearing the air" can be trusted only to Western historians. Presumably taking the first step in that direction, Dyer presents his own conclusions. In summary, he states that the massacres were not planned and the leaders of the Ottoman government cannot be held responsible for the events that followed their original legitimate and limited actions against disloyal Armenian subjects.

One would normally welcome a serious discussion and reappraisal of historical accounts regarding events that are of crucial importance to the human experience. Dyer's attempt is commendable in this respect. However, the appropriateness of his specific remarks regarding the scholarship of the authors reviewed is the only redeeming quality in Dyer's article, since it manifests neither a methodology less objectionable, nor a framework more adequate, than those he so avidly denounces.

The present essay will concentrate on three major areas of concern emanating from, but not limited to, Dyer's treatment of the subject: (a) a brief exposé of some basic flaws in Dyer's approach; (b) a discussion of political and ideological biases pervading Western, Turkish and Armenian approaches to the issue, and (c) consideration of some elements in the development of Armeno-Turkish relations essential for the understanding of the Genocide.

I.

Dyer's essay displays lack of sound, historical judgement and consistency on many levels (2). To begin with, his choice of representative works by Armenian scholars is highly questionable. M. Hovsepian's *The Smyrna Affair* deals primarily with events that occurred in 1922 during a crisis between Greeks and Nationalist Turks; while A. Hartunian's *Neither to Weep Nor to Laugh* is the memoir of an Armenian survivor of the Genocide, and is not intended to reflect the attitude of historians. In addition to a random, though hardly haphazard, selection of noteworthy books, Dyer's condemnation of Armenian historiography is also derived from a naive determinism; referring to a study originally made in Soviet Armenia, he remarks, "the fact that it has been translated by American Armenians and published by *Armenian Studies* will give an indication of its approach" (p. 102).

Having established to his satisfaction the hopeless subjectivity and immaturity of Turks and Armenians, Dyer casts himself in the immodest, role of the paternalistic intercessor. In order to show his impartiality, moreover, he strives to find as much fault with Armenian as there is in Turkish studies, and conversely, as much value in Turkish as there is in Armenian historiography. Underlying his

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whole method, this principle of contrived equalization leads Dyer into apparent contradictions. This is best illustrated by following the fate of the Turkish historian S. Sonyel throughout the article. When it first appears, Sonyel's work is presented as a good example of shabby scholarship and one sided judgement, and "follows a well established tradition amongst Turkish apologists" (p.100). Later, he finds that Sonyel's conclusion "though offensively phrased, is partly defensible at least in essence" (p.101). Toward the end Sonyel's luck has further improved when he is mentioned as the "exception" among Turkish historians, constituting R. G. Hovannisian's counterpart (p.106). Finally, in his own conclusions, Dyer adopts the basic assumptions upon which the apologist's arguments had rested and shares the framework within which the historian decides what questions to ask.

Nevertheless, the immediate problems pervading Dyer's essay can be understood when seen as manifestations of his notion of objectivity in history. Considering the divergence between Armenian and Turkish attitudes on the subject, Dyer seems to believe that the truth must lie somewhere between the two positions. Thus, "controversies" in history belong in the same category as haggings in a bazaar, as both sides are ascribed an equal degree of legitimacy. This becomes obvious when one analyzes the path he follows to achieve the desired "objectivity".

First, Dyer's premise is that the victim must be proven to be as much at fault as the victimizer. This is made possible by the expedient reduction of the distinct categories of individual and state into a simplistic equation. Analyzing Harutunian's description of columns of Armenians being driven to their deaths he speculates "but one is naggingly aware at the same time that he would not be greatly troubled if it were Muslim refugees suffering this fate" (p.102-3). Harutunian's supposed insensitivity is transferred to the level of collective guilt ascribed to the "not wholly innocent Armenian people" (p.103). The corollary to the first premise is that Ottoman leaders have not been shown enough understanding—hence his pleas of ignorance, paranoia and provocation by the victim, presented in their defense. Only a playful spirit would characterize political leaders as "desperate, frightened, unsophisticated men" (p.102). One is asked to believe that Talaat, Enver and associates stumbled into history as pathological cases, and not as the leaders of an Empire whose policies, whether by design or by default, resulted in the elimination of a whole ethnic group from its homeland through various "unsophisticated" methods.

Second, Dyer is careless with regard to the substantial issue of periodization. His original concern is "the subject of the Ottoman Armenians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and especially the deportations and massacres in 1915" (p.99). His concluding statement reads: "the 'final solution' attempted by the Ottoman government at the end of 1915, and all the succeeding bouts of mutual slaughter between Turks and Armenians down to 1922, grew out of these original decisions in early 1915, the history of which is yet to be written" (p.107). There is a shift of focus from the period of study initially suggested, possibly 1878-1915, to 1915-1922, which obviates the otherwise inescapable exigency of coming to terms with the period preceding the massacres and Ottoman policies toward its subject. Also, by adding the period 1917-1922 Dyer provides the very convenient but poorly conceived notion of 'mutual slaughter'.

Third, Dyer supports his revisionist views by a tortuous sense of time. The defensive activities of Armenian guerillas in the face of unmistakable threat to the existence of Armenians in the village of Fundejak are characterized as

"provocations" to the Ottoman Army (p.103); but the author has no difficulty understanding deportations and massacres ordered on the basis of Ottoman leaders' "genuine, though mistaken" fears of anti-government activities (p.106). The cause and effect relationship between two events that follow each other has been reversed to imply that it is the later event that caused the first.

Finally, explaining the complicity of Turkish soldiers and civilians in the massacres, he states that these are "common enough in all nations and even understandable in the Turkish situation in the East in 1915" (p.107). It seems necessary to restate that what explains everything explains nothing. Furthermore, the transformation of interest in or explanation of a subject in history into its defense or justification presupposes specific political and ideological biases of which no historian can assume to be free solely by virtue of his ethnic or national identity.

Unless compromise and expediency constitute the essence of dialectics in historiography, Dyer's brand of objectivity can be seen only as a balancing act. If the subject under consideration requires more research, his rush into outlandish conclusions without having had the benefit of new documents is difficult to understand. Given past and present practices, scholars will continue to ask for evidence that confirms their conclusions, unless there is a more thorough analysis of the attitudes of various groups of historians themselves.

II.

It should be clear that any interpretation of the massacres and deportations has serious implications for the present. Survivors and their descendants, who have lost the opportunity to exist as a people on their historic homeland, have formulated, since the Genocide, financial, political and territorial claims against the government of Turkey. Regardless of the feasibility or expediency of such demands, Armenians consider these to be legitimate based on their perception of what happened in 1915. Similarly, any admission of wrong-doing on the part of Turks would entail at least the moral, if not legal, responsibility to make reparations; this they are unwilling to undertake, particularly as it relates to the territorial issue. The Turkish government has had to respond to recent worldwide Armenian activities in favor of their cause. The Turkish reaction is aimed at establishing a "second" side to the story, which in turn could be used by allies of the Turkish government and "objective" historians in the West to soothe uncomfortable consciences on one hand, and erect upon it a compromise position, on the other.

This brings us to the role of the major powers in Turkish-Armenian relations. Was the West an uninvolved party before, during or after the Genocide? Is it now? No one could claim such innocent detachment, notwithstanding the assumption underlying Dyer's article. There is also no need to detail here the extensive and intensive interests which imperialism developed in the Ottoman Empire since the early phases of European expansion. The pattern of intervention, however, is crucial to the understanding of Ottoman domestic policies. The game of musical chairs played by England, France, Germany, Russia and increasingly the United States—alternating as "defenders of Ottoman territorial integrity" and "protectors

of Christian minorities"—allowed the Sultan's government to exchange its economic prerogatives and many of its sovereign territorial rights in outlying areas for the license to resolve domestic unrest in the core of the Empire as it saw fit. Dominated by dynastic, semi-feudal and bureaucratic elements and unwilling to reform the system, the Porte had no difficulty in identifying those European interests for which warships would be dispatched—such as the harassment of merchants—and those that were expandable and negotiable—such as oppression of and atrocities against Ottoman subjects. The Cyprus Convention (1878), which preceded the Treaty of Berlin and preempted the possibility of it improving the lot of Armenians, or the competition for railroad rights which sealed the fate of the May Reforms (1895) are only two prominent instances of such trade-offs.

Policies during World War I do not indicate a significant deviation from the pattern described above. The most direct complicity with which the German and Austrian governments have been charged as allies of the Ottoman Empire and advisors to its armies—while the latter were conducting the massacres and deportations—can only be seen as extensions of the same category of vital interests which had led imperialist powers to acquiesce in the earlier massacres. Similarly, the very loud protests and threats lodged by Allied governments against the Ottoman policy of Genocide were hardly consequential, when one considers the speed with which they accommodated the Turkish Nationalist Movement. Unfortunately for all concerned not much has changed since then. Turkey, as the 'bulwark of democracy', constitutes today an important link in the southern flank of NATO; as such western arms and diplomacy support Turkish militarism abroad and thus the oppression of dispossessed classes and ethnic minorities; students and workers are killed by weapons originally sent to preserve democracy.

Historians often function not only with the benefit of hindsight but also through the recognition of political realities of which they are part. In their zeal to remain "non-political" they tacitly accept the assumption underlying that same system. Consequently, the questions they ask are not geared toward understanding how and why anything happened at any given time, but how can one interpret the past in a way that it does not challenge the rationale of the present. This mutual reinforcement between particular perceptions of the past and the present, seen as objective since it implies no critique of the present, emanates from a specific ideological perspective. In the case of western scholars of Near Eastern history, political, and often moral, judgements have been articulated through the legitimist view of Ottoman history and the subsequent distortion of the history and role of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

The most encompassing and far reaching manifestation of the circumstances described above is the fallacious conception of the Ottoman Empire as a "nation" corresponding to the characterization of modern Turkey as a "democracy". In addition to the ideological burden it carries, there are distinct historical and political attributes implied in this term, which cannot be ascribed to an Empire that involved many different peoples, and subsumed the discrimination of communities along religious lines. But it is exactly such innocuous jargon as "nation" and "nation in crisis" that allows Dyer (p.107) and others, to impose their prejudiced analysis on the problem. First it provides for the reduction of Ottoman history into that of the Turks; secondly, it assumes an identity of interests between the Ottoman ruling class and those it was governing, i.e. the "nation". This in turn

obviates the need for any serious discussion of the nationalities, religious, social, political and economic policies of the Ottoman government. Armenians, then, are brought into the limelight of history only in 1914-15, first to be invested with all the obligations and responsibilities of a "citizen", and ultimately to be destroyed as a "treacherous" community. Under these circumstances, the most sympathetic of western scholars is able to reduce the question of Genocide to a human—and in essence a historical—issue.

Armenians failed in most western historians' ultimate criterion of legitimacy, that of constituting a nation-state. It is hardly coincidence that the decrease of interest among scholars in modern Armenian History has followed the termination of Armenian Question, both being results of the Genocide. In fact, the reductionism and historical amnesia in western sources with respect to the events in 1915 parallel the quite conscious decision announced a few years ago by the British historian A. Toynbee not to write on the subject, or for that matter, the advice to Armenians by both the Foreign Minister of Turkey and the U.S. State Department, to forger the past. (4).

Studies of the Genocide by Armenians in the West display serious deficiencies of their own. It should be noted at first that despite the extensive publications on the subject by Armenians, there is no comprehensive account of this crucial event. The neglect is only partly due to the overwhelming scope and nature of the task. Of greater importance has been the belief among Diaspora Armenians that common knowledge and experience of the past, constitute historical reality. They also did not imagine that a written confession signed by the perpetrators would be required to prove the fact of the crime.

Secondly, the survivors carried with them the burden of the past not only in terms of political aspirations, but also the problem of an uprooted culture. The articulation of these concerns was conditioned by the Sovietization of the Republic of Armenia (1920, in Eastern Armenia, previously part of the Russian Empire), the resettlement of most survivors of the Genocide in the urban centers of the western world, and the consequent transformation into ideology of the cultural and religious propinquities Armenians believed they had with the West. What emerged can best be described as conservative (in both the etymological and political senses of the word) nationalism. Its predominant goals have been the physical and political survival of the nation, and preservation of the Diapora against the threat of cultural and ethnic assimilation. Within this perspective 1915 became the focal point of the past, explaining everything before and determining what came after. Thus the Genocide became its own explanation.

Scholars have not been immune to those factors affecting the community in general. To begin with, there has been a tendency to project the notion of national survival into the period preceding 1915, accordingly disregarding the social and economic stratification that characterized both Armenian and Turkish elements. The Armenian revolutionary parties and the Liberation movement have been invested with rigid and stagnant nationalist perspectives. The social and economic dimensions which were crucial to the rise of these parties and formulations of their programs and goals have been either minimized or totally disregarded, since they no longer correspond to prevailing concerns and ideologies. Moreover, most Armenian writers have emphasized the anti-Armenian aspects of Turkish

nationalism, and denied the Ottoman and Turkish reform movements serious intent or legitimacy. Thus the issue has been reduced to a natural antagonism between two nations stretching back to the Ottoman conquest of Western Armenia in the sixteenth century. The result has been the abstraction of the Armenian people from the process of history and the adoption of absolute categories of moral judgement which are, at best, poor substitutes for historical analysis. (5)

Contrary to the attitude of their Armenian counterparts, Turkish historians have had no difficulty in identifying those compelling elements in Turkish nationalism which evolved as a reaction to Western imperialism. In fact, the threat against Ottoman sovereignty has been the matrix around which Ottoman and Turkish political and historical perspectives have been formulated. More specifically, the contraction of boundaries and the Sultan's inability to develop a policy that would not at the same time undermine its overall position were two of the basic factors that gave rise to the Young Turk movement. But within the extreme and exclusive nationalist ideology that came to dominate the Young Turk Government, and more so the Kemalist movement, foreign policy and domestic objectives were better integrated than under the Sultans. The suppression of domestic unrest and opposition through the same weapons as those used to face foreign threats could now be justified, and has been since, in the name of the same god.

Turkish statesmen have formulated a glorified and idealized view of the present State, and ascribed to it an inherent and absolute value. Turkish historians, whose thankless task has been to rationalize the assumptions and policies of the state, have obliged by participating in this process of mystification. The legitimization of the present has been at the cost of distorting Ottoman history as a prelude to the rise of modern Turkey. The single most important criterion in assessing the past has been the impact of an event on the power of the state and process of turkification, as dynastic control was replaced by military rule, and the rising middle classes came to dominate the government. From such a standpoint Armenians would be designated as enemies by definition, regardless of their actions or policies. The distortions otherwise abundant in Turkish historiography—the minimization of the numbers of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire prior to the Genocide, and those massacred; the reversal of roles between victim and victimizer; the charges of treason, etc. — are necessary solely to keep a semblance of analysis and objectivity.

III

Western, Turkish, and Armenian scholars alike have as yet to transcend their particular positions in life. In a sense all three groups, for different reasons, have shared the basic erroneous assumption that the event under scrutiny can be understood in and by itself. The gulf that has separated Turks and Armenians since 1915 has been generally projected into earlier periods, leading one to believe that the massacres were both natural and predestined.

The difficulty is not with the lack of sources and is not likely to be resolved with the unearthing of new documents. Furthermore, to the extent that all understanding of the past is conditioned by individual and current perceptions,

there will also be a level of subjectivity in any approach. This does not mean, however, that all interpretations are equally valid, or equally useless. The best guarantee for an adequate understanding and interpretation is a historical methodology which can account for and relate the whole range of factors and issues that the Genocide encompasses. The following concluding remarks, emanating mainly from observations already made, will hopefully contribute to the development of such a framework.

1) Ottoman history must be viewed through its dynamic society rather than the perspective of governments whose policies hinged on the preservation of the status quo. Whether the result of indigenous causes or the integration of Ottoman economy in the world market system, changes that were occurring in every aspect and on all levels of Ottoman society could not but provide for such a dynamism. The dual characteristic of the government—on one hand pressured by imperialism and on the other oppressing its own subjects—is only one aspect of the changing Ottoman scene.

2) Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were both subjects to, and agents of, these changes. Some in coastal cities participated actively in, and benefitted from, the new trade and production patterns that evolved by the end of the nineteenth century. But the majority were not as fortunate. Peasants, for example, were forced into bankruptcy following the appearance of large scale usury, when taxes were increased discriminately and were demanded in cash to support the Ottoman debts to the West. Neither the *Millet* system, the traditional framework for analyzing the status of Armenians, nor the abstraction of Armenians into a unified and separatist entity can reflect the political and economic levels at which they had long been integrated into the Ottoman system.

3) A comparative analysis must be made of the ways in which the rise of new problems and contact with the west affected the traditional Turkish and Armenian mentalities. More particularly, the evolution of the distinct Ottoman-Turkish and Armenian reform movements must be studied in function of i) the historical perspectives of each, as they groped to integrate their traditional positions and new aspirations, ii) the positions of different classes toward the reform movements, in order to understand the social bases and the ideological components of Turkish and Armenian nationalisms in 1914. The latter in turn is of paramount importance in identifying a) the strategy and tactics adopted by each to achieve its goals and b) those specific aspects of Turkish-Armenian relations where friction actually existed and led to the fateful decisions.

4) The causes of the Ottoman resolve to enter the war, and this on the side of Germany, must be analyzed not only in function of its foreign and military concerns, but also the government's domestic priorities. This aspect could be revealing in view of the fact that that decision followed the first steps taken in the implementation of new, Russian sponsored, reforms in Ottoman Armenia. Some of the actions of Armenian leaders regarded as treacherous by various historians followed this step by the Young Turks, who in many ways had started acting exclusively as a self-serving Turkish elite, rather than a government concerned with the welfare of its subjects.

5) Finally, a more thorough analysis must be made of the perceptions of both Turks and Armenians regarding the territorial issue. The depth of the conflict between the strategic importance Ottoman Armenia had for the government, and

the historic homeland that it was for Armenians, could have been sufficient to justify in the minds of Turkish leaders a military solution, particularly when such means had been used by previous Ottoman governments against many people and subjects who had dared to challenge the state and those who controlled it.

NOTES TO LIBARIDIAN

(1) *Middle Eastern Studies*, XII, 1:99-107.

(2) Because of the thrust of this article, I have refrained from pointing out factual errors of omission and commission in Dyer's essay.

(3) Salahi R. Sonyel, "Yeni Belgerin Isigi altinda Ermeni Tehcirleri-Armenian Deportations: A Re-Appraisal in the Light of New Documents" *T.T.K. Bulletin* XXXVI, 141: 31-69.

(4) Toynbee's comments are included in a letter to Prof. Vahakn Dadrian. Turkish Foreign Minister Mr. Ihsan Sabry Caglayangil's remarks came during a question and answer period following the Minister's address to the World Affairs Council Los Angeles chapter, on September 22, 1976; the State Department views were expressed in letters to American-Armenian individuals in 1971, and one might add, in an April 24, 1965 editorial of the *New York Times*.

(5) A discussion of Soviet Armenian historiography has been omitted since, for obvious reasons, it entails the introduction of problems different from those discussed here. Suffice it to say that Dyer's summary treatment of the work of Soviet Armenian historians is unjustified and superficial.