

The Legacy of Jihad

Islamic Holy War and the Fate of Non-Muslims

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JIHAD GENOCIDE OF THE ARMENIANS BY THE OTTOMAN TURKS

A. TWO ACCOUNTS OF THE MASSACRES OF 1894–1896

*Massacres of the Armenians at Sasun, Istanbul, Trebizond, Erzurum, and Urfa*¹

In the region of Sasun, south of Mush, the exactions of the Kurdish chieftains had evolved into an organized system of tribute by blackmail, paid for their protection by the Armenian population. On top of this the Turkish authorities now chose to demand payment of arrears of government tax—which in the circumstances had for some years been tacitly remitted. When the Armenians refused to submit to this double exaction, Turkish troops were called into the area, in close concert with the Kurdish tribesmen. Soon they were indiscriminately slaughtering the helpless Armenians. The soldiers pursued them throughout the length and breadth of the region, hunting them “like wild beasts” up the valleys and into the mountains, respecting no surrender, bayoneting the men to death, raping the women, dashing their children against the rocks, burning to ashes the villages from which they had fled. For this operation the Turkish commander, Zeki Pasha, was awarded an appropriate gratuity by the Sultan.

Leakage of the news of these first Armenian massacres, which the Porte had

hoped to brush aside as a trifling incident, aroused strong liberal protests throughout Europe, prompting demands by the three powers—Britain, France, and Russia—for a commission of enquiry. This was duly appointed by the Sultan, in 1895, “to enquire into the criminal conduct of Armenian brigands”—thus hoping to preempt further investigation and prove the Porte’s version of events. Following this mockery of justice the powers, reinforced by mass meetings in London and Paris, put forward a scheme for Armenian reform, which the Sultan made a show of accepting in a watered-down version, with a profusion of unfulfilled paper promises.

Meanwhile, the Armenians themselves, led by the Hunchaks, staged a demonstration as they marched through the city of Istanbul to present a petition to the Porte, voicing their protests and demands for reform. Despite counsels of patience from their Patriarch, the demonstrators got out of hand when one of them (from Sasun) shouted “Liberty or Death!” The cry was taken up by the rest, breaking into a revolutionary song and provoking intervention by the police, who bludgeoned many of them to death on the spot. Meanwhile, the fanatical Moslem elements, without police intervention, ran wild through the streets, routing out Armenians and slaughtering them with clubs. There followed ten days of violence and terror, from which Armenians by the thousand took refuge in their churches, persuaded to emerge only by guarantees for their safety from the foreign embassies, on condition that they lay down their arms.

This coincided with the news, from the captain of a foreign vessel, of a great massacre in Trebizond. Powerless, he had watched as Armenian fugitives, swimming out to his ship, were knocked on the head by Moslem boatmen or forced underwater till they drowned. Nearly a thousand had been killed in the town, with indigenous Laz tribesmen from the mountains, broke into the Armenian quarter and for five hours kept up a murderous fusillade, despoiling and subsequently gutting by fire the Armenian shops in the market.

This heralded throughout eastern Turkey a series of organized massacres, coinciding with the Sultan’s pretended acceptance of a new plan from the powers for Armenian reform. A telltale feature of them all was that they began and ended, as a matter of routine, with a bugle call, like any planned military operation. For such indeed they were. Here were no fortuitous police measures, forced on the authorities by outbreaks among the Sultan’s Armenian subjects. Here on the contrary was an official campaign by force of arms against the Armenians as against any foreign enemy, calculated among his military forces in the Armenian centers of the six eastern provinces.

Their tactics were based on the Sultan’s principle of kindling religious fanaticism among the Moslem population. Abdul Hamid briefed agents, whom he sent to Armenia with specific instructions as to how they should act. It became their normal routine first to assemble the Moslem population in the largest mosque in a town, then to declare, in the name of the Sultan, that the Armenians were in gen-

eral revolt with the aim of striking at Islam. Their Sultan enjoined them as good Moslems to defend their faith against these infidel rebels. He propounded the precept that under the holy law the property of rebels might be looted by believers, encouraging Moslems to enrich themselves in the name of their faith at the expense of their Christian neighbours, and in the event of resistance, to kill them. Hence, throughout Armenia, "the attack of an ever increasing pack of wolves against sheep."

. . . The conduct of these operations was placed in the hands of Shakir Pasha, one of the Sultan's more sinister advisors, who had once served him as ambassador in St. Petersburg. His ostensible post was that of "inspector of certain localities in the provinces of Asiatic Turkey" in connection with the Sultan's own pretended reform plans. Under this cover his actual role was the planning and execution of massacres in each specified locality. Their objective, based on the convenient consideration that Armenians were now tentatively starting to question their inferior status, was the ruthless reduction, with a view to elimination, of the Armenian Christians, and the expropriation of their lands for the Moslem Turks.

Each operation, between the bugle calls, followed a similar pattern. First into a town there came the Turkish troops, for the purpose of massacre; then came the Kurdish irregulars and tribesmen for the purpose of plunder. Finally came the holocaust, by fire and destruction, which spread, with the pursuit of fugitives and mopping-up operations, throughout the lands and villages of the surrounding province. This murderous winter of 1895 thus saw the decimation of much of the Armenian population and the devastation of their property in some twenty districts of eastern Turkey. Often the massacres were timed for a Friday, when the Moslems were in their mosques and the myth was spread by the authorities that the Armenians conspired to slaughter them at prayer. Instead they were themselves slaughtered, when the Moslems emerged to forestall their design. The total number of victims was somewhere between fifty and a hundred thousand, allowing for those who died subsequently of wounds, disease, exposure, and starvation.

In each of thirteen large towns the numbers of those dead ran well into four figures. In Erzurum, the bazaar of a thousand shops was looted and wrecked by the Moslems, while some three hundred Christians were buried the next day in a single massed grave.

Cruellest and most ruinous of all were the massacres at Urfa, where the Armenian Christians numbered a third of the total population. Here in December 1895, after a two-months' siege of their quarter, the leading Armenians assembled in their cathedral, where they drew up a statement requesting Turkish official protection. Promising this, the Turkish officer in charge surrounded the cathedral with troops. Then a large body of them, with a mob in their wake, rushed through the Armenian quarter, where they plundered all houses and slaughtered all adult males above a certain age. When a large group of young Armenians were brought before a sheikh, he had them thrown down on their backs and held by their hands

and feet. Then, in the words of an observer, he recited verses of the Koran and “cut their throats after the Mecca rite of sacrificing sheep.”

When the bugle blast ended the day’s operations some three thousand refugees poured into the cathedral, hoping for sanctuary. But the next morning—a Sunday—a fanatical mob swarmed into the church in an orgy of slaughter, rifling its shrines with cries of “Call upon Christ to prove Himself a greater prophet than Mohammed.” Then they amassed a large pile of straw matting, which they spread over the litter of the corpses and set alight with thirty cans of petroleum. The woodwork of the gallery where a crowd of women and children crouched, wailing in terror, caught fire, and all perished in the flames. Punctiliously, at three-thirty in the afternoon the bugle blew once more, and the Moslem officials proceeded around the Armenian quarter to proclaim that the massacres were over. They had wiped out 126 complete families, without a woman or a baby surviving, and the total casualties in the town, including those slaughtered in the cathedral, amounted to eight thousand dead.

Note

1. Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1977), pp. 457–60.

***Massacres of the Armenians at Ayintab, Birecik, and Severek*¹**

[The British Consul Barnham, whose district’s consular jurisdiction included the cities of Ayintab and Birecik in Aleppo province, in his report to his government underscored the religious avowals of the gangs and mobs perpetrating the massacre in Ayintab.]

The butchers and the tanners, with sleeves tucked up to the shoulders, armed with clubs and cleavers, cut down the Christians, with cries of “Allahu Akbar!” broke down the doors of the houses with pickaxes and levers, or scaled the walls with ladders. Then when mid-day came they knelt down and said their prayers, and then jumped up and resumed the dreadful work, carrying it on far into the night. Whenever they were unable to break down the doors they fired the houses with petroleum, and the fact that at the end of November petroleum was almost un-purchasable in Aleppo suggests that enormous quantities were brought up and sent north for this purpose. . . . Much of this has been told before, but it is evidence which must be emphasized in order to refute the accusations so wantonly hurled against these poor Armenians of Aintab.

[Speaking of similar atrocities in nearby Birecik, the consul provided these details.]

On the 1st of January, about two hours after sunrise, the massacre began without apparent cause, and continued until night. The soldiers and Moslems of the city generally participated in the work. . . . Profession of Islamism or death was the alternative. . . . Many of the victims were dragged to the Euphrates, and with weights tied to their feet thrown in. . . .

[Here is a description by one of the survivors of an assault of this type, involving two Armenian churches in Severek (Diyarbakir province), a Gregorian, and subsequently, a Protestant one.]

The mob had plundered the Gregorian church, desecrated it, murdered all who had sought shelter there, and as a sacrifice, beheaded the sexton on the stone threshold. Now it filled out yard. The blows of an axe crashed in the church doors. The attacker rushed in, tore the Bibles and hymnbooks to pieces, broke and shattered whatever they could, blasphemed the cross and, as a sign of victory, chanted the Mohammedan prayer “La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammedin Rasula-Ilah” (There is no other God but one God, and Mohammed is his Prophet). We could see and hear all these things from the room in which we huddled. . . . They were coming up the stairs . . . now butchers and victims were face to face. The leader of the mob cried: “Muhammede salavat” (Believe in Mohammed and deny your religion). [Disregarding our supplications to be spared] squinting horribly, he repeated his words in a terrifying voice. [When no one responded] the leader repeated again and gave orders to massacre. The first attack was on our pastor. The blow of an axe decapitated him. His blood, spurting in all directions, spattered the walls and ceilings with red. Then I was in the midst of the butchers. One of them drew his dagger and stabbed my left arm. . . . Another second, I lost consciousness. . . .

Note

1. Vahakn Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide* (Providence, RI: Bergahn Books, 1995), pp. 148, 150.

B. TWO EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE PLIGHT OF THE ARMENIANS DURING WORLD WAR I

Palestine (1915)¹

It has been more than proved (of their own admission!) that it was the Germans who “organized” the control and “correction” of the Armenians. Yet, these messengers from hell, who claim to be superior to others in many things, also describe themselves as “better Christians” than all the others (do relish William’s² prose . . .). Now, the Turks have promised that only 500,000 of the 2,500,000

Armenians living in the empire will be left at the end of the war. As far as these promises are concerned, have faith in the Turks. They are on the way to keeping their word. On our road [in Palestine], one sees long files of young and old men engaged in forced labour: from time to time, someone sick enough is borne on the shoulders of a helpful comrade in misfortune; sometimes, someone lying on the road whose sufferings will soon have ceased.

Even better: these wretches are pursued along the [railway] line of the Hedjaz: old men, old women, children. Sometimes they are allowed to camp down. No bread, no clothing, not a [piece of] cloth on their heads [as protection] against sun or cold, not a tool with which to work. Yet these wretches sometimes have the courage to ask: Will we stop here at last? The reply is invariably: "It is not know!" and the worst torture is added to all the rest: the torture of uncertainty. In many places, it is forbidden to give alms to this hapless people.

Even better: do you know what was done with the young girls and young women?! Yes, as soon as you read my question, you, who know Islam, have guessed. However, this will not stop me telling you: **THEY HAVE BEEN SOLD!** Yes, yes: sold, every girl from the age of seven or eight upwards. They are not expensive. Although it is difficult to feed even the animals in this starving country, there were found among the "faithful," bidders ready to pay from five to a hundred francs for a piece of white flesh. Do not console yourself with the idea that I am reporting gossip! Vain consolation! Things seen, witnessed, proven, official! Very small girls torn from their mothers, young brides taken from their husbands, young girls "kaffirs" [infidels] become the slaves of the debauchery of the "faithful!" The children of a race of martyrs, a race which is claimed to be physically beautiful, and which is undeniably of an acute superiority of intelligence. . . .

As for me, I no longer have teeth to gnash, whose turn is it now? For I came into my country, on the holiest ground, on the road from Jerusalem, and I asked myself if we were in 1915 or in the days of Titus and Nebuchadnezzar. For I, a Jew, I forgot that I was Jewish—it is very difficult to forget this "privilege"—and I asked myself if I had the right to weep solely for the grief of my nation and if Jeremiah [8:21] did not shed his tears of blood for the Armenians too?!

And, lastly, since the Christians—some of whom sometimes claim a monopoly of works of Love, of Charity, and of Solidarity—are silent, there is need once again for a son of the Old Race who disregards the Pain, overcomes the Torture, or denies the Death which for twenty centuries is offered to us more often than is our share; it would need a drop of blood from the Patriarchs and of Moses, of the Maccabees from arid Judea, of Jesus, the dreamer by the side of the blue lake of sweet Galilee, and of Bar Kochba; it would need to drop of the blood that had escaped from the slaughter, to rise up and say: Look! You who refuse to open your eyes.

Listen! You whose ears refuse to hear! What have you done with the secrets of Love and Charity entrusted to you?! To what purpose has served the spilled streams of our blood?! What are you doing in Life with your lofty words?!

And while a night's journey from here thousands and thousands of Englishmen, Canadians, and Australians—all volunteers who have come to fight—remain inactive, a few Arab dogs and Turkish hyenas are wallowing in a charnel-house which they create and maintain. And to know that whips would suffice to drive out all this cowardliness. Alas! The torture of being powerless and disarmed.

The valiant soldiers who would arose a Halleluya of liberation and joy do not come. . . . But tomorrow an official will come and teach us that the “Hasan” mosque of Jaffa is sacred and infinitely respectable because . . . a bandit built it with stones from stolen houses, and that some Muslim wearing an immaculately white “Lafeh” [gown] is worthy of respect and honor because he keeps well imprisoned in his harem two Armenians, bought “on the cheap,” or, to use the words of the Holy Bible, “for a pair of shoes.”

Forgive this tone, lieutenant! The roots of my past are in this country, my dreams for the future too; . . . I have my whole heart here and it is bleeding and wailing, forgive me.

And while the accursed German flood the world with their printed lies, their treachery built into professions of faith . . . , why are you silent?! Silent scorn and mistrust are fine, but bot Ecclesiastes say: “A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” . . . Especially, as honest people, should one not speak out, and is it a young, rebellious Jew who once again must do it?!

Extract from a report in French “PRO ARMENIA” (Athlit, 22 November 1915) by Absalom Feinberg³ to Lt. C. Z. Wooley, British naval officer in Port Said, Egypt.

Notes

1. Reproduced from Bat Ye’or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity*, pp. 439–41.
2. William II, German emperor.
3. Absalom Feinberg (1889–1917). Born at Gedera (Palestine). Agronomist and co-founder with Aharon Aaronsohn of Nili, the Palestinian Jewish intelligence service, which worked with British intelligence during World War I. He was assassinated by Bedouins near Gaza while traveling to Egypt in January 1917. A palm tree grew from the date seeds in his pocket. In 1967, after the Six Day War, his remains were discovered under the tree indicated by a Bedouin and buried in Israel on Mount Herzl.

IRAQ, 1915–1917¹

Constantinople, April 3, 1919

. . . As I am reflecting in order to coordinate my ideas and describe to you with some precision the situation of Mosul during this war, I am overwhelmed by a feeling of sickness and embarrassment; for I find that the pen is too imperfect an

instrument to convey truthfully all the horrors that I have seen, all the images which today fill my mind.

When I remember again, only a few months afterwards, the painful scenes which we have witnessed; when I think of that crowd of gaunt, fleshless specters, their faces white as corpses, filing through the streets and over countryside in search of a carcass or a few herbs to cheat their hunger; when I think of others, with limbs and cheeks bloated in the air, who came to ask for alms, collapsing from exhaustion on my doorstep, I come to the point of doubting myself. Was it a nightmare? What pen, what words could ever describe the distress, the agony of Mosul in 1918? What words could render the evil sight of those children's heads severed from their bodies and paraded in the streets to summon weeping mothers to recognize their stolen children, stolen in the street by ferocious starvelings, for whom this was the last resort? However improbable this may appear, it is—unless I am still dreaming—something I have seen, a reality experienced.

D. Sasson, report No. 4 (extract) Archives, AIU, Iraq, I.C.2.

Constantinople, April 30, 1919

. . . 1915 saw the massacre of the Armenians; 1916 saw—O divine vengeance—the explosion of a dreadful epidemic. The fetid decomposition of Armenian corpses which were found abandoned in the open fields; those that were foolishly thrown into the nutritive waters of the Tigris emitted vengeful germs of inexorable diseases which, alas, mowed down entirely innocent population. There was typhoid fever, malaria, yellow fever, cholera. The uninterrupted exodus of deportees and emigrants brought with it exanthematic typhus, the most terrible of calamities, which decimated the population and which unfortunately claimed an immense and harsh tribute from our coreligionists. Oh! What a sad Passover it was that year! It found our quarter in mourning and almost every family weeping at the grave of a deceased or at the bedside of someone agonizing.

D. Sasson, report No. 5 (extract) Archives, AIU, Iraq, I.C.2.

Note

1. Translation reproduced from Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity*, pp. 441–42.

Appendix A
TOWNS AND
VILLAGES RAVAGED
DURING THE
SELJUK-OTTOMAN
JIHAD CONQUESTS
OF ASIA MINOR,
ELEVENTH
THROUGH
FIFTEENTH
CENTURIES

Reconstructed from
Speros Vryonis Jr.