

Armenian Atrocities and Genocide in and around

Erzurum and Erzincan

Erzurum had previously witnessed numerous rebellions, massacres, atrocities and genocide perpetrated by Armenians. It is very well known that not only the Armenians but the Russian and British Consuls also played a role in the disorders incited in the area. (*Livre Bleu du Gouvernement Britannique concernant le traitement des Armeniens dans l'Empire Ottoman (1915 – 1916). Documents presentes au Vicomte Bryce. Paris, 1987, p. 233. It is stated in the Blue Book that the interpreters and other officials employed at the British, French, German and Russian consulates in the region were Armenians.*)

With the proclamation of the general mobilization, a large section of the Armenians took refuge in Russia along with deserters and formed voluntary regiments amid the Russian Army. They attacked the Ottoman Army in the ranks of the Russian Army later on. They inflicted unimaginable massacres and atrocities on the innocent and defenceless Turkish people in cooperation with the local Armenian armed bands.

The official report forwarded to the Commander of the Caucasian Army on March 3, 1918 by First Lieutenant Abgral, Commander of the Russian Forces at Erzurum while Erzurum was still under the Russian occupation during the First World War testifies to the atrocities and genocide perpetrated against the defenceless people at Erzurum by Armenians. I publish this report verbatim (*This Russian official document was published in the issue of 18 March 1920, No. 22, of the Weekly Bulletin "Muslim Outlook" published in London. The Bulletin was provided from the University of California Los Angeles Library. (See: UCLA call No. BP/14976 Mar. 1920-Aug. 1920). This document is being published in Turkish for the first time. (See: Annex-2)*):

"Massacre of Muslims By Armenians

Russian Official Document No. 31

Erzurum, March 3, 1918

To the Commander of the Caucasian Army

On February 26, 1918, at mid-day, a company of militia began to assemble the Turks in order to make them clean up the railways and the roads leading to the fortification. This order came from General Antranik. But it was carried out by the chief of the militia of the town, named M. Farachian.

The Turks complained and said that they were being gathered together without taking into consideration the prescribed formalities, according to which a written order should be issued by the Commandant of the town... I at once communicated with M. Farachian who told me that the above-mentioned formalities necessitating to get a written order of the Commander had been abolished in view of the circumstances... Thus three sections of workers were formed. One section was sent to the gate of Kars; second, towards the gate of Oltu; third toward the gate of Trebizond. At about 3 p.m. I was informed by one of my soldiers that the Turks of Kars, referred to above, were taken behind the fortification of Azizie. I realized the true significance of that information given by soldiers, only on February 27. While leaving Erzurum, I saw on the road of Kars more than 70 dead bodies (Turkish) riddled with bullets on the head, the neck and the chest as well as wounds from bayonets in the region of the heart and the abdomen. With the second section of the Turks the Armenians dealt in the following manner:

The Turks were tightly squeezed into the barracks, made of wood, where they were so crowded up that they could hardly sit down. On that night, according to the testimonies of the workers on the railway line, the Armenians began shooting the Turks one by one and after some time they began firing on the barracks.

The third section, according to my informants, was shot by machine-guns at the gate of Trebizond. Now I shall try to draw a picture of February 26, the day of nightmare and blood. The Armenians broke into the houses of Turks by using force and seized the males of age 11 and above, including the elderly ones, and formed them in columns and led them with blows of whips and rifles, outside the town, where they massacred them in the most savage manner. Once I asked them where they were taking the Turks and if it was to make them work? "No" replied the soldiers with an air of satisfaction "we shall probably kill them."

When I told them: "Have you got crazy? come back to reason", they replied to me: "For the love of God, do not prevent us. We do not touch you at all and what we do with them it is not your business." There was a great excitement in the town; every one was running about. Cries of children and lamentations of Turkish women were heard everywhere in the town. The Armenian soldiers were walking about in groups in the town and were continually forcing open the doors of Turkish houses. Finally, came the terrible night that shook the spirit of desolation. The blood congeals at the thought of the horror of this night. The cries increased. One should like to go to the rescue of the unfortunate victims, but when one goes there, one receives everywhere the impertinent answer "do not interfere" which is accompanied with threats. I heard the cries of women. I opened the door and climbing up the stairs I entered a room. Here I saw seven Armenian soldiers fully armed, one of them holding a candle in his hand, some searching for what they could find and some were massacring in a savage manner. There were three unveiled Turkish women, down whose faces blood was trickling. Their blouses were torn showing their breasts covered with blood. On their sides, children were there so terrified that they appeared dead with fear. A child cried out in an extraordinary voice opening the eyes full of tears. One of the Armenians prevented it from crying, but the terrified child understood nothing and kept on crying. Then the Armenian delivered a blow on the head of the child with his rifle and the child stopped crying and fell on the floor. When the mother saw the child in this condition she began to sob. Then he slaughtered the child with his bayonet and landed a blow on the head of the mother and bayoneted her. The other women seeing this began to cry hands on the eyes. The children folded their arms, with bended heads they awaited their turn, but at once a dagger was aimed at my abdomen. I thought it would be better to leave the room. I came out of the house. I heard a carriage coming. I at once recognized that it was that of the commander of the militia, M. Farachian. I begged him to enter the house; he roughly answered me thus: "when Armenia boils one cannot think about individuals" and asked me at once why I did not enter myself to stop these fools. I replied that I was a Russian and they would not listen to me. M. Farachian then told me "I am surprised that at such a moment you should find enough time to busy yourself with such silly things." I left him and walked for a long time in the streets. I also visited the Turkish quarters. Everywhere the same horrible picture that breaks one's heart was to be seen, the same cries, the same moaning of women and children. The victims of these crimes have been so numerous that it would not be wrong if I say that only 250 Turks, who could hide themselves, have been left alive in the whole town. The Armenians, having also realized that possibility, began to reclaim them from the Russian officers. They also called at my house where they searched for them everywhere, even in the cupboards and under beds. But they forgot to search the garret where I had hidden a Turkish family.

The following scene, which took place in the house of the former military cashier is characteristic. I happened to be there by chance. I found a few Armenians there. They were seated before a lamp and were picking out some articles in gold, rings, bracelets and other articles that they had robbed. One of them told me that he could not take a bracelet of the wrist

of a woman as she would not open. He had to cut the hand and the fingers of the woman (he himself said this) to take the bracelet, etc. off. The Armenians set the town on fire. They also burned non-military buildings and the house of the American Consul, M. Stempletten. Now and then we heard rifle reports; they completely massacred the remainder before the arrival of the Turkish Army. All the roads leading from the gate of Kars to Hasankale were covered with massacred Turkish bodies, despoiled of their dresses, and the noses and ears of a great number of them had been cut off. We came close to Hasankale and saw a group of Turkish prisoners along the railroad who were led by an Armenian soldier, who made them run. Those who happened to be behind were being whipped and hit on the heads. Their faces were covered with blood. Finally, we arrived at Hasankale. Among these prisoners was a blind old man, accompanied by a boy. The blind old man groping his way and the boy had no more strength left to help the old man. A soldier on horseback began to beat them. These poor persons were wiping the blood off their faces without uttering a word. They kept quiet thus hoping to be spared the martyrdom. But fate had it differently, as soon as they reached Hasankale, the crowd that awaited them massacred them at once by fusillade. We proceeded on to Keupry-Keuy. On arriving there I alighted from the train. I suddenly heard cries from the direction of Hasankale and saw a crowd of Turks running. I counted them afterwards and found them to be 40.

In front of them there were two soldiers on horseback, who, from their uniform, seemed to be officers. But I could not see their ranks, since they were quite far away. The horsemen who were in front made their horses trot and gallop and the Turks had to imitate them. Those who were unable to do so were beaten. Sometimes the horsemen would stop suddenly then the human momentum caused by inertia brought the prisoners almost up to the horsemen, the horsemen landed blows of rifle on their heads, made them pass through a group of carts; at a given time they had to come down a slope; a Turk fell down and this did not please one of the horsemen who went up to him and drew his sword and delivered a blow cutting open his (Turkish) forehead and lips. The wounded Turk attempted to rise but the horseman shot him dead. At this time the Armenians began shooting the prisoners and within five minutes there lay 40 warm dead bodies of the Turks on the side of our wagon. A few Armenians not content with this went and examined the bodies and fired a few more shots at those who showed any sign of life. All along the railroad we saw the same thing. For example at Horasan the Armenians opened fire on the Turks working on the railway lines. Happily only two were killed there; Russian mechanics bandaged the wounds of the wounded and carried them to the barracks. When we arrived at Karaugan we learned that all the wounded had died.

First Lieutenant ABGRAL

Military Commander of the town of Erzurum.

Erzurum, March 3, 1918."

A foreword was contributed to the War Journal of the Russian Second Regiment of Fortress Artillery at Erzurum by the Commanding Officer of the said Regiment, Lt. Colonel Twerdo- Khlebof, who annexed to it his war memories as well. I wish to quote from his memories the passages concerned with the massacres and genocide perpetrated by the Armenians at Erzurum (*This document is in the Archives of the Department of Military History and Strategic Studies, General Staff (ATASE), Cupboard of the First World War No. 123, Division 5, File 5-A-1 16, D-1. (TwerdoKhlebof: Journal de Guerre du 2e Régiment d'Artillerie de Forteresse Russed'Erzeroum-Notes d'un officier Supérieur Russe sur les atrocités d'Erzeroum. Translated from the Russian original, 1919):*

"News was reaching us that some occasional murders took place here and there. I have recently arrested myself an Armenian who had killed a Turk near the redoubt of Tafta and

handed him over to the Central Command. There was a rumour circulating among people that many of the Turks, sent somewhere to be employed as workers, were lost without trace and killed collectively under torture in Yanıkdere to the northeast of the city. On February 25, two Russian officers, who had seen a number of Armenian bandits, fully armed from head to foot, shooting some ten to twelve Turks near the railroad station, attempted to rescue them. However being threatened by gun they could not help them and those poor people were shot to death with nobody helping them.

... They began committing murders in villages faraway from towns and in the absence of Russian officers.

... Again we have begun hearing, exactly as in the past days, voices of Armenians in the street, sounds of axes, of broken doors, cries of people taken away by force. I was distressed to observe that many who were present on the scene did not pay attention to what was happening and overlooked the savagery and scandalous acts committed by the Armenians.

... A little while ago news reached us that Armenians massacred Turks at Erzincan. It was reported that more than 800 totally defenceless and unarmed Turks had been murdered. Poor Turks were slaughtered like animals at the head of large pits dug beforehand and tossed into those pits.

It is reported that an Armenian shot at one of the cart drivers. He did not die but fell on his back. The Armenian attempted to thrust a stick into the mouth of the poor victim in the throes of death, but could not do it as the mouth was locked, then killed him by kicking repeatedly to his abdomen.

Odishelidze told me personally that all of the Turks in the town of Ilica who could not escape were murdered and that he saw many child corpses decapitated with blunt axes. On March 11, 1918, namely 3 weeks later than the Ilica massacre, Lt. Colonel Griyazno returning from there related what he had witnessed there in the following words:

– I saw so many bodies on the roads leading to villages, bodies with severed limbs. I was told that every Armenian passing by would swear and spit on them contemptuously. In the courtyard of the mosque, which was 25.5 meter by 31.9 meter, corpses were heaped as high as 1.42 meter, corpses of women, men of every age, of children and elderly. The traces on the corpses of women showing that they had been violated by force were obvious. Cartridges were trusted into the genital organs of many women and girls." (*Neşide Kerem Demir: op. cit., pp. 112–117.*)

After having made a tour to the towns of Trabzon, Erzincan, Kars and Batum and the neighbouring villages as a member of a delegation from April 17 to May 20, 1918, historian and writer Ahmet Refik (Altınay) recorded what he had witnessed in two works of his: "Two Committees and Two Massacres" and "On the Roads of The Caucasus". The German journalist-writer Veys and Dr. Stein, an Austrian, were also members of the delegation. Ahmet Refik tells what he has seen at Erzincan and its environs in his work "Two Committees and Two Massacres" in the following words: "...fresh corpses lying about in the streets and deep in the wells covered with blood not yet dried were those of the poor Turks killed by Armenians. When looked down into the narrow wells, a bad odour would strike the nose and one would feel faint. Hairs and pieces of clothes of the unfortunate Turks were still there stuck to the stones of the wells. Places of ruins, places of burnt down houses, bottoms of the walls were filled with the corpses of the Turks, severed arms, skulls, fatty leg bones, bodies not yet decayed. People were grieved and wretched. Those wandering in the downtown were without shoes, with burnt faces and in tattered clothes. Only grass was on sale in the shops to feed the people. Wheat was not available anywhere but with the military command. Were it not for the kindness of the

Commander, even the Subgovernor would no doubt starve to death."(*AhmetRefik [Altınay]: İkiKomiteveİkiKıtıl. [Two Parties and Two Massacres]. İstanbul, 1919, pp. 71–72.*)

The author describes the savagery, brutalities and genocide that the Armenians committed at Erzurum in his work "On the Roads of the Caucasus" as follows: "I am in a place destroyed by fire. This historical and devoted land of the Turks lay in ruins. Streets, buildings, mosques, madrasas and entirely destroyed houses are filed up with bodies. When the rubbles of burnt down houses are slightly moved heads of men and children, arms, legs, parts and pieces of bodies and feet are revealed.

... While fighting against the Ottoman Army in the formation of armed bands outside the town, the Armenians were killing the people in the town by stuffing them into caserns and shutting in houses. Sometimes they chopped the heads on a log and threw the bodies into wells.

... There is nothing under the rubbles of walls but Turkish bodies. When the soil is slightly dug, a human arm would first appear, then the head and the whole body displaying a tragic scene. Corpses were so rotten that brains would flow out at the slightest touch, grinning chins would disintegrate and fatty, burnt and crushed chests would appear naked and wretched in soiled clothes.

... The Armenian savagery had terribly devastated Erzurum. Streets were all filled with bodies of women and children. Women's breasts and even private organs were nailed to walls. Children's lungs were hanging from telegraph wires. Entirely naked woman bodies with pierced abdomens were put in rows on both sides of the road. When we had seen this state of my unfortunate nation, we became almost crazy. I wonder if civilized Europe will try to find out those who are guilty of these crimes. History has never recorded such brutalities before.

They caught innocent maidens, attacked them like wild animals and satisfied themselves on their innocent bodies and then ripped their abdomens with bayonets and threw them onto ruins. We were occupied for weeks to gather these corpses, take their photographs and bury them. While entering the town it was terrible to see the roadsides. On both sides were arranged woman corpses. The genital organs of women were torn and male genital organs were pushed into.

Tears were coming involuntarily from my eyes and I was feeling a bitter curse at the deepest point of my heart." (*AhmetRefik [Altınay]: KafkasYollarındaHâtıralarveTahassüsler. [On the Caucasian Roads:Memories and Feelings]. İstanbul, 1919, pp. 27–28.*)

The telegrams dated May 10 et 11, 1332 (1916) sent from various provinces about the Armenian genocide committed at Erzurum, Bitlis and Elazığ, which are kept in the Ottoman Archives, report

"that Russians took with them as many as two thousand muslimswhen they, together with Armenian armed bands, were driven fromHasankale to their original borders and killed some of those muslims and sent some of them to the interior parts of the country and taht Russians hanged nine persons at Erzurum and sent all the male population over the age of 14 to unknown places and that a court composed of Armenians at Pekrech hanged as many as some 300 to 400 people and that they did not leave any muslims at Ashkale, Tercan, İlica, Tavuskerd and Artvin and that Armenians killed some 200 women and children at Van and 8 to 10 thousand muslims along the Mahfuran stream and that all of the population of the village of Hot near the border Narman were machine gunned and that most of the emigrants of Morh-iSufra at Chukurwere put to the sword and that the villages of Ergani, Cinis, Pezentan and Semerssheikh were set to fire with their inhabitantsand that lots of villagers resettled near Bitlis starved to death because of the kurdishBedirhaniKamil and that badly sick children hospitalised were brutally killed at the Bitlis

Hospital and that the corpses of those who were killed at the village of Balekan were thrown to dogs so that they eat them and that women and maids imprisoned at Chukur were violated, the elderly burnt, and children bayoneted, etc." (*BOA. HR. SYS. HU, kr. 110, dos.12-2, nr. 9-11, 17 (See: Annex-3)*)

Another document (*BOA. HR. SYS. MÜ, 57/4, 1919 VI 17 (See: Annex-4)*), kept in the Ottoman Archives, as regards the measures to be taken for preventing the atrocities from taking place, atrocities similar to those which were committed by Armenians at Erzurum and its environs, Pasinler, Namervan, Norshin, Pernos and Isisor contains letters from Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), Inspector for the Troops of the Ninth Army, to the Ministry of War; from the War Minister Nazim Shevked Turgut Pasha to the Foreign Ministry; and from the Foreign Ministry to the Ministry of War.

Historian and writer Ahmet Refik (Altınay) relates the massacres and brutalities committed by Armenians at Erzincan and its environs in his work "On the Roads of the Caucasus" as follows:

"One of the towns where Armenians carried out massacres is Erzincan. Formerly it had 20 thousand inhabitants, but at present its population does not count more than 3 to 4 thousand. Only the poor and the helpless remained in the town following its occupation by the Russians. Close to 700 of them were slain, killed, burnt and thrown into wells by Armenians. The Ottoman Army took the town back in February. The gathering of corpses is still under way.

I am amidst ruins. There are so many destroyed mausoleums. Even the tiles of the mosques were taken away. Suffocating smoke are still rising from the burnt poles of the houses. While at İstanbul the leaders of the Union were listening to speech and songs with cups of drinks in their hands, here Turks died helplessly amidst gasoline flames, suffocating smoke and hot fires at the hands of Armenians. Perished by the cruelty of Armenians, now they are lying under the burnt pillars. From Trebizond to Erzurum there is nothing but ruins. There is not a single living creature in any village, in any hut. Hunger has followed the Armenian savagery. Along the road from Aydos to Erzincan, hungry and wretched Turks were encountered. The Turks who had filled once towns and villages now seemed to have been uprooted." (*Ahmet Refik [Altınay]: op. cit., pp. 65-69.*)

Now, we may quote some passages from the Report of the official Commission of Investigation, which inquired into the destruction, massacres and brutalities committed by Armenians in this region:

"On May 28, 1332 (1916) we arrived at Mama Hatun which is the central settlement of the district of Tercan. We found out that four fifths of all the buildings in the town had been pulled down, the mosque had been transformed into a church by destructing the pulpit, a bell had been hung on the minaret. Armenians had plundered the houses and violated so many women and maids by use of force together with Russian Cossacks. Leaving Mama Hatun we went to the village of Sazavartik. Here Armenians caused a lot of destruction and committed so much brutalities, violated women and maids by use of force and killed seven persons trying to defend their families together with the members of their families. Even the aged women of this village could not escape from violation. Swearing on their honour they told themselves in tears and cries that each woman had been raped by at least 10 to 30 Armenians." (*Ermeni Komitelerinin Âmâl ve Harekât-ı İhtilâliyesi. [Aspirations and revolutionary movements of the Armenian parties]. pp. 289-296.*)

A document(*BOA. HR. SYS. HU, kr. 110, dos.12-2, nr. 144-162 (See: Annex-5)*) dated October 3, 1916, kept in the Ottoman Archives, testifies to the inhuman brutalities and genocide perpetrated by Armenians in the villages of Tercan in cooperation with Russians.

"Russians, Cossacks and Armenians destroyed every village they entered, and robbed them of their wealth, property, honours and sacred things and killed their inhabitants. They plundered every thing; they destroyed even farming tools and left only naked land. They killed all the men they had been able to catch, pierced their eyes with bayonets, slaughtered people like sheep, and threw the bodies into the wells and committed hair-raising brutalities and tortures. They took away two golden rings in the fingers of a one-yearold girl together with fingers. No girl or woman above the age of seven was left untouched. Many women were scared to death. Muslims hid their wives and daughters in chimneys, in the under ground grain pits, in caves in the mountains, in stream valleys and in wells.

They demolished the graveyards and destroyed the mosques of villages. After pulling down their pulpits they transformed mosques into stables and left them in dirt. They destroyed the graveyard at Mama Hatun, pulled down the pulpit of its mosque, turned it into a church and hung a bell to its minaret."

A document(*Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, German Empire. "Türkei: Allgemeine Politik, Türkei Nr. 41, R 22346"*). dated February 28, 1918, kept in the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry, clearly testifies before the world public opinion to the large scale destruction and genocide perpetrated by Armenian bands at Erzincan. The location number of this document, which is kept in the file No. 190 labelled "Turkey 41", is "R 22346." The document bearing the title of "Turkey General Policy" reports the Armenian genocide committed from November 1917 to March 1918.

A German diplomat by the name of Bussche wrote a report on the basis of the information given by the German Consulate at Sivas. The following statement is from this report:

"According to the telegram received from the Imperial Consulate at Sivas, Erzurum has been encircled as a half moon with the participation of the Second Army. Its surrender is expected shortly. The Armenian bands carried out overwhelming destruction at Erzincan. They literally eradicated the whole population living in villages."