



Eyewitness to the Armenian Genocide

Khanum Palootzian¹

Born 1898

Village of Darman, Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey

It was in May 1915 that the Turkish Government uprooted us from Darman² and all our villages and tried to destroy us all. Our houses, farms, sheep, cows, fuel, horses, donkeys, chickens, our furniture, beds, foods, and all belongings were collected and forcefully confiscated. They didn't give even one piastre as payment for all they took. My step-father, when they were going to kill him, pleaded that they let him pray before dying. As he knelt and prayed, they took a sword and cut off his head. They marched us into the mountains, fields and gorges to die of hunger. All the Armenian men and boys were killed with axes and swords. And all the women and girls were killed

through thirst, hunger and an even worse fate that I don't wish to say. Pregnant women were eviscerated, their stomachs cut open with swords and their babies ripped out, thrown against the rocks. These I saw with my own eyes.

In the summer heat, we were driven for days and weeks, without food and water, with our swollen bare feet bleeding from cuts. When we saw water, we ran to drink only to be beaten back by gendarmes on horseback who carried large wooden cudgels. We were beaten fiercely for just trying to drink water. We were led through the mountains for two months. On the way, many women couldn't take it and, holding their babies in their arms, simply threw themselves from cliffs into the Tigris River. The Turk gendarmes singled out the prettier girls and women and took them for themselves. Many, myself included, smeared mud on our faces so as not to appear attractive. I even closed one eye so as to appear blind, and limped. With this and other tricks I managed to escape being taken.

My entire family, along mountains, gorges, and fields, my mother, father, sisters, and brother who was not quite ten years old, were left as unburied corpses, left as food for wild dogs. Darman consisted of a group of seven villages. All were uprooted - that's several thousand people. By the time we reached Harput, weeks later, some 45 miles away, there remained only a few hundred. We knew they were leading us to die, we thought probably to dump us at sea, for none of us were allowed to leave the group nor allowed to drink water or even look for food. If they saw anyone leaving the group the gendarmes immediately killed them.

¹ From a tape recorded interview in 1972. Danish missionary Karen Peterson, in a March 1920 letter, describes how Khanum came to the orphanage at Mezreh, Harput: "Khanun has experienced very hard trials. With her family, including 14 persons, she were forced to leave their house and home in one day's time. After two months wandering in the mountains she succeeded in escaping and reached the fields outside Mezreh. Pregnant and with one year old child strapped to her back she found our orphanage. All that remained of her family was now beside her, On February 3, 1916, she gave birth to a girl which she named Diranouhi after her husband Diran, who was killed. Khanum's first child never recovered after the hardships she had been through and died within a few months."

² Darman, also known as Temran, is 45 miles north of Harput, 40 miles south of Erzerum, and 30 miles south of Erzingan. Today it is called Baglarpinari. Its coordinates are: "39°15'00"N" (Long), and "40°24'00"E" (Lat.). In 1915 it was a large village of 200-400 families, located in the district of Kighi, province of Erzerum. See "Armenia, A Historical Atlas" by Robert Hewsen, 2001, Univ. of Chicago Press.