



Eyewitness to the Armenian Genocide

Mesrob Kloian¹

Born 1903

Village of Darman, Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey

On May 14, 1915 the day before the deportation of our villages, a Turk official came to Darman and called together the leading figures and young men of our villages and sent them away. We were told they would rejoin us after we all left our villages – but we never saw them again. They gave us one day to get ready. We were forbidden to carry any weapons, even a pen knife. Any they found with weapons would be instantly put to death. So the next day we left our villages escorted by gendarmes. Some were allowed to use carts while others had to walk. The first day went without incident. Then the following morning we woke to find that a hundred Turkish gendarmes on horseback, all armed with guns, yatagans² and daggers, had joined our

caravan during the night. Then our carts were taken away from us and we were forced to walk on foot carrying the smaller children on our backs. We walked all day and were led through desolate areas where there wasn't even a drop of water then we camped at night. On the third day of our march we were led into a narrow canyon where we camped. I was beside my mother and father and our whole family was there together.

The next morning when we prepared to leave the encampment we heard some shots. In the wink of an eye we were completely surrounded by hundreds of bandits who had taken position around the convoy. They were accompanied by the Turk gendarmes who had been guarding the caravan. Among them were Kurds, Turks, Cherkas, Zazas, as many women as men, all armed with rifles, swords, yatagans, scythes, clubs, axes. At the shot of a rifle the massacre began. The ground was covered with bodies everywhere. My sisters, brothers, sister-in-law, niece, and nephew were killed or carried off. I saw my father try in vain to save my mother as two Turks carried her off. I ran behind my father as he climbed a hill. There were a hundred of us running in all directions but we were soon surrounded by Turks who searched the men, one by one. After taking everything they had, including their clothes, they cut them down with swords and axes, killing them right where they stood. After finishing with the others three Turks with swords drawn searched my father. After taking his money, belongings, whatever they could find, one of them, without warning, thrust a dagger in his stomach. As my father lay wounded another Turk came over to him and demanded money which he didn't have. Without hesitating, the Turk shot him in the chest. My father held out his hand to ward off the bullet but it was to no avail. He died in the arms of my older brother Zakar.

I escaped and hid in an abandoned stable that night. I awoke to hear cries and screams and through a crack in the door, I saw that under the trees surrounding the camp the Turks had piled up hundreds of babies that had lost their mothers. They had devised a game, one that was amusing them. I saw with my own eyes that they were trying with their yatagans to see who could sever the head of each child with just one blow. For them it was a game. First one, then another, raised his sword high in the air and, lest he lose his wager, brought it down with shattering force. To add to their sport, they placed babies at fifteen or twenty meters, up against a tree or bush, to see who could shoot the best. What I saw there that day and in the narrow canyon has haunted me all my life.

¹ This is an excerpt from a 100 pp. hand-written memoir by Mesrob Kloian written in 1965 in Grasse, France, where he owned and operated a sidewalk café, "La Regence," on the Blvd Du Jeu De Ballon. This photograph was taken by Richard Kloian in 1961 in France.

² A type of Turkish sword, referred to as the "sword of Islam." It is a short, curved, decorated sword, renowned for its strength and sharpness.