

GÉRARD DÉDÉYAN

AGO DEMIRDJIAN

NABIL SALEH (+)

Pour mon collègue de l'université d'Athènes, Hervé Georgelin, éminent chercheur et traducteur pour tant de sujets qui m'intéressent, à commencer par Smyrne, mais aussi pour les populations non musulmanes de l'Empire ottoman, Juifs, Arméniens et autres chrétiens orientaux de notre temps, sujets abordés diulement, grâce à une précieuse polyglotie,

The Righteous and People of Conscience of the Armenian Genocide

en très amical hommage, et en souvenir des rencontres avec mon père, Charles Dédéyan, gardien, avec son frère Christian, de la mémoire de Smyrne,

Montpellier, le 4 mars 2024

Gérard Dédéyan

Preface by

YVES TERNON



HURST & COMPANY, LONDON

CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xv
<i>Preface by Yves Ternon</i>	xvii
<i>Authors' Acknowledgements</i>	xxvii
Introduction	1
PRELUDE: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	15
THE HAMIDIAN AND CILICIAN MASSACRES: SOME REMARKABLE INDIVIDUALS	17
1. THE HAMIDIAN MASSACRES	19
2. PIERRE QUILLARD (1864–1912) <i>Poet and playwright who loved classical culture and sacrificed his work and career for the cause of the Armenians</i>	21
3. BERNARD LAZARE (1865–1903) <i>Armenian suffering as a mirror of Jewish persecution</i>	29
4. JEAN JAURÈS (1859–1914) <i>Prophet of human rights</i>	39
5. ALPHONSE CILLIÈRE (1861–1946) <i>Diplomat enamoured of Turkish culture and passionate about justice for the Armenians</i>	47
6. ESSAD BEY <i>Forerunner of the Muslim Righteous of 1915–16</i>	55
7. ROSE LAMBERT (1878–1974) <i>Compassionate evangelism</i>	61
THE OTTOMAN RIGHTEOUS	65
8. THE MUSLIM RIGHTEOUS? <i>Reflections on a denomination: Religion, compassion and social justice</i>	67

CONTENTS

9. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	75
<i>Senior Ottoman officials who refused to take part in the annihilation of the Armenians</i>	
10. HAMID BEY (D.1919)	79
<i>Vali of Diyarbekir</i>	
11. HÜSEYİN NESİMÎ BEY (1868–1915)	83
<i>Kaymakam of Lice, faithful to his religion</i>	
12. ALI SABİT ES-SÜVEYDİ	87
<i>Deputy kaymakam of Beşiri</i>	
13. HILMI BEY (D.1919)	89
<i>Mutasarrif of Mardin, faithful to his religion</i>	
14. ALI SUAD BEY	93
<i>The 'Armenian Patriarch'</i>	
15. FAİK ALİ OZANSOY (1876–1950)	97
<i>Poet and mutasarrif of Kütahya: for the sake of family honour</i>	
16. HASAN MAZHAR BEY	99
<i>Vali of Angora and president of the Mazhar Commission</i>	
17. MEHMET CELAL BEY (1863–1926)	105
<i>The 'Turkish Oskar Schindler'</i>	
18. MUSTAFA AGHA AZİZOĞLU (D.1921)	111
<i>Faithful friend of the German Bethesda Mission for the Blind</i>	
TRIBAL CLANS	115
19. THE CHARISMATIC ALEVIS OF DERSİM	117
20. THE KURDS	121
<i>A rare but valiant defence of the Armenians</i>	
21. THE ZAZAS	125
<i>Protectors of the Armenians</i>	
22. THE YAZİDİS OF JABAL SİNJAR	127
<i>A persecuted community who welcomed the Armenians</i>	
23. SHEİKH HAMU SHIRU	131
<i>An exemplary Yazidi protector of the Armenians</i>	
24. FAİZ EL-GHUSEİN	135
<i>The Great Arab Revolt and testimony on the genocide</i>	

CONTENTS

25. TESTIMONY OF GENERAL JEAN-MICHEL BİLEMDJIAN	143
<i>The story of his father Ovhannes and his rescue by a Righteous Arab</i>	
26. ABDUL HALİM ÇELEBİ	147
<i>Compassion among the Sufi</i>	
FAMILIES	151
27. TESTIMONIES REVEALING A RESPECT FOR OR COMPROMISE WITH THE CONCEPT OF 'ADÂLA	153
28. THE SOMOUNDJIAN FAMILY	163
29. THE KAZARIAN AND SAKOYAN FAMILIES	167
30. THE DERDERIAN FAMILY	173
31. THE DAMLAMIAN FAMILY	177
THE WESTERN RIGHTEOUS	183
32. HUMANITARIANS	185
<i>Missionaries, members of religious orders, health workers</i>	
33. MONSIGNOR ANGELO MARIA DOLCI (1867–1939) AND POPE BENEDICT XV (1914–22)	187
<i>The 'Angel of the Armenians' and the 'Pope of Peace'</i>	
34. PAUL BERRON (1887–1970)	195
<i>'Action Chrétienne en Orient' (ACO)</i>	
35. CLARENCE USSHER (1870–1955)	201
<i>American doctor and missionary in Van</i>	
36. TACY ATKINSON (1870–1937)	207
HERBERT ATKINSON (D.1915)	
<i>The sacrifice of a life, the testimony of a journal</i>	
37. HENRY H. RIGGS (1875–1943)	211
<i>Evangelist missionary and witness to the genocide and acts of humanity</i>	
38. BERTHA MORLEY (1878–1973)	217
<i>Missionary and protector of Armenian girls</i>	
39. RAY TRAVIS (1899–1965)	221
<i>From the defence of Ayntab to the establishment of the Jbeil orphanage</i>	

CONTENTS

40. BEATRICE ROHNER (1876–1947) <i>Swiss missionary who tried to negotiate with the Young Turks</i>	223
41. JAKOB KÜNZLER (1871–1949) AND ELIZABETH KÜNZLER-BENDER <i>'In the Land of Blood and Tears'</i>	229
42. ANNA HEDVIG BÜLL (1887–1981) <i>From Haapsalu to St Petersburg</i>	237
43. MARIA JACOBSEN (1882–1960) KAREN MARIE PETERSEN (1881–?) <i>A charitable and effective partnership</i>	245
44. KAREN JEPPE (1876–1935) <i>The 'Danish Mother of the Armenians'</i>	255
45. BODIL KATHARINE BIØRN <i>Healthcare pioneer and witness in words and images</i>	263
46. JOHANNES LEPSIUS (1858–1926) <i>'Guardian angel of the Armenian people'</i>	269
47. ALEXANDRA TOLSTOY (1884–1979) <i>Continuing the humanitarian legacy of Leo Tolstoy</i>	275
48. AARON AARONSOHN (1876–1919) ALEXANDER AARONSOHN (1888–1948) SARAH AARONSOHN (1890–1917) <i>A genuine empathy with the Armenians</i>	279
DIPLOMATS	287
49. FERNAND ROQUE-FERRIER (1859–1909) <i>Originator of the right of humanitarian intervention</i>	289
50. GIACOMO GORRINI (1859–1950) <i>A diplomatic mission to support the Armenians</i>	297
51. HENRY MORGENTHAU (1856–1946) <i>Denouncer of Turkey's 'crimes against humanity and civilization'</i>	301
52. LESLIE A. DAVIS (1876–1960) <i>American consul moved by compassion to overcome his preconceptions</i>	307
53. OSCAR S. HEIZER (1869–1956) <i>American consul general and witness to savagery and greed</i>	315

CONTENTS

54. GERMANY: A SPECIAL CASE <i>Germany and the Armenian Genocide</i>	323
55. HARRY STUERMER <i>Putting ethics before patriotism</i>	329
56. WALTER RÖSSLER (1871–1929) <i>German consul who went above and beyond the call of duty</i>	333
57. ARMIN T. WEGNER (1886–1978) <i>Righteous on behalf of the Armenians and the Jews</i>	341
THE MILITARY	349
58. REAR ADMIRAL LOUIS-JOSEPH PIVET (1855–1924) AND VICE ADMIRAL LOUIS DARTIGE DU FOURNET (1856–1940) <i>Two men of conscience</i>	351
59. ABBÉ JULES CHAPERON (1877–1951) <i>Army chaplain and pioneering humanitarian</i>	361
JURISTS OF COMMITMENT	369
60. ANDRÉ MANDELSTAM (1869–1949) <i>Russian Jewish lawyer who championed protection of the Armenians</i>	371
61. RAPHAEL LEMKIN (1900–59) <i>Jewish jurist who coined the concept of genocide</i>	377
THE RIGHTEOUS AT A DISTANCE OF PLACE OR TIME	385
62. LEADING FIGURES IN NEAR EAST RELIEF	387
63. ANTONY KRAFFT-BONNARD (1869–1945) <i>From humanitarian dedication to political commitment</i>	391
64. JAMES BRYCE (1838–1922) <i>'Proof in hand': the reality of genocide</i>	397
65. ANATOLE FRANCE (1844–1924) <i>The long struggle for human rights, the Armenian cause and peace</i>	403
66. JACQUES DE MORGAN (1857–1924) <i>A dream of Eurasia, a passion for Armenia</i>	411

CONTENTS

67. AHMET REFIK ALTINAY (1881–1937)	415
<i>A passion for history and historic truth</i>	
68. FRANZ WERFEL (1890–1945)	419
<i>From Armenian resistance on Musa Dagh to Jewish resistance in the ghettos</i>	
69. FRIDTJOF NANSEN (1861–1930)	425
<i>Polymath who devoted his exceptional talents to aiding survivors of the genocide expelled by Turkey and all stateless peoples</i>	
EPILOGUE: THE RIGHTEOUS, AVENGERS AND BRINGERS OF JUSTICE	435
70. THE TRIALS OF THE YOUNG TURKS	437
71. SOGHOMON TEHLIRIAN (1896–1960)	439
<i>Avenger of the Armenians</i>	
CONCLUSION	451
<i>Index</i>	459

HÜSEYİN NESİMÎ BEY (1868–1915)

Kaymakam of Lice, faithful to his religion

Hüseyin Nesimî Bey was born in 1868 at Girit in the province of Sivas. Imbued with the humanist principles of the Bektashi Sufi dervish order, which seem to have foreshadowed the Declaration of the Rights of Man, he himself prefigured the Turkish Righteous. Sufi philosophy was central to his life, and in it he saw a solution to the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Involved in revolutionary activities during his student days, he then distanced himself from politics before returning to favour and active politics once again. After a modest posting as a government official, he worked for himself in Constantinople.

In January 1915, he became mayor of Lice, the administrative centre of the *kaza* of the same name, a small town not far from Diyarbekir that counted among its population nearly 3,000 Armenians and some 2,000 Jacobite Syrian Christians. Another 3,000 or so Armenians were scattered throughout the mountains and valleys of the *kaza*. Hüseyin Nesimi's politics, always tinged with humanism, brought him into rapid and inevitable conflict with Dr Reshid Bey, who was appointed *vali* of Diyarbekir on 25 March 1915. When he received orders from Dr Reshid to exterminate the Armenians, he responded: 'I will have no part in this sin.' He then demanded a written order, meanwhile persisting in keeping the Armenian population in the town. In Nesimi's view, religious law allowed the killing only of those who were disloyal to the state and gave no sanction under any circumstances to the massacre of innocents. Initially, therefore, he felt in a position to delay the departure

of the deportation convoys. Having been unable to prevent the departure of the first convoy, he even went so far as to accompany it in person in order to protect the Armenians from attacks by armed gangs. He also managed to save some of the Armenian women from deportation by arranging sham marriages with elderly Muslim men.

Nesimi's vision was very different from the secular and nationalist agenda of the Young Turks, who put the nation above all else. In his correspondence with Dr Reshid, he accused him of being as cruel as Genghis Khan. In response to Nesimi's refusal to carry out his orders, Reshid—who was known to be one of those responsible for the Special Organization, which not only oversaw the extermination of the Armenians but also the murders of Muslim officials who refused to obey government orders—summoned him to appear before him. He then dispatched his notoriously loyal Circassian bodyguard, Harun, to intercept Nesimî en route and kill him. Obeying his orders, on 15 June 1915, Harun threw Nesimi's lifeless body into a ditch near the village of Karaz. The spot subsequently became known as *Türbe-i-kaymakam*, or 'the mayor's grave'. Nesimi's body was never returned to his family.

Nesimi's fate is emblematic of that of the handful of Turkish government officials whose refusal to obey inhumane orders cost them their lives. In the Diyarbekir region, the mayors of Çermik, Savur, Silvan, Mardin, Midyat, Derik and Beşiri were dismissed from their posts, and the latter two were murdered. It also demonstrates how government denial of responsibility for the crimes went hand in glove with the murders themselves, as state propaganda accused Armenian rebels of committing the murder. Following Nesimi's death, the Armenians of Lice were deported and massacred.

Nesimî was not alone in putting up resistance to Reshid: there were many officials in the province who refused to obey his orders. But Reshid would stop at nothing to ensure the plan to exterminate the Armenians was carried out, including the elimination of officials who refused to cooperate. Following the murder of Nesimî, he sent another of his loyal henchmen, Ibrahim Bedreddin, to Lice to 'supervise' the massacre of the Armenians, starting with the massacre of the elite of the community and moving on to the decimation of the deportation convoys. In November 1918, as we have seen,

Reshid was arrested and imprisoned. While awaiting charges brought by the special tribunal set up after the Armistice, he managed to escape and go into hiding. He committed suicide in February 1919, when he was on the verge of being recaptured.

Following the proclamation of the Turkish Republic by Mustafa Kemal in 1923, Reshid was rehabilitated and declared a 'martyr'.

During preparations for the commemoration of the centenary of the Armenian genocide at the Free University of Brussels, a tribute was due to be paid to Hüseyin Nesimî Bey. The lawyer Grégoire Jakhian (son of Maître Édouard Jakhian, president of the Brussels Bar, whose dream it had been to give due credit to the Muslim Righteous who had protected Armenians during the genocide, many of them at the cost of their own lives) planned to arrange a meeting between the son of a woman saved by Hüseyin Nesimî Bey, to whom she had recently revealed the name of her rescuer, and Nesimi's grandson, who lived in Istanbul; at the last minute, unfortunately, the latter was forced to cancel his travel plans.

Sources and further reading

Sources

Nesimî, Abidin, *Yılların İçinden*, Istanbul: Gözlem, 1977.

Studies

Göcek, Fatma Müge, 'In Search of the "Righteous People": The Case of the Armenian Massacres of 1915', in Andrieu, Gensburger and Sémelin, *Resisting Genocide*, pp. 61–9.

Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, pp. 363, 368.