

Ottoman Empire and Armenian Genocide

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The beginning of the 20th century brings the first non-colonial genocide when a population of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire was exterminated during World War I, in 1915. The young Turk Regime prosecuted hundreds of Armenians. Many of them were hung in the streets of Istanbul while a massive deportation of the population was entertained. Many were dispersed in the desert where it is believed that more than a million perished or were murdered on the way.

The Armenians were a minority sect in Turkey, in this vast Ottoman Empire where there have been sporadic prosecutions over centuries. The first World-War has noted a Turkish government prosecuting the Armenian population by nationalism following a governmental decree. Massacres have started in 1894-1896 while the Turks drove the Armenians from their homes to massacre them in an inhumanly way. It may have been near one million of them who were killed or marched to their death in the desert. Others were forced to convert to the Muslim traditions to escape death. They had to renounce their faith in the Armenian culture.

Many around the world spoke about those atrocities especially when reported by some famous historians like Arnold J Toynbee, but it is really at the end of the century, around the 1970's that much has been written about the killing and the atrocities until the society approached it like a human catastrophe. The mass murder of almost an entire population was indeed qualified as a genocide toward humanity. It took a convention in 1948 at the United Nations to declare it loudly through an international court.

Some will call it the first genocide of the 20th century, referring to the physical annihilation of 1.5 million of Armenian Christian people living in the Empire from the spring 1915 to the autumn 1916. At least 700,000 or perhaps 1.2 million died in massacre or through individual killings or by starvation or ill treatment. Others were killed by the Ottoman military forces. They forced the Arminian victims to march from the city of Kharput to an execution site outside of the city (March 1915-June 1915). Armenian

children would lie on the street of the town. These facts were reported by nurses working with the German sanitary Corps and American families. This was the physical annihilation of an Armenian Christian population in the spring of 1915. Many children were lucky to be able to join the refugee camp of a Relief organization, in Alexandroupoulos, Greece.

Armenian families set up tents in refugee camp and different organizations like the German Sanitary Corps. The term Genocide has its codification in the international law on mass murder of these Armenians in 1915-1916. It was coined by a lawyer Raphael Lemkin, and it was adopted as a resolution by the United Nations, when facts on the crimes of the Ottoman Empire authorities were revealed. They create a legal protection for the group and concluded that the Ottoman Government controlled the young Turks organization to solidify Muslim Turkish dominance in the region of central and eastern Anatolia by eliminating the Armenian presence, in the region.

Such genocidal atrocities were often perpetrated within the context of war but for the Armenians, it was closely related to the first World War because of the fear in the Ottoman Empire to see Armenians used by the enemy to fight against them. It is on that basis that the mass deportation, from the northern East regions of the empire, started in the spring of 1915. Later, it was expended in all the provinces regardless the possible combat zones. Armenians died while being deported or prior to reach the destination: the desert in the Northern and Eastern portion of Syria as well as the desert in the northern portions of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The conditions were difficult, and many died from dehydration, starvation, and diseased exposure during the displacement. Thousand of children were taken from their family and placed forcibly in places where they were imposed conversion to the Islamic religion.

Henry Morgenthau Sr, American Ambassador in the country, was deeply troubled by the atrocities committed against the Armenians and participated in assuring that the world knew about such committed injustice. It was reported to President Woodrow Wilson. Some Hollywood celebrities and the American society participated in fundraisers to collect over one (1) billions of dollars to support Armenian refugees and orphans.

The Ottoman Empire is known as the Turkish Empire between the 14th and 20th centuries englobing the Southeast of Europe, West Asia, and North Africa. Later in the 16th and 17th century, area in the southern region of Central Europe become included to the territories. It started in northwestern Anatolia in the town of Sogut (now Bilecik) by the tribal leader Turkoman. The empire extended during the 14th century, after the

conquest of the Balkans to cross into Europe. The Ottomans ended the Byzantine Empire with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Mehmed II. The Ottoman Empire mark the peak of its power under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent at the beginning of the 17th century. The empire was at the center of interactions between the Middle East and Europe for almost six centuries until the 1750's when it fell behind European rivals like the Habsburg and Russian empires against which they suffered severe military defeats during the 18th and 19th centuries, and then losing territories. This is when the Empire start struggling with internal dissidents especially, the Arab Revolt. Then started the genocide of the Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. In defeat after World War I, the southern territories were lost and divided between the United Kingdom and France. Later the Mustafa Kemal Atatürk fought the allied forces to lead an independent Republic of Turkey with the abolition of the Ottoman Monarchy.

The Turkish word "Ottoman" refers to the military elite of the empire. It comes from the tribal name of Osman (14th Century) while the term "Turk" was used to refer to the Anatolian peasant. Nowadays, an educated and urban Turkish speaker is called a "Rumi" (Roman) meaning a resident in the Balkans and Anatolia. In the western Europe, the names Ottoman Empire, Turkish Empire and Turkey were used interchangeably but historians avoid the term Turkey, Turks and Turkish when referring to Ottomans.

In the modern historiography, there is a direct connection between the fast Ottoman military advance and the consequences of the Black Death, Bubonic plague outbreak of the 14th century between 1347 and 1349. The initial Ottoman conquests were due to the plague outbreaks which facilitated their territorial expansion. The slave hunting was the main economic driving force behind the Ottoman conquests. Many battles allowed the conquest of Constantinople, ending the Byzantine Empire but the Eastern Orthodox Church maintained its autonomy in accepting the Ottoman authority.

The Albanian resistance was the major obstacle to an Ottoman expansion on the Italian peninsula (1456). They expanded in Egypt and created a naval presence to facilitate their extension under the reign of the Sultans. They conquered the kingdom of Hungary and other Central European territories in Transylvania, Moldavia (1536) until they reach the Persian Gulf, gaining control of the Mesopotamia. The Ottomans remained in power until the Russo-Turkish War in (1768-1774). A peace treaty was signed involving Western Armenia, Amasya, Western Kurdistan, Western

Georgia, falling into Ottoman hands while the Southern parts of Dagestan, Eastern Armenia, Eastern Georgia, and Azerbaijan remained Persian.

The Ottoman Empire became a dominant force controlling most of the Mediterranean Sea and become involved in multi-continental religious wars with Spain and Portugal. They became the leaders of all Muslims while the Iberians were leaders of the Christian crusaders. The success of the Ottoman war machine was comparable to the Roman Empire.

In the second half of the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire was faced to inflation and rising costs of warfare forcing transformations in its political and military institutions, to permit them to adapt to the challenges. This was a period of stagnation the Empire starts seeing its decline. New wars with the Portuguese and new trade with Yemen for the sale of Yemeni coffee became a commodity. Cairo became open for commerce. Russia expanded into Volga and Caspian region.

When the Ottomans decided to conquer Venetian Cyprus, 50,000 Christians died and 180,000 were enslaved (1570) and the Ottomans lost 50,000 soldiers while the Holy League mostly Spanish and Venetian fleets won a major battle at Lepanto (1571). 30,000 Turks were killed, and 200 ships were destroyed. It was a blow to the invincibility of the Ottoman Empire. The knights of Malta were victorious over the Ottoman invaders. A peace treaty was signed in 1573 allowing the Ottomans to consolidate their position in North Africa.

The reigns of the Sultans Murad III (1574-1595) and Mehmed IV (1648-1687) are represented by a unique surviving Ottoman galley (Tarihi Kadirga) in Istanbul, but in contrast the Habsburg frontier with Austria settled in a long Turkish war which needed an Ottoman Infantry equipped with firearms. Indiscipline and rebellions among the troops were seen commonly. Their armies suffer crushing defeats and a new treaty of Nasuh Pasha have them lost the entire Caucasus territories. During this Cretan war, losses totaled 31,000 Venetian soldiers and 119,000 Turkish soldiers. Iran was recaptured under the reign of Murad IV (1623-1640).

King Charles XII of Sweden became a welcome ally following the defeat of the Russians at the battle of Poltava in 1709 in Central Ukraine. He is the one who persuaded the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III to declare war on Russia with a victory in Moldavia. The Austro-Russian-Turkish war (1735-1739) ended by the treaty of Belgrade helping the Ottoman Empire to recover its northern territories Bona, Habsburg, Serbia, Oltenia. After this treaty, the Ottoman Empire was able to enjoy a generation of peace as Austria and

Russia were forced to deal with the rise of Prussia. So many wars and so many treaties to control all these countries at war.

Salim III (1789-1807) want to modernize his armies, but he found a resistance in the religious leadership. So many conflicts and so many countries involved: The siege of Acropolis (1826-1827) during the Greek War of Independence, the Serbian Revolution (1804-1815), The French invasion of Algiers (1830), the Russians marching on Constantinople's, the Egyptian -Ottoman war (1831-1833), the British Empire and the Austrian Empires helping ... etc. So many conflicts in this part of the world. By the mid-19th century, the Ottoman Empire is called th "Sick man of Europe" and Serbia, Moldovia and Wallachia want their independence (1860-1870).

A decline in this vast empire sees reforms in the army, changes in the parliament and reforms. Replacement of religious laws, decriminalization of homosexuality. This brings to us a taste of the actual politics in the world in which we are evolving. Constitutions re voted and replaced. Fights for religious rights reforms are implemented to change teaching and new learning in Arabic and Islamic theology are presented. Muslims, Christians, Jews are looking at the future differently and hopefully in a new society. More equitable. Christians and Jews gained protection and recognition.

The Crimean war (1853-1856) is like the apogee of this declining Ottoman Empire and most of the European powers rendering the Ottoman tributary of other countries in quest of foreign loans. Ethnic Migration of 200,000 Crimean tartars to the Ottoman Empire and 700.000 Circassians migrated to Turkey. A Bulgarian uprising was suppressed by the Ottoman army killing 100,000 and the outcome of the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878) provided to many countries their independence (Serbia, Montenegro, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria). The British sent troops to Egypt in 1882 and the German started training session for the Ottoman army during the last years of the Empire.

In 1894 to 1896, 300,000 Armenians were killed throughout the Empire, and this is what bought us to report this genocide (Hamedan massacre). Muslims migrated to Anatolia but after the first Balkan war (1912-1913), The Empire lost all its Balkan territories, and it is estimated that 5.5 million Muslims died in Southern Europe. The defeat and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (1908-1922) began with the second Constitutional Era, moment of hope with the new Young Turk Revolution. The Ottoman empire entered World War I in a combined German-Ottoman attack (Central Powers) and was defeated on the Black Sea coast of the Russian Empire and its allies France and the British Empire 1914).

The Armenians Genocide was then the result of the Ottoman Government's deportation and ethnic cleaning especially after the battle of Sarikamish (1914-1915) against the Russian imperial army where around 1 million were killed. The genocide was carried out in two phases through massacre and subjection of forced labor followed by deportation of women, children and elderly or infirm on death marches toward the Syrian desert. Military personal will escort the deportees and deprived them of food or water. They were frequently robbed, raped and killed. Greek and Assyrians were also objects of these mistreatments.

The Sharifian Army of Hussein and the Hashemites with British Egyptian Expeditionary Force successfully fought and expelled the Ottoman military army. An agreement (Sykes-Picot) divided the Middle East in mandated territories. Mohamed VI was the last sultan of the empire (1922) and the Turks become independent on 29 October 1923 with a new capital of Ankara.

For many historians, the Ottoman Empire was in essence a continuation of the Eastern Roman Empire with a Turkish language in the Islam religion, but others simply think that it reflects a "jihad state", dedicated to expanding the Muslim world.

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