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Mass Crimes in Kars (1920-1921) and Smyrna (1922) – Eyewitness Testimony

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Abstract: *The article presents and analyzes the anti-Armenian policies of the Turkish military and political leadership in Kars (1920-1921) and Smyrna (1922). The systematic killings of the unarmed population were marked by extreme brutality, including mass rapes and ritualized murders. Data is combined from ethnographic fieldwork, materials from the National Archives of Armenia, memoirs, and manuscript records from the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute.*

Key words: Kars, Smyrna, Genocide, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Armenians, Greeks

Introduction

Aftermath of the 1918 Armistice of Mudros, the Ottoman Empire was forced to relinquish its hold on the occupied Transcaucasian territories. Yet, amidst this withdrawal, Turkish interests actively fostered the creation of Muslim republics within these very regions. In the former territory of Kars, the “Southwest Caucasus Republic” was established. On April 10, 1919, British General Thomson issued a decisive declaration, dissolving the government of this republic and asserting that the Paris Peace Conference would adjudicate the final disposition of Kars and other disputed territories. On April 19, 1919, the British transferred power to the government of the Republic of Armenia. On April 23, the British were replaced by Armenian forces. Following the annexation of Kars to Armenia, the return of Armenians to Kars began and continued until August 1920.

In addition to the return of locals who had been forced to leave their native region as a result of the 1918 Turkish offensive, the government of the Republic of Armenia

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also initiated a policy of resettling Western Armenians in Kars. They had found refuge in Eastern Armenia and elsewhere following the Armenian Genocide.

According to preliminary data, by August 1920, approximately 80,000 Armenians, 2,500 Yezidis, and 3,000 Muslim residents had returned to the Vanand (Kars) province. A significant portion of these returnees were Western Armenian refugees. Separate data regarding the population of the city of Kars alone is not yet available. It is worth noting that during the days leading up to the city's fall, a large part of the province's population had concentrated there.

Ninety-five percent of the province's population was rural, a condition stemming from the severe socio-economic situation. Besides Armenians and Yezidis, Kurds, Turkmens, Lezgins, Russian Molokans, Greeks, and others also resided in the province. While the government of the Republic of Armenia was occupied with the issues of resettling thousands of refugees, on June 6, 1920, the government of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, led by Mustafa Kemal, decided to launch an attack on Armenia. On September 28, 1920, Turkish forces invaded the territory of the Republic of Armenia, with the Kars province bearing the initial brunt of the attack.

Almost in parallel with the British returning Kars to the Armenians, the Greco-Turkish War began on May 15, 1919. Greek forces, under the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference, took Smyrna under their control. On August 10, 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed, according to which Smyrna was to pass to Greece and be administered for five years.

However, the Kemalist government in Ankara did not recognize this treaty. The war continued, and the balance of power shifted in favor of the Kemalists, culminating in Greece's defeat. The population of Smyrna, including Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Turks, and others, was distributed in separate neighborhoods. Greeks and Armenians constituted the predominant majority of Smyrna's population.¹

Thus, both the cities of Kars and Smyrna were located in war zones, and the fall of both proved fateful for the local populations.

The purpose of the article is to investigate and present the mass atrocities committed by the Turkish army, using the examples of these two cities, Kars and Smyrna, taking into account the chronological sequence, which demonstrates the perpetration of similar atrocities by the same regime in two different cities.

The Fortress Became Orphaned: Memories of Eyewitness-Survivors

Kars province was always a target of the Turkish authorities. Due to national and religious, socio-economic, and genocidal policies of continuous persecution,

¹ Kharatian, 1995, 2012; Poghosyan & Ghmajyan, 2023; Virabyan & Virabyan, 2024; Hovhannisyanyan, 2024.

the number of Armenians in that area steadily declined. On October 30, 1920, Turkish troops, commanded by Kazim Karabekir Pasha, entered Kars. After being pushed into a forced war and powerless against the advancing Kemalist army following devastating battles, a portion of the Armenian army regrouped in the city of Kars. It was decided to surrender the city to the Turks without resistance. Despite the presence of strong defensive fortifications and a large number of troops, the military leadership did not take any measures to defend the city. These included the first, third, fourth, and fifth Armenian divisions, the garrison of Sarighamish, the fortress guard troops of Kars, separate battalions, several cavalry units from Alexandrapol, and groups of mauzerists. Everyone was in a panic. Colonel Hovhannes Mazmanian, the commander of the First Division, committed suicide. His body was transported to the Kars railway station in a wagon attached to a locomotive. The station was crowded with carriages full of refugees waiting for the trains to depart, while a few locomotives were being prepared with fuel. The Turkish army entered the city from the southwest, intensifying the turmoil and turning the exodus into a more frantic flight. Many abandoned their few possessions, and women, children, and the elderly fled in desperation, hoping to escape with their lives.² It seemed that the Armenian civilians would remain safe; however, they soon became the direct target. First, Kurdish horsemen invaded the city of Kars, committing various mass atrocities and killings. Civilians who could not hide were shot indiscriminately, while only women who managed to take shelter in American orphanages survived the violence.³

With the fall of Kars, brutal days began for the Armenian population of the province, where neither women nor children were spared. Horrible things happened in Kars, atrocities beyond human imagination were committed by Kemalist officers, soldiers, local Turks, and Kurds.

Sargis Harutyunian, an eyewitness-survivor born in 1907 in Katnajor, Lori province, Armenia, recounts:

On October 30, Kars fell... The Turkish army arrived and seized the city like a bloodthirsty dragon. People saw the dark ring of the enemy as Turkish soldiers eagerly eyed Armenian women and girls, sharpening their claws. The night of October 31 loomed heavily over the city, enveloping the unsettled population in its dark wings. The cries of children, women, and girls suffering from violence grew louder, and terror spread as the Turkish army entered the city. Within a day, the once-magnificent fortified city was devastated; most of its thirty thousand residents were massacred, and the remainder were deported deep into Turkey.⁴

² Hakobian, 2022: 172-173.

³ Harutyunian, 2019: 85.

⁴ Harutyunian, 1980: 31-32.

In his memoirs, Paruyr Hakobian describes the tragic scene of the city's fall:

In the morning, Turkish cannons were shelling the city. At dawn, thousands of residents fled frantically to the Chakhmakh valley, while some headed to Mazra. Amid the chaos, families became separated: fathers lost their children, children lost their parents, and siblings were torn apart. The cries, screams, and wails were so deafening that they even drowned out the sounds of the explosions.⁵

In his novel *Yerkir Nairi*, Armenian poet, writer, and public activist Yeghishe Charents (1897-1937) writes about the Turkish invasion, the fall of the city, the exodus of the population, and the massacre:

Like a vast herd of tens and hundreds of thousands, the terrorized people of the city were expelled, some taking the station road and others the highway. The city's houses began to burn one after another, and amid the fire and smoke, the retreating Nairian soldiers were taking away what they could. Indeed, the city had fallen at that moment, but it was not yet fully realized because the enemy had not yet cut off the escape routes, and it was still possible to flee.⁶

Charents describes how the “people of the lower and upper neighborhoods” of the city had begun to leave, leaving a small number of residents behind. He also refers to the influx of people from the regions: Nevertheless, the city was still filled with thousands of people in chaotic, disorganized groups, mostly ‘savages’ fleeing from the regions, with their tumultuous lines seeming endless.⁷

When the Turks first entered Kars, the troops and mob began to loot and kill Armenians indiscriminately, regardless of gender or age, with approximately 15,000 falling victim to the massacre. The population was subjected to extreme cruelty. Turkish soldiers, having seized the Kars station, slaughtered women, girls, children, the elderly, and the sick in the trains. Those on the roofs of the wagons were shot with rifles. By that time, two trains had managed to depart for Alexandropol (Gyumri).⁸

On January 27, 1921, Romanian citizen Vasil Ionesco wrote a letter to the representative office of Soviet Armenia in Menshevik Georgia, reporting that he had been taken captive by the Turks on October 30, 1920, and was released a month later, subsequently traveling to Kars. He learned from Turkish doctor Nuri Bey that eight thousand Armenians (women, children, and men) had been killed in the city, but based on his observations, he believed the actual number of those killed was over

⁵ Hakobian, 2022: 172-173.

⁶ Charents, 1977: 168.

⁷ Charents, 1977: 170.

⁸ Alexandryan, 1986: 31.

10,000 to 12,000.⁹ According to various sources, the massacres in the city lasted for three to five days. After three days, the pasha ordered the removal of the corpses from the city.¹⁰ However, the killings continued partially; shootings were heard throughout the city, and women's voices could be heard at night. All warehouses, basements, and shelters were filled with the corpses of children, women, and young people. There were entire families in which no one survived. Young people hiding in basements, under couches, and in various other places were either taken out, killed, held captive, or went missing. Most of those hiding on the outskirts of the city were massacred indiscriminately.¹¹

The killings in the city were also ritualized. Sergey Tairov's execution exemplifies Turkish brutality: he was first bound hand and foot, then beheaded by a Turkish kasab (butcher) who had previously worked with him. The mass massacres in Kars and surrounding villages continued for two weeks, resulting in a death toll that was countless.¹² During the horrific three days of massacres, there were also mass burnings outside the city. In an open field, kerosene was poured over Armenian young men, who were then burned alive.¹³

During those bloody days, Aram Yesayants was hiding with a few people in the hospital, where his wife, Vera Petrovna Soka-Yesayants, was an eyewitness. Vera, a senior nurse at the 4th American Hospital, along with other nurses from the same hospital – Kasakovskaya, Aghamalian (who resembled a Russian), and Shishenin – spent five to six days in the city's basements, trying to provide medical aid to the wounded. In some houses, they encountered around 30 bodies of men, women, and children. Over several days, they witnessed the killing of approximately 3,000 people.¹⁴ On the 8th and 9th days after the capture of Kars, Yesayants witnessed the bodies of killed civilians being transported in carts. Over those four days, he counted about 50 carts full of corpses.¹⁵ For twenty-three days, corpses were transported out of the city using carts and trucks. The surviving Armenians were imprisoned; some were killed, while others were forced into hard labor. They were either tied to carts or made to carry the corpses of their slain compatriots.¹⁶ The Turks primarily targeted the male population, and Armenian soldiers were subjected to severe violence. Turkish forces who entered Kars stripped the captured Armenian soldiers and sent them to Erzerum to be slaughtered en route, similar to the treatment of peasants

⁹ Sargsian, 1964: 498; Nersisyan, 2005: 146.

¹⁰ HAA, F. 114, list 2, dossier 43.

¹¹ Avetisian, 2006: 102.

¹² Sargsian, 1964: 498.

¹³ Avetisian, 2006: 103.

¹⁴ HAA, F. 114, list 2, dossier 43.

¹⁵ HAA, F. 114, list 2, dossier 43.

¹⁶ Avetisian, 2006: 101-103.

from the Alexandropol region in 1918. The entire Armenian population was disarmed, while “non-Armenians” were armed.¹⁷

Five days after capturing Kars, the Turks sent approximately 1,500 captured soldiers to Erzerum. Additionally, around two thousand arrested young men were transported in 18 wagons. Some survivors of the massacre were sent to Sarighamish. By December 9, about 30,000 men aged 15 to 60 had been forcibly removed from the city and its surroundings, leaving almost no male Armenians remaining in Kars.¹⁸ Before being transported to Erzerum, Armenian men endured unspeakable torture, violence, and hard labor. Many captives were killed in a gruesome manner along the way before reaching Erzerum. At night, around five people were taken out of the train shelter, ostensibly to be assigned to work or presented to the “leader,” but they were instead executed. At the stations of Turkish villages, Turkish women greeted the trains full of Armenian prisoners with hatred, attacking and killing them with stones, sticks, and axes.¹⁹ Detainees were not given bread and water for days, causing swelling of the tongue for many of them, they were completely stripped off clothes, and there were also cases of men being raped.²⁰

After the mass killings, Karabekir Pasha instructed Hamazasp Norhatian, the mayor of Kars, Karapet Grigorian (Sev Karo), and Dr. Gerasim Ghazanchian (Dr. Karo) to visit the homes of Armenians, identify the survivors, assess the damage, and compile a list of the affected individuals. He requested that these lists be submitted within 15 days, supposedly to address compensation for the damages. The committee completed their task and presented the lists to the Pasha, but they were immediately arrested. Later that same day, November 15, 1920, under orders from Karabekir Pasha, Hamazasp Norhatian, Karapet Grigorian, and Dr. Gerasim Ghazanchian were hanged in Khapan Square, Kars.²¹

In this way, the Turks obtained information about the surviving Armenians and continued their campaign of violence and deportation. The reprisals against Armenian men in Kars served several purposes: suppressing any potential resistance, inflicting unchecked violence upon women and children, and enforcing forced labor.

Blocking the Retreat Routes: The Massacre at “Kars Gorge”

Kars eyewitnesses often recounted the horrors of the massacre in the gorge. After the retreat of the Armenian military units and the capture of Kars by Kemalist troops, the city’s Armenian population endured unprecedented terror. Consisting mainly of

¹⁷ *Haratch*, 1920: 4.

¹⁸ HAA, F. 114, list 2, dossier 43.

¹⁹ Avetisyan, 2006: 101-102.

²⁰ Nersisyan, 2005: 145-146.

²¹ Minasian, 2014: 206.

women, children, and the elderly, the population fled in panic towards the valley, which was the former highway to Alexandropol. This area housed military posts and orphanages under American control. People fled in any manner possible – by carriage, automobile, horse, or donkey – many carrying their belongings and children on their backs, holding their children’s hands, or even losing their children in the chaos. They sought protection or hoped to reach Alexandropol. People and animals were packed together in an unimaginable state of disorder. The road was so congested that it was impossible to move forward.²²

Taking advantage of the defenseless civilian population moving into the gorge, the Kemalists carried out brutal massacres. Askyars and Kurdish thugs quickly seized the heights on both sides of the gorge and mercilessly gunned down the people with machine guns. Those at the front who managed to escape or reach the American orphanage were spared, but most of those in the middle and at the end of the crowd were killed. The shooting was relentless, with bullets raining down like hail. There was a narrow, swaying wooden bridge in the gorge, known locally as the “Hair Bridge.” As people crossed this bridge, many fell into the river, which then carried away human corpses and various belongings.²³ The Turks had blocked the only road leading from the gorge to Alexandropol and had captured the village of Mazra, the station, the bridges in the gorge, the American Committee orphanages, and the military headquarters building.²⁴ During this siege, the people were massacred. Eyewitnesses referred to the scene in Kars Gorge as “hell” or “hellish chaos.”²⁵

Many children were killed in the gorge and drowned in the Karsachai River. Eyewitness Srбуhi Andreasian (born in 1900 in Kars), whose husband was killed by the Turks, was caught in gunfire with her child. While fleeing with others and holding the little girl, askyars shot the child in the head and injured the woman’s hand (which remained permanently deformed). As she continued forward, she found her child dead from the gunshot wound.²⁶

Eyewitness Garegin Hovsepyants also provides details of the Gorge massacres. Following instructions from General Pirumian, he climbed up to the Kars fortress to report the Armenian side’s surrender and the need to save the civilians. Dressed in clergy attire, including a clergy head covering and the church panaki (a framed icon given by the Catholicos to a newly consecrated bishop), he tied the ribbon of courage and, accompanied by a pilot officer and Colonel Ter-Arakelian, took a two-horse carriage with a hoisted white flag to the fortress. During those days, it had been raining

²² Hovsepyants, 1945: 23; AGMI, section 8: 176, 177, 275, 276.

²³ Avetisyan, 2006: 101.

²⁴ Alexandryan, 1986: 34-36.

²⁵ AGMI, section 8: 176, 177.

²⁶ Narrator Alvard Hakhoian (born in 1953 in Kirovakan) is the grandchild of the eyewitness who passed down the story.

heavily for three days. As they ascended one of the roads, they were surrounded by dozens of askyars led by an officer. The officer asked who they were and where they were heading (the pilot officer, who spoke Turkish, acted as a translator). Hearing this, the Turkish officer climbed onto the pedestal of the carriage to guide them. Along the way, they saw Armenian soldiers surrounded by askyars being robbed of their clothes. There was a low wall extending from the mountain range to the gorge, behind which Turkish soldiers fired into the gorge. Riding a horse, the officer in charge approached Hovsepyants and inquired about their identity. Hovsepyants delivered a brief message, addressing him as “pasha” (believing the man to be a general, as “pasha” was used for addressing high-ranking officials). He informed him that the valley was filled with peaceful people, women, and children, and there were orphanages there. He appealed to the military man’s sense of bravery, dignity, and mercy, urging him to show humanity and cease the fire. After a moment’s consideration, the colonel signaled for the firing to stop.²⁷ Thus, through Hovsepyants’ mediation, the massacre in the gorge was halted.

Gegham Harutyunian (born in 1899 in Tsaghkahovit village, Aparan district) escaped the massacre during the occupation of Kars by reaching the American orphanage. He stayed there disguised as an orphanage employee for a month but was captured when askyars inspected the orphanage. According to his testimony, the askyars took him along with 50-60 young prisoners, and while passing through the gorge, they saw thousands of bodies of murdered Armenians in the water. They were beaten to prevent them from looking at the scene. During interrogation, they discovered that he had worked at the post and telegraph office in Kars. Under the watch of the askyars, he was put to work in the same telegraph office to maintain the telegraph wires. At some point, an order came from the front commander, Kyazim Karabekir Pasha, to stop the massacre of Armenians, though only a few old women were left alive in Kars; the rest had been killed and were floating cold in the Karsachai River. After working at the telegraph office for two months, he was imprisoned and subjected to forced labor, but he eventually managed to escape.²⁸

“Kars Gorge” became the primary site of mass killings perpetrated by the Turkish army, where many peaceful Armenians were slaughtered. The Turks primarily blocked the retreat routes of the displaced Armenians, subjecting them to further massacres.

Women and Children as Victims of Violence

The Turkish army did not spare even women and children. During and after the massacre, women were subjected to violence by askyars. Armed Turks would enter

²⁷ Hovsepian, 1945: 24-26.

²⁸ AGMI, section 8: 173.

the houses of Armenians, rape women and girls, and kidnap many. Terrible screams were heard from the houses.²⁹ Vasil Ionesco, describing the horrific scene of the city's capture and massacre, testifies that many women threw themselves into the Karsachai River and drowned.³⁰ Gevorg Gevorgyants, a refugee from the Kars region, testifies that both young men and women were hiding from the Turks. After capturing the young men and soldiers, the Turks began to rob and rape the remaining survivors.³¹ All the women, except for the ones from a handful of families who found protection at Ossetians, were raped and infected. Most of them were held by Turkish officers and soldiers, while the rest were taken to the villages by Kurds.³² Unable to bear the anticipated torture, many would kill their children, themselves, and, in some cases, other women. The eldest son of the Bakhchients family, Karo, a pharmacist named Misak, whose wife was Russian, saw an askyar trying to rape his wife in front of him and his children. Unable to tolerate such disgrace, he killed the attacker. He injected morphine into everyone, including himself, for fear that his family would be brutally slaughtered: as the effect of the morphine was slow, he cut everyone's and his veins.³³ Violence continued after the massacres. According to Koryun Kotanjian, the priest of St. Lusavorich Church in Kars, the survivors were returned to the city (men and women in separate groups) under the pretense of resettling them in their homes. Instead, they were placed in wooden warehouses next to the station and the city prisons. The imprisoned people were robbed, stripped, starved, and left thirsty for days. Kotanjian described the situation, saying, "What happened to the women... was indescribable: miserable and half-naked, they returned to their homes."³⁴ Khoren Stamboltsian, the last priest of the Arakelots Church in Kars, went around the houses and yards and saw the bleeding body of an old woman in her bed, the body of a drowned woman in a water stream, and the bodies of raped, murdered, and mutilated girls. Even an 8-9-year-old girl was not spared. Entering Kars Gorge, Turkish soldiers opened fire on the orphanage, killing the orphanage doctor, G. Surian. The Turks then entered the orphanage and continued firing at both children and adults. The Kemalists committed inhumane and horrifying acts, killing many children and civilians. Dr. Gharakeshishian was taken from there by the gendarmes.³⁵ During the Turkish-Armenian war, in Kars province alone, the Kemalist troops massacred tens of thousands of Armenians and took many captive. They did not spare even the 6,000 orphaned Armenian children under the care of the American Relief Committee for

²⁹ HAA, F. 114, list 2, dossier 43.

³⁰ Hovsepian, 1945: 145.

³¹ HAA, F. 114, list 2, dossier 33.

³² Hovsepian, 1945: 146.

³³ Alexandryan, 1986: 78.

³⁴ Avetisian, 2006: 101.

³⁵ Minasian, 2014: 209.

the Middle East; only a small portion of them was transported to Armenia.³⁶ Askyars continued their violence against those sheltered in American orphanages, killing or kidnapping them. Every night, young virgin girls and older girls from the orphanage were taken. The groups of those who remained in the orphanage fled in terror through various impassable mountain roads, but some were shot down by the thugs pursuing them. Months after the fall of Kars, Colonel Cox, the general representative of the American Orphanage, left for Alexandropol with the remaining orphans.³⁷ It should be noted that in November 1920, as victims of Turkish policies, 10,000 Armenian orphans were transferred from Alexandropol orphanages to Kars by the American Committee. By February-March 1921, only 6,000 of them had returned to Alexandropol. During the transportation, Turks attacked the train carrying the older boys and girls, while the younger ones died from the cold and epidemic. To prevent the spread of the epidemic, the dead children were thrown out of the train's windows.³⁸ In Kars, during the winter and spring of 1920-1921, the Turks carried out the mass deportation of the remaining Armenian population. Persecuted and robbed, they were transported by train to Alexandropol in the freezing winter. During these forced deportations, violence against women and girls continued unabated. A particularly terrible incident occurred at GzhIchakhchakh station: when the train stopped, askyars entered the carriage, beat and robbed the passengers (a 17-year-old girl was raped in front of parents and other displaced people).³⁹

In 1921, shortly after the Turkish atrocities, Aram Yesayan wrote in the February issue of the newspaper *Komunist* that “the unprecedented atrocities committed by the Turks in Kars against the Armenian population surpassed even the massacres organized by Sultan Hamid and the Young Turks in 1895-96 and 1908.”⁴⁰

On February 23, 1921, after the retreat of the Georgian army from the Ardahan region, Turks seized several villages, including five Greek ones. They annihilated 120 families of the remaining Greek population in Beberék and Toroskhev.⁴¹

Due to the lack of primary sources, estimating the number of massacred and captured individuals in Kars province is difficult. Approximate figures for the number of captives and killed are provided by some officials and individuals, including Aram Lyulikian, Aram Yesayan, Gevorg Gevorgyants, Vasil Ionesco, Priest Khoren Stamboltsian, and others.⁴²

Gagik Sargsian, the diplomatic representative of Soviet Armenia in Kars who was handling the issues of Armenian captives and orphans left in Turkey, was promised by

³⁶ Khachatryan, 2001.

³⁷ Avetisian, 2006: 103.

³⁸ Alexanyan, 2018: 132-134.

³⁹ Avetisian, 2006: 104.

⁴⁰ Yesayan, 1921: 1.

⁴¹ Nersisyan, 2005: 164.

⁴² Nersisyan, 2005: 142, 146, 148.

Kyazim Karabekir on April 4, 1922, that complete information about the fate of all Armenian captives in Turkey would be provided to him within a month.⁴³ Only a small portion of the 60,000 Armenian military and civilian captives forcibly driven from Kars, Alexandropol, and other locations to Erzerum returned to Armenia. The rest were either massacred or died from cold and hunger. In 1922, with the formation of the USSR, Armenian diplomatic representations in Turkey and other countries were dissolved.⁴⁴

The lack of information about the number of massacred Armenians is also attributable to the Turkish military occupation of Vanand province, the policies of the Turkish authorities, and the subsequent Moscow (March 16, 1921) and Kars (October 13, 1921) treaties. After these treaties, Armenians were unable to pursue investigations with the relevant commissions, unlike in Alexandropol and Gharakilisa provinces. The lack of information about the number of massacred Armenians is also attributable to the Turkish military occupation of Vanand province, the policies of the Turkish authorities, and the subsequent Moscow and Kars treaties. After these treaties, Armenians were unable to pursue investigations with the relevant commissions, unlike in Alexandropol and Gharakilisa provinces.

Mass Annihilation in Smyrna (1922)

The annihilation of Smyrna's Armenians and Greeks, along with the arson of their districts in September 1922, was a continuation of the genocidal policy of the Turkish authorities.⁴⁵ The Turkish troops entered Smyrna at 11 a.m. on September 9. The annihilation occurred simultaneously with the military operations and, at times, independently.⁴⁶

In this regard, U.S. Consul in Smyrna George Horton reports:

Looting and pillaging and rape and massacre went on on a large scale immediately after the entry of the Turks, their vengeance first breaking upon the Armenian population, who were accused of having thrown bombs [...]. This was no excuse for hunting, night and day for three days, of Armenians by squads of regular soldiers and their killing in the most revolting manner by being shot, stabbed, hacked to death or having their throats cut publicly in the streets [...].⁴⁷

⁴³ HAA, F. 131, list 1, dossier 102.

⁴⁴ Hakobyan, 2021: 46.

⁴⁵ Martoyan, 2021: 199-220, 2024.

⁴⁶ Aktsoğlu, 2007: 102. Before September 18, 1922, the Greek army had withdrawn from Asia Minor. On October 11, 1922, an armistice was signed between Turkey and the Entente countries in Mudania on the coast of the Sea of Marmara, and Greece joined the agreement on October 13. The Greco-Turkish War (1922-1923) concluded with the Armistice of Mudania and the Treaty of Lausanne.

⁴⁷ Horton, 1985: 20-21.

Eyewitnesses also recall the Turks searching for Armenians by going through houses one by one. Artin Kemjian, a gunsmith from Kirk-Aghach known as Wolf Artin, was discovered by thugs hiding in the attic of a school:

After being caught, he was taken to his house, where he was searched and all his military equipment was confiscated. He was then blindfolded, taken to an olive orchard, tied to a tree trunk, and executed [...]. The thugs subsequently began arresting prominent Armenians, including businessman and former teacher Hayk Tadikian, his brother Hovsep Tadikian, Armenak Kemjian, and blacksmith Stepan. Nerses Garanfilian's house was turned into a military camp. Gabriel Aberian, Garnik Aghsarian, Khachatur Chizmedjian (who was forcibly circumcised), Nerses Garanfilian, and others were beaten and tortured [...]. In the house of lawyer Karapet Darbinian, he was tortured and killed in the garden in front of his wife, while Mrs. Horopik Darbinian was stabbed into unconsciousness.⁴⁸

We learn from Mkrtych Avetian's writings that in 1922, during the capture of Smyrna by Kemalists, Armenian doctor Grigor Efendi Mnatsakanian, pharmacist Gevorg Ter-Galstian, his brother Abgar Ter-Galstian, his father, Priest Ter-Galust, and 60 other intellectuals were chained, stripped, and executed in Cordelio. Avetian writes:

Upon the capture of Izmir in 1922, together with their father, Priest Ter-Galust, and 60 other intellectuals, they were chained naked and gunned down by the men of Mustafa Kemal in Cordelio, in a place called Sovuk Koyu.⁴⁹

We read about the persecution of Christians in Smyrna in the memoir *Bloodshed Izmir* by the prominent public speaker, literary figure, and editor Mikayel Bartikian:

The Turkish people had already received the order for the massacre, but Mustafa Kemal was not satisfied with what had occurred. The governor remarked with displeasure after his inspection: My car did not pass over the corpses.⁵⁰

The Kemalists deliberately developed and implemented their criminal plan against Smyrna's Christians (Armenians and Greeks). The killings of the unarmed population were carried out systematically. People's possessions – carpets, clothes, gold, and anything that could be easily transported – were looted.

⁴⁸ Aharonian, 1965: 890.

⁴⁹ AGMI, Preliminary Fund, 6.

⁵⁰ Bartikian, 2022: 143.

The Ritualized Murder of Smyrna’s Greek Metropolitan Chrysostomos Kalafatis

Becoming part of an organized crowd,⁵¹ individuals descend several steps down the ladder of civilization, becoming barbarians in a crowd and captives of savage instincts. They become prone to arbitrary behavior, violence, and cruelty.⁵² In a crowd, the unconscious often dominates, leading to the suspension of higher brain functions and control of the spinal cord.⁵³ Witnesses recall the irrevocable loss of Greek Metropolitan Chrysostomos Kalafatis (1867-1922) of Smyrna with profound pain and horror. In the newsletter of the Armenian National Delegation, it was reported:

According to the Eleftherios Tiros journal of Athens, the Greek Patriarch Chrysostomos was killed under the following circumstances. The Patriarch had paid a courtesy visit to Nurettin Pasha, who was then the military commander of Izmir. During the meeting, Nurettin Pasha asked him:

– It is true that when the Allied soldiers first arrived in Izmir, you told the British commander Dixon that I am the main person in Izmir who deserves punishment?

The Patriarch confirmed:

– Yes.

Nurettin Pasha responded:

– I will not punish you for this. I will leave it to the people to execute justice as they see fit.

He then dismissed the Patriarch. On his way back, the Patriarch's car deliberately passed through the Turkish neighborhood, where a mob attacked the vehicle. They forcibly removed the Patriarch, tortured and killed him, and subsequently dragged his body through the streets of the Turkish neighborhoods before dismembering it.⁵⁴

At the outset, it should be noted that the “ritualized” killing of Chrysostomos was a manifestation of religious hatred carried out with inhumane cruelty. According to psychologist Armine Vahanyan, the ritual aimed to destroy Christian spiritual heritage. The perpetrator of the atrocity is internally a victim, thus the issue should not be addressed solely on the level of ethnicity or individual.⁵⁵ Various researchers have detailed the tragic death of the Metropolitan in their studies. Notably, French journalist and historian René Puaux offers this testimony:

⁵¹ In a general sense, the word “crowd” refers to a group of individuals, irrespective of nationality, profession, or gender, and regardless of the circumstances. In such a collective, individual identities often fade, and the emotions and ideas of the group converge towards a common direction. An organized or stimulated crowd adheres to the principle of the psychic unity of crowds. For further details, see Le Bon, 2020: 35-36.

⁵² Le Bon, 2020: 48.

⁵³ Le Bon, 2020: 35.

⁵⁴ HAA, F. 430, list 1, d. 744.

⁵⁵ Vahanyan, 2023.

The barbaric spirit of the Turkish leaders – regardless of the supposedly irregular troops blamed for the atrocities due to the lack of an alternative scapegoat – was fully revealed by the murder of the distinguished and venerable Greek Archbishop of Smyrna, His Holiness Chrysostomos. General Nuredin Pasha had ordered a search for him in the archbishopric monastery. Upon arrival, the general berated the archbishop, reproached him for his pro-Hellenistic stance during the Greek military operations, and informed him that the revolutionary court of Angora had long ago condemned him to death. Nuredin added that all he had to do was hand over Kalafatis to the court of the crowd.⁵⁶

According to Horton, the only fault of Metropolitan Chrysostomos was that the patriotic and eloquent Greek believed in the prosperity of his people. In his unbiased account, Horton describes his final meeting with Metropolitan Chrysostomos before his tragic death:

Archbishop Chrysostom came to the Consulate but a short time before his death, together with the Armenian Archbishop. Chrysostom was dressed in black. His face was pale. This is the last time that I saw this venerable and eloquent man alive [...]. As he sat there in the consular office, the shadow of his approaching death lay upon his features. Some who read these lines, perhaps will understand what it meant. At least twice in my life I have seen that shadow upon a human visage and have known that the person was soon to die[...]. Neither he nor the Armenian bishop spoke to me of their danger, but they asked me if nothing could be done to save the inhabitants of Smyrna.⁵⁷

To understand how the Metropolitan found himself among the crowd of Muslims in the yard of Nuredin Pasha's house, we turn once more to the testimony of an eyewitness:

The guard had barely left the Metropolitan's location when a vehicle carrying one officer and three soldiers armed with bayonet rifles stopped in front of the archbishop's monastery. The officer approached the Metropolitan and ordered him to follow him to the quarters of the army commander, Nuredin Pasha. Upon seeing the Metropolitan being taken away, I ordered the guard to follow the vehicle. We stopped in front of a large barrack where General Nuredin was stationed. The officer led the Metropolitan out, and ten minutes later, he was seen walking down the stairs.⁵⁸

Then Nuredin Pasha announced: "If he has done good, you should respond in the same way, respond to him the same way."⁵⁹ Thus, the raging crowd was not

⁵⁶ Puaux, 2001: 90.

⁵⁷ Horton, 1985: 135-136.

⁵⁸ Puaux, 2001: 92.

⁵⁹ Bierstad, 1924: 25.

allowed to act independently; the Muslims needed permission from the commander of the Turkish army to brutally kill Chrysostomos. This fact further proves that the annihilation of Armenians and Greeks in Smyrna was a pre-planned, systematic, deliberate, and administered crime.

Hasmik Grigoryan, a scholar of culture and genocide, in her book *Masses and Mass Violence: Participation of the Muslim Population of the Ottoman Empire in the Armenian Genocide*, refers to the ritualized killings:

The perpetrator, trying to gain dominance over the victim, subjects him to mockery. In the ritualized and ‘celebratory’ atmosphere of mass killings and violence, social norms are violated and the threat of punishment is absent, resulting in an increased likelihood of public participation.⁶⁰

Chrysostomos was tortured in an extremely cruel ritual: first, they hit him with fists and sticks, then they started spitting on his face, pierced him with a knife, tore off his beard, took out his eyes, and cut off his nose and ears.⁶¹ Having missed the opportunity to save himself, he preferred to “stay with his flock.”⁶²

What were the reasons behind the ease and extreme brutality of the mob involved in the killing? How could one feel satisfied with such an act and experience undisguised pleasure?

Specialist in criminal law Dr. Karine Abrahamyan, examining the killings of clergymen, notes:

At first glance, these murders may seem like acts of extreme cruelty committed by a group motivated by national and religious hatred. However, it is crucial to consider the intent behind these actions. In this context, we are dealing with genocide, as the killing of a priest is not merely about depriving an individual of life but about the systematic destruction of a specific national or religious group. Even if we attempt to view it as a separate criminal act outside the scope of genocide, it is inseparable from the broader context of genocide. Therefore, from a criminal law perspective, such acts should be classified as genocide.⁶³

The extreme brutality of fanatical Muslims was not confined to the killing of the archbishop alone; scenes of such murders were witnessed throughout Smyrna.

⁶⁰ Grigoryan, 2017: 136.

⁶¹ Bierstadt, 1924: 25.

⁶² Tsirkinidis, 1999: 283.

⁶³ Abrahamyan, 2023.

Gendercide: A Deliberate Part of the Plan

Gendercide is studied within the framework of genocide, as it is one of its mechanisms. Sexual violence is regarded as part of a deliberate strategy: it is characterized as both a crime against individuals and a covert aspect of genocide, isolating victims from their socio-cultural environment. Mass rapes during genocide are intended to facilitate the process of destruction. Rape serves not only as a means of physical destruction but also as a way to inflict moral and psychological harm on individuals.⁶⁴

The term “gendercide” was first introduced by American feminist Mary Ann Warren in 1985 in her book *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection*. She defines gendercide as the intentional destruction of individuals based on their gender.⁶⁵ Grigoryan’s interpretation is as follows:

Sexual violence is determined by gender perceptions: it is no coincidence that mostly attractive women are victims of sexual violence. This also explains why sexual violence is often portrayed in literature as the behavior of the ‘winner,’ with women from the ‘loser’ side perceived as a ‘reward’ for their ‘bravery.’⁶⁶

The extermination of Smyrna’s Christians was also accompanied by the mass rape of women and girls. Puaux notes in this regard:

The kidnapping of women and young girls is an old tradition among Turkish soldiers, and the evidence is as diverse as it is disturbing. Women were raped in front of their husbands or fathers, who were killed if they tried to intervene.⁶⁷

There are many examples proving this:

A Greek who served in one of the English establishments and managed to hide witnessed the murder of his father and the rape of his wife and daughter. A Levantine who had accepted American citizenship committed suicide after witnessing a similar scene.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Brownmiller, 1975; 1993; Card, 2005; Reid-Cunningham, 2008.

⁶⁵ Warren, 1985: 22.

⁶⁶ Grigoryan, 2017: 139.

⁶⁷ Puaux, 2001: 80.

⁶⁸ Puaux, 2001: 80.

According to another testimony, a group from a Turkish irregular troop broke down the door of a girls' orphanage, demanded three women, and then robbed, raped, and killed them. This crime was reported to Kazim Pasha by a British admiral.⁶⁹ British eyewitness Wallace reports:

On Tuesday, the 12th of the month, as I was going home, I met my servants in the suburbs of Bayrakli who were madly terrified; they had seen bodies of three women floating on the sea, as the irregular Turkish army had invaded the girls' orphanage, demanded three women, robbed, raped and killed them.⁷⁰

On September 16, the correspondent of *The Times* reported from Constantinople that, before the fire raged, an English marine battalion guarding the gas plant had witnessed Turkish soldiers raping many Greek women in the middle of the street. The English marines were under strict orders to refrain from any other operation except monitoring the gas gauges. Mr. Sykes, a resident of Burnabad, had witnessed the murder of twenty-six women.⁷¹

Horton mentions that the violation of women and girls was one of the most notable features of the Smyrna horror. A noted and native-born American physician who spent several years engaged in hospital work in the Near East, Dr. Mabel Elliott testifies that she has never seen a Muslim woman who had been violated.⁷²

It is necessary to present the content of her letter written from Athens on June 2, 1923:

My dear Mr. Horton, how true Gladstone's famous statement was in regard to the Turk's character has been most amply proved in the late Smyrna disaster. My position as a woman physician makes me peculiarly well placed to know about the treatment of young girls by the Turks. In my four-year experience in Turkey I think it is a rather remarkable fact that I have yet to see the Turkish girl or woman who has been ravished. As a marked contrast to this I have seen hundreds of Christian girls who have been in the hands of Turkish men. The late Smyrna disaster was no exception to this and I can justly come to the conclusion from what I have seen with my own eyes that the ravishing of Christian girls by Turks in Smyrna was wholesale.⁷³

⁶⁹ Economos, 1922: 77.

⁷⁰ Economos, 1922: 5-6.

⁷¹ Puaux, 2001: 80-82.

⁷² Horton, 1926.

⁷³ Horton, 1926: 163. American doctor Esther Paul Lovejoy, a representative of the "American Women's Hospitals" service, was in Smyrna in September 1922. In addition to fulfilling her professional duties as a physician, she provided valuable eyewitness accounts of the events she witnessed, Khanumyan, 2022: 74-89.

Hatcherian, in turn, describes the following scene:

After midnight, when I am lost in my thoughts, my attention is drawn to the begging voice of a woman, coming from the floor below. Her voice is mixed with the threatening voice of a Turkish soldier, and the plaintive screaming of a three to four-year-old child thereafter. The woman, whose voice sounds young, implores the soldier to spare her honor; but the soldier orders her threateningly to submit without a word. The child screams, the woman begs, but the Turk is merciless. One can also hear the voice of an older woman who appeals to the Turk's compassion, saying, 'Honor belongs to the Padishah.' The Turk orders the old woman to shut up, unless she wants to become a corpse at once. The old woman stops talking; the child continues to cry. The Turk makes threats and has, meanwhile, already achieved his monstrous goal, as far as one can guess from the few minutes of silence [...] After awhile, a third soldier's voice, and this continues until sunrise, when the woman's martyrdom comes to an end.⁷⁴

Sergeant Tsorbajis recounts:

In one house I followed a trail of blood that led me to a cupboard. My curiosity forced me to open this cupboard-and my hair stood on end. Inside was the naked body of a girl, with her breasts cut off. At another house, there was a girl hanging from a lemon tree in the yard [...]. On one of the roads, I saw a man about forty-five or fifty years old. The Turks had blinded him and cut off his nose and left him on the streets.⁷⁵

Horton desperately searches for explanations for the happenings but cannot find any, so he eventually abandons his futile efforts to find a justification:

Certainly at Smyrna, nothing was lacking in the way of atrocity, lust, cruelty and all that fury of human passion which, given their full play, degrade the human race to a level lower than the vilest and cruelest of beasts. For during all this diabolical drama the Turks robbed and raped. Even the raping can be understood as an impulse of nature, irresistible perhaps, when passions are running wild among a people of low mentality and less civilization, but the repeated robbing of women and girls can be attributed neither to religious frenzy nor to animal passions. One of the keenest impressions which I brought away with me from Smyrna was a feeling of shame that I belonged to the human race.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Sakayan, 1997: 25-26.

⁷⁵ Housepian Dobkin, 1998: 157.

⁷⁶ Horton, 1926: 153.

Do rape and other sexual acts of violence constitute the crime of genocide? Abrahamyan provides the following interpretation:

The crime of genocide is diverse in its methods of execution. In this context, rape and other violent sexual acts should be considered as serious harm to a person's health through violence, as they are crimes committed against individuals of specific ethnic and religious groups. Testimonies indicating that no Muslim women were raped support the view that rape and other acts of sexual violence are integral to the crime of genocide and do not occur in isolation. In this way, perpetrators aim to diminish the gravity of their crimes, breaking the resistance of their victims not only physically but also morally, effectively destroying them.⁷⁷

Genocidal policy, carried out by the Kemalists in 1920-1921, targeted the province of Vanand (Kars), particularly the city of Kars, and later extended to the provinces of Shirak, Alexandropol, and Gharakilisa. These actions were part of the broader genocidal campaign against Armenians and Greeks that continued in Smyrna.

The Turks targeted the Armenian and Greek civilian populations in occupied areas, leading to massacres and forced displacements. The province of Vanand was depopulated as many fled to escape the threat of physical annihilation, while those who remained were forcibly removed from their homes. The arson of Smyrna made it impossible to determine the exact number of people killed. However, attempts to hide the traces of the crime or to minimize the number of victims by any means do not negate the fact that a crime was committed and do not absolve the organizers of responsibility for their actions.

Conclusions

The study of the annihilation of Armenians in Kars and Smyrna leads to the following conclusions:

- The mass killings of Armenians and violence committed by Kemalist authorities in Kars and Smyrna were a continuation of the genocidal policy of the Turkish state.
- The mass killings of the Armenian civilian population involved extreme cruelty, including torture and burning. In some instances, the violence was ritualized. The bodies of the murdered were dishonored, indicating the deep-seated hatred and enmity of the perpetrators.
- Turks massacred the Armenian and Greek civilian populations in the occupied territories, creating a large number of refugees. As a result of the Turkish troops' invasion and their genocidal actions, Vanand (Kars) and Smyrna lost their Armenian

⁷⁷ Abrahamyan, 2023.

and Greek populations. Many fled under the threat of physical destruction, while those who remained were forcibly displaced.

- Turkish soldiers and officers exploited the defenselessness of the population, subjecting Armenian women and girls to sexual violence. Young children and the elderly were also victimized.
- These atrocities were perpetrated both during and after the war operations, leading to a significant alteration in the demographic makeup of the affected cities.



Fig. 1. Panorama of Kars, 19th century (Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, s. 13: 4846).



Fig. 2. The arson of Smyrna, 1922 (Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, s. 13: 1230).



Fig. 3. Scene from the massacre, 1922 (Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, s. 13: 1285).



Fig. 4. Armenian orphans from Kars, 1922 (National Archive of Armenia, f. 131, l. 1, d. 102).

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