



BOOK REVIEW

George N. Shirinian (ed.). *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks 1913-1923* (New York/Oxford: The Asia Minor and Pontos Hellenic Research Center, Inc. 2017).

Reviewed by Constantine G. Hatzidimitriou

The Asia Minor and Pontos Hellenic Research Center (AMPHRC) of Chicago has ably demonstrated what the Greek community is capable of given the right leadership and commitment. Under the direction of George Mavropoulos and his colleagues and supporters, some years ago the Pontian Greek Society of Chicago, a *topiko somatio*, focused its efforts on making an aspect of the history and culture of Hellenism better known on a national level with high academic standards and inter-ethnic support. Their outstanding and almost unique vision was not limited to a narrow focus only on the Pontian genocide but included all of Anatolian Hellenism and the Armenian and Assyrian experiences as well. The result has been a successful collaboration with the Zoryan Institute, the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, the Pan-Pontian Federation of the USA and Canada, and other non-Greek organizations which has resulted in important lectures, conferences and publications documenting Ottoman Turkish efforts to eradicate all of its Christian minorities (see <http://hellenicresearchcenter.org>).

Beginning with a local academic conference in 2008 and after several others, in 2015 AMPHRC organized their second international conference on the genocide at Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Additionally, they reprinted works such as Bierstadt's *The Great Betrayal: Economic Imperialism & the Destruction of Christian Communities in Asia Minor* and created resource guides for teachers that are currently being used by public schools in Chicago. The Research Center which is open to the public, continues to systematically collect and preserve documents and books on Pontian and Anatolian Hellenism and is currently engaged in fund raising for a documentary film on the Genocide and its aftermath. As part of its outreach efforts, *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire* volume was introduced to the public on September 24, 2017, with a lecture by its editor held at the Hellenic Cultural Center in Astoria, New York. The book launching was sponsored by a wide variety of local Greek organizations. The editor, George N.

Shirinian, the Armenian Executive Director of the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, spoke to a Greek audience about the book's theme and how much Greeks, Armenians and Assyrians had in common. AMPHRC and its collaborating institutions is a model that needs to be replicated in Greek communities in the United States and abroad.

The volume being reviewed here is the result of AHPHRC's first international conference which was held at the prestigious Holocaust Museum and Educational Center in Skokie, Illinois in 2013. Its contents are unique and well represent the important inter-ethnic vision of the Center. For the first time a group of over a dozen renown scholars from Armenia, Australia, England and across North America came together to discuss the common aspects of the Turkish genocides of Anatolian Christians which included the experiences of Armenian, Greek and Assyrian minorities. The conference site and the participation of Judaic studies specialists also invited comparisons with the Jewish Holocaust. With an excellent introduction to the topic by its editor, George Shirinian, fourteen of the papers from this conference are published in the *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire* volume which is divided into three thematic sections: Part I; Contexts (pages 19 - 134); Part II: Documentation and Eyewitness Accounts (pp. 135-252); and Part III: Legacies and Interpretations (pp. 253-403). While I cannot discuss each of these fine papers in any detail I will touch upon some of the highlights.

In his introduction, Shirinian explores how the concept of a Christian genocide evolved in relation to the more familiar Armenian identification. He also then goes on to explain the advantages of the more inclusive concept in studying and understanding the phenomenon. He pursues this theme in a lengthy study, (which I believe is the first of its kind), in which he explores the economic, political and social status of all three ethnic groups within the late Ottoman empire, and which begins the Context section of the book. Here, the most important contribution of the entire book is introduced – that is, despite what many genocide deniers and the Turkish government continue to claim, the term *genocide* can be applied to all three minorities, and all of them were persecuted and murdered well before the outbreak of World War I. In fact, as other studies such as that of Kaligian on the Armenians and the Greeks and Khorroeva on the Assyrians in this section demonstrate, the war accelerated the process and brought it to a tragic completion. This was especially true in the case of the Assyrians. World War I was not the cause of the elimination of Ottoman Christian minorities but provided “cover” and opportunities for the completion of a Turkification and nationalist agenda that evolved as part of a systematic government policy over time.

In Part II, Paul Bartrop draws upon Holocaust examples and focuses on survivor's memoirs and provides case studies from all three Christian ethnic groups victimized by the genocide; while Stavros Stavrides explores how the Australian press and official

documents presented the Assyrian victimization. The study of Robert Shenk however, drew my particular interest because it focused on the important documentary evidence of genocide left to us by courageous American female missionaries whose contributions to saving the lives of Christian minorities deserves to be better known. Dr. Shenk demonstrates that American officials such as Admiral Bristol, doubted and suppressed their eyewitness testimonies which in some cases enabled Turkish authorities to continue their policies of extermination in secret. A Greek eyewitness source, that of the journalist Kostas Faltaitis, is the subject of the study of Ellene S. Phufas whose work adds a new evidence for the massacres that occurred in Nicomedia. Multiple accounts are examined by Tehmine Martoyan concerning the infamous destruction of Smyrna in 1922 which she approaches from a Greek and Armenian comparative perspective. She concludes that the Greeks and the Armenians of Smyrna suffered the same common experiences—namely: murder, robbery, and abduction as part of a systematic policy to create a new Turkey with “blood and sword.”

In Part III, Steven L. Jacobs explores the writings of Lemkin, the originator of the legal concept of genocide, and compares his writings on the three Christian minorities and their victimization. It is important that he notes that Lemkin also compared them to what the Germans did during WW II. Continuing the comparative theme, Gevorg Vardanyan’s contribution compares the Greek and Armenian genocides based on solid documentary evidence that discusses not only the similarities but the important differences between the two. However, ultimately, he concludes that “the genocidal policy realized by Turkish authorities ... is almost identical from the viewpoint of the mechanisms used and means applied.” Next comes Thea Halo’s survey of the myths and facts concerning the genocide of the Ottoman Greeks which directly addresses the important issue that Turkish and non-Turkish historians often bring up, that on the one hand, Greek irredentism precipitated Turkish actions and on the other hand, the Greek nation helped protect this minority unlike the two others. Her solid chronological overview addresses a wide variety of issues and deserves to be widely circulated and read. The next two studies, that of Georgia Kouta on the Anglo-Hellenic League in London and that of Hannibal Travis on the legalities involved in Turkish policies of deportation and genocide, contribute new understandings concerning the diplomatic aspects of the genocide and the legal aspects of the genocidal intent of the Turks. Travis, in particular, provides so much detailed documentation, that it presents a model of how any related subject should be researched. Finally, Suren Manukyan explores the question of how ordinary Turks became participants in mass murder a topic which also relates to what happened in Hitler’s Germany later on. Her analysis is a warning against history being repeated in our own day.

Taken as a whole the volume of collected studies on the Armenian, Greek and Assyrian genocides prove that a pattern of extermination on the part of the Turkish

governments was well developed prior to 1912 and that an important motivating factor was their relative economic prosperity in relation to the Muslim majority. Thus, it helps document the motivation behind the often repeated Kemalist slogan of “Turkey for the Turks.” Once again, AMPHRC has contributed to the much-needed scholarship that continues to grow around the study of the genocide of the Anatolian Christian communities of the Ottoman empire. Its comparative approach breaks new ground and will have a broad appeal and impact. It belongs on the bookshelf of every personal and public library in the U.S. and abroad.

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