

Middle East · History · Human Rights



A CRIME OF SILENCE

The Armenian Genocide
PERMANENT PEOPLES' TRIBUNAL

The year 1985 is the 70th anniversary of the little-known massacre of some 1,200,000 Armenians in Turkey on orders of the Young Turk Government during the First World War. To mark the anniversary of this first genocide of the 20th Century, the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (successor to the Bertrand Russell Tribunal on Vietnam) held a special hearing in Paris. This volume reproduces the evidence and papers delivered at the Tribunal's hearings, and its Verdict.

The Tribunal's jury included three Nobel Prize winners — Sean MacBride, Adolfo Perez Esquivel and Professor George Wald, and ten other eminent jurists, theologians, academics and political figures from various Western and Third World countries.

The Turkish Government still denies its predecessor's responsibility for the wholesale killings and destruction. Of great interest in this book, therefore, is the official Turkish defence of their position, particularly when contrasted with Dr Tessa Hofmann's exhaustive survey of German eye-witness accounts of the killings, as well as former UN Human Rights Division Director, Theo van Boven's, detailed account of how in 1979 the Turkish Government successfully pressured the UN into deleting all reference to the Armenian massacre in Paragraph 30 of the UN Study on the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The political repercussions of this genocide are with us still. The large Armenian communities now living in the Soviet Union, France and the United States are determined the world shall not forget what happened. They have successfully persuaded the American Congress to institute 24 April 1985 as a day of national commemoration of Man's Inhumanity to Man. And the more militant elements have continued to take direct action to ensure, eventually, some official recognition of, and restitution for, the great crime that was perpetrated against the Armenian people.

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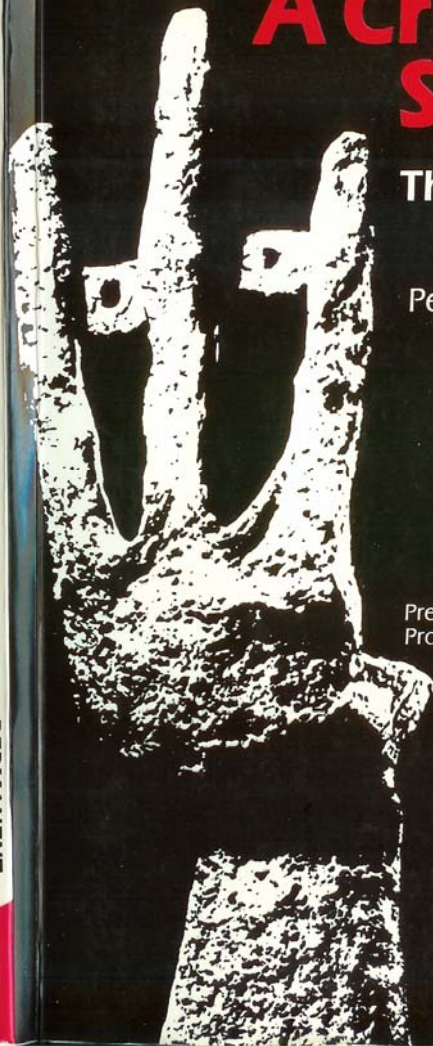
THIRD
WORLD
BOOKS

A Crime of Silence

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Tribunal

Preface by:
Professor Pierre Vidal-Naquet



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**This book is dedicated to the victims
of 20th Century genocides**

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8: The Destruction of Armenian Historical Monuments as a Continuation of the Turkish Policy of Genocide

Dickran Kouymjian

The Turkish Genocide of the Armenians has been one of the most systematic genocides of all times. As has been stated during the testimony of this Tribunal, its root causes were geopolitical and chauvinistic. Once the decision was made and carried out to rid the Armenian homeland of its autochthonous Armenian population, the logical consequence was to complete the genocide by removing forever any association of the Armenian people with the newly sequestered lands. Thus, the name Armenia was completely dropped from all Turkish maps and documents; when it inadvertently surfaced in textbooks or popular literature, as was recently the case, the edition was confiscated and destroyed; when it was used on foreign maps, such as those of airlines, there was vigorous and official protest.

The Turkish government has gone to great lengths to efface all trace of Armenian civilization on the historical homeland; thus, it consistently changed the names of towns, villages and hamlets in the eastern provinces in the late 1950s, as evidenced by the Turkish census of 1959-60. It is for this reason that, for example, the official *United States Gazetteer* for Turkey, last printed in 1958, reflects place names which no longer exist in the area east of Aintab. Roughly 90% of the names of historical Armenia have been changed; only the major cities — Van, Bitlis, Erzurum etc. — have been spared. As Turkish historians continue to revise the past, newer generations of Armenians will be hard pressed to find the localities inhabited by their ancestors.

Today in Turkish-occupied Armenia there are no Armenians, except for dissimulated ones of uncertain number. Armenians however, do exist in Turkey, concentrated in Istanbul, where against all forms of

harassment they try to maintain a semblance of national existence. They are tolerated simply because they and their monuments are so visible and because Istanbul was never an Armenian city nor were there ever any territorial claims on it by Armenians.

In all other parts of the former Ottoman Empire under the control of the Republic of Turkey, the thoroughness of the Turkish Genocide is meticulously continued by successive governments of the Turkish state in the 20th century which insist that all Armenian cultural remains — churches and monasteries, identifiable community structures, and even entire urban complexes — be eliminated or deprived of their distinguishing national content.

Armenian churches, silent, yet noble witnesses of Armenian national life for sixteen centuries, were soon recognized as intolerable embodiments of Armenia's historic presence. Surviving monuments of the victims are a great embarrassment to the perpetrators of genocide, the greater their number the more difficult is the rewriting of history. Thus, Armenian monuments became marked for destruction.

Turkish policy toward monuments of Armenian culture took the following forms:

1. *Willful destruction by fire or explosives of churches, civil buildings and homes during the period of the massacres, 1915–22.* Nearly every Armenian population centre was affected. In the Van-Mush area some 30 monasteries were destroyed in 1915 by artillery, as attested to by Drs Nicole and Jean-Michel Thierry who reported that during an on-the-spot-survey in 1964 in the entire plain of Mush all the way to Bingol no trace of Armenian churches remains.¹ According to a 1931 study during the genocide of 1915–22, 1,036 Armenian churches and monasteries were levelled to the ground while 691 other religious structures were half-destroyed.² By way of reference, it should be noted that historical sources recorded many thousands of Armenian monasteries and churches. Evidence which is more timely to our concern is afforded by the incomplete inventory compiled in 1914 by the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople of actively used Armenian churches in Turkish Armenian territories: 210 monasteries, 700 monastic churches, and 1,639 parish churches. Perhaps the best visual example is the former city of Van.

2. *Subsequent, but conscious, destruction of individual monuments by dynamite or artillery.* Churches provided convenient targets for artillery practice during manoeuvres of the Turkish army in the east. The best known examples: the basilica of Tekor (4th–5th century), the monastery of Khtzkonk' (11th century), and the churches of Holy Mother of God near Ani (13th century), Bagaran (7th century) and Arakelan (14th century).

3. *Destruction by willful neglect and the encouragement of trespassing by peasants.* The finely cut stones used on the facades of Armenian churches made perfect, prefabricated building material used in the

construction of village dwellings. Examples: Soradir (6th and later centuries), Abad Ghamrentz (10th century).

4. *Conversion of Armenian churches into mosques, prisons, granaries, stables and farms, and museums.* Examples: Kars (10th century), a museum; Ordu, a prison; cathedral near Urfa, turned into a mosque and the monastery at Varag into a farm.

5. *Destruction by failure to provide any maintenance.* All remaining Armenian churches in Turkey are endangered by this neglect. Examples (of two churches having unique characteristics to the history of Christian architecture) are the church of the Holy Cross on the island of Aght'amar (915–22) and the cathedral of Ani (989–1001).

6. *Demolition for the construction of roads or public works,* such as the Keban dam on the Euphrates. Example: Holy Saviour church in Ani (1036).

7. *Neutralization of a monument's Armenian identity by the effacing of Armenian inscriptions.* Examples include nearly all of the churches and fortresses of Cilicia, the prison at Ordu, and even the central school in Istanbul.

8. *As a final resort, especially for monuments well known to art historians, the intentional reattribution of a building to Turkish, usually medieval Seljuk Turkish, architecture.* The most famous examples are the 10th century churches of Kars and Aght'amar, which ironically were built before the Seljuk Turks existed.

Turkey continues its genocidal policy by destroying Armenian monuments while carrying on the pretence before world public opinion of being a model member of the international community of nations through its subscription to various international treaties on the protection of minority rights and monuments.

Articles 38 to 44 of the 1923 revised peace Treaty of Lausanne deal especially with the guarantee and protection of minority rights. Yet Turkey has consistently violated its provisions as foreign observers have regularly reported. In Istanbul repair on existing Armenian structures is forbidden, rebuilding or expansion is not tolerated, and church and community property is frequently sequestered by invoking the right of eminent domain. With such an attitude in the very visible former capital, is it not futile to expect that monuments in the relatively deserted interior are cared for?

Many scholars have suggested that Unesco as an international organization with a vast section devoted exclusively to the preservation of historical sites and monuments could play an active role in the safeguarding of at least those edifices, such as the cathedral of Ani and Aght'amar, which have recognized importance to the general history of art. But Unesco's charter is such that in order for it to devote resources toward conservation, the government ruling the area in which the monument exists must extend it an invitation. Furthermore, many

experts have cautioned about the possible adverse effect of Unesco's overt concern with Armenian monuments. The *Minority Rights Report*, no. 32 on Armenia (London, 1976) while detailing Turkish violations of international covenants on minorities concludes:

We would like to see the Armenian monuments in eastern Turkey better cared for, although we would warn any Western governments (or Unesco) from pressing the Turks on this matter, a course of action which would only hasten the destruction of the monuments that remain.³

The Turkish government cynically continues to operate on a dual level, officially adhering to international agreements concerning the monuments of minorities while willfully continuing their destruction. A partial list of such agreements follows:

A. Turkey subscribed and approved the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of the United Nations Charter recognizing, among others, minority cultural rights.

B. In 1965, Turkey signed the 1954 Treaty of the Hague on the Preservation of Cultural Monuments during the time of War.⁴

C. On 7 January 1969 Turkey signed the International Treaty for the Preservation of Cultural Monuments which includes clear provisions for the care and preservation of minority cultural monuments.⁵

Today, Turkey still holds the lands and property illegally seized in 1915 and after, contrary to international law and the Genocide Convention of which it is a signatory. Genocide cannot be used to acquire land or property. In the case of religious monuments, as cult buildings they have usually been respected by all peoples. In Turkey Armenian church buildings should fall under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople who could arrange for their care.

For fifteen centuries the Christian monuments of Armenia have survived. At times they have stood abandoned in isolated areas without care, but with dignity. Today they are vandalized and destroyed by peasants, nomads, and the military who have been reprogrammed to learn disrespect by their own government's attitude.

Edifices that have stood against the elements and earthquakes for millennia will have disappeared within a couple of generations in this, the great century of restoration and preservation. There is little hope that this destruction and vandalism will stop, despite the courageous efforts of scholars from many countries to survey, photograph and publish these monuments, unless and until the governments of the world publicly acknowledge the genocide of the Armenians — as France has done earlier this year — and collectively persuade the Turkish state to do the same.

Once this is done, the surviving monuments can be officially returned to appropriate Armenian authorities for safe keeping as a first step toward the return of the Armenian lands on which they stand.

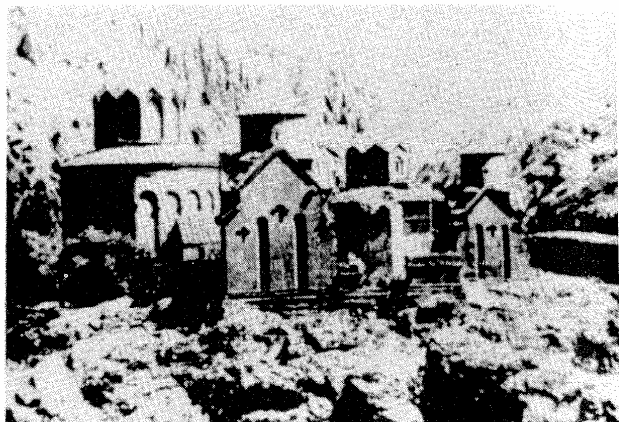
Illustrations of Destroyed Monuments*

1. The city of Van
- 2-6. Basilica of Tekor (4th-5th cent.)
- 7-12. Monastery of Khtzkonk' (11th cent.)
13. Church of Mother of God, Ani (13th cent.)
14. Bagaran (621-28)
15. Arkelan (13th cent.)
- 17-20. Soradir (6th-7th and later cent.)
21. St. Gregory Abughamrentz, Ani (10th cent.)
22. Kumbet Kilise, near Kars (10th-11th cent.)
23. Cathedral of Kars (10th cent.), a museum
24. Church at Ordu, a prison
25. Cathedral near Urfa, a mosque
26. Monastery of Varag, now a farm
- 27-31. Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar (915-21)
- 32-35. Ramparts and Cathedral of Ani (989-1001)
- 36-37. Church of the Holy Saviour, Ani (1036)
38. Church at Ordu
39. Central school, Istanbul
40. Armenian church, Yalta, the Crimea
- 41-42. Temple of Garni and its reconstruction (1st-3rd cent.)

Notes

1. Thierry, Nicole and Jean-Michel, *Revue des études Arméniennes*, 2 (1965).
2. Mesrob, Kevork, *Hayastani Kochnak*.
3. *Minority Rights Report No. 32 on Armenia* (London, 1976).
4. *Unesco Chronicle*, (1965).
5. *Unesco Chronicle*, (1969), p. 235.

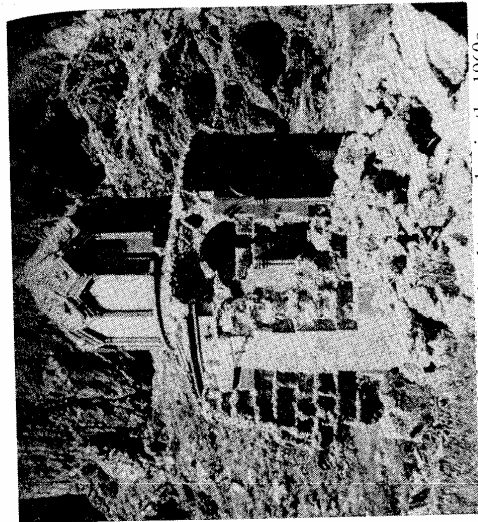
* Some of the slides shown to illustrate this paper are reproduced on the pages that follow (unless stated otherwise, they belong to D. Kouymjian).



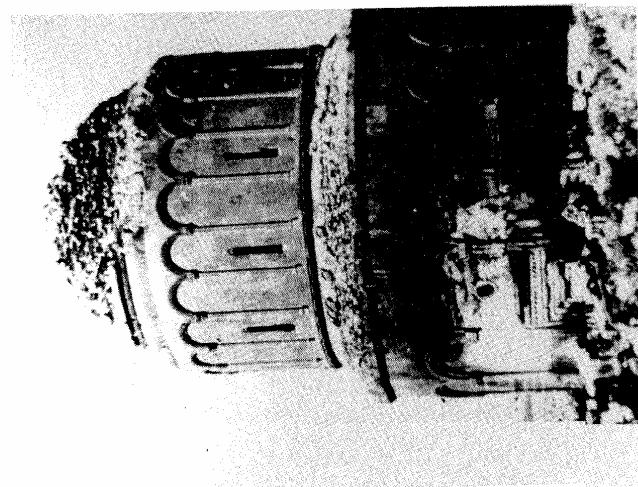
Khtzkonk' Monastery complex (11th Century) (including St. Sarkis Chapel), before 1915



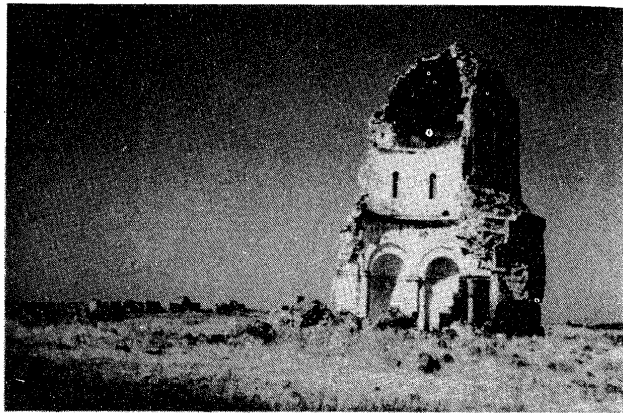
Khtzkonk' Monastery in the 1960s.



St. Sarkis Chapel, Khtzkonk' complex in the 1960s.



Surp Prkich (Holy Saviour) Church in Ani,
before 1915.



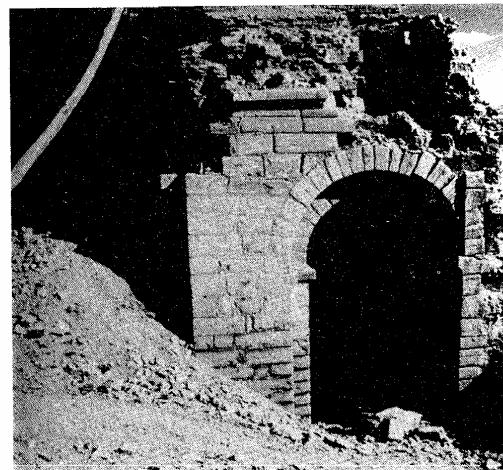
Surp Prkich, in the 1960s.



Varak Monastery, frescoes.



Varak Monastery, inside walls.



Varak Monastery, rear view.



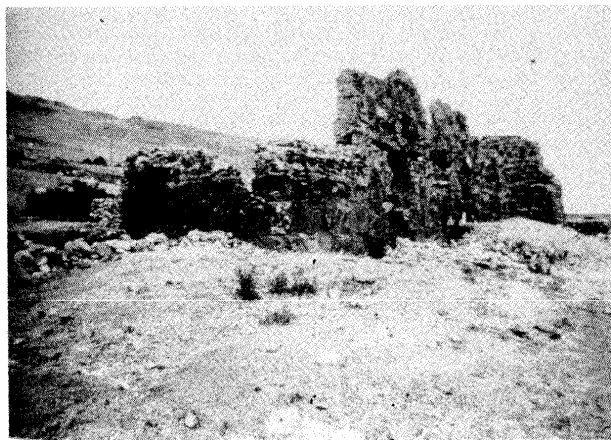
Ani Cathedral



Erzurum Cathedral



The Church of Tekor (4th-5th Century) before 1915.



The Church of Tekor in the 1970s.

Discussion

[D. Kouymjian completed his commentary on the projected slides.]

Mr FALK asked if the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople had protested formally against these destructions. Was there official information regarding Turkish policy in this area?

Mr KOUYMJIAN stated that during the past twenty years the Patriarch had been forwarding annual reports to the authorities and had been reminding them of the articles of the Treaty of Lausanne guaranteeing the rights of minorities. He had also requested authorization to begin repairs; but he had had no results. It should be noted that the building of the Patriarchate itself was in bad shape.

Mr FRY stated that he had asked the Turkish Foreign Ministry whether repairs were forbidden. The answer had been perfectly bureaucratic: repairs were not forbidden, but there were always good reasons not to authorize them.

Mr KOUYMJIAN added that there was in Istanbul an Armenian hospital which served everyone. The management wanted to carry out badly needed repairs; but it had been refused the right to increase rents even on farms which belonged to the hospital. Therefore, even if authorization was obtained, management would still have lacked the means to carry them out.

In another case, the government had a bridge built over an Armenian cemetery without notifying the relatives of those buried. Yet another case: the Turkish government had planned to use the services of a French Armenian architect for the restoration of a church; yet the architect was never officially invited.

Mr FRY stated that three years before, he had visited the Christian Church in Trebizond and found it in good shape.

Mr KOUYMJIAN pointed out that that was a Byzantine church, not an Armenian one.

Mr RIGAUX invited Prof. HOVANNISIAN to present the report by

Prof. LEO KUPER who could not be present.

Prof. HOVANNISIAN prefaced the reading of the report by stating that, while many survivors whom he had interviewed had told of maltreatment by Kurds, they did not consider the Kurdish people responsible; they rather condemned those who used them against Armenians; they also understood the struggle which the Kurdish people were waging today. He also added that current attempts by the Turkish government to present Armenians as anti-Muslim were in vain, since Armenians had always been grateful to Arab peoples who welcomed them after the deportations and the genocide. (Prof. HOVANNISIAN then presented Prof. KUPER's report.)