

12.1 Memoir of the Armenian Genocide (1915-1918)

Source: Grigoris Balakian, *Armenian Golgotha*, NY: Vintage, 2009

Background: Between 1915 and 1918 over one million ethnic Armenians living in modern day Turkey were murdered or marched into the desert to die of exposure, thirst, or starvation by the Turkish military, police, and militias. In 1922, an Armenian priest named Father Grigoris Balakian published an account of his deportation from the city of Constantinople, now known as Istanbul, with 250 other Armenian intellectual and political leaders. In the edited excerpt included here, Father Balakian reports on conversations with a police captain named Shukri in charge of escorting the prisoners. He titled the chapter “The Confessions of a Slayer Captain” (139-150).



Questions

1. Who was the author of this memoir?
2. According to the Turkish officer, how many Armenians were killed in this district?
3. How were the people murdered?
4. In your opinion, based on this evidence should the treatment of Armenians in Turkey be considered genocide? Explain.

A. “Now it’s not secret anymore; about 86,000 Armenians were massacred. We too were surprised, because government didn’t know that there was such a great Armenian population in the province of Ankara. However this includes a few thousand other Armenians from surrounding provinces who were deported on these roads. They were put on this road so that we could cleanse them.”

B. “After we had massacred all the males of the city of Yozgat – about eight thousand to nine thousand of them in the valleys near these sites, it was the women’s turn . . . Every woman, girl, and boy was searched down to their underwear. We collected all the gold, silver, diamond jewelry, and other valuables, as well as the gold pieces sewn into the hems of their clothes.”

C. “After stripping them all of their possessions and leaving them only what they were wearing, we made them all turn back on foot to the broad promontory [overlook] located near the city of Yozgat . . . Ten or twelve thousand Muslims were waiting there . . . The government order was clear: all were to be massacred, and nobody was to be spared.”

D. “I had the police soldiers announce to the people that whoever wished to select a virgin girl or young bride could do so immediately . . . Thus about two hundred-fifty girls and young brides were selected by the people and the police soldiers.”

E. “It’s wartime, and bullets are expensive. So people grabbed whatever they could from their villages – axes, hatchets, scythes, sickles, clubs, hoes, pickaxes, shovels – and they did the killing accordingly . . . The Sheikh had issued a *fatwa* [order] to annihilate the Armenians as traitors to our state . . . I, as a military officer, carried out the order of my king.”