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Armenian Agony- IV

Lead: During World War I, Turkish plans for exterminating or deporting the people of Armenia nearly succeeded.

Intro. : *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Being allied with Germany during the first World War meant that Turkey could settle once and for all its long-running ethnic and religious feud with the Armenians, a community living in a province in disputed territory east of Turkey near the Caspian Sea. The Russians,

principle allies of the Armenians, as well as the British and French could not come to their aid because of the war and they were left pretty much at the mercy, or lack of it, of the much stronger Turkish forces.

First, community leaders were arrested and shot. Second, younger men were drafted into Armenian units of the Turkish Army, purposely exposed to Russian fire and thus eliminated. When some units actually were not wiped out, they were deactivated and turned into labor detachments. When even then some survived these units were gradually decimated, their soldiers were simply taken out and shot.

Meanwhile, back in the province of Armenia, the Turkish government was either executing the peasants or deporting them to camps in the Syrian desert. When some Turkish officials began to draw back from this genocide, they would be reprimanded. One such merciful governor received this terse message. "You have already been informed that the government has decided to exterminate entirely all Armenians living in Turkey. No one opposed to this order can any longer hold an administrative position. Without pity for women, children and invalids, however tragic the methods of extermination may be, without heeding any scruples of conscience, their existence must be terminated."

Out of a pre-war population of about two and a half million, about half died. A post war famine claimed another 250,000 victims. Armenia survived as a part of the Soviet Union.

The official position of the Turkish government is that there were a substantial number of Armenian deaths – 300,000 to 600,000. Turkey maintains that the deaths resulted from warfare, starvation and epidemics that affected all segments of Turkish society.

The preponderance of current scholarship, however, has concluded that the Armenians barely survived the first systematic attempt in modern times to bring about the complete and

deliberate extermination of an entire ethnic population.

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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