

Andonian (Antonian), Aram, (Constantinople, 1875 – Paris, 1951)

Aram Andonian was a columnist, editor of periodicals, author of novellas, Armenian-language textbooks, children's books, and a multi-volume illustrated history of the Balkan wars, *Patkerazard endardzak patmutiun Balkanian Paterazmin* (1912–13). He was often persecuted for his outspoken articles and was jailed for publishing a piece by Avedis Aharonian (an Eastern Armenian writer, considered a revolutionary by the Ottoman government).

As a dangerous revolutionary, Andonian was among the first group of Armenian notables to be arrested on the eve of April 11 (24), 1915, imprisoned in Chankiri, then exiled to the interior. On the way, he fell off the carriage and broke his hip, while others continued and were all murdered. After recuperating, he managed to escape but was discovered and jailed. He escaped and was rearrested a few times until he joined a caravan of deportees. In early 1916 he reached Meskene, the infamous refugee camp. After a few months among the deportees, he fled to Aleppo where he stayed with the Mazlumian brothers (owners of the Baron Hotel) and was exiled with them to Lebanon, only to return to Aleppo in October 1918 as the British entered the city. Here he met Naim Sefa, the petty officer who had helped him escape from Meskene. Disobeying orders to destroy sensitive telegrams and documents after reading, Naim passed many of them on to Andonian in exchange for money. Andonian published them, adding his own analysis and Naim Bey's eyewitness accounts, in *Mets vochire* (The great crime, 1921). Although the Turkish government denounced the book as a fabrication, established historians have verified the authenticity of all the documents, which were offered at the Paris Peace Conference as valuable proof of intent to annihilate a nation. They were also used to exonerate Soghomon Tehlirian who assassinated the principal architect of the Armenian Genocide, Talaat Pasha, in Berlin in 1921.

From his personal experience and the plethora of eyewitness accounts he collected, Andonian chose six episodes to develop into short stories in *Ain sev orerun* (In those dark days, 1919). These stories expose outrageous atrocities, such as the hundreds of children set on fire and dumped in a pit from which wailing and moaning were heard for days; mothers gone mad, eating their dead children; a boy tortured and executed for attempting to escape. A recurring theme is the victims' selfishness in striving to survive at all costs.

From 1928 to 1951, Andonian served as director of the Nubarian Library in Paris. The library was raided by the German occupiers in 1941, and thousands of books and papers were confiscated and sent to Berlin. The incident affected Andonian's frail health. Over the next ten years until his death, he contributed 25 articles portraying a number of Armenian intellectuals with whom he had shared prison cells and deportation routes. He was commissioned to write about Komitas Vartabet, another Armenian detainee who lost his mind to the horrors of the Genocide. This series of articles kept him going, but remained unfinished at the time of his death. (503)

Further Reading

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Literature of the Armenian Genocide

The Armenian Genocide (1915–1923) has left a legacy of literary responses even as new responses continue to emerge from the attempt to confront the Genocide, grasp its historical and psychological impact, and uphold memory with which to relate and identify in dispersion.

The first-generation survivor-writers witnessed the horrors and strove to eternalize their experience in art. Hagop Oshagan, Aram Andonian, Zabel Yesayan, Suren Partevian, Vahan Tekeyan, Gostan Zarian, Shahan Natalie and others engaged in a personal interpretation of history, a dialogue with history based on certain assumptions deeply rooted in Armenian culture and religion and affected by prior traumatic experiences and historical archetypes borne in the nation's collective memory. The poetics of violence and the powerful literary tools devised in response to the massacres of 1894–96 and 1909 by Siamanto and Daniel Varuzhan, two literary giants murdered in 1915, played a major role as sources of inspiration and emulation.

Then there were ordinary survivors with modest skills who wrote their life story for posterity. Meticulous descriptions of people, places and events endow these memoirs with historical value, as the slaughtered nation speaks of a torturous journey; a first sighting of rotting corpses; looters snatching up belongings; *chetes* crushing small children, kidnapping pretty girls, raping women young and old, and corpses too, and tearing open the bellies of pregnant women; victims pleading for mercy; and *zaptiës* taking part or looking on with pleasure or indifference at best. Common themes recur, such as the key to survival, the good versus the evil Turk, nostalgia for the lost homeland and confessions of enduring nightmarish memories. These responses helped to link the generation growing up in the Diaspora to the Armenian past and functioned as a source of knowledge and inspiration. Kerop Bedoukian, Alice Muggerditchian Shipley, John Minassian, Hovhannes Mugrditchian, Bertha Nakshian Ketchian, Hambartzum Chitjian are a few of these memoirists whose work is accessible to English readers.

The younger generation, mostly orphan-leftovers of the Genocide, began their writing careers in 1920s with a new and sometimes eccentric thrust to find meaning in their horrible childhood experiences and a way toward the nation's survival. Their writing is inevitably influenced by their new environment, from the Middle East to Paris and the United States. Some, like Hamastegh, Aram Haygaz, Andranik Tsarukian, Mushegh Ishkhan, Hagop Asadurian, Vahe Hayg and Levon Zaven Surmelian, wrote autobiographies or autobiographical novels about the years of calamity. Others, like Vazgen Shushanian, Zareh Vorbuni, Shahan Shahnur and Nigoghayos Sarafian, echoed the complex psychological effects of the Great Catastrophe and the impossibility of surviving with the antiquated values and tools they had inherited.

Literary responses from second- and third-generation survivor-writers strongly indicate that the wound is not yet healed, the source of pain is undiminished. These immensely varied responses—narrative prose or poetry, autobiography, a parent's story cast as fiction, or texts only remotely echoing the Genocide—cover a broad spectrum, being crafted at a distance of time and space, with different levels of skill and understanding, through the impetus of transmitted suffering or a suddenly discovered past, and bearing the influence of different cultural, religious, environmental and sociopolitical factors. They are created with a variety of thrust and motivation, such as seeking catharsis or striving to establish further factual evidence to combat denial and

continuing injustice. As a socially conscious genre, they may manifest interconnection or detachment between generations of survivors.

Virginia Haroutunian had a strangely resentful relation with her strict mother who confided her terrible ordeal only in the final years of her life: *Orphan in the Sands* (1995) is the story of the after-effects of the Genocide which ruined her mother's life and her own. David Kherdian speaks of the same experience in a series of poems dedicated to his father (*Homage to Adana*, 1970); he recounts his mother's life in *The Road from Home: The Story of an Armenian Girl* (1979). Agop Hacikyan knew very little of the Armenian past when he was growing up in a family of survivors in Istanbul. *A Summer without Dawn* (2000) recounts his discovery of the magnitude of the Catastrophe.

Some authors, writing in Armenian, like Vahé Oshagan, Beniamin Nourigian, Biuzand Granian, Hakob Karapents and Noubar Agishian, deal with the effects of the Genocide by portraying the dispersed, assimilated and alienated generation whose roots call them back. One way or another, the entire nation bears the effects of victimization. "We are children of Der Zor," writes Diana Der-Hovanessian. "I am, whether I like it or not, a descendent of a massacred people," writes Gérard Chaliand. All Armenians are survivors of the Genocide, whether or not they lost family members to it. Despite their ethnic consciousness, they are also the product of the New World, with a sense of belonging to and identifying with it. Conflict between the two identities is often a major theme for second- and third-generation survivors. Peter Najarian's *Voyages* (1971) and *Daughters of Memory* (1986) are sites of this painful conflict and attempted reconciliation.

In Carol Edgarian's *Rise the Euphrates* (1994), it is clear that no matter how thoroughly assimilated, the American-born third generation carries traces of the wounds of the Genocide. In *Vergeen: A Survivor of the Armenian Genocide* (1996), Mae M. Derdarian speaks in her grandmother's voice to refute the historical revisionist denial of the Armenian holocaust. Thomas A. Ohanian's *Lines in the Sand: Love, Tragedy, and the Armenian Genocide* (2001) is a historical novel that concludes with a reminder of Hitler's statement and news of the Jewish holocaust.

Peter Balakian's *Black Dog of Fate* (1998) is another example of a journey into the past following the discovery of a family secret tied to the old world. Likewise, Vickie Smith Foston's *Victoria's Secret: A Conspiracy of Silence* (2001) reveals her ancestors as Armenians who fled the massacres of 1894–96. Micheline Aharonian Marcom's mother, raised in Beirut on stories of the Genocide, married an American and moved to America, in part, to leave the old world behind. *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* (2001) relates Micheline's discovery of her grandmother's life story.

The literature produced by the new generation(s), whether in Armenian or in the languages of the host countries, portrays the painful transition and the emerging make-up of the new Diasporan Armenian. The hardship of dislocation and the memory of family lost to Turkish atrocities have become part of the Armenian heritage, transmitted from generation to generation.

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Oshagan, Hagop (Oshakan, Hakob), (Bursa, 1883 – Aleppo, 1948)

Hagop Oshagan's entire literary legacy is an exploration of the mechanics of transforming the Armenian tragedy into art. It is also a quest to answer two questions: Why did the Turk commit such an inhumane crime? What impact did that crime have on the remnants of the Armenian nation?

Oshagan was a prolific writer. His ten-volume *Hamapatker Arevmtahay grakanutian* (Panorama of Western Armenian literature, written 1934–38, published 1945–83) and his literary creations including his unfinished novel *Mnatsordats* (Remnants, in three books, 1931–34), not counting a large corpus of unpublished works, add up to 12,000 pages.

Oshagan was five when he lost his father. He suffered the life of an orphan, hungry and miserable. After graduating from school at age 17, he taught in various Armenian town and village schools and published critical reviews and short stories. In 1914, with a group of young intellectuals in Constantinople, he initiated the literary movement *Mehian* (Pagan temple) together with a journal of the same name. Their goal was the rejuvenation of Western Armenian literature, using the glories of pagan Armenia as a source of inspiration. The 1915 Genocide put an end to Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire. Oshagan managed to avoid arrest, living as a fugitive until 1918 when he fled to Bulgaria. He returned to postwar Constantinople in 1920 to take part in the revitalization of Armenian intellectual life, until the threat of Mustafa Kemal drove the Armenian intellectuals out of the country two years later. Oshagan participated in the new literary movement, *Bardzravank* (High Monastery), taught refugee children at the Central Armenian School, and published critical reviews and his first impressions of the Catastrophe in five stories (*Kayserakan haghtergutian*, Imperial song of triumph, 1983). In lieu of a preface to these stories, he addresses Kaiser Wilhelm, accusing him of conspiracy in the crime. He struggles to fight emotions and tries different angles—vultures feasting on the dead, Germans indifferently witnessing the atrocities, Muslims killing the infidels with religious fervor and self-satisfaction. The more Oshagan wrote about the Catastrophe, the deeper he sank into the impossibility of creating art. His novellas, plays and short stories, such as *Khonarhnere* (The humble ones), *Hariur meg darvan* (Of 101 years), *Dzag bdoog* (The harlot), *Haji Abdullah* and *Haji Murad*, are testimonies to this struggle. His goal, however, was to write *the novel* of the Catastrophe, which he began in 1931. *Mnatsordats*, a realistic tale of pre-1915 Armenian village life, Turkish-Armenian relationships, and most importantly, the Armenian perception of the Catastrophe and characterization of the common Turk as victimizer, remained unfinished, stopping on the threshold of the Great Calamity.

After short stays in Cyprus, Cairo and Paris, Oshagan settled in Jerusalem in 1935, continuing his productive life as an author and educator. He died while on a visit to the Armenian community in Aleppo.

Oshagan confronted the Genocide as the end of Western Armenian literary norms and traditions, and embarked on building the foundations of the new Diasporan literature upon the ruins of Genocide.

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Partevian, Suren (Sisak Partizpanian), (Constantinople, 1876 – Alexandria, 1921)

Suren Partevian was a writer, columnist, editor and ruthless critic committed to resolving the “Armenian Question.” His literature breathes the pain and horror of the Armenian tragedy extending from the 1890s to 1915.

During the massacres of 1894–96, Partevian fled to London, witnessing the plight of Armenian refugees there and in other European cities. *Kaykayum* (Disintegration) portrays the disintegration of the established Diasporan communities, detached from Armenian issues and “avidly engaged in the pursuit of further wealth and luxury.” News of the massacres agitated their conscience, yet they were reluctant to help the wretched refugees in their struggle to survive. An important theme here is the image of the perpetrators and their religious ecstasy and gratification in shedding Armenian blood. Partevian also condemns the European powers for their reluctance to interfere and stop the carnage. He confesses his inability to convey the true picture of Turkish atrocities, whose magnitude and dreadfulness overpowered his creative imagination and command of language. These handicaps prevented him from undertaking large-scale literary creations. His thematization of this stage of Armenian history was limited to succinct reportage, describing the tragic events in telegraphic style.

After the Young Turk revolution of 1908, Partevian returned to Turkey, believing in the promise of liberty and justice and a better future for Turkish-Armenian co-existence. But only ten months after the revolution, Armenians in Cilicia became the victims of an appalling conspiracy between the reactionaries who committed the atrocities and the government which stood by indifferently. Like Zabel Esayan, Partevian served on a delegation that visited the disaster-stricken area and reported to the Patriarchate in Constantinople. *Kilikian arhvirke* (The Cilician Catastrophe, 1909) encapsulates his impressions and his disillusionment after having trusted in the goodwill of the Young Turks, as he offers analytic arguments in an attempt to understand and explain the calamity. A recurring theme is his blaming the victims for having lost their national spirit and values when subjected to extreme hardship. The victimizers not only achieved physical destruction, but they purposefully dehumanized their victims before killing them.

Hayuhin (The Armenian woman, 1911) treats the massacres of the 1890s but is inspired by his visit to Cilicia and his encounter there with women survivors, “the superhuman bearers of the cross of suffering.” The stories detail women’s various reactions to calamity: heroic resistance, desperate acts of vengeance against their abductors, suicide, and submission to their fate as a concubine or a whore in a brothel.

Ariuni matiane (The book of blood, 1915) also focuses on the massacres of the 1890s while news of the deportations reaches him in Cairo. Exaltation of armed resistance as the only means to achieve freedom for the nation is a new theme here, but again, Partevian is drawn deeper into internalization of the catastrophe. *Dzayne hnchets* (The sound echoed, 1916) and *Anmah botse* (The undying flame, 1917), two plays in response to the tragedy of 1915, repeat the scenario, dragging in the German role in the Armenian catastrophe, “conceived in an evil copulation of German intricacy and Turkish barbarity.”

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Women and the Armenian Genocide: An Unspeakable and Everlasting Ordeal

As a result of the systematic destruction of Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire during the period between the massacres of 1894–96 and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, an estimated 1.5 million lost their lives and some 500,000 fled the country. The presence of Armenians in their homeland of 3,000 years was reduced to a mere 50,000 residing in Istanbul and thousands of forcibly or voluntarily Islamized Armenians living discreetly and anonymously throughout Turkey.

During these trying times, Armenian women experienced a prolonged agony. More vulnerable and less well-equipped physically and emotionally, especially during the deportations of 1915, with almost all the men gone, they took charge of the remnants of their families and faced tragic choices, none offering true salvation, yet all demanding heavy compromises or extraordinary courage. Given space constraints, this entry is very succinct; a longer version is published in *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review*, vol. 7 (2009), pp. 7–24.

Eyewitness accounts of the plight of Armenian women during the massacres of 1894–96 and 1909 portray a morbid landscape of murder, rape and plunder: mothers witnessing daughters being violated and sons and husbands being tortured and killed; young women being forced into conjugal relations with their Turkish or Kurdish abductors, bearing their children and, in extreme cases of madness, rage or revenge, killing the innocent offspring and taking flight. These accounts also describe women taking up arms and fighting shoulder to shoulder with *fedayees* (freedom fighters) in the incomparably scant defense against Turkish troops and Kurdish tribesmen. Tormenting memories lived on within the confines of every Armenian household, yet total destruction did not occur during this period. The survivors continued living in their ravaged homes and ransacked towns and villages. Rebirth was possible despite continuing discrimination and persecution, and women played a major role in this revival.

Total destruction occurred in calculated phases beginning in the spring of 1915. First, all able-bodied Armenian men were conscripted, then disarmed, tortured and murdered. Next, a disarmament decree was implemented with the utmost brutality—bastinado, horse-shoeing, the extraction of nails, eyebrows and beards—forcing Armenians to reveal any hidden weapons. Women were treated with the same cruelty, stripped naked, whipped or beaten and even raped. Then, on the night of April 23–24, 1915, the Armenian secular and religious leaders in Istanbul and other cities, and then all Armenian men in every town and village, were arrested and executed outright or sent to be killed on the road to exile. This calculated strategy turned the Armenian population into defenseless and frantic masses of women, children and elderly men.

The deportation decree, the last blow to the remnants, ordered Armenians to unknown destinations, allowing only a few days or no time at all for preparation. It was up to the women to assume responsibility, first, to cope with the loss of their murdered or imprisoned husband or son, and then to prepare for the journey: what to take along, whether or not entrust a young child or precious possessions to a Turkish neighbor in hopes of returning to reclaim them. Many were given the option of converting to Islam and thereby avoiding deportation. Women had to make that difficult decision and face long-term compunction for having betrayed the Christian faith of their ancestors. But even with this sacrifice their troubles did not end. They had to marry a Muslim to prove

their sincerity and surrender their children to Turkish orphanages to be brought up as true Muslims.

Eyewitness accounts depict the most horrible and poignant scenes. The caravans of deportees were accompanied by gendarmes for “protection.” Instead, they alerted Muslim villagers or criminal gangs (*chetes*) of the approaching convoy, then stepped aside and allowed them to loot, rape and kill at will. Older and weaker men and women who could no longer continue after weeks of walking without food and water, were shot or left to die by the roadside. Mothers wrapped cloth, if they had any left, around their children’s bare feet, but this covering easily ripped on thorns and stones. Others begged strangers to take their infants, so that at least these might survive. Still others taught their children the Armenian alphabet, using a stick to draw in the desert sand, in the hope that after their own certain death, their children would keep the memory of their identity. Those who still had their Bibles would read to the children to soothe the pain of hunger and thirst. At night, gendarmes or bandits would attack the deportees and prey upon young girls, rape them and leave them to die, or take them away to sell as slaves or use as wives or concubines. Gendarmes would push women into the raging waters of the Euphrates and shoot them if they tried to swim away. Women jumped into the river themselves, with their children in their arms, to end their torturous life and avoid surrender to the Turk. Men who had not been arrested before the deportation and older boys were rounded up and shot or bayoneted, often in front of their wives or mothers. Pregnant women were prodded with bayonets; the fetus was taken out and tossed in the air or crushed on a rock.

From April to October 1915, thousands of wretched women and children filled the roads, prey to continuous assaults, hunger, thirst, disease and the scorching desert sun. The death march passed along circuitous country roads and through rugged mountain passes crowded with the rotting, maggot-ridden corpses left behind by previous caravans. The chosen route avoided villages so that the deportees could not get food, water or any other help. Even when the route took them by a stream or a well, the gendarmes prevented them from approaching the water.

Despite unspeakable hardships, some survived but their ordeal continued. In many cases, lingering shame and remorse for the price of survival they had paid ruined their chance of living a normal life. Others fought back, putting their eyewitness accounts into writing, speaking out against Turkish denial, in the belief that “recognition of the crime does not bring the victims back, but it eases somewhat the pain of the living.” These survivors, almost all of whom have now passed on, were denied the satisfaction of seeing the criminal admit the crime. They carried the burden of horrifying memories and transmitted it to their offspring. Now, it is the men and women of the second- and third-generation survivors who live with these unsettled accounts of the past and strive for an impossible healing and reconciliation.

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Yesayan, Zabel, (also spelled Esayan Zapel, Yessaian, Essayan) (Scutari, Constantinople, 1878 – Armenia, 1943)

It is commonly agreed that Zabel Esayan's *Averaknerun mej* (Amid the ruins, 1911) is the best artistic achievement inspired by the horrors, atrocities and after-effects of the Cilician massacres of 1909 and one of the most brilliant pieces in Armenian Genocide literature.

During the 1895 massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Esayan fled to Paris where she studied philosophy and literature at the Sorbonne. There she began her literary career and became known as an accomplished writer of free verse and short stories, molding feelings of love, hope, lust, envy and jealousy into lyrical expression and opening the darkest corners of the human psyche. Her stories, such as *Erg ar gisher* (Night song, 1895), *Skiutari verjaluysnere* (Twilights of Scutari, 1905), *Keghts hancharner* (The phony geniuses, 1905), *Hlunere ev embostnere* (The obedient ones and the rebels, 1906) and *Shnorhkov mardik* (Virtuous people, 1907), reflected life in Constantinople with the social, political and economic deprivations and injustices inflicted on the Armenian community under Ottoman rule. She was known as an outspoken feminist writer, particularly stressing the plight of Armenian women.

Like many Armenian intellectuals, Esayan welcomed the Young Turk revolution of 1908 and returned to Constantinople, hoping for a better future for Armenians. However, the massacres in Adana in 1909, spreading to surrounding towns and villages, and the participation of the Turkish mob were a shock to all. Esayan was a member of a delegation sent by the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople to evaluate the situation and prepare a report for the relief work to follow. Upon her return, she published several articles describing the plight of the survivors and analyzing the event. Her masterpiece, *Amid the Ruins*, a stark departure from her earlier works, paints a landscape of misery and suffering, a true image of the victimizers, the desperate yet heroic self-defense of some, the cowardly submission of others, and the will to survive in all of them.

In 1915, she escaped to Tbilisi to avoid imminent arrest. After the war, she returned to Turkey and helped to gather and shelter surviving refugees and orphans of the Genocide. She avoided thematizing the Genocide in a large-scale literary work. *Verjin bazhake* (The last cup, 1916) and *Hogis aksorial* (My exiled soul, 1919) contain only obscure references to the impact of the Genocide on her psyche.

Her quest for a more favorable environment took her to Soviet Armenia in 1926; *Prometeos azatagrvats* (Prometheus liberated, 1928) reflects her impressions. She settled there permanently in 1933, and paid tribute to the regime in *Krake shapike* (The shirt of fire, 1934), *Silihtary parteznere* (The gardens of Silihdar, 1935) and *Parba Khachik* (Uncle Khachik, 1936). During the Stalinist purges of 1937, she was accused of nationalism and arrested and exiled. She is believed to have died in 1943, possibly killed in Siberia.

Throughout her life Esayan struggled for freedom and justice for herself, for all women, and for all the deprived classes of society. Her chosen tool was literature, in her words, "a powerful means, a weapon to fight against everything that is unjust."

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