

THE ADANA MASSACRE AND THE PEOPLE'S HISTORICAL MEMORY

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Beginning from as early as 1955, I have written down, tape- and video-recorded, academically studied and published the testimonies (memoirs, Armenian and Turkish-language songs) communicated by eyewitness survivors, who were miraculously saved from the Adana massacre and the Armenian Genocide, were forcibly deported from about 100 localities of Western Armenia, Cilicia, Anatolia and resettled in Armenia and the Diaspora. The originals of these materials are kept at the archives of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute NAS RA.

These popular testimonies communicated by the eyewitness survivors, become, owing to their historico-cognitive value, authentic, objective and documental evidences, which are not only attestations of the past, but are also a warning for the future.

Beginning from as early as 1955, during more than 50 years, I have written down, tape- and video-recorded (remaining faithful to the popular speech), academically studied and published the testimonies (700 units: memoirs, Armenian and Turkish-language songs) communicated by eyewitness survivors, who were miraculously saved from the Adana massacre (1909) and the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923), were forcibly deported from about 100 localities of Western Armenia, Cilicia, Anatolia and resettled in Armenia and the Diaspora (Greece, France, Italy, Germany, USA, Canada, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, the Balkan countries, Turkey, etc.). The originals of these testimonies are kept at the archives of the Museum-Institute of the Armenian Genocide of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia.

The popular testimonies, narrated by the eyewitness survivors, saturated with expressive depth and descriptiveness has been created under the immediate impressions of those historico-political events. The representatives of the senior generation even remembered the establishment of the Turkish Constitution in 1908, which had the motto: “Hürriyet, Adalet, Müsavat, Yaşasın Millet” (Liberty, Justice, Equality, Long Live the People – Turk.). A nationwide exultation prevailed in the country, since equal rights were to be secured by law to all the nations living in the Ottoman Empire.

A survivor from Harpoot, Sargis Khachatryan (b. 1903), has told me about this unprecedented event: “I remember in 1908 when the Sultan’s reign was overthrown, people were singing in the streets”:¹

“Kalkın, hey vatandaşlar! ¹
Sevinelim yoldaşlar!
İşte size Hürriyet:
Yaşasın Osmanlılar!”²

“Get up, compatriots!²
Let us rejoice, friends!
Liberty has come to you:
Long live the Ottomans!”³

While a survivor from Bitlis, Hmayak Boyadjian (b. 1902), has testified in his memoir: “... When Hurriyet was declared in 1908, everybody, in the beginning, was of the opinion that Armenians and Turks would live like brothers. There were even festivities in our village and

¹ Svazlian, Verjiné. *The Armenian Genocide. Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors*. Yerevan, “Gitutium” Publishing House of the NAS RA, 2000, Testimony 110, p. 223 (in Armenian).

fusillades were performed.”²

A survivor from Eskishehir, Hovhannes Gasparian (b. 1902), has added: “...In 1908, when the new constitution was proclaimed, the party of the Young Turks was headed by Talaat, Enver, Djemal, Dr. Nazim, Behaeddin Shakir and thousands of young Turks became government members in 1908. They organized a Parliament. Sultan Reshad was the ruler, but he was deprived of any royal rights...”³

An eyewitness survivor born in Sassoun as far back as in the 19th century, Yeghiazar Karapetian (b. 1886), remembering the historical events of the past, has noted: “...The Hurriyet offered freedom to all the political prisoners, after which the Armenians, Turks and Kurds would have equal rights. Everywhere cries of joy were heard. The law of Hurriyet put an end to the humiliation, beating, blasphemy, robbery, plunder and contempt of the Armenians. Anyone involved in a similar behavior would be subject to the severest punishment; he would even be liable to be sent to the gallows. The two nations were put in a state of complete reliance. The Armenians would have the right of free voting, were allowed to elect and propose their delegate. This was a new renaissance in the life of the Western Armenians...”⁴

That was the awakening from the obscurity of the Orient. However, the Turkish reactionary forces, dissatisfied with the constitutional orders, began to accuse the Armenians for bringing the “Hürriyet” (the Constitutional orders), which allegedly pursued the object of seizing the power from the Turks and of reestablishing “the Armenian Kingdom.” Taking that circumstance into account the Armenians have woven the following Turkish-language song:

Padişah oturmuş tahtından bakar,	The king seated is watching from his throne,
Tahtının altında al kanlar akar,	Red blood is flowing under his throne,
Baltayı vurunca yattı ölüler,	Struck by axes, corpses are falling,
Acayip hallere düştü Ermeni.	The Armenians' condition is lamentable.
Şefketlim oturmuş tahtından bakar,	The kind ruler is watching from his throne,
Gâvurun kanları sel gibi akar,	The gâvurs' blood is flowing like a torrent,
Hürriyet isteyenler derede kokar,	The freedom-wishers are stinking in the valley,
Acayip hallere düştü Ermeni. ³	The Armenians' condition is lamentable. ⁷

In the environs of Sis, a Mullah even sermonized: “We can not be brothers with the gâvurs; to get united with them is not possible. The Sharia strictly forbids that. We can not cherish snakes in our bosom, whose biting we have no doubt about.”⁵

On the 31st of March, 1909, a session of the Provincial Council took place under the chairmanship of the valy (governor) of Adana, where a decision to exterminate the Armenians was made. Special secret orders to start the massacre were sent to the provinces. On the eve of the massacre the authorities distributed large quantities of arms and ammunition to the Mohammedan population. Hundreds of criminals were released from the prisons.

² Ibid., Testimony 17, p. 77.

³ Ibid., Testimony 205, p. 340.

⁴ Ibid., Testimony 1, p. 42.

⁵ Keleshian, Missak. *Sis-Register*. Beirut, 1949, p. 544 (in Armenian).

Nevertheless, a year had not elapsed since the declaration of the Turkish Constitution, when the town of Adana and the neighboring Armenian-inhabited villages, which had been saved from Abdul Hamid's massacres (1894-1896), became the target of the hatred of the Ittihat officials.

During the Holy Week of 1909, from the 1st to the 3rd and the 12th to the 14th of April, Adana and its environs were on fire. The blood-thirsty crowd attacked the Armenian-inhabited quarters of Adana and the neighboring villages, plundered all the shops, slaughtered the unarmed and unprotected Armenians, not sparing even the women and the children.

The massacre of Adana was premeditated. This fact is testified by the telegram sent by the councilor of Internal Affairs of Turkey, Adil bey, to all the Turkish officials of the region of Cilicia, where it was written: "Great care should be taken that no damage is caused to the foreign religious institutions and consulates."⁶

The Turkish government commissioned the Ottoman Armenian deputy of Edirné, Hakob Papikian, to go to Adana, to investigate the situation on the spot and to prepare an official Turkish-language report for the Legislative Assembly. H. Papikian left for Adana, scrupulously investigated the events and noted in his detailed "Report" in Turkish, that "...not only did the number of victims exceed 30,000 Armenians, but it was an evident fact that the massacres had been organized with the knowledge and by order of the local authorities."⁷

The eyewitness of that turmoil historian-novelist, Smbat Byurat, has, under the immediate impressions of those sad events, created the following poem of great popularity as a truthful reproduction of the event, which has been communicated to me by the eyewitness survivor from Zeytoun, Karapet Tozlian (b. 1903):

"Let the Armenians cry, the cruel massacre
Turned magnificent Adana into a desert,
The fire and the sword and the merciless plunder

Ruined, alas, the House of Roubinians!
Unarmed Armenians, in a moment
Fell before the mob under the swords,
Churches and schools were lost in flames,
Thousands of Armenians ruthlessly died.

The merciless Turks deprived
The child of his mother, the bride of her groom,
Smashed everything on their way,
Swallowed and got repleted with Armenian blood.

Three days and nights the fire from inside,
The enemy's sword and bullet from outside,
Wiped out the Armenians from the face of the earth
Blood ran down the Armenian streets..."⁸

6 Jizmejjan, Manuk. *History of the Armenian-American Political Parties. 1890-1925*. Fresno, 1930, p. 174 (in Armenian).

7 Papikian, Hakob. *The Massacre of Adana*. "Report." Constantinople, 1919, p. 28 (in Armenian). H. Papikian had just completed his historical "Report," when the Young Turks managed to poison and kill him, and thus the report was not published. After the author's death, the rough copy was translated into Armenian and published in 1919 in Constantinople.

8 Svazlian, V. *The Armenian Genocide*, Testimony 342, pp. 413-414.

The Cilician Armenians in distress have formulated the following malediction under these historical events:

“May you lose your sight, Satan,
You came and entered Adana.”

I have succeeded in writing down from the survivors, rescued from the Adana massacre, and thus saving from total loss also other Armenian- and Turkish-language popular songs, which artistically reproduce those historic events:

“In the morning at dawn
They encircled us on four sides,
Thousands of bullets
Scattered like hail.

Poor Adana was stained
Red with blood,
And the corpses of Armenians
Were sprawled here and there.

They broke doors and windows,
Striking with axes,
They didn’t leave a resplendent house
And burned them all down.”⁹

Or else, were woven other short notes, depicting scenes of the tragic massacre of Adana, which have been transformed into mournful songs:

“Seven girls fled and went away,
Ah, alas!
They shot three of them and caught the other four,
Ah, alas!
They burned little Tigranouhi’s house,
Ah, alas!
A rich girl like her was given to the mullah,
Ah, alas!
Three mullahs dug the ground,
Ah, alas!
They buried the Armenian young man all alive,
Ah, alas!
They took away the boy’s sister and crucified her,
Ah, alas!
They brought her down the cross and threw her into the sea,
Ah, alas!
They entered the school and caught the school-mistress,
Ah, alas!
They opened her mouth and cut her tongue,
Ah, alas!”¹⁰

Those historico-political events have remained in the memory of the Cilician Armenians

⁹ Ibid., Testimony 341, p. 413.

¹⁰ Ibid., Testimony 347-352, p. 415.

as “Kıyma (Slaughtered – Turk.) Adana,” and they have composed the following Turkish-language song:

“Hey, çamlar, çamlar, alnı-açık çamlar!
Her güneş vurunca sakız damlar,
Sakız damlarsa: yüreğim ağlar:
Adana ırmağı sel gibi akar,
İşte geldim sana, kıyma Adana!
Of, of, işte gördüm sizi, kıyma çocuklar!

“Hey, cedars, cedars, variegated cedars!
The resin drips whenever the sun strikes,
When the resin drips, my heart sheds tears,
The Adana River flows like a torrent,
I’ve come to see you, slaughtered Adana!
Alas! I’ve seen you, massacred children!

Adana köprüsü tahtadır, tahta,
Ermeni muhaciri gelir bu hafta,
Adana ırmağı leş ile kanlar,
Kaldırın leşleri, Adana kokar,
İşte geldim sana, kıyma Adana!
Of, of, işte gördüm sizi, kıyma çocuklar!”¹⁴

The bridge over Adana is wooden,
The Armenian refugees will arrive this week,
The Adana River is full of blood and corpses,
Take the corpses away, Adana will stink,
I’ve come to see you, slaughtered Adana!
Alas! I’ve seen you, massacred children!”¹⁴

An eyewitness survivor from Adana, Mikayel Keshishian (b. 1904), has told me with emotion about that fact: “In 1909, at the time of the massacre of Adana, I was five years old. That horrible night was named in Turkish ‘Camuz dellendi’ (The buffalo went mad). And indeed, the Sultan had gone mad. According to his order, people were slain, about thirty thousand Armenians were killed, their houses were demolished and burnt to ashes. ...They gathered all the remaining people and took them to the bank of the Adana River, they sent a message to Sultan Hamid, saying that they had gathered all the Armenians and had brought them to the riverbank and were waiting for his orders. There was water on one side and fire on the other. My father was clasping me in his arms. I remember, I was looking over his shoulder. My mother was also with us. We were all gathered on the riverbank. Then an order of pardon came from the Sultan. They compelled us to shout ‘Padişahım çok yaşa!’ (Long live the King! – Turk.). We returned home, but those who were killed were no longer alive.”¹¹

The following popular song also tells about miserable condition of the victims of the Adana massacre:

“Şimdi Adana’ya gitmeli değil,
Gidip de o halları görmeli değil,
Çorekşaptı^{5*} günü koçnak^{6**} çekildi,
Bütün Ermeniler jama^{7***} döküldü.

“We shouldn’t go to Adana now,
We shouldn’t go and see that condition,
On Wednesday* they rang the bell,**
And gathered all the Armenians in the church.***

Beni öldüren doydu mu ola?
Liralarımı saydı mı ola?
Benim burda vurulduğumu
Anam, babam duydu mu ola?

I wonder whether my killer was sated,
Whether he counted my gold coins,
Whether my mother and father
Heard that I was shot here.

Adana’nın yolları taşlık,
Cebimizde kalmadı beş para harçlık,
Aman, Adanalı, canım Adanalı,
Cebimizde kalmadı, beş para harçlık.”⁸

The roads of Adana are stony,
We all became stony-broke,
Alas, citizen of Adana, my dear,
We all became stony-broke.”¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid., Testimony 182, p. 318.

During the massacres of Adana, dozens of Armenian towns and villages were ravaged and burnt down, while Moussa Dagħ, Deurtyol, Hadjn, Sis, Zeytoun, Sheikh Mourad, Fendedjak and a number of other localities stopped the attack of tens of thousands of Turks with their heroic self-defense and were saved from the slaughter.

A survivor from Moussa Dagħ, Tonik Tonikian (b. 1898) has also referred to the Adana calamity: "Respect and honor are the highest values in the world. We, the people of Moussa Dagħ, love to live our lives with respect and honor.

The massacre of Adana started in 1909. The Turks attacked the Armenians' houses, shops. They plundered, killed, slaughtered, and raped. They did such things! One could not think of them!

We, the Armenians of the seven villages of Moussa Dagħ, took precautions; we assigned guards at night. In many places in Cilicia, the Turks attacked, broke-in, and plundered. People escaped with their lives. The Armenians fled and took refuge in churches, but the Turks entered their houses and plundered. They saw that the Armenians had entered their churches, so they attacked the churches and slaughtered them there. First, they slaughtered babies, right before their parents' eyes, and then killed the parents: men and women. They were slaughtering whole families. Blood flowed like water from the thresholds of the houses. I was in our village when we heard all about it. Until now, Arabs and Turks remember these massacres..."¹²

Hovhannes Abelian (b. 1903), a survivor from Kessab, has also testified: "In 1909, when the massacres in Adana took place, Shaghban agha gathered a mob of forty thousand people and came to pillage Kessab. They reached Ordu. We started to resist. In the village of Lower Esgyuran a battle waged that lasted four to five hours. At the end, our side said: "It's impossible to resist any further. There is no ammunition: let's escape."

We went to the Kessab seashore. I was six years old. "Father, the killers are coming," I said. And they really came. They captured my father in the bushes, pulled him out, lay him on the ground. I cried out, "Oh, dad, dad," fell on him and started crying.

The men stopped and said: "We also have children: if we kill you, the wild beasts will devour you. We grant your life for this child, you will find your death from someone else. Go, live..."¹³

In actual fact, that was the beginning of the Armenian Genocide, when the Young Turks, following the decisions of the secret meeting, organized in 1911, in Salonica, by the party "İttihat ve Terakki," feverishly prepared the total extermination of the Armenian nation, waiting for a propitious occasion. That occasion presented itself when the First World War broke out. Turkey entered into the war, having expansionistic objectives and a monstrous scheme of realizing the annihilation of the Armenians.

Thus, the popular testimonies: memoirs and songs of historical character, communicated by the eyewitness survivors, saved, in this manner, from a total loss and entrusted to the coming generations, become, owing to their historico-cognitive value, authentic, objective and documental evidences, which are not only attestations of the past, but are also a warning for the future.

¹² Ibid., Testimony 159, p. 285.

¹³ Ibid., Testimony 172, p. 309.

Photos:

1. Prof. Verjine Svazlian writing down the testimonies from the eye-witness survivor
2. Yeghiazar Karapetian (b. 1886)
3. Tonik Tonikian (b. 1898)
4. Hmayak Boyadjian (b. 1902)
5. Hovhannes Gasparian (b. 1902)
6. Hovhannes Abelian (b. 1903)
7. Karapet Tozlian (b. 1903)
8. Sargis Khachatrian (b. 1903)
9. Mikayel Keshishian (b. 1904)

(Footnotes)

1. In the various Turkish-language original songs I have recorded, it is possible to observe deviations from the grammatical and phonetic rules of the Turkish language or to encounter Armenian words and morphemes in them. With a view to keeping unaltered the information communicated by the survivors, I have remained faithful to their oral speech.

2. Svazlian, V. *The Armenian Genocide*, Testimony 337, p. 412.

3. Ibid., Testimony 339, p. 413.

4. Ibid., Testimony 340, p. 413.

*The Armenian word “çorekşapti/chorekshabpti” (Wednesday) has been used in the Turkish-language song.

**The Armenian word “koçnak/kochnak” (bell) has been used in the Turkish-language song.

***The Armenian word “jama/zham” (church) has been used in the Turkish-language song.

8. Svazlian, V. *The Armenian Genocide*, Testimony 458, p. 430.

Վերժինե Սվազլյան
Ադանայի կոտորածը և ժողովրդի պատմական հիշողությունը
Ամփոփում

Հոդվածում ներկայացվում է Ադանայի ողբերգությունը վերապրածների երգերի ու չափածո ստեղծագործությունների միջոցով: Այդ վկայություններն ունեն պատմական և ճանաչողական կարևոր նշանակություն: Հիմնվելով այդ եզակի վկայությունների վրա, որոնք պահվում են Հայոց ցեղասպանության թանգարան-ինստիտուտում, հոդվածում ցույց է տրվում Ադանայի կոտորածների արտացոլումը հայ ժողովրդի պատմական հիշողության մեջ: