

Raymond Kévorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens*, Paris: "Odile Jacob", 2006, 1007 pp., ISBN 978-2-7381-1830-1.

Very few people, in Europe, in the U.S. or elsewhere in the world would be capable of answering basic questions about the genocide of the Armenian people. Who knows the basics: when it took place, where, who committed it, how and why? Though important studies have already been written in many languages, the information has not really passed on effectively. In this long process of deeply understanding and disseminating knowledge about the Armenian genocide, R. Kévorkian's recent book is of considerable importance. The critics even see it as a new step in the global understanding of the events of 1915-1917.

The core of the huge book undoubtedly is the fourth and fifth parts, from p. 331 to p. 857. These two parts of approximately 500 pages focus on the course of the massacres. R. Kévorkian explains then, with a level of detail never reached before, what happens to the Ottoman Armenians—region by region, city by city, village by village... He describes and analyses the several periods of the process of annihilation that encompass the two main phases of the genocide.

The first phase covers the extermination of the Armenians of the Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. These massacres are led by the "Special Organisation" (*Teşkilat i mahsusa*), created by the Young Turks in power in Constantinople. In the spring and summer of 1915 about 800,000 of these Armenians are killed, most of them close to their village or city, in what the author calls *sites abattoirs* ("slaughterhouse sites").

The second one is the deportation and extermination of the Armenians of the Western provinces. For some historical, cultural, and political reasons, the author explains, the Armenian population of these Western regions cannot be "easily" killed there. They are, therefore, deported toward the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts. Several hundreds of thousands of them die then, some killed during the terrible journey, others in camps of transit or concentration. Some survive.

A large number of people (very difficult to number precisely), mostly children and young women, are incorporated into Muslim families or harems.

With an amazing concern for detail and the human factor of mass killings, which is characteristic of R. Kévorkian's works, the author names and identifies many actors and places. Never forgetting the national and international context and constantly changing his level of

geographical analysis, he shows precisely how things take place. Moreover, this “micro-history” also is a vehicle that highlights new elements of analysis and of understanding. The financial dimension of the Armenian genocide becomes thus palpable: not only did many Muslim individuals benefit from the large-scaled spoliation of the Armenians, but a major part of the economic network of the Empire was transferred to Muslim Turks, that is, in a way, as the author underlines, *nationalised*. A new light is also shed on the role of the Kurds in the genocide. It appears, according to R. Kévorkian, that only some nomadic groups, employed by the Young Turk Committee Union and Progress, were involved, and not “the Kurds” as is often referenced. Instead, he shows that the main “butchers” are found among the Muslim Caucasian population who had recently settled in the Ottoman Empire (mostly Cherkess and Chechens).

The rest of the book, that is to say the first and the last parts, are of great interest as well. They put the events in their historical and political context and focus on the immediate aftermath of the genocide.

The first part analyses the twenty years preceding the genocide, insisting notably on the complex relations between the Ottoman opposition (some of its members who were to become the deciders and organisers of the extermination of the Armenians) and the Armenian committees, both of them then in exile.

The last part focuses primarily on the very important Young Turks trials of 1919 and the filiation between Mustafa Kemal and the Young Turks. These two major elements are rarely mentioned by traditional Turkish historiography.

Indeed, if this 1000 page book is of crucial importance for the historiography of the Armenian genocide, it is also, and perhaps first and foremost, about Turkish history. Turkish and Armenian histories turn out to be inextricably interconnected in that tragic affair: while one world is wiped out—the Armenian one, a new nation emerges—the Turkish one. As the author concludes: *il s'est agit de 'détruire pour construire'*.

JULIEN ZARIFIAN

*Institut Français de Géopolitique, Université Paris 8*