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Remembrance of Terrible Things Past

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Dear Peter,

When I went to Central Anatolia last October to do interviews in some villages near the city of Kayseri, I never intended to do any research on the "Armenian question." I had more than enough trouble getting government permission to write about village life in general; I certainly did not want to complicate matters by delving into such a controversial topic.

But it kept coming up. Because of an action taken during the summer by the American Congress, everybody wanted to talk about Armenians, without any prompting by me. Although I had not planned on it, I found myself collecting material about the Armenians who once lived in the Kayseri area, particularly the two villages of Güzel Köy and Kayabağ just east of Kayseri.

I was still reluctant to push this investigation too far. The last thing I wanted was to be known in Kayseri as "that American who's here writing about Armenians." If the matter came up in a conversation, I noted what people said and sometimes I slipped in discreet questions. But generally, I did not push my sources too hard; if I sensed resistance, I dropped the subject.

Later, in the more relaxed environment of Cairo, I pursued the matter further. Cairo has had a large Armenian community since before World War I. After the war, many of the Armenians who had escaped the troubles in Turkey ended up in Cairo, Egypt then being under British control. I initiated contacts among this community, looking for refugees who had come from Güzel Köy-Kayabağ or, at least, Kayseri itself.

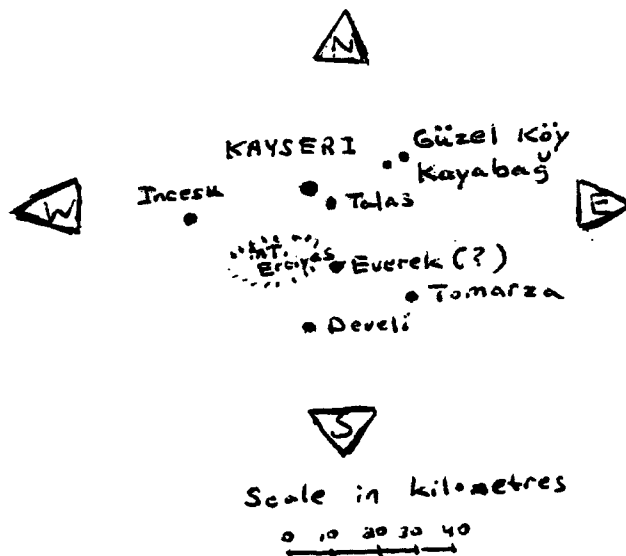
An Armenian friend helped in the search. We were not able to find any former residents of Güzel Köy-Kayabağ, a big disappointment, but we did turn up four people who had lived in Kayseri and had witnessed the 1915 deportation from Turkey to Syria. We also talked to a woman whose mother had been deported. My friend, who speaks English, Armenian, and Arabic fluently, provided the interpretation.

Many huge gaps and inconsistencies remain, but I judge the material collected interesting enough for a newsletter. Although I still have only the Turkish side of events in Güzel Köy-Kayabağ in 1915, I now have a fair idea of what happened to the Armenians in Kayseri itself.

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Map showing Kayseri and the villages and towns mentioned in this report.

1984,

On November 19, the old wound was reopened. Turkish UN diplomat Enver Ergün was assassinated in Vienna, killed by an Armenian terrorist who fired six bullets through his car window at a busy intersection. Ergün was the third Turkish diplomat killed in Vienna since 1975, when Ambassador Daniş Tunalıgil was shot dead in the embassy, and the 32nd Turk slain abroad by Armenian terrorists since 1973.

Turkish emotions had already been stirred up during the summer when the US House of Representatives passed by voice vote a resolution supporting Armenian genocide claims against Turkey. Sponsored by Tony Coelho, D-California, the resolution asked President Reagan to designate April 24, 1985 — Armenians identify April 24, 1915 as the day their persecutions began — as a "national day of remembrance of man's inhumanity to man," and listed only one example of this inhumanity — the Armenian claim that 1.5 million of their people died during a 1915 deportation from eastern Turkey to Syria conducted by the Ottoman government.

The Turkish republic has never accepted these claims. A recent government publication (The Armenian Issue in Nine Questions and Answers. Ankara: Foreign Policy Institute, 1982) argues that "the Ottoman decision to deport Armenians from the war areas was a moderate and entirely legitimate measure of self-defense" given the military threats pressing in from all sides in 1915. (p. 24) Of the 1.3 million Armenians living in Turkey before World War I, about 300,000 lost their lives during the war years, "more or less the same proportion of their total population as were the three million Turks who died at the same time." (p. 30) The publication argues that "since there was no genocide, Turks cannot accept something which did not happen as well as claims pertaining to indemnification for a purposely created myth." (p. 36)

It was not clear how many House members actually voted for the resolution. But the Republican leadership in the Senate prevented it from going any further. The Republicans also halted the progress of a resolution passed by the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee about the same time that asked policymakers to take the Armenian genocide claims into account when devising American foreign policy.

What were these congressmen trying to do? It is surely apropos that California is the home of the largest Armenian community in the United States and that Rep. Coelho was the head of the Democratic national committee for the election of Democratic congressmen in California during the recent election campaign. Another large Armenian community is located in Massachusetts; Senator Paul Tsongas, D-Massachusetts, is a member of the Foreign Relations Committee.

The American press and public never paid any attention to the House or Senate resolutions, both of which came up at the height of the election campaign. The House particularly passes hundreds of unimportant resolutions each year. For the American public, this one "was one of these resolutions on the level of 'National Strawberry Week,'" said a source at the American embassy in Ankara.

The Turks did not treat the matter so lightly. The country went into an uproar, which one veteran correspondent in Ankara described to me as "the strongest anti-Americanism in 20 years." Newspapers ran articles and cartoons bitterly attacking the United States, most of them drawing parallels with American mistreatment of blacks and Indians. Turkish television made a point of running the old Dustin Hoffman movie "Little Big Man," which gives the Indian side of the Custer's Last Stand story.

While traveling through the country that fall, I was constantly drawn into discussions about the mischievous resolutions by Turks who could not understand why the United States, supposedly their faithful ally, was dumping on them like that. Always, I carefully explained the separation of powers in the American government. The full Congress would never approve such a thing, I said, and even if it did, President Reagan (the administration is well aware of Turkey's strategic value) would never sign it.

One middle-aged man I met on a bus patiently listened to my explanation. When I told him that the Turks had no reason to get so excited about the resolutions, he responded with a little story -- An old man was pestered by a bee repeatedly buzzing by his head, and he swatted at it. "Why do you do that?" a friend asked him. "The bee is just passing by and will cause you no harm." "Ah yes," replied the old man, "but in passing by, he creates a road for himself that he may use again."

Opposition politicians in parliament saw a long-awaited opportunity to cause trouble for Prime Minister Turgut Özal and his ruling Anavatan (Motherland) Party; they demanded a general parliamentary debate on US-Turkish ties. The Anavatan was obliged to defeat this motion on September 25. Speaking for the majority, Prime Minister Özal cited the "90 percent probability" that the

full American Congress would not support the House resolution. After that, the situation quieted down. But the damage to American-Turkish friendship had been done. The Turks are people with long memories; they don't forget the arms embargo over Cyprus, and they won't forget this.

For the Turks, the Armenian genocide claims constitute a scar running across the national psyche. They point out, quite rightly, that the Ottoman Empire was generally tolerant of its religious minorities, even favoring them at times. Only when Armenian groups turned to Romanov Russia before and during World War I did Turks and Armenians finally clash.

The Turks refer to these terrible years from 1914 to 1923 as a period when "the world was boiling." During World War I, eastern Anatolia was the scene of a brutal slugging match between Turkish and Russian armies, with monumental casualties on both sides. After the war, the Greeks invaded western Anatolia and Ataturk's new Turkish government had to fight for its life. It is not surprising that these years saw the collapse of relations between Turkish Muslims and Christian Armenians and Greeks.

In the case of the Armenians, the main question is whether the Ottoman government in 1915 had developed a deliberate policy of genocide when it ordered Armenians in eastern Turkey deported to Syria, then under Ottoman rule. Armenian historians such as Richard G. Hovannisian (Armenia On The Road To Independence: 1918. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) say yes.

"If the apologists for Turkish policies have shaped a credible case against the Armenians," Hovannisian wrote, "the critics have refuted the argument point for point and have concluded that the deportation and massacres were calculated, irresponsible, and brutal crimes." (p. 53)

On the other side, Stanford J. and Ezel Kural Shaw argue in their two-volume History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977) that the evidence is against the government authorizing massacres. "... one can assume that about 200,000 perished as a result not only of the transportation," wrote the Shaws, "but also of the same conditions of famine, disease, and war action that carried away some two million Muslims at the same time." (vol. II, p. 316)

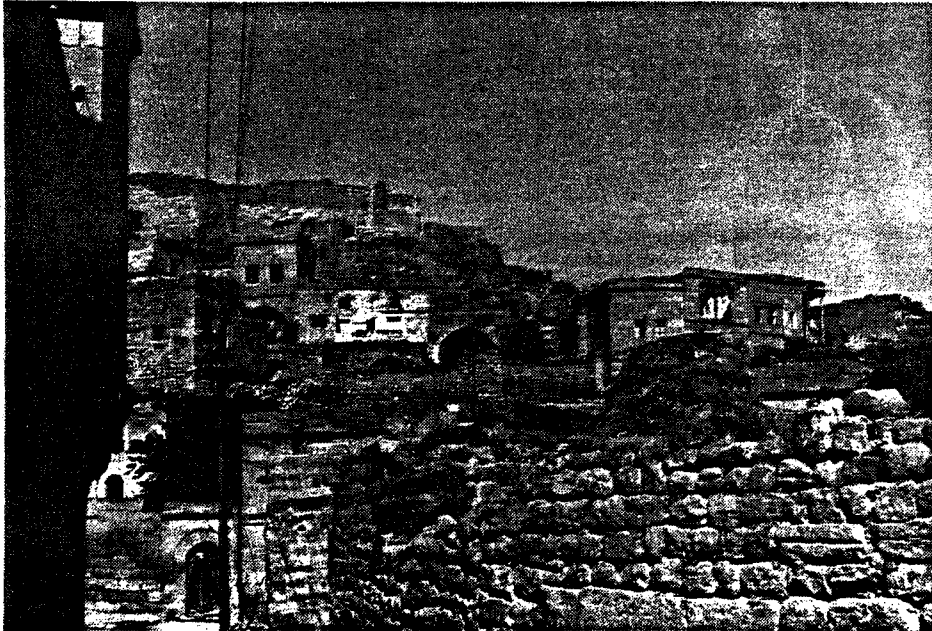
With so much history in dispute, and American strategic interests at stake, one might conclude that this is not the sort of thing responsible American congressmen should be getting themselves involved in.

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Although Armenian groups continue to uphold the claim of 1.5 million dead in 1915, most historians today agree the figure is exaggerated. Even Hovannisian says there were only between 1.5 and 2 million Armenians in all of Turkey before World War I; the Shaws go for a lower estimate of 1.3 million in Turkey. Today, about 40,000 remain, most of them living in Istanbul.

Before World War I, the Armenians were concentrated most heavily in the eastern regions of Turkey. But a large community also existed in Central Anatolia, near the city of Kayseri. Because of problems with their Byzantine rulers and Turkish incursions into the plateau, Armenians began to migrate to Central Anatolia in the 11th century. By 1882, Armenians constituted 21 percent of Kayseri district's population of 130,899. As was usually the case in Ottoman times, the Armenians excelled in trade and manufacturing while the Turks concentrated on farming and animal husbandry. Armenians were heavily involved in three industries for which Kayseri is famous today -- handmade carpets, textiles, and pastırma (pressed meat, or sausage).

During the 1890s, Armenian terrorist groups all across Turkey waged a campaign of assassinations and bombings against the Ottoman government in the hopes of provoking European intervention on their side. Central Anatolia had its share of these incidents. During the years 1892-93, disturbances occurred in both Kayseri and Develi, a village 30 km south of Kayseri with a large Armenian population. On 30 November 1895, a major anti-



The old quarter of Incesu, a town in Central Anatolia located 30 km west of Kayseri. Until the population exchange of 1923, Incesu contained a large Greek community and two churches, one of which is still standing. Note the architecture: houses built of cut stone with balconies projecting over the streets. The old quarters of Güzel Köy and Kayabağ look the same. Except for the telephone lines and television aerials, the photo could have been taken in 1914.

By 1908, according to an Ottoman government report (Aspirations et Agissements Révolutionnaires des Comités Arméniens avant et après la proclamation de la Constitution Ottomane. Constantinople: 1917), Armenian agents trained in the United States began to establish arsenals in Kayseri and nearby villages. It seems that both the Hunchaks and Dashnaks, the two major Armenian revolutionary committees, were active in this area. When Turkey and Russia went to war in 1914, these groups looked to the Russians for liberation. "To most Armenians of Turkey and Persia, Romanov Russia symbolized an advanced civilization and society, a champion of Christendom against Islam, and the hope for emancipation," wrote Hovannisian (p. 7).

With Turkish and Russian armies on the eastern front locked in a desperate struggle, the Ottoman government worried about the loyalty of Armenians in eastern Turkey — Armenian guerilla groups were cooperating with the Russian forces and, on the western front, some 150,000 Armenians were serving with the regular Russian army in the fight against the Germans and Austrians. The failure of the British and French naval assault on the Dardanelles in March 1915 seems to have emboldened the Young Turk government, particularly Enver Paşa and Talat Paşa, to move against the Armenians; the deportations began in late April.

The situation in the Kayseri area had already deteriorated. On 29 January, 1915, an accidental bomb explosion

in an Armenian's house in the village of Everek near Kayseri led to a government investigation. The authorities found bombs, dynamite, and weapons in Everek, Kayseri, Develi, and Fensse (apparently close to Everek). The 1917 Ottoman report, which was published to answer the Armenian genocide claims, included photographs of the munitions discovered in the Kayseri region. "One sees by these details that the committees had transformed Kayseri into an arsenal of the first order," said the report (p. 232).

While doing interviews in the town of Incesu (pop. 7,000) located 30 km west of Kayseri, I talked to a retired primary school teacher named Yakup Toker. Mr. Toker, who would have been 14 years old in 1915, gave me the following account of what happened in the Kayseri area.

"One Friday, the Armenians in Develi decided to bomb all the mosques," said Mr. Toker. "They knew lots of Turks go to mosque on Friday. A 12-year-old boy was working with the Armenians, who didn't know that he understood their language. One day, as the Armenians were planning to put bombs in the mosques, the boy understood their intention and told the situation to his father, who gave the information to the government. The government brought soldiers to this district, took all the Armenians together, and sent them somewhere. That was in 1915 or 1916."

The government report does not mention such an incident occurring in Develi. But referring to the explosion at Everek, the report says that when the Armenians ran up to the house where the bomb had exploded, "among them was a young Muslim, an apprentice baker, Yusef." (p. 231) This Yusef helped the authorities in their investigation.

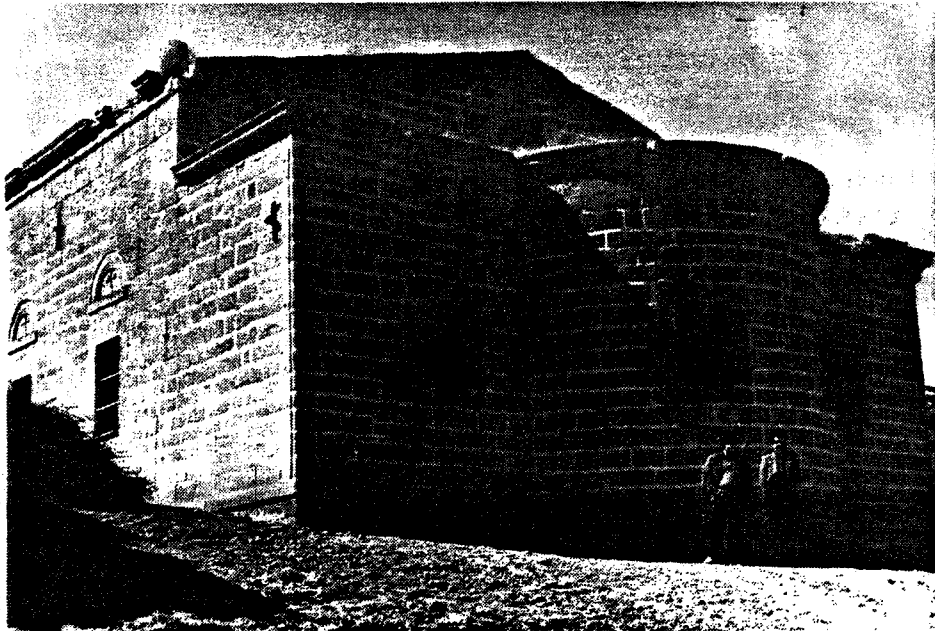
Referring to Develi, the report says only that tools for making bombs were discovered in the Armenian cemetery there and that bombs of large caliber were found in the garden of a certain individual.

It seems that Mr. Toker, like the other people I talked to in the Turkish villages, is mixing up stories he heard as a boy with later published accounts. Some details from his story match these in the government report, others don't. But several other people repeated Mr. Toker's version of events. Somehow or other, a standardized story, involving Armenian attempts to blow up Muslims in their mosques, has emerged in the Kayseri area.

A series of documents compiled for the British foreign office in 1916 by historian Arnold J. Toynbee (The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: 1915-16. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916) laments that "we have comparatively little testimony concerning the occurrences" in Kayseri district, which was then part of the vilayet (province) of Ankara (p. 327). But what does exist tends to confirm the government story. One item in the British collection is an account from an Armenian journal in New York published on 28 August 1915.

"At Everek, a bomb explosion was the signal for a terrible persecution of the Armenians," said the article. "The German who narrates this adds that the Governor of Everek was a good man and was therefore relieved of his duties and replaced by a Circassian of violent character. There have been numerous arrests and atrocities in this district. After that, the wholesale deportations were begun."

The second item in the collection comes from an Armenian journal published in Roustchouk (in Russia?). "The



The Greek church in Incesu. The one in Kayabağ is almost identical. Unlike the Kayabağ church, which you can enter through a rusted side door, this one is sealed up.

Armenians of the Kaisaria district, with the exception of Talas, have been deported," went the account. "At the end of July the Government issued the following manifesto to the Armenians of Talas and Kaisaria ...". The manifesto included the usual instructions for the separation of men and women during the deportation. Armenian accounts insist this was done to facilitate the deliberate murder of the men; most of the Armenians I talked to in Cairo reported male members of their families disappearing before the deportation never to be heard from again. The journal also said that "more than 80 persons have been hanged at Kaisaria, including doctors and other notables."

The 1927 republican census found only 1,277 Armenians and six Greeks (the Greeks left during the 1923 population exchange) still living in Kayseri. A few Armenians apparently remained in some of the nearby villages as well. Historian Christopher J. Walker (Armenia: The Survival of a Nation. London: Croom Helm, 1980) wrote that the Armenian residents of Everek-Fenese petitioned Ataturk in 1928 for the reopening of their church, writing out their request in the newly-introduced Latin script. "Impressed by the manner in which the Armenians demonstrated their support for his modernization plans," Ataturk gave his permission (p. 347).

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The Armenian memory is still vivid in the villages of Güzel Köy (Turkish for "Nice Village") (pop. 300) and Kayabağ ("Rock Vineyard") (pop. 650) located on opposing sides of a

wooded ravine 20 km east of Kayseri. Despite what government maps and road signs may say, the inhabitants here continue to refer to Güzel Köy by its old name "Nize" (apparently an Armenian name) and Kayabağ is still "Darsiyak," a modification of the Armenian "Der Ishak," or "Father Issac" (thus, the village may have been named after a priest).

The two villages have changed little since the World War I years, except for the introduction of electricity and piped water systems. Each village retains its old quarter where houses built of cut stone cluster densely along narrow cobblestone lanes, their upper stories projecting over the streets. The people who live in these old houses are old too, since young people seeking jobs or education leave for the cities. Agriculture offers no future because the land here is rocky and not easily irrigated; only five families in Kayabağ still farm, none in Güzel Köy.

Hobbling down a Güzel Köy lane with his walking stick, grey-bearded Hassan Aznevi, 74, greeted me and my interpreter and immediately launched into an excited tirade about the former Armenian neighbors. He began the story right at the beginning, 1071, when the Turks began their conquest of Anatolia, and moved swiftly on to modern times when the Armenians "got many weapons from Russia" and conspired to kill the Turks. "In those days, the Armenians tried to get the Turks into the mosques and burn them," said Mr. Aznevi, repeating the familiar story. "During our religious festival, the Armenians were waiting to kill us in the mosques."

Relations between the two communities were not always so tense here. "For some period, the Turks and Armenians lived together in a good atmosphere," said Erdal San, a slender, middle-aged man from Kayabağ.

"We were just like brothers and sisters," said Ahmet Alkaya, 68, a retired hoca, or religious teacher, from Güzel Köy. "But later, the Armenians tried to kill us from behind. When we understood this, we wanted them to leave the village, and told them that many times. When we learned they planned to attack us, we wanted to fight against them."

Mr. Alkaya's story is detailed and, once again, rather familiar. "They planned to kill all our people in the village mosques when we went for a special prayer during the festival," said Mr. Alkaya, a lanky, spry man with a grizzled beard. "Everyone from age three to 70 would be killed. We learned from our spies that they were going to kill us. A bomb was found in ..." -- he mentioned a village near Kayseri, but unfortunately, I did not note the unfamiliar name at that time; now, I think he said "Develi" -- "and after Enver Paşa" -- leader of the Young Turk government in Constantinople -- "learned there would be an attack all over Kayseri, he made the Armenians leave."

I have not yet found any mention of Güzel Köy-Kayabağ (the former Nize-Der Ishak) in books or documents. But the 1917 Ottoman report may contain a clue. It states that Armenian revolutionary groups carried out operations in Incesu, Devrevnek, Ekrek, Efkéré, "and other places." (p. 233) I have not located Devrevnek or Ekrek, but I do know that Efkéré is a few kilometers northeast of Güzel Köy-Kayabağ.

"Some of the Armenians took their treasures with them," continued Mr. Alkaya. "Some tried to hide their treasures in wells, others under rocks. There were certain signs where they



put their treasures. When they were later allowed to come to Turkey as tourists, after the democracy, they came here and lived in our homes for months. But in their last few days here, they tried to get their treasures. We later saw some holes in the ground."

A couple of things strike me about this account. I suspect Mr. Alkaya is confusing stories he heard as a boy ("My father told me about the Armenians," he said) concerning events in his own village with published accounts of the situation in Kayseri. Also, the reference to Armenian tourists may be incorrect. True, some Armenians do travel to Turkey (one of the Armenian women I talked to in Cairo had visited Istanbul), but Greek tourists are far more common. In other Turkish villages, including Incesu, I heard stories of former Greek residents returning as tourists.

In fact, I found a general tendency in Güzel Köy-Kayabağ to confuse the Ermeni (Armenian) people with the Rum (literally "Roman," but actually Greek) people. Both Armenians and Greeks lived with the Turks in this area; several sources said the Armenians were more numerous than the Greeks. But maybe not.

Crowning the Kayabağ side of the ravine is the brooding ruin of a large church. Farm machinery now sits parked under the roof of the front portico, blocking great iron doors that have been sealed for 60 years. A pile of rubble from the collapsed dome fills the church interior; on the upper walls and arches, frescoed saints and angels continue to stand vigil over the indifferent wreckage.

At first, I was told this was an Armenian church. My interpreter later said it was actually Greek, but I disbelieved him then. He had become very sensitive about the Armenian issue and I was having trouble working with him. However, I did manage to get into the church through a rusted side door (so had the village youths; the interior walls are covered with obscene graffiti). So intent was I on taking photographs as quickly as possible that I did not carefully observe interior details. Only months later, after having developed the color slide film in Istanbul, did I notice the Greek writing around the vaulted area that had supported the dome. So, it's a Greek church, raising the possibility that there might have been more Greeks than Armenians in Güzel Köy-Kayabağ.

The villagers still talk about a huge polished stone that once shone on the western side from a hole in the upper wall above the portico. "It was the color of honey," said Mustafa Tuncer, 75, of Kayabağ. "It became a bit red when struck by the sun, so we called it 'the burning stone.' The sun's light was reflected about one to two kilometers around the church by this stone. You didn't see the stone itself, just the reflected light -- particularly in the evening."

At one time, the stone had been covered with a phosphorescent material. "A clergyman saw it, said it was dirty and needed cleaning," Mr. Tuncer remembered. "The clergyman wanted it to reflect light more, but they used a cleaning material that took off the shining substance."

Mr. Tuncer said the stone remained in the church wall for several years after the Armenians left and then disappeared. He thinks the Greeks took it with them when they left in 1923.

Spotting the non-wooded parts of the ravine are hundreds of astonishing chimney-like structures built of stone with open, slanted tops. The villagers claim no other part of

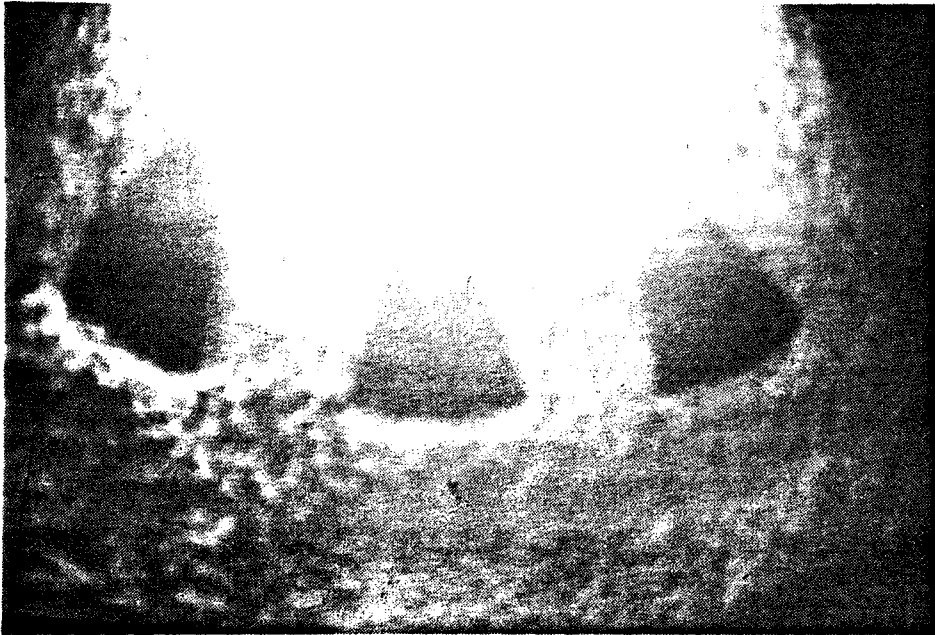


The kushlaks in the Güzel Köy-Kayabağ ravine. These stone structures provide an entrance for pigeons into underground chambers carved out of the volcanic tufa in the ravine. The pigeons nest in niches cut into the chamber walls. The villagers crawl into the chambers through narrow tunnels that usually begin a few feet down from the kushluk on the slope. They catch these birds too young to fly away out the chimney and kill them on the spot. The Armenians apparently designed and built these structures, although the Turks have since built some additional ones.

Turkey has them. They use the word kushluk, or "bird house," to refer to this kind of construction, which is actually a sophisticated pigeon coop. The kushlaks' stone chimneys provide pigeons with passageways into circular subterranean chambers built into the slope of the ravine. Because the earth here consists of a strong, but pliable, volcanic tufa (Kayseri is dominated by the twin peaks of the 1,305-foot Mt. Erciyes, a former volcano), the villagers have been able to carve niches into the sides of the chambers to provide nesting areas for the birds, who fly in through the chimneys.

During the period from March to November, a villager will enter his kushluk about twice a month, crawling on his hands and knees through a tunnel leading into the chamber from the slope. He captures these birds unable to fly away and enjoys, as one resident said, "the best meat in the world." During the winter months, each kushluk owner feeds his pigeons wheat seed twice a week because "if the pigeons don't have food, they don't come here."

Ali Düşün, 57, of Güzel Köy, built his kushluk in 1950. He said he modeled it on earlier structures built by the Armenians, thus indicating that the kushluk is an Armenian invention.



A poor photograph (no flash), but it provides an idea of what the interior chamber of a kusluk looks like. The pigeons nest in these triangular niches. This is the top row of niches, just below the chimney entrance; several more rows of niches are below it.

The kusluk is only one example of Armenian cleverness cited by the modern Turkish villagers. Mr. Alkaya marveled that the Armenians operated so many types of shops in the area that the villagers "didn't have to go to the city to buy things." Some of the old buildings that the Armenians used for their jewelry shops are still standing in Güzel Köy, he said. Two houses that once belonged to the Armenian and Greek muhtars (mayors) of Güzel Köy also remain.

Mr. Düşün is impressed by the Armenians' early 20th century version of the shower stall. In his backyard, Mr. Düşün keeps a rectangular stone slab with ridged sides and a small hole at one end. He explained that an Armenian would stand on this slab and pour water over himself, letting the water run out the hole. He seemed to think the Turks didn't have anything like it at the time.

Some Güzel Köy-Kayabağ inhabitants are descended from Armenians. The mother-in-law of one man I met had been Armenian (during the deportation, women and girls were often allowed to convert to Islam if they wanted to stay in Turkey). Mr. Alkaya mentioned another Armenian woman who had converted to Islam. "When her husband learned this, he wanted to hit her, but she escaped and stayed in Gesi," said Mr. Alkaya, referring to a nearby town. "She changed her name. After she died, she said in her will that she wanted to be buried in a Muslim grave."

Referring to both these women, Mr. Alkaya concluded, "They liked our religion very much."

For the villagers of Güzel Köy-Kayabağ, it's all a muddle in their minds now, their feelings toward their former Armenian neighbors. On one hand, they express respect for people who exceeded them in wealth and technological advancement. But this is combined with anger at the (supposed) attempt at treachery so long ago and the continuing attack on their country today.

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For the Armenians deported from Kayseri in 1915, there is no such ambiguity, only pure, undiluted hatred for the Turks.

"I tell you one thing," said 72-year-old Valian Kazaudjian of Cairo in a voice shaking with emotion. "What the Turks they have done to us the new generation is forgetting. But the old generation like me, we can't forget never their persecutions against us." During the course of our hour-long interview, Mr. Kazaudjian repeated this statement several times in his broken, idiosyncratic English.

The owner of a Cairo photography shop, Mr. Kazaudjian lives in a rather shabby apartment with an aged female relative. His present circumstances no doubt cause him to dwell on his family's past wealth.

"My father was a millionaire," said Mr. Kazaudjian. "My father had two factories in Kayseri. One, carpet factory. One silk factory. The silk which was coming from there they were making silk carpets. We got in Kayseri a street which belongs to us. So all this left for Turks; they eat it. But I tell you one thing -- the Arab people, they are very generous and very kind with Armenian people. They are not like the Turks. Turks, they are ... you make good, they make bad to you. That's their quality."

His cousin, Mrs. Mary Berberian Kezelian, attested to the former wealth of Mr. Kazaudjian's family. Although herself born in Cairo, her mother had been from Kayseri and had told her a story about Mr. Kazaudjian. "Because he was so rich, he was used to drinking from a fancy silver cup. During the deportation, he wanted to drink water from that silver cup. He was two years old then. His mother started crying because she remembered the old times."

Mr. Kazaudjian's father got into trouble during the weapons and bomb scare of early 1915. An Armenian revolutionary committee, the Dashnaks, had been collecting money from the Armenian community in Kayseri. "My father, he didn't want to pay. He says, 'Today, I pay some money for the committee, tomorrow, the committee is captured; they will get my name.' And they say, 'You pay money for the Armenian committee to make trouble in the town.' So my father refused to pay and told to these people, 'If anybody he was to make anything, I kill him just in place.' So my grandfather he says to this committee people, 'Go away and come tomorrow when my son's not here.' And the next day, my grandpa paid I don't know what money. And when the committee was captured, they found my grandfather's name, and they say, 'But this man has died.' 'No, but his son is alive.' Because they have got some Armenian people they make it to spy, like in every country they are like that. So they catch my father. My father says, 'But I didn't pay any money. Please don't make me trouble.' So they ordered him to be hanged."

Two Danish Red Cross nurses reached Kayseri from

Sivas on July 4, 1915, and testified to the general hysteria that had overtaken the region. "We then returned to Talas, where we passed several days full of commotion," wrote one of the nurses, "for there, as well as at Kaisaria, there are many arrests being made. The poor Armenians never knew what the morrow would bring, and then came the terrifying news that all Armenians had been cleared out of Sivas" (quoted in Chailand, Gerard and Yves Ternon. The Armenians: From Genocide to Resistance. London: Zed Press, 1981).

According to Mr. Kazaudjian, 27 men were arrested at the same time as his father and they were all hanged. But his father escaped because the Turkish governor of Kayseri was a good friend of the family. "He came to my grandmother and said, 'If you want to pay 50 pounds gold, I will take away from hanging and I will take away from Kaisaria by telling that the director of the prison says, 'This man, he died from his afraid.' But I will take him to Syria.' And there were some Turkish people were really kind for us.

"So my grandmother paid 50 pounds gold to the governor, and this governor has took my father out of Turkey to Syria. On the way, because they were going with carriage you know, with horses, my father saw several bodies thrown, killed, robbed, everything. He arrived at his destination and wrote a letter to his mother. He says, 'Mother, I have arrived safely in Aleppo. Don't leave the country. Stay where you are, because if you come out of the country, they will kill you on the way.' My grandma took the letter and says to the governor, 'I want one thing from you. Can you take us like you have taken my son to Syria?' 'Sure, you are my mother; I want to help you.' So my grandmother says, 'You see this carpet? It belongs to you, a present from me.' So the governor says, 'Look grandma, you have many other things. When you leave today, they will take all your furniture, everything. Let me take them all from you.' So my grandmother says, 'But we come back maybe.' 'I don't think so you will come back.' So my grandmother says, 'Alright, take all this for you.' So the governor takes all this."

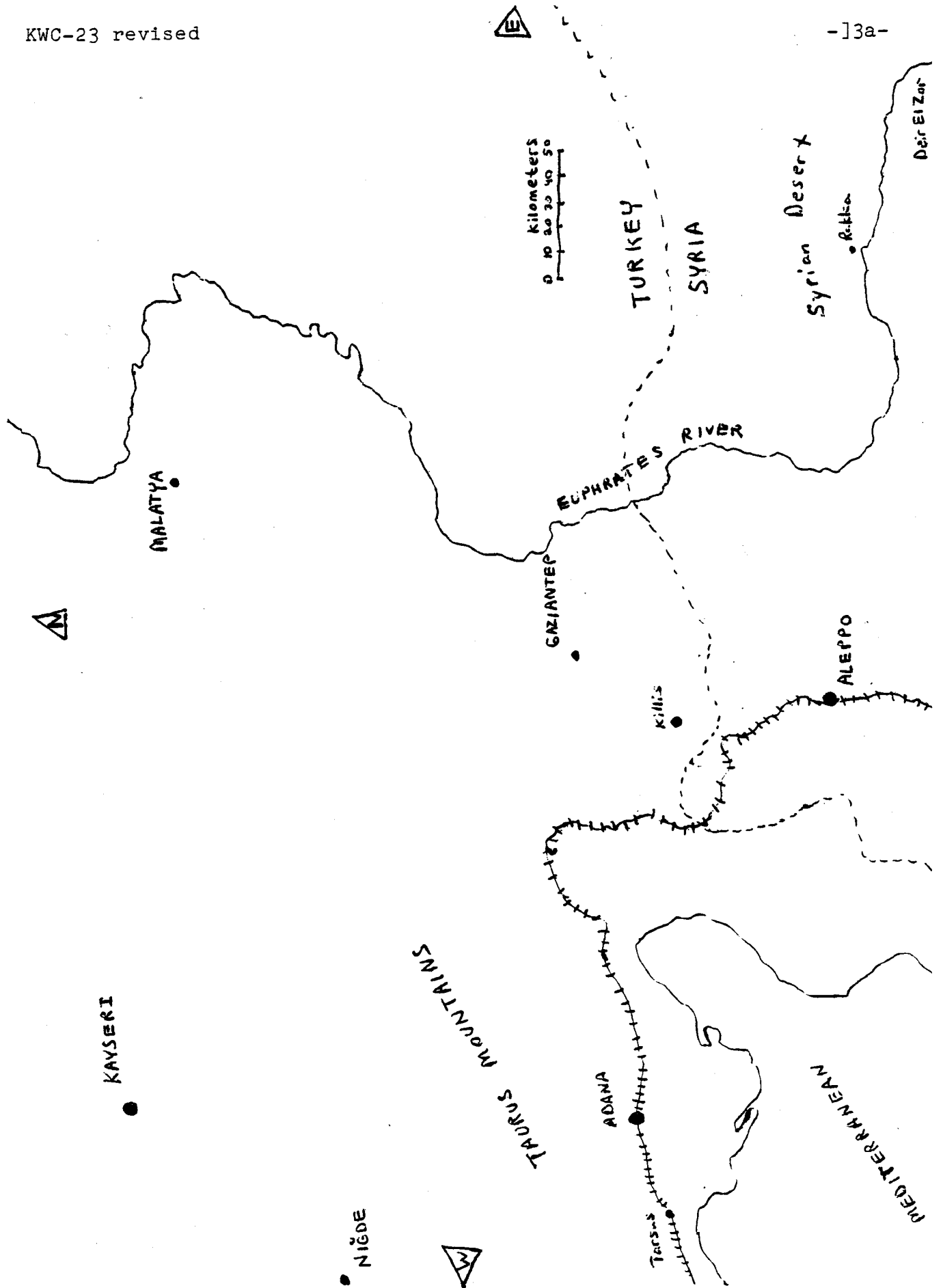
Mr. Kazaudjian's redoubtable grandmother died during the journey to Syria, but he, his mother, and two brothers survived to rejoin his father, who died soon after. At the end of the war, the four surviving family members returned to Turkey with French forces; the French controlled the southern coastal region around Adana from 1919-21. From Adana, they continued on to Istanbul. There, one brother departed for America where he married an American woman and established a shoe factory in Chicago, becoming a very wealthy man. Mr. Kazaudjian, his mother, and other brother then came to Cairo from Istanbul in 1921 to join an uncle who had settled there before the war.

"We died for our Christianity," said Mr. Kazaudjian, summing up the story of the deportation.

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"It was jealousy," said Valian Kezelian, 79, a retired Cairo jeweler. "Because the Armenians were such good merchants and all the trade was in their hands, this caught the eye of the Turks. That's why they wanted to eliminate us."

Mr. Kezelian's family had also been wealthy and



prominent in Kayseri. Educated in Vienna, his father knew seven languages and had many business interests. He was a big carpet merchant, controlling 60 looms, and was also an insurance agent, covering the region all the way up to Ankara. "If you had taken two hours to walk around our land, you couldn't have covered it all."

It was his linguistic skills that got Mr. Kezelian's father into trouble. When the war broke out in 1914, the authorities conscripted him to work as a translator. Three times, his family paid money to bring him back home. "After he came home the last time, they came and took him to the prison."

The arrest of Mr. Kezelian's father seems to have had something to do with the weapons search, because 40 other men were taken at the same time. But Mr. Kezelian said his father had not been a member of any of the Armenian committees.

After eight days, the family received a note in which Mr. Kezelian's father said he had managed to escape from prison and was well. "After that note, we never heard from him again."

Four or five months later, Mr. Kezelian's family joined the other Kayseri Armenians who were being deported to Syria. They first traveled by carriage to Tarsus, a town on the southern coastal railroad about 40 km west of Adana. "We were robbed and pillaged on the journey and, of course, many died. They would wake us up at night to continue the march." At Tarsus, they lived in a field under tents. The authorities announced that people with money could take the train to Aleppo in Syria.

"And that's what we did. But the government did not allow us into Aleppo, so we stayed in Killis, a town north of Aleppo. This was sort of a camp. Everybody was coming there. We saw that 30 or 40 people were dying and their bodies were being collected and just dumped into a ditch, or something. From that camp, we took three carriages and crossed a bridge to Aleppo. We paid 40 pounds to cross that bridge."

In Aleppo, the family lived nine months "in very bad conditions." Mr. Kezelian remembered that the authorities would send Armenians from Aleppo to Deir El Zor, the most notorious of the deportation camps along the Euphrates River. "But we tried to stay in Aleppo because Deir El Zor was horrible — everybody was dying there. There was no food or water."

After the war, the family moved on to Damascus and then Jerusalem, where the British army was stationed. "We used to sell cigarette papers there to live."

In 1920, Mr. Kezelian arrived with his mother and brother in Cairo to join an uncle, the brother of his father, who had settled there before the war (this man was also Mr. Kazaudjian's uncle). Two sisters of Mr. Kezelian's mother went to America, where another sister had been living before the war.

"Nothing will get better unless the Turks admit they committed the genocide," said Mr. Kezelian.

\* \* \*

"We have to do something," said Mrs. Mary Berberian Kezelian, Mr. Kezelian's cousin. She was responding to a question about recent Armenian terrorism. "What shall we do? Any suggestions? What shall we do? That's the problem. They don't admit ..."

Now 63 years old, Mrs. Kezelian was born after the war, in Cairo, and has never even seen Turkey. But stories told by her mother keep the horrors of the deportation alive for her. Her mother was from Kayseri and had not yet married when the war started.

One day, her father was taken to prison and beaten, "just to tell them where the Armenians had their weapons. All the trouble was with the weapons." Her father returned home after the beating, but was taken back to prison two or three more times. He never returned after the last incident.

Mrs. Kezelian's mother and grandmother then joined the deportation, ending up in Deir El Zer. "They walked around this hill seven times -- they didn't know where they were -- and then went to Deir El Zer. They had nothing left, not even any money, nothing to help. When they arrived at the camp, the soldiers wouldn't let anyone in until they paid money -- even to get into the refugee camp. So my mother stayed outside. Then, everybody inside the camp was dying, but my mother remained alive because she was outside."

From there, they went to Baghdad on foot. "There was no water, no food; people would die on the way. My grandmother said she couldn't walk anymore, so they gave her to another family to take care of. My mother walked and walked; she didn't die."

In later years, Mrs. Kezelian's mother would search the newspapers, always looking for the names of missing family members, always in vain.

From Baghdad, she traveled on a British warship to Egypt. Mrs. Kezelian's father, a jeweler, had been living there since before the war. "He was a gentleman, so he said, 'I will marry one of these orphans.' And he married my mother. I was born here in 1922."

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Mrs. Mary Tekeian Chilingirian, 76, belonged to another wealthy Armenian family in Kayseri. Her father was a textile merchant "and also dealt in some kind of glue or adhesive that they extracted from plants."

During the summers, her parents would holiday in Tomarza, a town near Kayseri, where her father owned a store. She remembered that her father "couldn't fold his finger because some Turks had attacked him one day; they wanted to rob him in Tomarza in his store. He fought back and was injured."

Mrs. Chilingirian was born in Tomarza in 1909, but mostly lived in Kayseri until 1915. She recalled the frequent snow in Kayseri and how "the houses were attached to each other so you could jump from one roof to another and visit your neighbors." The family lived in a large old building belonging to her grandmother. "After the deportation, the government tore down many of the old buildings, but left this one because it was so beautiful. It was made into a hospital."

One day, early in 1915, the town criers announced that all Armenians must prepare to leave Kayseri. "Everybody got ready to go because they realized that in other places people who refused the orders were being killed.

"One Turkish officer wanted to take me away from my



"When the war broke out in 1914, my father immediately sent a telegram and said, 'Bring anything you can and come over here to Egypt.' So my grandfather, my mother, myself, and two brothers went to Izmir. There, we waited two months for a ship to take us to Alexandria. While we were in Izmir, Turkey declared it was going into the war on Germany's side." (31 October, 1914)  
 "Finally, a ship came and we all arrived in Alexandria."

\* \* \*

Mrs. Vrejouhi Zambakdjian Sarafian, 70, owns a furrier shop in Cairo. Only two years old in 1915, all her memories of the deportation come from her father. "He used to tell me so many stories, but I never wrote them down. Now, I feel sorry about that."

Mrs. Sarafian's tale, particularly as it concerns her father's activities during the war, is indeed marked by hopeless inconsistencies. Her father died in 1956, taking all his secrets with him. Now, after 70 years, it's the general thrust of Mrs. Sarafian's story, rather than detail, that concerns us.

She is clear about one thing — her father was a prominent member of the Hunchak revolutionary committee in Kayseri, and he was often on the run from the Ottoman authorities. But the rest is very confused.

When the war broke out, Mrs. Sarafian's father was conscripted into the Turkish army. Like most Armenians serving in the army, he was assigned to a labor battalion. One day, while his unit was working in a village somewhere, he found nine Armenian children in a field. "Their mother had been killed, so he took them to an orphanage." Another time, "some Turkish officers found an Armenian woman in the last stages of pregnancy. They slit open her stomach, took the child out, and told her, 'Drink your child's blood.'"

On the question of how her father managed to stay in the army while still a Hunchak member, Mrs. Sarafian's story becomes quite muddled. "They caught him several times and wanted to hang him. But because he played the violin, the officers in the Turkish army kept him to entertain them. He escaped from this hanging business 18 times."

In direct contradiction to that story, she told another one. She said her father found a Turkish passport one day and entered the army under the name Ali Çavuş (çavuş means "sergeant" in Turkish) and "passed as that person."

"One night, the army was at some place in the mountains and the Turks told my father some 30 Armenian youths were being sent to them and that these youths were to be killed. They tied the Armenians together and put them in a pit with Turkish officers watching over them. My father, because he was considered one of them, was up there watching with them. One Turkish soldier came with an ax and started killing the Armenians. He hit the rope and untied them. One of the Armenians, a strong fellow, grabbed the ax and killed the Turkish boy. My father used this as an excuse to leave, saying, 'Oh no, a Turk has been killed here; I'm not going to watch this.' All the Armenians were killed, of course."

While her father was in the army, Mrs. Sarafian lived

family; I was six years old then. 'She is my only child,' my mother said. 'Alright, but you are going to die anyway,' the officer replied. 'At least leave her with me and she might be safe.' But my mother said, 'No, whatever fate is waiting for us, she will have to come with us.'"

From various published sources and comments made by the Armenians in Cairo, it seems clear that Armenian women and girls -- never the men -- were allowed to stay in Kayseri if they converted to Islam. Mr. Kezelian said his mother was offered that choice. Most, of course, refused.

Mrs. Chilingirian and her family traveled to Aleppo by horse carriage. "My uncle, my father's brother, had been taken and we don't know what happened to him. But his wife and their two children, my cousins, came with us on that trip to Aleppo."

She said her family had not been involved with any of the Armenian committees. "There were committee members in Kayseri and they had some activities, but they were picked up at the very beginning and hanged."

For Mrs. Chilingirian's family, the journey to Syria was not too difficult. "My father's partner in the business was a Turk. He came with us to Aleppo, so nobody robbed us or anything along the way. From Aleppo, we went to Tafas, a village in Turkey, and then went to Haifa, where we stayed for three years. We were very comfortable there. Since two of my father's brothers were in Egypt, we arrived here from Haifa on July 13, 1919."

Like most of the Armenians I talked to in Cairo, Mrs. Chilingirian speaks good Turkish. She said she always spoke Turkish in her home and did not actually learn Armenian until she attended an Armenian school in Cairo.

A British officer traveling in Turkey wrote to his superiors in 1879, commenting that "... in Antolia proper, the Turkish language is the one most generally used by officials and people. It is the language used by the Armenians about Kaisariyeh" (Şimşir, Bilâl N. British Documents on Ottoman Armenians, vol. I. Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu Basinevi, 1982. p. 410).

Mr. Kazaudjian related with gusto in his strange English an incident that occurred one day while he was working in his Cairo camera shop. The proprietor of a nearby watch shop called him over to interpret for a Turkish tourist. After the Turk told him he was glad to meet an Armenian, Mr. Kazaudjian told the watch shop owner, in Arabic, not to lower his price for this Turk. He then addressed the tourist in Turkish. "I say, 'The Armenian language is my motherland and the Turk language is under my foot.' The Turk says there are some Armenians living in Istanbul, and I say, 'They should leave.'"

\* \* \*

Sarkis Tekeian, 72, Mrs. Chilingirian's cousin, escaped the deportation thanks to the wisdom of his father. Before the war, Mr. Tekeian's father worked in Egypt for the Matossian Company, an Armenian tobacco trading firm. During the summers, he would return to Kayseri to visit his family. Mr. Tekeian and his two brothers were born in Kayseri.

with her mother, who escaped the deportation because she was a soldier's wife. During the war, her mother took ill, "something like the measles," and died. Armenian neighbors took care of Mrs. Sarafian.

After the war, Mrs. Sarafian's father returned to Kayseri and took her to Adana, then under the control of the French army, where they stayed for two years. "There were all these promises that there would be an Armenian state in Adana under French supervision. But of course, nothing happened." The French evacuated them and other Armenians by ship to Beirut about 1920-21. Mrs. Sarafian and her father stayed in Beirut one year and then came to Cairo in 1922. "My uncle, my father's brother, had come here about 1912. When we came to Cairo, we had nothing on us. We had left all our money, our house, our things, in Turkey. If I show you the photograph we had on our passport as we came from Beirut to here, you will know what kind of condition we were in. My father was very thin."

Mrs. Sarafian's father began working in the furrier business and she helped him after finishing school. She took over the business after he died. Her husband, who died last year, had been a printer.

Of all the Armenians I talked to, Mrs. Sarafian was the only one who returned to Turkey after 1923. She went to Istanbul in 1954 to visit relatives on her mother's side. "My grandfather had owned lots of land there. I went there to see if anything was happening to it. At that time, the Turkish government took a statement from me stating that I'm an Egyptian citizen now, not Turkish, and have no right to those lands anymore. The Turks won't give me anything."

Like the others, Mrs. Sarafian can only speak of the Turks with bitterness. Her father seems to have encouraged that by telling her stories about the massacres so that she would never ever forget what happened to her people. And to lend a ferocious clarity to her thinking on the subject, he left her with that first name, Vrejouhi. The word has a special significance; in the Armenian language it means ...

... REVENGE.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Cline

## APPENDIX: What The Governor Said

**From The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: 1915-16: Documents presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, secretary of state for foreign affairs, by Viscount Bryce. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916.**

**83. KAISARIA : STATEMENT BY A TRAVELLER\* FROM KAISARIA, PUBLISHED IN THE ARMENIAN JOURNAL "BALKANIAN MAMOUL," OF ROUSTCHOUK.**

The Armenians of the Kaisaria district, with the exception of Talas, have been deported. At the end of July the Government issued the following manifesto to the Armenians of Talas and Kaisaria :—

"(i) All the Armenians are to leave in batches of 1,000—the men, separated from the women, in one direction and the women in another.

"(ii) No one is to take with him more than 200 piastres (£1 13s. 4d.). If, after examination, anyone proves to have more than this, he will be brought before a Council of War.

"(iii) No one has the right to sell his property, etc.†"

After urgent petitions this latter condition was modified as follows :—

"Anyone who has no ready money is authorised to sell property up to a maximum of 300 piastres."

Up till now more than 80 persons have been hanged at Kaisaria, including doctors and other notables such as Hampartsoum and Boyadjian Mourad of the Huntchakist Party.

The relations of the victims themselves were compelled to take down the corpses from the gallows.

Only the women and girls were permitted to go over to Islam. When the Governor was petitioned to allow the infants to be entrusted to charitable Moslem families, to save them from dying on the journey, he replied :—

"I will not leave here so much as the odour of the Armenians ; go away into the deserts of Arabia and dump your Armenia there."

\* Name withheld.

† For other versions of the official proclamation see Doc. 120 and Annexe C. to the "Historical Summary."

## APPENDIX TWO: What The Archives Say

Note: Shortly after I sent the preceding 19 pages off to Hanover, my Armenian friend came to me with some additional information. A book written by one Arshag Alboyadjiam entitled The History of Armenian Kayseri published in Cairo in 1937 by the Kaisarean Armenian Union Association contains comprehensive information on all the villages and towns in the Kayseri area formerly inhabited by Armenians. The book devotes an entire chapter to each village mentioned in this report. It answers many of the questions left hanging in my report although, as you will see, one very crucial question -- what happened to the Armenians of Güzel Köy-Kayabağ in 1915? -- still remains a mystery.

Mr. Alboyadjiam's two-volume work is written in Armenian so my Armenian friend verbally translated the pertinent chapters. I now offer that information as the conclusion to this newsletter. But first, I'd like to present some relevant material from other sources.

\* \* \*

Captain A.F. Townshend ('late of the Scottish Rifles,' as he described himself) was a British military consul in Turkey during the years 1903-06. In his book A Military Consul in Turkey (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1910), he wrote: "Of all the towns I have visited in Asiatic Turkey ... the one in which racial and religious hatred seemed the most bitter is Kaisariyeh in the vilayet of Ankara. Of its population of about 50,000, some 20,000 are Christians, and of these 20,000 about three-fourths are Armenians, the remainder being Greeks ... The Moslem population of Kaisariyeh, Turks being more numerous than either Circassians or Kurds, keep the Armenians and Greeks in absolute subjection. No Christian would dare to walk through the Moslem bazar at any time, nor would he leave his house if he could possibly help it after dark, and if compelled to do so would never go alone.

"In spite of the large number of Christians, the latter are quite unable to stand up for themselves. They are not allowed to have any arms, whilst the Moslems are always well equipped in that respect; also the Christians are not all Armenians nor all Greeks, and the two races do not amalgamate." (p. 120)

A similar testimony comes from W.J. Childs in his Across Asia Minor on Foot (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1917). Mr. Childs was one of those amazing English travelers who turned up in every far corner of the world during the great days of the empire. He was quite eccentric -- he insisted on accomplishing most of his journey, as he said, on foot -- but also wonderfully literate and observant; the book is a joy to read. Mr. Childs passed through Kayseri a few years before the war and wrote that "Kaisariyeh always has the name of being the most fanatical city in Asia Minor, a city of Turkish stalwarts who believe that everything was better three hundred years ago than it is now, and do their best to delay the progress of decadence. When foreign

pressure is applied to the Ottoman Empire, men of Kaisariyeh hold meetings and send fiery resolutions to Constantinople ... many had recently gone to fight against the Italian infidels in Tripoli ... The city also has the reputation of looking ill-naturedly upon giaours (non-muslims). Here, more than elsewhere, the visiting giaour runs the risk of having stones or other missiles flung at him." (p. 194)

From these two accounts, one gathers Kayseri's Turkish population was ripe for the bloody excesses that the Young Turk government unleashed in 1915.

Regarding the deportation of the Armenians from Kayseri, the book of documents compiled for the British foreign office in 1916 supports the Kayseri-Tarsus-Adana-Aleppo itinerary described to me by the Armenians in Cairo. In documents 114 and 126, foreign observers report seeing Armenian refugees from Kayseri and Talas at different points along the Baghdad railroad on their way to Syria. In document 129, a "foreign resident of Adana" said she visited "Geulik station" near Tarsus, where she saw 10-15,000 Armenians encamped in the broiling sun "with no shade or shelter save the rudest arrangements -- anything that came to hand thrown over poles or sticks." (See Mr. Kezelian's apparent mention of this camp on p. 14 of this report -- he had described "a field" as well as the tents.)

Documents 6 and 11 of the British report contain brief mentions of arrests and executions in Kayseri. After the passage of 70 years, one can still sense in these accounts the fear and hysteria enveloping the Armenian community in Kayseri as the horror unfolded.

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Regarding the famous "exploding bomb" incident in Everek, Mr. Alboyadjian writes in his book that an Armenian named Kivork Poshian, "who did not belong to any of the committees," and had recently returned from a trip to the United States, was preparing a bomb in his house (why was he doing that if he wasn't a member of a revolutionary committee?) one day in February 1915. The bomb exploded by accident and killed him. The Turkish governor of Everek-Fenese (the two villages existed side-by-side with mixed Armenian, Greek, and Turkish populations) arrested a couple of Armenians, but did not hold the entire Armenian community responsible for the incident.

The authorities in Constantinople then replaced this governor with a new one, a man named Salih Çek. (This Salih Çek is regarded as a great villain by the Armenians. In 1916, he was made top official of the infamous Deir El Zor camp in Syria.) The new governor then began a systematic campaign of arrests and deportations in Everek-Fenese.

\* \* \*

According to Mr. Alboyadjian, the village that I call "Nize" in this newsletter (the present-day Turkish Güzel Köy) is more appropriately rendered from the Armenian as "Nirze." He describes Nirze as being located in "a beautiful valley" with a nice climate, orderly streets, vineyards, and gardens. Since the

conditions were so pleasant, people from Kayseri used it as a resort (they still do; see p. 22 of my KWC-25).

Nirze is thought to have been inhabited by Armenians in the 15th century. The first Armenian church there dated from the 17th century and was named after a St. Toros. It was renovated several times, the last time in 1851 (I saw no sign of this or any other church in Güzel Köy). The Armenians built their first school in Nirze in 1886. They built a new one in 1895 that contained a dark, damp space known as "the devil's room," which was reserved for the temporary incarceration of naughty boys (my Armenian friend said her Armenian school in Cairo also had such a room). By 1901, the school had two teachers and 80 students (none girls).

Nirze was known for its pilgrimage sites. One was called gatahburr, or "milk spring" in Armenian. Every May 7, people would bring their cows to this spring, have a feast, and pray that the cows produce more milk in the coming year. Children with sleeping problems were brought to a site known as "the hollow stone" to be cured. Mr. Alboyadjiam thinks the existence of these miracle sites indicates the Nirze area has been inhabited since before the time of Christ.

By 1886, Nirze had 160 Armenian and an equal number of Turkish houses. In 1915, the Armenian population was calculated at 762 people living in 186 houses. Most of the Armenians were craftsmen, making iron tools and textiles, or tradesmen. No Armenians farmed. All of the agriculture was in Turkish hands. Armenians with land hired Turks to work their properties. The standard of living for the Nirze Armenians was "not bad." Although no rich Armenians lived there, no poor ones did either. Because economic opportunities were so limited in Nirze, ambitious people tended to leave.

In 1890, three or four people from Nirze traveled to the United States, returning after seven years. In 1909, a larger wave of emigration began. Within five years, 70 men from Nirze were working in the US (the book describes the US location as "Westertown." (?))

In 1896, the so-called "Hamidian massacres," named after the reigning sultan Abdel Hamid, touched Nirze. A Turkish mob broke into a couple of Armenian houses, but only a few people were killed because Turkish villagers in Nirze intervened to protect their neighbors.

Mr. Alboyadjiam is not sure what happened to the Armenians of Nirze in 1915. He says that almost all of them, including their two priests, were killed "in completely unknown circumstances." He speculates that many of them might have been killed at a place called Furunjular, described as "near Malatya," in eastern Turkey. An Armenian source related that Armenians from some villages near Nirze were deported by a route passing through Alezya (I have not located that yet), Albistan, and Malatya and were killed at Furunjular (I cannot find that on the map). Mr. Alboyadjiam says the "beautiful Armenian girls" of Nirze were taken by the surrounding Turkish peasants. He also says that a few Armenian artisans remained in the village during the war because their skills were needed.

After the war, about four or five Armenians returned to the village. "But none of them could stand to live there

anymore, so they left."

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Mr. Alboyadjiam describes Darsiyak (the modern Turkish Kayabağ) as "the Greek village." Only a few Armenians ever lived there. In 1897, for example, nine Armenian houses existed alongside 99 Greek and 140 Turkish houses.

On the eastern side of Darsiyak was located a Greek monastery called in Greek Tarsiakis, or "the angels' monastery," hence the derivation for "Darsiyak." The Turks called the monastery vanantas, or "burning stone." "It is believed," writes Mr. Alboyadjiam, "that it took this name because at the altar was a stone 'the color of fire.'" Armenians, Greeks, and Turks all visited the vanantas in order to be cured of various illnesses. A Greek priest and "two helpers" worked at the monastery. It is believed the monastery housed some nuns as well. It had a "wonderful church" for Sundays and special feasts, and a small chapel for everyday use (I saw only the church). The Greeks also had a church on the western side of the village with the Greek community school located next to it (I did not notice these two structures, if they still exist).

The valley between Darsiyak and Nirze was known as the Guverchilik — güvercin is Turkish for "pigeon." "As the name suggests, the valley contains hundreds of pigeon towers. The visitor can see pigeons gathering there, especially during the springtime."

The first Armenians to settle in Darsiyak seem to have arrived about 1661. They built a small church, called St. Antreas, but it was closed after 1880. In 1897, a visitor to Darsiyak reported that the church was empty, except for a few old books lying about and some pictures on the wall. The Armenians of Darsiyak did not have a priest at this time; priests would come from Nirze when needed. An Armenian school with 12 students existed in 1873, but was later closed.

In 1915, many Armenians fleeing persecution in their own areas came to hide in Darsiyak because it was not known as an Armenian village. "They stayed there for awhile, but were soon discovered and also deported."