

WITNESSES TO THE Armenian Genocide

Khanum Palootzian

Born 1894 - Village of Darman, Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey

Mesrob Kloian

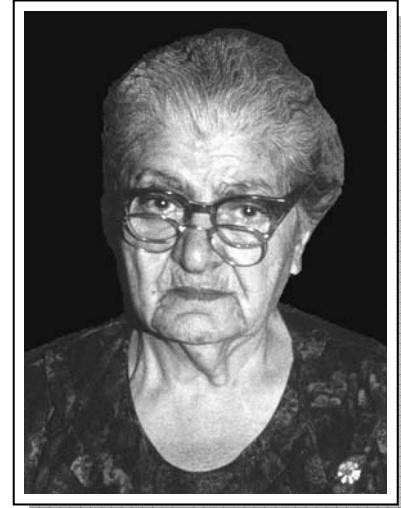
Born 1903 - Village of Darman, Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey

Zakaria H. Kloian

Born 1900 - Village of Darman, Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey

Khanum Palootzian¹

Born 1894 - Village of Darman, Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey



It was in May 1915 that the Turkish Government uprooted us from all our villages² and tried to destroy us all. Our houses, farms, sheep, cows, fuel, horses, donkeys, chickens, our furniture, beds, foods, and all belongings were collected and forcefully confiscated. They didn't even give us one piastre³ as payment for all they took. My stepfather, when they were going to kill him, pleaded that they let him pray before dying. As he knelt and prayed, they took a sword and cut off his head. They marched us into the mountains, fields and gorges to die of hunger. All the Armenian men and boys were killed with axes and swords. And all the women and girls were killed through thirst, hunger and an even worse fate that I don't wish to say. Pregnant women were eviscerated, their stomachs cut open with swords and their babies ripped out, thrown against the rocks. These I saw with my own eyes.

In the summer heat, we were driven for days and weeks, without food and water, with our swollen bare feet bleeding from cuts. When we saw water, we ran to drink only to be beaten back by gendarmes on horseback who carried large wooden cudgels. We were beaten fiercely for just trying to drink water. We were led through the mountains for two months. On the way, many women couldn't take it and, holding their babies in their arms, simply threw themselves from cliffs into the Tigris River. The Turk gendarmes singled out the prettier girls and women and took them for themselves. Many, myself included, smeared mud on our faces so as not to appear attractive. I even closed one eye so as to appear blind and limped. With this and other tricks I managed to escape being taken.

My entire family, my mother, father, sisters, and brother who was not quite ten years old, were left as unburied corpses, along mountains, gorges, and fields, left as food for wild dogs. Darman consisted of a group of seven villages. All were uprooted - that's several thousand people. By the time we reached Harput, weeks later, some 45 miles away, there remained only a few hundred. We knew they were leading us to die, we thought probably to dump us at sea, for none of us were allowed to leave the convoy nor allowed to drink water or even look for food. If they saw anyone leaving the group the gendarmes immediately killed them.

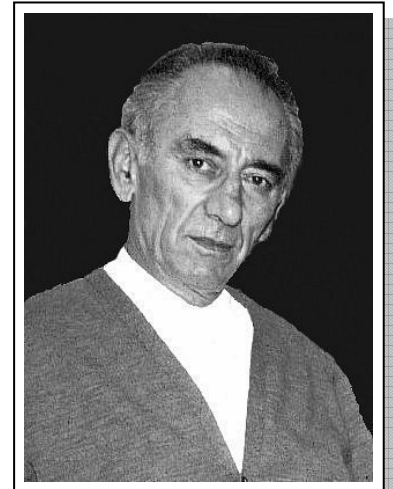
¹ Excerpted from her memoir, taped recorded in June 1972. Additional information regarding Khanum Palootzian's ordeal and escape to the orphanage in Mezireh-Harpoot was supplied by Sister Kirsten Vind in Denmark in a private letter to R.K. in 1997 wherein she found and translated a letter by Danish missionary Karen Peterson written in 1920 describing how Khanum came to the orphanage: "Khanun has experienced very hard trials. She, with her family, including 14 persons, was forced to leave their house and home in one day's time. After wandering two months in the mountains she succeeded in escaping and reached the fields outside Mezireh. Pregnant and with a one year old child strapped to her back she found our orphanage. All that remained of her family was now beside her. On February 3, 1916, she gave birth to a girl, which she named Diranouhi after her husband Diran, who was killed. Khanum's first child never recovered after the hardships she had been through and died within a few months."

² Her native village of Darman had in its environs a cluster of smaller villages. It's Turkish name was Temran and it's located 45 miles north of Harpoot, 40 miles south of Erzerum, and 30 miles south of Erzingan. It's new name is Baglarpinari and its coordinates are: "39°15'00"N" (Long), and "40°24'00"E" (Lat.). In 1915 it was a large village of about 330 households located in the district of Kighi, Erzerum Province.

³ The lowest value coin at the time in Turkey, which was also used in many other countries, and still is today.

Mesrob Kloian⁴

Born 1903 - Village of Darman, Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey



On May 14, 1915 the day before the deportation of our villages, a Turk official came to Darman and called together the leading figures and young men of our villages and sent them away. We were told they would rejoin us after we all left our villages – but we never saw them again. They gave us one day to get ready. We were forbidden to carry any weapons, even a pen knife. Any they found with weapons would be instantly put to death. So the next day we left our villages escorted by gendarmes. Some were allowed to use carts while others had to walk. The first day went without incident. The following morning we woke to find that a hundred Turkish gendarmes on horseback, all armed with guns, yatagans⁵ and daggers, had joined our caravan during the night. Our carts were then taken away from us and we were forced to walk on foot carrying the smaller children on our backs. We walked all day and were led through desolate areas where there wasn't even a drop of water then we camped at night. On the third day of our march we were led into a narrow canyon where we camped.

The next morning as we prepared to leave the encampment we heard some shots. In the wink of an eye we were completely surrounded by hundreds of bandits who had taken position around the convoy. They were accompanied by the Turk gendarmes who had been guarding the caravan. Among them were Kurds, Turks, Cherkes, Zazas, as many women as men, all armed with rifles, swords, yatagans, scythes, clubs, and axes. I was beside my mother and father and our whole family was there together. At the shot of a rifle the massacre began. The ground was instantly covered with bodies everywhere. My sisters, brothers, sister-in-law, niece, and nephew were killed or carried off. I saw my father try in vain to save my mother as two Turks carried her off. I ran behind my father as he climbed a hill. There were a hundred of us running in all directions but we were soon surrounded by Turks who searched the men, one by one. After taking everything they had, including their clothes, they cut them down with swords axes, killing them right where they stood. After finishing with the others, three Turks with swords drawn searched my father. After taking his money, belongings, whatever they could find, one of them, without warning, thrust a dagger in his stomach. As my father lay wounded another came over to him and demanded money, which he didn't have. Without hesitating, he shot him in the chest. My father held out his hand to protect himself but it was to no avail. He died in the arms of my older brother Zakar.

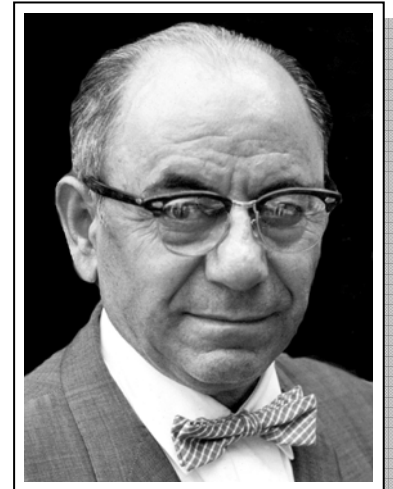
I escaped and hid in an abandoned stable that night. I awoke to hear cries and screams, and through a crack in the door, I saw that under the trees surrounding the camp they had piled up hundreds of babies that had lost their mothers. They had devised a game, one that was amusing them. I saw with my own eyes that they were trying with their yatagans to see who could sever the head of each child with just one blow. For them it was a game. First one, then another, raised his sword high in the air and, lest he lose his wager, brought it down with shattering force. To add to their sport, they placed babies at fifteen or twenty meters up against a tree or bush, to see who could shoot the best. What I saw there that day and in the narrow canyon has haunted me all my life.

⁴ This is an excerpt from a 100 pp. 1959 memoir by Mesrob Kloian (brother of Zakar Kloian) done in Grasse, France, where he lived and where he owned and operated a sidewalk café, "La Regence," on the Blvd Du Jeu De Ballon. He died in Grasse France in 1969.

⁵ A type of Turkish sword, referred to as the "sword of Islam." It is a short, curved, decorated sword, renowned for its strength and sharpness that was a favored especially for attacks on unarmed civilians.

Zakaria H. Kloian

Born 1900 - Village of Darman, Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey



I was born in the Village of Darman, Vilayet (province) of Erzerum, Turkey. I am a naturalized citizen of the United States of America, naturalization certificate having been issued to me by order of the District Court of the United States in the City of Detroit, Michigan.

My birthplace, the village of Darman in the Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey, was situated very close to the village of Asdghapert, also in the Vilayet of Erzerum, Turkey and for that reason I visited that village at frequent intervals.

On or about the 15th day of May, 1915, all the inhabitants of the village of Darman, including myself, were forcibly ejected from our homes upon orders issued by the Turkish gendarmerie; that after being thus driven from our homes we were compelled to travel on foot towards a destination unknown to us, whereupon a few days after our departure, we were attacked by armed mobs who, with the aid of the gendarmes guarding us, massacred hundreds of us causing those of us who were able to do so to flee for our lives.

I was one of those who fled and saved my life; I afterwards proceeded to join another band of people who were driven out of the village of Asdghapert, the neighboring village with whom I had intended to take refuge, having first had information as to their whereabouts; and when I did find the remnants of the people I was seeking I learned from them that they too were massacred like the people of the village of Darman.

An Affidavit
Subscribed and Sworn before Notary Public
Wayne County, Detroit, Michigan
August 24, 1943