

**A Forgotten Holocaust:
The Extermination of the Christian Assyrians in Turkey.**

By Gabriele Yonan,

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Egartho* [the German-language Journal of the Association of Assyrian
Organizations in Germany and Europe]. Expressly translated for JAAS.

Gabriele Yonan, author and editor of this text, has never hesitated to tread on difficult ground. By fate, family and scholarly curiosity, she has established herself as one of the few experts on ethnic problems in the Near East. By persistent effort, she has sought to call the attention of the public in Germany and in Central and Western Europe to a relatively unknown, and politically marginalized people. Her motivation is more than mere historical research. She sees her work as a concrete way of helping the socially discriminated ethnic minorities in the Near East. Of course, her own affection is reserved especially for the Assyrians, to whom she has dedicated this book.

This work illustrates the substantial contribution which can be made for modern-day Assyrians through responsible research. Clearly, their problem can only be understood once their history has entered public consciousness. For example, who knows that there are Turkish citizens who are members of the Christian church? Who knows that the Assyrians' native tongue is Assyrian-Aramaic? Who is aware that their varied Christian denominations played a major role in the preservation of their literary language to modern times? The list of such questions could go on.

As for the genocide which this small, brave people, suffered during the First World War, it has almost been forgotten. The few available sources in the Near East have been destroyed or made inaccessible. According to the official line of all Turkish governments down to the present one, whether democratic or otherwise, the massacres of Assyrians and Armenians never took place. One has but to examine the most recent editions of the Turkish propaganda newspaper, "*New Spot*", written for German and English readers. It describes the campaign of annihilation against the Christians as a fight against 'Communist gangs.'

By her exposition of documents drawn from British, American and German archives, Yonan's scholarship tears away the veil and exposes the lie behind Turkey's national mantra. In Central Europe between the wars, it was only the Prague author Franz Werfel who sought to break the silence, with his novel 'The Forty Days of Musa Dagh'.

Gabriele Yonan proceeds methodically, starting with the 19th century roots of the problem. She describes the first difficulties for the Syrian Christians, starting with the massacres of Nestorians in Kurdistan in 1843 and 1846. The author explains German Imperial policy in the Orient then, in Part 2, she

proceeds with actual documentation of the 'Holocaust'. By providing explanatory and annotative notes along with the documents, the author guarantees linkage between the various sources, and instills their historical sequence. While the same incidents are often described by several witnesses, selection and order of presentation for the documents is such that repetition is minimized.

The documents are complemented by a large and convincing quantity of pictures and maps. But the book's value goes well beyond that of a purely documentary report. Not merely an objective report, it is written to excite and dismay us; certainly it touches our feelings. What is one to add to Paul Shimmon's report in November 1915, describing the flight of 10,000 Assyrians towards the Russian border? *"The children's death throes are indescribable. Some mothers carried two or three children on their shoulders and in their arms. Many died on the side of the road, many lost their parents, and could not even be buried."* And what of those who remained behind? *"Two-thirds of the people who stayed in Urmia suffered a terrible fate ... The Kurds came from everywhere, and the Persian Muslims formed an alliance with them. They destroyed the Christian villages; pillaging, massacres, rapes were the order of the day. Each village had its turn. First they killed the men...."*

The fate of the Assyrians following the First World War consisted of flight, expulsion, and the fight to survive. 35,000 of these Assyrians currently live in the Federal Republic of Germany. According to Yonan: "This documentation is not only to honor the unnamed victims, but it seeks to establish a link in the long chain of suppression, persecution and expulsion of Assyrians in Turkey, down to the present day." To the author, this is but confirmation that an ethnic group must always focus on its present and its future. Moreover, history must respect objectivity and objective information; it must not be abused ideologically. By observing these rules, Gabriele Yonan has well served Assyrians throughout the world.