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# The Assyrian Genocide

Cultural and Political Legacies

Edited by  
Hannibal Travis



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# Dedication

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The promotion of cross-denominational, national, historical, and identity-building projects for Assyrians worldwide is among its stated objectives.



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## 6 Genocide/Seyfo – and how resistance became a way of life

*Sait Çetinoğlu (Abdulmesih Bar Abraham, trans.)*

### Resistance during the genocide

The Assyrians did not have a chance to defend themselves in towns such as Savur and Nisibin/Nusaybin in the Tur Abdin region, due to the sudden and bloody raids of the notorious gangs “*el Xamsin*” (Fifties) of the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* (the Special Organization), which the governor of Diyarbakır, Reşid Bey formed along with his key partner in crime Ibrahim Bedreddin, an official in Mardin.<sup>1</sup> These irregular gangs consisted of convicted criminals, Kurds, and Mahallamis.<sup>2</sup>

Today, the descendants of the Kurds and irregular forces of 1915 live among the richest and most influential families in the Tur Abdin region. In ܟܘܨܐ [Gzirā] (al-Jazirah, Gziro, or Cizre), the deputy of the Ottoman Council (*Osmanlı Meclisi*) Zülfü Tigrel<sup>3</sup> was *Qaymakam*, and in Seert, where Serfiçeli Hilmi was governing and where the Assyro-Chaldeans had dense residential areas, Assyrians were killed along with other Christians and had no chance to defend themselves or resist. The survivors of the initial resistance were driven out of the city in convoys and killed on the roads.<sup>4</sup>

1 Merve Erol, “*One Hundred Years of Sorrow*”: *Remembrance of 1915 in Diyarbakır*, *Heinrich Boell Foundation* (2015), <https://tr.boell.org/en/2015/07/15/one-hundred-years-sorrow-remembrance-1915-diyarbakir>. A *Qaymakam* was an Ottoman official charged with governing a provincial district.

2 Mahallamis have been called Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims, converts from Syriac Christianity 350 years ago; see Mark Sykes, *Caliph's Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 578.

3 Zülfü Tigrel was, as deputy of Diyarbakır, a member of the last Ottoman Parliament (1920). He was appointed by Mustafa Kemal as deputy of Diyarbakır for the first Turkish Parliament and served as representative of Diyarbakır until his death in 1930. He was the elder brother of the former MP Ihsan Hamit Tigrel.

4 As the Lepsius documents describe this process: “The Turkish government has driven its Armenian subjects, the innocent ones, . . . into the desert in thousands upon thousands, . . . exempting neither the sick nor pregnant women . . ., has given them both food and water in insufficient quantities and irregularly, . . . has left them to the mercy of their guards and therefore to dishonour, an escort which dragged away the girls and sold them.” Wolfgang Gust, *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence From the German Foreign Archives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 268.

## The Nestorians of the Hakkari mountains

During the *Seyfo*, resistance took place in various regions settled by the Assyrians. The Nestorians of the Hakkari mountains had a special situation; the “Assyrian tribes” were, like other Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire, regarded by the CUP as being untrustworthy – like the Armenians. The ethnic cleansing in Hakkari partially resulted from a series of government decrees issued in prewar times. Erasing the roots of the autonomous Assyrian tribes may have been an attractive option because they inhabited an almost inaccessible, significantly strategic border region, regarded as a non-Muslim “eagle’s nest.”<sup>5</sup> As war approached, ethnic cleansing began on a small scale, and grew over a few months into a full-size operation.

As the Assyrian Nestorian leader Malik Qambar realized that he could not resist the Ottoman forces in the region, he led his people southeast to safer places north of the Persian city of Urmia, in order to protect them and establish a line of defense there. He was successful in reaching Urmia, but the Ottomans sought revenge against the Assyrians. They were betrayed many times, and their patriarch was ultimately killed in an ambush by the Kurdish Agha, Simko.<sup>6</sup> The course of the war progressed at the expense of the Nestorians. After the Nestorians lost their safe region, they embarked on to Caucasus, and started a painful journey into the unknown.<sup>7</sup> Today, they are scattered all over the world.

In 1917, the Assyrians seized some correspondence of the tribal leaders with Ottoman officials in a raid. Among them was a letter of the Agha of Oramar, Suto, to Haydar Bey, Mosul’s governor and the commander in highest ranks of the forces fighting against Assyrians. “Your Holiness Pasha, I had the honor to meet you last spring when during the Great Jihad the soldiers marched on Tiyyari and Tkhuma.”<sup>8</sup> The event mentioned here was the military operation undertaken against the key center of the Assyrian tribes in June 1915.<sup>9</sup>

The ordeal of those in the Hakkari mountains surviving the sword did not end there. In one of the first military operations in 1924 of the Unionists in

5 David Gaunt, “The Ottoman Treatment of the Assyrians,” in Ronald Suny et al. (Eds.), *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 248; Joachim Jacob, *Ostsyrische Christen und Kurden im Osmanischen Reich des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Wien: LIT Verlag, 2014), 221–222.

6 Martin van Bruinessen 20. Yüzyıl Başında Türk-İran Sınırında Bir Kürt Müttegallibe: Simko İsmail Ağa, 5 Jan. 2015 (last visited July 7, 2015), <http://www.kovarabir.com/martin-van-bruinessen-20-yuzuil-basinda-turk-iran-sinirinda-bir-kurt-mutegallibe-simko-ismail-aga1>.

7 Sam Parhad and Vedii Ilman, *Görevin Ötesinde [Beyond the Call of Duty: The Autobiography of Malik Kambar of Jeelu]* (İstanbul: Yaba Yayinlari, 2009), 29–37.

8 Quoted in Jacques Rhétoré, “*Les Chrétiens aux bêtes*”: *Souvenirs de la guerre sainte proclamée par les Turcs contre les chrétiens en 1915* (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 279; see also Gaunt, *Katliamlar*, 184.

9 David Gaunt, *Katliamlar, Direniş, Koruyucular: Birinci Dünya Savaşında Doğu Anadolu’da Müslüman Hıristiyan İlişkileri*, trans. Ali Çakıroğlu (İstanbul: Belge Yayinlari, 2007), 184.



the new Turkish Republic, called the “Nestorian Operation,” Assyrians were driven southward into Iraq.<sup>10</sup>

This exile operation began in November 1924 and continued until 1933, accompanied by violence in what was known as the *Hat alti* [“down of the border”] operation. It is not wrong to say that, with the so-called Settlement Act (*İskan Kanunu*) of 1934, the Assyrians were declared hostile; Article 11 of the law banned Assyrian-speaking villages, although not necessarily all speaking of Assyrian dialects.<sup>11</sup> The voluntary and involuntary migration of the Assyrians remaining in the region continues until today, nearly uninterrupted.

### Resistance in the Tur Abdin region

Assyrians who densely populated the Tur Abdin region resisted to varying degrees, according to their local organization and strength. However, the Assyrians in this region did not capitulate easily.

The attacks on villages in Tur Abdin took place in two waves. The first attack occurred in the spring of 1915. Resistance was organized in few areas, although it became more successful in two areas, which became oases of protection.<sup>12</sup> This is confirmed by Rev. Armalto’s writings on the resistance, which tell the story of a dozen villages in 1915. As the news about massacres reached the surrounding villages of west Assyrians in Mardin, large groups of people from the region around Tur Abdin took refuge in Midyat (see Figure 6.1).<sup>13</sup>

### Resistance in Midyat

The *Qaymakam* of Midyat learned on Sunday, June 6 that Christians had killed the commander of the *حصن كيفو* [*Hişn Kayfā*] (Hesno-d Kifo) (Turkish: *Hasankeyf*) fortress. An investigation confirmed the incident. Thereupon the Qaymakam ordered the protection of the Christians. On June 11, he sent his soldiers to Hapisnas or Habsis/*Hapsdnäs* (Turkish: *Mercimekli*). This village was taken over by Kurds even though soldiers were supposed to protect the Christians. But at dawn on June 21, soldiers entered Christian

10 See Chapter 7 for references.

11 Erol Ülker, “Assimilation, Security and Geographical Nationalization in Interwar Turkey: The Settlement Law of 1934,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 8 (2008): 7, <http://ejts.revues.org/2123>.

12 Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 371–380. One of the two major places of resistance during the *Seyfo* was ‘Aynwardo’ [Turkish: *Gülgöze*] at a distance of 9–10 km to the east of Midyat. Hazakh (*İdil*) was another scene of resistance.

13 The information about the massacre and resistance in Tur Abdin is based on the study of Yves Ternon, *Mardin 1915, Bir Yıkımın Patolojik Anatomisi*, trans. N. Tateosyan (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2013).

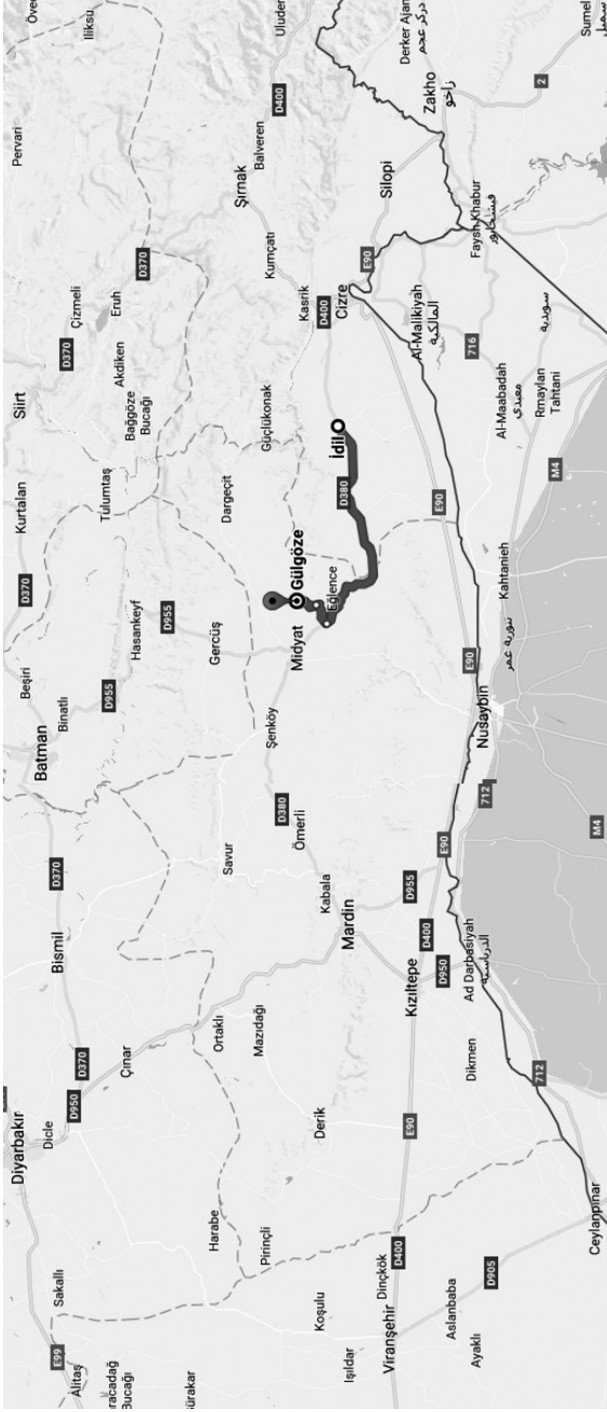


Figure 6.1 Southeastern Turkey

Source: Google Maps.

homes and started searching for weapons. The gendarmerie commander Rauf Bey used force to open the heavy doors of those houses to permit the soldiers to enter. He arrested 100 people from the Armenian Catholic and Protestant communities and kept them in jail for a week. Despite the mediation of the priest Ephrem and Hanna Safar, the governor ordered that the prisoners were to be taken out of the city at the night of June 28, all chained together. Meanwhile, the barkers announced a curfew. Prisoners were taken to the well of Saita, tortured, robbed, strangled, and thrown into the well.

On Friday, July 2, the governor sent a messenger to Saleh; there, Kurdish tribes were gathered and told to kill the Christians. Saleh was attacked the next day and its men were killed, women were raped, houses were pillaged, and livestock was stolen. Saleh had eighty Muslim and thirty Jacobite Assyrian houses and was seat of a diocese. It was the home of the famous monastery of Mar Jacob.

As the Assyrians of Midyat learned what happened in Saleh, they decided to organize a resistance. They tried to find weapons. As the Qaymakam learned about their intention, he resorted to deception. He promised them that he was ready to assign a soldier to each house for their protection. The Assyrians rejected the offer and pulled back to their homes. On July 16, the Qaymakam ordered the attack on the houses of the Assyrians. As resistance continued, the Qaymakam called for the Kurds from the entire province – and even people from Seert at some distance away heeded the call. The clash lasted a week and the Christians were outnumbered, defeated, and slaughtered.

According to Rev. Armalto, there were 10,000 victims of this massacre and Father Hermoz Danho was among them.<sup>14</sup> However, approximately 1,000 men, among them the priest Boutros Hammal, escaped. Arriving in Aynwardo, they joined the resistance there against a siege for more than fifty days. Kurds and soldiers searched the houses in Midyat and found an additional 500 people. They took them into a caravansary, separated the children younger than five years, and brought them to the Jacobite village of Enhel. “Those are yours, take and raise them,” they told the villagers.

Priest Andrus’s report differs from Armalto’s report. It is based on a narration of eyewitness and researchers. The people of Midyat acted quickly, resisted the assault, and withstood the siege:

After the deportation of two convoys of men in Mardin, the government starts with arrests in Midyat. [Seventy] notables are put behind bars. Ten days later they are taken out from prison, chained in groups of four. They are told that they will be taken to Diyarbakir and arraigned before a court martial. But instead they were taken by foot to the mountains and brutally massacred.<sup>15</sup>

14 Ternon, *Mardin*, 340.

15 *Ibid.*, 341.

Few people from Midyat were trying to help the prisoners. Those who saw the barbaric act returned immediately to Midyat and reported to others about the massacre; panic broke out. The families of the victims said that “tomorrow it is our turn; do we want them to slaughter us like sheep? Let us do something.” That same night the men gathered and went to the government’s armory, took weapons and ammunition, attacked official buildings, and stormed the gendarmerie and military garrison. They expelled 200 people from the village, set up checkpoints at strategic locations in the city, and prepared for a siege.

The government immediately sent troops from Mardin, called upon the Kurdish *aghas* from Savur for aid, and informed all other officials from around the region that a unit commander would soon invade Midyat, ordering them to help. The town was large and rich; Kurds followed the call immediately and willingly as they realized that the booty would be copious. Midyat’s people resisted hordes of soldiers and Kurds for 10 days. They killed or wounded approximately 100 Kurds.<sup>16</sup>

The defense of the town was a task larger than the Assyrians of Midyat could accomplish by themselves. As the Kurdish pressure became strong and irresistible and the ammunition decreased, they contacted neighboring villages. A withdrawal operation was put into place. Breaking through the Kurdish ring encircling Midyat, they tried to create a new front in Aynwardo. Aynwardo was a smaller settlement, but rich in water and food stores, so it seemed like a natural fortress. Taking advantage of the darkness, many people from Midyat were able to escape. For more than a month, the hardy highlanders would resist. They killed a sufficient number of Kurdish attackers that the latter began to withdraw. After the government realized that they could not depend on the Kurds anymore, they approached the people of Midyat with a truce including a secure retreat.

Two families are said to have played an important role in the resistance: the Hirmiz family, to which the head of the municipality of Midyat belonged, was Protestant and not native to Midyat while the Safar family was Orthodox and native to Midyat. According to the common narrative, the Protestants were initially arrested. In order to frighten and terrorize the others, the Protestants were marched throughout the city and murdered. In the following days the Orthodox community started to resist, but facing strong forces and lacking ammunition, the resistance of the Assyrians broke due to heavy losses. The remaining Assyrians pulled back to Aynwardo and continued there to organize resistance. Among those Assyrian Orthodox families who played a leading role during the resistance were the Grigos, Rhawis, Bahdis, and Chalmas.

16 Ishaq Armalto, *De kristnas hemska katastrofer: Osmanernas och ung-turkarnas folk mord i norra Mestopotamien 1895/1914–1918*, ed. Jan Beṭ-Şawoçe, trans. Ingvar Rydberg (Södertälje: Nisibin, 2005) [1919], 377–398.

## Resistance of Hazakh

The village of ھازک [Āzak] (Hazakh) (Turkish: *İdil*) is perched on a hill at 1,000 meters' altitude; it is a village in which the Assyrians performed a remarkable feat of resistance during the genocide of 1915. Hazakh is located close to the eastern border of Tur Abdin, near Cizre. The first attack on the village was conducted in August 1915 by the Kurdish clans who came from Cizre. The villagers demonstrated a heroic resistance against the attack. Hazakh's people, organized in an armed resistance movement called "the Volunteers of Christ," were able for many weeks to resist the siege and the attacks of Kurdish tribes.

As the militia of the Kurdish tribes could not break the resistance of Hazakh's people, a leading man of the CUP, Ömer Naji Bey, was sent in order to suppress the armed resistance of Hazakh. Ömer Naji entered the area in October 1915, bringing 2,000–4,000 Ottoman soldiers. Joining him were units of the nearly 8,000 criminals released from prison who formed gangs and militia forces of the Special Organization. Among them were also Ethem Bey and his militias.<sup>17</sup> Hazakh could withstand the attacks for weeks and did not surrender despite the secret order of Enver Pasha that it was to be destroyed, because the location of the village was suitable for defense and prevented a rapid invasion.

During the twenty-four days of the siege Omar Naji Bey's forces suffered losses. In an unexpected attack that the "Volunteers of Christ" organized in one night, some of the beseiging men were killed from among a force of 500 irregulars. Horses were released, and some soldiers and horses escaped towards Nusaybin and barely saved their own lives in doing so. Ömer Naji Bey was forced to declare a truce. The military operation was brought to an end and troops withdrawn; a few months later they came back again with additional forces being sent from Diyarbakir. All kitchen appliances in the village, copper buckets, etc. were melted in order to produce ammunition, while gunpowder had been made from sumac roots. Hazakh was able to resist various attacks until the end of World War I. It was in 1927 that the villagers delivered their weapons to the Kemalist forces, after demanding guarantees of their security.<sup>18</sup>

The leader of Hazakh's "National Assembly" who organized the resistance was Işo Hanna Gabre. Other members of the National Assembly

17 Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 184; Selçuk Uzun, Çerkes Ethem, 1915/16 ve Çerkesler, Marmara Yerelhaber, May 25, 2012, [www.marmarayelhaber.com/Selcuk-Uzun/8276-Cerkes-Ethem-191516-ve-Cerkesler](http://www.marmarayelhaber.com/Selcuk-Uzun/8276-Cerkes-Ethem-191516-ve-Cerkesler).

18 Later the Kemalists wanted revenge for their resistance. Some resistance leaders were killed by the light cavalry battalions and others on the road when being taken to the so-called Independence Courts. The remaining leaders lost their lives due to torture in Diyarbakir's prison. The elderly archbishop Behnam was killed in Aqrawi.

were: Tumá AbdeKette, Béhnañ Isko, Murad Hannuše [Hannuše], Andërawos Hanna Eliya, Ya'qub Hanna Gabre, and Behnam Aqrawi.<sup>19</sup>

After the cease-fire with the state, some members of the National Assembly were eliminated by state intelligence and the Kemalists, while the others were killed at the prison of the Independence Courts in Diyarbakir.

### The resistance's fifty-two days in Aynwardo<sup>20</sup>

The Jacobites of Kfar-Boran'da (Kerboran, Turkish: *Dargeçit*) were able to resist for four days only. In the great town of Kfarjos (Kfar-Gawze, Turkish: *Gercüş*) the Assyro-Chaldeans could not resist; they were deceived by the local Kurdish Ağa, Hasan Şemdin. Those who survived the massacres escaped to Midyat.

Except for a few that escaped to Aynwardo, the Christians of Boté (Turkish: *Bardakçı*) were not able to survive the attacks of Nedim and Cemil, the sons of Osman Ağa.<sup>21</sup> Qıllit [Qelith, Turkish: *Dereiçi*], near Mardin and Savur, was an Assyrian Christian village, being one-third Protestant and two-thirds Orthodox by Christian denomination. Kurds from Rajdiye, Miğajniye, and Deraveriye attacked the village early in the morning.<sup>22</sup> The Pastor Hannuş İbrahim was killed on the threshold of his house. The villagers who owned guns were able to protect their homes, but most others were killed.

Many women and children were abducted and very few survived. Some Kurds apparently did not obey government decrees to deport the people, but killed them and plundered the village. More than two hundred homes had been completely devastated. Kurds took Christian homes and lands into their possession. In Hesno d-Kifo, the majority of those who took refuge in the castle were Jacobites and Protestant Assyrians along with Armenians. Ramon Amaro (Ömer), the son of Aliye Ramo, in collaboration with Ottoman soldiers, killed all Christians there within four hours. Kafarbé

19 For a comprehensive information on Hazak during the Kemalist era see Devrimci Karadeniz, *Turabdin'de Bir Asur Köyü Azah'ın (Idil) Akıbeti* [The Fate of an Assyrian Village Hazakh (Idil) in Tur Abdin] (Feb. 27, 2015), <http://devrimcikaradeniz.com/turabdinde-bir-asur-koyu-azahin-idil-akibeti/>.

20 Today's Gülgöze is a village east of Midyat. İshak Armalé, *Al-quşara fi nakabat al-naşara* (Beirut: EL Shafi Monastery, 1970 [1919]), 405–409. This important source was translated into French in 1923. During the Lausanne negotiations, it was presented as a key evidence to punish crimes of massacre. Ternon, *Mardin*, 347–350.

21 İshaq Armalto, *Al-quşara fi nakabat al-naşara* (Beirut: Al-Sharfe Monastery, 2nd ed., 1970 [1919]), 410.

22 Rajdiye, Miğajniye ve Deraveriye tribes were originally Syriac Christians; after forced to Islamization they adapted Kurdization and Arabization. For more information see Altan Tan, *Turabdin'den Berriyéye, Aşiretler, Dinler, Diller ve Kültürler* [From Turabdin to Beriye. Tribes, Religions, Languages and Cultures] (Istanbul: Nübihar Yayınları, 2011).

(Turkish: *Güngören*) and Basıbrina (Turkish: *Haberli*) were located south-east of Midyat, south of Aynwardo, and west of Hazakh; except for a minority of Catholics, these three villages were inhabited by Jacobites. Like Hesno d-Kifo, Kafarbé and Basıbrina were attacked in 1915, but these attacks failed. A second attack on them was arranged in 1917, in which most of the survivors of 1915 were killed. This indicates that the plateau of Tur Abdin was in a continuous state of war between Kurds and Christians. The proximity of Bnebil [Turkish: *Benabil*] to the “Saffron Monastery” near Mardin, ܩܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܐܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐܘܢܐ (Dayro d-Mor Hananyo or Dairu ‘l-Za‘farān/Deir al-Záfarān) [Turkish: *Daryülzafaran Manastırı*], gave it lasting influence.

The village of Aynwardo, 10 kilometers east of Midyat, was located at the foot of a mountain chain and was completely inhabited by Jacobite Assyrians; it was able to resist for fifty-two days. Those mountains surround Tur Abdin to the north and separate it from the Tigris valley. When the news of the massacres of the Christians arrived, Mesut, the leader of the Assyrians in the Aynwardo, gathered the villagers and began preparations for a defense against the Kurds. Meanwhile, Christian survivors escaping from Midyat, Boté [Turkish: *Bardakci*], Kefr Salah, Kefr Zeh, Zaz, and Hapisnas were arriving in Aynwardo.<sup>23</sup> They informed the other Assyrians about the horrible massacres that had taken place. A total combined force of 6,000 people was formed, with 3,000 guns.<sup>24</sup>

The *Qaymakam* of Midyat gathered the Kurdish villagers and advised them to split their men into two groups. One group was supposed to attack Enhel [Turkish: *Yemişli*], a village to the south of Midyat, while the other group would attack Aynwardo. Aziz Ağa, one of the Kurdish chiefs, suggested that it would be better to keep the force together to eliminate Aynwardo first.<sup>25</sup> The *Qaymakam* endorsed this strategy. The men under the Ağas Ahmet and Salim gathered their tribes in Midyat. All Kurdish tribes from Mardin joined them as well. A total of 13,000 men advanced towards Aynwardo.<sup>26</sup> The *Qaymakam* armed them and paid them. The Kurdish army, along with women and children from the men’s families, proceeded towards Aynwardo. They set up a camp on a hill overlooking the village from where they continuously fired at the village. As the ammunition of the besieging forces was reduced, they informed Diyarbakir and Mardin of this. Reşid, the governor, and Bedreddin sent them

23 William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* (New York: Penguin Group USA, 1997), 119.

24 Ibid.

25 Aziz Agha was the grandfather of Ziver Midyat, the major of Midyat and member of the Mahmado clan. According to the oral tradition, Aziz Agha was arrested in 1916 along with the Assyrian leader Isa Zatte, the Kurd İsaye Hımo, and the Muhalleme Xalaf Beg. On the way to Mardin, he was shot on the road in the village of Dengizan near Savur. For more information see Tan, *Turabdin*, 203.

26 Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain*, 120.

ammunition and a cannon. Şevket Bey, Mohammed Said Ağa's son, took over the command and the clash continued. About 200 attackers and 300 villagers were killed in the first phase. Meanwhile, an Assyrian Catholic family, Nano-Mahdese, escaped and tried to reach Aynwardo in order seek refuge. They were captured by Kurds and killed. Only a small child survived, Nasir; he would remain for the next two years with Şeyh Sıdkı until Bishop Gabriel Tappuni paid a bounty for him and sent him to Aleppo, to his uncle.

During this siege the Assyrians melted iron and all kinds of goods that could be utilized for producing ammunition. Meanwhile, the *Qaymakam* of Midyat proposed that the Sheikh of Dara act as a mediator between the government and the besieged people. The Sheikh called for three leading villagers from Aynwardo and swore – according to the tradition of Islam – “to divorce his wife if he would cheat them!” He promised that they would remain alive if they delivered their weapons. The three envoys rejected the offer and the conflict continued. This resistance enraged the Kurds, who increased their pressure on the village. The siege went on for thirty more days. The besieging forces notified Bedreddin, who sent two Jacobite clerics, Yakub and Hanna, to Aynwardo. They were supposed to convince those who were still resisting to surrender. But they failed.<sup>27</sup> However, as the village ran out of food, and all the animals that could be eaten were finished, people were faced with starvation. The arsenal finished too. The dead began to reek.

After the fifty-two-day siege, the Kurds informed the villagers of Aynwardo that the population of ‘Arnas converted to Islam and that an agreement had been achieved. They announced a negotiator of their own in order to come to a deal and end the conflict. The Christians wanted them to call Sheikh Fethullah from ‘Aynkaf [Turkish: *Kayapınar*], son of Sheikh İbrahim. This man spoke in person with the elders of Aynwardo. Fethullah consulted with the government officials; after the removal of the Kurds he was able to make promises to the Christians. As a result, the Christians gathered their weapons and handed them over to the Sheikh. He then ended the siege and ordered that the Christians were not to be harmed.<sup>28</sup>

27 Bedreddin sent bishop of Mardin Circis and the priest Hanna to Aynwardo. Arriving in Aynwardo, the clergy tried to persuade the rebels from outside the village to hand out their weapons and to surrender to the government. The insurgents responded with bullets to the call. The clergy fled the same day to Midyat, saving their lives. They returned to Mardin empty-handed.

28 Şeyh Fethullah ordered the Muslims not to harm a single Christian. Despite the amnesty guarantees, most of the Assyrians stayed there and did not return to their villages. Some courageous people trying to return to ‘Arnas, Ahlah, and Mzizah were shot on the road. After the cease-fire, Mas’ud wanted to go to Anhel but the Christian leaders advised him to go elsewhere because the government was after him. Mas’ud went to Rayite, the lower Kafro. There he lived a short time in a tent on the roof of a local church. He was easy prey for the government and was quickly killed. The number of murdered Assyrians returning to their villages was higher than those killed during the siege. Gaunt, *Katliamlar, Direniş, Koriyucular*, 292–293.



This siege lasted for fifty-two days, recalling the “40 days of Musa Dağ,” which actually lasted fifty-three days.<sup>29</sup> Later on, the Christians did set up barricades in their villages, knowing that Kurds of the neighboring village were waiting to kill them. Despite the promises given after the siege was lifted, a majority of the villagers were slain.<sup>30</sup> Instead, the promises were flouted, and that the *el-Xamsin* units of the notorious *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* troops, who conducted the massacres, eventually murdered the Christians. Indeed, many eastern and western Assyrians were brutally murdered later on while attempting to travel between the villages and towns to make a living. Some Muslims waylaid and attacked them.<sup>31</sup>

The leader of the National Assembly that organized the resistance in Aynwardo was Mas’ud Be-Şlemën or Be-Şabo; the other members of the National Assembly were: Gallo Be-Şabo, Jërjo Be-Qaşo Asmar, and Tuma Be-Grigo.

## Conclusion

The life of the Christians in the region and of the Assyrian-Syriac people (along with other non-Mulim peoples) became a desperate struggle against death, which was closing in on them from all directions. Therefore, for these ancient peoples, resistance evolved into a way of life.

This tradition, and the remarkable resistance demonstrated during the Genocide/*Seyfo* of 1915 in different regions – along with the demand for justice extending to the present day – are the cornerstones of an attitude that does not forget the historical injustices of the past several hundred years. While in search for justice, the voices of the children and grandchildren of the genocide victims are emerging all over the world. The tradition of resistance of the Christian people of Turkey provides hope for policies to make amends in the future for a century-old historical injustice, the *Seyfo* of 1915.

29 Franz Werfel, *Musa Dağ'da 40 Gün [The Forty Days of Musa Dagh]*, trans. Saliha Nazlı (Istanbul: Belge Uluslararası Y., 2007).

30 Ternon, *Mardin 1915*, 347.

31 After the peace accord, established in Aynwardo by the Mahellemi Şeyh Fethullah, father 'İsa Polos reported: “Look, my son, I’m telling you in this in advance: Yes there was peace, but still I want us not to trust [fully] to that. You should never trust these Muslims. When you are on the road, go in groups of one-two-three people, but not alone. They will kill you!” He remarked: “After Sayfo, on the roads, more Assyrians were slaughtered than those during Sayfo. There was no pity!” Jan Beṭ-Şawoce and Abdulmesih BarAbraham, “Doğu-Batı Asurlulara Karşı – Baskı, Zulüm, Asimile, Kovulma,” in Fikret Başkaya (Ed.), *Türkiyede Azınlıklar [Resmî Tarih Tartışmaları-8]* (Istanbul/Beyoğlu: Özgür üniversite Y, 2009), 152–251.

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