

BOOK REVIEWS

(KİTAP TAHLİLLERİ)

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ARMENIANS: PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS (ERMENİLER: FAİLLER VE KURBANLAR)

Author: Dr. Arnold Reisman, New Academia Publishing, LLC,
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Since Dr. Arnold Reisman's book *Turkey's Modernization: Refugees from Nazism and Ataturk's Vision* (New Academia Publishing, 2006) was published, all his subsequent books were inspired by his initial research. In April and May of 2009 his next two books, *Arts in Turkey: How Ancient Became Contemporary* and *Post-Ottoman Turkey: Classical European Music and Opera*, were published by Booksurge, and provided a look back at Ottoman cultural history and the strides that were made by the modern Turkish Republic to infuse the past with the present and, with the help of the refugees invited by Ataturk, create a Turkish heritage in the arts that would be a springboard for future generations. In that same year three more books, *Refugees and Reforms: Turkey's Journey*, *The Transformation of Istanbul: Art Galleries Reviving Decaying Spaces*, and *Shoah: Turkey, the US and the UK*, appeared in the marketplace.

After reading Emir Kivircek's book about his grandfather, Behic Erkin, Dr. Reisman was enthralled with the story and pursued a line of research resulting in *An Ambassador and a Mensch: The story of a Turkish Diplomat in Vichy France*. Learning about Erkin and Gallipoli led to *My Enemy's Enemy*. A departure from the usual Turkish themes, *My Enemy's Enemy* is about the development of the Zion Mule Corps which eventually led to the creation of the Palestine Brigade. However, it was learning about Gallipoli that piqued his interest about the Zion Mule Corps.

Dr. Reisman's last book, completed just before his death and due to be

published in spring 2012, covers a subject which he avoided for years partly because of his lack of knowledge in the subject matter and partly because of its controversial nature. After reading Hovhannes Katchaznoui's *Manifesto: Dashnagtzoutiun Has Nothing to do Anymore*, Reisman began extensively researching to see if there was material by other Armenians in the same vein. Katchaznoui, had been a leader of the Dashnagtzoutiun, the Armenian Party, and was appointed the first Prime Minister of the Armenian state in 1918. He presented his *Manifesto* to his party when it convened in Bucharest in 1923. Essentially, it is a work of self examination and self criticism, the self to which he refers is his own party.

The result of Dr. Reisman's research is the forthcoming book *Armenians: Perpetrators and Victims*. Reisman uses archival documents and non-Turkish sources to show there is more to this controversy which people, including many historians and heads of state, either do not know or have chosen to ignore. He lays out facts providing the reader with an opportunity to have a more balanced understanding of this argument that polarizes people. Newspaper articles from the 19th and 20th centuries are reproduced giving a context for the subject. Quite cleverly, editorials are juxtaposed with actual on the ground reporting showing how uninformed and biased many people were. From the beginning of the book, which offers some of the history of Armenia, through the Appendices, the reader is almost overwhelmed with the amount of detailed information chronicling the Armenian/Turkish controversy through two centuries. Following the demise of the last Armenian kingdom in 1453, the greater part of Armenia was absorbed into the Ottoman Empire while the Eastern regions were controlled first by Persia, then Russia which annexed these territories during the nineteenth century. The Ottoman Empire's loss in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 resulted in the creation of a Bulgarian state and forced the Empire to recognize Romania and Montenegro as independent entities. Seizing upon this, the Russian Armenians, supported by their government, crossed into Turkey perpetrating crimes on many people including their own. Why would a people slaughter their "brothers"? The Russian Armenians had adopted the policy "the end justifies the means" and because their end was an independent Armenia, they believed that their behavior was the means to that end. Why would a government sponsor such horrific behavior? Russia wanted the Ottoman Empire dismantled and helping to stir up trouble was one way of accomplishing that goal. The British and French were interested in acquiring the rights to explore for oil so they, too, were eager to get into the area so they signed secret agreements with various sheiks and sent teams to the Persian Gulf to investigate the possibility of oil exploration in the region. Reisman documents instigation by missionaries and various consular personnel to stir up negative publicity against the Turks

in order to achieve their ultimate goal which happened in 1918 at the end of World War I.

As a child survivor of the Holocaust (*Welcome Tomorrow*, North Coast Publishing, 1982), Reisman is sensitive to the Armenian claims of genocide. Taking no sides, voicing no opinion, he documents the horrible atrocities perpetrated against the Armenians...sometimes as retaliation, sometimes not. It is left to the reader to make the decision if what was done to the Armenians was, indeed, genocide. With sensitivity intact, he shows that there is enough blame to go around and that both sides have an obligation to accept their responsibilities for the horrendous acts of the past so that they may move forward and establish a new relationship for present and future generations.

