



Patriarch Zaven Der Yeghiayan

Zaven Der Yeghiayan
Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, 1913–1922

My Patriarchal Memoirs

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Foreword

Memoirs, particularly crisis memoirs, are stories of events recounted by survivors. Unlike autobiographies, memoir writers chronicle memorable experiences lived through in the past. Memoirs are human testimony. As such, they are a valuable resource for historical research. Nevertheless, objectivity in memoirs is sometimes colored by the experiences of the memoir writers, and it is only through thoughtful reflection and consideration of the chronicled events that the reality of the history in memoirs is revealed and human consciousness is stimulated.

This book is the English-language edition of the Memoirs of Zaven Der Yeghiayan, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople during and in the aftermath of the First World War (1913-1922). His memoirs first appeared in the Armenian language under the title “My Patriarchal Memoirs—Documents and Testimonies” in June 1947, published in Cairo, Egypt.

It took many years for my great-uncle, Patriarch Zaven to write his memoirs. There were several reasons for this, foremost of which were his health and advanced age. Moreover, retrieval and compilation of the records and documents in Jerusalem and European centers during the Second World War years was difficult and lengthy. However, with the assistance of his Constantinople aide, Arshag Alboyadjian, he was able to complete the manuscript before his death in June 1947. He was close to 80 years in age when he passed away—only few weeks before the book was published.

The Memoirs cover the momentous years of his Patriarchal period, from his election in 1913 to his withdrawal in 1923—a traumatic period for the Armenian nation, a period marked by the disastrous rule of the Young Turks (Ittihadists) and their criminal legacy of annihilation of the Armenian population in Ottoman Turkey. It was a decade that saw the end of the Armenian people’s presence in their ancestral lands—an end through dispossession, destruction, and obliteration of the memory of an ancient people in Turkey.

The Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople had been an eminent institution for more than four-and-a-half centuries. The history of the Patriarchate goes back to the early years of the Ottoman Empire, when, after the fall of Constantinople and the end of the Byzantine Empire, Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror invited his friend Archbishop Hovagim of Bursa to Constantinople in 1461 and vested him with the Patriarchal authority over the Armenian *millet* (nation).

The Armenian Patriarchate played a vital role in the religious and civil life of the Armenian population throughout the Ottoman centuries. It had a particularly notable role after the promulgation of the National Armenian Constitution in 1863 that widened the rights of the Armenian nation and defined the statute of the Patriarch as the representative of his people to the Sublime Porte.

The Patriarchate served as the autonomous government for the Armenian nation in the administration of their affairs until the First World War, when the Young Turks and their fol-

lowers undermined its authority, reducing the Patriarchate to a shell and forcing the withdrawal of then-Patriarch Zaven.

It is in the memoirs of this man, who was the leading Armenian Church figure in Ottoman Turkey at that time and who had the misfortune of witnessing one of the greatest tragedies that had befallen his people since their Christianization, that makes this book such a unique document. To the extent that the book provides a perspective on the darker folds of the times, it tells us much of how history was made and something too of the dilemma of a man burdened with the salvation of his people against overwhelming and conflicting world power interests.

Patriarch Zaven's recounting of his agonizing conversations with Talaat Pasha and other leaders of the Young Turks, his appeals to the European political and Church leaders, his encounters and disappointments with Armenian figures, and his critical observations and pointed anecdotes, rendered sometimes in great detail, provide glimpses of the mentality of the times. It is a story about deceit and betrayal, dashed hopes and diabolical mindset.

After nearly one hundred years, the memory of that great calamity continues to haunt the Armenian consciousness. It is hoped that publication of this English-language edition of Patriarch Zaven's memoirs will reach a new generation of wider readership, will contribute to the understanding of the genesis of that fateful event, and thereby will help open the path of truth for both Turks and Armenians to face the reality of history.

I would like to express my appreciations to Ared Misirliyan for his competent translation of a linguistically and culturally difficult Armenian text, and to Vatche Ghazarian for his erudite research and advice in preparation of the historical background material and annotations for the book. My appreciation goes to all those family members for their encouragement and perseverance in publishing this book. I am particularly indebted to my cousins, Dr. Stephan A. Ovanessoff and Mrs. Sona Feshjian-Karakashian, for their loyal support in seeing that publication of this English-language edition of our great-uncle's Memoirs becomes a reality.

Melcon G. Melconian

Princeton, NJ
April, 2002

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ranslator's Preface

Patriarch Zaven Der Yeghiayan's memoirs constitute a significant eyewitness account to the events that befell the Armenians of Western Armenia (or, Turkish Armenia) during World War I. Written by the spiritual and administrative head of the Armenian Nation in the Ottoman Empire, a man of commitment, integrity, and courage, these memoirs contain a wealth of comments and observations, much of which may not be found elsewhere and which complement and corroborate the historical record.

Autobiography has a special place in an author's life. People often undertake to write their autobiography in the twilight of their life. This is much the case with Patriarch Zaven's work. Maneuvered out of office, declared an undesirable by the Turkish Republic, and self-exiled to Baghdad, he did not have access to records in Constantinople—although he visited the St. James monastery in Jerusalem to see copies of some of them. He also admits to occasional lapses of memory.

Executives are not always the most accomplished of writers. In his role as the Patriarch of the Ottoman Armenians, Zaven headed the Armenian National Administration. He had proven himself a skillful administrator since his early days in the service of the Armenian Apostolic Church, but, when drafting, revising, or finalizing official letters or reports, he often received the advice and assistance of jurists, philologists, journalists, etc. This approach, which had served him well in his active years, was not available to him later, and the Patriarch appears to have written his memoirs in Baghdad entirely by himself.

The inadequacy of the proofreading in the 1947 Cairo printing of the memoirs is illustrated by the following examples: the omission of the author's baptismal name; the cumbersome chapter structure, where Chapters 3 and 5, on Abp. Zaven's two terms of office as Patriarch, are broken down into numerous disjointed and repetitious sub-chapters; the unnecessarily long sentences (many run from 10 to 20 lines), which actually contain several smaller sentences joined with causal conjunctions; the inconsistency in the spelling of numerous personal names and titles; and the verbatim repetition in two separate places of Krikor Zohrab's speech at the Armenian National Assembly's session following the 24th/25th of April 1915 arrests of the Constantinople Armenian intellectuals.

Due to the historical value of the work, preserving the authenticity of the original text was considered a priority in this translation. Some of the long sentences were broken down into their component shorter sentences, and the spelling of people's names (but not always their titles) was standardized. The original text in Western Armenian was translated into English, but numerous expressions in Turkish, Arabic, or Western European languages were retained and explained in square-bracketed citations or footnotes.

In the transliteration of proper nouns from Armenian, the Western Armenian sound values were used in a close approximation of the U.S. Library of Congress recommendation, but with several modifications to avoid diacritical marks. An exception was the representation of the unrounded high back vowel (the 8th letter of the Armenian alphabet) with the symbol *ä*.

In rendering Turkish-language expressions—all given in Armenian alphabet in the text—rather than adopting contemporary standard Turkish spellings, a transliteration preserving the particularities of the dialectal usage of the time was adopted. Here again, the unrounded high back vowel sound (the 11th letter of the modern Turkish alphabet – sometimes referred to as the “dotless i”) was represented with the symbol *ĭ*.

An important issue in translating the present work was to remain aware that certain passages in the Armenian text had already been translated *into Armenian*, either in the Patriarch’s diaries or for the purposes of the 1947 Armenian-language edition. For instance, the conversations between the Patriarch and the various Ottoman statesmen must surely have taken place in Ottoman Turkish; the letters the Patriarch exchanged with representatives of European powers must have been in one or another European language. Because the mentioned passages (and others of the same nature) were already *translated into Armenian* for the 1947 edition and are now *translated into English*, there is some uncertainty as to their content and style.

The translator thanks Dr. Levon Avdoyan of the Library of Congress and Messrs. Nourhan Ouzounian and Vincent Salaün of Montreal for their help with various issues. Needless to say, the translator alone is responsible for any and all shortcomings.

Ared Misirliyan

Montreal, Canada
June 2000

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Preface

People have often urged me to put my memoirs on paper, taking into account the fact that, due to tragic circumstances, my reign as Patriarch occurred during what can be regarded as the stormiest period [in the history] of Armenians in Turkey.

After hesitating for a long time, when almost a quarter of a century has removed me from that period and I feel the approach of the last days of my life, I too think that it is not superfluous to revisit a past, where, because of my position [as Patriarch], I became one of the unfortunate leading actors.

There has been no other among the Patriarchs of Constantinople who has had as variable a fortune as I and has witnessed [such] days of glory and destruction.

To present the events, which for the history of our people were days of both dreams and tragedy, was a task that some suggested only I could accomplish, and they would urge me to carry it out, as a final duty, in order not to leave them in the dark.

By yielding to their wish, I undertook to write my memoirs just before the [Second World] War. Unfortunately, I lacked the necessary facilities in Baghdad, in particular the necessary documents, some of which I managed to obtain by a visit to Jerusalem.

Fortunately, having long had the habit of using a pocket diary, I let it guide me and worked as much as possible to reconstruct the sequence of past events and present facts, at times from memory and at others by using letters and documents that had fortuitously been saved.

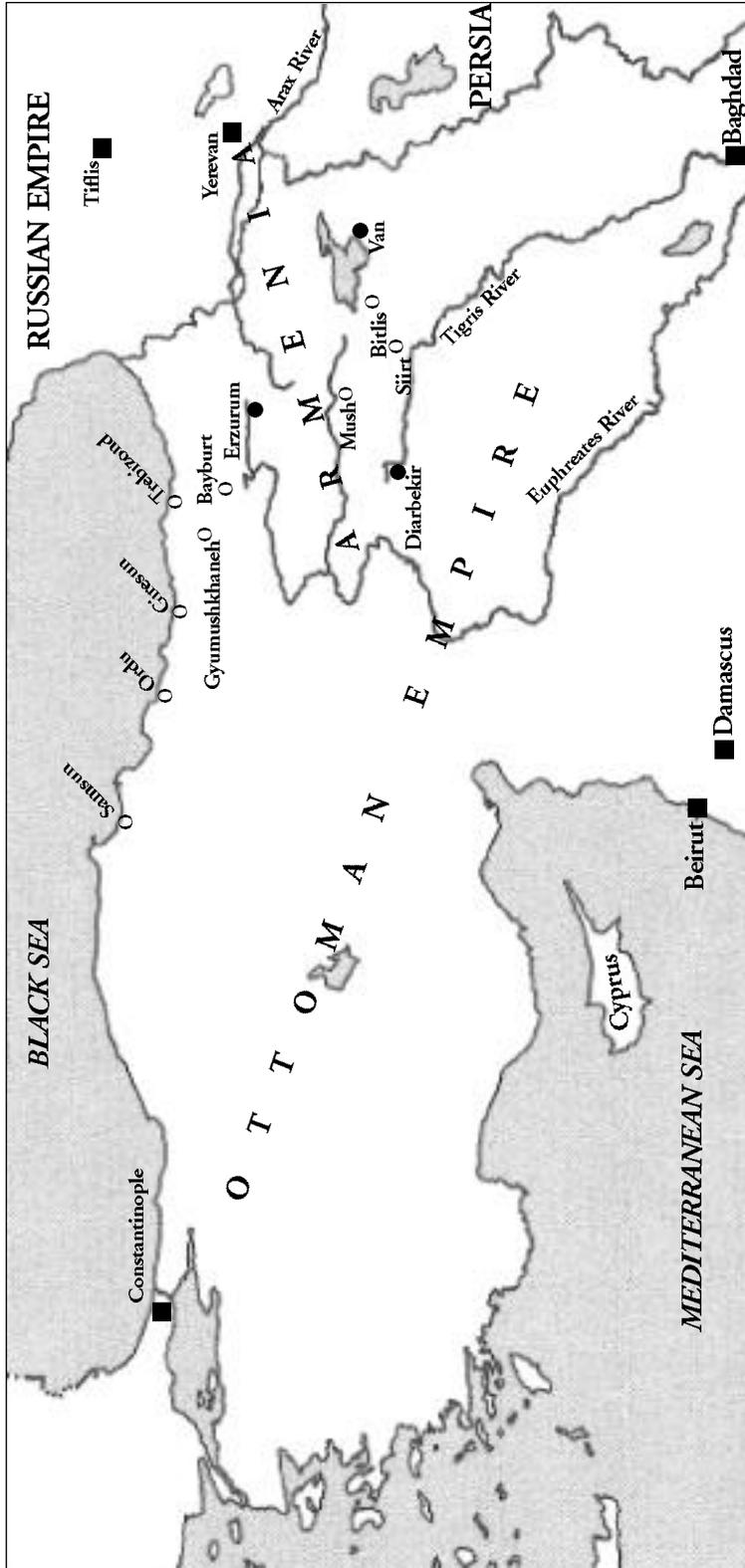
My effort has been to present my memoirs with unadorned simplicity, without embellishing and interpreting (analyzing) them, leaving the task to the reader. I have similarly refrained from repeating events that are known to the whole [Armenian] nation and have been covered by the press, time and time again, in order not to unnecessarily overburden these memoirs, which will aim to enlighten events hitherto unknown to the public.

This book is not an account of that period but rather an annotation to it.

As Patriarch, having taken no step without the knowledge of the [Armenian] National Assembly, I consider myself exempt from the duty of having to account for my actions, but desire for the purpose of history that the [Armenian] nation be aware of the efforts that have been made by the [Armenian] National Authorities to limit the extent of the evil [facing Armenians] as much as possible and [to know] that neither Patriarch nor Assembly has been indifferent to the barbarities of the Turkish Government and, similarly, after the armistice, have endeavored to make our Nation's sacrifices amount to something, unfortunately to no avail. With this viewpoint, I hope that these memoirs will be taken note of and be a positive contribution to contemporary Armenian history.

Archbishop Zaven

Baghdad, 7 May 1947



The black circles denote places where Zaven Der Yeghiayan served as Prelate and the white circles indicate places he visited before his election as Patriarch in 1913.

I. Life Before My Election as Patriarch

My name practically became part of the history of the Armenian Nation¹ after my election as Patriarch. However, up until that time, having served the Nation in various capacities, it was my past work that was to lead me to the throne that had been occupied by people of such fame and authority as [Archbishops] Khrimian, Varzhabedian, Vehabedian, Izmirlan, Ormanian, and Turian.²

To give a complete picture, I would like to say a few brief words about my past. I was born on the 8th of September 1868 (New Calendar) in the city of Mosul in Mesopotamia,³ where my father, Der Avedis Der Yeghiayan, a native of Sghert [Siirt] and ordained Kahana⁴ in 1861 in Mosul, was serving at the time. He had moved there to succeed his elder brother Der Hagop, who had been the first priest to serve the Armenian community of Mosul and had been sent there the very year the local Holy Echmiadzin church was built (1857).

My mother Marta (born Kharabian) was also a native of Sghert. My paternal grandfather, Der Yeghia, was himself the son of a priest, also called Der Yeghia. My maternal grandfather was Der Sahag. All these people were buried inside the Armenian Church of Sghert, as were my father's brother Der Hagop and our relatives Der Zakaria and Der Khachadur.

I had the good fortune of studying under the well-known teacher and patriotic educator Mihran Svajian,⁵ initially at the United Fellowship⁶ School in Sghert and later at the Baghdad [Armenian] National School.

Following graduation, I worked as a teacher from 1888 until 1890. In 1890, following my teacher Svajian's suggestion, I applied to the Theological Seminary at Armash,⁷ which had opened its doors the previous year, my intention being to serve the Nation through the Church. My application having been accepted, I enrolled at the Seminary on the 25th of December 1890 and completed my course of studies.

I became a *sargavak* [deacon] in 1892. In 1895, I was appointed *apegha* [a monk] by Archbishop Ormanian⁸ and was renamed "Zaven." In 1896, the Archbishop also bestowed upon me the rank of Vartabed.⁹

Unfortunate occurrences, such as the Ottoman Bank incident of 1896 and the ensuing massacre in Constantinople,¹⁰ disrupted the peaceful functioning of the Armash Seminary, and with [Patriarch] Izmirlan's resignation, Bishop Partoghimeos Chamchian was appointed Patriarchal Vicar. He was an opponent of the Seminary and, as a man of the old school, did not agree that Armenian clergy needed to receive higher education. He preferred that clergy receive an education befitting only the ranks of the minor orders.¹¹ Indeed, when the Seminary's benefactor, Apig Unjian¹² of blessed memory, was jailed, Chamchian considered this a good opportunity to shut down the Seminary.

As a result, Vice-Abbot and Superintendent Ormanian, Internal Rector Yeghishé Vartabed Turian, teachers, and other members of the staff were dispersed, as were the five Vartabeds who had been my Seminary classmates—Papken, Khosrov, Mushegh, Sēmpad, and Mashdots.¹³