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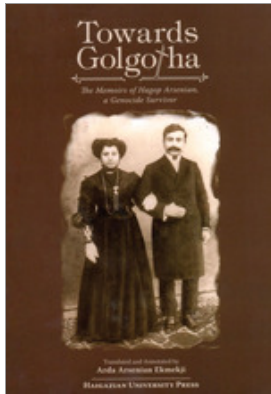
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Book of the Month



Towards Golgotha

By Nora Arsenian Carmi

Haigazian University Press, 2012, 300 pp., \$25.00

As the title announces, this book reflects the painful and traumatic journey of human beings who were exposed to humiliation, persecution, and oppression by unjust powers. However, these powers failed to break the spirit or the will of those determined to live with dignity.

Towards Golgotha, The Memoirs of Hagop Arsenian, a Genocide Survivor honestly and faithfully chronicles the ordeals of a family that started with deportation from Izmit, Nicomedia in Turkey on July 26, 1915. They endured the atrocities of a long death march through Anatolia, and limped into the Syrian desert where, finally, a providential miracle brought the remaining eight members of the Arsenian family into the safe haven of Palestine!

Arda Arsenian Ekmekji, became the "transmitter of memory" when she undertook the arduous mission of sharing the unique legacy of her paternal grandfather, a hand-written manuscript in Armenian, that Noubar, the eldest son managed to decipher and save on tapes for Arda to translate into English.

In 1919, in Bethlehem, Hagop Arsenian (Abu Noubar) collected all the scraps of papers on which he had noted important milestones of his life since 1900, recounting simple community life in Ovajik, Adabazar, and Izmit. His persevering determination to successfully become a pharmacist and to establish a happy family lasted until he was forced to experience the atrocious and cruel measures of the powerful Ottoman Empire. He had to write so that "my children will learn some lessons for the future...to scorn injustice...and become leaders in control of their lives and models of behaviour to others." These are the events recorded in the first part of the book, a testimony that the Armenian Genocide cannot be denied. The long lists of the names of friends, classmates, and fellow prisoners who would lose their lives during the genocide are concrete proof, the ancestors of dispersed Armenians in the diaspora.

The second part of the book describes the Arsenian family's post-genocide struggles and life in Palestine between 1919 and 1940. Life in Gaza, Nablus, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem is carefully observed and poetically described with deep passion. The success of the Arsenian children, their family weddings, religious ceremonies, and yearly vacations, as well as the growing tension under the British Mandate are all narrated by this resourceful, pious person who, even in the most perilous situations, succeeds in keeping his head and finds the means to overcome all difficulties, primarily through his faith.

Thanks to Hagop Arsenian's granddaughter, Arda, or "Ardanoush" as he called her, Towards Golgotha is not only a reverencing of the memory of her ancestors, but it offers the reader a careful, layered, scholarly narrative, complete with introduction, notes, maps, and photographs. This was made possible not only as a result of her background as a historian and archaeologist and the many libraries and experts she consulted, but also because of two important, painful pilgrimages she undertook. One pilgrimage, in 2002, was to Nicomedia, where it all happened. Later, in

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2010, she travelled to Deir Zor, Syria, to commemorate the 95th anniversary of the genocide.

The Arsenians are integrally part of both the Armenian and Palestinian tragedies, and the march towards Golgotha will go on until “confession, repentance, and restitution” is earned and true justice prevails.

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