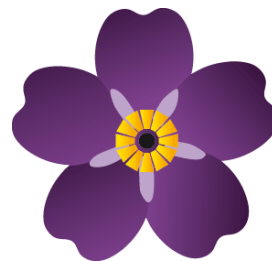


Armenian healthcare workers victims of the Genocide in 1915 and the role of Ottoman Turkish medical doctors

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One hundred years ago, in 1915, 1.5 million Armenian people were killed by nationalistic Young Turks government of the Ottoman Empire. 2015 marks the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. In commemoration of the centennial, Armenian Medical Union of France (UMAF) Lyon Rhône-Alpes has investigated the role of Ottoman Turkish medical doctors towards the killing of Armenians during the genocide and would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Armenian health care workers, medical doctors and students that were massacred.

The majority of the Ottoman Empire Armenian elite lived in Constantinople including 300 medical doctors. In the whole Empire, and in Western Armenia in particular, many doctors and pharmacists were taking care of not only the Armenian population but those of Turkish, Kurdish, Assyrian and Arabic origins as well.

Doctors of Armenian origin significantly contributed in the development of Medicine in the Ottoman Empire. Dr Manuel Chachian, the personal doctor to Sultans Mahmoud II and Medjid 1st, was a prominent contributor to the creation of the Ottoman Superior School of Medicine in 1838. Numerous members of the Armenian Medical Union (U.M.A.) were also involved in the foundation of the Ottoman Imperial Society of Medicine in Constantinople in 1885 ¹.

On April 24th, 1915, 235 Armenian intellectuals were arrested and murdered on the path of deportation. In 1919, U.M.A stated that at least 113 Armenian medical doctors, 73 pharmacists, 14 dentists, and 15 students were killed during the genocide ^{2,3}. Among those arrested were Dr Roupen Sevag, graduate from the Lausanne Medical School in Switzerland and Dr Vahram Torkomian, president of the two medical societies fore-mentioned above (Figure 1). Dr Sevag was killed on April 26th ⁴. Dr Torkomian was released and exiled to Paris. In France, he contributed in the creation of the Armenian Medical Union of Paris ⁵ that was replaced by UMAF (Armenian Medical Union of France) in 1974.

A consistent number of Ottoman Turkish medical doctors were actively involved in the preparation and organization of the killings but also by committing medical crimes during the genocide⁶.

Among the doctors that participated to the criminal orchestration were two members of the Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P), Dr Mehmed Nazim and Prof. Behaeddine Chakir (Figure 2). These two members played a key role in the genocide implementation by being heads of the Special Organization. The Special Organization was the body that had to execute the deportations and slaughter of civil Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire. Dr Mehmed Nazim, educated in Constantinople and Paris, was the Minister of Education during this time. He was later judged and sentenced to death by Ankara Martial Court on July, 5th 1919. Prof Behaeddine Chakir was a professor of Legal Medicine and Ethics at Constantinople Medical School ⁶.

As a justification of the criminal acts, governor general of Diyarbakir, Dr Mehmed Reshid said “You asked me how as a doctor I could have killed so many people. Here is my answer: Armenian traitors nested in our fatherland. They were dangerous microbes. Wasn’t it my duty as a doctor to destroy these microbes?” ².

The following list do not aim at giving a comprehensive list of all medical crimes committed by Ottoman Turkish medical doctors during genocide, but aims at pointing out on some examples ^{2, 3, 6, 7, 8}:

- **Criminal medical experimentation**

- Hamdi Souad was a professor of Pathology in Constantinople and educated in Germany. Tewfik Salim was the head doctor of the 3rd Army Corps. Both academics deliberately and intentionally inoculated blood of the sick that had Typhus to hundreds of Armenians, advising them that it was the cure for the disease⁹, in order to develop a vaccine¹⁰. Professor Souad was awarded an after death award by the Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Foundation in 1974 ¹¹.

- **Poisoning of children and pregnant women**

- Ali Saïb was public health and health services director in Trabzon. He is known to have injected lethal doses of morphine to Armenian orphan children and pregnant women at the Red Crescent Hospital. Those that refused to take the injections were drowned in the Black Sea ¹². Some witness reports state that Dr Ali Saïb also used toxic gases on Armenian children.

- **Redaction and forgery of natural death medical certificates**

- The Urfa municipal doctor redacted death medical certificate for two members of the Ottoman Parliament with Armenian origin that were murdered by the Special Organization as natural deaths.
- Bishop Ignace Maloyan, from Mardin, was murdered during the deportation operation and declared dead on June 10th 1915 by pulmonary embolism by Ottoman Turkish doctors in Diyarbakir¹³. In 2011, he has been declared a martyr and was beatified by Pope John Paul II.

- **Killing of medical colleagues**

- Suleyman Numan Pacha, medical chief officer of the Ottoman army and inspector of sanitary services, authorized to kill civil and military medical doctors of Armenian origin.
- Dr Assaf, municipal doctor of Moush, killed his colleague Nerses Chahbaghlian at his home. Dr Chahbaghlian was a doctor at the military hospital. Dr Sani Yaver who was the head medical director of Erzindjan military hospital killed Dr Minas Yarmayan from Tokat. Dr Feridoun killed fellow colleague and dentist Leon Egavian.

- **Rape and sexual assault**

- Dr Fethi, the chief medical officer at Silvan, Diyarbékir military hospital, raped ten Armenian nurses from this hospital. Dr Fethi knew he had a contagious venereal disease.

On the occasion of the centenary of the Armenian Genocide, the members of the Armenian Medical Union of France, descendants of the survivors and victims of the barbarism of the Young Turk government, are asking their medical colleagues to retrace their history, to recognize these sad truths and produce compensation for the damage caused to the Armenian nation as their colleagues, for the purpose of necessary justice.



Figure 1 Photographs of Dr Roupen Sevag (left), Dr Vahram Torkomian (middle) and Bishop Ignace Maloyan (right)



Figure 2 Photographs of Dr Mehmed Nazim (left), Professor Behaeddine Chakir (middle), and Suleyman Numan Pacha (right)

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