

Tendentious Criticism

The Gomidas Institute's *Armenian Forum* 2, no. 3, published a lengthy and illustrated review, "Icons and Scholarship," by Mr. Ara Sarafian, also editor of the journal, regarding the map of the Armenian Genocide issued by the Armenian National Institute (ANI). The review levels malicious charges against the Armenian National Institute and the map is subjected to tendentious criticism, none of which are sustainable.

The review begins with the accusation that ANI engaged in an unscholarly practice in producing a map on the Armenian Genocide because it lacked footnotes. There is no established practice or requirement that a map be footnoted and its derivation sketched out in some geogenealogical chart. There are entire libraries of maps without footnotes.

Still, ANI took the step of publicly indicating the principal sources upon which the ANI map is based and so communicated in its widely consulted Web site at <<http://www.armenian-genocide.org>>, as follows: (Based on maps prepared by Z. Khanzadian for the Armenian National Delegation and Raymond H. Kevorkian and Eric Van Lauve for the Bibliothèque Noubar.)

Thus, to insinuate that somehow ANI has misappropriated previously published maps because a particular footnote should have been included seems illogical. Presumably the reviewer is aware that modified versions of the Khanzadian map have been reproduced many times over by various organizations and individuals, seldom with credit. The reviewer fails to mention that practice.

The reviewer also faults the ANI map for allegedly including misinformation about the city of Trebizond, arguing that

Armenians from Trebizond were deported inland, whereas the map indicates that many Armenians were drowned at sea.

This is not new information. As an example, in 1996 the Yerevan publishing house of the Armenian Encyclopedia issued a one-volume encyclopedia entitled *Armenian Question (Haykakan Harts)* that includes a very fine new map indicating that Armenians were both deported and drowned in the Black Sea. If that was not the case, the reviewer might have raised the matter then. After all an entire contingent of academics participated in the compilation of the volume. This also raises another question. If the reviewer is really disturbed by the Trebizond matter, why is the Gomidas Institute advertising the sale of a reproduction of the Khanzadian map, showing drownings at Trebizond, on its Web site?

But the review is clearly in error. There is evidence that Armenians were drowned in the Black Sea. In an 11 April 1919 report to the Department of State on the subject of "Crimes of Nael Bey, representative of Committee of Union and Progress at Trebizond," American consul Oscar S. Heizer, formerly in Trebizond, wrote:

This plan did not suit Nael Bey and in about ten days he advertised that any Mohammedan who wanted to take girls or boys could apply to those homes and a great many children were taken. . . . Many of the children were loaded into boats and taken out to sea and thrown overboard. (RG 59, 867. 4016/411)

Oscar Heizer had reported similar information at the time of the deportations in his communiqué to Ambassador Morgenthau dated July 28, 1915:

A number of lighters have been loaded with people at different times and sent

off towards Samsoun. It is generally believed that such persons were drowned. During the early days before the deportation commenced a large caique or lighter was loaded with men supposed to be members of the Armenian committee and sent off towards Samsoun. . . . A Turk said this boat was met not far from Trebizond by another boat containing gendarmes who proceeded to kill all the men and throw them overboard. . . . A number of such caiques have left Trebizond loaded with men and usually the caiques return empty after a few hours. (RG 59, 867,4016/126 and RG 59, 867,4016/128)

It is simply inexplicable that the reviewer writes: "A microfilm collection assembled by none other than the ANI's director includes the dispatches of Oscar

of a microfiche reader. The Bryce-Toynbee report reproduces the above-quoted paragraph on page 287.

The reviewer also asks what the red circles on the ANI map indicate. The answer is simple, exactly what the legend says: "centers of massacre and deportation." The ANI map consciously avoided delving into the question of population figures and relied upon the red circles for purposes of communicating some proportional sense of where the atrocities and deportations occurred. The reviewer artificially introduces an entire lecture on the question of demography, a matter untouched by the map. The reviewer has missed the point.

These flawed criticisms are mere diversions, however, from the real points emphasized in the ANI map.

The review does not address them and they are thereby completely minimized. The map highlights three facets of the Armenian Genocide: deportations, massacres, and concentration camps. The reviewer mentions none of this. Moreover, by ignoring these important points, the

reviewer wholly and deliberately overlooks the key elements the ANI map seeks to highlight.

While the Khanzadian map was an important reference, the more recent template of the ANI map was the one produced by Kévorkian and Van Lauve for the Nubarian Library of Paris. In all the formats by which the map has been reproduced, the Nubarian Library has been properly credited. Moreover, had the reviewer bothered to ask, he would have been advised that the underlying template was produced with the written permission

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Heizer, United States consul in Trebizond, 1915. These dispatches also do not support the reported mass drowning."

One does not have to probe deep into archival evidence to establish the same or similar facts. The most commonly used reference of documents on the Armenian Genocide is the Bryce-Toynbee publication *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, which the Gomidas Institute recently issued in an uncensored format. The original edition, of which there have been at least two reprints, contains information that anyone can consult without the use

of the Nubarian Library, thereby sparing himself from making the scurrilous, if not libelous, accusation that ANI somehow “lifted” the maps. It would have been a simple matter to call ANI or Dr. Kévorkian.

As to the wholly gratuitous matter of the Baghdad Railroad, ANI did not presume to alter the Kévorkian–Van Lauve template. Upon consulting other maps and sources, it augmented with additional geographic information where space allowed. Since a copy of the Kévorkian–Van Lauve map is reproduced in the review article, may I ask the reviewer to examine it again? Or is the reviewer’s gripe merely with the ANI generation of the template? Incidentally, that map too indicates drowning at sea at Trebizond.

As stated, what pretends to be a critical review was accomplished only by neglecting to mention the points highlighted in the ANI map. Specifically, two facets of the Kévorkian–Van Lauve template, in the judgment of ANI, deserved wider distribution than the publication in which the map originally appeared. In this respect they do reflect the latest scholarship on the Armenian Genocide. Namely these are the identification of the concentration camps and the inset showing the other major deportation route from Aleppo south toward Palestine and Arabia, an aspect of the Armenian Genocide long overlooked.

If some egregious error had been inadvertently introduced or some significant flaw overlooked, the presumptive peroration of the reviewer in some way may have been justified. Given that each and every one of his points is refuted, one wonders what exactly was the true intent of the offensive review. It hoped to raise “questions about the competence of the ANI as an academic institution,” to quote the article. In light of the highly questionable methods of the reviewer, and the miniscule

issues raised with the map, it can only be concluded that the real intent of the review was to discredit an entire organization. The leap from this inaccurate examination of a map into the condemnation of an institute validates questions about the professionalism and honesty of the review article.

The *Armenian Forum* fills a void in the discourse on contemporary Armenian affairs, but if it is to set and maintain reasonable standards of public decorum, it should not stoop to methods akin to yellow journalism but return to communicating in a manner its readership has come to expect.

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Ara Sarafian responds:

My review of the Armenian National Institute’s map of the Armenian Genocide (see *Armenian Forum* 2, no. 3) has led to some discomfort, and to speculation that I have ulterior motives in my criticism. The letter by Rouben Adalian goes so far as to accuse me of malice.

The fact remains that the ANI map, which purports to represent the “latest research” on the Armenian Genocide, does not acknowledge the 1920 map by Z. Khanzadian from which it was lifted. As I pointed out in my review, the version on the ANI’s Web site is more forthcoming, but even that version obscures the fact that it is significantly based on an original that is eight decades old.

The ANI map, as I noted in my review, reproduces many of the errors and ambiguities in the original work. A specific issue that I use as an example—and I could have chosen others—is whether several thousand Armenians were drowned in the Black Sea during the Armenian Genocide of 1915. I argue that while there were



A caïque given to the Duke of Devonshire in 1839 (Chatsworth House). Drowning eight thousand people by caïque (*kayik*) would require some two thousand trips. Drowning was uncharacteristic of the fate of Armenians in Trebizond during the Armenian Genocide.

rumors of such *mass* drownings in 1915, the stories were soon dismissed by contemporaries such as James Bryce, who had originally engaged the mass drowning theory. I also cite a dissertation on the manifestation of the Armenian Genocide at Trebizond, by Kevork Suakjian, who uses American consular records and does not support the mass-drownings thesis. Instead he gives a detailed chronology of deportations (see my review).

Rouben Adalian, on the other hand, insists that the ANI map was carefully produced and argues that the United States consul at Trebizond, Oscar Heizer, and the encyclopedia of the Armenian Question (Yerevan, 1996) support his position on mass drownings. He categorically rejects my suggestion that the ANI map was simply lifted from the 1920 work without adequate checks of the actual data.

As Suakjian demonstrated in his thesis, Oscar Heizer accounted for the disappear-

ance of the vast majority of Armenians from Trebizond through mass deportations, while many Armenian children were kept in orphanages and farmed out to Muslim families. While Heizer noted that there were cases where some Armenians were taken to sea in caïques (rowboats) and probably drowned, he did not report any mass drownings as the Khanzadian and ANI maps suggest. Drowning was uncharacteristic of the fate of Armenians in Trebizond.

Dr. Adalian's reference to the encyclopedia of the Armenian Question is rather curious. This is a secondary source that is contradicted by Heizer's reports, and there are no details substantiating it. The encyclopedia actually maintains that eight thousand Armenians were taken out of Trebizond in boats and drowned by 6 July 1915 (p. 445; p. 316 of the Russian original, *Armyanskiy Vopros*, Yerevan, 1991). Adalian endorses this ludicrous assertion. The encyclopedia's assertion flies in the face of Oscar Heizer's reports to the United States government. Thus I must stand by my contention that the ANI map reproduces a discredited 1915 rumor in its representation of the Genocide in Trebizond.

I will comment briefly in response to the remaining points in Dr. Adalian's letter.

- The red circles of various sizes are the most salient feature of the 1920 map, where they were defined as the total, by district, of deported and massacred Armenians (1 millimeter for 5,000 inhabitants). The ANI map carelessly reproduces this feature without, however, explaining what the gradations in size are meant to represent. In my review, taking one example, I showed that the circle for Der Zor is too large if it represents the number of Armenian victims native to that region (there were fewer than 500 Armenians there in 1914) and too small if it represents the number of Armenians deported there

(870,000) or killed there (over 300,000). Dr. Adalian now claims that the size of the circles is supposed to communicate “some proportional sense of where the atrocities and deportations occurred.” As I showed in the case of Der Zor—and Der Zor is not the only such case—the circles fail to communicate “some proportional sense” correctly. If it is true, as Dr. Adalian claims, that the “ANI map consciously avoided delving into the question of population figures,” then the map’s misrepresentation of information is deliberate. That is not something for the ANI to be proud of.

- Dr. Adalian correctly notes that another map has the Baghdad Railway going straight through to Mosul. The fact remains, however, that the railway line did not go straight through in 1915; it was not yet completed in the Taurus and Amanus mountains. As I noted in my review, many Armenians were deported by train, in cattle trucks. They had to disembark and trek over the Taurus mountains because the railroad was not finished. Many died on the way. Other deportees, thousands of them, were used as forced labor to complete these incomplete sections of the railway.

- As the Gomidas Institute Web site <<http://www.gomidas.org>> notes, the Gomidas Institute’s “facsimile republication of Khanzadian’s map . . . celebrates the 1920 work as a milestone in the historiography of the Armenian Genocide.” Whereas the ANI claims its map represents the “latest

research” on the Genocide, the Gomidas Institute Web site notes that “although Khanzadian’s work captured the imagination of generations of Armenians (it was pathbreaking in 1920), much of its detail is now outdated and needs to be reevaluated.”

In rereading Adalian’s letter, I am struck by the whiny tone: *Others have plagiarized Khanzadian’s map too; another map has gotten the Baghdad Railroad wrong; others have claimed that many thousands of Armenians were drowned in the Black Sea; why pick on me?*

The issues raised in my review and reiterated here are not minuscule issues, as Dr. Adalian would have readers believe. First, plagiarism is a serious ethical lapse. Second, nonspecialists using the map to follow literature on the Armenian Genocide or family accounts will be misled by erroneously drawn circles and railroad tracks shown where none existed. Finally, reproducing indefensible claims about mass drownings does not help those people—ANI supporters among them—who seek affirmation of the Armenian Genocide. It erodes the credibility of Armenian Genocide studies and opens people to ridicule when they repeat these claims, having relied on institutions like the ANI to provide them with solid facts.

I stand by my review.

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