



Quest for Beauty

The Photographic Journey of Malak of Ottawa

HARVEY SAWLER



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University of Ottawa Press



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For the Karsh family

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I first spoke with Sidney about this biography project more than two decades ago. At the same time, I had a meeting to discuss the idea with Anna Porter of Key Porter Books, who had already published several books of photography featuring Malak's work and who expressed her deep admiration for him. For various reasons, the project did not materialize until I resurfaced with the idea in 2023 and reconnected with Sidney. He was not merely receptive: as we explored the narrative and photographic avenues of the book together, he became increasingly absorbed, nearly matching my own level of enthusiasm.

Everyone who agreed to an interview made a wonderful contribution to the project. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the generosity of Michel Gauthier, Gerry Arial and Dr. David Gaunt, professor of history at Södertörn University Centre for Baltic and East European Studies in Stockholm, Sweden, and a Member of Academia Europea. David was extremely generous with his time, providing insights particularly regarding the Armenian Genocide. Finally, I am grateful to all the wonderful collaborators at the University of Ottawa Press, especially Acquisitions Editor Mireille Piché, who—in a casual conversation in early 2024—spontaneously recognized the importance of creating a biography focusing on the life and work of Malak Karsh, and made it happen! All photographs are by Malak Karsh (www.malakofottawa.ca), unless otherwise noted.

Foreword

I remember the day Malak celebrated the occasion of his having been awarded the Order of Canada. It was in 1996, and his family gathered in the Senate Chamber to toast the man and his extraordinary achievements. Not many people were accorded the honour of using this room for a private event, but Malak was not like any other person, and he had a special relationship with this room and the building that housed it. He had climbed up scaffolding and tall ladders to reach the highest places both inside and outside the Parliament buildings—always in pursuit of that perfect shot, the photograph that would reveal the wonders of the place he loved. That love included not only the gargoyles, the towers, the stained glass, the grand corridors, but also the magnificent fall colours, the Ottawa River lit by the setting sun, the Rideau Canal in the winter, and the splendour of the tulips in the spring. I remember Malak lying on the still cold ground, photographing those fabulous tulips when they had just started to open and later, when they were in full bloom. His love of the tulips led to Ottawa's annual tulip festival and one of several Malak books we published.

Malak's love of Canada, its people and its awe-inspiring scenery, is best commemorated in his vast collection of photographs, a small sample of which form the heart of his book, *Canada: The Land That Shapes Us*. Every picture in that book was discussed, debated, and very carefully chosen by Malak and his wife, Barbara. He wrote of the joy of looking at a photograph that succeeded in capturing the image he had sought to keep and of the despair he felt when he had failed. His relationship to his subjects was deeply emotional, as was his relationship to his adopted country. He spoke of its awe-inspiring beauty and of "the indomitable spirit of the people of all races who are fortunate enough to inhabit it." His life's work is a remarkable celebration of a country that had taken him in and allowed him and his family to flourish. Canadians should be equally grateful for his tireless recording of our country and of his unwavering eye.

Quest for Beauty takes a deep dive into Malak's personal history, his childhood ordeals, his family's story and comes a long way to explain the enigma of this extraordinary man.

Anna Porter, O.C.

Quest: *to Seek*

*Every time I leave my studio in search of new pictures,
I ask God to open my eyes so that I can see.
There is not a day that goes by that I do not discover some surprises
that make me wonder how I missed them before.
That is part of the pleasures of life, to keep searching.*

Malak of Ottawa in an address to the Rideau Club, December 1, 1999, on the occasion of his presentation of a photographic exhibit, which was a tribute to the Parliament buildings.
The exhibit was gifted to the Rideau Club.

Prologue

Mardin

The name Mardin comes from the Aramaic/Syriac word Marīda, meaning “fortress,” a name fitting its location on a steep hill overlooking Mesopotamia, making it a natural stronghold. Mardin is far down in the southeast corner of Anatolia, very close to the Syrian border.

Mesopotamia is commonly referred to as the “cradle of civilization” because the earliest known indicators of civilization emerged there, marked by permanent settlements, farming, and other key inventions. Located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern Iraq, Mesopotamia saw the rise of cities, advanced crafts, and the first writing system known as cuneiform. The development of irrigation led to abundant food and supported a growing population, establishing Mesopotamia as a centre of innovation and of significant cultural influence. This rich heritage was bequeathed to its successors, shaping much of Middle Eastern civilization.

In the expansive 1998 book *Poetry of Stone and Faith: Mardin*, a richly illustrated and poetic album, the noted Turkish poet and author Refik Durbas (1944–2018) writes of Mardin: “In my cradle the caravans of East and West open the swaddling clothes of silk and of life, of spices and of death” [...] and as “a realm traversed by saffron and spices, silk and copper.”

Historian Dr. David Gaunt has visited Mardin numerous times, becoming an expert on the city in both historic and contemporary terms. A professor of history at Södertörn University Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, Gaunt is noted for his book about the Assyrian genocide: *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I*.

In a 2025 interview for *Quest for Beauty*, Gaunt talked widely about Mardin, about events there in 1915, and how he first became drawn into and immersed

in the subject of genocide. For over a period of twenty-five years, Gaunt had written about the history of the families in Nordic countries.

“But there came a time when I was traveling with my wife and we called home to our youngest daughter and asked, ‘Well, what are you doing now this summer?’ And she says, ‘I won’t tell you.’ Then my wife gets on the phone and says, ‘What’s up Siri?’ demanding an answer.”

Siri responded hesitatingly, saying she had decided to take a course in genocide at Sweden’s Uppsala University. She explained her hesitation as recalled by Gaunt: “I thought you’d think I was some kind of an idiot for taking that course.”

Siri’s delving into the subject of genocide had an immediate influence on Gaunt, an initial moment, followed by others, that altered the direction of his academic life. It began with his studies on the Holocaust, and an instance involving a small group of students at Södertörn University.



The term “genocide” was coined in 1943 by the Jewish-Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who combined the Greek word *genos*, meaning “race” or “tribe,” with “-cide” (borrowed from the French *-cide* and the Latin *-cida*), meaning “to kill.” Lemkin campaigned to have genocide recognized as a crime against humanity under international law after witnessing the horrors of the Holocaust, in which every member of his family, except one brother, was killed. His efforts led to the creation of the United Nations Genocide Convention in December 1948, which came into effect in January 1951.

As chronicled in a BBC article examining genocides, published in 2022, there are arguments about what has constituted a genocide over the past century, with “some saying that there was only the Holocaust.”

“But,” the article continues, “there have been at least three as defined by the terms of the 1948 UN convention, in chronological order: the mass killing of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks between 1915 and 1920; the Holocaust, during which more than six million Jews were killed; and in Rwanda, where an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus died in the 1994 genocide.”

There is an irony that is central to the phenomenon of genocide: That the concept of leadership as we think of it gets turned on its head, normally a set of mindsets and behaviours that aligns people in a collective direction, enables them to work together and accomplish shared goals, and helps

them adjust to changing environments. But in genocide, leadership has become poisoned, malignant, and immoral. Conversely, moral leadership is crucial to the prevention or termination of a genocide.

Dehumanizing groups of people by describing them as creatures who are not seen as human occurs repeatedly. According to the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, Hitler defined the Jews as a race rather than a religious community and characterized the effect of a Jewish presence as a “race-tuberculosis of the peoples.”



While Gaunt was in that role of leading the Södertörn University Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, he was approached by a group of students who said: “We’re Assyrians. Have you heard about us and the genocide that we went through?”

“I can’t remember if they were taking my class or simply knew that I was to speak on the Holocaust,” says Gaunt.

They were talking about the genocide of Assyrians and the teacher who, in Gaunt’s view, was obviously sympathetic to Turkish government claims that the genocide did not happen, and that the students’ parents and grandparents were lying about it. The Turkish government still today officially and systematically denies that the mass killings and deportations of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during the First World War constituted a genocide. This position has been maintained by every government of the Republic of Turkey since its founding.

The Armenian atrocities are regarded as being highly organized and executed through systematic, central government orders, including mass deportations (death marches) to the Syrian desert. The Assyrian atrocities were less systematic, with local actors and irregulars (Kurdish groups) playing a larger role in the massacres, though the Ottoman government also ordered attacks.

“The story of what happened to the Assyrian peoples is extremely important,” says Gaunt. “In the history of Turkey, if you go and read a normal history of Turkey, it is totally ignored.”

Gaunt explains that Assyrians were a small Christian group that were rather unimportant in the national history of Turkey.

They were not as important as the Armenians. Armenians were everywhere, and the Armenians had a cultural renaissance going

on from the middle of the 1800s, with lots of schools, lots of newspapers, lots of printing, playwrights, novelists and really big things and a lot of political thinkers as well.

The Assyrians had none of that. And the Armenian Catholics had no part in that either. At the same time, Armenians and the Greeks dominated the economy, the Greeks with shipping and the Armenians with areas such as banking architecture. The Assyrians were closed in their corner of southeastern Anatolia. They weren’t everywhere in the Ottoman Empire like the Armenians were, the Armenians and the Greeks were even outside of the country, so they had communications with the other Greeks and other Armenians outside who could communicate to the rest of the world what was going on.

The entire genocide was based on religions, because the Ottoman Empire was a theocracy, characterizing people according to their religion.

“That’s what they call the Millet System,” explains Gaunt, “so that you have no nationality, only religion.”

The Millet System was an Ottoman Empire governance structure allowing recognized religious communities (millets, like Orthodox Christians, Armenians, Jews) significant autonomy to manage their own internal affairs—laws, courts, education, taxes—under their own religious leaders, functioning as semi-independent “nations” within the empire, a form of non-territorial autonomy praised for managing diversity but also criticized for creating inequality and later challenged by modern nationalism.

“It was then that I realized the need for a proper and detailed research-based monograph on genocide, and particularly, on what happened in Turkey.”



Gaunt talks about Mardin as now being a destination for tourists, a place whose charm lies in a unique Middle Eastern atmosphere that is strikingly medieval.

He calls it a living museum of history, culture, and unique architecture, a place with stunning, ancient stone architecture, particularly its golden limestone buildings, narrow winding cobblestone alleys, historic mosques (including the Grand Mosque), monasteries such as the fifth century Deyrulzafaran, and traditional houses perched dramatically overlooking the previously-mentioned Mesopotamian plains. Gaunt says that Mardin

is a rich blend of cultures (Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac, Turkish), a place with a unique history and a place on the Tentative List of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Today's Mardin is a tourist place of boutique hotels, boutique shops, food, and a place for immersion into its many cultural wonders.

Gaunt's depiction of Mardin as a contemporary living museum is not, however, what Malak Karsh would have seen when he was born in Mardin on March 1, 1915, during what is often named in accounts of early twentieth century history as "the Year of the Sword." He was actually the second of the Karsh children to be named Malak. Three preceding Karsh children did not survive childhood. The firstborn, Josephine, died of starvation. The next two, Jamil and Malak, died from typhoid at ages four and six respectively. The boys' names would be reused when subsequent babies were born.

Malak's birth coincided with the Armenians in Mardin facing the noted systematic mass extermination as part of the Young Turk government's plan to create an ethnically homogeneous Turkish state.

1

What Everyone Saw

“In 1915,” says Gaunt, “Mardin is one of the most multicultural places in all of Turkey,” a city from which you can see almost forever around the surrounding countryside, which is very flat. “You could probably see into Syria if your eyesight was very good.”

In his article, “The View from the Roofs of Mardin: What Everyone Saw in the ‘Year of the Sword,’” published in January 2015 by *Armenian Weekly*, Gaunt wrote:

Mardin is an ancient and beautiful city, built on the steep slope of a mountain that descends from the fortress on top. Houses were literally built on top of each other, with one family’s roof becoming another family’s terrace. It is a very well-ordered form of residential chaos that evolved over the centuries and withstands modernization. Because of the height of the mountain, people living in Mardin can see for many miles around—far into the surrounding plains, far along the main road to Diyarbakir, sometimes even as far as the Syrian border.

Gaunt explained in his interview that people in Mardin standing on their roofs could see the deportation caravans as they were coming by. They could see how many people were moving within the caravans and what was happening to them.

“So, we have a lot of descriptions of what was going on in Mardin from observers mostly writing in Arabic or in French.

“About half of Mardin’s population of around 50,000 were Christians,” says Gaunt, adding that “the largest Christian group was the Syrian Orthodox Church, followed by the Armenian Catholic Church, who had an Archbishop there. And then there are smaller churches, like the Chaldeans.

They’re also Catholic, and the Syrian Catholic Church, and then a sprinkle of Yazidis, a Kurdish-speaking ethnoreligious minority.”

There were also remnants of even earlier religious groups like “soul worshippers” (an animistic/shamanistic faith focused on the sky god Tengri and pre-Islam nature spirits).

“And then there are Muslims with many madrasas sprinkled around (Islamic religious schools teaching the Quran, Hadith [Prophet’s sayings], Islamic law [fiqh], and other subjects).”

The Karsh family’s religious affiliations, as noted in Maria Tippet’s 2007 biography of Yousuf Karsh, *Portrait in Shadow and Light: The Life of Yousuf Karsh*, shows that his grandparents were Armenian Christians. His father Amsih Karsh was a Roman Catholic, and his mother Bahia Nakash was a Protestant, so he had mixed Christian faiths.

The architecture in Mardin is very unusual, making the city, in Gaunt’s view very “picturesque.”

“It is not like a typical Turkish town with steep roofs and the like,” describes Gaunt.

Every roof in Mardin is very flat. People would sleep on the roofs in the summertime when it gets very hot. Usually, the roof of one house is the terrace of the next house. Since it is built on a hill, everything is layered all the way up to the very top where there is a fortress.

There was in 1915 only one road through the middle of the city, going through from one of the gates in the town wall to the other. In fact, there’s still only one road even now from East to West. That’s it. And then even today, they use donkeys and mules in order to deliver things to the houses within Mardin because there are no roads upward through and into the city, only very narrow passageways.

Houses in Mardin were quite large, with households composed of several related families, brothers, sisters, children, married children, and their children.

“So, you could have about twenty people living in a very rich family’s house,” says Gaunt.

The economy was based on servicing the caravan trade the spice trade and the like—because it is a well-watered region just north of the desert. Caravans would be moving goods that were very valuable, as well as practical products like dried fruit and gold apples, the extract from which was used for tanning leather.

“Whatever was going from the Mediterranean to Iran and back, they would go through here or a little bit north of here.”

To service the caravans, artisans in Mardin would make and sell saddles and other leather goods needed to keep camels and donkeys harnessed.

“They also produced food for the travelling merchants, and they were into the manufacture of clothing,” says Gaunt, “taking in wool from the Kurdish Tribesmen, turning it into yarn, and then weaving and dyeing it. There were many who were tailors who would be making even the more elaborate and detailed Kurdish outfits.”



Less than three months following Malak’s birth, Mardin was terrifyingly transformed.

Much of what transpired starting in June of 1915 was witnessed by Ishāq Armalah (1879–1954), who chronicled what he could see from Mardin throughout the years of the genocide, writings that comprise much of Gaunt’s lectures and his contributions to the *Armenian Weekly*, an English-language newspaper serving as the media arm of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), a nationalist and democratic socialist political party founded in 1890.

Gaunt explains that Armalah was the secretary of the Syriac Catholic Bishop, so he was able to attend all the high-level meetings and had access to a lot of good information. He also had a unique observation point on top of the Syrian archbishop’s residence, which is now the Mardin Museum of Archaeology. He says that there are “a lot of bad places from the genocide that are now museums.” One of them is the Mardin Art Museum, the one of contemporary art that was used as a prison, from where the men of Mardin were chained together and marched through the centre of town.

“From that vantage point at the archbishop’s residence,” says Gaunt, “he could see a lot of things that were happening in the plains below.”

In relation to Gaunt’s work regarding the events in Mardin of 1915, he says that “Armalah has become my eyes.”



In March of 1915, a new governor arrived at the Ras al-Ayn camps, a specific subdistrict in the al-Hasakah Governorate, which were desert death camps where many Armenians were deported and slaughtered during the

Armenian genocide, referred to as the six “suffering provinces” (Six Vilayets) in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire, which had significant Armenian populations, and where Mardin is located. The new governor’s name was Bedri Bey, a very infamous figure in Armenian genocide literature because of his fanaticism.

“He is the man who extends Armenian massacres and deportations of Armenians to also include Assyrians,” explains Gaunt. This is because he thinks they’ve become Armenianized, also labelling them as terrorists.

“They have Arabic names like everybody else in Mardin.”

Gaunt explains that Bey had to “do a lot of tricks” in order to get rid of the local administrators who refused to collaborate with him, who were opposed to the anti-Armenian policy. The local governor, for example, was sent off to Mosul because of his refusal to follow Bey. Others are assassinated but the killing of a local governor was not seen as a good idea. In replacing the governor, Bey installed two individuals who had a blood-thirsty reputation. One of them is Mamdooh Bek, who would become the chief of police, “a really nasty person [...] a ‘thug’” as Gaunt brands him—who organized the mass arrests that unfolded in Mardin. He arrived at the beginning of June.

So, Malak was just three months old when Bek comes to Mardin and begins to arrest leading church figures and some of the richest men in Mardin. According to some accounts, about 800 people were arrested in the first days of June. They were jailed in Mardin Castle. They were tortured in order for them to confess to having hidden caches of weapons and bombs, dynamite, and things like that. They managed to get some people under torture to make some strange confessions and accusations.

After about five or six days, the prisoners in Mardin Castle were rounded up at nightfall. Soldiers called out their names, one by one, and tied them with ropes. Rings were pressed around the necks, and chains put around the wrists, of those thought to be Armenian. All of them stood like that, for several hours, until the soldiers had finished arranging them into columns and rows. They were marched out through the prison gate. Christians were not allowed to go down into the streets, but they could see what was going on from the roofs of their houses. Muslims, however, were allowed to be down in the street as this procession goes from east to the western gate.

"The Muslim inhabitants are hurling insults and throwing things at the prisoners as they march. Well, not march, they trudge," says Gaunt, "I mean, because they were chained together."



The reason for the marches, according to Gaunt, was humiliation.

"This is a totally conscious attempt to humiliate the Christian population of Mardin and also to give them a feeling of despondency and hopelessness about the future because there's still several thousand of them left after this first. So, you're taking away the elite, their leaders, the richest people, the clergy, just about everybody of importance.

"The Muslim population is engaged in the whole thing. They're not just observers, they are also participating by their throwing insults and becoming a mob as well."

"They come out and go down the hill," describes Gaunt.

Today it is a two-hour drive between the Diyarbakir and Mardin, the equivalent of a two-day march.

"On the way north towards Diyarbakir, after five or six hours, they stop at one place, and some of them are taken off to a cave and are killed."

Gaunt says that the several hundred remaining, around four hundred prisoners, continued on, stopping at various places along the way, where they were murdered. The prisoners were young and old. No distinction had been made by the authorities as to whether they were Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant. Those belonging to the Latin or Chaldean or Syriac Rites had been bound all the same. They were all Christians and thus deemed enemies of the state. Bek led the caravan from the front. He considered himself to be a hero [...] a warrior for his faith.

"But he was a horrible guy," says Gaunt.

Among those who had been arrested in this wave was a man called Ignatius Maloyan, Archbishop of the Armenian Catholic Archeparchy of Mardin, who was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2001, recognizing his death as a martyrdom in odium fidei ("in hatred of the faith"). He was later declared a Saint by Pope Leo XIV and canonized at the Vatican on October 19, 2025.

Born in Mardin, Maloyan was recognized because of the circumstances of his death and the miracles that are said to have occurred at the place where he was executed for refusing to renounce his Christian faith and convert to Islam.

On June 11, 1915, during the Armenian Genocide, Archbishop Maloyan was among those Christian prisoners who were force-marched from the prison in Mardin into the desert.

It was at Sheikhan, the site of an ancient castle, which is a couple of hours' walk outside of south of the Diyarbakir, where Maloyan was confronted by Bek to either convert or be killed. After repeatedly refusing to convert to Islam, it is said that Bek personally attacked Maloyan, beat him up, and pulled out his fingernails and toenails.

"Bek goes off says a prayer to his God," according to Gaunt, "and then comes back and shoots Maloyan in the head several times."

"So this," says Gaunt, "is the place where Maloyan dies and where miracles are said to have occurred later on. His last words as he was shot were: 'Lord, have mercy upon me. Receive my soul.'"

His martyrdom is a powerful symbol of the resilience and courage of the Armenian people who endured immense suffering during the mass killings and deportations. The canonization has been viewed as a significant historic moment for the Catholic Church and the Armenian people, honouring the memory of all Armenian martyrs. It remains significant for its potential diplomatic implications in ongoing reconciliation efforts between Turkey and Armenia, a process that remains sensitive due to Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide.

"Of the hundreds who started out in the march," explained Gaunt, "none are left in the end. When the guards come back to Mardin, they told people that the men in the caravan had arrived safely in Diyarbakir, and that everything was fine, a normal lie that they would do.

"Some of the guards who were guarding the procession come back days later, and they're wearing the clothes of the people who they have killed as well. So, they got something out of it. After this, I think everyone who is Christian knows that bad things are happening because it was not just the Armenian groups whose elite was taken."

In his article, "The View from the Roofs of Mardin" Gaunt wrote about the exodus from Mardin:

Armenians from eastern and western Anatolia were forced on grueling marches towards the desert concentration camps in Syria, particularly Deir ez-Zor and Ras al-Ayn. Mardin lay on this deportation route, and countless convoys of Armenians passed through or near the city. The marches were not simple relocations but were deliberately designed to maximize fatalities through starvation,

dehydration, exposure, disease, and systematic brutality. Mardin was a place where these atrocities occurred on a large scale. Regional officials in Mardin, under orders from the central government's Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), implemented the mass killings and deportations with the assistance of local militias, gendarmerie, and sometimes nomadic bands. Men of fighting age were often separated from the convoys and murdered in isolated locations, while women, children, and the elderly were subjected to extreme violence and abuse. Testimonies from survivors and foreign observers document the roads and rivers near such cities, including those in the Mardin region, as being choked with corpses. Many Armenian women and children were forcibly converted to Islam and integrated into Muslim households in an attempt to erase their Armenian identity. This was also a common occurrence in the areas surrounding Mardin. The events in Mardin were part of the broader Armenian Genocide that began with the arrest and execution of Armenian intellectuals in Constantinople on April 24, 1915. The subsequent Temporary Law of Deportation in May 1915 provided a legal cover for the forced removal of the Armenian population, leading to the death marches. The Turkish government has consistently denied that these events constituted a genocide, claiming the deportations were a legitimate wartime security measure. However, there is an academic consensus that the systematic and planned nature of the killings and forced marches point to an intentional effort to annihilate the Armenian people from the Ottoman Empire.

Gaunt observes that, as for so many others, it would become essential for the Karsh family to eventually get out of Mardin.

There were few means of escape for the Karsh family to depart Mardin. The journey from there to Aleppo, where the family ended up residing, was marked by horrific risks and conditions. While the Baghdad Railway was used to transport some deportees from western Anatolia, the caravans (or convoys) from eastern provinces, which included Mardin at the time, were largely marched overland. The railway often intersected with the march routes, and some survivors were packed into trains for parts of the journey to areas like Aleppo or Ras al-Ayn.

The convoys were frequently attacked by gendarmes, Kurdish and Circassian paramilitary bands, who killed men and abducted women and children. Deportees were systematically denied food and water and

subjected to harsh environmental conditions, leading to widespread death from starvation, dehydration, exposure, and disease. The concentration of thousands of people in transit camps and on the roads, coupled with a lack of sanitation, led to epidemics of dysentery, typhus, and pneumonia.

"It was a very, very bad place," Gaunt asserts.

Gaunt says that the refugees would either be part of a caravan or they could have travelled by themselves, or in a very little group, the latter two being less visible and therefore preferable due to the risk of attacks.

"If they were arriving by themselves, or in a very little group, it might not have been attacked and in that way would have gotten through. We sort of reckon that if you were coming from the east on a deportation train or the caravans, the chances were that two in ten would arrive safely, so 20 percent would get through.

"The Germans who still had their consulates open in Aleppo, made this accounting by going out and asking 'How many were you in your family when you started? And how many are you now?'"

People risking this journey would have to take their own food and other necessities.

"Typically, you would necessarily have to hide some money and be able to bring that money through as well. You might have relatives already in place who could help you."

Either way, says Gaunt, it was like with the Holocaust.

"You have to have a hell of a lot of luck to really survive."

Which the Karsh family of course eventually did.

At only seven years of age, Malak's witnessing and memories of the atrocities may not have matched those of his brother Yousuf, who must have been personally marked to some degree by what was happening all around him and his family; Yousuf was born in December of 1908, making him seven-and-a-half years old when matters turned grave and fourteen by the time the family became refugees. Whatever horror the family did or did not see first-hand, there were many people among them who did bear witness. According to Gaunt, writings lay unpublished for decades after they were first written down by witnesses who published books anonymously about what they had seen, such as Ishaq Armale, who had fled to Lebanon, and the writings of the French Dominican monk Jacques Rhétoré (whose manuscript was only discovered in Mosul, after the first Gulf War, in 1991).

Armale himself recounts the Armenians' reaction to the first reliable information on plans to eliminate them:

Some leading Muslims employed Christian servants, who by hiding listened to what was said and told of the secrets. We did not believe them and said, 'Our friendship with the Muslims is purer than the eye of a rooster and stronger than iron. It would be impossible to turn such a friendship into hostility and mildness into harshness, because we have no conflicts with each other.' We added that in our area, there were no hundred percent Armenians or opponents to the government. No, we are, praise God, Catholics and loyal to the state and follow its decisions to the letter of the law. Therefore, it has no reason to harass us and claim that we are hostile and plot treason. [...] But we were disappointed. The truest friend and the dearest comrade became the worst and most distrustful enemy. The sheep became wolves and the doves became snakes.

Gaunt reflects on how odd it is that friends and comrades, peaceful and trustworthy people, can be transformed into violent, brutal, immoral people. Yet this transformation is a key characteristic of genocide.

The Ottoman authorities, supported by auxiliary troops and at times by civilians, perpetrated most of the persecution and mass killings associated with the genocide, setting Armenia on a path toward becoming a vanishing nation, and Armenians on a path toward becoming a vanishing people. Lost would be their social cohesiveness and their roles in the society of Mardin and elsewhere, similar to the Jews. Their roles as bankers and merchants, as artists, playwrights, musicians and writers, weavers, and silver and goldsmiths, were eradicated.

While many Armenians were murdered in local massacres carried out by death squads armed with swords and other weapons, they were also killed individually in an array of nightmarishly unimaginable acts: The perpetrators drowned them in rivers, threw them off cliffs, crucified them, or burned them alive. The corpses were strewn across the Turkish countryside.

Others died during deportations due to starvation, dehydration, exposure, and disease. An American diplomat in Turkey at the time, US consul Leslie Davis, described the condition of Armenians he witnessed personally on one of the deportation routes: "All of them were in rags and many [...] almost naked [...] emaciated, sick, diseased, filthy, covered with dirt and vermin [...] driven along for many weeks like herds of cattle, with little to eat."

Davis reported to then-US Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Henry Morgenthau: "Any doubt that may have been expressed in previous reports

as to the Government's intentions in sending away the Armenians have been removed and any hope that may have been expressed as to the possibility of some of them surviving have been destroyed. It has been no secret that the plan was to destroy the Armenian race as a race."

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