

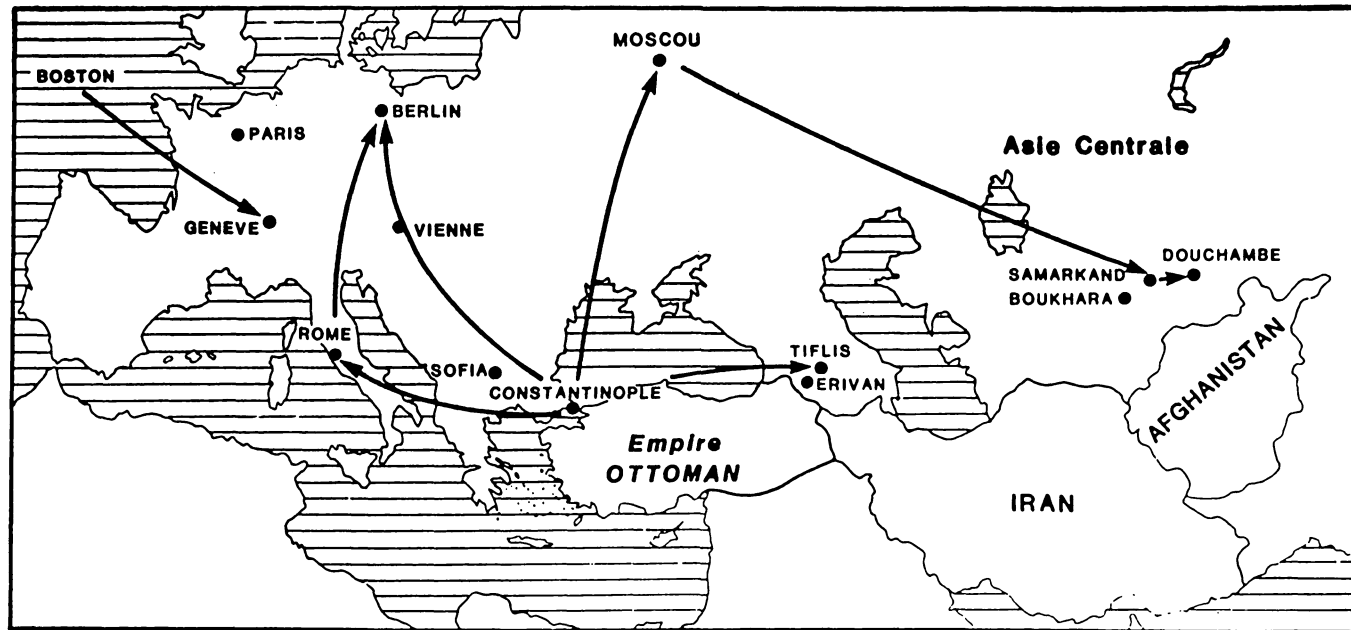
Resistance & Revenge

The Armenian Assassination
of Turkish Leaders
Responsible for the 1915
Massacres and Deportations

JACQUES DEROGY

Preface by Gérard Chaliand
Translated by A. M. Berrett

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To
Jiro, Nora and Lorky



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A Note on Sources

Jacques Derogy's re-creation of the story of *Operation Nemesis* has been based on the use of a variety of sources, including archival documents never used before and oral history.

The operation to punish the Young Turk Ittihad ve Terakke leaders responsible for the genocide against Armenians during World War I was initiated, planned, and executed by the major Armenian political organization then and now, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or Dashnaktsutiune, sometimes referred to as the Dashnak party. While known commonly by the rank and file and many Armenians, the Dashnaktsutiune's role in the operation, structure, and mechanism developed; but the *modus operandi*, and the names of organizers were known by few individuals. For reasons of tradition, politics, and security, the information was not made public and there had never been a formal acknowledgment by the Dashnaktsutiune regarding an operation probably only it could have mounted. The trials of Armenians involved in the assassinations caught after the acts in Berlin, Istanbul, and Athens revealed only personal motivations and covered up the organization's role.

Derogy's quest began with the understanding of the genocide and the context of Turkish-Armenian relations during and immediately after World War I. To understand the tragic events, Derogy used secondary sources by historians such as Serge Afanasyan, Jean-Pierre Alem, Gerard Chaliand, Yves Ternon, and Anahide Ter Minassian and by writers such as Jean-Marie Carzou and Kamuran Gurun as well as archival collections, including those of Arnold Toynbee and Aram Andonian. The "Central Asian" dimension was complemented by the works of Helene Carrere d'Encausee, Joseph Castagne, Essad Bey, and Paul Dumont. Documents representing orders for deportations and massacres and Young Turk government involvement in the genocidal process

have come from a variety of archives, best depicted in the *Permanent People's Tribunal. A Crime of Silence*.

To understand the Ittihad ve Terakke characters and depict their participation in the routine leading to the genocide, the author has relied on a number of memoirs of statesmen, both Western and Ottoman, and on archival material from a large number of official collections. These sources include works by Henry Morgenthau, US Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire until 1916 and a frequent visitor of the Turkish prime minister, Talaat Pasha; Armen Garo Pastermajian, who began his career as a revolutionary and was later elected to the Ottoman Parliament as a deputy; as well as the papers collected and published by German missionary activist Johannes Lepsius; and autobiographies by and biographical works on Young Turks.

Memoirs of the “terrorists” such as Arshavir Shiragian, Soghomon Tehlirian, Missak Torlakian, first published in Armenian, and the proceedings of trials constitute the primary sources for the reconstruction of the events themselves and the introduction of the characters. Memoirs of Armenian leaders of the period who knew the heroes of the volume, such as Simon Vratzian, the last prime minister of independent Armenia who lived until 1969, have been useful in complementing the picture.

The most challenging task has been to find written evidence for the role of the Dashnaksutiune in the operation, the relationship between the regular organization and the need for a special unit to supervise a top secret operation, and the mechanisms developed by it to implement the daring plan. The difficulty in relating this story is compounded by the complexity of the political situation as the independent republic of Armenia was sovietized in December 1920, its leadership was exiled and a diaspora tried to adjust to new circumstances, on the one hand, and the absence of detailed and reliable information on the structure and activities of the party during that period. Derogy used three sources. An important series of documents were discovered in the Central Archives of the Dashnaksutiune deposited at the Hairenik building in the Boston area. These archives consist of two main collections: The Archives of the ARF and the Archives of the Armenian Republic. The relevant, often cryptic documents were found not in the files of the Buro, or supreme executive body of the party, but were dispersed in administrative files of the party's Central Committee of the US, which had assumed responsibility for the organization and financing of the operation.

Many of the facts and details of the story were confirmed or revealed by discussions with individuals who had clear memories of the events. The most important such source was Stepan Dardouni, who died recently in New York.

Finally, Derogy worked closely with scholars of the modern period familiar with the structure and organization of modern Armenian political organiza-

tions, including Anahide Ter Minassian, Gerard Libaridian, Gerard Chaliand, and Yves Ternon.

Gerard Libaridian
Cambridge, Massachusetts



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Foreword

Gérard Chaliand

What in England is called a political thriller is a genre that British master craftsmen such as Graham Greene and Eric Ambler have cultivated magnificently. In France, this category of literature is seen less often. There, Gilles Perrault with *L'Orchestre rouge*, Yves Courrière, and Jacques Derogy are the leaders in this genre. I greatly liked the latter's *La loi du retour: la secrète et véritable histoire de l'“Exodus”* (Fayard) when it appeared; in 1970 it won the Prix Aujourd'hui. It is a richly detailed story, based on thorough research and written in a limpidly clear style.

For several years now I have wanted to see a work come out on Operation Nemesis. I said as much to Claude Durand who, ever quick to make a decision and ever ready to take a risk, accepted the idea on the condition that the story be entrusted to one of the two or three masters of the genre.

Jacques Derogy, whom I met at that time, agreed, despite numerous commitments, to bring the project to fruition. Of the troubled history of the Armenians, he, like many others, knew only of the genocide. Jacques Derogy is of Jewish origin, a former member of the resistance who had joined the maquis in the Ardèche when he was 19. He could not fail to empathize with the fate of the Armenian people.

After reading all the documentation on the subject, Derogy traveled twice to the United States, where he researched the archives of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Zoryan Institute in Boston. There he worked with historian Gerard Libaridian, the director of the Institute, and together they unearthed, from among as yet uncataloged documents, numerous new items that throw light on how the operation was organized.

Looked at historically, Nemesis was perhaps the most extraordinary manhunt of the century. It is also the least known, as its organizers took their story to the grave. It was a pursuit across three continents: decided on in Erevan

(Armenia), which was at that time independent, and in Constantinople, then occupied by the Allies; organized from Boston, with repercussions in Geneva; and executed in Berlin, Rome, Tiflis (Georgia), and as far away as Central Asia. In the direct tradition of tyrannicide, it aimed to punish major political figures condemned to death in absentia by an Ottoman court. Talaat, Enver, and Jemal, the triumvirate heading the Young Turks, and a few others who are mentioned in the present story, were guilty of what today is called “crimes against humanity.” The tale of vengeance told here was an act of elementary justice similar to the execution of high-ranking Nazi dignitaries after World War II. It was indeed more, for here we are not dealing with senior figures in a regime guilty of genocide but with the leaders themselves, who could not hide behind obedience to orders since they were the very ones who conceived the plan and ordered the crimes.

The murder of elites, the liquidation of men under arms who had been first disarmed, and the systematic deportation and extermination of the Armenians of Anatolia were the work of the highest bodies of the Committee of Union and Progress. In this operation they received their punishment.

The genocide of the Armenians—at least half the population disappeared—which has at long last been recognized by the United Nations Human Rights Subcommission (report by Benjamin Whitaker, 21 August 1985), reached its provisional conclusion with Operation Nemesis. Credit for this operation clearly belongs less to those who carried it out, determined young men in their twenties, than to the organizers who supplied the logistics, the intelligence, and the conditions for its execution. The men at the center of the group were Armen Garo, who had lost his family in the massacres and whose biography is amazing; Aaron Sachaklian, who was responsible for logistics, training and, above all, finance; and a younger man, Shahan Natali, the operational coordinator. They belonged to an exceptionally active political generation. Between the last decade of the 19th century and 1920, a portion of this generation fought in all the battles for freedom in the region. Most of these freedom fighters belonged to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Influenced by the Enlightenment, nurtured on the ideas of European socialism in the latter half of the 19th century, and marked by Russian populism, the Federation became a member of the Second International in 1907.

What this political generation believed in represented both the vanguard of modernity in Transcaucasia, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia, and the expression of national and revolutionary aspirations. Thus these men were to be found fighting alongside the Macedonians against the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century, participating in the constitutional revolution in Persia (1905–1907), as irregulars in eastern Anatolia between 1895 and 1908, or as resistance fighters against the deportations at Sasun in 1915.

The genocide of 1915–1916 cut down these aspirations and schools of thought. The survivors briefly formed a state that soon collapsed, and they prepared and carried out Operation Nemesis. Very quickly, events began to move: Armenia became Soviet, and Mustafa Kemal's modern Turkey appeared. The Armenian question, and more particularly that of the genocide, was forgotten for half a century.

Over the last decade a fair number of history books and works of fiction have resurrected these events which, in textbooks, did not even merit a footnote. What was lacking in this series of publications was a book like *Resistance and Revenge*. Thanks to Jacques Derogy's talent, this story is now unforgettably part of contemporary history.



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Preface

This relatively little known aspect of the Armenian passion belongs to the people who wrote it with its blood and tears. The author owes particular gratitude to Gerard Libaridian, the director of the Zoryan Institute in Cambridge and, until recently, the director of the Central Archives of the Dashnaktsutiune, who verbally translated Armenian and American sources on the subject; the Buro of the Dashnaktsutiune that allowed access to the unpublished documents and secret correspondence related to the issue; Stepan Dardouni of New York, now deceased, an active member of the Dashnak party with a remarkable memory of the period; Anaide Ter-Minassian, *maitre de conferences* at the University of Paris-I and Claude Mutafian, *maitre de conferences* at the University of Paris-XIII who were always available for research assistance; Alice Samuelian-Aslanian, an oriental book expert; and Dr. Yves Ternon, historian of the Armenian cause, who guided him in his research and provided him with the essential bibliographical references available in French.

Jacques Derogy
Boston-Paris-Boston
September 1985—April 1986



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Prologue

A Commando Group of Avengers

At 11 a.m. on Tuesday, March 15, 1921, Nicolas Jessen, aged 40 and a representative in the meat trade, was visiting customers in Wittenbergstrasse, in the Charlottenburg district in Berlin. The early rays of the sun were not yet warm enough to allow him to go out without a coat. On taking Hardenbergstrasse, Jessen found himself twenty meters behind a stockily built man wrapped up in a heavy gray winter overcoat and walking slowly, like someone out for a stroll, swinging his stick, on the right-hand pavement, toward the zoological garden. This man was overtaken by a young man with his hat pulled down over his forehead, with a long aquiline nose, who had just crossed the road in front of the School of Music. When he caught up with the man in the heavy overcoat, the young man took his right hand out of his coat pocket and raised it to the other's neck. A shot made Jessen jump. He realized at once that he was witnessing a murder when the stockily built man fell forward, face downward, in a pool of blood spurting from his smashed head. The young man hurriedly dipped the tip of his shoe in the pool of blood, threw down his weapon, and ran off, turning into Pheasant Street toward Kantstrasse. A woman passerby, who had been walking in front of the victim, fainted. Jessen rushed to pick her up, thinking she too had been hit. Then he ran off in pursuit of the murderer and caught up with him on Pheasant Street, as people were shouting on all sides: "Murderer! Stop him!" A removal lorry arrived just at that time and two men came out of a house to join the crowd. Jessen grabbed the fugitive around the waist, who managed to say in bad German: "Me Armenian, him Turkish, no harm for Germany! Let me go, it's nothing to do with you." Passersby who had gathered around were already beginning to hit the young man. Another witness to the murder, Boleslaw Dembiki, a 32-year-old servant who was returning home to have his lunch, helped Jessen save the killer from being lynched and took him to the police

station at the zoological garden. But there the young man was hit even more, as some passersby thought they had recognized the victim, whose body had been turned over on the pavement, as a war hero, General von Kappen, who was just as fat and who had an equally puffy face.

A police officer managed to pull the young man, covered with blood, away from the crowd and take him to the Charlottenburg police station. A guard came, dressed the young man's head, and locked him in a cell. All the murderer did was to repeat: "He was a foreigner, I am a foreigner; it has nothing to do with you." He also asked for the help of an Armenian interpreter. But the police had cordoned off the scene of the murder. The criminal lawyer Paul Scholz was the first person to search the victim, whose corpse was laid out on the pavement in front of 17 Hardenbergstrasse, between nearby Pheasant Street and Joachimstaler. On the corpse was a Turkish passport in the name of Ali Saleh Bey, businessman, residing at 4 Hardenbergstrasse. He had thus just left his home which had, curiously, been rented by the secretary to the Turkish embassy in Germany, Shiah Bey. The news quickly spread among the Turkish refugee colony in Charlottenburg.

All Dr. Schloss, a doctor in the health department at the zoological garden, could do was to simply observe the size of the wound covered with coagulated blood above the dead man's left eye. The criminal lawyer Gnass, from the district police, inserted his finger into the wound; it was the exit hole made by the bullet that had entered under the left ear, near the nape of the neck. Then he took the weapon, which had been abandoned in the gutter. It was a 9 mm eight-round automatic pistol from German army stocks, dating from 1915. Seven unspent bullets remained in the magazine.

Two hours later a Turkish leader in exile, Dr. Behaeddin Shakir, was allowed to see the body. Terribly shocked, he covered up the face again after identifying the dead man. It was former Grand Vizier Talaat Pasha, initially minister of the interior, who had been the head of the Ottoman cabinet of the Sublime Porte (the government of the Ottoman Empire) at the end of the war. He had fled the Ottoman Empire after its surrender, and had found secret asylum among his former allies of the Second Reich. The German minister for foreign affairs came at once to pay his respects to the remains, which had been taken to the morgue early in the afternoon. Dr. Schulinsky, who performed the autopsy, found numerous bone fragments in the wound and brain matter blackened with blood: "The brain had completely burst and suffered such pressure that death was instantaneous, with cardiac arrest."

The investigators recorded the statements of the first two witnesses. Jessen said he had helped the woman passerby who had fainted before noticing that the man in the gray overcoat was dead; then he had searched the murderer, whom he had grabbed by the waist, fearing that he might be carrying another handgun or a dagger. Dembicki confirmed that the killer had passed him at

the corner of Pheasant Street, about four paces from the man he was to kill. At first he had thought that a tire had burst, then he had seen the man in front of him fall down and the young man run away down Pheasant Street to the left before being caught by the first witness: "He had aimed at the victim from behind, after raising his head as if looking up toward a balcony. He fired and threw his weapon away without stopping near the body. I did not notice the woman who had fainted. In any case, no one was with the victim, whom I saw going down the street alone, walking steadily. The murderer was following him on the same pavement and only overtook him to run away down Pheasant Street."

Questioned the same afternoon by the criminal lawyer Gnass at the Charlottenburg police station, the murderer, holder of a valid residence permit in the name of Soghomon Tehlirian, born April 2, 1897, in Pakaridj (Turkey), a Protestant Armenian and a student of engineering, who had arrived in Berlin at the beginning of December, attempted to explain briefly why he had done what he had done. He had killed the pasha because he knew the pasha was responsible for the massacre of his family. The policeman then showed him the pistol, putting the barrel to his head, so as to ask him if indeed that was how he had proceeded. The Armenian, his face clean-shaven and emaciated, shook his head to say no and gestured to show that he had shot from behind. In the absence of an interpreter, he refused to make any further statement.

That day Gnass also took down a statement volunteered by a third witness, named Resch. Resch had seen the murderer come down Hardenbergstrasse on the opposite pavement, cross the road opposite the School of Music and position himself behind his victim (whom he had thus been able to get a good look at beforehand), and momentarily bend over the body, floored by the first shot, before attempting to escape.

When the official at the police station asked him why he had not confronted his victim face to face, Tehlirian was able to make him understand that he would not have been so sure of aiming accurately and that a defensive reflex by Talaat might have risked a failed attempt. The next day, he was transferred to another cell, with the dressing still on his head, for interrogation in the presence of an interpreter, George Caloustian, who embraced him and offered him cakes and chocolate.

"What?" thundered magistrate Schulze, counselor to the Charlottenburg court, who was in charge of the hearing. "You dare to offer sweets to a criminal?" To which the interpreter replied: "How, a criminal? He is a great patriot whom we Armenians all admire!"

Tehlirian immediately acknowledged that he had come to Germany to avenge his family and his people on the person of the man chiefly responsible for their extermination. As soon as he had discovered Talaat's address, he had arranged for an accommodation which had windows overlooking the entrance

to the bogus Ali Saleh Bey, so as to watch his comings and goings on the other side of the street. He had moved in exactly ten days before meting out justice.

“You acknowledge then that your action was premeditated?”

“Yes, and I would do it again if necessary. I was ready to sacrifice my life for it.”

“Who helped you?”

“No one. I acted alone.”

“Did you have any personal dispute with the victim?”

“None. But it was on his orders that my mother, my brother, my sister, my family, my people were massacred.”

“You admit then that you premeditated his assassination?”

“Yes.”

The interpreter made desperate signs to the accused, each of whose positive replies could only worsen his case judicially. But Tehlirian continued: “I have fulfilled my mission; you can do what you like with me.”

“So you did not come to Berlin to study engineering?”

“That was indeed my aim, before the war.”

“When, then, did you take the decision to kill Talaat?”

“When I swore it on my mother’s grave.”

The following day a Protestant chaplain, who had been impressed by the report drawn up in the middle of the war by theologian Lepsius on the Turkish atrocities in Anatolia, brought the detained a Bible in Armenian as well as the *Morgen Post*, which was headlined: “Former Turkish Premier murdered for political reasons.” Except for the German press, the European press generally did not have a word of sympathy for the victim. In Paris, *Le Figaro* described the fall of the “tyrant” as follows:

On 14 October 1918, when Franchet d’Esperey was battering and then breaking in the front line in Macedonia, and thus sounding the death knell of the Turkish armies, the cabinet which Talaat presided over had to resign. On 14 November he fled first to Switzerland, then to Holland from where, threatened with extradition, he moved to Germany. It is there that this tyrant, short in stature but with vast ambitions, met his end by the avenging hand of one of the oppressed.

On March 17, 1921, the Lorraine daily *La Meuse* headlined boldly: “A pro-Kraut Turk murdered in Germany,” and congratulated the murderer for having “executed the sentence of a court-martial handed down in his absence at the end of the war;” when the Allies had demanded the trial of the Young Turk leaders. Finally, on March 19, a German daily in Darmstadt, the *Hessischer Volksfreund* (The Friend of the People of Hesse), roundly criticized the complicitous silence of its country on the martyrdom of the Armenian people:

The torrents of blood that flowed in Armenia during the war became known in Germany only after the conflict. Reason of state required at the time that it not be talked about. Reason of state! Big words, that every big criminal in history has had it on his lips every time he wanted to justify his sinister undertakings. . . . The "oriental perspective" in no way changes the fact that attached to Talaat's blood is a whole sea of blood. Talaat Pasha wanted to resolve the Armenian question through blood and iron. He believed in Bismarck's recipe, according to which the great problems of the hour are settled not by speeches or democratic decisions, but by fire and sword. . . . The Young Turks backed the wrong horse, not because they went along with Germany, but because they wanted to implement the German policy of force.

Only the Turkish press in Constantinople and Ankara went into mourning. Headlines bordered in black announced the circumstances of the pasha's death. The last government of the Sublime Porte refused to have his mortal remains repatriated, so the funeral was therefore in Berlin, on March 20, and was attended by a vast crowd. Under a bright sun, friends and sympathizers met around the portrait of Talaat, in front of 4 Hardenbergstrasse, in the presence of the Turkish naval minister, a representative of the embassy, Shukri Effendi, personalities in the old and new Ottoman regimes, and businessmen who escorted the coffin, draped with the Turkish flag and the former prime minister's fez, to the Mattheus cemetery where Talaat was buried according to Muslim rites. Dr. Behaeddin Shakir pronounced the funeral address: "Do not think that with this servant of Allah, this man of principles, we are also burying our hopes. No, in this terrible settling of scores, one thought consoles us: there is no doubt that we shall emerge the winners. Talaat Pasha was ready to pay his share of the debts and fate has so decided. . . ."

Meanwhile, Tehlirian, who had been transferred to the central prison and had recovered from his wounds, was being pressed by his interpreter, his lawyers, and his fellow prisoners to retract his admissions of premeditation. He ought to justify his action in terms of an unthinking emotional shock, they advised, consequent upon his own sufferings, so as to be able to plead not guilty and turn his trial into the trial of his victim, who had been the murderer of his immediate family. He should recall the terror of the deportation, his three wounds, his epileptic fits when he remembered his mother, his brother, and his sisters murdered in front of him. He should assert that he was not even aware of Talaat's presence in Berlin when he had returned to resume his studies in Germany. One day, he had happened to run into him [Talaat] in the street and had followed him out of simple curiosity, with no murderous intent. But a fortnight before the attack he had dreamed again of the pile of bodies, among which he had recognized those of his martyred relatives. And his mother's ghost had risen up and addressed him harshly: "What, you know that our murderer is here, under your very eyes, and you are doing nothing?"