

# WITNESS TO THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

## Photographs by the Perpetrators' German and Austro-Hungarian Allies

### INTRODUCTION

#### The German Military Mission to the Ottoman Empire

The German Military Mission to the Ottoman Empire was established in 1913. German officers served on the Ottoman General Staff in Constantinople, and some were in leading positions with the Ottoman armies on various fronts during World War I. These men became eye-witnesses to the Armenian Genocide.

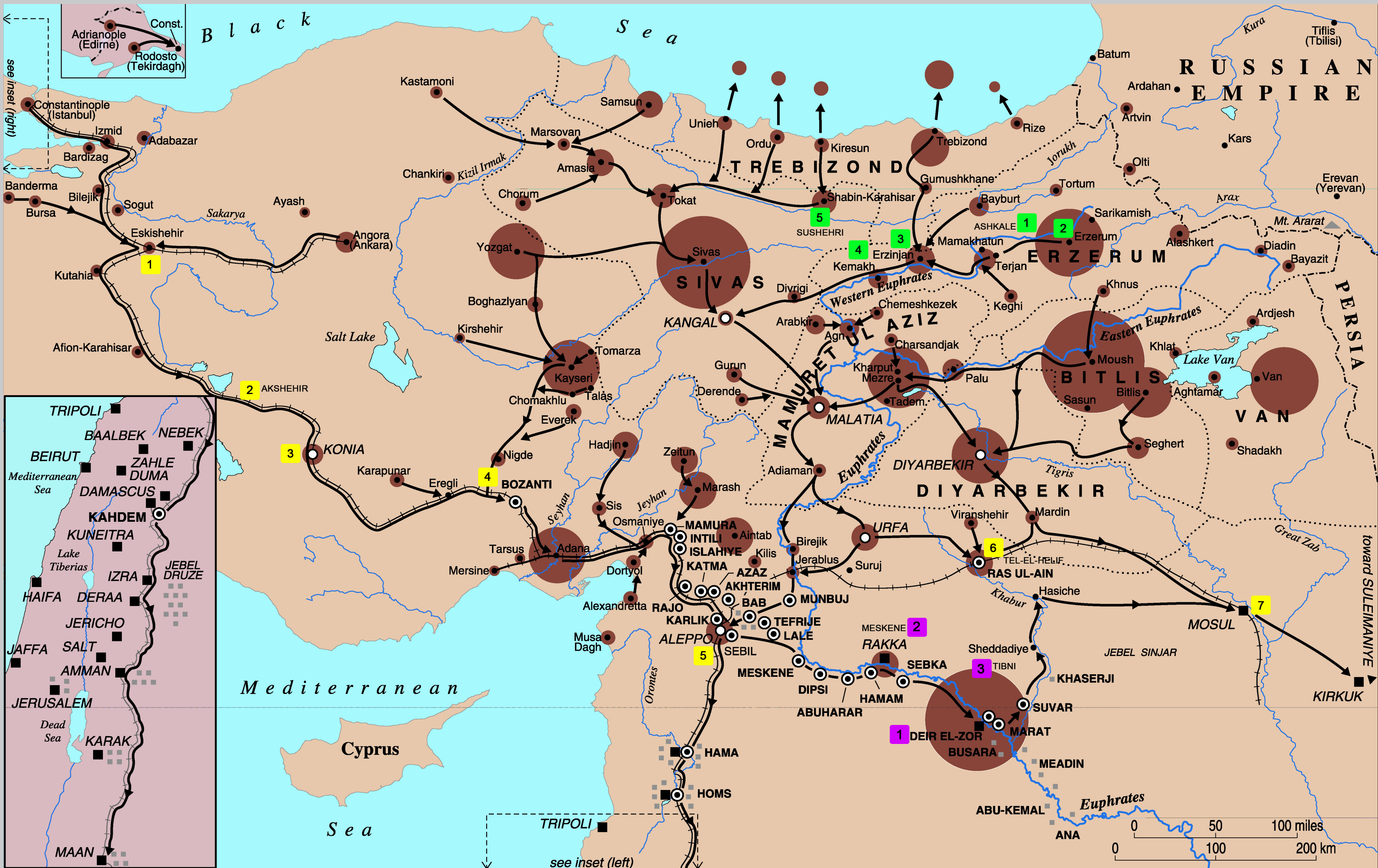
As a rule, German officers followed a policy of non-interference in what was claimed to be an internal affair of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, numerous officers tried to mitigate Ottoman policies and a few, in defiance of military regulations, even took part in clandestine activities to help the victims. Together, these officers, German consular staff, missionaries, and administrators of the Deutsche Bank-owned Anatolian and Baghdad Railways played a critical role in the creation of a humanitarian resistance network that included American missionaries and diplomats, surviving Armenians, and even some Ottoman officials.

Ottoman Martial Law prohibited taking photographs of the Armenian deportees. Thus, documenting the crime by photographing the reality of the deportations became an act of resistance. Many photographs were lost due to the interception of Ottoman intelligence services at the time and later destruction in Germany during World War II. Many of these photographs had been forgotten for decades and remained hidden in dusty drawers, files, and private collections.

The Armenian Genocide was a planned campaign by the Young Turk government to annihilate the Christian Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire. Embarked upon in 1915, during WWI, the deportation and decimation of the Armenians across Anatolia, modern-day Turkey, continued until 1923. The campaign resulted in the complete destruction of Armenian society across the region and in the greater part of its historic homeland.







This exhibit consists of photographs taken in the northeastern part of the Ottoman Empire (**Erzerum and surroundings**) in historic Armenia, the southeastern areas of the Ottoman Empire (**Der Zor and surroundings**) in Syria, and along the Ottoman Railway (running from **Eskishehir in Anatolia to Mosul in Iraq**).

- 1 Eskishehir
- 2 Akshehir
- 3 Konia
- 4 Bozanti
- 5 Aleppo
- 6 Tel-el-Helif
- 7 Mosul

- 1 Ashkale
- 2 Erzerum
- 3 Erzinjan
- 4 Kemakh Gorge
- 5 Sushehri

- 1 Der Zor
- 2 Meskene
- 3 Tibni

..... boundaries of the eastern provinces	● centers of massacre and deportation	→ principal routes of deportation	■ subsidiary points of deportation
⊙ concentration camps	○ principal points of transit	+++ rail lines	■ principal destination points of deportation

The map illustrates three prevailing aspects of the 1915 Armenian Genocide: the deportations, the massacres, and the concentration camps. The deportations affected the majority of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. From as far north as the Black Sea and as far west as European Turkey, Armenians were forcibly removed to the Syrian desert. From the outset the deportations were marked by atrocities. At select sites large-scale massacres were carried out. The survivors were dispersed across Syria, Iraq, and as far south as Palestine (see inset), where they were left in inhospitable places. Starvation, thirst, and epidemic diseases destroyed vast numbers of those confined to these places of concentration. The deportees in many concentration camps were eventually killed through further massacres. As the map demonstrates, the total effect of the policies of the Ottoman government was the mass destruction of the Armenian people.



TIMELINE OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

1878

Congress of Berlin: Peace treaty between Russia and the Ottoman Turkey stipulating reforms to ensure legal equality and security of Ottoman Armenians’ life and property.

1894 – 1896

Massacres in Constantinople and throughout the Armenian-inhabited regions of the Ottoman Empire. Up to 300,000 killed, many women and children abducted. Government condoned targeted assassinations, and theft of land and property continued.

Continued obstruction of the reforms by the autocratic regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II..

1908

Successful revolution by Young Turk Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and establishment of parliamentary democracy in Ottoman Turkey. Armenians support government.

1909

April 14th: Following a counterrevolution in Constantinople, reactionary circles organize massacres in Cilicia. About 30,000 Armenians slaughtered or burned alive. Following the reestablishment of control, the CUP starts appeasing conservative Muslim circles who continue to occupy Armenian property.

1912 – 1913

Balkan Wars: The Ottoman Empire loses all European provinces with the exception of Eastern Thrace. More than 300,000 destitute Muslims seek refuge in Asia Minor. Ottoman Government starts covert operations against Ottoman Greeks and Bulgarians. More than 200,000 are forced to leave.

In the course of the peace settlement for the Balkans, Armenian reforms are revived on the diplomatic agenda. Ottoman government finally agrees to the implementation of reforms under European supervision in the Armenian-inhabited provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

1914

August: The beginning of World War I allows the Ottoman government to abolish the Armenian reforms and at the same time asks Ottoman Armenians to engage in subversive activities in Russia in order to prepare an Ottoman attack on Russia. Armenians refuse the demands and Ottoman authorities begin harassment of Armenian communities. Ottoman Armenian political leadership remains, nevertheless, loyal and urges Armenians to fulfill their patriotic duties.

October 29: Unprovoked Ottoman attack on Russia. Ottoman forces invade Iran and massacre Armenians and Assyrian Christians along the border. Russian forces, including Armenian volunteers and conscripts, repulse the attack by Kurdish tribes who had participated in the atrocities.

1915

January: Ottoman attack on Russia in the Caucasus ends with total defeat. Ottoman authorities intensify persecution of Ottoman Armenian political parties and Armenian villages near the front. Local massacres, targeted assassinations, and increased hate propaganda.

March: Ottoman army expels Armenian villagers from the Zeitun and Dortyol regions on the charge of espionage and harboring Armenian deserters.

March 19: Allied defeat at the Dardanelles. Ottoman government confident of holding the western front. Following further setbacks on the eastern front, military and CUP circles decide to annihilate the Armenian population of Van province before Russian forces can occupy the area.

April 20: Local Armenian leaders at Van try to mitigate tensions but are either assassinated or arrested by authorities. Remaining leaders decide to end cooperation and to resort to resistance in a last ditch effort. Widespread massacres of Armenian villagers throughout Van and Bitlis provinces but Armenian quarters at Van and some villagers escape total destruction.

April 24: Ottoman authorities arrest 235 Armenian politicians, intellectuals, clerics and businessmen in Constantinople and order the empire-wide arrest of hundreds of Armenian leaders. Armenian political parties are banned and party-membership is criminalized. Beginning of deportations to Der Zor in the Syrian desert. All Armenians living in areas to the rear of the Ottoman eastern front are to be deported without distinctions.

May: Law of Deportation gives Army commanders the right to deport all Armenians without any legal recourse or due process. All Armenian property other than that carried by the deportees is confiscated and used for the war effort or the settlement of Muslim refugees.

June: All Armenians living in the provinces subject to the earlier reforms are to be deported. Large scale massacres along the Euphrates at Mama Khatun, Kemakh, and in the Malatia region, at Lake Khazar, the Moush Plain, around Bitlis, Siirt (Seghert), and throughout Diyarbekir province.

July: Extension of deportations to the rest of the Ottoman Empire. Communities in Constantinople, Aleppo, Smyrna, and some smaller places are partly exempted. Constant track keeping of deportee convoys, transit camps, and the emerging concentration camps in the Syrian desert gives the government precise oversight over the extermination process.

September: Almost all Armenian communities have ceased to exist.

October 1915 – January 1916:

Deportation of convoys into the desert. Extremely high losses in the eastern provinces, comparatively moderate death toll for the western and Cilician communities. Extension of religious conversion program to Turkify Armenian women and children. Those who refuse to give up their identity are killed.

1916

Spring: Surviving Armenian deportees are increasingly concentrated around Der Zor.

July: Central government dispatches additional forces to Der Zor and orders the removal of all Armenians from the Euphrates river further into the desert.

August – September: Der Zor massacres. At least 100,000 Armenians massacred by Ottoman forces.

October: Continued conversion of remaining women and children.

1917

The Death Toll of the Armenian Genocide

The exact number of Armenian victims is unknown. Official Ottoman data filed in 1914 suggests an Armenian population of 1,281,173, or, adjusted for undercounting, at least 1,750,000. Ottoman government data shows that in the provinces of Erzerum and Bitlis, 143,178 Armenians had been killed in clashes or fled. The fact that the 67,792 Armenians of the province of Van were not deported reflects massacres, and also Armenian resistance and flight. Of these 210,970 Armenians (from Erzerum, Bitlis and Van provinces), about 65,081 survived by escaping to the Russian lines.

By late 1916, 284,157 Armenians remained, thereby bringing the total number of Armenians accounted for by Ottoman sources and alive to 349,238. The statistics probably did not include those who were converted. Possibly more than 150,000 Armenians had been forcibly assimilated. These formed, however, only a fraction of Armenians who had disappeared from Ottoman records by early 1917.

These calculations suggest that over 1.2 million Armenians had lost their lives due to government policies. These low estimates are based on government data and do not cover Armenian losses in 1917 and 1918. It has to be emphasized that most survivors suffered from physical injuries, diseases, and psychological trauma. Many had been maimed. These medical conditions, taken together with the survivors’ age, gender composition, and the annihilation of the secular and religious elites, mean that the remaining Armenians were a disintegrating fragment of their former community rather than resembling just a numerically shrunken population. The conclusion of Word War I in 1918 and the fall of the Young Turk government brought only a short respite as a subsequent series of atrocities claimed more victims. By 1923, when the Republic of Turkey was founded, an estimated 1.5 million had perished, a full three quarters of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire. A precise death count is still pending on the ongoing declassification of all Turkish archives.





1 A branch of Euphrates at Der Zor



1 Armenian camp on lower Euphrates near Der Zor, July 1916



Euphrates river banks at Der Zor. Notes from the photographer Hellmuth von Mücke: The number of slaughtered Armenians, including women and children, can be estimated at 1.2 to 1.4 million. The massacres are conducted on a large scale and completely in public... Following massacres of Armenians one encounters whole bundles of massacred and drowned people. For example, above Psehrra [Busayrah, Syria] I drove with the motorboat for two hours along clods of Armenian corpses. These were a part of the 36,000 Armenians massacred by Circassians upon the orders of the governor of Der Zor during the first week of September [1916]. Along the roads, on which Armenian deportations had taken place, the corpses used to lie around in heaps... Most of the local Turkish commanders keep some abducted Armenian girls.

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2 Tent with Armenian orphans, Meskene, mentioned in Wegner's diary.



3 Twelve-year-old Armenian boy starved to death, Tibni, October 10, 1916 – Wegner's diary entry.





**1** Armenian priests conducting funeral masses in lower Euphrates



**7** German officers traveling in Kelek from Mosul to Baghdad

Armin T. Wegner - On October 9, 1916 at Der Zor, Wegner recorded in his diary that no Armenians had been left in the city.

On October 10, 1916, Wegner described a mass grave near Tibni on the Euphrates. The dead had been buried in a nearby gorge and in caves. Wegner noted in his diary that he saw “many bleached human bones, namely skulls, skulls of children, skulls of women with black hair [and] curls...Smell of decaying bodies.”



**7** Misery! [Original caption] Hungry and starved to death children on a street in Mosul



**6** Starved to death [Original caption] An Armenian woman starved to death and partly fed upon by jackals, Tel-el-Helif, 1917



**5** Aleppo: The living, sick and dying all covered with flies





5 Aleppo: The yard serves as living/sleeping quarters and toilet at the same time. The ground is completely soiled with human feces (Daily death rate at 20-30).



5 Aleppo: The yard of the house across from the German School in which the government placed together healthy Armenian deportees and those suffering from contagious diseases (September – October 1915) in what local authorities called “hospital.”



5 Aleppo: Armenian deportee women in a khan [rest house] surviving on their own work



4 Railroad terminal in Bozanti, transport of military supplies



Armenian deportees transported in cattle cars on the Anatolian Railroad. On Oct. 30, 1915, Anatolian Railroad director Franz J. Günther reported to Bank Director Arthur von Gwinner remarking sarcastically: Enclosed I send you a little photo showing the Anatolian Railroad as an upholder of culture in Turkey. These are our so-called sheep-carts in which, for example, 880 people are transported in 10 carts.





1 German soldiers’ quarters in Eskişehir



Victor Pietschmann taking photo and members of the ski mission, May 1915. Pietschmann took many of the photos in this exhibit.

2 Armenians waiting at Akshehir Railway Station to be deported to Syria



3 City of Konia

De-licing at a deportee camp. Lice transmitted typhus, one of the major killers of adult deportees







1 Peasants supplying the Ottoman Third Army with oxcarts near Ashkale



2 Erzerum, May 1915



4 Ak Koi deportees on their way to Kemakh Gorge



2 Supply line of the Ottoman Third Army, near Erzerum, May 1915.



2 Erzerum: Armenian deportee camp, May 20, 1915





2 Erzerum: Distribution of bread by the employees of the German Consulate, May 20, 1915



2 Erzerum: Distribution of bread by the employees of the German Consulate, May 20, 1915



2 Armenian deportees around Erzerum, May 18-19, 1915



2 German Vice-Consul at Erzerum, Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, took these photos



2 Armenian deportees around Erzerum, May 18-19, 1915





Erzinjan: Destroyed Armenian Cathedral of Erzinjan, July 1915.  
**3** Recollections of the photographer: "...the gate was wide open. On the ground torn apart prayer books."



**3** Erzinjan: Destroyed Armenian Cathedral of Erzinjan, July 1915



**5** Sushehri deportation caravan of Armenians. Impressions of the photographer Viktor Pietschmann on the Sushehri deportation caravan: "Here as well, one could see only very, very few men. Aside from the coachmen and the gendarmes, who escorted the caravan on both sides with guns ready, there were almost only women. Occasionally women even drove the carts, and if one could see men, they were old and frail very old men. And children, again and again children, half-grown ones and very small, who walked in the crowd with dark and sorrowful faces or were in tears and crying."



**5** Sushehri deportation caravan of Armenians