

THE NETWORK OF HELP FROM THE RUSSIAN ARMY TO THE USA, AND BACK PHOTOGRAPHY AND DENUNCIATION OF GENOCIDE ON THE WWI CAUCASUS FRONTLINE

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During the genocide, the American diplomacy actively organized help for the Armenian refugees from the US and the Ottoman Empire. Because of the difficulties of communication with the Ottoman Empire, where censorship often caused problems in the documents mailing, the US State Dept. often communicated directly with the American missionaries in the Caucasus area. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, James Barton¹, and others, were the major references for the help, and the archival documents show the importance of their action as mediators between the US political sphere and the missionary one in the Ottoman Empire and in the Caucasus.

The Van evacuation was widely represented in pictures, and also vehiculated in the US through the publication of illustrated articles in the press. In the same years, 1916-1918, in the Caucasus area some illustrated albums were published on the atrocities and deportations, giving space to the idea that a whole independent production of images was carried on there.

In 1916, during the retreat of the czarist army from the Eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire, the American missionaries that followed the Armenian refugees referred to the ACASR, and it is quite certain that they got to let some pictures arrive in the US at the State Dept., through the missionaries that went back home. Were these images taken from the Russian Army? Or from the missionaries themselves? Were they from the Caucasus Armenian humanitarian organizations? Was there any organization behind the picture production - like denunciation campaigns etc. - or were they the result of different individual actions?

Let's see how they contribute in reconstructing the network of help from the Russian Army to the US diplomacy, and back.

American illustrated publications about the Armenian genocide

During the diplomatic service in Constantinople, Henry Morgenthau had a central role in coordinating help and denunciation of the genocide against the Armenians; his position put him at the core of the diplomatic, political and humanitarian milieu. He was one of the founder of a new humanitarian organization and, once back in the United States (1916), active witness of the Armenian genocide, with articles and publications. At the end of 1917, he asked the President of United States, Woodrow Wilson and the Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, the permission of publication for his memories about the

¹ President of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief – ACASR – and reference of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions – ABCFM.

diplomatic experience in the Ottoman Empire.² It was *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*,³ first published into the magazine *World's Work* (from May 1918 to January 1919), and in some more thirty local newspapers in the United States; the British edition was titled *Secrets of the Bosphorus*.⁴ A selection of pictures was present in the magazine publication, but the most poignant were published in the American edition (n. 1-4), as we will see.

The book was born as an act of accusation against the Germany will of power, as Morgenthau says in the preface; the war situation, with the United States already participating, pushes to think about a propaganda operation against the German enemy, based on the diaries and the direct experiences of the Ambassador. The XXIII-XXVII chapters of the book are about the Morgenthau actions to denounce the violence and to try to save the most people possible. Many requests were sent to Talaat Pasha, the Minister of Interior of the Ottoman Empire. The *World's Work* pictures are now preserved at the Nubar Library in Paris, cut out from the magazine⁵ (n. 5-7): they perhaps illustrated this part of the text on the magazine, and they were most probably published in the second half of 1918. The captions explicitly talk about the violence against the Armenians: one of the more interesting is the n. 7, whose caption talks about refugees in Van. The picture could be about the Russian occupation of the town, in 1915 spring and summer, before the population followed the czarist troops retreating, when also the American missionaries abandoned Van.⁶ The same picture is also present in the first edition of Morgenthau's book, with the same caption. It is one of the few pictures that were used in that edition, while the second one in 1975 was widely illustrated.

Two pictures in the first edition explicitly show the violence, and this is a quite exceptional case in the history of the Armenian genocide denunciation of the time. (n. 1-2). This is actually a unique example of publication of this kind of subject in the United States and in the Western world; "atrocities" were not usually showed anywhere, even if they were told and well known by a large public, through the media of the time. The pictures were probably collected by Morgenthau, but it is difficult to be sure of that, because of the lack of documents. Anyway, the n. 1 image is present in every article by the Ambassador and in every publication that presumably was linked and supervised by him: the article for the American Red Cross,⁷ where also other recurring images are present (n. 8-11), March

² For a documented history of the first edition of the ambassador's memories see Morgenthau Henry, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, edited and with an introduction by Ara Sarafian, Taderon Press Reading, UK, 2000 (by arrangement with the Gomidas Institute, Ann Arbor, Michigan).

³ Morgenthau Henry, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1918, 1919.

⁴ Morgenthau Henry, *Secrets of the Bosphorus, Constantinople, 1916-1919*, London: Hutchinson & Co., London 1918.

⁵ Bibliothèque Nubar, Paris.

⁶ See 'Les Américains en Arménie', "Journal del Genève", 26th October 1915.

⁷ 'The Greatest Horror in History' "American Red Cross Bulletin", March 1918, Museum and Archives of the Red Cross, Washington DC.

1918; and some other titles by the ACASR, in 1916⁸ (n. 12). This and other documents (like n. 2) are now present at the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA)⁹: a collection of glass positives archived as “Mission Slides”. On some of them it is also possible to read “Board of Foreign Missions”: even if we do not have a precise date and time of production, they for sure come from the American missionary and humanitarian side; as we will soon see, they are copies of some photographic materials produced in the refugee camps of the Caucasian area, managed also by American missionaries and humanitarian operators of the ACASR. Perhaps they were the photographers, perhaps just the intermediary, because there were other humanitarian subjects in the camps: infact, what is really interesting is that the Caucasian origin of the material is confirmed by the quite contemporary publication of picture n. 2 in the “Armjanski vestnik”, a Russian Armenian magazine in February 1917.¹⁰

The association had copies of the pictures published in the Morgenthau book and elsewhere, as witnessed by the collection preserved by the United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington,¹¹ with photographs taken and received between 1918 and 1919, when the association could not yet directly act on the field, with no direct contact and management, because of the ongoing war: the photographic materials, also about the territories of Russian Armenia – Etchmiadzin, Yerevan – had to be of different origin. They were perhaps taken by different subjects, above all the Russian Armenian humanitarian associations, as we will see: an example of this is the picture n. 40, where the caption talks about the Armenian Moscow Committee. The connection with the US government were for sure the American missions, that perhaps also produced other pictures, as probably did the Russian Army. The missions were present in this area from decades and were responsible for a large network of schools, hospitals and orphanages; they also worked strictly in contact with the American embassy. The missions followed the Armenian population that run away from the Eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire, with the czarist army after the evacuation of Van, toward the Russian Caucasus area.

The dates on the document sheets are just references: the n. 13, for example, is dated 1918, but is present in the ACASR publications already in December 1916, see n. 14.

⁸ “The Cry of Millions – Exiled, Destitute, Dying”, December 1916, and Bulletin n. 5, “Latest News Concerning the Armenian and Syrian Sufferers”, May 24, 1916 in Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Papers of Henry Morgenthau 1795-1941 (bulk 1870-1941).

⁹ Watertown, MA.

¹⁰ See the Yerevan Genocide museum website: http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/armjanski_vstnik.php

¹¹ 76 pictures, about refugees but also about the US activity, on a sheet. The pictures were taken in Aintab (Cilicia), Urumia (Persia), Yerevan, Etchmiadzin, Erzurum, Erzincan, Van. They – US NARA, Still Picture Unit, RG 165 – WW – 559C.

How the denunciation pictures arrived in the United States from the Caucasus

In *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-16* uncensored edition by Ara Sarafian (2005), the editor talk about the archival documents to certify the US contribution to the genocide denunciation: they show that the American channel of Viscount Bryce was James L. Barton¹², ACASR president and fundamental figure of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the network of American missions, in the Ottoman Empire from a century, actively working for ACASR during the first world war. Barton had complete access at the State Department documents, as Sarafian says: this mean his mediator role between the politicians and missionaries in the Ottoman Empire was extremely important, perhaps more than Morgenthau's one. The case of the American diplomatic reports published during the war, as for the one of the Harput Consul Leslie Davis, is now clearer and even more interesting in this light: it's sure that an action of concrete resistance against the genocide was present in the United States by the government, since the first days of the denunciation, with a strong support to the American diplomats in the Ottoman Empire.¹³ In this kind of context, Barton was the reference to receive the pictures taken and collected by the missionaries run away in the Caucasus area. These last were for a long time cut out from the communication tools of the American delegates in the Ottoman Empire: they had to communicate directly with the US government, through the people that went back home.¹⁴ Also Morgenthau had many problems in this sense, because of the war, that caused many difficulties and irregularities in the mail service.¹⁵

Some more two pictures, also present in copies at ALMA, are present in the NARA collection of the ACASR: the one that corresponds to the already seen n. 2, has this caption: "Relic of Armenian massacres at Erzingan"¹⁶ (received 1919); another one, n. 15, (better reproduced in n. 16¹⁷), shows two covered wagons, full of people; the pic-

¹² Sarafian Ara, "The Archive Trail. Authentication of *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-16*", in Richard Hovanissian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial. The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1998, pp. 51-65; see also Sarafian Ara (ed.), *United States Official Documents on the Armenian Genocide, Volume I: The Lower Euphrates*, Armenian Review, Watertown, MA 1993, pp. ix-xxx.

¹³ See *America and the Armenian Genocide*, Jay Winter (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003.

¹⁴ See Barton James L., *Story of Near East Relief (1915-1930). An Interpretation*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930, pp. 79-88.

¹⁵ See Barton James L., *Story of Near East Relief (1915-1930). An Interpretation*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930, pp. 58-69, on the American presence in Turkey before and after the US entry in the war. See also Cfr. Leslie Davis about the problems with the mail service, Davis Leslie A., *The Slaughterhouse Province, An American Diplomat's Report on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917*, edited and with an introduction by Susan K. Blair, New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas Publisher, 1989, pp. 20-21.

¹⁶ This is the same caption present in the Morgenthau biography to describe this picture.

¹⁷ At the Bibliothèque Nubar, Paris.

ture is not very clear and the scene is taken from the top, so it is difficult to identify the people. The caption says: “Refugees run away from Van. Women and children are in the wagons” (received 1919). The same picture is in the website of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in Yerevan, taken again from “Armjanski vestnik”, 1916, with a caption that talks about orphans transportation from Igdir to Sanahin.¹⁸ We will see this subject again in a Georgian publication immediately after the genocide. There is also another interesting picture: perhaps of a mother, beside a corpse, dated 1918 (n. 17); this photograph, already seen in the American Red Cross publication of 1918 (n. 8), could have been taken at Igdir or Etchmiadzin, where also some other similar pictures were taken to document the epidemic situation in the refugees camps (see for example n. 18).

The Russian Armenian Charities

These last pictures are collected in one album with texts and captions in Armenian and Russian, published in Tiflis from the Armenian National Council.¹⁹ The album collects 30 photographs, the half of which about atrocities (n. 19-28): note that n. 25-27 captions talk about the corpses of some Armenian worker soldiers of the Ottoman Army in Bitlis. Often in these pictures it is possible to see the presence of Russian soldiers: this means that taking picture was legitimate and that perhaps the same soldiers had the possibility to do it; another hypothesis could be that the Russian Army had a specific policy about the denunciation of the ongoing violence. The album also shows pictures about the refugees camps (n. 29-35) and the humanitarian help activity of the *Armenian Benevolent Society of the Caucasus*. This last was one of the most important Armenian charities in that area, that survived the restrictions by the Czarist régime at end of the XIX century, when many of them were suspected of being separatist organizations.

About the geographical indications, the album talks about Mush and Bitlis when showing the atrocities; Igdir, Etchmiadzin, Van and the Anatolian Eastern Regions when showing refugees.²⁰ Two of these last pictures are about the Van evacuation, and one, n. 30, is particularly interesting, as it seems to be part of a series if we compared it with n. 16. This could confirm the will of document and prepare some denunciation material about the violence and consequent evacuation. The caption indicates Van as the pictured place and they remind one of the glass positive of the Board of Foreign Missions: with this reference it is possible to identify the origin area of those positive with the Eastern regions of Anatolia and the Caucasus.

The album publication gives us some indications about time and place, and help us in reconstructing the documentation history. These pictures also show some other indications, like the Russian sign of the photographer in the low right corner.

¹⁸ See http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/armjanski_vstnik.php

¹⁹ *Album des déportés*, édition du Conseil Général Arménien. I thank professor Raymond Kévorkian for the information about the album, and Vahé Tachjian for the translation of the captions.

²⁰ In many captions the text indicates the date of July 14th, 1915, even if it is the same for every picture and this let us think that it is just indicative of the period in which the pictures were taken. talks about.

Many pictures of the refugees camps in this album also remind to the ACASR pictures (n. 36-39), where some captions explicitly talk about the “Moscow Committee” (n. 40), as a confirmation of the origin of many pictures in the collection. Another group of pictures, preserved at the Nubar Bibliothèque in Paris (n. 41-48²¹), is from this area and this is another source that confirms the wide photographic documentation during the military operations by the Russian Army and the humanitarian associations between the summer of 1915 and the one of the following year. An interesting case is the one of picture n. 42, that is also part of an anglophone illustrated publication (n. 43), not identified, but perhaps a USA one if we think about the publishing action of the diplomatic circle in that country. Furthermore, some of these images (n. 44-48) show the negative number like some others (n. 49-51), taken by the Russian Army in the Batoum area.²²

Some more pictures from this area were taken by Victor Pitchman, an Austrian that served in the Ottoman Army, then in the German one, in the Erzerum region: his collection is now preserved at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute of Yerevan,²³ as the one of Parakhodov, a Russian military photographer. Also Joseph Pomiankowski, an Austrian Hungarian vice marshal, published a memoir illustrated with pictures.²⁴

Conclusions

We have seen so far many different subjects, actions and documents of denunciation, originated from the Caucasus area to different destinations and media. The purpose was to illustrate a sort of “map” of the pictures production and circulation, to tell the network of help beyond geography and localism.

The Caucasus area saw the presence of different nationalities representatives, at public and private level, from the political and humanitarian milieu: we know that, elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, many German and American representatives, soldiers and civilians, took pictures of the victims of genocide, as they were in direct contact with those territories.²⁵ In the Caucasus, the subjects were mostly Americans, Armenians and Russians; the American diplomatic action was for sure supported by the circulation of the pictures, published or not.

As we have seen, from the research point of view the publication helped to match the pictures with archival sources and to find a confirmation of the Caucasian origin and of the intermediary role of the American missions: the same pictures published by Mor-

²¹ The last five pictures of this group are apart from the others and are dated August 3rd, 1916.

²² Nubar Library, Paris.

²³ http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/victor_pitchman.php.

²⁴ Pomiankowski Joseph, *Der Zusammenbruch des Ottomanischen Reiches: Erinnerungen an die Türkei aus der Zeit des Weltkrieges*, Zürich: Amalthea-Verlag, 1928, and Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1969 (reprint of the 1928 edition).

²⁵ See Guerzoni Benedetta, *Cancellare un popolo. Immagini e documenti del genocidio armeno*, Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis, 2013.

genthau were then found in different US Archives with notes about their geographic and institutional origin. Sometimes we also saw the same pictures in different countries like USA and Russian Armenia, as n. 2 and 16, or also n. 8 and 15 as recurrent subjects in the Us Archives and Russian Armenian publications.

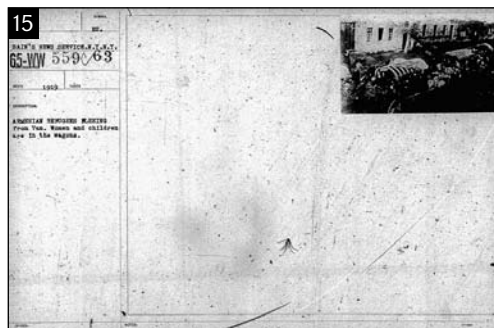
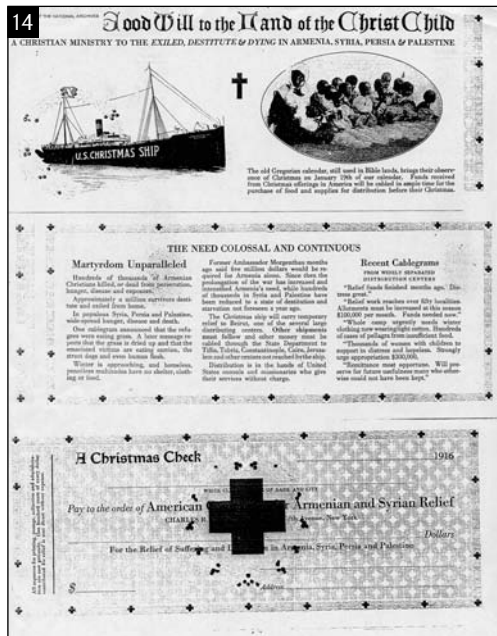
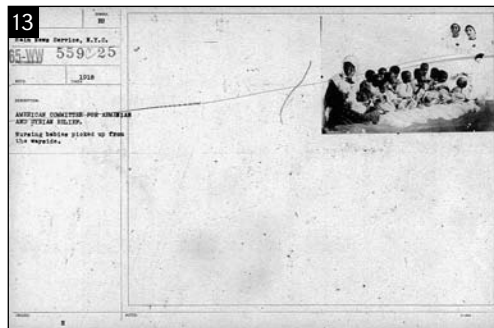
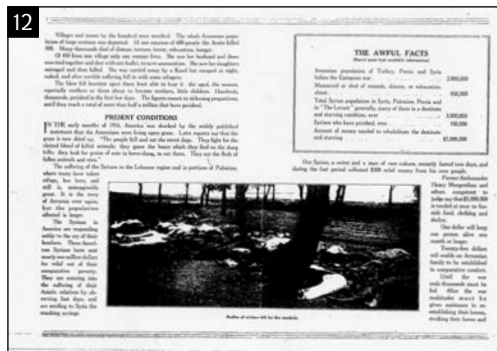
All this lead us to some reflections: first, some more material had to be produced by the Russian Army, or from the other Armenian, Russian and American subjects that worked in the humanitarian circle, in the Caucasus area. Second, they lead to the conclusion that the production was probably not accidental but - even if not traditionally planned, because of the emergency war situation – perhaps somehow coordinated by the different production subjects to create a network of circulation outside the frontline.

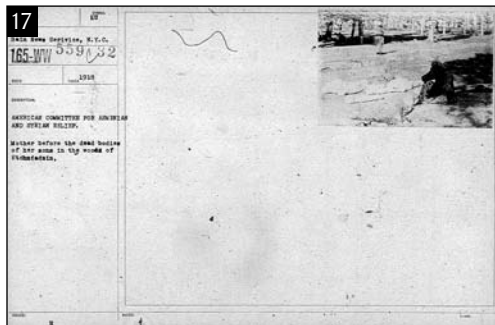
From the pictures examined we can also conclude that it is in this moment that the post war humanitarian action representation began, already *during* the war: refugees, women, orphans, victims, Western representatives bringing aid, all these are the symbols and categories that will be protagonist of the post war era, when the humanitarian milieu will be fundamental to denounce the genocide.

Finally, some of the pictures produced in the Caucasus area were so published and seen in the United States by a large public, even if after some years from the genocide. The most important characteristic of these pictures is that they are some of the few that had a public circulation, outside the Western diplomatic circles during the First World War. Even if many newspapers in the Western world talked regularly about the Armenian genocide, quite no image circulated. This is one of the paradoxes of the First World War, a war when the modern media began to be used, but the old communication attitude that preferred texts and illustrations instead of photographs still resisted.

ILLUSTRATIONS







24



№ 16. Մահածո՞ւյնները Քուրդ թուրքերին հիմար խառնախառնույն էր թափվելը վիճակը՝
 Դարձի արմ. աշխատողի մարմինը ցածր ճանապարհի վրա:

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№ 17. Մահածո՞ւյնները Քուրդ թուրքերին հիմար խառնախառնույն էր թափվելը վիճակը՝
 Դարձի արմ. աշխատողի մարմինը ցածր ճանապարհի վրա:

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№ 18. Քուրդ թուրքերին հիմար խառնախառնույն էր թափվելը վիճակը՝
 Օգնականները թուրք աշխատողի մարմինը ցածր ճանապարհի վրա:

27



№ 19. Քուրդ թուրքերին հիմար խառնախառնույն էր թափվելը վիճակը՝
 Օգնականները թուրք աշխատողի մարմինը ցածր ճանապարհի վրա:

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№ 20. Քուրդ թուրքերին հիմար խառնախառնույն էր թափվելը վիճակը՝
 Դարձի արմ. աշխատողի մարմինը ցածր ճանապարհի վրա:

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№ 21. Գաղթականների համայնքը Սարգսյան անտառում 1915 թ. ընթացքում հալածվելու ժամանակ:
 Օգնականները թուրք աշխատողի մարմինը ցածր ճանապարհի վրա:

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№ 22. Գաղթականների համայնքը Սարգսյան անտառում 1915 թ. ընթացքում հալածվելու ժամանակ:
 Օգնականները թուրք աշխատողի մարմինը ցածր ճանապարհի վրա:

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№ 23. Գաղթականների համայնքը Սարգսյան անտառում 1915 թ. ընթացքում հալածվելու ժամանակ:
 Օգնականները թուրք աշխատողի մարմինը ցածր ճանապարհի վրա:

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№ 29 Յարկը Բարձր սնուցում կայ և՛ վաղը Կովի նահանգի ժողովուրդը Բարձր ժող. -
Կարգին անձն ծախսում են քաղ. անձն Իգարի, ու քաղ. Բանսկոյ օղակում:

33



№ 30 Յարկը Բարձր սնուցում կայ և՛ վաղը Կովի նահանգի ժողովուրդը
Սերտի և՛ Իգարի անձնական քաղ. ու քաղ. Բանսկոյ օղակում:

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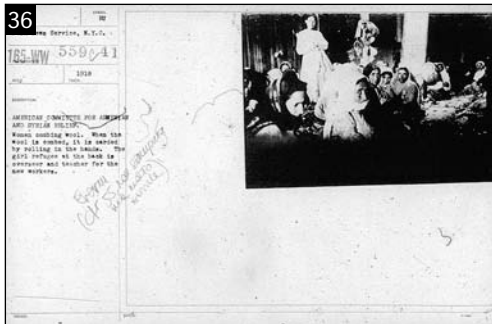
№ 31 Յարկը Բարձր սնուցում կայ և՛ վաղը Կովի նահանգի ժողովուրդը Բարձր ժող. -
Սերտի և՛ Իգարի անձնական քաղ. ու քաղ. Բանսկոյ օղակում:

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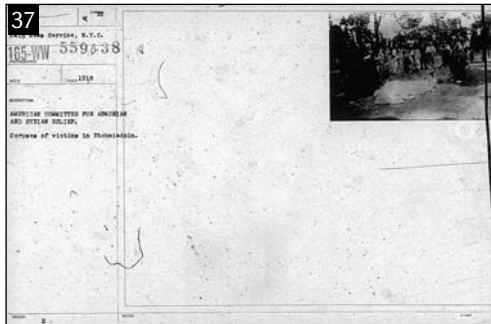


№ 32 Յարկը Բարձր սնուցում կայ և՛ վաղը Կովի նահանգի ժողովուրդը
Սերտի և՛ Իգարի անձնական քաղ. ու քաղ. Բանսկոյ օղակում:

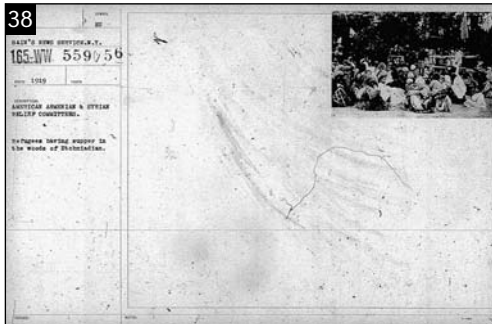
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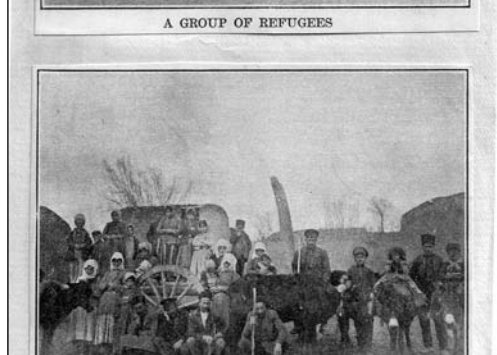
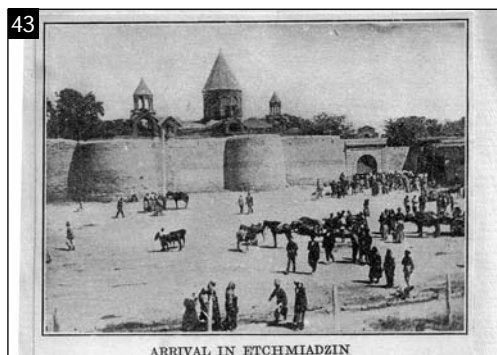


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39







ՌՈՒՍԱԿԱՆ ԲԱՆԱԿԻՑ ԴԵՊԻ ԱՄՆ ԵՎ ՀԱԿԱՌԱԿԸ ԳՈՐԾՈՂ ՕԳՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ
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Բենեդեթա Գվերզոնի

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Վանի հայերի տարահանումը լայնորեն ներկայացվել է ամերիկյան մամուլում նկարների, ինչպես նաև պատկերագրող հրապարակումների միջոցով: Նույն տարիներին՝ 1916-1918 թթ., Կովկասում հրատարակվել են լուսանկարչական ալբոմներ՝ Օսմանյան կայսրության հայ բնակչության նկատմամբ կիրառվող վայրագությունների պատկերներով: 1916 թ. Օսմանյան կայսրության արևելյան շրջաններից ցարական բանակի նահանգի ընթացքում ամերիկյան միսիոներները, ովքեր հետևում էին հայ գաղթականներին, կապեր են հաստատում Հայկական և սիրիական օգնության ամերիկյան կոմիտեի հետ: Սա հիմք է տալիս եզրակացնելու, որ ԱՄՆ հասած և Պետքարտուղարությունում հայտնված որոշ նկարներ ուղարկվել են հայրենիք վերադարձած ամերիկյան միսիոներների միջոցով:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Հայոց ցեղասպանություն, լուսանկարներ, միսիոներներ, Հայկական և սիրիական օգնության ամերիկյան կոմիտե:

THE NETWORK OF HELP FROM THE RUSSIAN ARMY TO THE USA, AND BACK.
PHOTOGRAPHY AND DENUNCIATION OF GENOCIDE ON THE WWI
CAUCASUS FRONTLINE

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ABSTRACT

The Van evacuation was widely represented in pictures, and also vehiculated in the US through the publication of illustrated articles in the press. In the same years, 1916-1918, in the Caucasus area some illustrated albums were published on the atrocities and deportations, giving space to the idea that a whole independent production of images was carried on. In 1916, during the retreat of the czarist army from the eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire, the American missionaries that followed the Armenian refugees referred to the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, and it is quite certain that they got to let some pictures arrive in the US at the Department of State, through the missionaries that went back home.

Keywords: Armenian genocide, photos, missionaries, American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief.

СИСТЕМА ПОМОЩИ ОТ РУССКОЙ АРМИИ В США И ОБРАТНО: ФОТОСЪЕМКА И ОСУЖДЕНИЕ ГЕНОЦИДА АРМЯН НА КАВКАЗСКОМ ФРОНТЕ ПЕРВОЙ МИРОВОЙ ВОЙНЫ

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Эвакуация армян Вана была широко представлена в фотографиях, в иллюстрированных публикациях в прессе США. В те же 1916-1918 гг. на Кавказе были опубликованы фотоальбомы с изображениями сцен зверств в отношении армянского населения Османской империи.

В 1916 г. во время отступления царской армии из восточных районов Османской империи, американские миссионеры, которые последовали за армянскими беженцами, установили контакты с Американским комитетом помощи армянам и сирийцам. Это дает основания утверждать, что некоторые фотографии, оказавшиеся в США и попавшие в распоряжение Государственного департамента, были пересланы через американских миссионеров, возвращавшихся домой.

Ключевые слова: Геноцид армян, фотография, миссионеры, Американский комитет помощи армянам и сирийцам.