

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a tall, dark, triangular monument, possibly the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan, Armenia. The monument is silhouetted against a bright sunset sky with orange and yellow hues. The sun is visible as a bright orb near the horizon, partially obscured by the monument's base. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

RESISTANCE and REVENGE

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

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With a preface by Gérard Chaliand

killed, as if the terrorist incarnated the bullet that was to hit him.¹

Thus, Soghomon Tehlirian was not the hallucinating Berlin student he appeared to be at his trial. While his fits were not feigned, he was in reality a member of a commando unit made up of five militants recruited by a special agency of the Dashnak party and charged with executing former Grand Vizier Talaat Pasha, as part of an operation christened Nemesis, after the Greek goddess of vengeance. And it was not Tehlirian's first such assignment. In Constantinople, on the last Sunday in March 1920, he had killed a traitor, the Armenian Harutiun Meguerdichian, with a bullet in the heart, fired from the street through a window. This man had once helped Talaat draw up a list of 300 Armenian intellectuals and notables in Constantinople for priority liquidation, on April 24, 1915, to forestall any resistance to the imminent and inevitable deportation of Armenian peasants and artisans from Anatolia.

Similarly, Missak Torlakian, who had joined the irregular units as soon as war broke out in 1914, and who had set a failed ambush to assassinate General Enver Pasha, the minister of war, during the initial retreat of the Ottoman army on the eastern front, had supplied funds and weapons to Aram Yerganian, one of the first volunteers for Operation Nemesis. In June 1920, in Tiflis (Georgia), Yerganian executed the president of the council of Azerbaijan, Fathali Khan Khoiski, who had led the massacres in Baku—where, in fact, Torlakian had no family (his had been decimated in Trebizond, the great Turkish port on the Black Sea).

On December 6, 1921, it was the turn of the former head of the Young Turk government, Saïd Halim, to die in Rome, shot down by another avenger belonging to the organization, Arshavir Shiragian. This same Shiragian was to be found teaming up with Yerganian in Berlin the following April 17 to kill in one blow another figure chiefly responsible for the genocide, Dr. Behaeddin Shakir, and the former governor of Trebizond, Jemal Azmi. The hunt for the former Navy minister, Jemal Pasha, a member of the Young Turk triumvirate responsible for the war and the genocide, who had become Soviet adviser on Caucasian affairs, led a commando unit of intrepid militants, Stepan Dzaghigian, Bedros Der Boghossian, and Ardashes Kervorkian, to kill Jemal on July 25, 1922, in front of the Cheka (Bolshevik political police) headquarters building in Tiflis.

It was ironic that Enver Pasha, the first Young Turk leader to have gone over to Moscow, escaped the Dashnak avengers only to die at the head of a band of revolting Muslims in the emirate of Bukhara, on August 4, 1922, mown down by a squad of Bolshevik

People had taken refuge behind cars. The two policemen on guard in front of the hotel had taken to their heels when they saw the gun being fired. Taking advantage of the commotion, Missak ran around the corner of the street and disappeared behind the palace. Suddenly the memory of a nightmare entered his head: Jivanshir was on a white horse, its hooves threatening him, and his pistol became a whip unable to fire a single shot. This image, rising from his subconscious, pushed Missak to return and administer the coup de grâce to his victim, whom he had probably not killed. There were now some thirty people surrounding Jivanshir, but they moved aside when they saw the assailant return, gun in hand, and let him shoot the wounded man, who died shortly after reaching the hospital. Four or five policemen, called in as reinforcements, ran up, brandishing their weapons. Missak tried to escape by jumping over an open car, but he tripped over bodies crouched on the ground. One man tried to grab him around his waist; it was Jivanshir's brother. Missak fired to get away from him and wounded him in the eye. Missak had only four bullets left. He fired one in the air to prevent one of the policemen from disarming him, and leaned on the roof of a vehicle to keep his colleagues at bay until the French occupation military police arrived. He agreed to hand over his weapon only to them. But the soldiers kicked him repeatedly and let the crowd tear his shirt off and maltreat him all the way to the nearest police post, where the Turks beat him up soundly. When he regained consciousness, still covered with blood, he saw a French officer raise his truncheon above him, but the officer commanding the post intervened: "Leave him to us. It's an internal affair, it has nothing to do with you." The officer handcuffed Missak and, after cursorily interrogating him, took him into a big building where he was kicked until he lost consciousness again.

When he came to, Missak found himself in a cell in company with a young Greek detainee who offered him water from his water bottle. The next day, he was called in for interrogation. The handcuffs had to be sawed off. They were chaffing his skin and the guard had lost the key. A Greek interpreter translated his replies from Turkish into French. He told the officer that Jivanshir was the man chiefly responsible for the Baku massacres in which his whole family had perished and he himself had been wounded, as evidenced by his scars.

In the afternoon, he was transferred to a British barracks where his handcuffs were changed. The French soldiers also handed over to their British colleagues the transcript of the interrogation, which the officer taking him to his new gaol tore up into pieces, with contemptuous words for the French. He ended up in a damp and dirty dungeon where three Jews, an Arab, a Greek from Macedonia,

came to set out their observations on the physical and mental state of the accused. A professor of neurology of Armenian origin, practicing in Warsaw, had examined Torlakian in prison shortly after his arrest: "The emotional crises to which he is subject make him not responsible for his actions," he asserted, agreeing with an Ottoman doctor of Greek origin and another Greek specialist. But the Turkish neurologist, who had examined the accused at the request of the victim's family, had observed no sign of epilepsy or mental disorder. This was not the opinion of the British prison doctor, who felt that his crime seemed to result from a sort of hereditary epileptic crisis, rather than from intentional and premeditated vengeance. Moreover, Missak's three fellow detainees came to affirm that they had seen him get up in the middle of the night and fall down stiff, his mouth full of spittle (they had learned their lesson well).

Finally, Torlakian seemed to emerge from his lethargy to tell how he and his family had managed to follow the Russians as they retreated in 1917 to take refuge in Baku. As they went through Tiflis, he had wanted to join the Armenian army being formed, but he had been rejected, he added, because of epilepsy inherited from his grandmother. Wounded by bullets during the massacres, he had succeeded in hiding in the house, but he heard his wife and sister begging the Tatars to spare their children. They were all massacred before his eyes.

For the two months that this lengthy trial lasted, the president and his two assessors repeatedly showed their understanding for the accused's case, but the deputy prosecutor was known for his pro-Turkish sympathies. However, the latter was recalled to London in the middle of the proceedings and was replaced by a young officer who was more understanding, Captain Cripton. What emerged above all from these hearings was the role played by Jivanshir in the Baku massacres. The sentence, deferred for two weeks, was delivered on October 20. Torlakian was found guilty, but not responsible, because he was unbalanced at the time of the events. He was therefore acquitted but was subject to a banning order, which was sanctioned by his expulsion from Ottoman territory. After waiting for 18 days in cell number one in the military prison, he was taken under escort aboard a Greek ship. He was freed on arriving at Piraeus, from where he went to the Armenian church in Athens. He had to wait for ten months to obtain the visa that enabled him to study in the United States at the expense of the ABM.

Meanwhile, two other teams of avengers had headed for Europe. One had been at post since the beginning of the summer of 1921, even before Jivanshir's murder, with a target of unprecedented