

## GERMAN OFFICER HEINRICH VIERBÜCHER ON THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE



*Heinrich Vierbücher*

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German pacifist-democrat Heinrich Vierbücher was born in 1893 in a social democratic family. Being recruited to the army in August, 1914 as soon as the World War I started, Vierbücher witnessed the mass deportations and carnage of the deported Armenians in Mesopotamia and other Armenian populated places.

Vierbücher was fluent in French along with his native German language and was quick to master Turkish and Arabic as well and during 1915-1921 he became the interpreter for General Liman von Sanders. In his book "What Did The Imperial Government Hide From German Subjects: Armenia 1915: The Annihilation of the Civilized Nation by Turks"<sup>1</sup>, published in 1922 and republished with additions in 1930 under the title "Armenia - 1915"<sup>2</sup>, Vierbücher depicted in detail all the pain and wrath he felt during the mass extermination of Armenians in Constantinople, Mesopotamia, Aleppo and Damask, the heinous crimes committed by Turks and the ghastly indifference of their allies, German senior instructors cooperating with them.

In his book Vierbücher condemns the 1915 Armenian Genocide with wrath and shows the reader with vivid historical facts that the Ottoman Empire itself was based on blood and carnage from the beginning. Osman, the nomadic chieftain after whom the dynasty of sultans was called, dreamt of huge conquests. He became famous for killing his 90-year-old uncle with an arrow: the latter was an obstacle for conquering a castle.

Osman's son Orkhan (1326-1359) created the army of *janissaries* which would soon violently spread dread and horror over Europe and Asia. It was re-manned with Christian boys who were brutally taken during military campaigns or kidnapped from Greek and Armenian families in Asia Minor and Western Armenia<sup>3</sup>. "With the victory gained in the battlefield called "Field of black thrush" near Kosovo, where the Serbian state power was destroyed. Murad fell from a Serb's dagger. His son Bayazid I came to power by suffocating his brother and thus introduced a terrific tradition - nearly each enthronement was accompanied by the death of a brother and a relative. Mohammed III

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<sup>1</sup> Vierbücher H., Armenien 1915. Was die kaiserliche Regierung den deutschen Untertanen verschwiegen hat: Die Abschachtung eines Kulturvolkes durch die Türken, Hamburg-Bergedorf.

<sup>2</sup> Vierbücher H., Armenien 1915. - The Armenian translation: Հայնրիխ Ֆիրբյուխեր, Հայաստանը 1915-ին, Երևան, 2000:

<sup>3</sup> Vierbücher mentioned that the sultans were in terrible fear of the janissaries they had created themselves: "Turkey would have been abolished one hundred years ago because of the janissaries' self-will if Mahmud II with Hussein Pasha's efforts hadn't shot 40,000 of those disobedient boys in the horse market of Constantinople in 1828" (Ֆիրբյուխեր, էջ 30).

(1595-1603) had his seventeen brothers' heads piled in a pyramid in front of a four-pillared throne. The heirs to the throne were being driven into a prince cage where they often spent half of their life dispelling their nervousness with alcohol and women, so when the "prisoners" came to power they were mostly too weak-minded to take responsibility for anything"<sup>4</sup>. The bloody sword that was the symbol of rule of the despotic sultans, was often directed against them: 76 of the 200 grand viziers didn't die a natural death. One third of sultans was killed. The facts brought forward by Vierbücher are proved in one memoir by Heinrich Heine, the great German poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: "When I was very young I used to open the last page of the newspaper where it would always be written that such-and-such vizier was hung in Turkey and such-and-such vizier was appointed. And I always wondered how people still agreed to become a vizier".

German military man Vierbücher presents dreadful facts about the internal life of the Ottoman Empire. A couple of years ago Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in his falsifying style speaking in London announced that Turkey had a history bright as the sun, and the Turks radiated only light and warmth wherever they went. Erdoğan was probably unfamiliar with Vierbücher's book.

Step by step, with calendar accuracy Vierbücher brings to the surface the monstrous violence of the Young Turks in Constantinople and other places populated by Armenians in 1915. The first news about the slaughters reached Constantinople on April 21, 1915. Then we read in his book that the Turkish government had passed a resolution on the extermination of Armenians and had secretly sent an order to the military and civilian bodies. About 590 of 600 intellectuals imprisoned and deported from Constantinople to the depths of Anatolia (Asia Minor) were killed. "Thus the Armenian people were relieved of their heads", - Vierbücher mentions. "Kemakh (ancient Armenian Kamakh) lies between Yerznka (ancient Armenian Yeriza) and Svaz (ancient Armenian Sebastia). In June 1915", - mentions Vierbücher, - "tens of thousands of women and children were thrown down alive from a giddy height, after being subjected to unspeakable tortures. That gorge ought to be called *Dante's Gorge*. It is the abyss of a curse that has become a reality, as Dante depicted in his Hell... Humanity has reached awareness of its disgrace and recognition of its sinfulness... since here took place the most dire crime of all. The desire to clean that disgrace and the disgust of people cursing war should unite and make people go on pilgrimage to Kamakh canyon. There, over and over the pilgrims will spiritually experience what happened in 1915"<sup>5</sup>.

In order to substantiate their unreasoned opinions and to make their worthless arguments convincing for the international community the Turkish denialists of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide have been repeating for decades the same false justification about the necessity to deport the Armenians under military conditions. In this regard Vierbücher noted: "Often an opinion was expressed that the slaughter of

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<sup>4</sup> Ֆիրբյուխեր, էջ 28:

<sup>5</sup> Ֆիրբյուխեր, էջ 7-8:

more than one million Armenians should be less referred to as a premeditated and planned extermination, than as some hapless circumstances that could not be predicted by the government”<sup>6</sup>.

Vierbücher revealed in his book the planned nature of that genocidal massacre: “The execution of Talat’s orders doubtlessly prove that the government aims **not at the transmigration of Armenians but their extermination**. Those orders that were being sent to the managing organizations of Aleppo from September 1915 till March 1916 were partly presented in the original during Tehlerian’s trial”.

However, all the facts brought in Vierbücher’s book doubtless prove that the fate faced by hundreds of thousands of local or deported Armenians was not the result of unfavorable conditions but the result of the brutal mania instigated by the Young Turks’ “Sublime Porte” (read “Hell’s door”) to exterminate the Armenians in every possible way under the name of transmigration. Here are a series of various atrocities that Vierbücher describes: “In Hastevan and Salmast alone, 850 beheaded corpses were taken out of wells: why? Because the Commander in Chief of the Turkish army paid a certain sum of money for each head of a Christian. The wells were filled with the blood of Christians. From Hastevan alone 500 women and girls were sent to Shoghakn to be dishonored... Seeing the bandits raping their sisters, women threw themselves into the deep river... One teacher from Van writes: “In mid-April our street and my house were put to fire. 250 refugee women and children had found shelter in our house from the neighboring villages and 50 people from the city. All of them were burnt alive together with the house. There was no living being in the deserted villages except for the dogs gourmandizing the corpses... The gendarmes conquering the town Mughli started to rape the wives in front of their husbands. A lot of men killed their wives and daughters not to be raped. A whole family took poison... Near Ankara 500 people were killed but before that their noses and ears were cut and their eyes were taken out”<sup>7</sup>.

“Almost none of the Armenians deported to Der el Zor oasis remained alive. Every now and then hundreds of them were taken and violently killed... In Baba, within two and a half days 1029 Armenians died of hunger”<sup>8</sup>.

How is the “committee” of historians suggested by the President of Turkey Erdoğan and Prime Minister Davutoğlu going to deny or attribute to “natural disasters” these facts established by the German officer?

In November 1916 General Liman von Sanders succeeded in stopping mass deportations of Armenians from Smyrna (they were deported and massacred in 1922). This example showed Vierbücher that within the frames of the German-Turkish alliance, the German military mission in Mesopotamia could have performed a lot of preventive actions to stop deportation, moreover the unpunished extermination of Armenians, but

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<sup>6</sup> Ֆիրբյուխեր, էջ 51:

<sup>7</sup> Vierbücher H, Armenien 1915, S. 68-69.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., S. 76.

this was not done. Vierbücher in his article “The Victim of the East” expressed his whole anger towards this deliberate inaction instructed by the government. Vierbücher called Turkey ruled by Sultan Hamid and Young Turks, a monstrous executioner of the Armenian people. As the great Armenian poet Hovhannes Tumanyan diagnosed Turkey: “The epileptic of the East”. According to Vierbücher’s depiction the tributaries of the Armenians’ moans flowing from Constantinople, Trapezunt, Sebastia and Karin) “accumulated and became a tremendous-terrible symphony of unspeakable torment”<sup>9</sup>.

On March 15, 1921, on Hardenberg Street, Charlottenburg, Armenian student Soghomon Tehlerian shot former grand vizier Talat pasha who secretly lived in Berlin. For this just shot Vierbücher compares the Armenian student with medieval Swedish mythical archer Wilhelm Tell with unconcealed admiration, and he sees in the surname “Tehlerian” the name of the folk hero “Tell”<sup>10</sup>. The reader might remember at least from Friedrich Shiller’s drama “Wilhelm Tell” that the son of the mythical archer was condemned to death in Switzerland and according to the sadistic decision of the court he would be freed from the gallows only if his father could drop the apple on his son’s head with one shot of an arrow.

By exterminating the Armenian people, Young Turks not only did take possession of the western part of millennia-old Armenian Motherland, but also went from house to house and stole their personal property, the gold laid in Turkish banks and their cash money. “Only the property and cash money stolen from the Armenians is estimated several hundred million German golden marks”, - Vierbücher writes, - “in 1916 Turkey sent to Berlin 100 million golden marks of that stolen money to be kept in the banks as currency. After the Armistice all of that money was confiscated by the Entente Powers”<sup>11</sup>.

After World War I Heinrich Vierbücher actively participated in the pacifist movement dedicating to it his indisputable rhetorical endowment and the bitter experience of a person who had witnessed war and violent massacres. In 1930 thanks to the publication of Vierbücher's new book “Armenia 1915” condemned slaughter of Armenians the crime was voiced again, but unfortunately in 1933, after the German Nazis came to power the book was prohibited and mainly burnt. Even the libraries of private citizens were being inspected in search of that book.

For his long-lasting pacifist and anti-fascist activity and public speeches Vierbücher fell victim to the Gestapo violence. At the night of February 12, 1939 a stranger came into Vierbücher's house and obviously acted on the orders of gestapo. Nothing is known about their conversation. Immediately after the visit Vierbücher fainted. Vierbücher who was safe and sound before that, died from a stroke right on the next day in the Berlin hospital named after Robert Koch.

***Translated from Armenian by  
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<sup>9</sup> «Worwärts», 61, August 10, 1920.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Shiller depicted the mythical hero in his drama “Wilhelm Tell”.

<sup>11</sup> Vierbücher H. Armenien 1915, S. 81.