

ARMIN T. WEGNER'S LETTERS AND DIARY OF 1915-1916 AND STRUGGLE FOR CONDEMNATION OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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Armin T. Wegner (1886-1978), who served as a sanitary soldier in the German military headquarters of the Turkish 6th Army Corps, located in Mesopotamia in 1915-1916, was one of the most exclusive eyewitnesses of the Armenian Genocide, who could not stay indifferent to the horrible annihilation scenes of the Armenian nation. By means of sending secret letters to his relatives residing in Germany and renowned German writers, from the death camps stretching along the Euphrates River, he announced to the whole world about the Genocide against the Armenian nation.

During his leave of absence in December 1916, Armin T. Wegner completed the editing of his two books in Breslau, which reflected his experiences and impressions in Turkey¹. Although Armin T. Wegner was just a sanitary soldier, then second-lieutenant in the German Sanitary Corps in Mesopotamia, he already had a doctoral degree in law and was the author of a number of poetry booklets. Hence, his story and the Genocide photos² taken by him in the death camps of Mesopotamia, were gaining serious legal significance from the perspective of condemning the forced deportation and extermination of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and under the tolerance of Imperial Germany. This explains why present day Turkey considers it extremely important to discredit Armin T. Wegner, a lawyer, a passionate public speaker and a talented expressionist-poet, and dismiss his pro-Armenian activities and eyewitness accounts of the Armenian Genocide³.

¹ Wegner A. T., *Der Weg ohne Heimkehr. Ein Martyrium in Briefen*, Berlin 1919 (Ա. Վեգներ, Ճանապարհ առանց տունդարձի: Գերմաներենից թարգմանեցին հայերեն Ռ.Վ. Մուշեղյանը և Ա. Վ. Մուշեղյանը, Երևան, 2000); Wegner A.T., *Im Hause der Glückseligkeit, Aufzeichnungenaus der Türkei*, Dresden, 1920.

² On October 19, 1916 Armin Wegner wrote from Aleppo: "I have taken numerous photographs during the past few days. I was told that Jemal Pasha, the hangman of Syria, imposed the death penalty on anyone violating the prohibition on photography inside the [Armenian] refugee camps. I carried these images of horror and accusation rolled into a bundle against my stomach ... I have no doubt that I am committing high treason, but I am conscious that perhaps I have been able to assist these poor people even a little" (See: Sybil Milton, Armin T. Wegner, Polemicist for Armenian and Jewish Human Rights, *Journal of Armenian Studies*, 1992, vol. IV, p. 168).

³ Following the Turkish falsifiers, Martin Tamcke in a number of articles and his dissertation (Dr. Martin Tamcke: Armin T. Wegner und die Armenier. Anspruch und Wirklichkeit eines Augenzeugen. Habilitationsschrift, eingereicht beim Fachbereich "Evangelische Theologie" der Philipps - Universität Marburg (Cuvillier Verlag Göttingen 1993) put under doubt the role of Armin T. Wegner in elucidating the history of the Armenian Genocide (a detailed criticism of Tamcke's ungrounded accusation against Armin T. Wegner see: Մուշեղյան Ա.Վ., Արմին Վեգների հիշատակն անարգելու փորձ, "ՎԷՄ" համահայկական հանդես, 2010, 2, էջ 25-44).

The first of Wegner's letters, a very emotional one, was written on his way from Constantinople to Baghdad, to Marga von Bonin, a nurse at the so-called "Giulhane" military hospital in Constantinople. Wegner had become friends with this German nurse while in Constantinople, during the days when he was familiarizing himself with the sanitary work at that hospital. In the letter, sent from Raas-el-Ain on November 26, 1915, he describes the horrors of the forced deportation of Armenians. He had just passed through the devastated settlements of Armenians in Asia Minor where not a single Armenian survived. Driving in a truck going downhill in Cilicia, Wegner observed the densely crowded procession of Armenians walking through the Taurus and Amanos mountain passes heading toward the burning deserts of Syria: "Today we passed over Amanos, while two days ago over Taurus.... an enormous flood of a displaced nation, those thousands of misfortunate people, flows through the Taurus and Amanos canyons. It whirlpools in the foothill of the mountains, getting weaker and weaker, in order to rush into the plains with its endless tail, to get lost in the desert, seeping into it. Where? whereto? That is the road of no return home?"⁴.



Armin T. Wegner was an eyewitness of the premeditated extermination of Armenians and he was not just an ordinary eyewitness, but the eyewitness with a law degree who wrote: "...all the roads are lined with famished and suffering Armenian deportees. Our tortured souls proceed through a sobbing and screaming live fence, from which extend thousands of begging hands".

"I just came back from a walk around the camp. Now, I am writing these lines. From all sides I was besieged by screaming hunger, death, disease and despair.

⁴ Վեգներ Ա., Ճանապարհ առանց տունդարձի, էջ 41:

Overall filth and foul smell. The grievance of a dying woman came from a tent. A mother, noticing the dark purple cuffs of my uniform, a token of sanitary corps, rushed towards me with her arms stretched. Confusing me with a doctor, she made her last attempt to stick to me. Miserable me. I had no bandage, no medication. It was prohibited to help her anyway”.

“Nevertheless, all this was dwarfed when compared with the horrible scene representing the crowd of orphan children, whose number was growing day by day. There were rows of ditches in the ground, dug for them at the end of the tent city, which were covered with tattered mats. They were hiding under them, head to head, boys and girls of every age, without refuge, undomesticated, suffering from hunger, deprived of food and bread, longing for a bit of human help, and shivering from night cold, clinging to one another, each holding in their frozen fingers a tiny coal stick trying in vain to warm up. Some of them were crying endlessly. Their uncut hair had turned yellowish and was hanging on their foreheads. Dirt and tears were smeared on their faces. Some lay half dead. Their juvenile eyes were immense and popped out from pain, and although they quietly looked ahead, their faces seemed to reflect bitter condemnation of the world. Yes, it seemed as if the destiny had piled up all the calamities of the world at the edge of this desert, to show once again what was going to happen to us. With a pounding heart and plagued with horror, I rushed out of the camp and although walking on the flat ground, I felt dizzy, and it seemed like the earth tore in two parts and an abyss opened under my feet”⁵.



Wegner revealed, for the first time, the top secret order, already in force in the German military mission of Mesopotamia in 1915, by which it was categorically prohibited to show any humanitarian approach towards the Armenian nation. Eleven

⁵ Op. cit., pp. 40-41.

months later, returning from Germany, Wegner was again passing through those areas. Only bones had remained from the displaced Armenian nation: "While approaching the riverbank, I notice many graveyards, numerous traces of old bonfires. Is this the ending of that horrible and awful forced deportation? In front of my eyes, anew visualizes the procession of the displaced people in the camps of anguish, where I was wandering last year with a horrified soul. Soon we meet with the first deportees. All the roadsides are covered with their bones, which shine dazzling white under the sun"⁶ (October 11, 1916).

Two letters that were later sent by Wegner from Germany to the above-mentioned nurse Marga von Bonin verify the fact that Wegner had described the horrors seen only with his own eyes⁷. The first of those letters Wegner had written in December 16, 1916, one week after arriving in Breslau. "It was more of a chance and a miracle, that I was able to get out alive once more from the hell of those horrifying ghosts", Wegner writes, adding that the publication of his books failed because of censure. In his second letter to Marga on January 10, 1917⁸, Wegner was reminding her: "What we experienced together is mostly summed up in the book "At the Home of Happiness". Of course, I have seen all that with my own eyes - the eyes that view the home of happiness from their viewpoint, since that wonderful piece of land of the country is the most misfortunate house that you could ever imagine".

Nature has "endowed" the Young Turks with an open-air and widespread furnace - a waterless desert, burning sun, and scorching south wind mixed with suffocating sand - to kill millions of people with thirst and intense heat. The Nazis did not have all those "goodies". However, they not only copied from Young Turks the idea of death camps, but also gas chambers instead of the Turkish open air furnace. But the Young Turks were not satisfied with only this measure of extermination. Johannes Lepsius reported that in the Deir-ez-Zor desert "the Armenian deportees were continuously separated in groups, consisting of a few hundred people each, and were dragged to the South-East to the disease-infested swamps, where they were exposed to the seemingly surprise ambushes of Cherkez groups and were slaughtered savagely."⁹

⁶ Op. cit., p. 66.

⁷ M. Tamcke cannot convince (as he tries in his published dissertation) anyone, who already has read this description, that Wegner has not personally witnessed the premeditated extermination of the displaced Armenian nation.

⁸ See Brief an Marga [Marga von Bonin] vom 10 Januar 1917. The letter is addressed to Marga, who must be identified with the nurse Margavon Bonin, because no other women is mentioned by the name of "Marga" in the literary heritage of Wegner.

⁹ Lepsius J., Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918, Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke, Potsdam, 1919, S. 290.

T. Wegner's diary "40 Days and Nights of Coming Home"¹⁰ contains exclusive details about the deportation camps of Armenians that he encountered when returning from Baghdad to Constantinople during September-October, 1916. They stretched along the Euphrates; however, from hundreds of thousands of deportees, only a small number of shabby living skeletons remained. Human bones were scattered all over the desert. During his trip, when passing through the camps of Tibni, Maden, Rakka, Abu Herera and Meskene (camps continued down to Aleppo), Wegner eye-witnessed the shocking scenes of extermination of Armenian deportees and reflected the details, that were important to him, in the form of abbreviated and brief notes in his original diary.

Although "The Collection of Diplomatic Documents"¹¹ of Lepsius's and Wegner's "The Road of No Return" were both published in 1919, Wegner's book was ready for publication earlier than that, since its preface was written after the book was finished and carried the date "January, 1919", which means Lepsius's collection had not been published yet. It was published in June 1919. The collection of works by Lord Bryce, which was published even earlier, in 1916 in London, has as well supplied many facts to Wegner and Lepsius about the brutalities organized by the Young Turks.

As mentioned, Wegner's two books were already edited in December, 1916. Besides, while working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany from 1917 to 1920, Wegner had access to the current political-diplomatic documents. Therefore, as an authorized person responsible for the propaganda and anti-propaganda campaign, he was also involved in preparing the collection of Lepsius and was active in acquiring the necessary facts and documents from the Foreign Ministry files and British news agencies and making them available to Lepsius. This explains that Wegner was familiar with those facts of the collection already before its publication, since in his letter written to the US President Woodrow Wilson in January, 1919, he emphasizes Lord Bryce's¹² and Lepsius's collections about the sufferings and extermination of Armenians in the camps of Mesopotamia: "Mr. President, if you browse through the reliable records of this horror amassed by Lord Bryce in England and Johannes Lepsius in Germany, you will see that I am not exaggerating. [...] On my clandestine visits to the refugee camps for the deported in the desert I sat on their mats in their tents with the starving and dying, and their pleading hands grasped mine. The voice of their priests [...] beseeched me to entreat for them on my return to Europe. [...] This document is a legacy. It is the mouth of a thousand of the dead, speaking through me"¹³.

¹⁰ See Die vierzig Tage und Nächte der Heimkehr. Aus dem Tagebuche. In: Der Wegohne Heimkehr, Berlin, 1919, S. 145-172.

¹¹ See Lepsius J., Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918, Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke, Potsdam, 1919.

¹² See Bryce J., The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16, Documents presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Miscellaneous No.31, London, 1916.

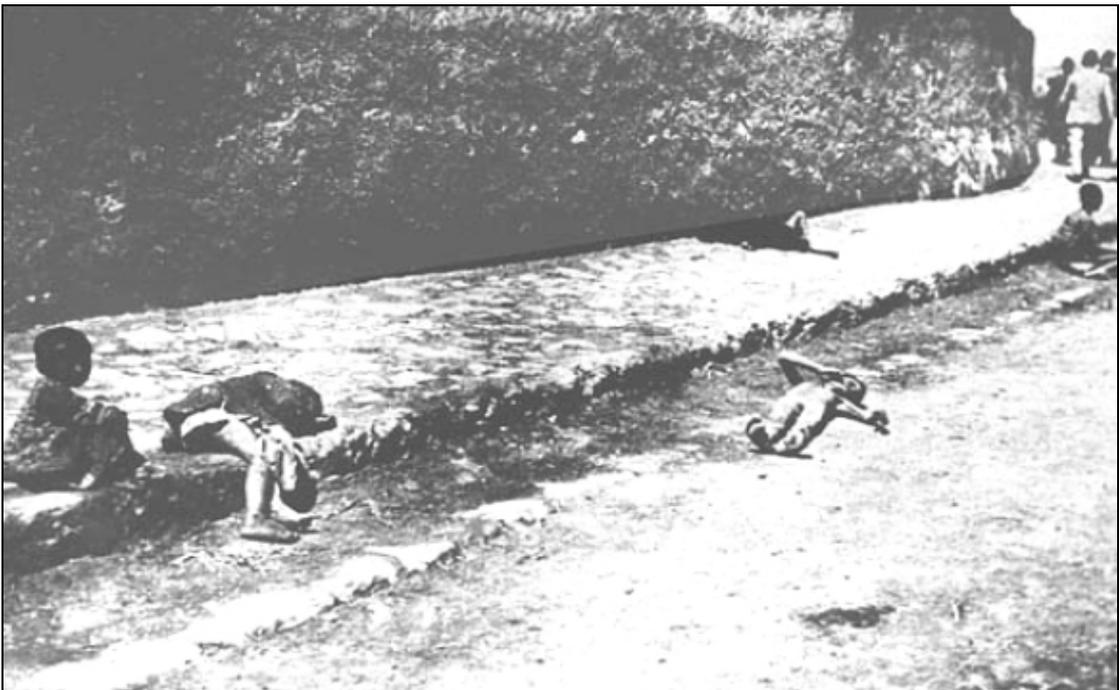
¹³ Wegner A.T., Bildniseiner Stimme, Redaktion: Ulrich Klan und Christoph Haacker, Wuppertal, 2008, S. 70.

This means that in January 1919, when Wegner was writing his open letter, he already had the unpublished collection of Lepsius in his hand, while Johannes Lepsius himself was stationed in the Netherlands and had not returned yet. Thus, it speaks about Wegner's certain role in compiling that collection of works.

Some initially memorized diary notes have remained unpublished in Wegner's literary archive. He noted: "when we entered the empty inn, we found the desiccated corps of a 12-year-old boy inside the open door at the side wall ... most likely, he had died of starvation ...".

After the detailed description of the 12-year-old boy's corpse, Wegner examines the surroundings.

"When I approached the river, (I saw) many graveyards, half-way submerged (in water), traces of countless old bonfires in front of the barrier." Then Wegner discovers the mass grave: "In the nearby canyon and in the caves, partly man-made, hanging over the river bank, under the cover of which, the corpses and the dead were apparently concealed with numerous stale human bones, especially skulls. (I saw) children's skulls, skulls with women's brunette locks, with almost all the chest bones tenderly bent, as clasps. "Smell of corpse" - "rags and old items near the river".



According to the published version of the diary: "Abu Herrera" (October 11, 1916)¹⁴ - "Is this the last corpse? When we entered the vacant inn, which was full of filth and stink, he was lying in front of the open door. The starved body of a 12-year-old Armenian boy with red hair; the body was melted to the bones, the hands and feet looked like sticks. Only the left hand was covered with a rag. Approaching the riverbank

¹⁴ According to the initial diary, Wegner had been in Abu-Herera on October 14, therefore, the date October 16, printed here, is wrong and needs to be changed to October 14.

I notice a number of graves, many traces of stale bonfires. Is this the end of that horrible and awful forced deportation?"¹⁵.

According to the edited version (unpublished): "On the road from Sabkha to Hamam" -near one of the curves of the Euphrates River, below the high cliffs, which at this location get closer to the bank, and are covered with the eagle nests, we come across the first Armenian camp at dawn - we run into the same misery as we saw last year".

"They were much scared now. We didn't see anymore those miserable and starving faces that may have died and vanished during this time. To my question they answered that most of them were from Adana and have been on this road for one and half years now, the last four months of which were in this area. Supposedly "each one received a tiny portion of bread from the Turkish government but then they were used as workers on the street jobs...There were many whitish shining human skeletons on the road, right next to the camp- they must have gotten used to it"¹⁶.



The reader notices that based on the incoherent notes, jotted down on the road, Wegner, has reproduced a coherently composed and well developed version, which is truly consistent with the preliminary notes, and hence they have the legitimate validity of the documentary evidence observed by the eyewitness. Wegner did not use the above-mentioned edited version in his diary published in 1919, but instead he used a more summarized description of the same first camp, omitting some details, either for literary preference, or just to fit the text in the designated space.

¹⁵ Wegner A. T., *Der Wegohne Heimkehr*, S. 161-162.

¹⁶ *Nachlass Wegners, Kriegstagebuch*, Eintragungunterdem 15. und 16. Oktober.

According to the published version of the diary: “Soon we meet the first deportees. All the roadsides are covered with their bone fragments glaring white under the sun. We came across the first camp in Maden. Children and women surround our cab. They break their heads for a piece of bread or a shallow slice of a melon peel”¹⁷.

It is worth mentioning that the secret league agent von Radovich of the German Embassy in Constantinople had calculated the number of Armenian victims reaching 1,175,000 as of August 1916¹⁸ (this calculation was certainly made for internal intelligence purposes).

When Wegner says that all the roadsides were covered with glaring white bones, the eyewitness means the roadsides from Maden to Hamam. Armenian camps were located in uncharted and nameless territories in the desert and were referred to by the name of the nearest settlement, depending on which side the wanderer was approaching them, and Wegner is right, when in the published text he calls the first camp by the name of Maden. When coming from Baghdad the first settlement before reaching Hamam is Maden (Matan)¹⁹. The existence of this same camp near Maden is confirmed by Beatrice Roner, the nurse of the Armenian orphanage in Aleppo, in April, 1916. She mentions the name of Hamam settlement as a reference to the location of “a camp on the road to Hamam”²⁰, because the settlement close to the camp from Aleppo was the village of Hamam.



¹⁷ Wegner A.T., *Der Wegohne Heimkehr*, S. 162.

¹⁸ See Tamcke M., S. 121.

¹⁹ The camp was located near Maden.

²⁰ See Lepsius J., *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918, Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke*, Potsdam 1919, S. 261.

According to preliminary diary notes: “Hamam (October 13/14, 1916), a larger camp - many workers - market - in tents tightly next to each other - many children - they don't get anything - living on the money brought with them and with relatives - a meeting and conversation with the priest – refusal of taking his daughter with me”²¹.

On the basis of these jotted notes, in the next days (October 17-18), Wegner had composed his conversation with the priest Reverend Tachat Arslan[yan] and his compatriot Hakob [Y]aghub[yan].

According to the edited version (unpublished): “Under the moonlight, I followed Priest Reverend Tachat Arslan and the Armenian man Hakob Aghub into his tent through the opening”. From the conversation we had in the tent, it turned out that the priest and his friend were both from the same neighborhood in Constantinople. They were almost one and a half years on the way. “From the 800 deported families from that city, only 25 families are still alive.” The priest had lost his wife and son, only the daughter is alive. His friend Hakob, is the only survivor in his family. Although the priest does not wear his church mantle, he still continues to perform his spiritual duties, wearing just an ordinary hat. “In a single day he had buried 300 Armenians, who had died from spotted fever”. ...during the conversation Reverend Tachat asked Wegner to take his daughter away with him to save her from certain death. “A 15-year-old beautiful human being, and very orderly. Her fiancé serves in the Turkish navy: they have written letters to him, but it has been one and a half years that they have no news from him. The priest keeps asking me to take his daughter with me to Constantinople, but what can I do, I feel so miserable”. The priest is convinced, that they all will be dragged to Deir-ez-Zor and they all will be killed there”²².

The rest of the conversation, which I skip, has been published in Wegner's “40 Days and Nights of Coming Home”. Wegner, in this publication leaves out only the request of the priest to rescue his daughter, and his own helplessness to fulfill the priest's wish.

It is necessary to note that the fiancé of the daughter of the priest was one of the young men “lost with no traces”. The Young Turks drafted young Armenians in the beginning of the war in the Turkish army and navy, treacherously annihilating everyone, depriving the Armenian nation of the vital self-defense forces before the displacement.

According to the published version: “Meskene, October 15 - In the evening, priest Reverend Tachat Arslanyan, his friend and I sit together in front of the tent. They tell me about the sufferings that they went through, about those 800 families of the city, with whom they started their wandering, about those thousands of people, whom he had buried in the desert, including twenty-three priests and one bishop....In a totally abandoned dirty camp near Rakka, I met a thirteen-year-old boy. He had lost his mother

²¹ Tamcke M., p. 244: Hamam (13./14. Oktober 1916).

²² See Nachlass Wegners, Kriegstagebuch, Eintragungsterdem 17. Und 18. Oktober.

and brother, only his father had stayed alive. His name was Manvel. In order to protect his head from the sun, he had wrapped a white rag around it. He was blowing a cow's horn, joyfully running through the piles of starving, sick and dying people, who laid motionless or, having reached the degree of insanity, were picking at garbage... I wanted to take him to our car, and take him to Germany with me... I asked him to take me to his father, who was an Alexandrian merchant. And since he could read and write, they had appointed him as the camp's guard. ...So, I went to the Arab supervisor myself. Sitting on his straw-mat for two hours I kept trying to convince him, offering him all the money I had with me, but they did not want to set the boy free. I promised to mediate for him in Aleppo, before Hakky Bey, who was the superintendent for resettlements...²³.

The last facts contained in the same fragment of the preliminary notes about the Armenians that were tied to one another with ropes, is also reflected in Wegner's poem "The Expulsion of Mankind".

*Here they are crawling wildly in the plain
Tied to one another, women and men
The desert has immensely opened its jaws
To furiously swallow humans and beasts²⁴*

In summary, we conclude that Wegner jotted down, on the spot, the initial disconnected ideas, as preliminary notes, and later, during the next days, when more time was available, he completed the notes by memory, refining the rough draft into a stylized format, according to what he had seen and experienced in Mesopotamia. Thus far, it can be verified that the unpublished edited diary notes, preserved in Wegner's literary archive, as well as the diary "40 Days and Nights of Coming Home" published in 1919, find their sources in the preliminary diary notes taken on the way home. All of them have equally authoritative value of an original source, since they belong to the pen of the same author and do reciprocally clarify one another.

In his preliminary diary notes, Wegner is an eyewitness and a lawyer, who documents the events as accurately as he sees them. On his way in the deserts of Syria he uses shorthand writing to record in detail the horrors seen in the death camps of Armenians. But in the published diary, as well as in the letters from Mesopotamia, next to Wegner-the-eyewitness stands the expressionist writer as well. This is why Wegner's published diary stands out as a literary work. The author tries, successfully, to deliver to his readership the reality of the horrendous scenes of hell, which he has witnessed, to its possible extent through verbal expression. During the next days

²³ Wegner A.T., Der Wegohne Heimkehr, S. 164-165.

²⁴ Վեգնեի Ա., Ճանապարհ առանց տունդարձի, էջ 69:

following the initial diary notes, when he had free time in new places, Wegner refined and stylized the jotted down initial notes, and titled his edited version by the name of the new place of settlement and with the respective date.

Returning to Germany from Constantinople, Armin T. Wegner set foot in Breslau on December 8, 1916. However, after ten days he complains about suffering from appendicitis, a result of the military exercises²⁵. Once Wegner set foot in Breslau he became target in the trap of double stalking by both the German secret service and military superintendence. First, instead of the 4 months, his rightful leave of absence and vacation granted by the German headquarters in Mesopotamia, he was given 8 weeks only (56 days) in the city of Breslau. Then (probably from February 2, 1917) he was drafted as a recruit (new draftee) in the 42nd battalion. The fact of being recruited as a new draftee itself reveals that the military superintendence had nullified Wegner's two years of military service in Mesopotamia, as a soldier and medic. They also revoked his rank of second lieutenant, a title awarded to him, not by himself, but by Field Marshall von der Goltz, as Wegner testifies in his letter addressed to his parents on August 21, 1916²⁶.

Thus, the exhausted second lieutenant, fatigued from infectious diseases, is again recruited as a "new draftee" as retaliation for his pro-Armenian letters sent from Mesopotamia. He was supposed to be sent to the front. However, Wegner's mother, Mary Wegner, who was one of the popular figures of the women's pacifist movement, protests against cutting her son's allotted 4 months vacation by two months, and she complains against ignoring of his suffering from serious diseases that he had endured in Mesopotamia²⁷.

After that, Wegner, cannoneer, exhausted from long-lasting infectious illnesses, is discharged from the barracks of the new draftees of the 42nd regiment of the field artillery. Then, he is sent to Breslau, under the supervision of the deputy commander-in-chief of the 4th army, to work in the media propaganda department²⁸.

The war still continued and it was necessary to elucidate the military actions of Germany against the British "deceitful propaganda". During his eight-week vacation in Breslau, Wegner, who was extremely fatigued, came to grips with the realization of his long-time dream: the publishing of his poems, which was hindered due to war and his recruitment to Mesopotamia. In the spring of 1917, he published the collection of his poems under the title "Face of the Cities". Soon after, his publisher was sued in Berlin for including a poem in the book, which allegedly was of an immoral character.

²⁵ See Armin T. Wegner's letter addressed to Gerda Maurer on March 13, 1917 – M. Tamcke, p. 155, Footnote 8.

²⁶ Wegner A.T., *Der Wegohne Heimkehr*, S. 118.

²⁷ See Tamcke M., p. 155, Footnote 9.

²⁸ See Rooney M., *Leben und Werk Armin T. Wegners (1886-1978) im Kontext der Soziopolitischen und Kulturellen Entwicklung in Deutschland*, p. 2.

Wegner's immediate supervisor went even further and threatened that: "A person, who authored such an immoral book, could not work under him and he had to be sent back to the front"²⁹. Wegner himself attributed the lawsuit to an act of revenge (Racheakt) by the German-Turkish Society in Breslau, for a public speech Wegner had held dealing with Turkish atrocities against Armenians in Mesopotamia as well as the massacres of Armenians. In defense of that particular poem and the entire collection in general, positive opinions were expressed by such renowned writers like Thomas Mann and his brother Heinrich Mann, Karl Hauptman (the brother of popular playwright Gerhard Hauptman), Richard Dehmel and others.

But eventually, the Berlin Court fined Wegner 200 Reichsmarks and confiscated the rest of the copies. This was Wegner's first serious confrontation with the German-Turkish alliance, which was going to worsen in the near future, after returning to the Fatherland. Anyway, the publishing of his book led Wegner to start working in the publishing office of "Der Neue Orient", a semiofficial periodical of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and to be released from military service. During 1917-1920 Wegner was in active relationship with Armenian intellectuals such as Karapet Melik-Ohanjanyan, Hakob Zoryan, Avetik Isahakyan, Libarit Nazaryan and others. Melik-Ohanjanyan had come to Germany for obtaining higher education and for a while he couldn't leave Germany due to war. Hakob Zoryan was executed in 1937 [during Stalinist repressions]. Avetic Isahakyan was already a famous poet. Liparit Nazaryan was an active member of the Dashnak party.

It was during this period in 1919, when the German translation of "Abu-Lala Mahari", a masterpiece poem of the Armenian poet Avetik Isahakyan, was published, with Wegner's help, in "Der Neue Orient" (1919, issue 2, page 77-83). The translation was realized by the lively participation of Karapet Melik-Ohanjanyan³⁰, in those years residing in Germany, jointly with Liparit Nazaryan and the German poet Heinrich Noeren.

Armin T. Wegner actually presented to the world the raging condemnation of Armenians who were being annihilated in the deserts of Mesopotamia, who heavily criticized the Germans for the alliance with the Turks and extermination of Armenians.

Here is such evidence: "Their gazes were screaming at me: "You are German yourself", they were saying, "and you are allied with Turks... so it is true, that you too wanted it." I am lowering my eyes. What can I answer to disperse their doubts?"³¹.

A courageous request presented by Wegner to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany in 1918 is extremely worthy of attention: "Germany may be released from its

²⁹ Gespräch zwischen Armin T. Wegner und Martin Rooney, in: Rooney, "Der Weg ohne Heimkehr", S. 25.

³⁰ Karapet Melik-Ohanjanyan later became a well known philologist and a member of the NAS of Armenia.

³¹ Wegner A.T., Der Weg ohne Heimkehr, S. 165

accomplice only in case of sincere and unconditional support for the rights and freedom of Armenia”³².

In the beginning of 1919, the legal-adviser for the secret service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany, Dr. O. Göpert, who was in the meantime one of the leaders of the German-Turkish union, furiously summoned Wegner to his office and strictly ordered: “Do not intervene in the Armenian matters, not even at the personal level”³³. He reasoned that the German-Turkish union was under the threat of failure. During and after the First World War, the Armenian Question was harshly confronted by the German-Turkish alliance.

But nothing could stop Wegner any longer. After Otto Goeppert’s threat in January 1919, Wegner wrote his remarkable open letter to the President of the United States of America, Woodrow Wilson. It was published on February 1, in the newspaper “Frau der Gegenwart”. The reputable newsletter “Berliner Tageblatt” published it under the title “A Testament in Desert” on February 23. In this message, as well, Wegner was not hiding Germany’s complicity in the extermination atrocities of Armenians by the Ottoman Turkey: “Mr. President, you will believe in my impartiality, if I speak to you on this subject, as a German, belonging to a nation, which has become close friends with Turkey. That is why; we have been blamed for the accomplice participation in the forced deportation of the people”³⁴.

On the other hand, while already in Germany, Wegner wrote in mid-1917 stories about the massacre of Armenians and about the sufferings they had undergone in Ottoman Turkey “Der Sturm auf das Frauenbad” (“Assault on the Women’s Bath”) and “Der Bankier” (“The Banker”), and on March 19, 1919, he presented a lecture along with his own slide show “Die Austreibung der Armenier in die Wüste” (“The Expulsion of the Armenians in the Desert”) at the “Urania” hall in Berlin.

In the preface of “The trial of Talaat Pasha”³⁵ Doctor of Law Armin T. Wegner strictly condemned the Young Turks’ false excuse that the deportation of Armenians was a necessary “military measure”. He emphasized: “As a rule the false necessity of military measures is just an excuse, and the “resettlement in the desert”- just a worthless prate to veil the bloodiest crime of the present century the purpose of which is nothing but an assiduous and complete annihilation of a superior race”³⁶. Here for the

³² “Deutschland könne von seiner Mitschuld nur frei gessprochen werden, wennes offen und rückhaltlos für Armeniens Rechte und Freiheitspricht” – Armin T. Wegner, Presseerklärung, in: Martin Rooney, “Weg ohne Heimkehr”: Martin Tamcke, pp. 183-184.

³³ Ibid., p. 184.

³⁴ The translation from original German into Armenian made by Albert Musheghyan: Published in the book “Armin T. Wegner: Bildnis einer Stimme”, Edited by Ulrich Klan und Christoph Haacker, Wuppertal, 2008, p. 71.

³⁵ Der prozeb Talaat Pascha. Stenographischer Prozebbericht mit einem Vorwort von Armin T. Wegner und einem Anhang. Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, Berlin, 1921, S. 6.

³⁶ Վեգներ Ա., Ճանապարհ առանց տունդարձի, էջ 82-83:

first time with the expression, “Vernichtung einer Rasse”, Wegner gives the juridical definition of the crime of genocide as the extermination of the human species of Armenian as the bloodiest crime of the 20th century against humanity.

Years ago I wrote that lawyer Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew, got his first impressions of the Armenian Genocide at the beginning of the 20th century from Armin Wegner’s publications, especially from the Berlin trial acquitting Soghomon Tehlirian’s revenge on Talaat Pasha and from Wegner’s publication of the preface of that stenography. In his dissertation of 1926 Lemkin discusses Soghomon Tehlirian’s feat, presents the prehistory of the Genocide, the origin of the Armenian nation since the heathen times, etc.

In 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland, Lemkin found refuge in the US and was involved in the anti-Nazi struggle serving in governmental and military departments. In that period members of his family became victims of the Holocaust. In November 1943 Lemkin coined the Latin term *genocide*³⁷ in fact taking as a basis the expression *Vernichtung einer Rasse* (extermination of race) used by Armin T. Wegner in 1921, in the preface of “The trial of Talaat Pasha”. Lemkin replaced those two German words by two Latin roots *genus+cid* (*caedere=exterminate*). Thus, three terms - German expression *Vernichtung einer Rasse* used by Wegner, Lemkin’s Latin *genocide*, and Armenian *ցեղասպանություն* (killing race) by their composition and criminal-juridical meaning are quite identical and characterize the same crime - initially, in the case of Armenians meaning the *genocide* (annihilation) of the Armenian ethnos - the same race.

According to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1948, along with the newly-coined international term *genocide* the identical meaning is expressed by the German term *Völkermord* (slaughter of people)³⁸. The point is that at Lemkin’s suggestion on December 10, 1948 the Latin neologism “genocide” was included only in the English, French and Russian originals of the UN Convention, and the German original included the German term *Völkermord* which had already been officially used in international forums in the 20-30s in connection with the Armenian Genocide. The German term was necessary to show that the convention also spread on the genocides of the Armenians, Jews, Poles and Assyrians. From the beginning of the independence of the Republic of Armenia our diplomats using the internationally recognized German term could have succeeded in the recognition of the Armenian Genocide not only in German speaking countries, but also through the Hague Court they could have made Turkey recognize the Armenian Genocide.

³⁷ Lemkin for the first time officially used the term *genocide* in 1944 in the book “Axis rule in occupied Europe” written to order of the Polish government in exile. He described mass extermination of Poles and Jews.

³⁸ Dörr O., *Kompendium völkerrechtlicher Rechtsprechung: eine Auswahl für Studium und Praxis*, Tübingen, 2004, S. 155.