

ancestors. This was followed by the 1942 wealth tax levied on non-Muslim citizens including Islamized Armenians—a pretext to force all Armenians and Christians out of business by extreme, disproportionate, and discriminatory taxation and strip them of their belongings. Those who could not pay the heavy taxes—and many, especially those in the interior could not—were exiled to the Aşkale labor camps. As Sarkis Varpet puts it, Armenians “did not go through a second deportation/exile during World War II. There were not enough Armenians or Greeks left to deport. However, all Christians suffered the wealth tax. This time, the destination of exile was Aşkale” (Yalçın, p. 295).

Baba Yusuf, an Aşkale Turk, related to Yalçın how the Armenian exiles suffered and perished in the labor camps, and how unfair was their treatment. He always wished for the opportunity to tell what he had witnessed so that the world would know, so that Turkish citizens, unaware of the tragedy at Aşkale, would know (p. 102). He had always been afraid, but now, at the end of his journey on this earth, he was ready to speak up and no longer afraid. Yalçın was hearing about this human tragedy for the first time. But he was to hear stories of Aşkale from others too. Vahram Garabent, for example, was serving in the reserve army when the wealth tax was announced, and it was only through the intervention of a Turkish friend that he escaped the Aşkale labor camps (p. 140).

One expects to find the echo of this disastrous event in Armenian literature, this onerous taxation that not only materially but also spiritually ruined a generation of Armenians, affecting their social status, individuality, and identity. Significantly, Andan Özer is the only Armenian poet