

rejected the offer; they preferred to hold on to their faith and took the road to exile. Obviously, they perished on the deportation road toward the Syrian desert.⁴⁸ Vahram cannot forget the horrors of the day the men of the family were taken away and the forced deportation began. To overcome their reluctance and start them on their way with a minimum of fuss, the government spread the news that they were going to join their husbands, fathers, and brothers. Vahram recalls that, although they were ultimately Islamized and allowed to stay, his twenty-five-year-old mother at first decided to join the deportees in the hope of finding her husband. Luckily, their Turkish neighbors advised her not to believe the rumors and to stay put. Apparently, they knew better what fate awaited the deportees (Yalçın, p. 131).

Vahram's experience through the long years of the First World War and Mustafa Kemal's campaign against the Greeks in 1920 is unbelievably horrifying. In Yalçın's words, "What he recounted sounded like epic legends, whereas what we heard were life stories" (p. 126). Vahram lived the memory of these horrors all his life, and was never able to overcome the impact. "I see the days of the catastrophe in front of my eyes, just like today; the screams, the cries, the whimpering still ring in my ears" (p. 126).

In 1920, on the pretext of driving the Greeks out of Merzifon, Turkish bandits attacked the town and, not finding very many Greeks to loot and kill, turned their swords on the Islamized Armenians of the town. With the aid of some locals, they identified Armenians, ransacked their houses, and

⁴⁸ Yalçın, *Hogis kezmov ke khayta* (2003), p. pp. 127–8.