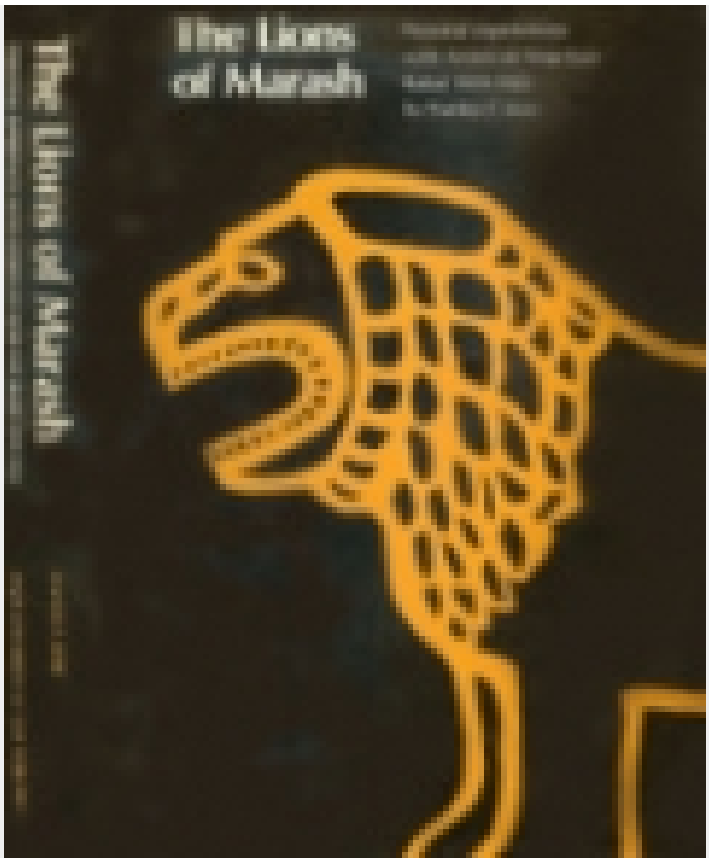
A BIG BOOK'S LITTLE STORY

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Dr. Antranig Chalabian, translated and abridged by **Vahe H. Apelian**, 3 September 2012

> *This article appeared in Antranig Zaroukian's **Nairi** Weekly in Beirut on December 2, 1973, few months after the publication of "The Lions of Marash". Antranig Chalabian narrates how Dr. Stanely E. Kerr's monumental book came about.*

Dr. Stanely E. Kerr was the Chairman of the Biochemistry Department of the American University of Beirut for almost four decades. During the last years of his tenure he had merited the title of *Distinguished Professor*. For all I know, in the history of the University, few individuals have been conferred with this title. He retired from his post in 1965 and moved to America.

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Dr. Stanely E. Kerr was the Chairman of the Biochemistry Department of the American University of Beirut for almost four decades. During the last years of his tenure he had merited the title of *Distinguished Professor*. For all I know, in the history of the University, few individuals have been conferred with this title. He retired from his post in 1965 and moved to America.

I knew the Professor simply because we worked in the same building. He worked in the second floor of the University's School of Medicine building while I worked in its fourth floor as Research Assistant. I had heard that the Professor was an Armenophile. A friend had told me that at the aftermath of the First World War he had helped the Armenian refugees.

The American University of Beirut's School of Medicine building has two storage rooms in its fourth floor where all sorts of equipment, instruments, some usable others not, are kept. When the storage rooms get filled up workers come and remove some of the items that are not needed any more.

It was in the summer of 1966. I heard that workers have come and are emptying the two storage rooms. I went to see that they do not remove instruments and other items we owned we may need in the future. In one corner there was a very old wooden box. "Take this wooden cart away!" I told the workers because of its rough and tumble look and accumulated dust.

I had hardly uttered my order when I noticed that at its bottom there were papers that appeared to be newspaper and envelopes of sorts. The papers appeared to be very old. Had a garbage collector come across the box he would not have wanted to handle the papers inside and would have tossed the box away. I, on the other hand, who has a tendency to wash his hands 50 times a day, do not know how is that I extended my arm into the box and reached the papers. It may be that luck would have it that way.

I opened the large envelope with utmost care. There were clippings from an English language newspaper. TODAY IN SVAS A THOUSAND ARMENIANS WERE MASSACRED. I turned my face the other way and shook the fifty years accumulated dust and took the envelope to my office.

I placed the papers on the table next to my desk and started to look into the newspaper clippings. They were clippings from New York Times dating to the Armenian Genocide. There were also correspondences and documents and also Stanley Kerr's picture (he was not a professor then). His picture appeared in the newspaper on two occasions in a military like uniform. It turned out that they were the uniforms worn by the American Relief Workers. From the correspondences I concluded that the envelope belonged to Dr. Stanley Kerr.

Emotions overtook me as I read the newspaper clippings; Dr. Suhail Jabbour, one of the Professors of the Physiology Department who is a very curious and observant person, happened to step in.

- "What are you reading?" He asked.

- "Papers that belong to Dr. Stanley Kerr" I said "He seems to have left them here"

- "Place them in my office after you are done" He said. "I would like to read them as well".

Three days later I asked him, "Where are Dr. Stanley Kerr's papers?" "I sent them to his son", he said. Professor Stanley Kerr's son, Malcolm, was a professor at the University's Political Science Department and is a specialist of Arab history.

I wrote a letter to Dr. Malcolm Kerr at the U.C.L.A. Political Science Department inquiring about his father's papers. He wrote back letting me know that he had sent the papers to his father who lived in Princeton, NJ.

I wrote to Dr. Stanley Kerr and asked him if he would return the papers he had left behind to me to give to an Armenian editor.

"No, Antranig" he replied. "I had not thrown these papers away. I had lost them. They are very valuable to me. I had collected them to write a book. I am glad that you found them……".

This incident became the reason that initiated a correspondence between the two of us the outcome of which became the monumental book Dr. Stanley E. Kerr wrote about the massacres of Marash. To write this book, the eminent professor devoted six years and produced a book about the tragedy of Marash that historians may not have anything else to add. We may mention here that

Krikor Kaloustian's book titled "Marash or Kermanic" has only a 30 pages long section about the tragedy of Marash including eyewitness accounts.

Dr. Kerr has been in Aleppo and Marash between 1919 and 1923 as an American Middle East Relief officer. He has been a witness to the post War massacres by the Kemalists. Before that he has been interested in the Armenian issues and has collected newspaper articles about the Armenian massacres.

My task became collecting references about the Armenian Genocide and the Cilician tragedy. I translated into English almost all the Armenian references available about the tragedy of Marash and the Cilician calamity. Fortunately the Professor's knowledge of German, French and Turkish greatly facilitated our searches.

In the spring of 1967, a year after the initiation of the work, the Professor came to Lebanon in search of sources. We looked for a book but we could not find it. I checked almost all the bookstores in the city but I could not locate a copy. The title of the book was "La Cilicie 1919-1920" by Edmond Brimond. I was told that the Armenian Catholic Library in Zmar had a copy.

The 1967 Israeli six-days long war started. The city was very tense. It was the third day of the war and the city was at a heightened mood. People were protesting all over and the streets were littered with glass fragments. The schools were closed and people were indoors; I was concerned that the Professor would soon leave due to rising anti-American sentiments without the reference. I decided to go to Zmar but I did not own a car then. I ventured out of the house, crossed the city center and walked to my friend Yervant Grboyan's house and knocked at the door. He was still in his bed.

- "Take me to Zmar" I said.

- "Are you crazy or what?" He said. "Who goes out in these times leaving his house?" He added.

We drove to Zmar. We were sipping tasty wine when the *Vartabed* went to fetch the book from the library. He came back. "We do not have the copy" he said. "It is in our registry but it appears that Father Gergerian has taken the book with him to Philadelphia".

In the afternoon I went to the University and found that Dr. Stanley Kerr and all the American nationals had left the country early that morning at 7 a.m.

I continued to search for the book through Librarie Du Liban. I wrote to friends in Paris, but to no avail. Then someone told me to check Vahe Setian's private collection. Giving the benefit of the doubt that a personal collector would have a book the libraries did not, I visited Vahe Setian to inquire. Not only I found the book I was looking for in his collection, I also found additional seven historical books in French about the Cilician tragedy. In President Hoover's Library we found another French book we needed titled "Historique du 412n Regiment d'Enfanterie" by Captain C. Tribault.

"The Lions of Marash" was printed by the State University of New York Press and was published on July 2, 1973. It retails for $15. Few copies have arrived to Beirut. I do not want to be misunderstood. The author has purchased few copies and gifted to friends.

I am pleased that an eminent American Professor wrote this book. The Professor has shown his greatness early on. Just imagine that a young 20 to 22 years old student leaves America and volunteers to help Armenian orphans in a foreign land.

I narrated the story of a big book. Let the Marashtsi intellectuals evaluate the book.

Note: *Dr. Stanley E. Kerr's son – Dr. Malcolm Kerr – became the President of the American University of Beirut but was gunned down in his office. Malcolm's son - Steve Kerr - is a retired professional basketball player and a 5 time National Basketball Association (NBA) Champion.*