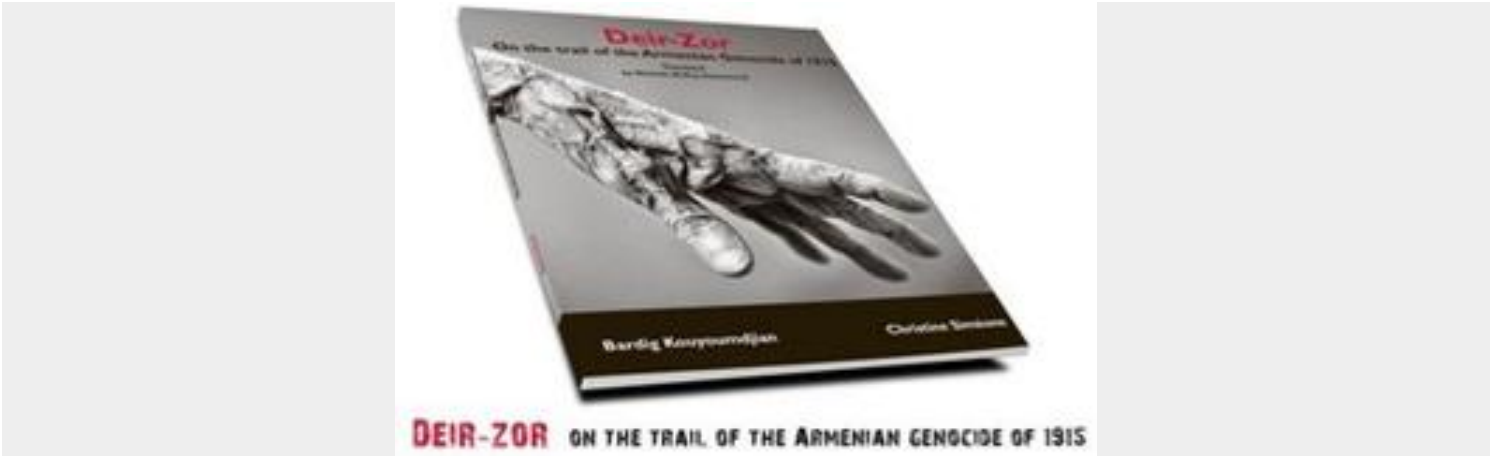


IN THE STEPS OF THE MARTYRS

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By Gassia Topoushian, Beirut, 6 October 2011 "To all the innocent victims,
to all those men and all women
struggling for the truth and justice.
To all those who offered me their glances,
their words, and sometimes their silence."



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Bardig Kouyoumdjian, a Paris-based Armenian photographer is the grandson of a survivor of the 1915 Genocide of Armenians. Kouyoumdjian is part of the generation which wants to understand, discover, and above all, find traces of the black pages of the Genocide.

Kouyoumdjian's ***Deir-Zor: on the trail of the Armenian Genocide of 1915*** was written with the help of French journalist Christine Simeone. The book is an account of his adventures in the Syrian Desert where hundreds of thousands Ottoman Armenians were killed by Turkish soldiers or died of thirst, starvation or exhaustion, following their deportation from their homeland. The town of Deir-Zor was the end of the road for those who survived, but for most it was the world of the dead.

Kouyoumdjian's journey to Deir-Zor was an awakening, a trip to the forgotten places--Marat, Hatla, Markade, Shaddade, Suwar, the centers of deportation and massacre. His photographs of the sites, the places and the people also illustrated the first publication of this book, which was in French.

In an interview Kouyoumdjian said, "This is a book for all those Armenians who do not know what Deir-Zor is besides being a desert. It is a book written for the French people, to familiarize them with Armenians and the Genocide of Armenians."

From 1985 to 1996 Kouyoumdjian collected documents, photos, videos and stories... about the survivors of the Genocide of Armenians. In 2001, he visited Deir-Zor and decided to write a book about his research and trip. In 2005 he published ***Deir-Zor*** in French. Five years later the book was published in English. Both books were published in partnership with Radio France and France Inter.

"We, as Armenians, have so little information about the Deir-Zor desert... We think Deir-Zor is a vast and dry desert, where our ancestors were deported to and eventually massacred. We are not aware that this desert is now a city with a long history. Deir-Zor used to have an Armenian community and an Armenian church. Armenians in Deir-Zor long before 1915..." pointed out Kouyoumdjian in an interview.

Quoting from the book, he said, "I still feel the desperate hand of Hripsime Kazezian. I entered her room, explaining that I had come to speak with survivors of the Armenian Genocide...She was blind... I

picked up a camera and began to take photos...Meanwhile, she told me her story...She remembers feeling alone in the world...I have told this story a thousand times, with the same words, the same gestures, the same emotions, like a recital...A thousand times the story has moved people, a hundred times it has been forgotten, swept away again and again by the shifting wind."

Talking about some of the survivors who converted to Islam at the end of their long desert trek, Kouyoumdjian, said, "...these children of Christians turned Muslim are accepted neither by the Bedouins who are native to the desert nor by the Armenians who have preserved their Christian heritage...Being Armenian no longer had much meaning for them, and leaving the Bedouins would have plunged them once more into the unknown..."

The striking cover photo is that of Marie Badji. "I photographed it at the Center for Armenian Handicapped in Lebanon. The only picture that has touched me beside all the others that tell each and every survivor's story...the wrinkles on that hand tells me the sufferings of all the Armenian people."

Commenting on the book, French historian Yves Ternon has said, "...Whether you are Armenian or not, reader, open this album and reflect."

The book can be purchased from the author at deireszorATgmail.com

