



Our Lady of Azakh, 1915

Today, the town of Azakh is part of Turkey, known as İdil. While many Westerners are aware of the systematic destruction of Armenians, who were Christian, by the Ottomans during WWI, other Christian groups such as the Arabic-speaking Assyrian or Syriac Christians were also deported or killed. During this period, Azakh was populated by about 1,000 Catholic and Orthodox Arabic-speaking Christians, who came to be seen as no longer part of the Ottoman project of creating a unified empire.

During fall of 1915, Azakh was first attacked by nearby Kurdish tribes, and later, in November, the Ottoman Army with the assistance of German forces assaulted the village for several days but failed to overtake it.

According to local legend, after the fighting ended, the Ottoman and German officers asked to enter the city because they wanted to see the British cannon used against them and the young woman who was constantly firing at them day and night from the tower of a local church. The priest assured them that there were no weapons, certainly no cannon and no young woman shooting at them. The officers were incredulous until they searched the town and could find no cannon nor any young woman who resembled the young woman they had seen. They left the locals unharmed though in the following years.

Among the German officers who entered the city and claimed to have seen the young woman was one who realized it was the Blessed Mother protecting her children as they prayed to her. This event let him to convert to Catholicism, and he later became a cardinal. Hence, the origin of Our Lady (or the Virgin) of Azakh.

I am Chaldean/Syrian Catholic whose family lived in Azakh and I am especially grateful for the opportunity to paint this image and to share the story of the Christians of Azakh.

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