



Aurora Mardiganian

Aurora Mardiganian was born Arshaluys Martikian in 1901. She was the third of eight children born to a prosperous farmer and silk manufacturer and his wife in Ottoman Turkey.

Arshaluys was a promising student and budding violinist when the Armenian Genocide began in 1915.

In April 1915 the Ottoman (Turkish) government began its systematic destruction of the Armenian population. The persecutions continued with varying intensity until 1923 when the Ottoman Empire was replaced by the Republic of Turkey. An estimated 1.5 million, mostly Armenians, perished in the Genocide. Hundreds of thousands had to flee their homes.

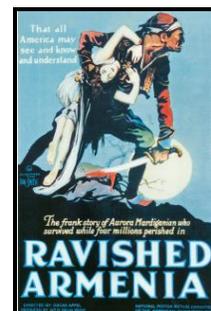
In 1915 the army entered Arshaluys' home town. Her father and a brother were killed in the massacre. Aurora was able to escape and joined the deportation of Armenian women to Syria.

Arshaluys was sold for the equivalent of 85 U.S. cents to a tribal leader. She escaped but was later recaptured by slave traders. She escaped again. After an 18-month trek over the Dersim Mountains where she hid in caves and lived off roots, she arrived barefoot and starving in Russian-occupied Erzerum, where she was taken in by American missionaries.

Arshaluys eventually found her way to New York. She was adopted by an official of the American Committee of Armenian and Syrian Relief. She attracted considerable attention and so changed her name to Aurora to protect her family members who were still alive.

Arshaluys became actively involved in fundraising for the relief of Armenian refugees. A book, titled "Ravished Armenia: The Story of Aurora Mardiganian — The Christian Girl Who Lived Through the Great Massacres" sold over 300,000 copies.

Public interest in Aurora attracted Hollywood, and her memoir was turned into a film script. The resulting 85-minute movie was a silent film with sub-titles. Aurora played herself, the lead character.



The film, "Auction of Souls", was probably the first major Hollywood film to portray genocide. It challenged conventional norms by including themes of violence, rape, nudity and mass crucifixion. The U.S. film premieres took place in Los Angeles and New York in 1919. Leading American personalities and benefactors were present.

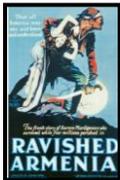
Aurora continued her work as the face of Armenia with endless fundraising appearances. Through her efforts \$20 million was raised. She finally collapsed under pressure. In 1920 she fainted following a presentation in Buffalo, New York and never appeared in public again.

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