

**Pre-Genocide photos of Armenians before the Genocide: -  
Armenians picnicking in Diyarbekir **Տիգրանապօլիս**,  
1910** (Source PROJECT SAVE, Armenian Photograph Archives, Watertown,  
MA, courtesy of John Kazanjian. Diyarbakır, c. 1900.



**"Life Before Loss: Armenians of Diyarbekir** (Dikranagerd **Տիգրանապօլիս**)":  
At first glance, the photo is an ordinary scene. Men in suits and fezzes, women  
in long dresses and lace collars, children gathered on blankets in the grass. They  
are picnicking outside modern day Diyarbakır.



**1) A city with deep Armenian roots:** Diyarbekir was one of the ancient centers of Armenian life in Western Armenia. Its walled city held Armenian churches, schools, guilds, and neighborhoods for centuries. At the turn of the 20th century, Armenians made up a large part of the city's Christian population, alongside Syriac Orthodox Assyrians. They were merchants, artisans, doctors, and farmers. They published newspapers, staged plays, and took photos of family picnics.

**2) Living between massacres:**

The calm in this photo is deceptive. Just 15 years earlier, in 1895, an estimated 25,000 Armenians and Assyrians were massacred in Diyarbekir Vilayet during the Hamidian Massacres. Churches were burned. Entire villages were wiped out. The city itself saw house-to-house killings. Yet the community was rebuilt. They reopened schools. They replanted vineyards. They went back to picnics. That resilience is what this 1910 photo captures — a people insisting on normal life between waves of violence.

**3) The erasure of 1915:**

Five years after this photo was taken, Diyarbekir became one of the bloodiest sites of the Armenian Genocide. Governor Reşit Bey boasted that he had “solved the Armenian question” in his province. More than 150,000 Armenians from the city and vilayet were deported in 1915. Caravans were marched south toward the Syrian Desert. Men were shot outside the city walls at Mardin Gate. Women and children died on the death marches to Der Zor. The churches photographed by missionaries in 1913 were emptied, seized and "repurposed". Of the Armenians picnicking in 1910, we don't know how many survived 1915. Most did not. The names behind the smiles were erased along with the community.



#### 4) Why do these photos matter:

Genocide doesn't just kill people. It tries to erase that they ever lived normally. Propaganda reduces victims to numbers, corpses, or “rebels.” Photos like this fight back. They show Armenians as they were: families on a Sunday, not yet knowing they were living in the “before.”

PROJECT SAVE and archives like it preserve these moments. Each photo is evidence — not only of death, but of life. Of a city where Armenians picnicked, worked, married, and believed they had a future.

Diyarbekir's walls still stand. The Armenian churches are mostly gone. But the faces in this 1910 photo remain, asking us to remember them not just in 1915, but in 1910 — alive, ordinary, and at home.

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