

Stanley E. Kerr Archive  
**Dr. Stanley Elphinstone Kerr: A Brief Biography\***  
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Stanley Elphinstone Kerr was born on March 30, 1894, and was raised in Hopewell, New Jersey, where his father, James R. Kerr, was pastor of the local Presbyterian Church.

In spite of their strict Protestant household, Stanley and his siblings were adventurous and independent. With his brother Stuart, Stanley shared an innate interest in science, and both boys went on to study chemistry. With his sister Marion, Stanley shared a strong sense of the importance of helping others, a quality that would eventually lead brother and sister to travel to the Near East to offer assistance to the Armenian community. As a young man, Stanley's scientific interest developed academically, and he studied biochemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, where he received an undergraduate degree in 1919.

During the 1915 Armenian Genocide and the years thereafter, American humanitarianism and relief work came to the rescue of thousands of Armenians. The relief effort was administered through Near East Relief (NER). Among the numerous volunteers who went overseas from America was Stanley Kerr, who at the time was a junior officer in the United States Army Sanitary Corps. After first having served in Aleppo in a wide array of positions, such as clinical biochemist and photographer, in the autumn of 1919 Stanley transferred to Marash, in central Anatolia, where he headed the American relief operations, once the British army had turned over military control to the French and then the French forces precipitously withdrew. Considering the fact that many Turks regarded the Americans as allies of the French and collaborators with the Armenians, it was at enormous risk that Stanley and his brave colleagues stayed at their posts to aid the thousands of Armenians deserted by the French. Stanley could not escape from the fear and uncertainties arising from this hostage-like experience until he departed for Beirut with the last group of Armenian orphans in 1922.

Stanley met his future wife, Elsa Reckman, during this formative time. With a similar world outlook, as well her own adventurous spirit, Elsa had travelled to Marash to teach Mathematics at the Marash Girls College. Following their marriage in Beirut in 1921, Stanley and Elsa took responsibility for a Near East Relief orphanage for Armenian children at Nahr Ibrahim, Lebanon. The orphanage was abandoned in 1923 due to outbreaks of malaria, which cost Elsa and Stanley the life of an unborn child.

In 1925, Stanley earned a Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania and subsequently returned to the Middle East as chairman of the Department of Biochemistry at the American University of Beirut. He and Elsa, who also served on the faculty as Dean of Women students, raised their four children on the AUB campus. In 1965, following 40 years of faculty service, he retired with the rank of Distinguished Professor. Also, in recognition of his service, the Republic of Lebanon conferred upon him its Order of Merit and its Order of Cedars (Chevalier rank). He and Elsa retired to Princeton, New

Jersey, where Stanley died on December 14, 1976.

While Stanley was celebrated for many of his scientific achievements, including seminal research on the biochemistry of energy metabolism and the brain, many would argue that his most outstanding work remains a memoir documenting his experiences in Marash. *The Lions of Marash: Personal Experiences with American Near East Relief, 1919-1922* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973) is an eye-witness account of the dreadful events which resulted in the annihilation of the Armenian population of Marash following World War I. As Stanley cites in the Preface, prior to the war, in 1914, some 86,000 Armenians lived in Marash and its neighboring villages. By January 1923, none of them remained.

*The Lions of Marash* is a tragic, adventurous, and intimate narrative. The book reviews in significant detail the forced deportations of 1915, the siege of 1920, and the final desertion of their homes and property by the last trace of the Armenian population in that region. Although Stanley's personal experiences shape the foundation for the narrative, he also makes use of the writings and memoirs of French officers and priests, Turkish military historians and Armenian survivors.

Stanley's book remains, to this day, one of the most insightful, first-hand accounts of the atrocities committed in Marash. As Prof. Richard G. Hovannisian described in his Introduction, the book's essential strength lies in the personal narrative that touches upon the big and little things in the lives of commoners and leaders, its ability to lay bare the entire spectrum of human emotion and portray with shuddering reality man's inhumanity to man.

To make Dr. Stanley E. Kerr's invaluable work accessible to all, the Zoryan Institute has made available on its website almost all the documents given by the Kerr family to its archive. Here you will find a catalogue providing detail on the 158 full-length documents. All that is missing from the online collection is the typed manuscript of *The Lions of Marash*. The documents available online include personal letters from Stanley to friends and family members, essays, articles, short autobiographies, hand-written notes, diary entries, translations and photographs.

The Zoryan Institute would like to thank the Kerr family not only for donating the documents to the Institute many years ago, but also for providing assistance and support to enable us to share these precious documents with the world.

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\*Note: The information in this brief biography is based on Richard G. Hovannisian's Introduction in *The Lions of Marash* and unpublished information provided by the Kerr Family.

This collection has been curated by Dr. Bedross Der Matossian.