

Ottoman Bystanders

Report for Forum för levande historia

December 2007

by David Gaunt

In the evening of August 21, 1915 Joseph Naayem a priest in the city of Urfa (now renamed Sanliurfa) took off his clerical robes and disguised himself as a Bedouin tribesman and prepared his escape from the planned massacre of Christians. An Arab Muslim friend, Sallal had promised to guide him. After passing several soldiers and officials, they found their horses and galloped away. On their way south they encountered one of Sallal's many brothers, the despotic chief of the tribe, who was on his way to plunder abandoned houses. As they passed words were exchanged and the chief challenged them: "I quite understand! You are busy saving another Christian." Which was true, as Sallal had indeed helped many others to escape from Urfa.

Soon after arrival in Sallal's village several Turks arrived to investigate the newcomer. Fearing that it might be discovered that Nayeem was a Christian he was taken to hide outside the village until they were gone. When he was able to return he "found everyone in a state of alarm and terror, declaring that Sallal had jeopardized their safety" and they had to ride away.¹ Sallah was not the only example of an Arab who protected Christians during the Ottoman genocide. In 2005 the chiefs of twelve Syrian Arab tribes whose forefathers had rescued Armenians were honored at a ceremony in Armenia on the 90th anniversary of the genocide. Despite a number of heroic efforts to protect the persecuted Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks most people remained passive bystanders. Because of the nature of the genocide in the Ottoman Empire there were a great number of ordinary people who knew what was going on. Large caravans of destitute women and children wandered hundreds of miles along roads that passed through the middle of towns and villages. Males were executed at places near to their hometowns. Corpses and pieces of bodies were strewn over the countryside or were floating in lakes and rivers. Survivors huddled in tent camps or at railway stations. It was impossible not to see or understand what was going on and many foreign observers reported about it while it was still in progress. These observers could draw two contradictory conclusions: the first, a minority of observers believed that the Christians were being justly punished for treacherous collaboration with the enemy, or, second

¹ Joseph Naayem, *Shall this Nation Die?* (New York: Chaldean Rescue 1920).

the great majority of observers, believed that the Christians were unnecessarily being annihilated to radically erase Turkey's most inflamed internal political problem, that of minority rights.

This study will take up some of the aspects of bystander-ism that are known from the Jewish holocaust, but have yet to be examined for the genocide committed in the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

Short background to the Ottoman genocide

After World War I entire regions of Turkish Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia had been "ethnically cleansed" of a large Christian population, whose ancestors had lived in there since antiquity. Several nationalities made up the disappeared: the Armenians who spoke an Indo-European language, and the Assyrians, who spoke a Semitic language. The Armenians and Assyrians had adopted Christianity in its earliest phase and long before the Roman Empire became Christian in the Fourth Century. They developed their own church rites and stubbornly refused to integrate with the Roman Orthodoxy and became isolated and sometimes persecuted. Thus the linguistic differences from their neighbors became reinforced by religious differences, first to the Greek Orthodoxy of the Byzantine Empire and then to its successor state, the Sunni Islam of the Ottoman Empire. After the war was over the Greek population along the Black Sea Coast was also violently forced out of its homelands and many people died during the process.

Islamic tradition treated the Armenian and Assyrian Christians as "people of the book" who were to be protected as *dhimmi* as long as they behaved with deference to Muslims and paid a special tax known as *jizye*. Among the various rules the non-Muslims were forbidden to hold public office, to bear arms, to hold ostentatious religious ceremonies, to build new houses of worship, and they were at times forced to wear clothes of a certain color. At times these rules were strictly imposed, at other times enforcement was loose, and there were many exceptions. In its golden age (ca 1450-1800) the Ottoman Empire was a pluralistic theocratic state ruled by a sultan who as caliph was also recognized as the highest Muslim religious leader. The non-Muslims were expected to be represented by their highest religious leaders who would collect taxes from their communities, and supervise the schools, charities, legal courts and so on for the members. For a long time there were only three recognized self-governing non-Muslim communities, termed

millet (meaning nation in modern Turkish).² These were the Jewish, the Greek Orthodox, and the Armenian millets. Because of a degree of similarity it was assumed that the Armenian millet would also include the Assyrians, who had two indigenous churches - the Church of the East known in European church history as the “Nestorians” and the Syrian Orthodox Church, known in church history as the “Jacobites”. It is not very clear whether this religiously centered millet model was useful for the non-Muslim communities but it did result in the preservation of identities based solely on religious belonging (rather than secular ethnic or cultural identity) and prolonged the hold of church organizations into modern times. The advantage for the Ottoman state was that it served as an effective system for tax collection and the positions of highest religious leader could be sold to the highest bidder.

However, by the late 18th century, the Ottoman pluralistic model was no longer a winning concept. State finances were abysmal and kept worsening, the army’s elite military units were often in revolt, in peripheral areas local brigands usurped control creating a climate of everyday violence. Wars with foreign countries resulted in loss of territory, particularly in the European provinces, but even in North Africa and the southern Caucasus region. In the first half of the 19th century, attempting to cope with the worsening balance of power the Ottoman state tried to modernize, first its military organization and technology, and then its political organization and constitution. The direction of these reforms followed European models, particularly that of revolutionary and Napoleonic France with its concept of the citizen army and a state in which religion was considered a private matter. Taken as a whole a series reforms, stretched over a long period of time (known as the *Tanzimat* period) aimed at creating a new balance of power between the Muslims and non-Muslims, as it made no political sense to exclude non-Muslims from military service in a time when all other armies were growing ever larger. In order to gain the full loyalty of the non-Muslims, they had to be granted the same status as the dominant Muslims, and the age-old rules of deferent behavior, in-grown forms of discrimination, and the special taxes were removed. The direction of the reform also pointed towards secularization since the political life would no longer be the monopoly of the religious hierarchies. Ideally a form of Ottoman “citizenship” would evolve in which subjects of all ethnic and religious background would be loyal to the state that granted them equality. The reform movement culminated in the adoption in 1876 of a new constitution with a new form of political

² Braude, Benjamin and Bernard Lewis, eds. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society*. (New York. Holmes and Meier 1982). Bat Ye’or, *The Dhimmi. Jews and Christians under Islam* (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 1985).

representation, a National Assembly, which met for the first time in 1878 with representatives from all major religious groups.

Modernization proceeded slowly and the declarations of equality had to be repeatedly re-issued. The Tanzimat reforms were stopped almost completely by a backlash that opened for a reactionary period during the long reign of sultan Abdul-Hamid II (he reigned 1876-1909). He suspended the new constitution, after two sessions the National Assembly was not recalled until the Young Turk revolution of 1908. The basic Ottoman dilemma was that despite the reforms, it could not keep up with the rate of modernization of its traditional enemies and the other great powers. The great powers increasingly intervened and seized parts of the imperial territory. On all sides provinces were lost: a small Greek state formed after a war of independence 1821-1832 and it aspired to expand to cover all ethnic Greeks, the Serbs revolted 1804-1812 resulting in autonomous status in 1817 and complete independence in 1878; Bosnia had become a protectorate of Austria-Hungary in 1878 and was annexed in 1908; Britain took control over Cyprus in 1878 and in 1882 it assumed de facto control over Egypt; the northern part of Bulgaria became an independent principality in 1878 and all of Bulgaria became an independent kingdom in 1908. In the southern Caucasus Russia gained several provinces from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and they included many Armenians, particularly the provinces of Kars and Ardahan (Turkey would regain these provinces after World War I). Territorial loss resulted in waves of Muslim refugees pouring over the borders. Many Ottoman statesmen and political personalities linked these movements for independence to the new status and demands that were coming from the Christians and which were supported by foreign governments. It became increasingly possible to see the demands of the non-Muslim populations for greater political participation as part of a general anti-Ottoman campaign orchestrated by the great powers and as a first step in a process that would lead to full break-away. Part of the backlash also called for a return to Islamic values, arguing that the reforms had weakened rather than strengthen the state, and that all citizens, regardless of religion, should be subject to *sharia* law. Abdul-Hamid, influenced by the loss of territory and by the resurgence of Islamic politics, suspended the constitution indefinitely and began to rule as an autocrat, and sought popular support through manipulating Islamic sentiments and the feelings for revenge for the territorial losses.

The Abdul-Hamid period of reaction encouraged the rise of a political surge known as Pan-Islamism which used religion as the primary tie of the state to the people, and this placed the non-Muslims in jeopardy, and it de-legitimized the Tanzimat spirit of religious equality. Not all

of the reforms were rescinded, but much discrimination survived. The Christians and Jews could serve in the army, but were kept out of high rank and positions in which they were in direct command over Muslim soldiers. The first time Christians fought in frontline units was during the Balkan wars of 1912-1913. Christians and Jews could serve within the state functions such as finance, diplomacy or in the civil administration, but were placed in positions in which they actually would rule over non-Muslims such as state-appointed provincial, district or town governors. Thus there was some opportunity for non-Muslim individuals to rise to high position within certain limited sectors, particularly trade. The Ottoman infrastructure expanded in a technological sense, particularly in the form of transport with steamboat services and an embryonic railway system, concentrated to begin with in the western parts of the Empire. For military technology the sultan found a new favorite partner in the recently united German Empire (1871), which supplied arms, munitions and instructors.

Since it soon became clear that Pan-Islamism and reaction did not stave the Ottoman decline, as even the Muslim Albanians, Arabs and Kurds were breaking away. The sultan's autocratic style clashed with serious political opposition. Two movements are especially relevant for this study: the Young Turk and the Armenian. Both grew up as secret revolutionary movements and were sometimes even personal friends, but ended as bitter enemies. The Young Turk movement began in the late 1880s among nationalistic young officers, military doctors, and civil administrators who were outraged by the inability of the state to modernize on full scale.³ Many of these personalities had experience of education or political exile in European countries. Their immediate political demands were relatively progressive, foremost to reinstate the constitution, permit political parties, elections to the National Assembly. In this they had support of many minority politicians. The Young Turk movement spawned several political groupings, the most successful being a small semi-secret clique that called itself the Committee for Union and Progress (here shortened CUP), whose full composition and ruling group was not known. In their rejection of Pan-Islamism as a binding force of the empire, they oriented on an ideology of Pan-Turkism focused on uniting all peoples who spoke Turkish languages.

An Armenian political movement grew out of disappointment over the failure to attain full citizenship to non-Muslims and the failure of the government to protect them from widespread discrimination and persecution. They strove not for independence, but rather for some form of

³ The Young Turk movement was composed of many political groupings. Some were liberal, some were aristocratic, some were right-wing nationalistic. For an overview see Erik J. Zürcher, *A Modern History of Turkey* (London ...).

autonomy – for instance regional in places where Armenians made up a large proportion of the population along the model adopted for religiously diverse Lebanon. Because there was a significant Armenian population living inside the Russian Empire the influence of Russian anti-Tsarist political developments grew strong and the main Armenian political groups became the social-democratic *Hunchak* party formed 1887 and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Dashnaktsutiun* usually shortened to Dashnak) formed in 1890, there was also a liberal party, the *Armenakan* started in 1885, and which included a revolutionary faction. Gradually the Dashnaks emerged as the most influential of the many parties.

From the start both the Young Turks and the Armenian parties adhered to revolutionary praxis and advocated political violence. The Committee for Union and Progress staged a military *coup d'état* in 1908 that reinstated the constitution, in 1909 it forced Sultan Abdul-Hamid to abdicate after a failed counter-coup, and in 1913 it staged a bloody coup killing members of the liberal cabinet in order to take full control. During the war the government was to all intents and purposes a military dictatorship ruling by emergency laws. After 1908, the Dashnaks gave up the revolutionary strategy in order to work through parliamentary reform inside the existing Ottoman state. In return for this support the CUP agreed to work for solving the Dashnak's main issue – land reform for the Armenian peasants, particularly those who had been forced off their lands. However, a few independent guerilla groups rejected parliamentary reform and continued to fight for liberation. In 1911 the CUP had shifted from a multiethnic stance to clear “Turkification” position thus reducing the prospects of internal reforms to alleviate the condition of the non-Muslims. This change resulted in a formal breach between it and the Dashnaks in 1912, although informal contacts were kept up. This break was caused by the realization that the CUP would not fulfill its promise of land reform in eastern Anatolia. In disappointment the Armenians appealed to the great-powers who came up with their own scheme for implementing reform. By the start of World War I the Young Turk movement had withered down to a military dictatorship run by three personalities Enver, the Minister of War, Talaat, the Minister of Interior, and Jemal, the Ministry of Navy and governor of Syria. It is the first two who are primarily responsible for instigating the genocide, while Jemal appears to have opposed it.

The Armenian revolutionary movement was much weaker than the Young Turk movement. But it did have some success in shaking international opinion through sensational acts, which often was the only purpose. Much of Armenian politics focused on attracting the attention of foreign powers in order to pressure the Ottomans to implement already promised reforms. The most

famous of these actions was the seizure of the Ottoman Bank building in Constantinople in 1896 and there was a failed attempt to assassinate the sultan in 1904. The Armenian parties reacted to the sharp deterioration of the Armenian situation during the 1890s uniquely symbolized by the widespread massacres of Armenians in towns and villages during the fall of 1895 and throughout 1896.⁴ Many local officials such as mayors were named as the instigators and the police did not interfere. In a sense this was an attempted genocide that was stopped short of its goal by great international pressure. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians and an untold number of Assyrians were killed,⁵ many shops and houses had been burned and plundered and many became refugees. One result of the international engagement was the establishment of many orphanages for the Armenian children set up by foreign missionaries. After this Abdul-Hamid was often caricatured as the “Red Sultan” because of the bloodshed for which he was widely held responsible, and there were many books and articles written to publicize the calamitous plight of the Christian minority. Besides the massacres, the everyday situation of Armenians and Assyrians deteriorated as their lands could be seized with impunity, crimes against them were seldom prosecuted, the irregular Cossack-like Hamidiye cavalry had free reign. In some places Armenian partisan groups established. In Sassun region there was a series of clashes with Turkish troops starting in 1894 but which the Armenians heroically lost. In towns like Erzurum in 1895 and Van in 1896 armed Armenians were somewhat able to limit the extent of the massacres, by organizing a self-defense, but still hundreds had been killed. In the mountains the guerilla bands although greatly outnumbered fought on. Armenians celebrate a battle in which 250 guerilla fighters at Khanasor in July 1897 destroyed a Kurdish tribe that had previously mass murdered Armenians. A vicious pattern emerged that the Ottoman officials would retaliate against the partisans, whom they could not always find, by the collective punishment, killing and destruction of entire villages, of a proportionally very much greater number of completely innocent Armenians. In this time of incessant violence the Christians made stockpiles of weapons the extent and quality of which cannot be not known, but probably was enough to arm the few cells throughout the country. Such a stockpile was discovered in the city of Van in 1907, and in 1915 a few rusty stockpiles were dug up and used as evidence for preparations for rebellion.

⁴ There are a great number of works on these massacres. Johannes Lepsius, *Armenien und Europa. Eine Anklageschrift wider die christlichen Grossmächte und ein Aufruf an das christliche Deutschland* (Berlin: Faber 1896); Bresnitz von Sydacoff, *Die Christenverfolgungen in der Türkei unter dem Sultan Abdul Hamid* (Berlin: Luckhardt 1896). For Swedish accounts see John Larsson, *Förföljelserna och blodbadet i Armenien* (Helsingborg 1897); Per Pehrsson, *Armenierna och deras nöd* (Uppsala 1896).

⁵ Estimates of the number of victims vary from a low of 80,00 to a high of 300,000.

Since the turn of the century and during and after the revolution of July 1908 the Armenian revolutionaries and the Committee of Union and progress acted in close harmony to remove the sultan, change the way of government and establish a representative legislature. As already mentioned this cooperation continued until the breach of 1912. The Young Turk revolution began with the reinstatement of the constitution. Suddenly political parties became legitimate, political prisoners and revolutionaries were given amnesty. The Armenian revolutionaries came out of hiding and gave up the idea of revolution in order to participate in forming a new system of government. When a new National Assembly gathered there were several Armenian members, some actually belonged to the CUP, some to the Dashnaks and some were independent members. This could have ushered in a completely new era in which issues were settled through parliamentary debate.

But the initial enthusiasm gradually waned and disappeared in the years just before the outbreak of the world war. The first sign of trouble came when the sultan was not deposed, but could keep his throne. He attempted a counterrevolution in April 1909 in which massive massacres of many thousands of Armenians and hundreds of Assyrians took place in Adana in the rich and economically advanced province of Cilicia on the Mediterranean Sea. An estimated 20,000 persons died. At first all blame was put on sultan Abdul-Hamid, who finally was banished and replaced with the docile Reshid V, but later it became obvious that even some local Young Turks had participated. An Armenian National Assemblyman, Hagop Babakian, who was part of an investigating commission uncovered several features that made this massacre different, first the victims included women and children not just able-bodied males, the victims included not only Armenians, but also Assyrian Christians. Making the matter even more serious, Babakian mysteriously and suspiciously died two days before his report was to be presented to the Assembly.

A further turn that worsened the Armenian situation came during the Balkan Wars, which started in October 1912. Montenegro, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia combined to push the Ottomans out of their remaining possessions in Europe. They succeeded so greatly that their armies were almost in Constantinople when an armistice went into effect. When they perceived that the government was on the verge of signing a treaty giving up Adrianople (Edirne), the CUP staged another bloody coup. Enver took over as field general and retook Adrianople, forever gaining hero status. However, despite this final slight success the Ottomans were pushed out of their remaining European possessions except the province of Thrace. Macedonia was split between

Greece and Serbia, and Albania became the first predominantly Muslim country to gain its independence, proving definitively that Pan-Islamism was a dead letter. Great waves of Balkan Muslim refugees migrated towards Constantinople and most of them had no money and wound up in shantytowns living a life in destitution.

The leading figures in the new governing clique were Minister of Internal Affairs Talaat, formerly an official in the telegraph office in Salonica, and Enver, who assumed the post of Minister of War in early 1914, had previously been military attaché in Berlin and who was very pro-German oriented. Both had radical plans to change the Ottoman Empire and these plans were quite different from those of the early Young Turk movement. Talaat was enamored with social engineering and had plans drawn up to forcibly move minorities from regions where they made a compact settlement and distribute them throughout the empire, so that they would have difficulty in maintaining a separate culture and assimilate into a Turkish speaking Islamic world. Thus Kurds, Arabs and Armenians would be sent westwards from eastern provinces, refugees from Bosnia, Bulgaria and Macedonia would be spread eastwards, Chechens and Circassians would be settled here and there. These plans began to be realized in early 1914, beginning with the forced removal of Greeks living in strategically important coastal areas in western Anatolia. Immediately before the world war began Assyrians living along the Iranian border were ordered deported to the central provinces of Ankara and Konya.⁶ Talaat's dream was to make a less cosmopolitan, more homogeneous "Turkish" citizenship out of the very disparate Empire. His concentration was on only one part of the empire, Anatolia, which he and many like-minded considered the heartland of the Turkish nation. In comparison, Enver's ambitions were more expansive as he adhered to the ideals of Pan-Turkism, the creation of a sprawling empire encompassing all Turkish speaking peoples extending into the Caucasus, Russia and Central Asia. For this reason many of his war plans came to involve eastern campaigns on the Caucasus front where the main Armenian and Assyrian settlements were situated.⁷

⁶ Dündar, Fuat. *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları Iskan Politikası (1913-18)*. [CUP Muslim Settlement Policy 1913-1918] (Istanbul: İletisim Yayınları 2001); Nesim Şeker, "Demographic Engineering in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Armenians," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43:3 (2007) 461-474; David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors. Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, N. J.: Gorgias Press 2006).

⁷ Allen, W. E. D. and Paul Muratoff. *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828-1921*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1953); Erickson, Edward J. *Ordered to Die. A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press 2001); Genelkurmay Başkanlığı. *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi Kafkas Cephesi 3 ncü Ordu Harekâtı*. [The First World War, Turkish War on the Caucasus Front, Third Army Operations] (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basım Evi 1993) vol. 2:1.

Although basically different both Talaat's and Enver's plans came into direct confrontation with the massive Armenian settlement eastern Anatolia. Since the treaty of Berlin in 1878 the Ottoman government was obliged to implement some sort of participation of the Armenians in six provinces designated "the Armenian provinces". These were Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Erzurum, Harput, Sivas, and Van making up the easternmost part of Anatolia up to the borders with Russia, Iran and the Arab provinces. The motivation for selecting just these provinces was the high proportion of Armenians in the population, even though reliable statistics were impossible to obtain. Actually Armenians were very populous outside the designated area in more westerly provinces like Cilicia and Trabzon, and sizeable communities lived in every important town and city. The provisos of the Berlin treaty had never been put into effect even though the great powers were supposed to have rights to inspect the progress. Early in 1914 the Ottomans were forced to bow to international pressure to finally ensure Armenian participation and two inspectors were appointed (one Dutchman and one Norwegian) in order to carry through administrative reform in the Armenian provinces. Great hopes were attached to these inspectors. However, they had just arrived when the world war broke out in Europe and the Ottoman government who was to pay their salaries immediately relieved them from their tasks.

Genocide in the Shadow of World War I

Until late October 1914 the Ottoman Empire remained outside the conflict, but it had declared a general mobilization on August 2. A secret protocol was signed to enter the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary, and after a series of provocations Tsarist Russia declared war in early November and its allies France and Britain followed suit. Mobilization concerned all males within certain age groups and both Muslims and non-Muslims were called up and placed in religiously homogeneous companies. To begin with many of the non-Muslim units were armed and given a combat role, but successively nearly all of them were turned into unarmed labor battalions, which when they were considered expendable were annihilated. It is hard to pinpoint exactly when an aggressive anti-Armenian policy was introduced. Ottoman Christian combat troops participated in the first major campaign in the southern Caucasus, normally called the Sarikamish operation since it aimed at a Russian railway junction with that name. This campaign began in December of 1914 and ended with a crushing Russian victory in early January 1915. Enver was even saved by an Armenian soldier, and he expressed thanks to the Armenian patriarch for the loyalty of his community. This testimonial was then printed in Turkish and

Armenian newspapers. However, by late February there are orders to remove Armenian officers from positions of importance and soon afterwards Armenian soldiers were being executed. At the same time orders are given to deport Armenian civilians from the immediate front area. And in late May Talaat began sending a series of orders deporting all Armenians from Anatolian provinces, starting with the easternmost provinces, south to the sparsely inhabited regions of the Arabian region. The reason given for the deportation was that the Armenians were collaborating with the enemy and had rebelled in one or two places.

Anti-Christian activities went through several stages leading up to the May deportation orders and culminating in the systematic massacres during the summer. Already from the call for general mobilization there was a feeling that Christians would be targeted and there was much hate-speech. From the start of the war there were a limited number of massacres in rural villages and hamlets along the border, intending to clean the areas of potential collaborators. Christian recruits were placed in labor battalions constructing roads, carrying supplies, digging trenches. There was a very high attrition rate from these units and many deserted. The search for deserters resulted in raids on villages and residential sectors in the cities and the trial and execution of those discovered. These unlucky persons were hanged in public as a warning. After the New Year 1915 a more intensive persecution began in the aftermath of the catastrophe at Sarikamish where virtually the entire Ottoman Third Army was lost. As already mentioned the Christian officers were removed from command positions, mass executions of Armenian soldiers took place at the discretion of their generals. An order for this named “Increased Security Precautions” was sent from the war ministry on February 25 requesting them to look for signs of dissidence and collaboration with the enemy.⁸ By March large-scale massacres of Christians occurred in Ottoman occupied areas in Iran and even on the Ottoman side of the border. In April in many towns Armenian residential sectors and churches were surrounded by troops ordered to search for deserters, hidden weapon depots and documents that would show contacts with the enemy. Torture was used routinely to gain confessions and accusations.

In most places these provocations did not result in fighting and the Christian leadership adopted a policy of appeasement and co-operation in order to avoid even worse treatment. But in Van a real battle did take place starting on April 20, 1915. The Armenian sector had been surrounded by Ottoman troops and canons bombarded the area from higher ground. Here the Armenians did

⁸ Ericson, *Ordered to Die*, 98.

have access to some weapons and made effective use of them and succeeded in preventing a massacre until the arrival four weeks later of a Russian force sent to relieve the Christians of Van. This force included a volunteer brigade of Armenians headed by Antranik Ozanian, who was a well-known guerilla leader, but who had lived in exile since 1904. This single event convinced the Ottoman leadership that a long-expected general Armenian rebellion aiming to support the Russians, had started. On April 24, hundreds of Armenian notables in Constantinople were arrested and transported to the interior and most of them were killed during their internment. They included National Assembly delegates (including those who were friends with the CUP politicians), lawyers, journalists, teachers, physicians and other professionals. No one knew what was the accusation.

From Massacres to Genocide

In April and May in other towns and cities throughout the country Armenian and Assyrian notables were arrested in a similar manner, on suspicion of contact with the enemy, and incarcerated in the local prisons or in caravan stations that had been converted into prisons. These persons included not only intellectuals, who were few in the provinces, but also high clergymen and the wealthy tradesmen. The procedure was to hold these people in prison for a number of days using torture to gain confessions of intended rebellion. During this time the families were pressed to give bribes to officials in order to get their husbands, sons and brothers free, which seldom happened although large bribes had been paid. After a period of a few days the prisoners were bound together and marched out of the town under pretense that they were being sent to another location. Their escort killed these persons at convenient places along the way, but often a false telegram was sent to their families saying that they had arrived safe and sound. Depending on the size of the town there could be several waves of arrests followed by executions. On May 27, 1915 Talaat sent out the first order for deporting the Armenians, but this came after massacres and mass arrests had already been going on for several weeks.⁹

Thereafter mass deportation of the families, mostly women and children, was organized. This could take many forms usually by forming columns of several hundred persons, sometimes many

⁹ BOA. DH. SFR 53/129 this decree was entitled “Regulation for resettlement of Armenians relocated to other places because of war conditions and emergency political requirements” and concerned the provinces of Bitlis, Erzurum, and Van. BOA. DH. SFR 54787 was a similar decree issued on June 21, 1915 for the provinces of Diyarbakir, Trebizond, Harput and Sivas. Even in this latter case the mass arrests and massacres had begun much earlier.

thousand. Sometimes they were told that they would be reunited with their husbands and fathers. Most traveled on foot taking only what they could carry, but there are reports that sometimes it was possible to buy a donkey, sometimes crude wagons were in use. Eastern Anatolia had no railway at that time, so only persons deported from the westernmost provinces were sent on trains, in open cattle-wagons. As the Baghdad railway was unfinished in several places, even those deportees who could take a train were forced to go by foot through the mountains.

The arrests and deportations followed a geographic pattern. The easternmost provinces were ordered cleansed first, during May to mid-July 1915. Here deportations and massacres were intertwined. In some places columns of families to be deported were organized in the town center, but as soon as the column came outside the town the able-bodied males were taken away and shot, leaving only women and children. These were then marched south over mountain passes on their way to Syria or Iraq. Along the way they were open to attack from local people, nomadic tribes and bandits. Survivors tell of daily recurring plundering, systematic rape followed by murder, kidnapping of children, selling deportees to the highest bidder, and other horrific events. Columns received little or no food and water, medical care or shelter, the attrition rate was very high. For instance of 1,700 Armenian women and children deported from Siirt in June 1915 only between six and seven hundred arrived in Mosul after a death march of eight days, and this was a relatively short journey. Very few of the first columns survived to arrive in the main concentration camps in Syria, sizeable numbers of deportees streamed into the concentration camps of Deyr Zor only at the end of August and in September, which even at its largest did not exceed 160,000 of the nearly one million deported, the others having succumbed.

The next phase in the deportations- from August to October 1915 encompassed provinces further to the west. In some of these places it was possible to use the railway for part of the journey south, but all had to go by foot in mountainous terrain where the railway was still incomplete. Along the railway, travelers could see thousands of destitute Armenians in the streets and platforms, begging for food. The Armenians in these circumstances had higher chance of actually arriving in Syria, but as usual the arrivals were mostly women and children. Once inside Syria they were placed in a system of concentration camps, usually in the vicinity of Deyr Zor on the Euphrates River or Ras al-Ayn and Shadadde on the Khabur River. The size of these camps varied, as the commanders would order mass extermination in order to prevent epidemics. Even today it is possible to find piles of human bones in this region. Conditions in the camps and settlement areas were deplorable. A German military doctor attached to the general staff found

the primary designated settlement the town of Deyr Zor to be a death camp: “There is no regular organization for the great number of people. Not enough foodstuff (sometimes the bakers have no bread), an inadequate steam mill grinds day and night, the lack of bread and vegetables is manifest. Three hospitals are filled to the brim with over a thousand sick people. One general practitioner, one military doctor, an almost empty pharmacy... the daily mortality amounts to 150-200 individuals (in the words of the general practitioner). Only in this way is it possible to receive the thousands more of new settlers.”¹⁰

There was a short pause in the massacres and deportations from the end of 1915 until the spring of 1916 when they began again. In the latter phase it was more a matter of mopping up the few people who had been allowed to remain behind, stragglers and persons who had been stranded during transit. This involved smaller numbers of persons, but was systematic. The only tract where there were some Armenians in place was in western Anatolia. Otherwise the survivors were concentrated to designated areas in Syria and Iraq, where control was lax. A very few had construction jobs at places along the still partially unfinished Baghdad railway.

Figures for the number of deaths through massacre, executions, armed conflict, rape and murder, hunger and exhaustion, are not easy to calculate. Deaths of Armenians and Assyrians simply because they belonged to these targeted groups began early during the war and continued until armistice in autumn 1918. In some districts killing the targeted Christians continued during the 1920s in order to prevent them from returning to their home villages. The most intensive mass murder took place before August 1915 when the Armenian patriarchy released the news that it had calculated a loss of 835,600 lives up to that time. Later at the end of 1915 it estimated the number of victims at “not less than one million.”¹¹ The family of Talaat preserves a notebook that he had giving the number of Armenians sent away from various provinces (except Van which was in Russian hands). It gives a total of 924,158 deportees and is apparently from the late summer of 1915.¹² There are many reasons to increase this number and add many hundred thousand more for the whole genocidal period:

¹⁰ Report of Oberstabsarzt Dr. Schacht November 11, 1915 included as appendix to Walter Rössler to Bethmann Hollweg November 16, 1915 in Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien*, 195-198.

¹¹ First figure from Armenian prelate in Bulgaria to Boghos Nubar Pasha (president of the Armenian National Delegation) August 25, 1915; the second figure is from Patriarch Zaven to Archimandrate Vegunin December 28, 1915. Cited in Gaunt, *Massacres*, 68-69.

¹² Murat Bardakçı, “Tehir edilen Ermeniler 924 bin 158 kişiydi“ *Hürriyet* April 24, 2005.

1. Ottoman Armenians annihilated during the rest of 1915 and up to the end of the war. Systematic extermination took place in 1916 of Armenians held in concentration camps inside Syria.
2. Armenian victims who were not members of the patriarch's Gregorian Armenian Church – such as the Armenian Catholics and Protestants.
3. Armenians of non-Ottoman origin who were killed during Turkish invasions: residents of Iran (invasions 1915 and 1918) and in the Russian Trans-Caucasian provinces of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (invaded and partially occupied 1919-21). Estimates of the number of Armenian victims in the Turkish invasions of 1920-21 vary between 69,000 and 198,000.¹³
4. Assyrians of all denominations – Nestorian, Syrian Orthodox, Chaldean, Protestants and Catholics and residents of both the Ottoman Empire and Iran. Delegations to the Paris Peace Conference estimated these losses to 250,000 amounting to half of the original population.¹⁴

The Armenians estimated that about two-thirds of their pre-war population had been annihilated. However, in certain provinces the proportion of victims was much higher. In Diyarbakir province a knowledgeable observer who was held there in house-arrest, the Dominican monk and scholar Jacques Rhétoré, calculated that up to late 1916 when he was transported to another province: loss of life was 97% for the Gregorian Armenians and 92% for the Catholic Armenians. For the Assyrians groups the proportions varied: 90% of the Chaldeans, 72% of the Syrian Orthodox, 62% of the Syrian Catholics and 67% of the Protestants. Overall this gave a total of 144,185 persons representing 82% of the combined Armenian and Assyrian population. In addition Rhétoré reckoned that 50,000 Christians in columns on their way south from other provinces died while on transit inside Diyarbakir's borders.¹⁵ Immediately after the war the British sent an intelligence officer to Diyarbakir to assess the situation. He found only 18,959 Christians left in the vast province and of them the main part, 12,981 were “widows and orphans in more or less destitute condition.” Most were captives held against their wills in Muslim households.¹⁶ In 1916 a German nurse working in Aleppo Beatrice Rohner made a statistical investigation of the experience of 720 Armenian orphans in Aleppo about what had happened to their family members. They had come from

¹³ Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act. The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books 2006) 326-327.

¹⁴ *La question Assyro-Chaldéenne devant la conférence de la paix* 16 July 1919.

¹⁵ Rhétoré, Jacques, “*Les Chrétiens aux bêtes* » *Souvenirs de la guerre sainte proclamée par les Turcs contre les chrétiens en 1915*. Étude et présentation du document par Joseph Alichoran (Paris: Cerf 2005), 136.

¹⁶ Noel, Memorandum diary entry for April 23, 1919, cited in Gaunt, *Massacres*, 303.

all over Anatolia and their average age was 9 years old. Of the fathers 329 had died an “unnatural death” of the rest most were in the military, in banishment or in prison. Of the mothers 379 had died “unnatural deaths” during the deportation. The children were asked to name the close relatives who had been deported and state which of them had died during the deportations. A total of 3336 names were given for all of the deported and a total of 2616 had died along the way, giving a death rate 78.5 per cent.¹⁷ The U.S. consul in Aleppo Jesse B. Jackson also tried to calculate the death rate, and he found that about 85 per cent had died.¹⁸

At the end of August several provincial governors, among them those of Diyarbakir, Bitlis and Erzurum, reported that they had deported all of their Armenian residents and that there were no more to be sent away.¹⁹ At this time Talaat informed the German ambassador that “the Armenian question does no longer exist.” The few Armenian notables whom the Germans had intervened to have saved were at that time killed.²⁰

Evidence of the carnage was easily present, as bodies lied exposed along the highways. An Ottoman official of Arab origin was being sent to Diyarbakir and he noted. “half-way on the road we saw a terrible spectacle. The corpses of the killed were lying in great numbers on both sides of the road; here we saw a woman outstretched on the ground her body half veiled by her long hair; there women on their faces, the dried blood blackening their delicate forms; there again, the corpses of men, parched to the semblance of charcoal by the heat of the sun. As we approached Siverek [a minor administrative center], the corpses became more numerous, the bodies of children being in great majority... as we approached Diyarbakir the corpses became more numerous... we had not expected to find corpses of the killed near the walls of Diyarbakir, but we were mistaken, for we journeyed among the bodies until we entered the city gate.”²¹ Another observer, a mercenary in Ottoman service, came to the district capitol of Siirt in mid June and saw terrible evidence of a recently completed slaughter of that town. He saw on a hill beside the highway: “The ghastly slope was crowned by thousands of half-nude and still bleeding corpses, lying in heaps, or interlaced in death’s final embrace... Overcome by the hideous spectacle, and jumping our horses over the

¹⁷ The investigation is an appendix to Walter Rössler to German ambassador in Istanbul September 11, 1916 in Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien*, 297-298.

¹⁸ Jackson to Morgenthau September 29, 1915 in *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide*, 307-313.

¹⁹ Gaunt, *Massacres*, 69.

²⁰ Hohenlohe to Bethmann Hollweg September 4, 1915 in Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien*, 147-148.

²¹ El-Ghusein, *Martyred Armenia* (1917), 19-23.

mountains of cadavers, which obstructed our passage, I entered Siirt with my men. There we found the police and the populace engaged in sacking the homes of the Christians. At the Seraglio I met various sub-Governors of the province, assembled in council under the presidency of the chief of the local gendarmes... who had directed the massacre in person. From their talk I realized at once that the thing had been arranged the day before by Jevdet Bey [the former governor of Van]. Meanwhile I had taken up my lodging in a handsome house belonging to Nestorians, which had been sacked like all the rest. There was nothing left in the way of furniture except a few broken chairs. Walls and floors were stained with blood.”²²

Those people who were deported often had to march through places that were strewn with the corpses and cut off body parts of previous columns. Deportees who could not endure the pace of the march or who were too weak were often slaughtered or left to die. “It must be remembered that all who lingered on the road were put to death. The vicinity through which we were now passing was littered with corpses, fragments of human bodies, leg bones and putrifying skulls, indicative of the passage of other convoys before our own.”²³ This survivor had started her death march from Trebizond on the Black Sea coast, which was one of the last provinces from which Christians were deported.

As soon as the deportees had abandoned their homes, the other residents would plunder the houses. Furniture, rugs anything with value was taken away. Sometimes even windows and doors were plundered. Relatively soon after Muslim refugees from elsewhere were resettled in the abandoned houses.

Those who were not massacred on the first days faced long marches of weeks and months filled with daily harassment. When a large column of deportees starting from Erzurum, Lice and Harput came to the southern city of Mardin, their number had diminished from 50,000 down to 10,000. The priest Ishaq Armalto from high up on the roof of a building on mountainside observed horrible scenes. “What do I see over by the spring of Omar agha? An enormous caravan draws through like a herd of sheep or cows. Up with my binoculars to look! An enormous army of nearly ten thousand people! Most of them are women and

²² de Nogales, Rafael. *Four Years Beneath the Crescent*. (London: Charles Scribner's 1926). He served as artillery officer during the siege of Van and later in his career Nogales became the head of Venezuela's army.

²³ Nayeem, *Shall this Nation Die?* 244-245.

children. There are also some elderly. I see soldiers surround them and kick and beat them. They try to get away. Above their heads are rifle barrels. My ears hear a shot. I see a group that is encircled by soldiers. I see them shout and brutally push them towards the fortress. Oh God! Where are they being taken? To the deep well just like before during the past weeks! They disrobe them, pull out knives and approach them, dive in and throw them down headfirst. And so they return. What an atrocity.” When the survivors come into the city limits Armalto he sees how the townsmen prepare to plunder them. “The wealthy of the town succeed in capturing a large number of boys and girls, and none of the guards react, or rather they encourage them to take captives. I see people return with their catch. Some lead boys tied after their horses, others have gotten girls and have covered their faces so that none of the kidnapper’s friends will see them and begin to quarrel. A woman carries a little sweet boy in her arms, which she wants to adopt because she is childless. Another leads a girl by the hand that she wants to keep her as a servant. A man has filled his pockets with gold and silver and returns laughing. One carries objects he has picked up and chuckles satisfied as he walks... Some talk merrily as they walk back and cannot control their happiness over the plunder they have gotten in such a short time. They don’t consider what they have to be stolen and illegal.”²⁴

One woman told of her experience in an army brothel after her capture. She was Anna Papazian, wife of a photographer in Erzurum, who had been stoned to death in front of her eyes. She was the mother of three children, but her baby was killed at the same time as her husband and she fainted. She was found by a mounted officer and was taken to a village where she was raped. “From that time on Degin Anna (Mrs. Papazian) was passed from one officer to another on the road from Ashkalla to Baiburt until twelve had had her but she kept her children with her during those awful eight months and at last when the news reached the army that the Russians were coming she with many other women and three children who were kept for the same vile purpose were gathered in a room in Ashkalla to be sent on before the army. In the dark of early February [1916] Degin Anna with her children and two other women escaped from the house and barefooted fled across the snow to a village where they begged shelter from some Kurds who put them in a grain cellar, a pit with an opening at the top. The Kurd who had sheltered them was ordered to bring them to Erzurum and from them

²⁴ Ishaq Armalto, *Al-Quosara fi nakabat an-nasara* (Beiruth 1919), Swedish trans 255-258.

they had a few pieces of clothing and were brought to our house not eight days after Erzurum had been occupied and Degin Anna told me the story with tears rolling down her face.”²⁵

The American consul in Harput reported of similar misery and brutality in the refugee camps he visited. These people had been deported from Erzerum and Erzincan. In his view this treatment resulted in de-humanization and would if continued end in total extermination. “A more pitiable sight cannot be imagined. They are almost without exception, ragged, filthy, hungry and sick. That is not surprising, in view of the fact that they have been on the road for nearly two months, with no change of clothing, no chance to wash, no shelter and little to eat. The Government has been giving them scanty rations here. I watched them one time when food was brought. Wild animals could not be worse. They rushed upon the guards who carried the food, and the guards beat them back with clubs, hitting hard enough to kill them sometimes. To watch them, one could hardly believe that these people were human beings. As one walks through the camp, mothers offer their children and beg one to take them. In fact, the Turks have been taking their choice of these children and girls for slaves, or worse. In fact, they have even had their doctors there to examine the more likely girls and thus secure the best ones. There are very few men among them, as most of them have been killed on the road. All tell the same story of having been attacked and robbed by the Kurds. Most of them were attacked over and over again, and a great many of them, especially the men, were killed. Women and children were also killed. Many died, of course, from sickness and exhaustion on the way, and there have been deaths each day that they have been here... Those who have reached here are only a small portion, however, of those who started. By continuing to drive these people on in this way, it will be possible to dispose of all of them in a comparatively short time.”²⁶

Wilhelm Litten, who worked at the German consulate in Aleppo composed a macabre list during a journey through the designated resettlement area for Armenians in Syria. Acting on the orders of the consul, each day he recorded every corpse he saw, noted the exact time, indicated whether it was to the left or right of the road, and made a short description. Here is a selection from his travel from Hamam on February 3, 1916:

²⁵ Statement of Ida S. Stapelton, Erzurum in “*Turkish Atrocities*”, 24-25.

²⁶ U. S. consul Leslie A. Davis to Secretary of State August 10, 1915 in Treatment of Armenians, 290 and US National archives RG 59/867.4016/122.

8:50 left, 1 corpse in deterioration
9:01 left, skeleton with socks
9:40 left, clothed fresh corpse
10:10 left, clothed fresh corpse, face black
10:20 left, clothed fresh corpse, legs eaten, face black
10:26 left, clothed fresh corpse, face covered
10:30 right, clothed fresh corpse, face black
10:57 corpse covered with a cloth
11:48 left, a young woman, very fresh. Blue stockings, black jacket, peaceful expression, face brown
12:05 left, a corpse that was torn apart, one clothed leg, the other somewhat further away gnawed to the bone
12:25 ten fresh graves
12:35 one naked boy²⁷

Because of the great suffering of the Christians during the war the Armenians and Assyrians had been promised their own independent states. In the Armenian case plans advanced very rapidly and US president Woodrow Wilson placed himself behind a map giving the Armenians a large part of the former Ottoman territory stretching as far south as Lake Van. All these plans, however, built on the idea that independent Armenia was to be an American mandate territory. When the US congress decided not to fulfill this commitment the large Armenian state idea could not be implemented. An attempt to build a smaller Armenian state within some of the provinces that had been inside the Russian Empire failed after a short period (1918-1920) and Armenian became a republic within the Soviet Union. Even the Assyrians had been promised independence because of help given to the allies.²⁸ But in this case plans were not as well developed and there was discussion of making a federative Kurdish and Assyrian state. Nothing became of these ideas.

After the war there was an enormous refugee problem, as survivors could not return to the Republic of Turkey. Large and badly supplied refugee camps were established in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria as well as in the Caucasus republics of the Soviet Union. Some of the camps were supported by the American organization Near East Relief. The League of Nations was

²⁷ Wilhelm Litten to consul Rössler, February 6, 1916 in *Der Armenische Frage*, 300-313.

²⁸ Wigram, W. A. *Our smallest Ally*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 1920).

responsible for solving the refugee problem and the famous Norwegian explorer Fridjof Nansen made many trips on the league's behalf to inspect the Armenian camps.²⁹

Because of the evidence of so much slaughter strewn about the landscape and the ubiquitous presence of destitute Armenian refugees, the number of bystanders must have been very great. At the same time the need for help must have been equally great, particularly for the women and children who were sent on death marches.

Historians and Historiography of the Ottoman Genocide

Very much has been written both during the events and afterwards on the subject of the Armenian genocide. The most recent bibliography has 4,450 entries published in Armenian, English, Russian and Turkish, and even it is incomplete as it excludes Assyrians and Greeks.³⁰ The term genocide began to be used in this context in the 1970s but was most accepted in the 1980s, previously and parallel the terms “Armenian holocaust” and “Armenian Atrocities” have been common.

The Ottoman orchestrated genocide of World War I differed from the Nazi orchestrated genocide of World War II in many ways. An important difference was that the Nazis carefully hid the Jewish and Roma genocide so that its actual extent was not discovered until well after the war, but what went on inside the Ottoman Empire occurred more or less in the open. This openness resulted in a declaration by the allied Entente powers – Britain, France and Russia – on May 20, 1915 that it would hold trials against the members of the government who organized, and here they coined a new expression “crimes against humanity and civilization.” This threat, however, had no impact at all on Ottoman policy, which instead intensified its anti-Christian activities. However, the Entente powers began to assemble documentation for the expected post-war trials, and even Germany felt the need to document that it was not involved. Rumor spread throughout the Ottoman Empire that the deportations and mass murders had been ordered by the Germans. Because of the chaos

²⁹ Fridjof Nansen, *Armenia and the Near East* (London: Allen & Unwin 1928)

³⁰ Candan Badem, *Türk-Ermeni Sorunu Bibliyografyası: kitaplar, makaleler, tezler* (Istanbul: Aras 2007); comparison an earlier bibliography Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian Holocaust: A Bibliography Relating to the Deportations, Massacres, and Dispersion of the Armenian People 1915-1923* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Armenian Heritage Press 1978, 2nd edition 1980) shows how greatly scholarship has developed in the last three decades. The Hovannisian bibliography is 43 pages long while Badem's is 427 pages.

after the war and before the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the trials were only partially successful.³¹

There were many witnesses. Particularly important were the many German diplomats, military, missionaries who once they realized the extent of what they termed “general massacres” reacted negatively and built up public opinion to put pressure on their Turkish ally. Besides this there were many citizens of neutral countries who reported on the carnage, particularly important are diplomats and missionaries from the United States and Switzerland. There were also several Scandinavian witnesses – female missionaries and nurses attached to the Women’s Mission Worker Association who were usually working for German charitable organizations. The most important Swede was Alma Johansson from Blekinge who was the head mistress of an orphanage for Armenian children in Mush.³² A very important Dane was Karen Jeppe who was located in Urfa and who at great risk hid Armenians under the floorboards of her kitchen.³³ A Danish missionary, Maria Jacobsen’s diaries from the provincial capital of Harput have been published.³⁴ The Norwegian Bodil Biörn took photographs that are now in the Norwegian national archives and Flora Wedel-Jarlsberg left statements on events in Erzincan to diplomats in Istanbul. Newspapers throughout the world covered the story of the genocide from its very beginning. The New York Times printed 145 stories on the Turkish horrors during 1915 using words like “slaughter,” “atrocities,” “extinction,” “annihilation of a whole people.”³⁵

The British parliament debated the news of the atrocities and in February 1916 commissioned a distinguished member of the House of Lords, Viscount James Bryce a historian and former cabinet minister, to carry out an investigation. To his help he had Arnold Toynbee, who later became a world-famous historian. The two published in 1917 a report that is often simply termed the “Blue Book” as it was a volume in the official parliamentary blue book series, entitled “The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire”. The bulk of the report was 150 eyewitness testimonies on the atrocities. Most of the testimony had been supplied by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions

³¹ James F. Willis, *Prologue to Nuremberg: The Politics and Diplomacy of Punishing War Criminals of the First World War* (London: 1982).

³² Alma Johansson, *Ett folk i landsflykt. Ett år ur armeniernas historia* (Stockholm: Kvinnliga missionsarbetare 1930).

³³ Jakob Künzler, *Dein Volk ist mein Volk. Das Lebensbild einer Heldin seltener Art, der Dänin Karen Jeppe* (Basel 1939).

³⁴ Maria Jacobsen, *Diaries of a Danish Missionary, Harput 1907-1919* (Princeton: Gomidas 2001).

³⁵ Samantha Power, *“A Problem from Hell” America and the Age of Genocide* (N. Y.: Harper 2003), 9.

and the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. Despite the title there were accounts about the Assyrians and nearly one hundred pages dealt with massacres of Assyrians in the Turkish-Iranian border zone. The statements are sorted into chapters based on region or province. They give good coverage for certain regions, but almost none for others. Because most of the observers were still inside Turkey the names and places were often omitted, but recently an edition giving nearly all the names and places has been published.³⁶ Another limitation is that the documents were collected in 1916 and therefore do not deal with events during the rest of the war years. This problem has been slightly ameliorated by the publication of a series of final reports solicited by the Board of Commissioners from the missionaries after they had left Turkey.³⁷ A very important place among the various missionary eyewitnesses is taken by the Swiss Jakob Künzler, who was one of the very few who was continually at his home base throughout the war. Thus he could describe every stage in the build up of the Armenian and Assyrian massacres in the city of Urfa. Here he witnessed in September 1915 a failed attempt by Christians to defend themselves against units of the regular army with heavy artillery commanded by German officers.³⁸

Germany commissioned Johannes Lepsius, the founder of Deutsche Orient-Mission and a well-known friend of the Armenians, to edit a similar volume based on documents in the German foreign office. The aim was to show how German diplomats had pressured the Ottoman government to stop the atrocities and urge the punishment of officials who were responsible. Widespread rumors throughout Turkey maintained that the CUP government had been forced by Germany to implement deportations. This volume includes 444 documents from the ambassadors (successively baron Hans von Wangenheim, prince Hohenlohe-Langenburg, Count Wolff-Metternich), the consuls in provincial capitals, military officers and some private persons. They are printed in chronological order enabling the reader to see the timing of reactions to events.³⁹ Particularly valuable are the reports from

³⁶ James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916. Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Falloden by Viscount Bryce*. Uncensored Edition edited by Ara Sarafian (Princeton, New Jersey: Gomidas Institute 2000); Alma Johansson tells of the missionaries fear of writing about the atrocities as letters were censored, *Ett folk i landsflykt*, 12.

³⁷ James L. Barton compiler, *"Turkish Atrocities" Statements of American Missionaries on the Destruction of Christian Communities in Ottoman Turkey, 1915-1917* (Ann Arbor: Gomidas 1998).

³⁸ Jakob Künzler, *Im Lande des Blutes und der Tränen. Erlebnisse in Mesopotamien während des Weltkrieges (1914-1918)* (Potsdam: Tempelverlag 1921, new edition edited by Hans-Lukas Kieser (Zürich: Chronos 1999).

³⁹ Lepsius, Johannes, *Deutschland und Armenien. Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke*. (Potsdam: Tempelverlag 1919). See also his *Le Rapport Secret du Dr. Johannes Lepsius sur Les Massacres D'Arménie*. (Paris: Payot 1918).

consular agents in Aleppo (Walter Rössler), Erzurum (Max von Scheubner-Richter), Mosul (Walter Holstein) and Trabzon (Dr. Bergfeld) who were very close to events, and who all tried to ameliorate conditions for the deportees, some protested the complete innocence of the victims, and others attempted to calculate the number of victims. It is now known that a number of documents had been manipulated before they were given to Lepsius and an uncensored version is now available online. The alterations were the removal of passages that indicate a high degree of German involvement.⁴⁰ A further 333 German diplomatic documents have been published by the Armenian Academy of Sciences and they basically confirm the tendency in Lepsius volume that the Germans were outraged by the Ottoman policies and tried to stop them.⁴¹

There is also a more recent volume of 330 documents in the U.S. national archives.⁴² These are basically the reports and correspondence of the secretary of state Lansing, the ambassadors to Turkey Henry J. Morgenthau and Abram Elkus, plus the handful of consular agents in some of the major provincial towns, Aleppo, Harput, Samsoun and Trabzon. The files also include testimony given to the diplomats by missionaries and private persons inside Turkey. Important collections from French⁴³ and Austrian⁴⁴ foreign office archives also exist. The Vatican archives contain much material on the fate of Armenian and Assyrian Catholics, but very little of this has yet been published except the correspondence of the Pope on this issue.⁴⁵ Other publications reprint contemporary articles in Russian newspapers and journals.⁴⁶ As yet there is no definitive document publication based on the rich sources in Russian archives, or even from the papers in archives and libraries held in Armenia.

⁴⁰ See the online site www.armenocide.de and Wolfgang Gust, ed., *Revidierte Ausgabe der von Johannes Lepsius unter dem Titel 'Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918' herausgegebenen Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke (1999)*.

⁴¹ Wardges Mikaeljan, ed., *Die armenische Frage und der Genozid an den Armeniern in der Türkei (1913-1919)* (Yerevan: Institute for History, Armenian Academy of Science 2004).

⁴² *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1917*, ed. Ara Sarafian (Princeton: Gomidas 2004). This volume also contains some material from Morgenthau's papers in the Library of Congress.

⁴³ Arthur Beylerian, *Les grandes puissances l'Empire Ottoman et les arméniens dans les archives françaises (1914-1918)*. (Paris: Sorbonne 1983); Hasan Dilan, *Fransız Diplomatiği Belgelerinde Ermeni Olayları (1914-1918)* 6 volumes (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 2005).

⁴⁴ Ohandjian, Artem, *Österreich-Armenien 1872-1936: Faksimile-Sammlung Diplomatischer Aktenstücke* 12 volumes (Vienna: Ohandjianverlag 1995).

⁴⁵ Riccardi, Andrea. *Mediterraneo. Cristianesimo e islam tra coabitazione e conflitto* (Milano: Guerini 1997).

⁴⁶ Abraamyan, G. A. And T. G. Sevan-Khachatryan, eds. *Russkie istochniki o genotside armyan v Osmanskoi imperii 1915-1916 gody. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*. (Yerevan: Areresum-Ani 1995); *Genotsid armyan i russkaya publitsistika*. (Yerevan: Muzei-institut genotsida armyan 1998).

Turkish official publications include many volumes with selections of documents whose tend is to prove the guilt of the Armenians in conspiring to destroy the Ottoman state by terrorism, collaborating with the enemy, plotting rebellion, or massacring the Muslim population. Most of these documents come from the Ottoman Archive (BOA) located in Istanbul.⁴⁷ Very recently the Military History Archives (ATASE) in Ankara has begun publishing similar volumes indicating what the highest military command knew about the activities of Armenian revolutionary groups and massacres committed by Armenians on Muslim civilians.⁴⁸ Much of the published archival material is not actually relevant for the period of the intensive genocide that is 1915, but rather concern verbatim interrogations with captured suspected Armenian activists before the war. Many deal with some massacres committed by Armenian fighters in 1918 when they were being forced to withdraw from northern Anatolia after Bolshevik negotiators at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk gave back to the Ottomans Armenian provinces that had been Russian since 1878. It is possible with some stretch of the imagination to treat the period 1918-1921 as a civil war, since there was an outright armed struggle to establish an independent Armenian state that would bring together some of the Armenian provinces of Anatolia (Erzurum and Van) and former Russian provinces (Kars, Ardahan, Yerevan). But the evidence for a civil war for the period 1915-1916 simply does not exist, nor is the published evidence for a full Armenian rebellion convincing, but rather indicates a limited amount of unprepared and desperate self-defense in a few isolated places. There is some evidence that Armenian guerillas would retaliate in a bloody fashion if and when opportunity was given.

Up until the late twentieth century there was very little academic research in any country on the Ottoman genocide. However, some publications were made of witnesses or of “memory-books” for local communities.⁴⁹ Starting during World War I and continuing with great consistency all Turkish governments up to today have denied that genocide took place. Until about 1980 there was some Turkish literature written by diplomats, which did admit that many Armenians died, but that it was a bloody civil war and many more Muslims than Christians died. Sometimes it is argued that the Armenians brought this terrible collective

⁴⁷ *Armenians in Ottoman Documents (1915-1920)* (Ankara: General Directorate of State Archives 1995); İsmet Binark, *Archive Documents about the Atrocities and Genocide Inflicted upon Turks by Armenians* (Ankara: Grand National Assembly 2007).

⁴⁸ *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri 1914-1918*. 7 volumes (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basım Evi 2005-2007); See also the periodical *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*.

⁴⁹ Sarkis Karayan, “Bibliography: Histories of Armenian Communities in Turkey,” *Armenian Review* vol 33 (1980)

punishment on themselves because of disloyalty and treachery at a time of war and conspiracy to break up the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁰

After 1980 it became usual in Turkey to deny outright that many Armenians died and claim that the greater part arrived in the designated destinations in Syria and Iraq.⁵¹ The high-pitched political rhetoric has made it relatively difficult for Turkish, not to mention foreign, scholars to work freely on the subject and to have access to the necessary archival sources, which *de facto* have only recently been catalogued and opened.⁵² There is now realization that many types of documents such as all the lists of deportees by names and the value of their possessions that were confiscated cannot be located, and perhaps have been destroyed. The Turkish Historical Society set up by Kemal Atatürk in the 1930s has a near monopoly on publishing inside Turkey on what happened to the Christians. For a long time the society has had an Armenian section and since 2006 it also has an Assyrian section. Its position is fully denialist, apologetic and the publications contain racist slurs against the Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, as well as Kurds (who ultimately get all the blame). The president of the society, Yusuf Halaçoğlu, dominates Turkish TV and media discussions about the treatment of the Christians.

One of the few major Turkish historians to deal professionally with the Armenian question is professor Taner Akçam, who has been living in exile first in Germany where he took his doctorate at the University of Hannover and now teaches at the University of Minnesota in the U. S. A. Although not having access to Turkish archives he has previously been able to study primary sources through Ottoman newspapers, published accounts of several trials with CUP leaders accused of war crimes just after the armistice and debates in the Ottoman National

⁵⁰ Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi* (Ankara: Yeni Matbaa 1950); idem., *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question* (Istanbul: Documentary Publications 1988); Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları 1983); idem., *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1985); Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi* (Ankara 1983); Fatma Müge Göçek, "Reading Genocide: Turkish Historiography on the Armenian Deportations and Massacres of 1915" in Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer & Y. Hakan Erdem (eds.), *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press 2006) 101-127.

⁵¹ Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *Ermeni Tehciri ve Gerçekler 1914-1918* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları 2001); idem., *Facts on the Relocation of Armenians (1914-1918)* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House 2002); Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press 2005); on Muslim deaths see Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1922* (Princeton: Darwin Press 1995); for denialist views on the role of Assyrians and Greeks as well as Armenians see Salahi R. Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House 1993).

⁵² The Ottoman Archive opened the "Second Section" dealing with World War I only in mid-2006. This section includes the correspondence between the central government and the provincial administrations.

Assembly. These trials and debates reveal many details about how the genocide was organized, who were the instigators, when important decisions were made and so on. The debates in the National Assembly indicate that all of the major politicians acknowledged that the Armenians had been annihilated and that the reason was politically, rather than militarily, motivated.⁵³

In the United States studies of the Armenian genocide have usually had the memoirs of the American ambassador Henry Morgenthau as the point of departure. This work is very valuable as Morgenthau records many verbatim discussions with the CUP leaders and is very detailed about his efforts to save the Armenians. He gives many insights into the personality of Talaat and Enver as well as pungent views on Turkish national character.⁵⁴ However, academic writing did not begin until after Armenian terrorists (belonging to ASALA, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) killed a number of Turkish diplomats in the 1970s, bringing much public attention to the unresolved issue of recognition of the genocide. In parallel with Holocaust researcher, scholarship on the Armenian genocide divides into opposing “intentionalist” and “functionalist” interpretations. On the one hand, the intentionalists maintain that there was a long-standing, probably planned, intent to eradicate the Armenian population merely waiting for a suitable opportunity. On the other hand, the functionalists maintain that the decision to annihilate was not planned in advance, but developed piecemeal and through political and administrative decisions taken in the context of the war itself. Actually these positions are not in total opposition, and evidence is available for both positions.

First represented in research on the Armenian genocide was the intentionalist interpretation. The American professor Vahakn Dadrian, who was born in Turkey, has published many books and articles on the Armenian part of the genocide, and is in many ways a pioneer. His research includes studies of the intentions of the CUP governing circles, many articles evaluating the documents concerning the genocide. Dadrian argues that the genocide was the final outcome of longstanding hatred of the Armenians coupled with secret decisions taken long before the war by the CUP leadership to exterminate the Armenians. Thus he gives

⁵³ Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act. The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books 2006); Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic. Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London: Zed 2004).

⁵⁴ Henry J. Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Garden City: New Age 1918); see also his diaries which give a slightly different picture.

much attention to the various pre-war congresses of the CUP and the possibility of a secret agenda behind the official position that propagated pluralism and cooperation.⁵⁵ In its overall tendency Dadrian's argument is intentionalist, in that he sees the 1915 genocide as a continuation of the 1909 and 1895-95 anti-Armenian massacres and therefore mark the culmination of a longstanding socio-religious conflict. Closely allied with the intentionalist interpretation is Richard G. Hovannisian, of the University of California in Los Angeles. He has written both on the genocide itself, analyzed the denialist standpoint, and has edited a series of collective volumes on the Armenian provinces which each have chapters on the massacres in a local perspective.⁵⁶

Among the functionalists, Ronald Suny, historian at the University of Michigan, challenged Dadrian's thesis and argued that the genocide decision was built up by increments inside the CUP starting at some point before the war and thus was a politically motivated decision not connected with public opinion.⁵⁷ A similar standpoint is taken by Donald Bloxham, University of Edinburgh, who however points to changes in policy taken during the course of the war with a pivotal decision sometime in the period February to March 1915.⁵⁸ Minassian has made a special study of the relations between the main Armenian political organization, the Dashnaks, and the CUP throughout the pre-war era.⁵⁹

Most of the academic debate about the Armenian genocide has concerned the intentions of the central government, since this is a key feature of the UN declaration on genocide. However, many of the personal papers of the leading figures have disappeared and probably will never be found, thus making it very difficult to find a plan or any document revealing the motives. There are however some local studies. The Swiss historian Hans-Lukas Kieser has concentrated on the region around Urfa, making use of rich documentation from the

⁵⁵ Vahakn Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*. (Providence, R. I.: Berghahn 1995); *German Responsibility in the Armenian Genocide*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Blue Crane Books 1996); Badem's bibliography names 92 separate publications by Dadrian.

⁵⁶ Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective* (New Brunswick, N. J. Transaction 1987); *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's 1992); *Remembrance and Denial: the Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1998); *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction 2003); the local studies are in a series "Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces" cover Bitlis, Cilicia, Diyarbakir, Erzurum, Harput, Kars, Sivas, Urfa, Van published by Mazda publishers Costa Mesa, California.

⁵⁷ Ronald G. Suny, "Empire and Nation: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire", *Armenian Forum* 1(2) 1998, 17-51.

⁵⁸ Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide. Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005).

⁵⁹ Gaidz Minassian

Swiss missionaries working there.⁶⁰ One of the pioneers in the European research on the Armenian genocide, Yves Ternon has made a study of Mardin district, which was then part of Diyarbakir province, and gives a great amount of hitherto unknown detail.⁶¹ Raymond Kevorkian, the head of the Nubarian library in Paris, in a massive tome of over a thousand pages uses many hitherto unutilized Armenian documentation and memoirs to document events province by province.⁶²

Academic research on the treatment of the Assyrian population in the Ottoman Empire is compared to the Armenian rather limited. The linguist Gabrielle Yonan did a pioneering effort for the German organization for threatened peoples. This goes through previously published official documents and memoirs and attempts to give a comprehensive picture, but uses very little archival material.⁶³ French historian Sébastien de Courtois has gone through French foreign office material in order to paint a picture of the genocide that affected the Assyrians inside the Ottoman Empire. Because of the outbreak of the war and the closing of diplomatic relations with France, this work actually concentrates on the period before the world war.⁶⁴ A monograph was written during the soviet period based on Russian sources and it deals mostly with the Nestorian Assyrians in the Turkish-Iranian border zone.⁶⁵ Swedish historian, David Gaunt, has focused on the Assyrian and Armenian Catholic groups living in the southeastern corner of Anatolia and catalogues the many massacres taking place in this area.⁶⁶ French historian Yacoub has written a doctoral dissertation on how the problem of the displaced Assyrian refugees was dealt with in international politics in the postwar period.⁶⁷ There is a denialist publication maintaining that since the Nestorian tribes

⁶⁰ Kieser, Hans-Lukas. *Der Verpasste Friede. Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei 1839-1938*. (Zürich: Chronos 2000).

⁶¹ Yves Ternon, *Mardin 1915. Anatomie pathologique d'une destruction*, Special issue of *Revue d'histoire Arménienne Contemporaine* IV (2002).

⁶² Raymond Kévorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Odile Jacob 2006).

⁶³ Yonan, Gabrielle. *Ein vergessener Holocaust. Die Vernichtung der christlichen Assyrer in der Türkei*. (Göttingen: Gesellschaft für Bedrohte Völker 1989).

⁶⁴ de Courtois, Sébastien. *The Forgotten Genocide. Eastern Christians, The Last Arameans*. (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press 2004).

⁶⁵ Matveev, K. P. And I. I. Mar-Yukhanna. *Assiriiskii vopros vo vremya i posle pervoi mirovoi voyny*. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka 1968).

⁶⁶ David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors. Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, N. J.: Gorgias Press 2006).

⁶⁷ Yacoub, Joseph. *La Question Assyro-Chaldéenne, les Puissances Européennes et la Société des Nations (1908-1938)*. 3 volumes unpublished Ph. D. thesis (Université Lyon II: U. E. R. des Sciences Historiques et Géographiques 1984).

of Hakkari Mountains declared war on the Ottoman state in May 1915, the violent ethnic cleansing of the region was justified.⁶⁸

The difficulties of helping the victims

On May 23, 1915 Minister of Interior Talaat sent a directive to the Fourth army. It was commanded to make house-to-house searches for Christian collaborators. The search would even encompass any “Muslim partners” who were suspected of aiding them. These partners would be tried in military courts if found hiding Christians and risked death and loss of all property.⁶⁹

This was probably the law applied to shaykh Osman, a Kurdish agha, chief of the tribes Hadide and Atamissa. In June 1915 he was executed for having hidden his good Assyrian friend the Chaldean archbishop of Siirt, Addai Sher. He had helped the bishop get away from the massacres in the town by disguising him in Kurdish clothes. After some days they were discovered and the bishop was shot and Osman executed.

In Budapest during World War II, the Swedish diplomat, Raoul Wallenberg, could approach the Nazi authorities that were organizing the transport of Jews to Auschwitz. He could obtain their release by placing these persons under the protection of a neutral government. In Vilnius, the Japanese consul could grant visas to Jews allowing them to escape from certain death. This sort of diplomatic activity proved impossible in Ottoman territory and the interventions of foreign diplomats was hardly tolerated, much less respected and diplomats were threatened. The diplomatic reports from neutral countries and even the allied Germans and Austrians were filled with disappointment and dejection.

At the peak of the deportations and massacres in July 1915 many ambassadors made formal protests to the Ottoman government over the treatment of the Christians. On many occasions both the United States and the Bulgarian ambassadors had tried to intervene, but their words fell on deaf ears. Talaat would always respond that the treatment of the Christians was an internal affair and that no foreign power had any legal right to interfere in such matters.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Salahi R. Sonyel. *The Assyrians of Turkey. Victims of Major Power Policy*. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 2001).

⁶⁹ BOA. DH. ŞFR 58/85.

⁷⁰ Patriarch Zaven to Archimandrat Vegunin December 28, 1915 in *Genotsid armanyanyan*, p. 343.

This was also the answer repeatedly given to the German ambassadors baron Hans von Wangenheim and his successors Prince Hohenlohe-Langenburg and Count Wolff-Metternich during the summer of 1915. The latter summed up his impressions in a final report: “Turkey is set on fulfilling, in its own way. A policy that will solve the Armenian question by destroying the Armenian people. Neither our intercession, nor the protests of the American ambassador, nor even the threat of enemy force... have succeeded in turning Turkey from this path, and nor will they succeed at a later date.”⁷¹

During the autumn of 1915, the Vatican began to put pressure on the Austro-Hungarian government to use its influence their Ottoman ally to end the persecutions and atrocities of the Christians. On October 24, 1915 the ambassador of the Vatican to the Viennese court approached Foreign Minister Stephan von Burian to intervene at the Sublime Porte on behalf of the Armenians. Burian replied that the Austrians had been trying for months to make an impact on the Ottoman government. But they had made no progress as the Turks always held forth that “Armenian attacks on the peaceful Turkish population motivated such measures.”⁷²

Energetic Vatican involvement was triggered by the murder of the Armenian archbishop of Mardin, Maloyan, since he was a Catholic and had even been to Rome. In July Monsignor Dolci, the Vatican agent in Istanbul, was called to the Armenian Apostolic Patriarch in Istanbul to a meeting to discuss the “general massacre in Mardin.”⁷³ Trying to correspond as the highest Catholic leader with the highest Muslim leader, Pope Benedict XV sent a personal letter to Sultan Mahmud V on September 10, 1915 protesting that innocent Christians were being treated barbarously and appealed to the Sultan for clemency.⁷⁴ Other dispatches of Vatican diplomats indicate a deep concern for a “threatening destruction of an entire people.” It had become a case of collective punishment with no distinction as to religion or whether the victims were women, children or priests.⁷⁵ The Austrian diplomats had even difficulty in getting a meeting in order to give the Pope’s letter personally to the Sultan because of Young Turk obstructionism. But when this finally happened, on November 19, 1915, the Sultan replied that it was unfortunately not been possible to distinguish the

⁷¹ Cited in Akçam, *Shameful Act*, 177.

⁷² Artem Ogandzhanyan, *1915 god neosporimye svidetel'stva. Avstriiskie dokumenty o genotside armyan* (Saint Petersburg: Armenian Apostolic Church 2005), p. 189.

⁷³ Dolci to Cardinal Gasparri July 29, 1915, cited in Andrea Riccardi, *Mediterraneo. Cristianesimo e islam tra coabitazione e conflitto* (Milano: Guerini 1997), p. 116.

⁷⁴ Benedict XV to Mahumd V September 10, 1915, *ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷⁵ Cardinal Gasparri to Monsignor Scapinelli September 15, 1915, *ibid.*, p. 121.

“peaceful elements from those who were in rebellion” thus the punishment had to be collective.⁷⁶ However, the mounting international pressure did seem to be making effect and in December Dolci could report that the persecutions has “nearly completely ceased” and that there was a “substantial improvement of the situation”⁷⁷ By the end of 1915 the massive expulsions and massacres had ceased, but the major part of the Christian population in eastern Anatolia was already exterminated. Persecution did not subside but continued off and on throughout the rest of the war. One of the most striking aspects of the deportations was the refusal by the government to allow help to the deportees while they were on their journey. In itself this indicates an intention to annihilate as persons many as possible before they arrived at the designated settlement areas. This also corresponds with article IIb of the United Nations declaration against genocide by placing a people in conditions in which it cannot survive.

When the German consul in Aleppo tried to intervene to save the lives of two of the most well known Armenian politicians, Zorab and Wartkes, from a certain death, he was rebuffed, and they were killed during transport to Diyarbakir.⁷⁸ Even symbolic gestures such as relief efforts for the few survivors once the genocide had taken place, would be rejected. This was the case of a U. S. offer made in August 1916 of humanitarian aid for the starving survivors in Syria.⁷⁹ In April 1916 Turkey rejected an offer from the German Orient-Mission to send an expedition to help the Armenians who had arrived in Syria and Mesopotamia. Quite naturally, this was to focus on women and children. The reason for the rejection was “the Turkish Government would not permit any help activity that would raise the hopes of the Armenians for support from foreign countries.” This negative answer was also given to a combined German-American help plan.⁸⁰

Members of foreign religious missions often included doctors and nurses, but they were expressly hindered from helping the deportees. Often missions did not even succeed in protecting their own Armenian employees such as the professors and teachers at the various colleges, hospital employees and close friends. William Dodd, a physician at the American hospital in Konia, was forbidden by the provincial governor of the province of giving any

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 122.

⁷⁷ Dolci to Cardinal Gaspari December 12, 1915, in *ibid*, p. 123.

⁷⁸ Rössler to German embassy June 29, 1915 in *Deutschland und Armenien*, 93.

⁷⁹ Communique August 14, 1916 in *Deutschland und Armenien*, 287.

⁸⁰ Ambassador Metternich to Bethmann Hollweg April 28, 1916 in *Deutschland und Armenien*, 257.

medical aid or even inspecting the deportees.⁸¹ A Norwegian Red Cross nurse, Flora Wedel-Jarlsberg, who worked for a German organization in Erzurum reported that “the Red Cross staff were forbidden to have any relations with the exiles, and prohibited any excursions on foot or horseback beyond a certain radius.”⁸² Despite these regulations foreign missionaries did try to save small groups of Armenian children, although these were often taken from them after a short period of time. Wedel-Jarlsberg and a colleague managed to buy a family of six Armenian children from a convoy. But when she arrived at the nearest administrative center the district governor upbraided her. “Women have no business to meddle with politics, but ought to respect the government... He forbade us to take the children away, and at once sent a gendarme to carry them off from our room.” The children were immediately murdered.

In the town of Mush, Alma Johansson the Swedish director of a German orphanage for Armenian children in Mush was unsuccessful in her negotiations with the local authorities to have her charges saved. The district governor insisted that the Armenian orphans must “perish with their nation.” When she herself is banished from Mush she traveled towards Constantinople and passed destitute Armenians all along the way who were begging for food and water. “We are not allowed to give them anything, we are not allowed to take them in, in fact we are forbidden to do anything for them and they die outside. If only permission could be obtained from the authorities to help them! If we cannot endure the sight of these poor people’s sufferings, what must it be like for the sufferers themselves?”⁸³

A deported woman testified that she and some friends managed to run away from a column, but she was in a state of near nudity, as her clothes had been plundered. Wandering she saw a Kurdish man who she recognized. “Next day we saw a Kurd Shepard of the village of Bekand whom I knew and who had frequently come to my house at Siirt. He recognized me, and, seeing my lamentable state, cried out and covered his face not to see me thus. He took us to the Sheikh, who, touched with pity at our condition, ordered bread and curdled milk to be given us. He also found us some old garments with which to cover ourselves. Having allowed us time to sleep, Sheikh Asso summoned us the next day and said he was going to send us to Bekand. ‘I am forced to do so,’ he added because to give hospitality to Christians would be to bring me into grave displeasure with the government. I shall give you four men

⁸¹ William S. Dodd to Henry Morgenthau May 6, 1915 in *U. S. Official Records*, 36.

⁸² Statement of Flora Wedel Jarlsberg August 21, 1915 in *Treatment of Armenians*, 276.

⁸³ Statement by Alma Johansson November 1915, in *Treatment of Armenians* 127; a similar statement by her is in Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien*, 181-182. See also her ...

to take you to your destination. When you get there give them each a little money lest they kill you.’⁸⁴ In general Muslim households could contain some Christians, but in order that it not appear that they were hiding them, the Christians were strongly pressured to convert to Islam. If they did convert they were given new names. Those who refused to convert ran great risk of being killed.

Many of the captive women who survived told that they had been sent from household to household after staying a few months. Captive women and children had been seized by high administrators to serve as cooks, servants or become adoptive children to childless couples had the greatest chances of survival. Those with least chances of survival were those girls who were seized to become sex slaves or concubines.

Some Muslims dared to do small services. A deported woman testified that when the deportation column she belonged to passed through the city of Erzincan “amidst the shouts and insults of the people, who stoned and spat upon us. One Turkish lady, however, it is a matter of note, threw us from her roof many loaves of bread, and, assisted by little girls and children, by means of cords lowered us pails of water to quench our thirst. When we thanked her warmly she replied. ‘My friends, I am doing no more than my duty.’”⁸⁵

Historian Ahmet Refik, served as an army officer in the important rail-junction of Eskişehir in western Anatolia. From his arrival in summer of 1915 he daily observed Armenian deportees who in thousands had to camp near the railway station waiting for the trains that would take them south. His memory book gives many insights into the sadness that some Turks experienced at the plight of the Christians. “Now the convoys coming out consisted of children, women, old men and young women. This small convoy constituted such a sad, such a painful view that it would break your heart to see small children embracing their mothers with their soft arms, under the scorching sun of June, hungry and bowing their necks. Was that all, one would wonder. It was said that ‘They were going to Konia’. But in their pockets there was no money for the train tickets. And they were all poor, unfortunate villagers. In the train station, in front of the railing, an old woman with a blond blue-eyed girl, five or six years of age, in her lap and next to her a boy, sitting bow necked. I inquired. They were a family of a [Armenian] soldier; their father was taken to the army. Their mother had died.

⁸⁴ Nayeem, *Shall this Nation Die?*, 156.

⁸⁵ Nayeem, *Shall this Nation Die?* 239.

She [the old woman] was raising these unlucky orphans. I asked the girl's name: - Siranoush! The poor innocent child, in her hand a dry piece of bread dipped into water and ate it that way. I found food for Siranoush, I embraced and caressed her... But Siranoush would never smile. In her glance, in her eyebrows, in her face, there was melancholy, there was grief. Her soul was crushed by this deportation, this oppressive action and her innocent heart was broken. When she used to see the food I gave her, as though she deeply felt hatred towards the nation I am a member of, without smiling, without looking at my face, with her tiny fingers, she would put it to her mouth." When the old woman and the girl were to be sent away. Ahmet Refik tried to get the old woman to give him the children, but she refused saying "we will all die together."⁸⁶

On another occasion he notes the arrival in the night of a large convoy signaling that an enormous wave of deportees was on its way. "That day in front of this sad spectacle [of the first small group] everyone was touched. And it was thought that this was all. The train that arrived a night annulled this apprehension perfectly. Along the train line a cry of lament was heard. From the side of the station facing the valley cries of help could be heard. I ran. It was such a sad sight. There was no lantern, no lights, no guide; there was nothing. Women crying with their children in their arms, priests with disheveled beards, gathering their robs, tossing their loads on to their backs, mothers streaming in perspiration trying to unload their belongings, carrying their sick, their daughters, their children; poor, rich, hungry, destitute, thousands of families trying to get out of the cargo cars, struggling not to lose their children, their mothers, their belongings. It was not possible to see this sight – tears were shed uncontrollably from their eyes; it was not possible to help anyone. It was not possible to come to the aid of anyone. Even if help was offered, no one accepted it. This unjust oppression has created such a deep enmity that even if one wanted to help the most helpless, pitiful woman who had no kith or kin, would frown, look at our faces with hatred and with her firm heart, hurt soul, would walk fearlessly towards disaster, hunger and death."⁸⁷

Wedel-Jarlsberg heard from soldiers of the 86th cavalry brigade that they had been ordered to execute defenseless Armenians at a place along the Euphrates River. One soldier testified

⁸⁶ Ahmet Refik, *Two Committes, Two Massacres* (London: Firodil 2006), 27 & 36, Refik later became professor of history at Istanbul University, his book was originally published in 1919 entitled *İki Komite, İki Kilâl.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

that: “It was horrible. I could not fire, I only pretended.” She continued: “For that matter, we have often heard Turks express their disapproval and pity.”⁸⁸

The prohibition of helping the Armenians prevailed even once they had reached their destinations in the desert. Sven Hedin, the world-famous explorer and pro-German propagandist, was traveling by raft along the Euphrates River and came to the Syrian town of Rakka in the summer of 1916. The town was filled with begging Armenian refugees, more than 1,500 inside the town and 5,000 in a tent camp on the opposite side of the river. He had heard that a German officer had distributed money to the refugees some weeks before and asked the district governor for permission to give them 30 pounds in silver. The governor said that he was grateful for the offer and had nothing against it, but that he had “just received a telegram from the provincial governor in Urfa forbidding the distribution of gifts to the banished without consulting with the provincial governor.” Thus Hedin was stopped. However, walking through the town he was surrounded by begging children and women. He saw a shop selling bread, bought the entire stock and distributed it to the hungry. He concluded this episode with: “It makes you happy to see them eat and think with pain and sympathy of the five thousand who suffer on the other side of the river. But even if we had taken everything we had and distributed it among the poor, it still would not have been enough, for they were so many.”⁸⁹

Even high Ottoman officials had no influence over government policy. The provincial governor of Baghdad, Suleyman Nazif, who was of Kurdish origin, was traveling through Diyarbakir on official business. On the way, July 16, 1914, he met with a convoy of Armenian women trudging towards Viranşehir under the control of the police chief Memduh. He realized that they were in danger and he tried to pull rank on the police chief, saying that he would take over the convoy and lead it back to his home province. Memduh showed him an order for their deaths signed by Diyarbakir’s governor. Suleyman pleaded: “let me do as I want and save these unfortunate Christians as best I can.” To this he was warned: “Watch yourself. Otherwise I will let the soldiers arrest you and take you under guard to Diyarbakir.” Suleyman backed down. The next day the convoy was massacred.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Wedel-Jarlsberg, 277-278.

⁸⁹ Sven Hedin, *Bagdad, Babylon, Ninive* (Stockholm: Bonniers 1917) 114-116.

⁹⁰ Ishaq Armalto, *Al Quosara fi nakabat an-nasara* (Beirut 1919) Swedish translation s. 272.

All of these rules prohibiting helping the Armenian refugees points in the direction of genocide according to the United Nations declaration article IIb, that is putting the survivors of the massacres in living conditions that would result in extermination.

The many Germans who tried to assist the refugees were extremely frustrated by their inability and by the compact resistance of the authorities. A group of German teachers in Aleppo reacted when a large building opposite their school was filled with refugees and they could do nothing to help. Dr. Martin Niepage, who was a lecturer, acted as the group's spokesman when they sent a report to the German government in October 1915. "How can we as teachers read fairy tales with our pupils or relate the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan? How can we decline and conjugate meaningless words, when all around the German school's schoolyard the kinsmen of our pupils are slowly wasting away through starvation? We are giving our schoolwork and all true morality a slap in the face and it becomes an insult to all human feeling. And these unfortunates, who have been forced through the town or its vicinity out in the desert, almost only women and children, what will become of them? They are driven from place to place, until of a thousand has become a hundred, until of a hundred only a little group is left. And even this little group is pushed further, until even the last are dead. Only then have they reached the goal for the wandering, then they have reached 'the new designated settlements for the Armenians,' which the Turkish officials speak of in the German press."⁹¹

Nothing came of this letter of protest and Niepage considered leaving his teaching position in protest. But he was convinced by the other teachers to remain as they argued that it was valuable to have eyewitnesses inside the country, and who might also ameliorate the situation. However, after some time Niepage concluded that he for "too long was a silent witness to all this injustice. Nothing has been improved by our presence, and what we ourselves could do has been highly meaningless. Frau Spiecker, our energetic, brave colleague, bought soap and those women and children (there were no men left) were washed and freed from lice. Frau Spiecker got some women to cook soup for those who still could eat any food. I myself distributed for six weeks each evening two buckets of tea, cheese and softened bread among the dying children. But as from this residence of death, hunger or typhus spread to the town, we became ill along with five of our colleagues and had to break

⁹¹ Martin Niepage, *Vad en tysk lektor i asiatiska Turkiet upplevde år 1915* (Stockholm: Birkagården 1921) 6; also Martin Niepage to German Foreign Office October 15, 1915 in Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien*, 165-167.

off our assistance. For the deportees who arrived in Aleppo all help was hopeless. These persons destined for death, received from us no more than a slight ease in their dying need. What we saw in Aleppo with our own eyes was only the final scene in that grand tragedy, called the extermination of the Armenians, only a small fraction of the terror that went on inside the other Turkish provinces. Even more horrible things were told by the engineers constructing the Baghdad railway, when they came home, or German travelers who had met with the deportation caravans on their way. Many of these gentlemen could not eat for several days, after the horrible things they had seen. One of them, Herr Greif from Aleppo, told that at Tel Abiad and Ras ul Áyn lay masses of Mutilated and naked female corpses along the railway. ”⁹²

A German businessman, Franz Eckart, who managed a carpet factory in Urfa testified that he had tried to help a deported woman who was about to be raped. Two young Turks had seized the woman away from a convoy passing by and had taken her into the German’s garden and were about to rape her. Alarmed of this by the cries of his wife and children, Eckart took some workers and rushed to the spot, freed the woman and took her into his house. After a short while the two Turks returned accompanied by four others and demanded with threats that they turn over the Armenian woman. Eckart’s workers were harassed and chased away. In the end Eckart was forced to ask the German government for protection.⁹³

The German consul in Mosul managed to use embassy funds to feed and clothe the deportees arriving there. He tried also to intervene when he was traveling outside his home base. Alma Johansson records that he was horrified by the treatment given the Armenian labor battalion soldiers in Mush. “However much he stood on the Turkish side what he had to witness became too much for him. One day he saw how Armenian soldiers were carrying wheat through the town. While they were carrying heavy burdens, they were followed by armed Turkish boys who took pleasure in hitting them with their rifle-butts when they did not walk fast enough. The consul went a pair of times to the governor and pleaded for better treatment of the Armenians, but after this they let him understand, that he was no longer a desired guest.”⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid., 9-10.

⁹³ Franz Eckart to German consulate in Aleppo August 5, 1915 in Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien*, 131.

⁹⁴ Alma Johansson, *Ett folk i landsflykt*, 9.

On a much larger scale, the American ambassador to Turkey Henry Morgenthau, in September proposed a gigantic rescue effort intending to bring all of the remaining Turkish-Armenians to the United States. But the Ottomans refused to allow the Armenians to leave.⁹⁵ Morgenthau reported of the horrible treatment of the Armenians to his government. But the American administration would not intervene, wanting to remain friendly with the Ottoman government. After two years of growing frustration Morgenthau resigned his post. “My failure to stop the destruction of the Armenians had made Turkey for me a place of horror – I had reached the end of my resources.”⁹⁶

Two elderly American protestant missionaries in Mardin, Alpheus Andrus and Dr. D. M. B. Thom, who had taken care of some of the deported Armenians’ savings, were punished with banishment from that town in humiliating circumstances. In mid July 1915 the U. S. consul in Harput was very worried for the safety of the American missionaries in his jurisdiction and advised them not to intercede for the Christians. “I do think that the life of every American here is in danger and that the anger is increasing. If all the missionaries can get away safely I shall feel greatly relieved. It is not only that the present situation is very critical, but they are constantly doing things that are more or less imprudent. The entire colony may suffer for the imprudence of one person. It is quite natural that they should sympathize with the people [Armenians] among whom they have been working and want to aid and protect them, but there is great danger of carrying their zeal too far and getting into trouble themselves.”⁹⁷

Efforts by the Swiss to organize an international help expedition in the spring of 1916 were also stopped by Ottoman refusal to allow foreign groups to enter the country. Even the Red Cross was prohibited from entry.

The enormous Turkish effort to hinder aid for the Christian refugees continued even after the armistice in November 1918. Those who tried to return to their homes found that “the deported who reach their homes at last, are finding them either in ruins as a result of general plunder, or else they are occupied by Muslim refugees from European Turkey, the Caucasus, or elsewhere. The latter refuse to give up the homes they occupy, and the Muslim officials naturally support the Muslim occupants rather than the Armenian new-comers, who were the

⁹⁵ New York Times September 14, 1915; October 19, 1915.

⁹⁶ Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Reading: Taderon Press 2000) 385.

⁹⁷ Leslie A. Davis to Henry Morgenthau July 11, 1915 in *U. S. Official Records*, 176.

former owners. Thus the Armenians find themselves on the streets of their own villages, surrounded by hostile people and officials, and without means of work or support.”⁹⁸ The only province to which a sizeable number of Armenian refugees could return was Cilicia, because it was occupied by the French army and even this did not last as the French withdrew in 1922.⁹⁹

Norm displacements

A major factor, that can perhaps explain the large number of bystanders, is that the government was so successful in creating the image of the Armenian as “other”.¹⁰⁰ That is as alien and enemy, impossible to live with or tolerate. This of necessity meant a shift in traditional values from seeing Armenians and Assyrians as worthy neighbors and friends. They were accused of treason, plotting to destroy the Empire, even plotting to destroy the world of Islam. This process made all Armenians, in fact all Christians suspect. The rage of the government was directed at the whole population not the few activists and enemy collaborators.

From memoirs and retrospective observations it seems clear that even the Ottoman political leadership realized that they were committing a terrible deed. Some even realized that they had been murders, who perpetrated a crime. However, the goal of building a nation was worth the genocidal means. A citation from discussion in the National Assembly can perhaps illustrate the effect of this extreme nationalistic viewpoint:

“The question of the deportations was, as you know, an event which set the world in an uproar, and which caused us all to be perceived as murders. Even before this was done, we knew that the Christian world would not stomach this, and would turn all their wrath and anger upon us because of it. [But] why have we attached the title of murderer to ourselves? Why have we gotten involved in such an immense and problematic cause? These things were

⁹⁸ George Horton to Secretary of State December 18, 1918, US National Archives RG 59, 867.4016/398 cited in Şeker, “Demographic Engineering,” 470.

⁹⁹ Sam Kaplan, “Territorializing Armenians: Geo-texts, and Political Imaginaries in French-occupied Cilicia 1919-1922” *History and Anthropology* 15 (2004) 399-423.

¹⁰⁰ Ayla Göl, „Imagining the Turkish Nation through othering Armenians“, *Nations and Nationalism* 11:1 (2005) 12-139.

done for the sole purpose of ensuring the future of our homeland, which we know is more beloved and sacred than our own lives.”¹⁰¹

From protected “dhimmi” to despised “gavour”

From the beginning of the twentieth century radical Turkish political parties in the Ottoman Empire played on religious divisions. One motive was to create a large public opinion in favor of the Young Turk government and in this case the largest opinion base was Muslim. Thus it was necessary to show opposition towards the non-Muslims. This meant a shift in values as Islamic thought had traditionally treated non-Muslims as protected peoples who were not to be harmed as long as they lived peacefully and observed deferent behavior. However, there was a considerable amount of popular antipathy against non-Muslims. Gavour is a very derogatory Turkish word commonly used even today to designate infidels. When mobs attacked the Armenians in Urfa they shouted “Down with the gaviours”.¹⁰²

One argument was that the Christians were conspiring to destroy Islam. Bahaettin Şakir a leading member of the CUP wrote to the Turks of Azerbaijan appealing to them as fellow Muslims united in opposition to the Armenians: “Do you not see that the Armenians are not working to ease the burden of human sorrow or for the progress of industry, but to produce the tools of destruction that will kill their Muslim neighbors easily and in large numbers... Beginning with the assumption that you are Muslims each and every one of you should not only consider the atrocities committed by the revolutionary Armenians, who are enemies of your religion, against the Muslims of the Caucasus, but against your coreligionists within the Ottoman state and against the Islamic Sultanate.”¹⁰³

When reporting on atrocities alleged to have been perpetrated by Armenian partisans, the governor of Van stressed that the Armenians were out to destroy the entire Muslim world. He found the massacre a “real insult to sacred Islamic principles... The Armenians with their actions have not only assaulted Islam but the world of Islam... Their changing of mosques into stables, their forcing students to accept Christianity, and their obscene insults to [named

¹⁰¹ Cited in Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic*, 150.

¹⁰² Jakob Künzler, *Im Lande des Blutes und der Tränen. Erlebnisse in Mesopotamien während des Weltkrieges (1914-1918)* (Zuerich: Chronos 2004, originally Potsdam: Tempel-Verlag 1921), 49

¹⁰³ Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi* vol 1 372-373.

religious leaders] are all epitomies of treachery. Armenians' vile attacks on religion, and on the Muslims constitute an unlimited subject.”¹⁰⁴

In this way the Armenians were portrayed as the declared enemies of Islam.

From the “most loyal” to the “treasonous Armenian millet”

During the nineteenth century it was common to refer to the Armenians as the most loyal of all the subjects (*millet-i sadıka*) among the non-Muslims. This was probably made as a contrast to the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians who had been liberated after armed conflict. Many Armenians were loyal administrators and businessmen. The Armenian political parties strove for autonomy within the empire rather than independence outside of it. For a genocide to take place, the Ottoman government needed to remove this positive image of the loyalty and replace it with its opposite. Thus much effort was placed on showing them to be enemies of the state and the Turkish people. Even children were portrayed as potential enemies. Taner Akçam points to the activities of a department inside the War Ministry that coordinated the anti-Christian propaganda through journals spread in the army.¹⁰⁵

Historian Ahmet Refik wrote in 1919 that a massive press campaign had been mounted to portray the Christians as disloyal. “In Istanbul, the propaganda work necessary to justify an enormous crime was fully prepared: the Armenians had united with the enemy, revolution was about to break out in Istanbul, they were going to kill the CUP leaders, they were going to force open the [Bosphorus and Dardanelles] Straits.”¹⁰⁶

This message was hammered in repeatedly. Photographs in the newspapers purported to describe Armenian bombs and weapons, or massacres committed by the Armenians. Doctor Dodd of the American hospital in Konya noted with alarm the growing negative impact of this propaganda in his hometown. “The Turks of Konia have been noted for their mildness and opposition to such measures [deportations], but their temper we can see is changing. The papers are publishing articles against the Armenians as traitors, as revolutionists, telling of

¹⁰⁴ Governor of Van vilayet March 14, 1915. The events described took place earlier and were recorded in response to the Foreign Ministry's appeal for documentation of Russian and Armenian atrocities. In *Arşiv Belgeleriye Ermeni Faaliyetleri 1914-1918*, volume 1, 90-91.

¹⁰⁵ Akçam, *Shameful Act*, 125-126.

¹⁰⁶ Refik, *Two Committees, Two Massacres*, 44.

atrocities committed by hem in Van, 60,000 Turks killed by them etc. everything to inflame their minds and poison their thoughts. It is the same course that I saw at the time of the massacres twenty years ago.”¹⁰⁷

Already in August 1914 when the Turks noticed that the Armenians were not enthusiastic about the news of German victories in Europe, they became suspicious that the Armenians did not wish the Central Powers to win. “That did not improve the already suspicious attitude toward them. Soon one could hear that the Muslims spoke of the Armenians only as the ‘treasonous Armenian nation’ (*melum ermeni millet*).”

Armenians are not human

The anti-Christian propaganda followed religious lines. Racist thinking was not widespread within the Ottoman Empire at that time. However, some of the most radical activists in the genocide, had knowledge of racial thinking from studies in Europe or through the natural sciences. Many of the most rabid anti-Armenians were doctors and had been exposed to Social-Darwinist thinking. Perhaps the most outstanding of them was Mehmet Reshid, the provincial governor of Diyarbakir. During his reign of terror from in 1915 and early 1916 nearly two hundred thousand Armenians had been killed within his jurisdiction. This extreme bloodshed came to the attention of the government, and after the war he was actually put on trial in a Turkish court for his malfeasance.

Late in 1915 Reshid was summoned to Istanbul to be interrogated by the CUP general-secretary Mithat Şükrü Bleda as to the reason for the massive killing, which appeared excessive in the eyes of the committee. Reshid was harshly questioned about how he could reconcile the extermination of Christians, with his profession as a medical doctor. He defended himself “if you like I in Diyarbekir had the opportunity to see at close quarters what kind of secret plans with which the Armenians let themselves be possessed, in what prosperity they lived, what an awful animosity they felt towards the state, they you would not today be making any admonitions [against me]. The Armenians in the Eastern Provinces were so agitated against us, that in their areas, if they were allowed to remain in place, not a single Turk or Muslim would be left alive. I have studied the personal dossiers of many of

¹⁰⁷ William S. Dodd to Henry Mongenthau August 15, 1915 in *U. S. Official Records*, 194

them. In house searches we found ammunition that would have blown up an entire army. They possessed a fantastic organization. We would soon need to use candles to find any Turks in Anatolia, if we allowed this widespread organization to exist in our country. Therefore – either them or us. In this situation, I thought to myself: Hey Doctor Reshid! There are two alternatives. Either the Armenians liquidate [*temiz liyecekler*] the Turks, or the Turks them! Placed before this necessity, I did not hesitate. My Turkishness triumphed over my medical identity. Before they did away with us, we should remove them. I said to myself... But this act neither pleases my personal pride, nor has it enriched me. I saw, that the fatherland was on the verge of being lost, therefore with my eyes closed and with no hindsight I continued in the conviction that I acted for the well being of the nation.... The Armenian bandits were a bunch of dangerous microbes that infected the body of the fatherland. Is it not the duty of a doctor to kill microbes.”¹⁰⁸

Another Turkish physician expressed similar thoughts, but in more brutal Social-Darwinist language. He was the superintendent of hospitals in Bitlis province. “On one occasion the superintendent of hospitals, a Turk, said to Mr. Knapp in the presence of all us Americans, that these ignorant village Armenians were not fit to live – they ought to die.”¹⁰⁹ According to Kuşçubaşı Eşref who orchestrated some of the deportations, the Christians were “internal tumors” that needed “to be cleaned”.¹¹⁰

Even after death, the Armenians were treated as less worthy. In the Syrian Desert the local government refused to bury the dead Christians. Rössler, the German consul in Aleppo reported finding a corpse. When he asked the district governor why he had not “at least seen to a burial, as is described in the Quran, he replied, that he could not determine if it was the body of a Christian or a Muslim (the sexual organs had been cut off). He would only bury a Muslim.”¹¹¹

Turkey only for Turks

During the nineteenth century reform period, the leading political ideology was called “Ottomanism”. This concept called for the union of all the peoples of whatever language or

¹⁰⁸ Cited from Salâhattin Güngör, “Bir Canlı Tarih Konuşuyor,” *Resimli Tarih* (July 5, 1953), p. 2444.

¹⁰⁹ Statement of Myrtle O. Shane, in “*Turkish Atrocities*”, 7.

¹¹⁰ Cited in Akçam, *Shameful Act*, 92.

¹¹¹ Rössler to Bethmann Hollweg July 17, 1915 in *Der Armenische Frage*, 161.

religion who lived within the Ottoman Empire. It envisioned a sort of imperial citizenship in which there was equality and all were equally loyal to the sultan and his government. This vision broke down by the early twentieth century as it became clear that too many groups were struggling for their autonomy or independence. The result was a shift to Turkish nationalism, that is to build a homogeneous core out of the largest ethnic group the Turks, and to try to “Turkify” as many other groups as possible. Turkification meant sharing the common Turkish language and the Muslim religion. This change resulted in a need to portray the non-Turkish peoples as a grave problem. One of the leading ideologues, Ziya Gökalp equated ethnicity with religion, stating “Turkism is simultaneously Islamism.”¹¹²

The CUP declared Ottomanism bankrupt before the First World War. It abandoned its attempts to create a union because of the opposition of the various ethnic communities. Talaat was reported to have given a speech stating: “You are aware that by terms of the Constitution, equality of Mussulman and Gavour was affirmed by you. One and all know and feel that this is an unrealizable idea. The Shariat, our whole past history and the sentiments of hundreds of thousands of Mussulmans and even the sentiments of the Gavours themselves, who stubbornly resist every effort to Ottomanize them, present an impenetrable barrier to the establishment of real equality. We have made unsuccessful attempts to convert the Gavour into a loyal Osmanli and all such efforts must inevitably fail... There can therefore be no question of equality, until we have succeeded in our task of ottomanizing the Empire – a long and laborious task.”¹¹³

Summary

This report has presented the evidence for a genocide perpetrated during World War I by the Ottoman government on Armenian and Assyrian Christian subjects. It has described the historical background, the process of deportation and discusses the available statistics. Then it discusses the historiography. The second part of the report concerns itself with bystanderism. It shows the legal and other hindrances that confronted people who desired to help the persecuted. It gives examples of various attempts. It then discusses various shifts in social values that motivated ordinary people to hesitate to help their friends and neighbors.

¹¹² Cited in Akçam, *Shameful Act*, 84.

¹¹³ Cited in Akçam, *Shameful Act*, 75-76

Appendix Institutions that Study the Armenian or Assyrian Genocide

Armenian National Institute
1140 19th Street
NW Suite 600
Washington, D. C. 20036
USA
www.armenian-genocide.org

Armenian Genocide Museum and Memorial
14th and G Streets, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001
USA
www.armenian-genocide.org/Memorial

Division of Armenology and Social Science
Institute-Museum of Genocide (Armenia)
National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia
Memorial Complex of Tzitzernakaberd
Yerevan, Armenia
www.sci.am

Armenian Library and Museum of America
65 Main Street
Watertown, Massachusetts 02172
USA
www.almainc.org

Zoryan Institute for Contemporary Armenian Research and Documentation
2286 Massachusetts Ave.
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140
USA
www.zoryaninstitute.org

Association Culturelle Arméniene de Marne-la-Vallée
Biblioteque Nubar
11 Square Alboni
75016 Paris
Frankrike
www.acam-france.org

Zohrab Information Center
630 Second Avenue
New York, New York 10016-4885
USA
www.zohrabcenter.org

Armenian Research Center
University of Michigan-Dearborn
4901 Evergreen Road
Dearborn, Michigan 48128-1491
USA
www.umd.edu/dept/armenian

Society for Armenian Studies
California State University, Fresno
5245 North Backer Ave.
Fresno, California 93740-8001
USA
www.armenianstudies.csufresno.edu

The Strassler Family Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies
Armenian Genocide Studies
Clark University
950 Main Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01610
USA
www.clarku.edu/departments/holocaust

Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies
University of Minnesota
100 Nolte Hall West
315 Pillsbury Drive
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
USA
www.chgs.umn.edu

Armenian Educational Fund Chair in Modern Armenian History
University of California
Los Angeles, California
USA

Institut für Diaspora und Genozidforschung der Ruhr Universität
Universitätsstr. 142
Bochum
D-44799 Germany
www.ruhr-uni.bochum.de

Gomidas Institute
PO Box 208
Princeton, New Jersey 08542
USA
www.gomidas.org

National Association for Armenian Studies and Research
395 Concord Avenue
Belmont, Massachusetts 02478
USA
www.naasr.org

Lepsius Archiv
C/o Evangelische Kirche

Georgenkirch Str.69/70

10249 Berlin

Germany

www.ekbo.de

Workshop for Armenian-Turkish Scholarship, University of Michigan

Listserves: armworkshop@umich.edu

Seyfo Center

C/o Sabri Atman

Netherlands

Türk Tarih Kurumu (Turkish Historical Society)

Kızılay Sokak No. 1

06100 Sıhhiye

Ankara

Turkiet

www.ttk.org.tr

Haigazian College

Beirut

Lebanon

www.haigazian.edu.org

Ashurbanipal Library/ Assyrian Alliance

7055 Clark Street

Chicago, Illinois 60626

USA

Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Armenian Studies

Jerusalem, Israel

www.mscc.huji.ac.il/armenia

Zinda magazine (weekly for Assyrian international community)

www.zindamagazine.com