Earth, fire, water: or how to make the Armenian corpses disappear¹

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In the planning of mass violence, the logistical aspects of the elimination of the corpses of victims have almost as important a place as the executions themselves. The mass violence committed by the Young Turk regime against the Ottoman Armenian population has sometimes hinted at improvisation, but works published in recent years have shown that the destruction of Armenians (and Syrians) had been organized with far more care than one might have imagined, including the logistics of eliminating the corpses.² As we shall see, the Young Turk authorities made every effort to enforce their directives on officials or paramilitaries reluctant to carry out these menial tasks or negligent in performing them. Weather and domestic or wild animals also played their part, as they brought to light a multitude of corpses sometimes buried several months earlier. The location of the massacres largely conditioned the method used to eliminate from public view the corpses of the victims, although the ideological dimension should not be downplayed, as the first priority for the Young Turks was to conceal all traces of their crimes as quickly as possible.

The first phase of the genocide

The first phase of the genocide, from April to September 1915, consisted of the forced deportation (the ‘death marches’) of the

Armenian and Syrian populations from the Ottoman Empire, in particular from six eastern provinces, where the majority had their historic roots. These are wild, mountainous regions, at average altitudes of 2,000 metres; the enclosed valleys – especially those of the Tigris and the Euphrates, but also of the Murat River – were used as traps, with their entries and exits controlled by the butchers of the regime's 'Special Organization'. The males, constituting the principal target of the Central Committee of Ittihad ve Terakki (Committee of Union and Progress), were systematically executed and tossed into the turbulent waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates.

The deportees were supposed to be 'relegated' to the deserts of Syria and Mesopotamia, to which they were transferred on foot. However, the first to arrive in these regions were the corpses of deportees floating on the Tigris and the Euphrates. By 10 June 1915, the German vice-consul at Mosul, Walter Holstein, wired his ambassador:

Six hundred and fourteen Armenians (men, women, and children) expelled from Dyarbakir and conducted towards Mosul were all killed during the voyage by raft [on the Tigris]. The *keleks* [rafts] arrived empty yesterday. For several days now, corpses and human limbs have been floating down the river. Other convoys of Armenians 'settlers' are currently en route, and it is probable that the same fate awaits them, too.³

The situation was still worse on the Euphrates, as a report by the German consul at Aleppo, Walter Rössler, attested:

The aforementioned presence of corpses in the Euphrates, which has been observed in Rumkale, Burecik, and Jerablus, continued for twenty-five days, as I was informed on 17 July. The bodies were all tied together in the same way, in pairs, back to back. This systematic arrangement shows that it is a question, not of random killings, but of a general extermination plan elaborated by the authorities.... The corpses have reappeared, after an interruption of several days, in ever greater numbers. This time, it is essentially a question of the bodies of woman and children.⁴

While the Euphrates made it possible to get rid of the corpses encumbering the northern provinces at small cost, they created problems for the local authorities in Syria and Mesopotamia. In confirming the information from the German diplomat, certain authenticated documents, mentioned during the trial of the Young Turks, show that this method was not to the taste of Ahmed Djemal Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman Fourth Army, who held authority over the entire region. In a telegram of 14 July 1915

(transcribed in the Gregorian calendar) addressed to the governor of Diyarbakir, Dr Mehmed Reshid, the navy minister, complained about the presence of corpses floating on the Euphrates. The governor then wired him two days later:

The Euphrates has little relationship with our province. The floating corpses come probably from the side of the provinces of Erzerum and Harput. Those who fall dead here either are thrown into deep abandoned caves, or, as often happens, burned. There is rarely a place to bury them.⁵

One might also highlight a well documented case of 2,833 infants from the Bayburt district, who had passed the age limit accepted for 'adoption', who were drowned in the Euphrates at the level of the Kemah gorge.⁶

Not only the water courses, but also lakes, wells, and cisterns served to get rid of corpses. The extent of the crimes committed around Lake Geoljik/Gölcük in this regard is well documented in a report by the American consul in Harput, Leslie Davis. On 24 September 1915, the diplomat decided to take a ride on horseback towards this mountain lake, after a Turk had told him the place was covered in corpses.⁷ Leaving at about four o'clock in the morning, in order to get away without being noticed, the consul and his Turkish guide were in the saddle for five hours towards Kurdemlik, finding all the way along the road hundreds of scarcely buried bodies, with arms or legs sticking out of the ground or partially eaten by dogs. Some of the bodies had been burned 'in order to find any gold which the people may have swallowed'.⁸ After this, the consul decided to roam the cliff's north-eastern bank, intercut with 'deep valleys'. It seemed that the method most frequently used by the paramilitary bandits was to push the deportees over the top of the cliffs into these steep valleys, real traps whose sole exit was the lake. This doubtless explained why hundreds of bodies were floating on the banks of the lake. During this first part of the trek, Davis observed two valleys, one filled with at least 1,000 and another with more than 1,500 corpses, and many others less filled, but which he could not approach at that time as the stench was so great.⁹

Davis concluded the report of his second trek with an estimate of no fewer than 10,000 massacred and abandoned on the banks of Lake Gölcük. 'Few localities could be better suited to the fiendish purposes of the Turks in their plan to exterminate the Armenian population than this peaceful lake ... far removed from the sight of civilized man'.¹⁰

In the southern district of Nisibin, where Armenians, Jacobites, Chaldeans, Kurds, and some 600 Jews lived, the subgovernor, on 16 August 1915, organized a raid on Christian notables, including the Jacobite bishop, who were executed the same day outside the town's limits. Women and children were exterminated in the course of the following days and thrown into sixty-five pits that also received thousands of corpses of deportees coming from the north.¹¹ To the north of Nisibin, Dara was the scene of repeated massacres, which makes one think that the ruins of the ancient town were chosen as a slaughterhouse. For example, at Dara on 11 July 1915, some 7,000 deportees coming from Erzerum were thrown into the town's immense Byzantine underground cisterns.¹² Around the same time, a convoy of deportees from the north arrived at Argana Maden, where they saw on the banks of the Tigris a spectacle reminiscent of Dante: thousands of decomposing corpses.¹³

Several hundred kilometres downstream, during the winter of 1915–16, General Halil Kut, appointed in January 1916 by his nephew, the war minister Generalissimo Ismail Enver Pasha, as commander of the Sixth Army operating on the Iraq Front, gave the order to exterminate the 15,000 deportees 'residing' in Mosul and its surroundings. According to testimony collected by the Swiss historian S. Zurlinden, Halil had these 15,000 Armenians executed on two nights by Kurds and irregulars, by throwing them into the Tigris bound in batches of ten.¹⁴

All these elements show planning, the use of proven methods, and preparatory work by the executioners; they ensured that the victims did not escape drowning, by binding them in pairs or more, back to back, before tossing them into the water. This method, which was used only on male victims, seems to have come into widespread use with the removal of the Armenians from their homes over the months of May–June 1915. Its advantage was that it could be carried out quickly, but it also had the disadvantage of polluting waterways situated downstream, sometimes over a distance of several thousand kilometres.

The treatment of the bodies of women and children, who comprised the large majority of the convoys of deportees, was significantly different. During this first phase of the genocide, the hilly routes taken by the convoys, remote from any habitation, and the extreme conditions imposed by the escorts – the deportees were provided with neither food nor water – determined both the death of the deportees and the treatment of their corpses. A form of 'natural selection' occurred, with the weakest being simply

left to die by the roadside or finished off with a gunshot. Survival was entirely dependent on the ability of the deportees to keep up with the convoy. In the eyes of the decision-makers, these 'natural' deaths corroborated the official description of the genocide as merely a 'population transfer'.

Among the countless sites chosen for the destruction of the deportees, the mountainous district of Kahta, situated to the south of Malatia, to the east of Adiyaman, was without doubt the most murderous. More than 500,000 deportees crossed by the Firincilar plain, about three hours to the south-east of Malatia, the arrival point for convoys of deportees coming from the north.¹⁵ The site was littered with rotting corpses that emitted an extreme stench. An elderly Turk explained to one of the deportees that worse was to come next day, when he would embark on the 'death march' beyond the peaks of Malatya Dağları.¹⁶ One witness reported seeing a battalion of 'gendarmerie' and a 'director' receiving orders by telephone.¹⁷ It was in fact a command centre for the Special Organization, remote from everything but equipped with a field telephone, to coordinate the departure of the convoys for the 'death march'. The witness further noted that the 'gendarmes', with a certain courtesy, ordered the deportees to leave their belongings on the spot, by entrusting them to the commission responsible for the 'war tax' (*teklif-i harbiye*). He estimated that 80,000–100,000 deportees were then camping at the foot of the mountains.¹⁸

One by one, the convoys took the direction of the gorges opening beyond Firincilar, one of the killing fields regularly used by the Special Organization. It had been put under the supervision of the parliamentary deputy for Dersim, Hacı Baloşzâde Mehmed Nuri Bey, and his brother, Ali Pasha. They had two Kurdish chieftains of the Reşvan tribe, Zeynel Bey and Hacı Bedri Aga, under their command, with their squadrons of bandits.¹⁹ The deportees were suddenly confronted with an appalling sight: the gorge opening after Firincilar was filled with the corpses of people from earlier convoys.²⁰

Once the convoy reached the gorge, Zeynel Bey directed operations from a height. He first had the few men still in the convoy separated from the other deportees and then put to death. The operation went on for a full hour and a half. According to Alphonse Arakelian, who was in this convoy, 3,600 people lost their lives, but around 100 men survived.²¹ One of Arakelian's companions, Sarkis Manukian, later declared that 2,115 men were slain that day in the Kahta gorge.²²

While isolated mountain passes, such as Kahta's, suited mass slaughter by relieving the killers of the need to get rid of the bodies, the mountain routes and sometimes the main roads the deportees had to follow presented problems from time to time. Tens of thousands of Armenians died en route, and were rarely buried, or only in haste. The increasing number of rotting corpses along the roads, as well as a typhus epidemic that spread rapidly within the local populations, could not fail to worry the governors and subgovernors, who were assailed with complaints on all sides. It was then essential that the ministry 'sanitize' the region, and take the necessary measures to put some order into the prevailing anarchy. Commander Djemal Pasha reported in his memoirs, 'I was furious when I learned that the exiled Armenians were to come to Bozanti on their way over the Taurus and Adana to Aleppo, for any interference with the line of communications might have the gravest consequences for the [Suez] Canal Expedition'.²³ In other words, epidemics caused by the rotting corpses threatened some crossing points essential to a switch from the Armenian plateau to the deserts of Syria and Mesopotamia, of major strategic importance for the commander of the Palestine Front.

As for the measures taken by the authorities to control these problems, the investigation files for the Young Turk criminals brought to trial in 1919 contain a series of exchanges between the governor-general of Mamuret ul-Aziz province, Sabit Bey, and the administrator of Malatia, Reshid Bey, and between the Minister of the Interior and Sabit Bey. The first telegram on this matter was addressed by Sabit to the Malatia administrator on 21 August 1915, or shortly after the passage of the main convoys of deportees from the northern and western regions in the department of Malatia. It tells us first that 'there are many corpses littering the roads' in the department, with 'the numerous inconveniences that engenders'. Sabit complains that the corpses were not buried with 'care' and says there should be no hesitation in punishing 'officials showing evidence of negligence'.²⁴ It seems, however, that the instructions were not always followed. On 10 September, Sabit renewed his complaints to Reshid. He wrote, 'We learn that there are rotting corpses on the boundary between [the departments] of Hüsnî Mansur and Besni.... It is not appropriate, from the point of view of government and for reasons of hygiene, that one finds [corpses] in the open air, in a state of decomposition'.²⁵ In excuse for the administrator of Malatia, one must grant that the repeated passage of convoys demanded a regular renewal of road clearing by the

gendarmes to whom, oddly, this task had been entrusted. These corpses rotting away betrayed rather too well the real purpose of the deportations.

Three months later, doubtless on the heels of complaints reaching Istanbul through diplomatic channels, the Minister of the Interior rebuked the governor-general of Mamuret ul-Aziz, on the grounds that 'one again finds exposed corpses ... or remains'.²⁶ It seems that these orders communicated to subgovernors and gendarmerie commanders, threatened with court martial,²⁷ did finally convince the latter 'to open trenches dug sufficiently deeply so that the dogs could not reach them'.²⁸

These precautions lasted only a while. According to the official figures cited during what became known as the Yozgat trial, held some years after the events, before a military court, about 33,000 Armenians from the Yozgat department were deported, and the majority of them massacred in a valley near Keller, at Boğazkemin. Captain Şükrü, who served in the Yozgat gendarmerie, noted in his 'confessions' that the massacres were carried out under the order of the Minister of the Interior, and that the traces of these massacres 'were wiped out, at the end of October, by digging huge trenches into which the bodies were tipped, then burned, but the winter rains brought to light the rotted corpses or the bones'.²⁹

Finally, one sees that during the first phase of the extermination of the Ottoman Armenians, the priority of the central authorities was the physical destruction of the deportees and the use of summary means to get rid of the bodies. The rivers flowing down from the Armenian plateau, principally the Tigris and the Euphrates, provided a low-cost means of doing so, although many of the bodies became stuck on the banks, where they took months to decompose. This method, in theory highly efficient, nonetheless therefore had unforeseen consequences: it was sometimes necessary to use explosives to clear what were quite literally dams formed by the mass of floating bodies, while the waters of these two legendary rivers remained polluted long afterwards, giving rise to epidemics among the Arab populations living downstream. This method was used exclusively on men, who were the first victims of the genocidal process. Some of the bodies drifted as far as the Syrian desert and the Persian Gulf, with lasting pollution to the feeder rivers, under the gaze of the local population and of other witnesses, especially Germans. Similarly, the land routes used for the deportation became littered with corpses, although attempts were certainly made by the local administrative services to clean

them, but since the latter were reluctant to dig sufficiently deep trenches, the vagaries of the winter weather of 1915–16 and animals brought traces of these decomposed bodies to light, provoking the wrath of the Minister of the Interior.

The second phase of genocide and the network of concentration camps

The second phase of genocide, which stretched from autumn 1915 to autumn 1916, was in the context of Syria and Mesopotamia. These thinly populated desert regions afforded a very different treatment of bodies. Here, the deportees who survived the death marches were poured into a couple of dozen concentration camps. People there died a ‘natural’ death, from exhaustion, starvation, or epidemic disease.

The common lot of the several hundred thousand deportees in Syria or Mesopotamia was to clutter the makeshift concentration camps managed by the subdirectorates for deportees, created at Aleppo in the autumn of 1915. This quasi-official organ, which was attached to the directorate for the ‘installation of tribes and migrants’ (İskân-ı Aşâyirîn ve Muhâcirîn Müdiriyyeti, or IAMM) and dependent on the Ministry of the Interior, was entrusted with the task of organizing deportations, and of placing Armenian goods at the disposal of *muhacir* refugees (Muslim settlers), who were effectively being installed in place of the deportees. It was the coordinating body, for example, for relocating Roumeli Muslim emigrants or Circassians from Palestine and Asia Minor into the zones emptied of their Greek or Armenian populations.³⁰ Hence, the IAMM was the body charged with implementing the Ittihadist Central Committee’s policy of ‘demographic homogenization’, or what now would be termed ethnic cleansing. Under its official remit, it was called upon to settle the displaced Muslims, but it was primarily charged with uprooting the Armenian populations and coordinating their deportation, and we now know what that means according to the location of the people targeted. When one observes the chronology of the movements of Muslim populations under its authoritarian orders, one sees a process almost parallel and synchronized with the cleansing of Armenians from the regions destined for the refugees displaced by the IAMM.³¹ Its link with the Committee of Union and Progress is underlined by the very nature of its mission of ‘Turkification’ of the area, as well as by the choice

of its director, Muftizâde Şükrü (Kaya) Bey, a Young Turk close to Mehmed Talât,³² who was delegated by the Committee of Union and Progress in the provinces of Adana and Aleppo in the summer of 1915,³³ like many of his Istanbul colleagues, when the situation demanded urgent intervention and the implementation of a policy determined by the Ittihadist centre.

If the first arrivals in the summer and the start of autumn 1915 had temporarily been established in the roadside inns of Aleppo, from November the governor-general, Mustafa Abdülhalik, forbade access to the town by the convoys, and they were systematically redirected along the Euphrates or the Baghdad Railway, towards Mosul. It was probably under his orders that the subdirectorate created a first transit camp, one hour to the east of the town, at Sibil, a vast plain heralding the deserts of Syria. The camp was supervised by Selanikli Eyub Bey, a bandit chief, and assistant to the director-general of deportations (*Sevkiyat müdürü*), and administered by the *Sevkiyat müdürü* himself, Cemil Hakim Bey.³⁴ Each day a convoy would arrive, as another left in the direction of Meskene and Der Zor (the modern Deir ez-Zor). Several thousand deportees were established there.

However, one establishment reserved for Armenians was maintained in the town: the vast roadside inn in the Achiol quarter, named Kasıldih, in the court of which were ranged immense tents serving as a prison. The camp in fact was reserved for adult men still miraculously present in the convoys arriving at Aleppo, and for deportees who had hidden in the town whom the police or gendarmeries had caught during their countless night raids. The deceased there were so numerous that, as Walter Rössler wrote, 'towards mid-October, it was decided to set up a new cemetery outside the town. But before one could begin to bury the dead, one unloaded the corpses in piles there and they remained for several days in the open air.'³⁵

A second camp was put in place near a village situated on the northern periphery of the town, at Karlik, along the railway line. According to the American consul, Jesse B. Jackson, one would find there on average 500 tents, housing 2,000–3,000 deportees in appalling conditions, virtually without water. A hundred dead were taken away each day.³⁶

The humourist Yervant Odian, who was temporarily in another camp on the outskirts of Aleppo, witnessed terrible scenes.³⁷ He later wrote about a trench dug at the edge of the camp into which, every morning, were thrown the deceased of the night before, above all

victims of the dysentery epidemic that raged there at the beginning of December 1915. He also observed how the Turks, Arabs, and Jews of Aleppo, without children, came to the camp to buy boys and girls from their parents. Cold weather and rain decimated especially those who had no tent; the lack of food did the rest. In this environment, ethical and moral standards are overthrown. Nonetheless, mothers often objected to these transactions, and would not always allow themselves to be convinced by the arguments of the buyers when the latter remarked that, in any case, the mothers would be going to their deaths, and so their child would be saved by being bought. Some mothers who had consented fell into madness or stupor soon after giving up their progeny. The most sought after were children of seven to ten years, above all girls. Thousands of boys and girls were thus sold by their parents.³⁸

By October 1915, some 870,000 deportees had reached the border regions of Syria or Mesopotamia. The general strategy of the Turkish authorities was to leave them there to 'rot' in the temporary camps for a few weeks, then to set them on their way to another camp, and so on, until the convoys amounted to no more than a few moribund survivors. The Mamura camp, situated half an hour from Osmaniye, in a place called Kanlıgeçit, received during the months of August, September, and October 1915 around 80,000 Armenian deportees, who were then housed in makeshift tents on:

a vast and muddy terrain stretching before the Mamura station. Every day, six to seven hundred would die.... The unfortunate, without roof, without clothing, without bread would like fall like dead leaves.... The unburied bodies of the dead piled up. The ground was covered with them. Under many tents, entire families would die of starvation and cold.³⁹

The next stage of the deportation journey was to the Islahiye camp, situated on the eastern slope of the Amanus range, where the Baghdad Railway resumed its course. Islahiye was the first concentration camp in the province of Aleppo. A German missionary reported:

The Islahiye camp is the saddest thing I have ever seen. Right at the entrance a heap of dead bodies lay unburied ... in the immediate neighbourhood of the tents of those who were down with virulent dysentery. The filth in and around these tents was something indescribable. On one single day, the burial committee buried as many as 580 people.⁴⁰

Father Krikoris Balakian, who spent several months in the region and visited the camp in autumn 1915, reports that the subdirector for deportees, using the lack of militiamen and means of transportation as an excuse, deliberately let the convoys that arrived in quick succession crowd the camps, making it impossible to provide the deportees with the basic necessities and creating conditions that encouraged the spread of epidemics:

People arrived by the thousands in Islahiye; only a few hundred were marched off.... There were days on which the deportees in the tens of thousands of tents died, not by the dozens, but by the hundreds, while no healthy people could be found to collect and bury the dead.... The victims were, first and foremost, Armenian children.... The area spread out before us looked like a battlefield. The plain just beyond Islahiye was covered with countless earthen mounds, large and small. These were the graves of Armenians, containing fifty or a hundred bodies each.... Some, unfortunately, were as high as hills.⁴¹

The camps in Rajo, Katma, and Azaz, located some 20 km south of Islahiye on the road to Aleppo, were in operation only briefly, in the autumn of 1915. In a telegram dated 18 October 1915, the interim German consul in Aleppo, Hermann Hoffmann, informed his ambassador that the director of political affairs in the province estimated that there were 40,000 deportees concentrated in the camps in Rajo and Katma, and that other convoys 'from western, central and northern Anatolia were on the way. Three hundred thousand people have to continue their route southward'.⁴² The camp in Rajo lay approximately 1 km from the railway station. At this time of the year, it was a vast marshland, but nonetheless it was covered in tents. A deportee from Banderma reported:

Corpses piled up in the tents. People who did not have tents had taken up quarters under the railroad bridge in order to protect themselves a little from the cold. A torrent caused by the rains suddenly inundated the spot and swept them off: they all drowned. There were bodies on all sides. Very few escaped with their lives.⁴³

On 8 November the German consul, Dr Rössler, returning from Alexandretta, informed the Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, that 'the concentration camp in Katma is an indescribable sight'.⁴⁴ Within a few weeks, the number of deportees arriving at Katma had soared. According to the same deportee from Banderma, 40,000 tents were set up there in just over a month, housing nearly 200,000 people. Then the survivors 'were ultimately transferred, in the space of a few days, to Azaz, an hour's march away'. The

concentration camp in Azaz remained in operation somewhat longer, until spring 1916, but with fewer deportees – those who had managed to bribe officials of the *Sevkiyat* to let them stay in the camp. In the account by the same witness:

I may say that with the naked eye it was impossible to see from one end to the other of this gigantic tent camp.... Famine and lack of shelters caused great suffering to the population. Dysentery was omnipresent. Poverty was absolute. The dead past counting. [The system] of Armenian supervisors took shape here and was an additional appalling nightmare for the population.... The ground beneath the sagging tents, made of whatever was to hand, was strewn with the dead and dying. Many people were wasting away amid excrement, wracked by hunger. Odour and death reigned everywhere.... The gravediggers were unable even to remove all the bodies.... Every day a convoy was led away by force.

According to Aram Andonian, 60,000 deportees perished in these two camps, carried off by famine or typhus, in autumn 1915.⁴⁵

Bab, the following stage, had a concentration camp set up half an hour from the city, on a clay plain that was transformed into a veritable lake whenever it rained. In October 1915, Bab acquired the status of transit camp and concentration camp. With the beginning of winter and the arrival of deportees from the camps of Islahiye and Katma-Azaz, typhus broke out in Bab. Each day, 400–500 people died there.⁴⁶

Roughly 50,000–60,000 Armenians lost their lives in Bab between October 1915 and spring 1916, according to the evidence of Father Dajad Arslanian, who took it upon himself to bury the dead with as much respect as possible.⁴⁷ These figures are confirmed by the German consul and by the camp's chief gravedigger, an Armenian named Hagop, who counted 1,209 deaths in two days, 11 and 12 January 1916 (the gravediggers, recruited from the ranks of the deportees, were allowed to stay with their families until the camps were shut down). The consul, Rössler, stated in a report dated 9 February that 1,029 people died in two days in the same camp.⁴⁸

Of the two main deportation routes on which the concentration camps were located, the first, Mosul–Baghdad, had the camp of Ras ul-Ayn, to the east of Urfa and to the south of Dyarbakir, on the borders of Syria and of Mesopotamia, in a particularly desert region. It had the advantage of being far from everything, screened from indiscreet observation. The first deportees to arrive there came in mid-July 1915; they were natives of Harput, Erzerum, and Bitlis.⁴⁹ In approximately the same period, the American consul in

Baghdad, Charles P. Brissel, noted in a report that the governor-general of Baghdad, when he had been the governor of the Mardin department, 'began at and near Mardin, persecutions against the Armenians and sent them to Ras ul-Ayn. There is a report in Baghdad that the Armenians sent to Ras ul-Ayn were massacred some time after their arrival at that place or en route to it'.⁵⁰

Subsequently, many other convoys coming from Urfa, where the first and second deportation routes converged, reached Ras ul-Ayn. In his report of 13 August 1915, the German consul at Aleppo, Rössler, tells us that, thanks to the evidence of a Turkish-speaking Austrian engineer, Lismayer, who was working in the region on construction of the railway, he had been 'able to obtain precise information on another group that had left Adiyaman [to the north-west of Urfa]. Of the six hundred ninety-six people who set out, three hundred twenty-one arrived in Aleppo, two hundred six men and fifty-seven women were killed'.⁵¹ Krikoris Balakian, who met this engineer some weeks later, reported:

It was in the last days of October [1915], Lismayer had been busy constructing a narrow-gauge railway between Sormagha and Ras ul-Ayn, when he saw a large column coming from the north and slowly descending towards Ras ul-Ayn.... This mass of people moved slowly down the road, and only when it had drawn near did the Austrian realize that the army was made up, not of soldiers, but of an immense convoy of women guarded by gendarmes. On some estimates, there were as many as forty thousand women in the convoy.... There was not a single man among them.⁵²

Another engineer working on the Baghdad railway, M. Graif, informed Dr Martin Niepage, a professor in Aleppo, 'that along the entire trajectory of the railroad leading to Tell Abiad and Ras ul-Ayn were piles of naked corpses of raped women', while the German consul in Mosul who had travelled on the road between Mosul and Aleppo 'had seen, in several places on the way, so many severed children's hands that the road could have been paved with them'.⁵³

According to the evidence of the director of the concentration camp at Ras ul-Ayn, at the end of October 1915 it already contained 10,000 tents – housing about 50,000 Armenian deportees – ranged on a height ten minutes from the town.⁵⁴ A new subgovernor, Kerim Refif Bey, a committed Young Turk, took up his duties at the beginning of March and immediately got down to the task he had been given: extermination of the deportees from the camp at Ras ul-Ayn. The preparations were done from 17 to 21 March 1916, on

which date began the operation aimed at the systematic liquidation of the 40,000 internees still there.⁵⁵

The first information about the extermination of the deportees in the camp at Ras ul-Ayn did not reach Aleppo until the beginning of April. The first despatch of the consul, Rössler, is not until 6 April 1916, and alludes to a massacre by 'Circassians'.⁵⁶ The diplomat is more precise in his report of 27 April, drawing on the account of a reliably informed German who spent several days at Ras ul-Ayn and in the surrounding area:

Every day or almost every day for a month 300 to 500 victims were taken from the camp and slain in a place about 10 kilometres from Ras ul-Ayn. The corpses were thrown into the river named Djirdjib el Hamar.... The Chechens established in the region of Ras ul-Ayn have served as executioners.⁵⁷

One needs to draw on the evidence of some survivors to take the measure of the carnage. The camp director spells out:

By 23 April only a few hundred people remained, the sick, the blind, the disabled and a few youngsters.... After each convoy was sent off, hundreds of dead were collected for whom large communal graves were dug.... A few days after the departure of the last convoy, the subgovernor made an announcement that the activities of the concentration camp were done with, [and] he ordered me to hand over the registers.⁵⁸

Officially, the area around the Euphrates constituted the main region in which the Young Turk authorities chose to 'settle' the Armenian populations who had been 'displaced towards the interior'. By late September 1915, the number had risen to 23,300,⁵⁹ soaring to 310,000 by early February 1916.⁶⁰ These exiles were split up between Meskene and Der Zor. Throughout the period in question, this journey was synonymous with death for all the deportees. Strung out along the route was a succession of camps: Meskene, Dipsi, Abuhar, Hamam, Sebka/Rakka, and finally the camps of Der Zor/Marât. However, the number of those interned in them did not rise significantly until the winter of 1915–16, after the Constantinople authorities decided to purge northern Syria of its deportees. The camps of Mamura, Islahiye, Rajo, Katma, Azaz, Bab, Akhterim, Munbuc, and Mârra, all located in the outskirts of Aleppo, or at a relatively short distance from the town, were now shut down, one after the other, and the survivors of these camps were sent on, following the Euphrates.

The camp in Meskene was the first important way-station on the route leading to Zor; it lay at the point where the road from

Aleppo intersects the Euphrates. According to Hocazade Huseyin Avni Bey, who was appointed director of the camp in January 1916, barely 20,000 deportees were living there on his arrival. In the following weeks its population jumped to 100,000.⁶¹ This camp was one of the most deadly on the Euphrates route. According to the testimony of Huseyin Avni Bey himself, the official estimate of the number of Armenians who died there in 1916, carried off by typhus, cholera, or other illnesses, or by hunger, was 80,000, although the real figure was much higher than is suggested by the well known *çeles* (sticks on which one made notches to record numbers) kept by the chief gravedigger (*mezarıcı başı*). Since the chief gravedigger was illiterate, he contented himself with cutting a notch on one of his *çeles* for every body of which he took charge. Certain people learned from him that the number of bodies he counted – that had been buried – did not include those that had been thrown into the Euphrates: approximately 100,000, at the very least. There were only 2,100 internees left in the camp in Meskene by April 1916.⁶²

In his report of 29 July 1916, the German consul, Rössler, confirmed that ‘a Turkish army pharmacist who had been serving in Meskene for six months told him that 55,000 Armenians were buried in Meskene alone. A Turkish vice-commander had, moreover, cited the same figure’.⁶³ The American consul, Jesse B. Jackson, reported similar statistics in a despatch dated 10 September 1916:

Information obtained on the spot permits me to state that nearly 60,000 Armenians are buried there, carried off by hunger, privations of all sorts, intestinal diseases and the typhus that results. As far as the eye can reach, mounds can be seen containing 200 to 300 corpses buried pell mell, women, children, and old people belonging to different families.⁶⁴

The camp in Dipsi, located five hours from Meskene, was the next stage. The transfer from Meskene to Dipsi was customarily made in conditions that Krikor Ankut, a young Istanbul intellectual who spent more than a year in the region, describes:

Mid-March [1916], we were transferred from Meskene to Dipsi. There were about a thousand persons on foot and fifty on wagons.... Along the route, we would meet at each step corpses, the dying or exhausted men and women who had no more strength to march and were waiting to die on the road, hungry and thirsty. On the stretch from Meskene to Dipsi, we met roving gravediggers who had the task of burying the dead. They were so ruthless that they would bury the dying with the dead to avoid a double task. We would ceaselessly find the corpses of people whose heads had had been chopped off. The dogs were

numerous and lived by devouring the corpses. All the unfortunates who had been displaced from Meskene on foot or on wagons were brought and abandoned in a place called the Hospital [*Hastahane*]. They remained there, naked, hungry, and thirsty, until death should come and harvest them. We would encounter corpses at every step, to such an extent that the gravediggers could not bury all the dead. Misery was absolute in this place and had reached its peak. Day after day, the number of tents at the Hospital was increasing, with the arrival of people from Meskene. Dipsi was in effect the Meskene death ward where the most seriously ill deportees were sent. The camp operated for only six months, from November 1915 to April 1916, but 30,000 people gave up the ghost there.⁶⁵

On the Der Zor route, across the Syrian desert, lay the camps of Abuharar, nine hours' march from Meskene, Hamam, requiring another nine hours' march from Abuharar, and Sebka, opposite the locality of Rakka, on the left bank of the Euphrates, which was the last stop before reaching what the deportees regarded as the supreme hell, Der Zor.

With the camps of Der Zor and its periphery, we approach in some ways the final chapter of the massacres of 1915–16. Zor was, in effect, the end of the road for the survivors reaching it from across the desert. Despite the gradual elimination of the deportees all along the route following the Euphrates, from camp to camp, tens of thousands reached Zor. According to a German witness who gave an account to Rössler of his journey to Zor, by the beginning of November 1915 there were already about 15,000 Armenians in this corner of the Syrian desert, where '150 to 200 people die each day. Moreover it explains how the town can absorb the deportees who continue to arrive in thousands'.⁶⁶ As a result of the killings, but also of famine and epidemics, Zor largely respected the orders to maintain a 'reasonable' proportion of Armenians in the area. When the norms were exceeded, the local authorities' solution to the problem was to send small convoys to Mosul, to restore the balance. This situation lasted for as long as the influx of new arrivals was compensated for, as it were, by the fairly temporary placement of deportees in the concentration camps in the Aleppo and Ras ul-Ayn regions.

The decision to rake out the Armenian deportees from the entire region of Aleppo and its surroundings, taken in February 1916, as is confirmed in a telegram from the Minister of the Interior, dated 9/22 February 1916,⁶⁷ gave rise during February, March, April, and above all in May and June 1916, to a real obstruction of the Euphrates route. The route was overrun with survivors from the convoys from

the camps in the north. The Ottoman archives count the arrival in Zor of 4,620 deportees, for 7, 8, 11, and 12 February 1916. These figures give some indication of the rate of despatch from Zor.⁶⁸

According to information gathered from a Turkish officer by Rössler, towards the middle of April Zor had no more than about 20,000 deportees.⁶⁹ The consul in Mosul communicated to his colleague Hoffmann, interim consul in Aleppo, that of two convoys leaving Zor on 15 April 1916 by two different routes, only 2,500 people reached Mosul on 22 May and that later not a single convoy arrived there,⁷⁰ although twenty-one groups had in fact left in that direction during the summer of 1916.

At the end of June 1916, the last cleansing operations in the region of Aleppo and on the Euphrates route caused an exceptional increase in the number of convoys arriving one after the other, following an order from Talât addressed to the governorate of Aleppo, on 16 June, demanding the expulsion of the last Armenians towards Zor.⁷¹ The Minister of the Interior appointed Salih Zeki as the new governor of Zor, probably to handle these deportees, then estimated at some 200,000.⁷² Zeki's bloody exploits at Evrek were known to everyone. The machine ground into action. Customarily, when some 10,000 deportees were concentrated on the other bank of the bridge in Zor, Zeki would organize their dispatch towards Marât, a camp situated five hours to the south, some way from the Euphrates. Generally, the gendarmes delivered their 'protégés' to the Chechens, recruited by Zeki, who took on the task of selecting the folk who still had some financial resources: they were methodically stripped of their last goods and killed on the spot, to avoid the risk of leaving the benefit of this significant revenue stream to the Bedouins who were entrusted with the final extermination of the convoys deeper in the desert. Marât was a 'decantation' camp. The big convoys were sectioned into groups of 2,000–5,000 people, who were gradually sent to Suvar, in the Khabour valley, two days' march by the desert route. There came the task of definitively separating the last male survivors – to be executed in the surrounding area – from the women and children. Then, in a continuing method of splitting, people were regrouped according to their region of origin.⁷³ After a stay – on rations – of some ten days in these desert places, women and children were sent on their way to Sheddadiye, where they were customarily exterminated behind the mountain overlooking the Arab village.

There was a total of twenty-one convoys, six large and fifteen more modest. The first left the camp at the Zor bridge (on the other

bank) about 15 July 1916, with some 18,000 people, in the direction of Marât. A group of women, however, escaped the fate of the others and were finally taken to Haseke, some hours to the north of Sheddadiye, where they were given to the local tribes, who shared them out.⁷⁴

To recruit enough people to exterminate the tens of thousands of remaining deportees, as there were insufficient numbers of Chechens available, Zeki turned to the nomad tribes in the region stretching from Marât to Sheddadiye, especially the Baggara tribe, established between Zor–Marât and Suvar, the Ageydid, who lived nomadically between Suvar and Sheddadiye, and the Ceburi, located at Sheddadiye and its surroundings, whom he could dazzle with the prospect of pillage.⁷⁵

In a despatch dated 29 July 1916, the German consul, Rössler, confirmed that Zeki had moved swiftly into action. He wrote:

Just received communication from Der Zor, dated 16 July, informing us that the Armenians have received orders to quit the town. On 17 July, all the ecclesiastics and the notables were thrown into prison.... Now those who remained will be exterminated in their turn. It is possible that this measure is directly bound up with the arrival of a new pitiless governor.⁷⁶

Late in August, the interim consul, Hoffmann, reported that:

On the official version of events, they were conducted to Mosul (a route on which only a small minority has any chance of arriving at the destination); the general view, however, is that they were murdered in the little valley lying southwest of Der Zor, near the spot where the Khabour flows into the Euphrates. Gradually, all the Armenians are being evacuated in groups of a few hundred people each and massacred by Circassian bands recruited especially for that purpose. A [German] officer received confirmation of this information from an Arab eyewitness who had only recently been present at a scene of this sort.⁷⁷

These despatches, however, present no more than bits and pieces of what actually happened. Only first-hand accounts by survivors can give a true picture of the events.

Zeki left to last the extermination of 1,500 orphans kept in Zor in appalling conditions and a few hundred others gathered on the Meskene–Zor line by Hakki Bey, a creature of Zeki. A witness reported the fate of these children:

They walked about, for the most part, bare-footed and naked, the burden of fatigue on their shoulders.... The arms and legs, as well as the reddened shoulders of many of them, were covered with untold

wounds that had become horrible sores. Since the wounds had not been treated, these sores were devoured by worms that the poor little children pulled out with their fingers.... In a company of eight hundred orphans of Der-Zor, they endured, for a while, a great many hardships in this hell that had been christened an orphanage, and were then, on a freezing December day, packed off in carts and put on the road.⁷⁸

Some of them were blown up with dynamite in their carts, in an uninhabited spot in the desert. Others were put in natural cavities in the ground, sprinkled with kerosene, and burned alive. Zeki Bey found a pretext for sending them off. He had the *müdir* of Zor write a report that, given the increase in the orphans' numbers, there was a danger that they would spread contagious diseases. Only two children survived this massacre.⁷⁹

Investigations conducted after the Moudros armistice revealed that it was the police chief, Mustafa Sidki, who supervised the slaughter of these children from the orphanage in Zor on 9 October 1916, followed on 24 October by that of some 2,000 more orphans, whom Hakki had rounded up in the camps to the north. Here they had been tied together in pairs and thrown into the Euphrates.⁸⁰

According to information gathered by Aram Andonian, 192,750 people were victims to the massacres in Zor in the five months (July–December 1916) that Salih Zeki took to cleanse the region.⁸¹ The indictment of the Young Turk leaders, read out at the first session of their trial on 27 April 1919, states that 195,750 people were murdered in Zor in 1916,⁸² of whom 82,000 were liquidated between Marât, Markade, and Sheddadiye, and another 20,000 were liquidated at the fort of Rav, near Ana, under the supervision of Lieutenant Türki Mahmud.⁸³

In having these nearly 200,000 victims slain in the remotest corners of the Syrian desert, far from traffic routes, the Young Turk authorities dispensed with a mammoth task: their burial. Public health issues, along with the question of potential witnesses, were thus removed from the equation, the bodies being simply left beneath the sun. The corpses rotted naturally there. In 1974, when this author went to the sites, notably at Markade, the bones of the deportees were still visible over considerable areas.

Conclusion

The bodies of the deportees generally underwent two forms of treatment: in the concentration camps, the deceased – most of whom

died by 'natural' causes – were buried by the deportees themselves, sometimes by the families, but most often by the brigades of diggers recruited among the internees, as was highlighted above; in the uninhabited zones of the desert, where the deportees had been most often actively slain, nature took care of making all but the bones of the corpses disappear.

A measure of rationality, an evident pragmatism, was not lacking in the Young Turk authorities seeking to eliminate the traces of their abuses. The Tigris and the Euphrates, then the Syrian deserts, were the instruments most frequently employed. Clearly, after giving priority to physical destruction of the Armenian populations, the local authorities were short of personnel or were reluctant to bury the bodies, even in summary fashion. Only under orders from Istanbul, whose aim was to conceal the crimes and avoid epidemics reaching the army and the local non-Armenian populations, did they bend to the task, sometimes several months after the events. Scavengers may well have played a part too in the sanitization of the public realm.

These few comments complete our understanding of the prevailing ideology within the Young Turk Central Committee, which was steeped in social Darwinism and had as its priority the planning of the speediest possible elimination of Armenians. Even rudimentary means, such as earth, fiery sun and water, would be used to bring about the disappearance of the 'internal enemy', these 'microbes polluting the social fabric'.

On the left bank of the Euphrates, across from the modern town of Deir ez-Zor, some dozens of metres from the bridge, a vast meadow of several hectares was still a score of years ago left without buildings or cultivation: it more or less matched the bounds of the Zor concentration camp. The local population was keeping the remembrance of the place where the Armenians had been massacred, and regarded it as a sacred site that must be left to rest.

A memorial was built in Zor in the 1980s, including a genocide memorial church and victims' remains, where there gather, every year on 24 April, Armenians from all over the world, local authorities, heads of Bedouin tribes, and descendants of the Arabized deportees of the Khabour valley.

Based on evidence gathered on the ground, the observations presented in this short study allow us to draw some conclusions of a general nature. It will first be noted that some of these methods of killing involved the simultaneous destruction of the bodies or, in some cases, their physical transportation to less populated areas.

This was the case in particular with rivers such as the Tigris and the Euphrates, which guaranteed both death by drowning and removal of the corpses to Syria and Mesopotamia.

The death marches, which killed most of the women and children forced into the convoys, gave rise to significant pollution over a vast area. The cursory burial given to the resulting heaps of bodies – the Ministry of the Interior complained bitterly that the local authorities had not dug pits deep enough to guard against the attentions of scavengers – is evidence of a certain repugnance on the part of the local employees as regards disposing of these bodies, and even of gross negligence in respect of this task.

The siting of the concentration camps in the middle of the Syrian desert was much more effective in this respect, insofar as daily burials were carried out by the deportees themselves, sometimes with the assistance of a priest. The gradual shutting down of the camps, which began in April 1916, nevertheless forced the Young Turk authorities to liquidate the 200,000 or so surviving deportees whom they held by slitting their throats in the Kabur valley. These are the traces that survive to this day. They reveal the successive ways in which the Young Turk leaders adapted their methods of dealing with bodies.

Notes

- 1 The text of this chapter was translated from the author's French by Cadenza Academic Translations.
- 2 Notably R. Kévorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006); and see R. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011); T. Akçam, *Un acte honteux: le génocide arménien et la question de la responsabilité turque* (Paris: Denoël, 2008), available in translation as T. Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (trans. P. Bessemer) (New York: Henry Holt, 2006).
- 3 A. A. Türkiye, '183/376, K169, 48', in J. Lepsius, *Archives du génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), p. 93.
- 4 Ibid., A23991, pp. 112–13.
- 5 French translation of the indictment in the trial of the Unionists published in M. Fisch, *Justicier du génocide arménien, le procès de Tehlirian* (Paris: Éditions Diasporas, 1981), p. 266, in which this telegram is cited.
- 6 A. Krieger, *Yozghadi hayasbanoutian vaverakragan badmutiune* (in Armenian) (*Documentary History of the Massacre of Yozgat Armenians*) (New York: publisher unknown, 1980), p. 10.
- 7 The precise date of this ride is given in T. Atkinson, 'The German, the Turk and the Devil Made a Triple Alliance': *Harpoon Diaries, 1908–*

- 1917 (Princeton: Gomidas Institute, 2000), p. 55; Report of L. Davis to the State Department, 9 February 1918, reproduced in L. A. Davis, *La Province de la mort: archives américaines concernant le génocide des Arméniens* (1915) (trans. Anne Earth) (Brussels: Complexe, 1994), p. 166; L. A. Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province: An American Diplomat's Report on the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1917* (trans. A. Terre & Y. Ternon) (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1988).
- 8 Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province*, p. 167. Davis indicates he thought at first that this had been done as a 'sanitary measure', but was soon made aware of the practices of the assassins.
 - 9 Ibid., pp. 168–9.
 - 10 Ibid., pp. 175–7. The precise date of departure of the two men is given in Atkinson, *The German, the Turk*, p. 58.
 - 11 Y. Ternon, 'Mardin 1915: anatomie pathologique d'une destruction', *Revue d'Histoire Arménienne Contemporaine*, 5 (2002), 182–4; H. Simon, *Mardine, la ville héroïque: autel et tombeau de l'Arménie durant les massacres de 1915* (Lebanon: Jounieh, n.d.), p. 12.
 - 12 Simon, *Mardine*, p. 86.
 - 13 Bibliothèque Nubar (Nubar Library, Paris, hereafter BNu), Fonds A. Andonian, P.J.1/3, Bundle 39, Tchémchgadzak, ff. 2–3.
 - 14 S. Zurlinden, *Der Weltkrieg* (Zurich: Art Institut Orell Rissli, 1918), vol. 2, p. 707, cited by V. N. Dadrian, 'Documentation of the Armenian genocide in Turkish sources', in I. W. Charny (ed.), *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 116–17.
 - 15 BNu, Fonds A. Andonian, P.J.1/3, Bundle 10, Arapkir, fo. 11r–v, evidence of Kaloust Kaloyan.
 - 16 Ibid., fo. 12.
 - 17 Ibid., fo. 12v.
 - 18 Ibid. Their escort left for Arapkir.
 - 19 BNu, Fonds A. Andonian, P.J.1/3, Bundle 10, Arapkir, ff. 1–4. This source contains the evidence of three female survivors of the Arapkir convoy who arrived at Urfa, then Aleppo, after having crossed the Kahta gorge.
 - 20 BNu, Fonds A. Andonian, P.J.1/3, Bundle 59, Erzerum, fo. 4v, evidence of Alphonse Arakélian. The convoys of deportees from the regions of Erzerum, Sivas, Bitlis, and Harput nearly all passed through the Kahta gorge and were decimated there by these same squadrons.
 - 21 Ibid. See also Archives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople/Archives of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Patriarchate of Constantinople Information Bureau (hereafter APC/APJ, PCI Bureau), T 358–60 and T 723–6, Faits et documents, doc. no. 29, 'Les déportations des Arméniens d'Erzerum'.
 - 22 H. Kaiser, '“A Scene from the Inferno”: the Armenians of Erzerum and the genocide, 1915–1916', in H.-L. Kieser & D. J. Schaller (eds), *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah* (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2002), p. 157, n. 152, citing a report addressed by the Aleppo consul Rössler to Bethmann-Hollweg, on 30 November 1915.

- 23 D. Pasha, *Memoirs of a Turkish Statesman, 1913–1919* (London: Hutchinson, 1922), p. 277.
- 24 APC/APJ, PCI Bureau, File XXIX, T 578, certified copy of decoded telegram, and T 578/3, copy of encrypted telegram from the *vali* of Mamuret ul-Aziz, Sabit Bey, to the *mutesarif* of Malatia, dated 21 August 1915, at Mezreh.
- 25 APC/APJ, PCI Bureau, File XXIX, T 579/3, copy of encrypted telegram from the *vali* of Mamuret ul-Aziz, Sabit Bey, to the *mutesarif* of Malatia, dated 10/23 September 1915, at Mezreh. (Translator's note: such alternative dates reflect Turkey's continued use of the Julian calendar in this period, when many Western countries had long before moved to the Gregorian calendar.)
- 26 APC/APJ, PCI Bureau, File XXIX, T 578, certified copy of decoded telegram, and T578/4, copy of encrypted telegram from the Minister of the Interior, Talât, to the *vali* of Mamuret ul-Aziz, Sabit Bey, dated 19 December 1915.
- 27 APC/APJ, PCI Bureau, File XXIX, T 578, certified copy of decoded telegram, T 578/2 copy of encrypted telegram from the *mutesarif* of Malatia to the gendarmerie captains assigned to the regions and to the *müdir*, dated 20 December 1915.
- 28 APC/APJ, PCI Bureau, T 578, certified copy of decoded telegram, T 578/5, copy of encrypted telegram from the *vali* of Mamuret ul-Aziz, Sabit Bey, to the *mutesarif* of Malatia, dated 20 December 1915, at Mezreh.
- 29 SHAT, Service Historique de la Marine, Service de Renseignements de la Marine, Turquie, 1BB7, 231, doc. no. 259, Constantinople, 7 February 1919, 'rapport sur les atrocités de Yozgat, dressé par un fonctionnaire turc', dated 30 December 1918. See also Confessions de Şükrü, gendarmerie captain at Yozgat, collected in K. Balakian, *1915 ou le Golgotha arménien* (Paris: publisher unknown, 1984), pp. 221–30, which is an unpublished French translation from the Armenian original published in 1922, but see also K. Balakian, *Le Golgotha arménien: Berlin–Deir es-Zor* (trans. H. Bedrossian) (Chamigny: Le cercle d'écrits caucasiens, 2004).
- 30 F. Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları Iskân Politikası (1913–1918)* (Istanbul: Baski Temmuz, 2001), notably pp. 92–174 and the map on p. 93.
- 31 Ibid., pp. 201–25; APC/APJ, PCI Bureau, x 370, 'Musulmans qui ont émigré pendant la guerre balkanique et la guerre générale', gives the following breakdown: province of Andrinople 132,500; province of Adana 9,059; province of Angora 10,000; province of Aydın 145,868; province of Aleppo 10,504; province of Brousse 20,853; province of Sivas 10,806; province of Konya 8,512, etc., for a total of 413,922 people.
- 32 British Foreign Office file FO 371/6500, personal dossiers on the main Turkish war criminals and notably Şükrü Bey, published in V. Yeghiayan (ed.), *British Foreign Office Dossiers on Turkish War Criminals* (Pasadena: Doctorian Production, 1991), pp. 143–6. Şükrü Bey would become Minister of the Interior in the Kemalist era.

- 33 APC/APJ, PCI Bureau, T 125–8, 129–30.
- 34 BNU, Fonds A. Andonian, Materials for the history of genocide, P.J.1/3, Bundle 14, Konya, which presents the evidence of people originating from Akşehir, drafted at Aleppo on 23 February 1919, fo. 2v.
- 35 Report dated 8 November 1915, cited in Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, p. 164.
- 36 US National Archives, State Department, Record Group 59, 867.4016/373, report of 4 March 1918, published in A. Sarafian (ed.), *United States Official Documents on the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Gomidas Institute, 2004), vol. 1, p. 146.
- 37 Yervant Odian was a humourist and journalist well known in Istanbul. He just escaped the raid on the Armenian élite on 24 April 1915. Finally arrested and deported to Syria in July that year, he survived thanks to the intervention of secret Armenian mutual aid networks, and to his language skills, by becoming a translator for a German officer who was unable to communicate with his Turkish colleagues.
- 38 Y. Odian, *The Cursed Years, 1914–1919: Personal Memories* (published as a series in the *Jamanag* newspaper, Istanbul, starting from 6 February 1919), n. 51. On the fate of the children taken away or sold, see R. Kévorkian, L. Nordiguian & V. Tachjian, *Les Arméniens, la quête d'un refuge, 1917–1939* (Beirut: Presses de l'Université Saint-Joseph, 2008).
- 39 Balakian, *1915 ou le Golgotha arménien*, pp. 332–4. Balakian's information is matched by the evidence of Alèksan Tarpinian, who made the journey from Osmaniye to Mamura at the beginning of September, and already counted there 37,000 Armenian deportees. See R. Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés arméniens ottomans dans les camps de concentration de Syrie et de Mésopotamie 1915–1916', *Revue d'Histoire Arménienne Contemporaine*, 2 (1998), 68–74.
- 40 Report of visit to the camp in Mamura, dated 26 November 1915, of Béatrice Röhner, in V. Bryce & A. J. Toynbee (eds), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915–16: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1916), pp. 391–2; see also Report of the visit of Paula Schafer to the camp in Mamura, dated 1 December 1915, *ibid.* Both original documents, with the name of the missionaries, are in the Public Record Office, Kew, FO 867.4016/260.
- 41 Balakian, *1915 ou le Golgotha arménien*, p. 253.
- 42 Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, pp. 160–1.
- 43 Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés'.
- 44 Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, p. 164.
- 45 Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés', pp. 73–4.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 79, evidence of Aram Andonian.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 87–8, evidence of Father Dajad Arslanian.
- 48 *Ibid.*; see also Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, p. 199.
- 49 Türkiye, '183/38, A23991', in Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, p. 114.
- 50 US National Archives, State Department, Record Group 59, 867.4016/191, no. 372, report of 29 August 1915 addressed to ambassador Henry

- Morgenthau, published in Sarafian, *United States Official Documents*, vol. 1, pp. 127–8.
- 51 Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, pp. 130–3.
 - 52 Balakian, *1915 ou le Golgotha arménien*, p. 294.
 - 53 Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés', note 86, evidence of Martin Niepage.
 - 54 Ibid., pp. 110–14, evidence of J. Khéroyan.
 - 55 Ibid., text of Aram Andonian, Ras ul-Ayn/1,106. See also below.
 - 56 Andonian's propositions are matched by the report of Rössler in Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, pp. 200–1. It was in fact a case of Chechens, as is made clear in later reports, settled at Ras ul-Ayn at the end of the nineteenth century by Sultan Abdul Hamid II, when a station was built there on the Baghdad railway.
 - 57 Türkei, '183/38, A27200', in Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, pp. 203–5. This information is matched by the overall report drafted by the American consul J. B. Jackson: US National Archives, State Department, Record Group 59, 867.4016/373, report of 4 March 1918, published in Sarafian, *United States Official Documents*, vol. 1, pp. 148–9. The information is completed by the evidence of Garabèd K. Mouradian, published in Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés', pp. 119–20.
 - 58 Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés', pp. 113–14, camp director's evidence.
 - 59 US National Archives, State Department, Record Group 59, 867.4016/219, letter and annex from the consul, Jackson, to Henry Morgenthau, both dated 29 September 1915, published in Sarafian, *United States Official Documents*, vol. 1, pp. 100–1.
 - 60 US National Archives, State Department, Record Group 59, 867.48/271, letter and annex of 8 and 3 February 1916, published in Sarafian, *United States Official Documents*, vol. 1, pp. 112–13.
 - 61 Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés', evidence of Aram Andonian, pp. 128–9.
 - 62 Ibid., evidence of Aram Andonian, pp. 124–5.
 - 63 Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, p. 219.
 - 64 US National Archives, State Department, Record Group 59, 867.4016/302, published in Sarafian, *United States Official Documents*, vol. 1, p. 131.
 - 65 Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés', evidence of Krikor Ankout, p. 144.
 - 66 Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, p. 182.
 - 67 T. C. Başbakanlık Arşivi (Turkish Republic Prime Minister's Office Archives), 18Z1333, 27 October 1915 (§fr 57/135), EUM, order from Talât to the prefectures, doc. no. 146; 'Aram Andoniani hradaragadz tourk basdonagan vaverakrerou vaveraganoutioun', 1915–65, in *Houchamadian medz Yegherni* (trans. Krikor Gergerian) (Beirut: 1965), p. 241. See also Y. Ternon, *Enquête sur la négation d'un génocide* (Marseille: Editions Parenthèses, 1989), p. 122.
 - 68 T. C. Başbakanlık Arşivi, 2R1334, 3R1334, 6R1334, 7R1334, dated 7,

- 8, 11 and 12 February 1916, DN, telegrams from Ali Suad, DH. EUM, 2.Ş.69/6, 7, 8, 9, doc. nos 158, 159, 160, 161.
- 69 Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, p. 203.
- 70 Ibid., report of 5 September 1916, p. 227.
- 71 T. C. Başbakanlık Arşivi, 16Ş1334, 16 June 1916; IAMM, Talât to the prefecture of Aleppo, Şfr 65/32-1, document no. 187.
- 72 The figure is given in the indictment during the first session of the trial of the Unionists, 27 April 1919, *Takvim-i Vakayi* (official bulletin of the Ottoman state, Istanbul), no. 3540, dated 5 May 1919.
- 73 Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés', p. 176, evidence of Aram Andonian.
- 74 Ibid., p. 177.
- 75 Ibid., p. 185.
- 76 Lepsius, *Archives du génocide*, p. 219.
- 77 Ibid., despatch of 29 August 1916, pp. 223–4. A report from Auguste Bernau, sent to the American consul, Jackson, on 10 September 1916, says nothing different.
- 78 Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés', p. 186, evidence of Aram Andonian.
- 79 Ibid., pp. 188–9.
- 80 APC/APJ, PCI Bureau, T 301–9, Memorandum on the judicial process against Mustafa Sidki, one of those responsible for the Zor massacre, before Court Martial No. 1. This document mentions the names of the survivor witnesses, who came from Rodosto, Geyve, Erzincan, and Adabazar, along with the names of the Ottoman officers who served in the region.
- 81 Kévorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés', p. 190, evidence of A. Andonian and of M. Aghazarian, p. 224. This information was probably gathered from the source mentioned in note 82, but with a misprint in the figure.
- 82 *Takvim-i Vakayi*, no. 3540, dated 5 May 1919.
- 83 APC/APJ, PCI Bureau, T 304–9, Memorandum against Mustafa Sidki. The figures of massacres between Marât and Sheddadiye were communicated by the head of the statistics bureau in Zor, Urfali Mahmud Bey.

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