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by ARA SARAFIAN
From *The Armenian Reporter*, 13 March 2009

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“[Talaat stated that]... they had already disposed of three quarters of them [Armenians], that there were none left in Bitlis, Van, Erzeroum, and that the hatred was so intense now that they have to finish it. . . . He said they would take care of the Armenians at Zor and elsewhere but they did not want them in Anatolia. I told him three times that they were making a serious mistake and would regret it. He said, ‘We know we have made mistakes, but we never regret.’”

–8 August 1915 diary entry of conversations between Talaat Pasha and U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau, 1913–1916*, comp., ed., and intro. Ara Sarafian (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2004)

A handwritten black book that belonged to Mehmet Talaat Pasha, the Ottoman minister of interior in 1915, was published in facsimile form in the end of 2008. It is probably the single most important document ever uncovered describing the destruction of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915–17. The Black Book draws on Ottoman sources no longer available to answer many questions about what those sources showed.

Looking through the Sifre Kalemî or cipher telegram collection at the Prime Ministry Archives in Istanbul some years ago, I was struck by the number of telegrams in 1915 from Talaat Pasha ordering the deportation of individual communities, inquiring about the state of convoys, and giving instructions for further deportations. What emerged was a picture of a ruler obsessed with the progress of his signature program. Much of the responses to Talaat's inquiries were not available. What the Black Book does is to summarize the data he collected.

Ara Sarafian is an archival historian specializing in late Ottoman and modern Armenian history. He is the director of the Gomidas Institute, London. This article is a summary of a broader project on “Talaat Pasha's Black Book and the Armenian Genocide” at www.gomidas.org/blackbook

OTTOMAN ARCHIVES

Turkish state intellectuals in recent years have insisted that the 1915 deportations of Ottoman Armenians were not part of a genocidal exercise, but an orderly population transfer and resettlement. They have insisted that Ottoman archives in Turkey today support their contention. Yet, between them, they have only managed to cite an amalgam of official deportation and resettlement regulations, certain reports related to deportations, and no substantial account of what actually happened to deportees.

Indeed, no historian working in Turkish archives has managed to present a coherent picture of the deportation and resettlement of Armenians from any region in the Ottoman Empire based on Ottoman records. This is because Ottoman records do not support the official Turkish thesis on the Armenian Genocide.

While there is broad agreement between Turkish archives and other sources that thousands of Armenians were removed from their homes in 1915, there is no solid account of what happened to these deportees in Ottoman records. However, foreign archives, such as the consular records of the United States, give a better qualitative assess-

ment of actual developments than the available Ottoman documentation.

This absence of Ottoman records could seem perplexing, because according to Ottoman regulations, Ottoman officials had to keep detailed records of the deportation of Armenians, as well as an inventory of their properties, as well as details of the final settlement of the people concerned. The total absence of such registers in Turkish archives today is therefore remarkable.

A HANDWRITTEN BOOK

The recent facsimile publication of Talaat Pasha's Black Book may well answer many questions with the authority of Ottoman records. At 77 pages, the book includes a substantial section on the deportation of Armenians in 1915–17. The book and its content were never disclosed in Talaat's lifetime, including in his posthumous memoirs published in 1921. After his assassination in 1921, the book was kept by his widow and given to the Turkish historian Murat Bardakçi in 1982. Mr. Bardakçi made parts of the booklet public in *Hürriyet* newspaper in 2005. The full account was not published until the end of 2008.

The significance of the Black Book lies in the authority of the owner, the fact that its content was drawn from Ottoman administrative records no longer available to historians in Turkey, and the actual data that it gives about the deportation of Armenians. Neither the book nor the data it yields bear clear dates, though Mr. Bardakçi thinks that the figures refer to 1915–1916 – though I think that could be the end of 1916 or even the beginning of 1917.

THE STATE PERSPECTIVE

The data presented in this book can be considered to be a view of the Armenian Genocide from the perspective of the state. This state perspective still needs to be evaluated critically, which I am doing in a separate study. The purpose of this article is to introduce the core data that informed Talaat Pasha about the actual state of Armenians.

The statistics regarding the destruction of Armenians in the Black Book are enumerated in four categories covering 29 regions (vilayets and sanjaks) of the Ottoman Empire.

These statistics are supposed to reflect:

- The Armenian population in each region in 1914
- Armenians who were not deported (presumably 1915–16)
- Armenians who were deported and living elsewhere (1917)
- Armenians who were originally from outside the province they were living in (1917)

Talaat Pasha's figures confirm that most Ottoman Armenians outside Constantinople were indeed deported, and most of these deportees had disappeared by 1917. On average, 90 percent of provincial Armenians were deported, and 90 percent of those deported were killed. [...] These figures clearly show that deportations were tantamount to a death sentence.

From these statistics, we can also have an idea of the number of Armenians who were deported but not accounted for in 1917. Some of these missing Armenians undoubtedly fled the Ottoman Empire, such as those in the province of Van (where there was fierce resistance) or parts of Erzurum (which fell under Russian occupation after the Ottoman offensive collapsed in the east). However, very few Armenians were able to flee in such a manner, and for our discussion today, we will assume that the vast majority of the “missing Armenians” in 1917 were killed or died during deportations.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

The figures from Talaat Pasha's Black Book answer some fundamental questions about the Armenian Genocide. Two such questions concern the nature of the actual deportations of 1915, and the specific fate of those deportees as they were pushed into the deserts of Der Zor, one of the main areas identified for resettlement.

Talaat Pasha's information contradicts the official Turkish thesis that deportations were an orderly affair governed by Ottoman laws and regulations, or that deportees were actually successfully settled in Der Zor. Interestingly, Talaat's Black Book also shows the number of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire to have been much higher than supposed by official figures.

Talaat Pasha's figures confirm that most Ottoman Armenians outside Constantinople were indeed deported, and most of these deportees had disappeared by 1917. On average, 90 percent of provincial Armenians were deported, and 90 percent of those deported were killed. The number of people who went missing was over 95 percent for such provinces as Trabzon, Erzurum, Urfa, Diyarbakir, Mamuret-ul-Aziz, and Sivas. These figures clearly show that deportations were tantamount to a death sentence, and they give credence to United States consular reports that said as much, especially for those deported from the eastern provinces.

THE DER ZOR MASSACRES OF 1916

The data at hand also tells us about the scale of the Der Zor massacres of 1916. There is general agreement that hundreds of thousands of deportees were sent into this desert region in 1915–16, the main resettlement zone according to Ottoman decrees. Ottoman sources yield little information on what happened to these deportees. Survivor accounts and sources outside Turkey (such as those in United States archives) attest to the fact that deportees in the Der Zor region mostly wasted away.

By 1917, even those Armenians who had been able to settle in this area, mainly because of the efforts of the provincial governor Ali Suad Bey, were taken away and massacred after a new governor, one of Talaat Pasha's henchmen, was sent. Deniers of the Armenian Genocide – who do not have adequate records from Turkish archives – cite United States records to argue that up to 300,000 people were sent into this area – omitting the fact that practically none of them survived to 1917. Talaat Pasha's records show 6,778 Armenians in this province in 1917.

POPULATION TOTALS

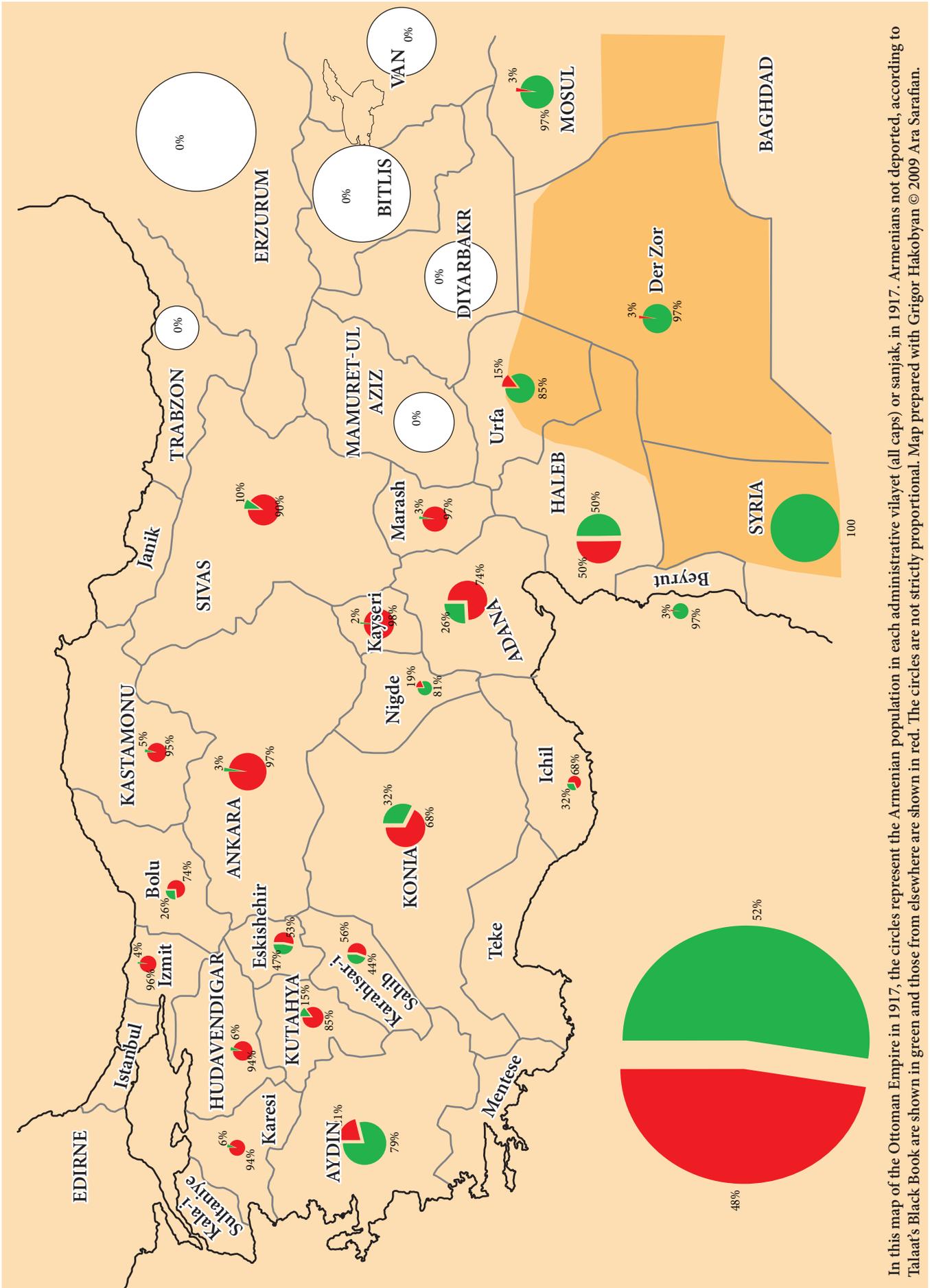
The Black Book also gives interesting insights into the number of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire circa 1914. While these figures are still smaller than some statistics cited outside Turkey, Talaat Pasha's dataset contradict the figures cited by deniers of the Armenian Genocide, who minimize the number of Ottoman Armenians as part of their strategy.

The Black Book cites official figures from the 1914 Ottoman population survey, with a note explaining that this figure, like the figures for Armenians registered in 1917, should be increased by a factor of 30 percent to account for undercounting.

Talaat Pasha's footnote: "The 1914 [1330] census gives 1,187,818 Gregorian Armenians, and 63,967 Catholic Armenians [no talk of Protestanst] with a total of 1,256,403 [sic, 1,251,785]. If one adds by way of precaution [presumably undercounting] 30% to the figures at hand, the true number of Armenians in 1914 can be taken as 1,500,000, and the number of Armenians remaining in the provinces, 284,157, to be around 350,000 to 400,000."

The note thus increases the main Apostolic (or Gregorian) Armenian community from 1,187,818 to 1,500,000 people before deportations. The note also mentions the figure for Catholic Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as 63,967 (which could also be revised upward to 83,157). There is no figure given for Protestant Armenians. These figures bring the number of Ottoman Armenians, based on official figures, close to 1,700,000 people. According to these figures, the total number of Armenians who were missing in 1917 was around 1,000,000 people. If one discounts those who might have fled to Russia, the number of missing Armenians was still in the region of 800,000 to 900,000 people.

Talaat Pasha's Black Book gives us invaluable insights into the type of bureaucratic control Ottoman officials wielded over Armenians and the type of information they gathered as a matter of course. The existence of such information in Talaat Pasha's Black Book again raises the question of what happened to the archival trail that underpinned his data. The Black Book also provides actual details about the apparent destruction of Armenians in 1915–16, and it dismisses the official Turkish assertion that deportations were an orderly affair in moving and resettling people between 1915 and 1916. Indeed, the image painted by the Black Book validates the more impressionistic or passing accounts of atrocities against Armenians reported throughout the Ottoman Empire by foreign observers and survivors between 1915 and 1916.



In this map of the Ottoman Empire in 1917, the circles represent the Armenian population in each administrative vilayet (all caps) or sanjak, in 1917. Armenians not deported, according to Talaat's Black Book are shown in green and those from elsewhere are shown in red. The circles are not strictly proportional. Map prepared with Grigor Hakobyan © 2009 Ara Sarafian.

Armenians in the Ottoman Empire [1914-1917]
according to Talaat Pasha's Black Book

Generated Analysis

| Place | 1914 | Not deported | Elsewhere [in 1917] | Outside Armenians in province | Number deported | Deported missing in 1917 | % deported | % of deported not accounted for in 1917 |
|----------------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|------------|---|
| Ankara | 44,661 | 12,766 | 4,560 | 410 | 31,895 | 27,335 | 71 | 86 |
| Musul | n/d | 253 | 0 | 7,033 | | 0 | | |
| Nigde | 4,939 | 193 | 547 | 850 | 4,746 | 4,199 | 96 | 88 |
| Izmit | 56,115 | 3,880 | 9,464 | 142 | 52,235 | 42,771 | 93 | 82 |
| Kutahya | 4,023 | 3,932 | 0 | 680 | 91 | 91 | 2 | 100 |
| Eskishehir | 8,620 | 1,258 | 1,104 | 1,096 | 7,362 | 6,258 | 85 | 85 |
| Bolu | 3,002 | 1,539 | 56 | 551 | 1,463 | 1,407 | 49 | 96 |
| Afyon Karahissar | 7,498 | 2,234 | 1,484 | 1,778 | 5,264 | 3,780 | 70 | 72 |
| Icel | 350 | 252 | 0 | 116 | 98 | 98 | 28 | 100 |
| Karesi | 8,663 | 1,852 | 1,696 | 124 | 6,811 | 5,115 | 79 | 75 |
| Kayseri | 47,974 | 6,650 | 6,778 | 111 | 41,324 | 34,546 | 86 | 84 |
| Adana | 51,723 | 12,263 | 19,664 | 4,257 | 39,460 | 19,796 | 76 | 50 |
| Marash | 27,306 | 6,115 | 2,010 | 198 | 21,191 | 19,181 | 78 | 91 |
| Sivas | 141,000 | 8,097 | 3,993 | 948 | 132,903 | 128,910 | 94 | 97 |
| Beyrut | 1,224 | 50 | 0 | 1,849 | 1,174 | 1,174 | 96 | 100 |
| Kastamonu | 9,052 | 3,437 | 211 | 185 | 5,615 | 5,404 | 62 | 96 |
| Konya | 13,078 | 3,730 | 3,639 | 14,210 | 9,348 | 5,709 | 71 | 61 |
| Aydin | 19,710 | 11,901 | 0 | 5,729 | 7,809 | 7,809 | 40 | 100 |
| Syria | 0 | 0 | 0 | 39,409 | | | | |
| Zor | 63 | 201 | 0 | 6,778 | | | | |
| Hudavendigar | 59,038 | 2,821 | 10,251 | 178 | 56,217 | 45,966 | 95 | 82 |
| Halep | 37,031 | 13,679 | 19,091 | 13,591 | 23,352 | 4,261 | 63 | 18 |
| Urfa | 15,616 | 1,144 | 451 | 6,687 | 14,472 | 14,021 | 93 | 97 |
| Erzurum ¹ | 125,657 | 0 | 3,364 | 0 | 125,657 | 122,293 | 100 | 97 |
| Bitlis ² | 114,704 | 0 | 1,061 | 0 | 114,704 | 113,643 | 100 | 99 |
| Van ³ | 67,792 | 0 | 160 | 0 | 67,792 | 67,632 | 100 | 100 |
| Diyarbakir | 56,166 | 0 | 1,849 | 0 | 56,166 | 54,317 | 100 | 97 |
| Trabzon | 37,549 | 0 | 562 | 0 | 37,549 | 36,987 | 100 | 99 |
| Elazig | 70,060 | 0 | 2,201 | 0 | 70,060 | 67,859 | 100 | 97 |
| SUBTOTAL | 1,032,614 | 97,247 | 94,206 | 106,910 | 935,367 | 841,161 | 91 | 90 |
| Istanbul | | 80,000 | | | | | | |
| Deported and surviving elsewhere | | 106,910 | | | | | | |
| Not deported | | 284,157 | | | | | | |

[Talaat's Note:] "The 1914 [1330] census gives 1,187,818 Gregorian Armenians, and 63,967 Catholic Armenians [no talk of Protestants] with a total of 1,256,403 [sic, 1,251,785]. If one adds by way of precaution [presumably undercounting] 30% to the figures at hand, the true number of Armenians in 1914 can be taken as 1,500,000, and the number of Armenians remaining in the provinces, 284,157, to be around 350,000 to 400,000."

¹ Some areas avoided deportation because of Russian advance (Bayazid and Terjan), though generally deportation and destruction implemented.

² Some Armenians were not subjected to deportation as they put up resistance (e.g., Sassoun).

³ Significant number not subject to deportation because of resistance in province.

A devastating document is met with silence in Turkey

by SABRINA TAVERNISE

From *The New York Times*, 8 March 2009

the *International Herald Tribune*, 9 March 2009

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ISTANBUL — For Turkey, the number should have been a bombshell.

According to a long-hidden document that belonged to the interior minister of the Ottoman Empire, 972,000 Ottoman Armenians disappeared from official population records from 1915 through 1916.

In Turkey, any discussion of what happened to the Ottoman Armenians can bring a storm of public outrage. But since its publication in a book in January, the number — and its Ottoman source — has gone virtually unmentioned. Newspapers hardly wrote about it. Television shows have not discussed it.

“Nothing,” said Murat Bardakci, the Turkish author and columnist who compiled the book.

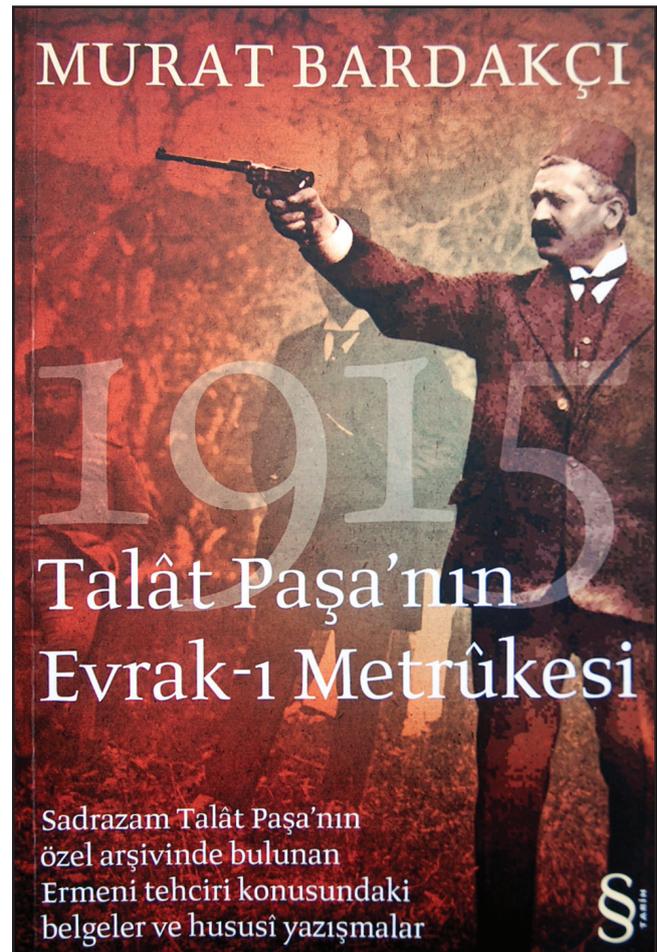
The silence can mean only one thing, he said: “My numbers are too high for ordinary people. Maybe people aren’t ready to talk about it yet.”

For generations, most Turks knew nothing of the details of the Armenian genocide of 1915 to 1918, when more than a million Armenians were killed as the Ottoman Turk government purged the population. Turkey locked the ugliest parts of its past out of sight, Soviet-style, keeping any mention of the events out of schoolbooks and official narratives in an aggressive campaign of forgetting.

But in the past 10 years, as civil society has flourished here, some parts of Turkish society are now openly questioning the state’s version of events. In December, a group of intellectuals circulated a pe-

Sabrina Tavernise is an American journalist who is currently the Istanbul bureau chief of The New York Times.

She previously reported for the Times from Iraq, Lebanon and Russia.



Murat Bardakçı's publication of Talaat's Black Book.

tion that apologized for the denial of the massacres. Some 29,000 people have signed it.

With his book, “The Remaining Documents of Talat Pasha,” Mr. Bardakci (pronounced bard-AK-chuh) has become, rather unwillingly, part of this ferment. The book is a collection of documents and records that once belonged to Mehmed Talat, known as Talat Pasha, the primary architect of the Armenian deportations.



Ottoman Armenians are marched to a prison by armed Turkish soldiers in April 1915. About 972,000 Armenians disappeared from population records in 1915 and 1916. Project Save.

The documents, given to Mr. Bardakci by Mr. Talat's widow, Hayriye, before she died in 1983, include lists of population figures. Before 1915, 1,256,000 Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire, according to the documents. The number plunged to 284,157 two years later, Mr. Bardakci said.

To the untrained ear, it is simply a sad statistic. But anyone familiar with the issue knows the numbers are in fierce dispute. Turkey has never acknowledged a specific number of deportees or deaths. On Sunday, Turkey's foreign minister warned that President Obama might set back relations if he recognized the massacre of Armenians as genocide before his visit to Turkey next month.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire was bloody, the Turkish argument goes, and those who died were victims of that chaos.

Mr. Bardakci subscribes to that view. The figures, he said, do not indicate the number of dead, only a result of the decline in the Armenian popu-

lation after deportation. He strongly disagrees that the massacres amounted to a genocide, and he says Turkey was obliged to take action against Armenians because they were openly supporting Russia in its war against the Ottoman Empire.

"It was not a Nazi policy or a Holocaust," he said. "These were very dark times. It was a very difficult decision. But deportation was the outcome of some very bloody events. It was necessary for the government to deport the Armenian population."

This argument is rejected by most scholars, who believe that the small number of Armenian rebels were not a serious threat to the Ottoman Empire, and that the policy was more the product of the perception that the Armenians, non-Muslims and therefore considered untrustworthy, were a problem population.

Hilmar Kaiser, a historian and expert on the Armenian genocide, said the records published in the book were conclusive proof from the Ot-

toman authority itself that it had pursued a calculated policy to eliminate the Armenians. “You have suddenly on one page confirmation of the numbers,” he said. “It was like someone hit you over the head with a club.”

Mr. Kaiser said the before and after figures amounted to “a death record.”

“There is no other way of viewing this document,” he said. “You can’t just hide a million people.”

Other scholars said that the number was a useful addition to the historical record, but that it did not introduce a new version of events.

“This corroborates what we already knew,” said Donald Bloxham, the author of “The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians.”

Mr. Bardakci is a history buff who learned to read and write Ottoman script from his grandmother, allowing him to navigate Turkey’s written past, something that most Turks are unable to do. He plays the tanbur, a traditional string instrument. His grandfather was a member of the same political party of Mr. Talat, and his family knew many of the important political figures in Turkey’s founding.

“We had a huge library at home,” he said. “They were always talking about history and the past.”

Though he clearly wanted the numbers to be known, he stubbornly refuses to interpret them. He offers no analysis in the book, and aside from an interview with Mr. Talat’s widow, there is virtually no text beside the original documents.

“I didn’t want to interpret,” he said. “I want the reader to decide.”

The best way to do that, he argues, is by using cold, hard facts, which can cut through the layers of emotional rhetoric that have clouded the issue for years.

“I believe we need documents in Turkey,” he said. “This is the most important.”

But some of the keenest observers of Turkish society said the silence was a sign of just how taboo the topic still was. “The importance of the book is obvious from the fact that no paper except *Milliyet* has written a single line about it,” wrote Murat Belge, a Turkish academic, in a January column in the liberal daily newspaper *Taraf*.

Still, it is a measure of Turkey’s democratic maturity that the book was published here at all. Mr. Bardakci said he had held the documents for so long — 27 years — because he was waiting for Turkey to reach the point when their publication would not cause a frenzy.

Even the state now feels the need to defend itself. Last summer, a propaganda film about the Armenians made by Turkey’s military was distributed to primary schools. After a public outcry, it was stopped.

“I could never have published this book 10 years ago,” Mr. Bardakci said. “I would have been called a traitor.”

He added, “The mentality has changed.”

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting.

REPRINTS №1

The **Armenian Cause Foundation** is a non-profit research and advocacy organization based in Yerevan, Armenia, dedicated to the multi-disciplinary study, promotion and pursuit of all aspects of the Armenian Cause, including but not limited to the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Armenian rights and restitution claims.

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Armenian Cause Foundation
12/1 Mher Mkrtchyan
Yerevan
Armenia 0010

tel.: +374 10 52 17 65
fax: +374 10 52 14 53
info@armeniancause.am
<http://www.armeniancause.am>

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