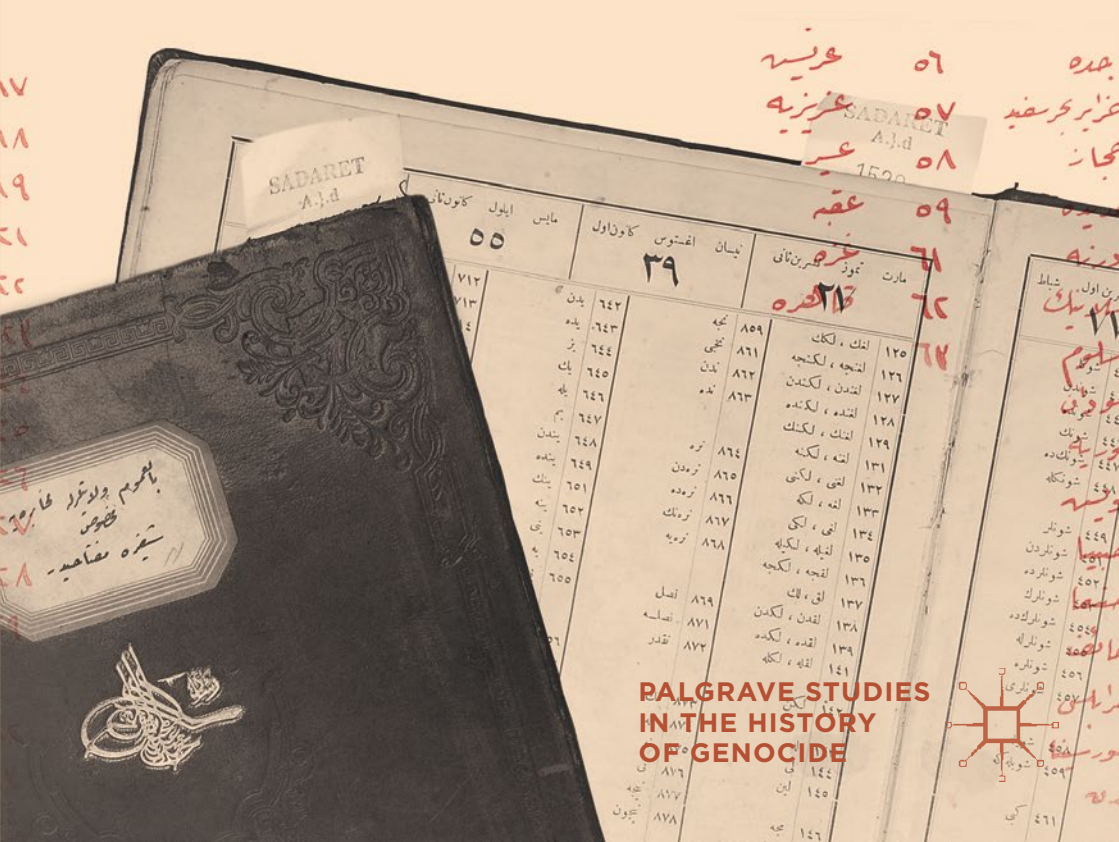


# KILLING ORDERS

Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide

TANER AKÇAM



PALGRAVE STUDIES  
IN THE HISTORY  
OF GENOCIDE



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Taner Akçam

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Talat Pasha's Telegrams and  
the Armenian Genocide

palgrave  
macmillan

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Clark University  
Worcester, MA, USA

Palgrave Studies in the History of Genocide

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*To my dear friend Hrant Dink, who dreamt of bringing the Armenians  
and people of Turkey together on the basis of Truth and Justice.  
His assassination in 2007 did not kill this dream, but instead inspired  
hundreds of thousands of individuals to follow in his footsteps.  
And to my daughter Helin, who gives me hope in the next generation's  
ability to carry on Hrant's dream for a better future.*

## ABOUT THE BOOK

This book presents new evidence and arguments that prove the killing orders for the Armenian Genocide issued by Talat Pasha are authentic. For decades it has been claimed that these incriminating documents and the memoirs of the Ottoman bureaucrat Naim Efendi, in which they are preserved, were forgeries.

## A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

We have strived for consistency in the spelling of names, even when the same name is spelled differently within the same document. Armenian names are rendered as they are spelled in Naim's text, followed in square brackets by how they are commonly known in modern English in the west.

Ottoman Turkish names are rendered generally as they are spelled in modern Turkish, with a few exceptions. Characters with a circumflex, such as "â," are rendered without the circumflex. The capital letter "İ" is rendered as "I." The names of individuals well-known in the English language are rendered in anglicized form, e.g., "Talat" instead of "Talaat" or "Talât," the title "Pasha" instead of "Paşa." The names of cities well-known in the English language are rendered in anglicized form, e.g., "Aleppo" instead of "Halep," "Beirut" instead of "Beyrut," "Diyarbakır" instead of "Diyarbakır," "Marash" instead of "Maraş." Turkish language publications referenced in the footnotes, however, are reproduced in their full, Modern Turkish form.



# KEY TO TRANSCRIPTION AND PRONUNCIATION OF OTTOMAN-TURKISH WORDS AND NAMES

## TURKISH SPECIAL CHARACTERS AND THEIR PRONUNCIATION

- c *j* as in *just*  
ç *ch* as in *chair*  
ğ *gh* as in *though*, or *w* as in *sowing*  
ı *u* as in *just*  
j *zh* as in *gendarme*, *azure*, or *garage*  
ö *oe* as in *Goethe* or, *i*, as in *girl*; French *eu* as in *seul*; German *ö* as in *Öl*  
or *öffentlich*  
ş *sh* as in *sugar*, *shut*, or *she*  
ü high *u* as in *blue*; French *u* as in *du*; German *ü* as in *Lüge*

## MAJOR ABBREVIATIONS IN THE BOOK

AMMU	General Directorate of Tribal and Immigrant Settlement ( <i>Aşair ve Muhacirin Müdiriyeti Umumiyesi</i> )
BOA.A.}d	Ministry Registries ( <i>Sadaret Defteri</i> )
BOA.BEO.	Grand Vezier's Chancery Office ( <i>Babiali Evrak Odası Evrakı</i> )

BOA.DH.EUM.	Interior Ministry Public Security Directorate ( <i>Dahiliye Nezareti Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdürlüğü</i> )
BOA.DH.EUM. 2.	Şube: Second Department of Public Security of the Interior Ministry ( <i>Dahiliye Nezareti Emniyet-i Umumiye İkinci Şube</i> )
BOA.DH.EUM.LVZ.	Provisioning Office of the Interior Ministry's General Security ( <i>Dahiliye Nezareti Emniyeti Umumiye Levazım Kalem</i> )
BOA.DH.EUM.MH.	Record Office of Officials of the Interior Ministry's General Security ( <i>Dahiliye Nezareti Emniyeti Umumiye Memurin Kalem Evrakı</i> )
BOA.DH.EUM.VRK.	The Records Office of the Interior Ministry's General Security [Office] Registry ( <i>Dahiliye Nezareti Emniyeti Umumiye Evrak Odası Kalem Evrakı</i> )
BOA.DH.KMS.	Record Office of the Interior Ministry's Private Secretariat ( <i>Dahiliye Nezareti Dahiliye Kalem Mahsus Evrakı</i> )
BOA.DH.ŞFR.	Cipher Office of the Interior Ministry ( <i>Dahiliye Nezareti Şifre Kalem</i> )
BOA.İ.MMS.	Directorate of Personnel and Service Registers ( <i>İrada Meclisi Mahsus</i> )
BOA.MF.MKT.	The Correspondence Office of the Education Ministry ( <i>Maarif Nezareti Mektubi Kalem</i> )
BOA.ŞD.	Papers of the Council of State ( <i>Şuray-ı Devlet Evrakı</i> )
CUP	İttihad ve Terakki (Committee of Union and Progress; members are Unionists)
DE/PA-AA	German Foreign Ministry Political Archive ( <i>Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts</i> )
IAMM	Interior Ministry's Office of Tribal and Immigrant Settlement ( <i>Dahiliye Nezareti İskan-ı Aşair ve Muhacir'in Müdüriyeti</i> )
SO	Teşkilatı Mahsusa (Special Organization)
TV	<i>Takvimi Vekayi</i> ("Calendar of Events"—Official Gazette of the Ottoman Government)

# THE OTTOMAN PROVINCIAL HIERARCHY OF GOVERNORS

<i>Rank in Turkish</i>	<i>Rank in English</i>	<i>Jurisdiction in Turkish</i>	<i>Jurisdiction in English</i>
Vali	Governor-General	Vilayet	Province
Mutasarrif	District Governor	Sancak, liva Mutasarrıflık	Provincial district Provincial district government
Kaymakam (Kadı)	County Executive [Head]	Kaza	County
Müdür	Administrator	Nahiye	Township
Muhtar	Headman	Karye	Village

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# Preface

## FACTS, TRUTHS, AND DENIAL

There is a story, according to which French Premier Clemenceau, shortly before his death in 1929, was engaged in a friendly chat with a representative of the Weimar Republic on the question of guilt for the outbreak of the First World War. “What, in your opinion,” Clemenceau was asked, “will future historians think of this troublesome and controversial issue?” He replied “This I don’t know. But I know for certain that they will not say Belgium invaded Germany.”<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between facts and truth remains a hotly contested topic in the social sciences. As a rule, facts, opinions, and interpretations are considered as different things, separate from one another. The “truth” rests upon established facts, over which there is a consensus; as such, they are not the same thing as opinion or interpretation; to deny the truth is to deny established facts. So we would like to believe. Yet, as Hannah Arendt once mused,

But do facts, independent of opinion and interpretation, exist at all? Have not generations of historians and philosophers of history demonstrated the impossibility of ascertaining facts without interpretation, since they must first be picked out of a chaos of sheer happenings (and the principles of choice are surely not factual data) and then be fitted into a story that can be told only in a certain perspective, which has nothing to do with the original occurrence? No doubt these and a great many more perplexities inherent in



the historical sciences are real, but they are no argument against the existence of factual matter, nor can they serve as a justification for blurring the dividing lines between fact, opinion, and interpretation, or as an excuse for the historian to manipulate facts as he pleases.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing with Arendt's thoughts, we can argue that each generation has the right to write its own history and *interpret* facts in accordance with its own perspective, but not to *alter* them. The honest effort must be made to differentiate between that which is claimed to have happened and what the evidence indicates actually *did* happen. One does not have the right to manipulate the factual matter itself.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, the practice of "denialism" in regard to mass atrocities is usually thought of as a simple denial of the facts, but this is not true. Rather, it is in that nebulous territory between facts and truth where such denialism germinates. Denialism marshals its own facts and it has its own truth. Ultimately, the debates over denialism do not revolve around the acceptance or rejection of a group of accepted facts, or a truth derived therefrom. Rather, they are a struggle for power between *different* sets of facts and truths, driven by ulterior motives.

Such a struggle for power can be witnessed in regard to the reality of the Armenian Genocide, which, between the years 1915–1918, resulted in the death and/or murder of more than one million individuals. Over the century since its occurrence, consecutive Turkish governments have succeeded in creating their own version of "official history" and "holding history hostage" with their own documentary evidence and truths. In doing so, they have succeeded, at the very least, in broadly publicizing their own "historical viewpoint," thereby raising it to the level of reasonable historical possibility. Turkish denialism in regard to the events of the First World War is perhaps the most successful example of how the well-organized, deliberate, and systematic spreading of falsehoods can play an important role in the field of public debate, employing factual statements to construct a false "truth." Those who abide by the dictum, "everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts,"<sup>4</sup> have followed with amazement the public and historical debates over the Armenian Genocide over the past decades, whereby fact-based truths have been discredited and relegated to the status of mere opinion.<sup>5</sup> Keeping the truth hidden and condemning it to silence has been one important aspect of this strategy.

The book you now hold in your hands aims to serve as a major clarification in the debate and confusion created over the relationship between

facts and truth regarding the Armenian Genocide. It will serve as a detailed case study and show precisely how those who hid these truths, dismembered them, and felt themselves successful in this regard, are mistaken.

\* \* \*

The following passage from Michel-Rolph Trouillot is directly relevant to the issue: “Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments,” he wrote: “(1) the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); (2) the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); (3) the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and (4) the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).”<sup>6</sup> To these, I would add a fifth: (5) the moment of destroying or attempting to disprove the authenticity of critical documents.

If every case of genocide can be understood as possessing its own unique character, then the Armenian case is unique among genocides in the long-standing efforts to deny its historicity, and to thereby hide the truths surrounding it. Another characteristic of this century of denialism is that it has been an inherent component of the genocide, since the beginning of the events themselves. In other words, the denial of the Armenian Genocide began not in the wake of the massacres but was an intrinsic part of the plan itself. The deporting of the Armenians from their homeland to the Syrian deserts and their elimination, both on the route and at their final destinations, were performed under the guise of a decision to resettle them. The entire process was, in fact, organized and carried out in an effort to present this image.

Even though we cannot discuss it in detail here, the most pressing question in this context is the roots of this particular policy. The weakness of the Ottoman state at that juncture seems the most important reason for such a policy. The Ottoman authorities had to organize the entire deportation and extermination process especially under the scrutiny of Germany and the United States. The Ottomans depended on German military and financial support, and wanted that the Americans should be kept as a neutral power; they could not ignore these two powers and felt compelled to justify their actions. Denial and deception were important ways to ease the American and German pressure. The lack of an ideological mass-movement to provide popular support within Ottoman society for a genocidal policy seems to be another reason.<sup>7</sup> This also explains the high amount of bribery among Ottoman bureaucrats, which played an important role (especially

in Syria), which is one of the subjects of this book, and the government's incitement of the populace to plunder the vulnerable Armenians as an incentive for supporting the genocidal policy.

The official documentation that presents the entire deportation and extermination as a legitimate resettlement began to be produced from the very first days of the deportations. In other words, what Trouillot has described as “the moment of fact creation (the making of sources)” began, if not earlier, on 25 April 1915, which serves as the symbolic date marking the beginning of the Armenian Genocide.

On the aforementioned date, some 200 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Istanbul were arrested. They were sent to Ayaş [*Ayash*] and Çankırı (either in prison or compulsory residence), both close to the city of Ankara, and, in the following months, more intellectuals were sent to both places. A majority of these individuals would subsequently be re-deported to their final destinations and killed on their way. The Ottoman archives are full of documents reporting that such persons perished from heart attacks and other natural causes, or, alternatively, that they fled or were released at some point. In an article written by Yusuf Sarıay, who served long years as Director-General of the Ottoman archives, based on these documents and dedicated to this topic, it is claimed that of 155 intellectuals in Çankırı, only 29 were kept in prison there, 35 were found innocent and returned to Istanbul, 31 were pardoned by the government and allowed to go to any city they wanted, 57 were deported to Deyr-i Zor, and three foreigners were exiled from the country. It was claimed that none of these intellectuals was the subject of murder.<sup>8</sup>

We would like to provide three striking examples that illuminate this process of “fact creation” and developing a historical narrative. The prominent Armenian parliamentary deputy for Istanbul, Krikor Zohrab, was arrested in Istanbul on 2 June 1915.<sup>9</sup> He was sent off to the southeast Anatolian city of Diyarbakir on the pretext of standing trial for charges filed at a military tribunal there, but was murdered en route near Urfa on July 19, his head being bashed in with a rock.<sup>10</sup> At the moment that Zohrab was being killed, official documents were already being prepared reporting his demise from a heart attack. According to a report dated 20 July 1915, signed by the Urfa municipality physician, Zohrab experienced chest pains while in Urfa and underwent treatment there as a result. After being treated, Zohrab was once again sent on his way to Diyarbakir, but was later reported to have died en route. The doctor traveled to the place of the incident and determined the cause of death to be cardiac arrest.<sup>11</sup>

Another report on the incident was ordered by the priest, Hayrabet, the son of Kürkçü Vanis, a member of the clergy of the Armenian church in Urfa. In this report, which bears his own signature, the priest claims that Zohrab “died as the result of a heart ailment” and was buried “in accordance with [his] religious traditions.” At the bottom of the report, there is a note certifying that it was “the personal signature of Hayrabet, son of Vanis, of the priests of the Urfa Armenian Church,” along with the official seal of the Ottoman authorities.<sup>12</sup> We have a third official document in hand that also indicates that Zohrab was not murdered but died as a result of an accident. According to an Interior Ministry cable sent to Aleppo on 17 October 1915, it was confirmed through the investigation document “number 516, dated 25 September 1915, that [Zohrab] perished as the result of a mishap en route.”<sup>13</sup>

As has been seen, the official “facts and truth” of Zohrab’s death are that he died of a heart attack, and there is sufficient documentation of this. Later on, this was no longer employed as a significant part of the denialist narrative, since Zohrab’s actual killers, Çerkez Ahmet and his accomplices, well-known members of the Unionist Special Organization, were arrested, charged, sentenced to death, and executed. Ali Fuat Erden, the aide to Cemal Pasha—one of the triumvirate of the ruling Committee of Union and Progress party (henceforth CUP) who played a central role in the hanging of the killers, wrote the following about the CUP’s treatment of the assailants: “the means used for ‘dirty business’ (defecation) were necessary during the time of need and use; but after being used they were no longer important and had to be disposed of (like toilet paper).”<sup>14</sup> Ahmet and his associates were probably used in the killing of other Armenian intellectuals too, and therefore had posed a risk for the Unionist leadership.

The relevant information on this incident appeared not only in some of the memoirs of the period, but also found its way into the parliamentary minutes of the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies in November 1916.<sup>15</sup> On 12 November 1916, the question was raised in the Chamber as to the fate of Zohrab and another deputy, Vartkes Serengülyan, who was killed with him. Sixteen days later, on November 28, Grand Vizier Sait Halim Pasha responded to the question, stating that “During their journey to Diyarbekir, where they had been summoned to stand trial in the Court-Martial, Erzurum Deputy Vartkes Serengülyan and Istanbul Deputy Krikor Zohrab were murdered by a gang under the leadership of Çerkez Ahmet. The killers were tried and executed in Diyarbekir.”<sup>16</sup>

The second example that we shall provide concerns Agnuni (Khachatur Malumyan), one of the leaders of the Dashnaksutun organization.<sup>17</sup> He was arrested, on 24 April 1915, taken into custody and held in the Ayaş Prison in Central Anatolia near Ankara. On June 2, Agnuni, along with five friends, was also dispatched to Diyarbekir to stand trial at the military court there.<sup>18</sup> The group, which reached Aleppo before Krikor Zohrab, was then sent further to Diyarbekir in accordance with an order given on 24 June 1915.<sup>19</sup> In all probability, these men were killed in a similar fashion to that of Zohrab—probably by Zohrab’s assailants—only a few days earlier, at the beginning of July.<sup>20</sup> However, certain Ottoman documents in our possession state that Agnuni and his companions were not killed but instead managed to escape while on the road to Diyarbekir and flee to Russia. A note sent by Talat Pasha to Foreign Minister Halil Menteşe on 19 July 1916 stated: “it has been understood that, without a doubt, while being sent to the military court in Diyarbekir,” Agnuni and his friends “deceived their guards and fled to Russia.”<sup>21</sup>

The final example is that of Diran Kelekyan, the editor-in-chief of the daily *Sabah*. Kelekyan, who was known to be close to the Unionists, was also among those arrested on 24 April 1915. He was released on May 8 on the understanding that he would “resettle himself and his family in an area of his choice within a province where there were no other Armenians, and on the condition that he would not return to Istanbul.” However, Kelekyan remained in Çankırı, where he had been previously deported.<sup>22</sup> On July 18, he submitted a request to be allowed to return to Istanbul, but the official reply, which was sent back eleven days later, reiterated the previous conditions: he could settle where he wanted on the condition that he not return to Istanbul.<sup>23</sup> Like Zohrab and Agnuni before him, Diran Kelekyan was eventually dispatched to Diyarbekir for the alleged purpose of standing trial, but was murdered en route by armed gangs on 2 November 1915.<sup>24</sup> Yusuf Sarııay, the author of the article mentioned above, cited a note that Diran Kelekyan “is excused by Ministry of Interior order dated 4 August 1915 and will go to the center of Izmir.”<sup>25</sup>

The Ottoman archives themselves are, as Trouillot described in his second point, a monument to “the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives).” Apart from the aforementioned documents dealing with the arrested Armenian intelligentsia, they are replete with documents bearing government orders that present the deportations and massacres as run-of-the-mill, legal relocation efforts. Prime examples of this are the government decree of 30 May 1915 and list of regulations (44 articles’ worth)

issued on 10 June 1915. According to the latter, the property and possessions left by Armenian deportees were to be recorded, and the owners would be reimbursed the value of the goods in their new places of settlement. The following instructions come from the May decree: “properties and land will be distributed to them [the Armenians in their newly resettled areas] in proportion to their previous financial and economic situations. The state will construct houses for the needy, distribute seeds to farmers, [and] distribute tools and implements to those with professions who need them. The things and goods which remain in the places they left or their equivalent values will be given to them in the same form.”<sup>26</sup> Later, with the 26 September 1915 law and the Regulation of 8 November 1915, the points described above were more developed and laid down the process of transferring the revenues from Armenian properties to the Armenians in their new settlement areas.<sup>27</sup>

Another important document is a new set of regulations, or *Talimatname*, issued on 7 October 1915. These regulations, consisting of 55 separate articles, were written to arrange the orderly dispersal of those Armenians who arrived in Syria and accumulated in great number in the environs of Aleppo. According to them, the names of the Armenians to be dispatched to the new areas of resettlement were to be recorded in the deportation registries; they, themselves, were to be sent off in 1000-person groups; each convoy was to be given 150 donkeys, mules, and camels. They were also to be assured at least four days’ worth of food and water; flour depots were to be set up along the route, and ovens built to bake bread. Additionally, there would be areas for rest and repose along the routes, and health and sanitation officials would be posted there; those who were unable to continue their journey would be able to receive treatment there. Finally, the Armenian deportees would be resettled on fertile lands, and each family would be given sufficient land to survive.<sup>28</sup>

As these documents show, throughout the genocidal process, a parallel process was underway of constructing a “truth” on the foundations of a fabricated body of facts whose authenticity was indisputable.... The inevitable result of this, of course, was that an alternative account was created, thereby paving the way for a historical debate—a power struggle, in some sense—over whose truth was more accurate. These “facts,” produced throughout the genocide process, laid the groundwork for the process wherein “truth” could be transformed into nothing more than “one opinion among many.”

Despite all efforts in the contrary, every mass atrocity leaves inevitable traces. This was the case in the Armenian Genocide; there are, indeed, enough materials showing the genocidal intent of the Ottoman-Turkish government. Because of this, the silencing and taking hostage of history could not be simply limited to fabricating facts. The existing incriminatory materials had to be either made to vanish or declared invalid. This is what we were referring to in our addition to Trouillot's list as point (5): "the moment of destroying and/or proving the falsity of critical documents." Turkish denialism has long been characterized by the erasure of the material foundations of "true reality."

We now possess detailed evidence that vital official Ottoman documents regarding the Armenian Genocide were intentionally destroyed. Chief among these is the information provided in the indictment filed against the Unionist leaders in the main post-war trial in Istanbul in 1919. In the indictment, the prosecutor's office claimed that the Unionist government, facing imminent defeat in the First World War, performed a "cleansing" of its archives. Among those documents destroyed were a significant part of the Interior Ministry's papers, the papers of the Union and Progress Party, and those of the Special Organization, which played a central role in the annihilation of the Armenians. Additionally, a circular was sent to all of the regional administrative centers instructing that all of the orders sent in regard to the Armenians be burned.<sup>29</sup>

Chief among the documents of which no trace remains were the case dossiers and associated documents from the trials against the Union and Progress leaders that took place between the years 1919 and 1922. These include the papers of the commission of inquiry established in November 1918, the papers from the investigations carried out by the courts-martial themselves, the case files for the approximately 63 cases filed at these courts, the minutes of the court sessions, the testimonies of both the witnesses and defendants, and the investigation papers regarding dozens of persons and events that did not make it to trial. All of this—*all* of it—has disappeared without a trace and without a clue as to its fate or whereabouts.<sup>30</sup>

During the investigations that were performed before the cases were filed, as well as during the subsequent trials, hundreds of official documents were produced showing how the genocide was organized. Some of these were telegraphic orders. For instance, there were 42 telegrams from the Province of Ankara alone. There were also the oral and written testimonies of a number of high-level Ottoman civilian and military officials,

who confirm that the massacres were planned and systematic, and carried out under the aegis of the Union and Progress Party. Today, this enormous compendium of information has disappeared completely. If we consider what the Nuremberg Trials might have been like had all the existing evidence been lost, we can begin to better understand the meaning and magnitude of this loss.

Apart from the 13 indictments and final judgments found in the Ottoman Gazette (*Takvim-i Vekayi*), all that remains of the historical record of these events is the reports on the trials found in the daily newspapers. In the end, by concealment and destruction of documentary evidence, the genocide, a well-documented, robust historical truth, was transformed into a thin sheet of ice, a fragile hypothesis, very easily breakable.

After concealment and destruction, there was one more thing needed: to prove that every remaining incriminating document was fabricated or somehow inauthentic. The most striking example of this is the telegraphic cables of Talat Pasha ordering the annihilation of the Armenians, which are the subject of this book. The original telegrams, and/or handwritten copies of them, were sold to the Armenian journalist and intellectual, Aram Andonian, in November 1918 by an Ottoman bureaucrat by the name of Naim Efendi, who worked in the Aleppo Deportation Office.<sup>31</sup> Naim not only copied ca. 52 telegrams in his own hand, but also sold ca. 24 original documents and wrote his recollections related these specific telegrams in the form of small notes. This is the reason Aram Andonian would later call these recollections, “Naim Bey’s Memoirs.”<sup>32</sup>

Andonian would subsequently organize these invaluable cables, which show that the Ottoman Armenians were eliminated by direct government order, along with Naim’s notes, and publish them in three different languages between the years 1920–1921.<sup>33</sup> In 1983, the Turkish Historical Society published the work, *Ermenilerce Talat Paşa’ya Atfedilen Telgrafların Gerçek Yüzü*, by Şinasi Orel and Süreyya Yuca, which was translated into English in 1986 with the title, *The Talat Pasha Telegrams, Historical Fact or Armenian Fiction?*<sup>34</sup> The book claimed that both the memoirs and cables published by Andonian were forgeries, and that the telegrams were produced by Armenians, most likely by Andonian himself.

In the years following the appearance of Orel and Yuca’s book, their view of the inauthenticity of both Naim’s memoirs and the accompanying cables became widely accepted, the latter even being known and referred



to as “the fake telegrams attributed to Talat Pasha.” Orel and Yuca’s work appeared to have “closed the book” on the topic. Critical scholars tended to avoid the subject altogether until now. This book that you now hold in your hands can be said to “turn a new page” in this saga.

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Regarding Trouillot’s third and fourth steps in silencing the past and taking history hostage, “the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives),” and “the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance),” essentially, this task has fallen to the field of history and its practitioners. A great many historians, who claim to aspire to the pursuit of objective history in accordance with scientific principles, have nevertheless joined the chorus of those who embrace this “document-based narrative.” They have invited those who claim the existence of an Armenian Genocide to engage in a discussion on the basis of documents. Such discussions often end with the call to “show us the originals.” The well-known Islamic and Middle Eastern scholar, Bernard Lewis, was himself a prominent spokesman for this chorus of voices, at one point declaring that “there exists no serious proof of a decision and a plan by the Ottoman government aimed at exterminating the Armenian nation.”<sup>35</sup>

Guenter Lewy is another prime example of this chorus of voices.<sup>36</sup> The central thesis of his 2004 book is that “no authentic documentary evidence exists to prove the culpability of the central government of Turkey for the massacre of 1915–6... it is safe to say that no such evidence exists for the events of 1915–6.”<sup>37</sup> According to Lewy, the materials-documentation that were published in either the Ottoman Gazette (*Takvim-i Vekayi*) or daily papers during the post-war war crimes trials of the Unionist leaders cannot be accepted as reliable sources because “the loss of all of the original documentation leaves the findings of the military tribunals of 1919–20 unsupported by credible evidence... the reproductions can hardly be considered a valid substitute for the original documentation.”<sup>38</sup> He even went so far as to refer to these materials as “alleged documents.”<sup>39</sup>

Lewy rejected the telegrams given to Andonian by Naim as invalid and unreliable. Repeating Orel and Yuca’s view that they are “crude forgeries,” he claimed that “Orel and Yuca’s painstaking analysis of these documents has raised enough questions about their genuineness [so as to] make any use of them in a serious scholarly work unacceptable.”<sup>40</sup>

This is a peculiar alliance indeed. On one hand, there are successive Turkish governments that have destroyed any and all evidence that would show the events of 1915 to have been a systematic program of annihilation; this has included all of the case files from the post-war trials of the Unionists (1919–1921), all of the Talat Pasha telegrams and other incriminating documents, as well as any trace of their ultimate fate. On the other hand, there is the chorus of historians who reiterate the line that, in the absence of solid, reliable documentary evidence—in other words, “smoking guns” from the Ottoman archives or elsewhere—proving otherwise, there can be no objective claim of a government-sponsored genocide against the Armenians. In light of this odd coalition, the awarding to Lewy of the “Turkish Grand National Assembly Medal” by parliamentary speaker Bülent Arınç on 22 November 2005 should come as no surprise.<sup>41</sup>

A final brushstroke is needed to complete the picture of denial: to discredit the accounts of the genocide given by Armenian survivors and classify them as “unreliable sources.” Official Ottoman documents were referred to as the only fully reliable source, and held pride of place in the “hierarchy of sources.” The British “Blue Book,” prepared during the war by Arnold Toynbee and Viscount Bryce, detailing Ottoman atrocities, was rejected out of hand as “war propaganda,” since much of the information contained within it was obtained from Armenians.<sup>42</sup> In the words of Marc Nichanian, “[the Armenians] had to provide the proof of their own death.”<sup>43</sup> The events themselves, in the sense of their very nature as events, have been invalidated from the outset. In this way, the factuality of genocide, its reality as an historical fact, has already been, if not called into question, nevertheless reduced to an opinion with no substantive evidence.

What should have been done was very simple: treat survivors’ accounts as important as the Ottoman documents and pose a simple question to the Turkish regime: What *did* happen to those files that came to the light during the 1919–1922 trials? If the government did hide or destroy them, it can only be because they were unwilling to allow the information contained within them to become widely known, something that unambiguously points to its incriminating nature. The ferreting away or willful destruction of trial documents and case files should be enough to raise the serious suspicions of those historians who demand solid, reliable documentary evidence, and claim that the absence of directly incriminating documents does not allow them to pass judgment.

In this situation, it has fallen to us, as historians, to bring to light the information that we managed to uncover in documents long lost or hidden away, and to show, in the face of opposition from the denialist school, their authenticity. The time has come for the reigning narrative, one based on their version of truth and carefully constructed from their own selected facts, to be done away with. This is my aim with this work: to give voice to information heretofore condemned to silence, and to show that a verifiable set of facts regarding the events of 1915 can indeed be extracted from the muddled swirl of “opinion” and “interpretation.”

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We owe a great debt to one person, Armenian Catholic Priest Krikor Guerguerian, who has enabled us to accomplish the challenge described above. The majority of the materials that build the foundation of this work was found in his private archive. The private archive was preserved by the priest’s nephew, Edmund Guerguerian, and in 2015, he gave us permission to see the archive and use the materials. Before introducing anything from this archive, it is important to give the basic information about Father Krikor Guerguerian and the creation of his archive.

### KRIKOR GUERGUERIAN AND HIS ARCHIVE

Krikor Guerguerian (12 May 1911–7 May 1988) was born in the district of Gürün, which is in the province of Sivas. He was the youngest of 16 siblings, eight boys and eight girls,<sup>44</sup> only six of whom survived the Deportations. The other ten were killed, along with their parents. Krikor personally witnessed the killing of his parents. Together with one of his older brothers, he succeeded in reaching Beirut in 1916, where he was taken into an orphanage, and it is there that he spent his childhood years. In 1925 he enrolled in the Zımmar (Bzemmar) Catholic Monastery-School, and, after graduating from Beirut’s St. Joseph University in the early 1930s, he went to Rome, to the Levonian Academy, with the intention of continuing his theological education and becoming a monk, an ambition that was fulfilled in 1937, when he earned the right to become a Catholic monk. During the same year, Father Krikor decided to pursue a doctorate on the subject of the Armenian Genocide, but he would never complete it, despite working on it for the rest of his life. The archive is actually the product of his life’s work.