



“The Armenians, living in Turkey, will be destroyed to the last. The government has been given ample authority. As to the organization of the mass murder, the government will provide the necessary explanations.”

*—Behaeddin Shakir, a member of the Central Committee
for the Committee of Union and Progress*

Chapter 4

GENOCIDE

SCHOLAR ROBERT MELSON WRITES THAT ALTHOUGH THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE WAS CARRIED OUT DURING World War I, it was not an action of military necessity.

The genocide of the Armenians should be understood not as a response to “Armenian provocations” but as a stage in the Turks’ revolution, which as a reaction to the continuing disintegration of the empire settled on a narrow nationalism and excluded Armenians from the moral universe of the state. Once the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers [Austria-Hungary and Germany] against Russia, the CUP could use the excuse of military necessity to destroy the Armenians. As many historians have noted, the Turkish revolution initiated by the CUP was successful in creating a new Turkey, but it also came close to destroying an ancient people in the process.⁶¹

In 1915, there was no word to accurately describe what the Turks were doing to the Armenians. Raphael Lemkin did not coin the term “genocide” until Nazi brutality in Europe brought mass murder closer to the heart of the Western world. In the Ottoman Empire, journalists, diplomats, and other witnesses struggled to find language to convey the depth and the enormity of the anti-Armenian measures. Accounts refer to “horrors,” “barbarity,” “massacres,” “murder,” “deportations,” or “ravages,” but no

word captures the scale of the violence. American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, after reading report after report from his consuls in the provinces, proclaimed that Turkish plans amounted to “race murder.” On July 10, 1915, he cabled Washington:

Persecution of Armenians assuming unprecedented proportions. Reports from widely scattered districts indicate systematic attempt to uproot peaceful Armenian populations and through arbitrary arrests, terrible tortures, whole-sale expulsions and deportations from one end of the empire to the other accompanied by frequent instances of rape, pillage, and murder, turning into massacre, to bring destruction and destitution on them. These measures are not in response to popular or fanatical demand but are purely arbitrary and directed from Constantinople in the name of military necessity, often in districts where no military operations are likely to take place.⁶²

The perpetrators also looked for language. They looked for language to cover up the nature of the crime and for ways to distort language to blame the victims for their own misfortune. Armenian resistance to deportation and murder was called “revolt” or “rebellion.” Armenians, once called “the loyal millet,” were now accused of joining the enemy. The government claimed that Armenian deportations were necessary for the “security of our country” and the “welfare of the Armenians.”

Even without contemporary language, people knew what they saw. On May 24, 1915, the Allied nations of Great Britain, France, and Russia warned the Young Turk leaders that their “crimes against humanity and civilization” would not go unpunished. Somebody had to be held accountable. The genocide was the result of choices made by individuals and groups acting in the name of the Ottoman government. The readings in this chapter focus on the results of those choices.

If reading this history makes you feel powerless, and without a sense that people could stop the horror, then consider the importance of recognizing when there were opportunities to alter the course of history.

Reading 1 — EVACUATION, DEPORTATION, AND DEATH

In April 1984, The Permanent People's Tribunal—a public tribunal that hears cases of human rights abuses and tries them according to international law—held a session considering the facts of the Armenian Genocide. After considering arguments, the international panel of jurors, which included three Nobel prize winners and other prominent figures from around the world, ruled that the Turkish government was responsible for the crime of genocide against the Armenians. A section of their report details the genocidal process.

Beginning in January 1915, Armenian soldiers [serving in the Ottoman army] and gendarmes were disarmed, regrouped in work brigades of 500 to 1,000 men, put to work on road maintenance or as porters, then taken by stages to remote areas and executed. It was not until April that the implementation of a plan began, with successive phases carried out in a disciplined sequence. The signal was first given for



Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, courtesy of Garbis Kazanjian, River Vale, New Jersey, and Alice Jernazian Hagig, Dana Point, California, daughter of Rev. Ephraim R. Jernazian.

Survivors of the genocide hold a burial service for the Ourfa Armenian victims whose bones were found strewn around the monastery yard. At the top, the words of Armenian poet Krikor Zohrab in translation say, "We are gone now, but the nation has 400,000 orphans. Save them."

deportation to begin in Zeytun [Zeitun] in early April, in an area of no immediate strategic importance. It was not until later that deportation measures were extended to the border provinces.

The pretext used to make the deportation a general measure was supplied by the resistance of the Armenians of Van. The vali [governor] of Van, Jevdet, sacked outlying Armenian villages and the Van Armenians organized the self-defense of the city. They were saved by a Russian breakthrough spearheaded by the Armenian volunteers from the Caucasus. After taking Van on May 18th, the Russians continued to press forward but were halted in late June by a Turkish counter-offensive. The Armenians of the vilayet [region] of Van were thus able to retreat and escape extermination.

When the news of the Van revolt reached Constantinople, the Union and Progress (Ittihad) Committee seized the opportunity. Some 650 personalities, writers, poets, lawyers, doctors, priests and politicians were imprisoned on April 24th and 25th, 1915, then deported and murdered in the succeeding months. Thus was carried out what was practically the thorough and deliberate elimination of almost the entire Armenian intelligentsia of the time.

From April 24 onwards, and following a precise timetable, the government issued orders to deport the Armenians from the eastern vilayets. Since Van was occupied by the Russian army, the measures

applied only to the six vilayets of Trebizond (Trabzon), Erzerum, Bitlis, Diarbekir, Kharput, and Sivas. The execution of the plan was entrusted to a “special organization” (SO), made up of common criminals and convicts trained and equipped by the Union and Progress Committee. This semi-official organization, led by Behaeddin Shakir, was under the sole authority of the Ittihad central committee. Constantinople issued directives to the valis, kaymakans [district governors], as well as local SO men, who had discretionary powers to have moved or dismissed any uncooperative gendarme or official. The methods used, the order in which towns were evacuated, and the routes chosen for the columns of deportees all confirm the existence of a centralized point of command controlling the unfolding of the program. Deportation orders were announced publicly or posted in each city and township. Families were allowed two days to collect a few personal belongings; their property was confiscated or quickly sold off. The first move was generally the arrest of notables, members of Armenian political parties, priests, and young men, who were forced to sign fabricated confessions then discreetly eliminated in small



From the private collection of Berij Fenerci

Special organization gangs known as “chetes” or “shotas.”

groups. The convoys of deportees were made up of old people, women, and children. In the more remote villages, families were slaughtered and their homes burned or occupied. On the Black Sea coast and along the Tigris near Diarbekir boats were heaped with victims and sunk. From May to July 1915, the eastern provinces were sacked and looted by Turkish soldiers and gendarmes, SO gangs (“chetes”), etc. This robbery, looting, torture, and murder were tolerated or encouraged while any offer of protection to the Armenians was severely punished by the Turkish authorities.

It was not possible to keep the operation secret. Alerted by missionaries and consuls, the Entente Powers [Allied] enjoined the Turkish government, from May 24, to put an end to the massacres, for which they held members of the government personally responsible. Turkey made the deportation official by issuing a decree, claiming treason, sabotage, and terrorist acts on the part of the Armenians as a pretext.

Deportation was in fact only a disguised form of extermination. The strongest were eliminated before departure. Hunger, thirst, and slaughter decimated the convoys' numbers. Thousands of bodies piled up along the roads. Corpses hung from trees and telegraph poles; mutilated bodies floated down rivers or were washed up on the banks. Of the seven eastern vilayets' original population of 1,200,000 Armenians, approximately 300,000 were able to take advantage of the Russian occupation to reach the Caucasus; the remainder were murdered where they were or deported, the women and children (about 200,000 in number) kidnapped. Not more than 50,000 survivors reached the point of convergence of the convoys of deportees in Aleppo.

At the end of July 1915, the government began to deport the Armenians of Anatolia and Cilicia, transferring the population from regions which were far distant from the front and where the presence of Armenians could not be regarded as a threat to the Turkish army. The deportees were driven south in columns which were decimated en route. From Aleppo, survivors were sent on toward the deserts of Syria in the south and of Mesopotamia in the southeast. In Syria, reassembly camps were set up at Hama, Homs, and near Damascus. These camps accommodated about 120,000 refugees, the majority of whom survived the war and were repatriated to Cilicia in 1919. Along the Euphrates, on the other hand, the Armenians were driven ever onward toward Deir-el-Zor; approximately 200,000 reached their destination. Between March and August 1916, orders came from Constantinople to liquidate the last survivors remaining in the camps along the railway and the banks of the Euphrates.

There were nevertheless still some Armenians remaining in Turkey. A few Armenian families in the provinces, Protestants and Catholics for the most part, had been saved from death by the American missions and the Apostolic Nuncio. In some cases, Armenians had been spared as a result of resolute intervention by Turkish officials, or had been hidden by Kurdish or Turkish friends. The [majority of the] Armenians of Constantinople and Smyrna also escaped deportation. Lastly, there were cases of resistance (Urfa, Shabin-Karahisar, Musa-Dagh). In all, including those who took refuge in Russia,

the number of survivors at the end of 1916 can be estimated at 600,000 out of an estimated total population in 1914 of 1,800,000, according to A. Toynbee.

In Eastern Anatolia, the entire Armenian population had disappeared. A few survivors of the slaughter took refuge in Syria and Lebanon, while others reached Russian Armenia.⁶³

CONNECTIONS

- Why was the Committee of Union and Progress able to use the story of Armenian resistance at Van as an excuse to begin widespread deportation and mass murder? What is a pretext? How is a pretext used to cover the truth?
- The report notes that: “The execution of the plan [of genocide] was entrusted to a ‘special organization’, made up of common criminals and convicts trained and equipped by the Union and Progress Committee [the Young Turks].” How did the use of a “special organization” create a cover for the government’s plans?
- In 1915 German officer Liman Von Sanders rejected a deportation order for the Armenians and Greeks of Smyrna and the central government backed off. What questions does the story raise for you?
- The genocide unfolded in several stages. List the turning points in the process that led to mass murder?
- The treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire had been of international concern long before the deportations began. Given that attention, how is it possible that no country intervened and that the genocide was not prevented?
- Reread the description of the genocide. What choices had to be made to make the genocide possible? Who made those choices? When was prevention possible?
- Based on the description of the genocide, is it possible that people did not know what was happening to the Armenians? If people knew, how do you explain why more people did not try to stop the deportations and massacres? What options were available to leaders, to ordinary people, and to other governments?



To view an interactive map of the Armenian Genocide including the principal routes of deportation, massacre sites, and concentration camps, visit www.armenian-genocide.org. A chronology of the genocide is also available on the same website.

Reading 2 — UNDER THE COVER OF WAR

Historians Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt note: “The genocide of the Armenians was made possible by two events: the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the first decade of the twentieth century and the advent of total war in the second.”⁶⁴ During the early months of World War I, Young Turk leaders continued to target the Christian population of the empire—Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians. Behaeddin Shakir, a member of the central committee within the Committee of Union and Progress, outlined a rationale and structure for the forthcoming genocide in March of 1915.⁶⁵ He claimed that the Armenian Revolutionary Federation was preparing an attack and that the Armenians stood in the way of the central committee’s “patriotic efforts.” Shakir wrote:

*Unable to forget the humiliations and the bitterness of the past, and filled with an urge for vengeance, the Cemiyet [central committee of the Committee of Union and Progress], full of hope for the future has reached a decision. The Armenians, living in Turkey, will be destroyed to the last. The government has been given ample authority. As to the organization of the mass murder, the government will provide the necessary explanations to the governors, and to the army commanders. All the delegates of the Ittihad ve Terakki in their own regions will be in charge of this task.*⁶⁶

Throughout the late winter and spring, follow-up telegrams were sent to local officials with rationalizations for the deportation and murder of the Armenians. Arrests of Armenian leaders began in several regions as well as mass deportations of the Armenians from Zeitun and Erzerum. In late May, a law legalizing the deportations was enacted without debate in the Ottoman Parliament. By June, notices were hung in villages and towns throughout the empire meant to justify the government’s plans to ordinary people.

Our Armenian fellow countrymen, who form one of the Ottoman racial elements, having taken up with a lot of false ideas of a nature to disturb the public order, as the result of foreign instigations for many years past, and because of the fact that they have brought about bloody happenings and have attempted to destroy the peace and security of the Ottoman state, of their fellow countrymen, as well as their own safety and interests, and, moreover, as the Armenian societies have now dared to join themselves to the enemy of their existence, our Government is compelled to adopt extraordinary measures and sacrifices, both for the preservation of the order and security of the country, and for the continuation of their existence and for the welfare of the Armenian societies. Therefore, as a measure to be applied until the conclusion of the war, the Armenians have to be sent away to places which have been prepared in the interior vilayets [provinces], and a literal obedience to the following orders, in a categorical manner, is accordingly enjoined upon all Ottomans:

1. *With the exception of the sick, all Armenians are obliged to leave, within five days from the date of this proclamation, and by villages or quarters, under the escort of the gendarmery [police force].*



Courtesy of Martin Gilbert, from *The First World War: A Complete History*, revised edition (Henry Holt: New York, 2003)

THE WAR FRONTS OF WORLD WAR I

With World War I being fought on numerous fronts, the Young Turk government found in the war a nationalist rationale—and shield—for their deportations of the Armenians.

2. Although they are free to carry with them on their journey the articles of their movable property which they desire, they are forbidden to sell their landed and their extra effects, or to leave them here and there with other people. Because their exile is only temporary, their landed property will be taken care of under the supervision of the Government, and stored in closed and protected buildings. Any one who sells or attempts to take care of his movable effects or landed property in a manner contrary to this order shall be sent before the Court Martial. They are only free to sell to the Government, of their own accord, those articles which may answer the needs of the army.

3. To assure their comfort during the journey, hans [inns] and suitable buildings have been prepared, and everything has been done for their safe arrival at their places of temporary residence, without their being subjected to any kind of attack or affronts.

4. The guards will use their weapons against those who make any attempts to attack or affront the life, honor, and property of one or of a number of Armenians, and such persons as are taken alive will be sent to the Court Martial and executed. This measure being the regrettable result of the Armenians having been led in error, it does not concern in any way the other races, and these other elements will in no way or manner whatsoever intervene in this question.

5. Since the Armenians are obliged to submit to this decision of the Government, if some of them attempt to use arms against the soldiers or gendarmes, arms shall be employed only against those who use force, and they shall be captured dead or alive. In like manner, those who, in opposition to the Government's decision, refrain from leaving, or hide themselves here and there, if they are sheltered or are given food and assistance, the persons who thus shelter them or aid them shall be sent before the Court Martial for execution.

6. As the Armenians are not allowed to carry any firearms or cutting weapons, they shall deliver to the authorities every sort of arms, revolvers, daggers, bombs, etc, which they have concealed in their places of residence or elsewhere. A lot of weapons and other things have been reported to the Government, and if their owners allow themselves to be misled, and the weapons are afterwards found by the Government, they will be under heavy responsibility and receive severe punishment.

7. The escorts of soldiers and gendarmes are required and



An Armenian mother and child, fleeing from death. This photograph was taken by Armin T. Wegner, an eyewitness to the Armenian Genocide.

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are authorized to use their weapons against and to kill persons who shall try to attack or damage Armenians in villages, in city quarters, or on the roads for the purpose of robbery or other injury.

8. Those who owe money to the Ottoman Bank may deposit in its warehouses goods up to the amount of their indebtedness. Only in case the Government should have need thereof in the future are the military authorities authorized to buy the said goods by paying the price therefor. In the case of debts to other people it is permitted to leave goods in accordance with this condition, but the Government must ascertain the genuine character of the debt, and for this purpose the certified books of the merchant form the strongest proof.

9. Large and small animals which it is impossible to carry along the way shall be bought in the name of the army.

10. On the road the vilayet, leva, kaza and nahieh [province, county, district, village and cluster] officials shall render possible assistance to the Armenians.

25 June 1915 ⁶⁷

Witnesses recorded the atrocities of the deportations. Deportations to the desert meant death, either by starvation or through the butchery of special battalions created by emptying the jails of former prisoners and impoverished Kurdish tribesmen. Kurds and other Muslims became the beneficiaries of Armenian property when a second law, the Law of Expropriation and Confiscation became national policy.

CONNECTIONS

- Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt note: “The genocide of the Armenians was made possible by two events: the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the first decade of the twentieth century and the advent of total war in the second.”⁶⁸ What is total war? Why would the staggering brutality of World War I make the Armenian Genocide possible?
- What did the Young Turks hope to teach ordinary people about the Armenians through their public notices? What words and phrases stand out? How did they hope the notices would influence the way people think about the deportations of Armenians? How might an Armenian individual or an Armenian group respond to the decree?
- How do you explain the differences in tone and content between the two government statements about the Armenians? Who is the intended audience for each?

- By the time the deportation order was posted thousands of Armenian leaders from across the empire had been separated from their families and murdered. How does this order try to explain those executions?
- Just before the United States entered World War I, President Woodrow Wilson told a friend: “Once [I] lead this people into war and they’ll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance . . . a nation cannot put its strength into a war and keep its head level; it has never been done.” What makes it difficult to keep a nation’s “head level” during war? How might the outbreak of the war have influenced ordinary people’s responses to the deportations?
- Compare the language of the order with the reading “Describing the Genocide” as well as other survivor and witness accounts. How is language used to cover what really happened?
- How do the messages in this order compare with the myths and rumors that had been spread through the Young Turks’ propaganda?
- Look carefully at the photograph of the Armenian mother and child on page 89. What can you learn about their situation by studying the image? What questions are you left with? Armin Wegner, the photographer who took the picture, wrote a longer caption for the photograph which he called “Mother and Child.” His caption reads:

*Fleeing from death. An Armenian mother on the heights of the Taurus Mountains. Her husband has been killed or slaughtered, thrown into prison or driven to forced labour. On her back she carries all that she owns, i.e. what she could take with her, a blanket for sleeping or to use as a tent to protect against the sun, some wooden sticks, and then, on top of everything else, her baby. How much longer can she carry this weight?*⁶⁹

How do Wegner’s comments influence the way you respond to the photograph? What context does he add that you could not learn from looking at the photograph on your own?

Reading 3 — THE ROUND UPS BEGIN

While the ministry of war coordinated propaganda, Talaat, the minister of the interior, coordinated the mass murder of the Armenians. In January 1915, Talaat warned the Greek Patriarch that there was no room for Christians in Turkey and their supporters should advise them to clear out. Orders announcing the Committee of Union and Progress's plans for deportation began to circulate in late February 1915. By March, Armenian men in the Turkish army were being disarmed, placed in labor battalions, and killed.⁷⁰ Quietly, deportation had already begun in several communities. Armenian resistance was labeled sedition and used as propaganda to justify the murder and deportation of ordinary Armenian men, women, and children. By April, Armenian schools were closed. Later that month, on the night of April 23 and all through April 24, Armenian leaders and intellectuals in Constantinople were arrested and led outside of the city, where they were subjected to torture and many were executed.

One of the survivors, the priest (later to become Bishop) Krikoris Balakian recalls how he and others were resting after Easter celebrations while a secret project was being carried out near the central police station.

Blood-colored buses were already transporting groups of Armenians who had just been arrested from the near and far suburbs and neighborhoods to the central prison. Chief of Police, Betri, had sent official letters weeks earlier in sealed boxes to all the Guard offices with orders to open them on the same day and to carry out the assignments with precision and in secret.

The letters contained the blacklist of Armenians to be arrested—a list which had been compiled with the help of Armenian traitors, and in particular by Artin Mkrтчian, as well as the neighborhood Ittehatist [Young Turk] clubs. Those listed for death were the Armenians who had played vital roles as social reformers or non-partisans, and were deemed to be able to incite revolution or resistance.⁷¹

[Balakian and eight friends were arrested and put in the central prison.]

Every few hours until morning, newly arrested Armenians were brought to the prison. Behind the fences of the prison, there was a strange hustle and bustle to the growing crowd of prisoners. Like some dream it seemed as if on one night, all prominent Armenians of the capital—assembly men, representatives, progressive thinkers, reporters, teachers, doctors, pharmacists, dentists, merchants, and bankers—had made an appointment in those dim cells of the prison. More than a few people were still wearing their pajamas, robes, and slippers, and it made the whole scene seem even more dreamlike.

On the Sunday the prisoners were subjected to searches and were crowded on buses under police escort and taken in the direction of the sea shore near Sirkedji. The buses then entered the area of the Saray-Bournou orchards where in the 1890s hundreds of young... Armenian intellectuals had been

killed. From there they were crowded on a steam ship under armed army and police officials as well as army spies.

For a moment we were so shaken, we were convinced that we were being taken out to the Sea of Mavmara to be drowned. Many of the men were crying, many were remembering their loved ones, as we sailed toward the open sea. In a few months, many of us would regret that we had not thrown ourselves into the sea that night. Because death by sea would have been kinder than the torture the Turks did to us with axes and hatchets in the places they would later take us.⁷²



Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Courtesy of anonymous donor

Armenians being marched to prison in nearby Mezireh under the guard of armed Turkish soldiers, Kharpert, Historic Armenia, Ottoman Empire, 1915.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Why do you think the Young Turk government singled out intellectuals and professionals for arrest and deportation?
- ❖ What choices were available to Balakian and other leaders of the Armenian community? If they had chosen to resist, what do you think would the consequences for the rest of the Armenian community have been?
- ❖ Balakian uses the phrase “Armenian traitors” to describe the Armenians who cooperated with the Young Turks. What options were available to Armenians who were asked to cooperate with Young Turk authorities? Were they traitors, collaborators, or just trying to survive?

Reading 4 — THE GERMAN CONNECTION

Before becoming part of the triumvirate that ceased power in Turkey at the beginning of 1913, Enver, the Ottoman minister of war, served as a military attaché to Berlin. During his four-year commission Enver developed a close relationship with German Kaiser Wilhelm II.⁷³ After the coup of 1913 that brought Enver to power, German-Ottoman military cooperation became national policy.

In December 1913, a German mission arrived in Turkey with the task of reorganizing the Ottoman army. Officers of the German military mission assumed responsibility for the command of the Turkish army under the leadership of Enver. The German-Turkish relationship was strengthened after the agreement of a military alliance between Germany and the Ottoman Empire in August 1914.

In notes written after a meeting with Young Turk leaders, Max Scheubner-Richter, a German vice consul and commander of a joint German-Turkish special guerrilla force, described plans to “destroy” the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire.



Morgenthau

**Kaiser Wilhelm II, of Germany
wearing a Turkish Fez**

The first item on this agenda concerns the liquidation of the Armenians. Ittihad will dangle before the Allies a specter of an alleged revolution prepared by the Armenian Dashnak party. Moreover, local incidents of social unrest and acts of Armenian self-defense will deliberately be provoked and inflated and will be used as pretexts to effect the deportations. Once en route, however, the convoys will be attacked and exterminated by Kurdish and Turkish brigands, and in part by gendarmes, who will be instigated for that purpose by Ittihad.⁷⁴

From their unique position as overseers of the Ottoman army, German soldiers watched as the genocide was carried out. The highest-ranking member of Germany’s military mission to Turkey, General Bronsart von Schellendorf, directly issued orders for the round up and deportation of Armenians. Another high-ranking German officer, Lieutenant Colonel Boettrich, the military chief overseeing the construction of the Baghdad Railway, produced orders to deport the Armenian laborers, workmen, technicians, engineers, and administrators who were working on the railroad.⁷⁵ When Franz Gunther, deputy director of the

Anatolian Railway, learned about Boettrich's orders, he warned:

*Our enemies will some day pay a good price to obtain possession of this document . . . they will be able to prove that the Germans have not only done nothing to prevent the Armenian persecutions but they even issued certain orders to this effect, as the [Turkish] Military Commander has ecstatically pointed out.*⁷⁶

In a study of German participation in the Armenian Genocide, Vahakn Dadrian notes: "Whereas some German operatives went out of their way to avoid being drawn into acts that would have been tantamount to complicity, others willingly allowed the Turks to coopt them. . . . What is most noteworthy in this connection is the additional fact that the Germans belonging to the latter category had more power."⁷⁷

On October 8, 1915, four members of the German missionaries staff to Turkey appealed to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs to intercede with their ally on behalf of the Armenians.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Enver Pasha

We think it our duty to draw the attention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the fact that our school work will be deprived, for the future, of its moral basis and will lose all authority in the eyes of the natives, if it is really beyond the power of the German Government to mitigate the brutality of the treatment which the exiled women and children of the massacred Armenians are receiving.

In face of the scenes of horror which are being unfolded daily before our eyes in the neighborhood of our school, our educational activity becomes a mockery of humanity. How can we make our pupils listen to the Tales of the Seven Dwarfs, how can we teach them conjugations and declensions, when, in the compounds next door to our school, death is carrying off their starving compatriots—when there are girls and women and children, practically naked, some lying on the ground, others stretched between the dead or the coffins made ready for them beforehand, and breathing their last breath!

Out of 2,000 to 3,000 peasant women from the Armenian Plateau who were brought here in good health, only forty or fifty skeletons are left. The prettier ones are the victims of their gaolers' [jailers'] lust; the plain ones succumb to blows, hunger and thirst (they lie by the water's edge, but are not allowed to quench their thirst). The Europeans are forbidden to distribute bread to the starving.

Every day more than a hundred corpses are carried out of Aleppo.

All this happens under the eyes of high Turkish officials. There are forty or fifty emaciated phantoms crowded into the compound opposite our school. They are women out of their mind; they have forgotten how to eat; when one offers them bread, they throw it aside with indifference. They only groan and wait for death.

“See,” say the natives, “Taâlîm el Alman (the teaching of the Germans).”

The German scutcheon [a shield with a coat of arms] is in danger of being smirched forever in the memory of the Near Eastern peoples. There are natives of Aleppo, more enlightened than the rest, who say: “The Germans do not want these horrors. Perhaps the German nation does not know about them. If it did, how could the German Press, which is attached to the truth, talk about the humanity of the treatment accorded to the Armenians who are guilty of High Treason? Perhaps, too, the German Government has its hands tied by some contract defining the powers of the [German and Turkish] State; in regard to one another’s affairs?”

No, when it is a question of giving over thousands of women and children to death by starvation, the words “Opportunism” and “definition of powers” lose their meaning. Every civilized human being is “empowered” in this case to interfere, and it is his bounden duty to do so. Our prestige in the East is the thing at stake. There are even Turks and Arabs who have remained human, and who shake their heads in sorrow when they see, in the exile convoys that pass through the town, how the brutal soldiers shower blows on women with child who can march no farther.

We may expect further and still more dreadful hecatombs after the order published by Djemal Pasha. (The engineers of the Baghdad Railway are forbidden, by this order, to photograph the Armenian convoys; any plates they have already used for this must be given up within twenty-four hours, under penalty of prosecution before the Council of War.) It is a proof that the responsible authorities fear the light, but have no intention of putting an end to scenes which are a disgrace to humanity.

. . . We know that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already, from other sources, received detailed descriptions of what is happening here. But as no change has occurred in the system of the deportations, we feel ourselves under a double obligation to make this report, all the more because the fact of our living abroad enables us to see more clearly the immense danger by which the German name is threatened here.⁷⁸

Despite the pleas of the mission’s staff and many ordinary German citizens who witnessed the treatment of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire, the German government chose not to intervene.

CONNECTIONS

- Vahakn Dadrian believes that German officials were “indirect accessories to crimes perpetrated by the [Turkish] Special Organization functionaries whose overall goal they endorsed, financed to some extent, and shepherded.” Dadrian uses legal language to describe the German officials’ participation in the genocide. How would you describe the relationship in moral terms?
- How do the German missionaries express their outrage? What arguments do they make to convince the German foreign minister to intervene? What words or phrases from the letter stand out? What rules are needed so that individuals can know they are protected as they voice dissent?
- In the letter the German missionaries ask: “How can we make our pupils listen to the Tales of the Seven Dwarfs, how can we teach them conjugations and declensions, when, in the compounds next door to our school, death is carrying off their starving compatriots?” How would you answer their question?
- After the war, General von Schellendorf compared the Armenians and the Jews living in his country, Germany. In language laden with stereotypes, Bronsart von Schellendorf explains:

...the Armenian is just like the Jew, a parasite outside of the confines of his homeland, sucking the marrow of the people of the host country. Year after year they abandon their native land—just like the Polish Jews who migrate to Germany—to engage in usurious activities. Hence, the hatred which, in a medieval form, has unleashed itself against them as an unpleasant people, entailing their murder. ⁷⁹

What stereotypes are reflected in his comparisons? Whom does he blame for the mistreatment of Armenians and Jews?

Between 1904 and 1907, German troops killed between 65,000 and 80,000 of the Herero people who inhabited present-day Namibia in Southwest Africa, then a German colony. Some scholars suggest that Germany’s colonial experience, and its experiences during World War I and the Armenian Genocide served as models for the Nazi Holocaust. To research the relationship between the treatment of colonized Africans and genocide, see the book *Exterminate All the Brutes: One Man’s Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide* by Sven Lindqvist.



Reading 5 — FOLLOWING ORDERS

Lieutenant Said Ahmed Mukhtar al-Ba'aj, an Ottoman officer, was one of four Arab Muslim soldiers who defected to the Russian Army. The Russians turned the men over to the British, who interviewed them. In December 1916, the officer testified about his role in the deportation of Armenians from Trebizond and Erzerum.

An order came from Constantinople that Armenians inhabiting the frontier towns and villages be deported to the interior. It was said then that this was only a precautional measure. I saw at that time large convoys of Armenians go through Erzeroum. They were mostly old men, women and children. Some of the able-bodied men had been recruited in the Turkish Army and many had fled to Russia. The massacres had not begun yet. In May 1915 I was transferred to Trebizond. In July an order came to deport to the interior all the Armenians in the Vilayet of Trebizond. Being a member of the Court Martial I knew that deportations meant massacres....

Besides the deportation order. . . an Imperial "Iradeh" was issued ordering that all deserters when caught, should be shot without trial. The secret order read "Armenians" in lieu of "deserters." The Sultan's "Iradeh" was accompanied by a "fatwa" [Muslim legal opinion] from Sheikh-ul-Islam stating that the Armenians had shed [Muslim] blood and their killing was lawful. Then the deportations started. The children were kept back at first. The Government opened up a school for the grown up children and the American Consul of Trebizond instituted an asylum for the infants. When the first batches of Armenians arrived at Gumush-Khana all able-bodied men were sorted out with the excuse that they were going to be given work. The women and children were sent ahead under escort with the assurance by the Turkish authorities that their final destination was Mosul and that no harm will befall them. The men kept behind were taken out of town in batches of 15 and 20, lined up on the edge of ditches prepared beforehand, shot and thrown into the ditches. Hundreds of men were shot every day in a similar manner. The women and children were attacked on their way by the ("Shotas") the armed bands organised by the Turkish government who attacked them and seized a certain number. After plundering and committing the most dastardly outrages on the women and children they massacred them in cold blood. These attacks were a daily occurrence until every woman and child had been got rid of. The military escorts had strict orders not to interfere with the "Shotas."

He continues:

In July 1915 I was ordered to accompany a convoy of deported Armenians. It was the last batch from Trebizond. There were in the convoy 120 men, 700 children and about 400 women. From Trebizond I took them to Ghumush-Khana. Here the 120 men were taken away, and, as I was informed later, they were all killed. At Ghumush-Khana I was ordered to take the women and children to Erzinjian. On the way I saw thousands of bodies of Armenians unburied. Several bands of "Shotas" met us on the way and wanted me to hand over to them women and children. But I persistently refused. I did

leave on the way about 300 children with [Muslim] families who were willing to take care of them and educate them. The “Mutessarrif” of Erzinjian ordered me to proceed with the convoy to Kamack [Kemakh]. At the latter place the authorities refused to take charge of the women and children. I fell ill and wanted to go back, but I was told that as long as the Armenians in my charge were alive I would be sent from one place to the other. However I managed to include my batch with the deported Armenians that had come from Erzeroum. In charge of the latter was a colleague of mine Mohamed Effendi from the Gendarmerie. He told me afterwards that after leaving Kamach they came to a valley where the Euphrates ran. A band of Shotas sprang out and stopped the convoy. They ordered the escort to keep away and then shot every one of the Armenians and threw them in the river.

At Trebizond the [Muslims] were warned that if they sheltered Armenians they would be liable to the death penalty.

Government officials at Trebizond picked up some of the prettiest Armenian women of the best families. After committing the worst outrages on them they had them killed.

Cases of rape of women and girls even publicly are numerous. They were systematically murdered after the outrage.



Courtesy of the American National Institute

Family of deportees on the road in the Ottoman Empire, 1915. Armin Wegner, the photographer, described what he saw: “Armenian deportees—women, children and elderly men. Woman in foreground is carrying a child in her arms, shielding it from the sun with a shawl; man on left is carrying bedding; no other belongings or food noticeable among effects being carried. All are walking in the sun on an unpaved road with no means of shelter from the elements.”⁸⁰

*The Armenians deported from Erzeroum started with their cattle and whatever possessions they could carry. When they reached Erzinjian they became suspicious seeing that all the Armenians had already been deported. The Vali of Erzeroum allayed their fears and assured them most solemnly that no harm would befall them. He told them that the first convoy should leave for Kamach, the others remaining at Erzeroum until they received word from their friends informing of their safe arrival to destination. And so it happened. Word came that the first batch had arrived safely at Kamach, which was true enough. But the men were kept at Kamach and shot, and the women were massacred by the Shotas after leaving that town.*⁸¹

Not everybody went along. Upon taking command of the Third Army in February 1916 General Vehib learned that the unit had killed 2,000 Armenian soldiers. After a complete investigation he court-martialed two men in charge, both of whom had followed the directive to “kill all Armenians in the armed forces.” They were convicted and hanged.⁸²

CONNECTIONS

- How does Lieutenant Said Ahmed Mukhtar al-Ba’aj describe his role in the deportations? What orders did he receive? What did he know about the deportations before he received his orders? How would you describe his role in the genocide?
- The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *perpetrators* as people responsible for committing a crime. Was al-Ba’aj a perpetrator? What choices were available to al-Ba’aj?
- In his account, where do you find examples of obedience to authority? Do you also see examples of resistance?
- The sultan’s order for deportation was followed by a religious opinion that came from the Sheikh-ul-Islam—the religious leader appointed by the Young Turk dictatorship. What is the difference between the way people respond to political leaders as compared to religious figures?

Many psychologists have studied the way human beings respond to the roles they are given. Among the most famous experiments are Stanley Milgram’s work on “Obedience to Authority” and Philip Zimbardo’s prison experiment investigating “what happens when you put good people in an evil place?” Zimbardo’s prison experiment is documented on line. Visit his web site at <http://www.zimbardo.com>. Videos of both experiments are available from the Facing History and Ourselves resource library. A Reading describing the experiments can be found on page 210 of *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*.

Reading 6 — WOMEN AND THE DEPORTATIONS

The deportation of Armenians from villages across the Ottoman Empire followed the same pattern. Families were given a few days to collect their belongings. Their property was sold off or given to the local population. Men were rounded up and killed. Convoys of the elderly, women, and children were sent on the road and subject to robbery, looting, and murder at the hands of the special operations units and local tribesmen.

Children were often separated from their parents, some were forcibly converted to Islam and joined Muslim families, and others were killed. A number of women were given a chance to convert and compelled to join Muslim families; countless women were raped. Their stories, often recounted by witnesses, or recorded on scraps of paper, were given to sympathetic strangers who in turn passed on the papers to journalists or those working for Armenian relief groups. An Armenian woman from Bitlis told a witness about the brutality she and other Armenian women faced during the deportations. The witness recorded her story.

All the old women and the weak who were unable to walk were killed. There were about one hundred Kurdish guards over us, and our lives depended on their pleasure. It was a very common thing for



Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, courtesy of Elizabeth Boyajian Roberts.

Armenian survivors from Kharpert on a forced march to Baghdad in 1916, pictured here on the banks of the Euphrates River at Der-Zor, Syria.

them to rape our girls in our presence. Very often they violated eight-or ten-year-old girls, and as a consequence many would be unable to walk, and were shot.

Our company moved on slowly, leaving heaps of corpses behind. Most of us were almost naked. When we passed by a village, all the Kurdish men and women would come and rob us as they pleased. When a Kurd fancied a girl, nothing would prevent him from taking her. The babies of those who were carried away were killed in our presence.

They gave us bread once every other day, though many did not get even that. When all our provisions were gone, we gathered wheat from the fields and ate it. Many a mother lost her mind and dropped her baby by the wayside.

Some succeeded in running away, and hid themselves in the fields among the wheat until it was dark. Those who were acquainted with the mountains of that region would thus escape and go back to seek their dear ones. Some went to Sassoun, hearing that it had not yet fallen, others were drowned in the Mourad [Lower Euphrates] River. I did not attempt to run away, as I had witnessed with my own eyes the assassination of my dear ones. I had a few piastres left, and hoped to live a few days longer.

We heard on our way from the Kurds that Kurdish Chettis (bands of robbers) had collected all the inhabitants of Kurdmeidan and Sheklilan, about 500 women and children, and burnt them by the order of Rashid Effendi, the head of the Chettis.

When we reached the Khozmo Pass, our guards changed their southerly direction and turned west, in the direction of the Euphrates. When we reached the boundary of the Ginj district our guards were changed, the new ones being more brutal. By this time our number was diminished by half. When we reached the boundary of Djabaghchour we passed through a narrow valley; here our guards ordered us to sit down by the river and take a rest. We were very thankful for this respite and ran towards the river to get a drink of water.

After half-an-hour we saw a crowd of Kurds coming towards us from Djabaghchour. They surrounded us and ordered us to cross the river, and many obeyed. The report of the guns drowned the sounds of wailing and crying. In that panic I took my little boy on my back and jumped into the river. I was a good swimmer and succeeded in reaching the opposite shore of the Euphrates with my precious bundle unnoticed, and hid myself behind some undergrowth.

By nightfall no one remained alive from our party.⁸³

Two days after giving her account of the deportation the woman's son died of starvation. She was later tracked down and killed.

CONNECTIONS

- How do you respond to such unspeakable horror? How do you understand the brutality this woman faced if you have never experienced it? What do you know after hearing stories like this that you would not know otherwise?
- Much of this book has emphasized choice and decision-making. But in accounts like the one in this reading, the victims are faced with what Professor Lawrence Langer refers to as “choiceless choices.” In *Versions of Survival*, a book about survivors of the Holocaust, Langer describes these as decisions made in the “absence of humanly significant alternatives—that is, alternatives enabling an individual to make a decision, act on it, and accept the consequences—all within a framework that supports personal integrity and self-esteem.” What distinguishes a “choiceless choice” from other decisions? Why does Langer believe that normal standards for judging behavior will not apply to all the “choices” of victims?
- Donald Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller have studied the testimony of women who survived the deportations. They believe the conditions of the deportations had tragic consequences for Armenian parents and required Armenian mothers to make unthinkable choices. They frame some of those choices:
 1. Whose life is of more value? My own or those of my children?
 2. If I cannot care for all of my children, which lives shall I seek to preserve?
 3. Is it better that we, as a family unit, all die together, or that some family members perish while others survive?
 4. Is it preferable to give my son or daughter to a passing Turk or Kurd, knowing that he or she will thereby lose all consciousness of their Armenian as well as religious identity—but thereby survive—or is it preferable that they die? ⁸⁴

How are the choices they describe like the “choiceless choices” that Langer writes about?

- Systematic rape and forced prostitution were not specifically subject to international law until the creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia included them in its mandate in 1993. The first conviction for rape as a crime against humanity came in February of 2001 in a case where Muslim women were systematically raped by Bosnian Serb soldiers. Why do you think it took so long for crimes against women to be recognized and prosecuted?

Reading 9 → CRIES RINGING IN MY EARS

Viscount Bryce's collection *Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16* includes dozens of eyewitness accounts of the Armenian Genocide, some of them from survivors, others by witnesses. In the book, all of the accounts are published anonymously, but there was a classified key to each person's identity. The following letter was written by a woman from the United States who was traveling with her husband by train. Her train had a three-hour stop in the town of Kara Hissar.

We took a carriage at the station and drove to the home of an Armenian doctor there—a well educated, fine young doctor, whom we had met on our previous visit to Kara Hissar. We found his wife and two small children at home, but the doctor had been taken a year ago to work for the wounded Turkish soldiers.

The wife had heard of the exiling of all the Armenians from different towns around her, and so she was packing a few things to take with her when her hour came to go. That hour arrived while we were in her home. All the Armenians were ordered to be at the station in twenty-four hours, to be sent—where? They did not know, but they did know that they had to leave everything—the little homes they had worked for for years, the few little things they had collected—all must be left to the plunder of the Turks.



From the private collection of Berli Fenerci

Post card of Kara Hissar before the Genocide.

It was one of the saddest hours I ever lived through; in fact, the hours that followed on the train, from Kara Hissar to Constantinople, were the saddest hours I ever spent.

I wish I could picture the scene in that Armenian home, and we knew that in hundreds of other homes in that very town the same heart-breaking scenes might be witnessed.

The courage of that brave little doctor's wife, who knew she must take her two babies and face starvation and death with them. Many began to come to her home—to her, for comfort and cheer, and she gave it. I have never seen such courage before. You have to go to the darkest places of the earth to see the brightest lights, to the most obscure spot to find the greatest heroes.

Her bright smile, with no trace of fear in it, was like a beacon light in that mud village, where hundreds were doomed.

It was not because she did not understand how they felt; she

was one of them. It was not because she had no dear ones in peril; her husband was far away, ministering to those who were sending her and her babies to destruction.

“Oh! There is no God for the Armenians,” said one Armenian, who, with others, had come in to talk it over.

Just then a poor woman rushed in to get some medicine for a young girl who had fainted when the order came.

Such despair, such hopelessness you have never seen on human faces in America.

“It is the slow massacre of our entire race,” said one woman.

“It is worse than massacre!” replied another man.

The town crier went through all the streets of the village, crying out that anyone who helped the Armenians in any way, gave them food, money or anything, would be beaten and cast into prison. It was more than we could stand.

“Have you any money?” my husband asked the doctor’s wife. “Yes,” she said; “a few liras; but many families will have nothing.”

After figuring out what it would cost us all to reach Constantinople we gave them what money we had left in our small party. But really to help them we could do nothing, we were powerless to save their lives. . . .

It was with broken hearts that we left the town, and hardly had we started on our way when we began to pass one train after another crowded, jammed with these poor people, being carried away to some spot where no food could be obtained. At every station where we stopped, we came side by side with one of these trains. It was made up of cattle-trucks, and the faces of little children were looking out from behind the tiny barred windows of each truck. The side doors were wide open, and one could plainly see old men and old women, young mothers with tiny babies, men, women and children, all huddled together like so many sheep or pigs—human beings treated worse than cattle are treated.

About eight o’clock that evening we came to a station where there stood one of these trains. The Armenians told us that they had been in the station for three days with no food. The Turks kept them from buying food; in fact, at the end of these trains there was a truck-full of Turkish soldiers ready to drive these poor people on when they reached the Salt Desert or whatever place they were being taken to.

Old women weeping, babies crying piteously. Oh, it was awful to see such brutality, to hear such suffering.

They told us that twenty babies had been thrown into a river as a train crossed—thrown by the mothers themselves, who could not bear to hear their little ones crying for food when there was no food to give them.

One woman gave birth to twins in one of those crowded trucks, and crossing a river she threw both her babies and then herself into the water.

Those who could not pay to ride in these cattle-trucks were forced to walk. All along the road, as our train passed, we saw them walking slowly and sadly along, driven from their homes like sheep to the slaughter.

A German officer was on the train with us, and I asked him if Germany had anything to do with this deportation, for I thought it was the most brutal thing that had ever happened. He said: “You can’t object to exiling a race; it’s only the way the Turks are doing it which is bad.” He said he had just come from the interior himself and had seen the most terrible sights he ever saw in his life. He said: “Hundreds of people were walking over the mountains, driven by soldiers. Many dead and dying by the roadside. Old women and little children too feeble to walk were strapped to the sides of donkeys. Babies lying dead in the road. Human life thrown away everywhere.”

The last thing we saw late at night and the first thing early in the morning was one train after another carrying its freight of human lives to destruction. . . .

The crying of those babies and little children for food is still ringing in my ears. On every train we met we heard the same heart-rending cries of little children.⁸⁵

CONNECTIONS

- The author writes that she was “powerless” to save the lives of the Armenians she encountered yet she struggled to respond morally to the atrocities she witnessed. Where do you see evidence of her struggle? How does she respond?
- How would you describe the differences between a bystander to injustice and a witness to injustice?
- Today people all over the world “witness” ethnic cleansing and the results of genocide and famine on television, the internet, and in the press. What should be done? Why do some people take action in response or to prevent further atrocity while others do not?
- How would you respond to the German officer who told the author: “You can’t object to exiling a race; it’s only the way the Turks are doing it which is bad”?

Reading 8 — TARGETING THE GREEKS AND THE ASSYRIANS

Although many of the Young Turk measures were directed specifically at the Armenians, other non-Muslim populations, including the Assyrians and the Greeks of the empire faced deportation and murder. Although Greece won its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1828, territorial disputes left many people who identified themselves as Greek or Pontian subject to Ottoman rule. Those Hellenist or Greek Ottomans that remained in the empire were viewed with suspicion. In response to the Balkan war of 1912–1913 there were massive boycotts of Greek Ottoman businesses that spread to other Christians, including Armenians. In the aftermath of Greek victory thousands of ethnic Turkish refugees fled and resettled in Turkey. As the war broke out Talaat, Young Turk Minister of the Interior, told the Greek Patriarch that “there was no room for non-Muslims” in the Ottoman Empire.



Greek and Armenian refugee children from Anatolia, near Athens, Greece.

Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection (Library of Congress).
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Thea Halo, an author and daughter of a Pontian [Greek] survivor of the genocide, writes that “there were three separate groups of Greeks in Turkey: the Ionians, who lived in the Western coastal regions facing Greece; the Kappadokans, those from the area of the ancient Greek cities of Anatolia now known as Cappadocia; and the Pontians, who lived in the Pontic Mountains below the Black Sea and on its southern shores. But the term Pontian has come to encompass the struggles and tragedies of all the Greeks of Turkey.”

In her book, *Not Even My Name*, Halo, using official documents, outlines the evolution of anti-Greek measures under the Young Turks.

14 May 1914 Official document from Talaat Bey, Minister of the Interior to Prefect of Smyrna: The Greeks, who are Ottoman subjects, and form the majority of inhabitants in your district, take advantage of the circumstances in order to provoke a revolutionary current, favorable to the intervention of the Great Powers. Consequently, it is urgently necessary that the Greeks occupying the coastline of Asia Minor be compelled to evacuate their villages and install themselves in the vilayets of Erzerum and Chaldea. If they should refuse to be transported to the appointed places, kindly give instructions to our [Muslim] brothers, so that they shall induce the Greeks, through excesses of all sorts, to leave their native places of their own accord. Do not forget to obtain, in such cases, from the emigrants certificates stating that they leave their homes on their own initiative, so that we shall not have political complications ensuing from their displacement.

31 July 1915 German J. Lepsius: “The anti-Greek and anti-Armenian persecutions are two phases of



Courtesy of Martin Gilbert, from *The First World War: A Complete History*, revised edition (Henry Holt: New York, 2003)

GREECE AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Though Greece won its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1828, many Greeks still lived within the Empire's borders. On July 31, 1915 German missionary and historian Johannes Lepsius warned, "the anti-Greek and anti-Armenian persecutions are two phases of one programme."

one programme—the extermination of the Christian element from Turkey.”

16 July 1916 Austrian consul at Amisos Kwiatowski to Austrian Foreign Minister Baron Burian: “on 26 November Rafet Bey told me: ‘we must finish off the Greeks as we did with the Armenians. . . .’ On November 28 Rafet Bey told me: ‘today I sent squads to the interior to kill every Greek on sight.’ I fear for the elimination of the entire Greek population and a repeat of what occurred last year.” (the Armenian Genocide).

13 December 1916 German Ambassador Kuhlman to Chancellor Hollweg in Berlin: “Consuls. . . report of displacement of local population and murders. Prisoners are not kept. Villages reduced to ashes. Greek refugee families consisting mostly of women and children being marched from the coasts to Sebastea. The need is great.”

19 December 1916 Austrian Ambassador to Turkey Pallavicini to Vienna lists the villages in the region of Amisos that were being burned to the ground and their inhabitants raped, murdered or dispersed.

20 January 1917 Austrian Ambassador Pallavicini: “the situation for the displaced is desperate. Death awaits them all. I spoke to the Grand Vizier and told him that it would be sad if the persecution of the Greek element took the same scope and dimension as the Armenian persecution. The Grand Vizier promised that he would influence Talaat Bey and Enver Pasha.”

31 January 1917 Austrian Chancellor Hollweg’s report “. . . the indications are that the Turks plan to eliminate the Greek element as enemies of the state, as they did earlier with the Armenians. The strategy implemented by the Turks is of displacing people to the interior without taking measures for their survival by exposing them to death, hunger, and illness. The abandoned homes are then looted and burnt or destroyed. Whatever was done to the Armenians is being repeated with the Greeks.”⁸⁶

Until the summer of 1917 official persecution of Greek Ottomans was tempered by foreign policy considerations. Greece, under the rule of King Constantine, remained neutral as the war waged on. When the Special Organizations began to deport Greek Ottomans in the early days of the war, the Greek Premier warned that the Greek government might take reprisals against the Turkish subjects of Greece. Further tempering Turkish treatment of its Greek population was the attitude of the German leadership, a number of high ranking German military and civilian officials lobbied on the behalf of Greek Ottomans.

Vahakn Dadrian explains:

In December 1917, for example Marshal Liman von Sanders alerted the German Ambassador Bernstorff about an order by war minister Enver who wanted “the deportation of virtually all Greeks

of the coast to inland areas. . . .” Enver had prepared a list of five categories for the deportation order. Sanders “had personally intervened and had succeeded because he had threatened to resign.” The German Foreign Office supported the efforts of Sanders and Ambassador Bernstorff, and let it be known that it “advised strongly against the deportations. . . .” All the while, however, “the plundering and burning down of a large number of Greek villages . . . and the forcible relocation of 70,000 Greeks from the Littoral, stretching from Bafra [on the Aegean Sea] to Tirebolu [on the Black Sea] continued; many of the victims in all likelihood died due to the privations they incurred.

To demonstrate his solidarity with the deported Greeks, German emperor William II authorized the allocation of 10,000 Deutsche Marks to be used as relief money for the needs of the deported Greeks.”⁸⁷

In July 1917 Greece joined the Allies and declared war on the Central Powers of Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Turkey. As war broke out between Greece and Turkey, Ottoman Greeks lost their leverage. According to Thea Halo, during and especially after World War I some 360,000 Pontian Greeks were systematically deported and killed and one and a half million were sent into exile.

Throughout the war, another Ottoman Christian minority, the Assyrians were also subject to genocide. Estimates of Assyrian deaths range from 75,000 to 150,000.

CONNECTIONS

- How is your understanding of the Armenian Genocide influenced by examining the persecution of the Greeks and Assyrians?
- How do you explain the difference in the way German officials responded to the treatment of Greeks and Armenians? What does it say about the way German officials defined their “universe of obligation”?
- Some historians believe that many Ottoman Greeks were saved from death through the outside intervention of the Greek and German governments. Neither the Assyrians nor the Armenians had a country of their own, and those concerned with their plight either failed to use their power or were unable or unwilling to directly intervene in the deportation and murder. Who is responsible for groups that do not have their own state? How can their safety be protected?

NOTES

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81. <http://www.armenian-genocide.org/sampledocs/br-12-26-16-text.htm>, from the British Public Record Office, FO 371/2768/1455/folios 454–458
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84. Donald Miller and Laura Touryan Miller, "Women and Children of the Genocide," in Richard Hovanissian ed. *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 166.
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87. Dadrian, *German Responsibility*, pp. 230–231.