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Young Turk social engineering : mass violence and the nation state in eastern Turkey, 1913-1950

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3. Genocide, 1915-16

This chapter will closely examine the history of the first phase of Young Turk social engineering. It will do so by describing and attempting to explain the mass violence that was unleashed against Ottoman Christians in Diyarbekir province during World War I. The chapter is divided into three parts: first, it will trace the genocidal tendencies of the Young Turks up to the crisis of 1914-15 and their entry into the war. How did the process of persecution begin? Second, it will concentrate on Diyarbekir province and describe the persecution process of Armenians and other Christians in that region. How did the process of persecution develop into genocide? Third, it will analyze how that persecution developed into genocidal destruction by focusing on how local elites in Diyarbekir interpreted, organized, and intensified the destruction of Armenians. How did the behavior of local elites affect the genocidal process? The conclusions will focus on the close interdependence of victimization and perpetration, the importance of local elites in any genocidal process, and how the genocide can be placed in the broader structure of Young Turk population politics. This approach is designed to capture the complexity of processes of mass violence.

War and persecution

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 stirred up acute international tensions. In the midst of the atmosphere of mounting belligerence, the CUP sought to forge alliances with any of the Great Powers in order to bring the empire out of its diplomatic isolation. Cavid Bey, the pro-British Minister of Finance, had appealed to Britain in 1911, but apart from Winston Churchill, the Foreign Office was not interested.³³¹ Talaat flirted with Russia on his trip to the Crimea in May, where he spoke to the Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov about a possible alliance. The Russians expressed ambivalence in judgement but in essence were not interested.³³² Cemal Pasha approached France but left empty-handed, lamenting the negotiations with the French as “a huge disappointment”.³³³ On 24 July 1914 a general mobilization was issued by the Ottoman general staff. On 28 July, the same day that Austria-Hungary declared war against Serbia, Enver Pasha proposed a defensive alliance between Imperial Germany and the Ottoman Empire to the German

³³¹ Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol.3: *1914-1916, The Challenge of War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p.189.

³³² Sergej D. Sazonov, *Les années fatales: souvenirs de M. S. Sazonov, ancien ministre des Affaires Étrangères de Russie (1910-1916)* (Paris: Payot, 1927), p.182.

³³³ Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar: İttihat ve Terakki ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı Anıları* (Istanbul: Çağdaş, 1977), p.141.

Ambassador Wangenheim. In the next few days Grand Vizier Said Halim, Chairman of the Parliament Halil, Enver, and Talaat launched intensive negotiations with the Germans behind closed doors. Finally, on 2 August, one day after the German declaration of war against Russia, a written agreement was signed between the two states.³³⁴ The discussions were top secret, and even Cemal Pasha had no knowledge of them.³³⁵ Three days later Austria-Hungary joined the Turko-German alliance and completed the Central Powers bloc, whereas Russia, France and Britain united into the Entente Powers. The Ottoman Empire was now officially allied to Germany and on account of the treaty was inevitably obliged in this political constellation to prepare for war. Following the succession of declarations of war in August 1914, the Germans urged Minister of War Enver Pasha to act against Russia. Enver agreed as a sign of goodwill. Without a formal declaration of war, he ordered the Ottoman navy immediately to bomb the Russian shore, destroying oil tanks and sinking fourteen vessels.³³⁶ Though few politicians in Istanbul knew of Enver's attack, the *fait accompli* triggered declarations of war by the Triple Entente powers. From 11 November 1914 on, the Ottoman Empire was officially at war with Russia, France, and Britain.³³⁷

World War I was not something that happened incidentally to the Ottoman Empire. Powerful cadres in the CUP's nationalist wing consciously headed in a belligerent direction. By participating in the war it hoped radically to solve the many problems of the Empire. Three days after the outbreak of the war, the Young Turk journalist Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın (1875-1957) published an article entitled, "The Awaited Day," rejoicing that the war "had come like a stroke of good fortune upon the Turkish people, who had been sure of their own decline. The day had finally come," he wrote ominously, that "the Turks would make an historical reckoning with those... whom they had been previously unable to do so." The Turks would exact "revenge, the horrors of which had not yet been recorded in history."³³⁸ From the first day of the war, Young Turk dictatorial rule became more repressive towards oppositional groups. Discordant behaviour was dealt with systematically and ruthlessly. On 6 September 1914 Talaat ordered the Ottoman security apparatus to "follow and observe" closely the local leaderships of Armenian political parties who, according to Talaat, had been engaging in "agitation and disturbance" against the notion of Ottomanism all along.³³⁹ Another perceived

³³⁴ For the eight articles of this treaty see: Şevket S. Aydemir, *Makedonya'dan Orta Asya'ya Enver Paşa* (Istanbul: Remzi, 1972), vol.2 (1908-1914), p.510.

³³⁵ Cemal, *Hatıralar*, pp.142-43.

³³⁶ Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), p.76.

³³⁷ John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Vintage, 1998), p.217.

³³⁸ *Tanin*, 14 November 1914.

³³⁹ *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (Ottoman Archives, Istanbul, hereafter: *BOA*), DH.ŞFR 44/200, Talaat to provinces, 6 September 1914.

problem were the foreign capitulations, a set of legal concessions under which foreign subjects enjoyed privileges, such as exemption from Ottoman taxes. The CUP regarded the capitulations as humiliating³⁴⁰ and did not wait long to confront them: all capitulations were unilaterally abrogated on 17 September.³⁴¹ The CUP's bold policies not only directly caused the ranks to close, but also led to an indirect form of ethnic unweaving as government functionaries voluntarily left office. On 12 November, Minister of Commerce Süleyman Bustani, a Syriac Protestant, resigned his cabinet portfolio out of protest over what he considered ongoing CUP aggression.³⁴² This trend of "Turkification" of Ottoman political culture allowed the CUP to fill these administrative positions with nationalists.



Photo 7: The Young Turk dictatorship in 1913; from left to right: Talaat, Cemal, Halil, and Enver (Kévorkian & Paboudjian, 1992)

³⁴⁰ In the parliament, CUP members had dubbed the capitulations "satanic angels". *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi*, 3rd election period, 4th sitting, 60th session, p.1028. In his memoirs Cemal Pasha confessed they wanted to "tear them apart". Cemal, *Hatıralar*, p.438. The annulment of the capitulations "was received euphorically as a military success." Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, vol.3, p.420.

³⁴¹ "İmtiyazat-ı Ecnebiyenin (Kapitülasyon) İlgası Hakkında İrade-i seniyye," in: *Takvim-i Vekayi*, no.1938, 17 September 1914. Together with the capitulations, the reform plan for the eastern provinces Russia had designed in 1913 mainly to curb abuses against Christians, was also *de facto* cancelled. Roderic H. Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914," in: *The American Historical Review* (1947), pp.481-505.

³⁴² Feroz Ahmad, "Unionist Relations with the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914," in: Bernard Lewis & Benjamin Braude (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982), vol.I: *The Central Lands*, p.424.

Meanwhile, the mobilization did not go unnoticed in Diyarbekir province. The city streets thronged with soldiers of the Second Army Corps, led by Ahmet İzzet Pasha, which was partly lodged in large mosques such as the Nebii Mosque.³⁴³ On 3 November, the mayor of Diyarbekir held a public speech, explaining the conduct of the war to an exclusively Muslim crowd. Upon hearing that the Russian army was pushing into the provinces of Van and Erzurum, the frantic crowd yelled “Praise to Mohammed! Death to the Russians and their allies!” The non-Muslims of the city, frightened and cautious because of this outbreak of mass rage, did not leave their homes in the following days.³⁴⁴ The army began requisitioning goods from the population and drafting men into its ranks. Daniel Thom, a missionary in Mardin, summarized these acts and wrote that “the Govt. has robbed the city, and the country around, of its men, of its animals, of its money,” leaving the people “pennyless, shops all closed”.³⁴⁵ Gradually, the Armenian elite of Diyarbekir was targeted and persecuted. Coinciding with his earlier order, on 29 November Talaat ordered the arrest of Thomas Muggerditchian, the former interpreter of the British consulate in Diyarbekir. Muggerditchian was accused of espionage for the Entente Powers and was threatened with a court-martial.³⁴⁶ He escaped arrest, fled to Egypt and subsequently wrote his memoirs.³⁴⁷

From November 1914 on, the CUP began drawing up formations of irregular militia in order to invade Russia and Persia to provoke war. This secret military organization was integrated into the existing ‘Special Organization’.³⁴⁸ The cadre of these new guerrilla bands was to be made up of convicts, Kurdish tribesmen and Muslim immigrants, and would be led by the same combatants the CUP had used in the Balkan Wars and in prior political competition. The convicts, named “savages and criminals” even by CUP officials,³⁴⁹ were very often Kurdish tribesmen, or local outlaws and bandits who had committed crimes of theft or manslaughter. According to an Ottoman bureaucrat, they were drilled in Istanbul for one

³⁴³ Ali Emîrî, *Osmanlı Vilâyet-i Şarkîyyesi* (Istanbul: Dâr-ul Hilâfe, 1918), p.34.

³⁴⁴ Ishaq Armalto, *Al-Qousara fi Nakabat an-Nasara* (Beirut: Al-Sharfe Monastery, 1970, 2nd edition). This detailed chronicle was written in 1919 in Arabic by the Syriac priest Ishaq Armalto and provides a very valuable account of Diyarbekir province before and during the war. The book has recently been translated into Swedish: *De Kristnas Hemska Katastrofer: Osmanernas och Ung-turkarnas Folkmord i norra Mesopotamien 1895 / 1914-1918* (Stockholm: Beth Froso Nsibin, 2005), translated by Ingvar Rydberg. This author has used an unofficial Turkish translation by Turan Karataş (Sweden, 1993), p.22.

³⁴⁵ Daniel Thom to William Peet, 16 August 1914, quoted in: Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede: Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei 1839-1938* (Zürich: Chronos, 2000), p.336.

³⁴⁶ BOA, DH.ŞFR 47/243, Talaat to Diyarbekir, 28 November 1914.

³⁴⁷ Thomas Muggerditchian, *Dikranagerdee Nahankin Tcharteru, Aganadesee Badmoutiun* (Cairo: Djihanian, 1919). This book is alternately titled *Dikranagerdee Nahankin Tcharteru yev Kurderou Kazanioutounneru* (Cairo, 1919).

³⁴⁸ A. Mil, “Umumi Harpte Teşkilâtı Mahsusa,” in: *Vakit*, 2 October 1933 up to 18 April 1934, republished as: Arif Cemil (Denker), *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa* (Istanbul: Arba, 1997).

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.196.

week before being deployed in various regions.³⁵⁰ The entire operation was led by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir and was kept out of the control of the Ottoman army as much as possible.³⁵¹



Photo 8: Special Organization operatives in front of the Ministry of War in 1914 (Harb-i Umumi Panoraması, 1914)

On 18 November Talaat personally ordered the drawing up of lists of names of “those convicts who were able to exert influence on tribes”.³⁵² A week later, the Special Organization was put together in Diyarbekir. Among the members enlisted in the paramilitary organization were the Zaza brigand Alo,³⁵³ as well as the Chechen social bandit Hamid and his group of loyal warriors. Hamid was recruited by CUP members, who cabled the following notification to the Central Committee in Istanbul:

The courageous bandit [*eşkiya*] Chechen Hamid, resident of the town of Reşadiye in the Bergama district, has requested help to assist the army with some of his comrades and if allowed, to form a significant corps in Diyarbekir. Since we hope that the aforementioned gentleman is able to serve in this way, their dispatch will benefit the homeland. We would like to request a telegraphic answer on whether their patriotic venture will be necessary or not, and present our compliments, dear brothers.³⁵⁴

During the winter of 1914, the groups began penetrating into Russian and Persian territory to incite the Muslim populations to rise in rebellion and join the Ottoman forces. In this guerrilla war, Special Organization operatives also attacked Armenian villages, plundering, raping, and killing with impunity. Ambassador Wangenheim wrote to the German Chancellor that their

³⁵⁰ Ahmet Refik (Altnay), *Kafkas Yollarında: İki Komite, İki Kıtıl* (Istanbul: Temel, 1998 [1919]), p.157.

³⁵¹ Denker, *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*, pp.236-38.

³⁵² BOA, DH.ŞFR 47/70, Talaat to provinces, 18 November 1914.

³⁵³ *Tarihi Muhakeme* (Istanbul: Kitaphane-i Südi, 1919), p.14.

³⁵⁴ Quoted from internal CUP correspondence, 23 November 1914, quoted in: Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, vol.3, p.349.

anti-Russian actions across the Erzurum border frequently escalated into “Übergriffen und Ausschreitungen” against Armenian villagers in that region.³⁵⁵

The war on the eastern front gained momentum when Enver Pasha, driven by expansionist designs towards the east, attempted to attack the Russian army in Sarikamish on 29 December. Against all military advice from German and Ottoman strategists, Enver insisted on waging an encirclement campaign through the rugged Kars mountains. However, the Russian general Yudenich anticipated the outflanking manoeuvre, outsmarted Enver and delivered a heavy blow to his forces. Enver’s attack failed miserably, and as a result the Third Army was effectively wiped out. Of the 90,000 soldiers that engaged in the battle, approximately 78,000 perished, mainly through frost.³⁵⁶ The CUP leadership was convinced that the disastrous defeat had been caused by “treacherous Armenian elements”. Retreating Ottoman soldiers took revenge on Ottoman Armenian villagers, massacring many and pillaging their goods. After returning from the front, Enver wrote a letter to the Armenian patriarch of Konya, expressing his respect and admiration for the courage the Armenian soldiers had shown in the Sarikamish battle. He gave the example of sergeant Ohannes who had received a medal for valor,³⁵⁷ but it may not have been how Enver really felt. In a personal discussion with publisher Hüseyin Cahit, he bitterly blamed the Armenians for the fiasco and proposed their deportation to somewhere they would not cause trouble.³⁵⁸ The defeat triggered a wave of persecutions, especially in the front line provinces Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van. On 26 December 1914 Talaat ordered “the dismissal of all Armenian police officers, police chiefs, and government employees, and the deportation of anyone who opposes these measures.”³⁵⁹ This official notice marked an acceleration in CUP suspicion towards Armenian loyalty to the Ottoman state.

For the population of Diyarbakir city, there was little to celebrate between Christmas and New Year’s Eve 1914. The news of Enver’s losses reverberated there and had a detrimental effect on the morale of the locals. The war was experienced closely and

³⁵⁵ PAAA, R14085, Wangenheim to Bethmann-Hollweg, 29 December 1914.

³⁵⁶ Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp.51-74. For a detailed account of the Sarikamish disaster see: Alptekin Müderrisoğlu, *Sarikamış Dramı* (Istanbul: Kaştaş, 1997), 2 volumes.

³⁵⁷ Lepsius, *Der Todesgang*, pp.161-2.

³⁵⁸ Hüseyin C. Yalçın, *Siyasal Anılar* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1976), p.233.

³⁵⁹ BOA, DH.ŞFR 48/166, Talaat to the provinces of Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van, 26 December 1914. Talaat Pasha’s involvement in the dismissal of Armenian government officials typifies him as a micro-manager. In February he urged local officials to keep him abreast of the developing situation with regards to the Armenian civil servants. BOA, DH.ŞFR 50/3, Talaat to the provinces of Erzurum, Van and Bitlis, 14 February 1915. When he got the impression that the firing wasn’t proceeding quickly enough, he personally had police chief Krikor and police officers Armenag, Boghos, and Shahin of the Van police squad removed from their offices and deported to Mosul. BOA, DH.ŞFR 50/179, Talaat to Van province, 6 March 1915. For the official declaration sanctioning the dismissal of all Armenian and Greek police officers see: BOA, DH.EUM.MEM 80/63, 21 November 1916.

emotionally, since both Muslims and Christians had been drafted into the army, and many of them had perished in the Sarikamish campaign. The bad news distressed the communities and strained their relationships, sparking suspicion and enmity. The Saint Ephraim church was vandalized and property was stolen, and gendarmes beat up a Syriac village headman.³⁶⁰ The governor also prohibited the use of all non-Turkish languages in some of the province's institutions, such as the American hospital or the French mission.³⁶¹ In February 1915 the government initiated arms searches in Christian houses in Diyarbekir city. During these violent searches the inhabitants were accused of treason and espionage, and hiding guns in secret arms stores. On 18 February twelve young men of the large Syriac village of Qarabash were convicted and sentenced to death under charges of alleged desertion. Four of them were hanged publicly in the central square in Diyarbekir in order to deter potential deserters.³⁶² When their compatriot villagers protested against the execution, gendarmes clubbed two men to death and dispersed the group.³⁶³

March also saw the disarming of Armenian soldiers and their recruitment, together with many other Christian men, into labour battalions.³⁶⁴ The cadre of these battalions were deemed disloyal elements, as an official decree proscribed them “at all costs” from taking up arms in the regular Ottoman army.³⁶⁵ The labour battalion conscripts were deployed in road construction under dire circumstances in and around Diyarbekir. Irrespective of weather conditions, every individual, including teenagers, was forced to carry a load of 55 kilograms. They were escorted by two dozen soldiers. Many conscripts in the labour battalions perished of exhaustion, exposure, and maltreatment. On 5 March 1915 a Syriac native of Diyarbekir, Abed Mshiho, was conscripted into a labour battalion numbering 1100 men, and assigned to work on the Diyarbekir-Aleppo road. According to his account, the maltreatment increased every other day, bastinado and other beatings becoming commonplace, the violence escalating in sporadic murders of individual conscripts by late March.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁰ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, pp.26, 27.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.26.

³⁶² Abed Mshiho Na'man Qarabashi, *Vergoten Bloed: Verhalen over de Gruweldaden Jegens Christenen in Turkije en over het Leed dat hun in 1895 en in 1914-1918 is Aangedaan* (Glanerbrug, The Netherlands: Bar Hebraeus, 2002, translated by George Toro and Amill Gorgis), p.60. This important diary was originally written in Aramaic under the title *Dmo Zliho* (“Shed Blood”) by Na'man Qarabashi, a native of the village of Qarabash. During the war Qarabashi was a theology student at the Syriac monastery Deyr-ul Zaferan. Along with Armalto's account it is one of the very few survivor memoirs. However, his account suffers from victim bias in at least two ways: the myth of extreme cruelty on the part of the perpetrators, and the myth of resistance by the victims. Nevertheless, his account is factually correct and will be utilized, albeit with caution.

³⁶³ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.27.

³⁶⁴ Raymond Kévorkian, “Receuil de témoignages sur l’extermination des amele tabouri ou bataillons de soldats-ouvriers Arméniens de l’armée Ottomane pendant la première guerre mondiale,” in: *Revue d’Histoire Arménienne Contemporaine*, vol.1 (1995), 289-303.

³⁶⁵ See the official order in: Kâmuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası* (Ankara: Bilgi, 1988), p.276.

³⁶⁶ Qarabashi names nine Armenians who were led away and killed. Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, pp.62, 64-66.

March 1915 was perhaps the most fateful month for the future development of the Ottoman Empire in general and of Diyarbekir province in particular. The naval attacks upon the Dardanelles straits and the Russian move towards Van cast panic into the hearts and minds of the CUP leaders.³⁶⁷ This reinforced their established fear of a nightmare scenario in which potential Armenian disloyalty would pave the way for an Allied incursion into Anatolia. This ‘wishful suspicion’ led to a series of meetings of the Central Committee in Istanbul in mid-March. As a result of these gatherings, Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir was delegated substantial authority to deal with “the internal enemies”. The Special Organization was reorganized, expanded, and placed under his jurisdiction.³⁶⁸ The army was given more autonomy on Talaat’s orders to “turn to the Third Army for the application of measures aimed at Armenian actions.”³⁶⁹ Four days later he imposed total censorship on the Armenian newspaper *Azadamart* and sent Osman Bedri, police commissioner of Constantinople, to confiscate their presses.³⁷⁰ This radicalization at the center metastasized into the periphery as Diyarbekir province saw the appointment of its new governor: Dr. Mehmed Reshid.

On 25 March 1915 the governor of Diyarbekir, Hamid Bey, was relieved of his duties and replaced by Dr. Mehmed Reshid (Şahingiray). Reshid was born into a Circassian family



Photo 9: Dr. Mehmed Reshid
(*Yakın Tarihimiz*, 1962)

in Russian Caucasia on 8 February 1873. When the Tsarist government intensified its campaign against the Circassians in 1874, his family fled to the Ottoman Empire. Reshid grew up in Istanbul, where he enrolled in the Military School of Medicine and joined other students to found the kernel of a secret political party that would later adopt the name CUP. In 1897 the Abdulhamid regime exiled him to Tripoli for his politically recalcitrant activities. Having made a career in the army and risen to the rank of major, he wrote a book on the CUP revolution in 1908. However, he was never influential in the CUP core and his power did not match up to that of party bosses Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir or Dr. Nâzım. In 1909 he

³⁶⁷ If the Entente navy were to penetrate the Straits, Talaat promised they would blow up the Aya Sofia and retreat into the Anatolian heartland, from where they planned to resist and repel the Entente. Talaat laughed at Morgenthau’s protests by saying that not even six men in the CUP would care about the building. Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story* (Ann Arbor, MI: Gomidas, 2000), p.132.

³⁶⁸ For a detailed reconstruction of this decision-making process see: Taner Akçam, *İnsan Hakları ve Ermeni Sorunu: İttihat ve Terakki’den Kurtuluş Savaşı’na* (Istanbul: İmge, 2001), pp.260-65, especially p.264.

³⁶⁹ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 51/15, Talaat to the provinces of Erzurum, Van, and Diyarbekir, 14 March 1915.

³⁷⁰ Heinrich Vierbücher, *Armenien 1915: Die Abschichtung eines Kulturvolkes durch die Türken* (Bremen: Donat & Temmen Verlag, 1985 [1930]), p.49.

relinquished his employment in the military and became district governor and mayor in several provinces between 1908 and 1914. During his professional progress Reshid gradually radicalized and scapegoated the Christians as the reason for the Empire's erosion and wretched condition. By 1914 he was thoroughly convinced that the Ottoman Christians were abusing their ostensibly privileged positions and therefore were to blame for the Empire's depressed economy. He was delegated the task of secretary-general of the international reform plan for the eastern provinces which was annulled when the CUP engaged in war. In 1915 he became governor of Diyarbekir and in 1916 he was appointed governor of Ankara. When the war was over, he was arrested and incarcerated in Istanbul. With the assistance of his former loyalists, he escaped from prison and lived incognito at various Istanbul addresses. Fed up with being forced to evade the law, and fearing arrest and possible execution, he committed suicide when a police chief tracked him down on 6 February 1919.³⁷¹

When Reshid acceded to the governorship of Diyarbekir province, he brought with him thirty mainly Circassian Special Organization operatives, such as Çerkez Harun, Çerkez Şakir, and Çerkez Aziz.³⁷² They were joined in Diyarbekir by more troops released from the local prison.³⁷³ This way, Reshid absorbed more effective power than the average Ottoman governor. In his case, it was certainly true that “[i]n the provinces party bosses of one kind or another often exercised substantial control, amounting in some cases, [...] to virtual autonomy”.³⁷⁴ Upon arrival in Diyarbekir, Reshid and his men faced a poor rule of law, a serious desertion problem, and an anxious population. The bazaar, for example, was buzzing with rumors that the Russians had invaded Istanbul.³⁷⁵ The Muslims feared an invasion of Diyarbekir by the Russian army, whose reputation as a valiant fighting corps had preceded its offensive into the south. The Christians were torn between fear and hope: whereas one moderate group (such as the clergy) was terrified that a Russian incursion might trigger reprisals, another, discordant group (such as nationalists) expressed audacious beliefs that it was possible to defend themselves against the brutal policies of the CUP dictatorship.³⁷⁶

The concerns of many young men were of a pragmatic nature. They wanted to avoid the possibility of being conscripted into the Ottoman army and being sent off to an almost

³⁷¹ Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Dr. Mehmed Reshid (1873-1919): A Political Doctor,” in: Hans-Lukas Kieser & Dominik J. Schaller (red.), *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah: The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah* (Zürich: Chronos, 2002), pp.245-80.

³⁷² Mehmed Reshid, *Mülâhazât* (Istanbul, 1919), transliterated in: Nejdett Bilgi, *Dr. Mehmed Reshid Şahingiray'ın hayatı ve hâtualları* (İzmir: Akademi, 1997), p.89, footnote 28. According to Abidin Nesimî, son of the then mayor of Lice, Hüseyin Nesimî, the number of volunteers Reshid employed was 20. Abidin Nesimî, *Yılların İçinden* (Istanbul: Gözlem, 1977), p.39.

³⁷³ Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p.151.

³⁷⁴ Alexander L. Macfie, *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1923* (London: Longman, 1998), p.128.

³⁷⁵ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.28.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.28.

certain death, at the front or in the labour battalions. Therefore, some had actually gone into hiding in the complex web of rooftops of Khanchepek, a neighbourhood with a large concentration of Armenians. Some of these draft evaders had acquired weapons.³⁷⁷ Dr. Floyd Smith, an American doctor of the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM), witnessed that at the end of February, the Armenian bishop Tchilgadian finally “went upon the roofs and lectured the men, telling them that they were bringing ruin upon themselves and the whole Christian quarter. As a result quite a number surrendered.”³⁷⁸ Still, there were a number of both Muslim and Christian deserters when Dr. Reshid became governor.

In a post-war booklet titled “Reflections” (*Mülâhazât*),³⁷⁹ Reshid defended and sought to legitimize his wartime policies as governor of Diyarbekir. These memoirs, composed of two of his four wartime notebooks (the other two were lost), carry extraordinary importance as they allow a close look at his line of thought when he was appointed governor. From the moment he set foot in Diyarbekir, Reshid found confirmation of his prejudices of a conspiracy of disloyal Christians. He wrote,

My appointment to Diyarbekir coincided with a very delicate period of the war. Large parts of Van and Bitlis had been invaded by the enemy, deserters were transgressing, pillaging and robbing everywhere. Yezidi and Nestorian uprisings in or at the border of the province required the application of drastic measures. The transgressive, offensive and impudent attitude of the Armenians was seriously endangering the honor of the government.³⁸⁰

In his memoirs Reshid especially targeted the Armenians. He accused them of “high treason” and of “pursuing the goal of an independent Armenia”.³⁸¹ In his paranoia and animosity Reshid ignored the many Muslim deserters, and imagined an army of Armenian deserters whereas they may not have been as numerous and organized as he visualized. He believed that the Armenian draft dodgers on the rooftops were all “formidably” organized revolutionaries, and that they numbered more than one thousand. Moreover, according to

³⁷⁷ Mustafa Â. Tütenk, *Mahsûl-i Leyâlî-i Hayatım* (Diyarbekir, 1918, unpublished memoirs), fourth notebook titled “The Armenian Affair in Diyarbekir” (*Diyarbekir’de Ermeni Hâdisesi*), pp.21-23, quoted in: Beysanoğlu, *Diyarbekir Tarihi*, pp.787-88.

³⁷⁸ Floyd Smith to James Barton, 18 September 1915, *ABCFM Archives*, Houghton Library (Harvard University), ABC 16.9.7, reel 716:436, quoted in: Kieser, “Dr. Mehmed Reshid”, p.264.

³⁷⁹ The booklet was alternately titled “Persistence” (*Sebat*).

³⁸⁰ Reshid, *Mülâhazât*, p.24.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.95, 99.

Reshid “there was not a single Armenian in the province who was not participating in this national endeavour”.³⁸²

In order to deal with these perceived problems, Reshid organized a committee for the “solution of the Armenian question”. This council was named “Committee of Inquiry” and had a “Militia Unit” at its disposal.³⁸³ According to a German charity worker the committee, drawn up of a dozen CUP loyalists, was “a sham committee for the solution of the Armenian question” and served only one purpose: to eliminate the Armenian political parties.³⁸⁴ It was headed by Colonel Cemilpaşazâde Mustafa Nüzhet Bey, and consisted of deputy Pirinçizâde Aziz Feyzi, postal clerk İbrahim Bedreddin,³⁸⁵ Majors Rüşdü Bey and Yasinzâde Şevki (Ekinci), his brother Yasinzâde Yahya (Ekinci), representative of the the ‘Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants’ (*İskân-ı Aşâir ve Muhacirîn Müdüriyeti*, henceforth İAMM) and chairman of the Diyarbekir branch of the ‘Society for National Defense’ Veli Necdet, police chief Memduh Bey, militia commander Şevki Bey, and Müftüzâde Şeref Uluğ, son of the mufti.³⁸⁶ On orders of Reshid they selected the following civilians and appointed them Captain: Zazazâde Hacı Süleyman (by profession a butcher in the Diyarbekir bazaar), Halil (also a butcher), Cercisağazâde Abdülkerim, Direkçizâde Tahir, and Pirinçizâde Sıdkı (Tarancı). The following volunteers were nominated Lieutenant: Halifezâde Salih (Kalfagil), Ganizâde Servet (Akkaynak), Muhtarzâde Salih, Şeyhzâde Kadri (Demiray), Pirânizâde Kemal (Önen), Yazıcızâde Kemal, Zaza Alo Efendi, and Hacı Bakır.³⁸⁷

At that time a certain Hacı Zeki of Lice, a radical activist, incited the locals of Mardin to take up arms against the Christians. Zeki convened groups of Muslims at his house in Mardin city where he held inflammatory political speeches, openly calling for pogroms. The district governor of Mardin, a moderate man by the name of Hilmi, was displeased by Zeki’s aggressive vilification. Since the outbreak of the war Hilmi had been showing consistent

³⁸² *Ibid.*, pp.103, 106.

³⁸³ Süleyman Nazif, “Doktor Reshid,” in: *Hadisat*, 8 February 1919. It is possible that the establishment of these provincial committees was an empire-wide undertaking. There is evidence that in other provinces similar organizations were set up. *Yale University Library*, Ernst Jäckh Papers, file 49, folio 1354, “Anlage Abschrift”.

³⁸⁴ PAAA, R14087, director of the Deutscher Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient (Frankfurt am Main) Friedrich Schuchardt to the Auswärtiges Amt, 21 August 1915, enclosure no.6.

³⁸⁵ On 2 September 1914 İbrahim Bedreddin (Bedri for short) became the postal clerk of Diyarbekir province. Previously he had held this office in Basra and Mosul. After the defeat of the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, he had coordinated the CUP-sponsored deportation of the Ottoman Greeks of Biga (a town between Çanakkale and Bursa). On 12 September 1915 he was officially appointed district governor of Mardin, which he remained until 11 December 1916. On 24 January 1917 he was assigned to the governorship of Diyarbekir, which he occupied until 24 November 1918. Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, pp.69-70.

³⁸⁶ A *müftü* (mufti) is a Muslim jurist who is versed in Islamic religious law (the *shari’a*) and provides binding advice on its application.

³⁸⁷ Beysanoğlu, *Diyarbekir Tarihi*, pp.793-94; Bilgi, *Dr. Mehmed Reshid*, pp.26-27. See also: Joseph Naayem, *Shall This Nation Die?* (New York: Chaldean Rescue, 1921), pp.182-83. Reverend Naayem was a Chaldean priest of Urfa, where he witnessed the killing of his father and the persecution of the Christians. Disguised as a Bedouin Arab, he narrowly escaped with his life.

efforts to restrain conflict, and maintain relative stability and moderate rule. He reprimanded Zeki and expelled him from Mardin. Zeki then took off to Diyarbekir where he found willing partners among the CUP elite who were just consolidating their rule in the provincial capital.³⁸⁸ On 6 April 1915 Talaat ordered Reshid to “appoint a capable, loyal, and devout İttihadist for the vacant position of mayor” in Diyarbekir.³⁸⁹ Reshid immediately fired the political moderate Cemilpaşazâde Dr. Fuad Bey and replaced him with the anti-Armenian radical Piriñçizâde Sıdkı.³⁹⁰ Police chief Dersimli Hüseyin Bey was replaced by İAMM boss Veli Necdet, who had previously had occupied the office of provincial secretary.³⁹¹ All the key positions in Diyarbekir were now occupied by CUP loyalists.

In Diyarbekir city, Reshid now embarked on a relentless campaign to find and punish deserters. On 1 April he issued a proclamation demanding the surrender of all arms to the police.³⁹² When this failed to produce the results he had expected, he brutalized the arms searches from 5 April on. Aided by his gendarme commander, Major Rüşdü, he personally supervised and participated in the warrantless searches of churches and houses.³⁹³ Whereas district governor Hilmi in Mardin visited the Christian clergy to congratulate them on Easter,³⁹⁴ Reshid’s roundups of Armenian men became more and more arbitrary and categorical. As he wrote: “On a certain day I had the 3 or 4 most important streets in the Armenian neighbourhood barricaded and ordered surprise searches on every single house in the early morning, arresting more than 500 armed deserters”.³⁹⁵ By 15 April Reshid had already had more than 600 Armenian notables and artisans arrested and put in jail. There he had them tortured to exact confessions on the locations of hidden arms depots. The prisoners were beaten, burnt with hot irons, had their nails pulled out with pliers, and suffered prolonged bastinado.³⁹⁶ Even so, Reshid was not satisfied with what had been accomplished and wired Istanbul twice to request the deployment of more manpower to assist his force of

³⁸⁸ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, pp.29, 34.

³⁸⁹ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 51/220, Talaat to Diyarbekir, 6 April 1915.

³⁹⁰ Reshid, *Mülâhazât*, p.112. Right after the appointment of Sıdkı, a wave of violence swept over the labour battalions as two supervisors came to inspect the workers, yelling “You’re not here to play, come on, I want to see blood on those rocks!” Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, p.65.

³⁹¹ Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p.48.

³⁹² Floyd Smith to James Barton, 18 September 1915, quoted in: Kieser, “Dr. Mehmed Reshid”, p.265.

³⁹³ Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, pp.63.

³⁹⁴ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.29.

³⁹⁵ Reshid, *Mülâhazât*, pp.105.

³⁹⁶ Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, p.127. Fa’iz Al-Ghusayn, an Ottoman bureaucrat hailing from Damascus, was arrested for his opposition against the CUP and put in the Diyarbekir prison, where he witnessed the tortures inflicted on the Armenian notables. He later fled to Bombay and wrote his memoirs in Arabic. Fa’iz Al-Ghusayn, *Martyred Armenia* (London: C.A. Pearson Ltd., 1917). This source has been discredited in denialist literature, but the level of detail and accuracy Al-Ghusayn provides on Diyarbekir’s prison is compelling and corroborates other sources.

300 gendarmes and policemen. The Interior Ministry did not comply with his requests, frustrating and galvanizing him into more severe measures.³⁹⁷



Photo 10: Young Turk propaganda photo: Dr. Reshid (center, in suit) and militia posing in front of weapons allegedly taken from Armenian revolutionaries (www.ermenisorunu.gen.tr)

A peculiar aspect of the operation was the hunt for “recalcitrant” books and other texts, generally written in non-Ottoman languages. In Young Turk jargon this material was branded “harmful documents” and needed to be confiscated.³⁹⁸ As Floyd Smith wrote, “Books and papers were sure to bring condemnation to a household.”³⁹⁹ On 22 April Reshid’s men went from door to door in the Khanchepek and Fatihpasha neighbourhoods to find books. The Syriac tailor Habib had warned the inhabitants to hide their books, especially books in the French and Armenian languages. The militia also paid a visit to the Armenian bishop Tchilgadian and accused him of hiding arms in secret niches in the large Armenian church of

³⁹⁷ Reshid, *Mülâhazât*, pp.103, 104.

³⁹⁸ In World War I, the CUP confiscated and destroyed an unknown but undoubtedly large number of non-Turkish language works. A striking example is the fate of the books at library of the Armenian school of Sivas. In October 1916 Talaat was disturbed by the idea that the library kept “important volumes on the condition of the Ottoman Empire in French, German, English, Russian, and Kurdish,” and ordered “the immediate seizure of these books and their dispatch to Istanbul by post.” *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 69/75, Talaat to Sivas province, 23 October 1916. Five months later, when the books still weren’t sent, he repeated his order, requesting the books to be sent “urgently”. *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 76/243-14, Talaat to Sivas province, 24 May 1917.

³⁹⁹ Floyd Smith to James Barton, 18 September 1915, quoted in: Kieser, “Dr. Mehmed Reshid”, p.264.

St. Sarkis. They raided his room, took away all his books and documents, and sent them to Reshid for examination. The next day the books were burnt publicly.⁴⁰⁰ Vahram Dadrian was a young boy when he was deported with his family from Çorum. After many trials and tribulations they arrived in the Syrian desert and met an Armenian man named Pakrad who had just escaped from Diyarbekir. Pakrad related to them that his father Abraham had been caught up in the book searches. A corporal took two of their books and walked out, facing a frantic crowd of Muslims:

The corporal gestured to the crowd to shut up. "Listen! Look here. Look what we found in his home," he yelled, lifting a geography book into the air. "You don't know how to read, so you don't know how dangerous this book is. But I won't have to say much before you can draw your own conclusions. In the hands of our enemies this book is a more terrifying weapon than all the guns and cannons of the army. This book gives the locations of all the cities, villages, rivers, and roads in Turkey. All of them meticulously portrayed. Anybody who goes through this book can find not only the plan of every city, but also the location of every house and whether it belongs to a Christian or a Muslim. They have marked each one with a cross or a crescent, so that one day when they rebel it will be easy for them to tell a Muslim household from the others." Grumbling from the mob – arms into the air in defiance! "Oh, oh, oh... clobber him, kill him, let him rot, the traitor." "Please, calm down. Not so fast," the corporal ordered with authority, "I haven't finished yet. Look. Here's another book." He held up another book – a physics text. "It tells you all you need to know about how to make gun-powder, bullets, and dynamite. These conspirators' homes are filled with books like this. Both the young and the old read these books and learn what to do to destroy our country. But thank God and the Sultan that we have been vigilant and were able to uncover their plot at the last minute. Now it's *we* who will destroy *their* homes and put *their* children to the sword." The policemen had a hard time clearing a way through the violent crowd. They finally succeeded and, pulling and pushing their victim, they took him off to jail.⁴⁰¹

Pakrad's father Abraham died in jail, where chances of escape or survival were very slim. As the city prison was now overfilled with prisoners, Reshid ordered the large caravanseraï of Diyarbekir evacuated. Every day several dozens of prisoners were locked up and tortured in that khan.⁴⁰²

The violent persecutions were not limited to Diyarbekir city. In April a gradual shift occurred from discerning between combatants and non-combatants, to not discerning between

⁴⁰⁰ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.29. Patriarch Rahmani, *Les dégâts causés à la nation syrienne* (présenté devant la conférence de la paix, 1919).

⁴⁰¹ Vahram Dadrian, *To the Desert: Pages from my Diary* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2003), pp.64-65.

⁴⁰² Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, pp.82, 128. This famous caravanseraï, a large inn providing shelter to travelling businessmen or pilgrims, was also known as "guest house" (*misafirhane*) or simply "khan" (*han*) and is presently known as the Deliller Hanî near the Mardin Gate. After restoration in the 1990s, it became the 5-star Hotel Kervansaray.

them any longer. This momentum is exemplified by the crucial battle of Van, which had very high stakes for all parties. The Van front saw mutual indiscriminate massacring of Muslims by the joint Russo-Armenian forces and of Christians by Ottoman forces.⁴⁰³ This dynamic between state and minority triggered a process of radicalization, both in geographical scope and in intensity. The anti-Armenian policies at the national level now became more and more categorical as well. Moreover, inspired by the brutalizing war in Persian Azerbaijan and in Transcaucasia, the measures were also gaining ‘total’ traits: more and more violence was applied. Fear of Allied landings on the western coasts added fuel to the fire. As a result, the CUP began incarcerating dissidents and assailing the Armenian community all over the Ottoman Empire. Beginning on 24 April 1915, the political and cultural elite of the Ottoman Armenian community was targeted for arrest and deportation to the interior. The political prisoners were detained in Ayaş, the intellectual prisoners were sent to the prison of Çankırı. Others were sent to Diyarbekir to be court-martialled.⁴⁰⁴ With few exceptions, these men were murdered or tortured to death in the next months. Simultaneously, deportation convoys to the interior were rerouted to Der el-Zor in the Syrian desert. The persecutions soon increased in intensity and were extended to larger parts of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁰⁵ These three dimensions were conducive to a genocidal process: categorical assaults, geographic expansion, and deadly violence.

In Diyarbekir, Reshid had not distinguished between guilty or innocent Armenians ever since he had arrived. His intensive arms searches of the first three weeks of April had delivered some results for his militia as many arms were found. The scope of armament and the extent of its organization were blown out of proportion and photos were taken of the arms and the culprits.⁴⁰⁶ On 27 April Reshid wired an elated telegram to Talaat summarizing and evaluating his work in Diyarbekir:

For ten days, the pursuit of deserters has been carried out with utmost severity. As a result of yesterday’s purges a significant amount of explosives, fifty bombs, lots of ammunition and various arms, and a great deal of dynamite powder was found. 120 leaders and operatives of the villages were taken into custody. Until now, in

⁴⁰³ Anahide Ter Minassian, “Van 1915,” in: Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2000), pp.209-44.

⁴⁰⁴ Grigoris Balakian, *Le Golgotha arménien: Berlin - Deir es-Zor: Mémoires* (Paris: Le cercle d’écrits caucasiens, 2002), vol.1, pp.95-102.

⁴⁰⁵ Donald Bloxham, “The Beginning of the Armenian Catastrophe: Comparative and Contextual Considerations,” in: Kieser, *Der Völkermord*, pp.101-28.

⁴⁰⁶ Beysanoğlu, *Diyarbakir Tarihi*, p.789. A similar method was applied in Mardin, where Memduh Bey had been sent. Ara Sarafian, “The Disasters of Mardin during the Persecutions of the Christians, Especially the Armenians, 1915,” in: *Haigazian Armenological Review*, vol.18 (1998), p.263.

the city alone more than 1000 deserters of different regions were apprehended, many of whom are party members. Searches and pursuit are continuing.⁴⁰⁷

Having incarcerated the bulk of the political elite of the Diyarbekir Christians, Reshid's militia now targeted their religious leaders. Blanket arrests of priests and monks were carried out and their houses were ransacked. In Mardin, where Reshid's persecutions had not yet started, the news from Diyarbekir nevertheless caused fear. The Armenian Catholic Bishop Ignatius Maloyan had become anxious about the worsening situation and seems to have written a letter to his co-religionists, in case something happened to him. Maloyan urged his parish to remain calm and loyal to the government, and wrote, "Above all, never lose your faith in the Holy Trinity." The letter was sealed and entrusted to the Syriac Orthodox Bishop Gabriel Tabbuni on the first of May.⁴⁰⁸

While the war was raging in all intensity on the eastern front, the CUP began questioning the loyalty of the Ottoman Armenians even further. On 5 May 1915 Talaat authorized the Third Army to disarm all Armenian gendarmes in Diyarbekir province.⁴⁰⁹ This way, even loyal Armenians were categorized as disloyal and treated as such. The next day the Directorate for Employment and Supplies of the Ministry of Economy ordered all its offices to fire their Armenian staff and "deport those of whom it is necessary to areas where there are no Armenians".⁴¹⁰ After Reshid had arrested these men in Diyarbekir city, he proceeded to persecute the city's clergy and extend the arrests to the villages. On 9 May he summoned the Chaldean priest Hanna Soha in Mardin to Diyarbekir for interrogation. Upon arrival, the militia publicly maltreated him before killing him in broad daylight in the streets.⁴¹¹ The absence of constraints in his murder emboldened the militia and triggered a new wave of arrests and violence, this time targeting the surrounding villages as well. The predominantly Christian villages Kabiye, Qarabash, and Qitirbel, all situated on the plain of Diyarbekir, were subjected to brutal arms searches by Yasinzâde Yahya and Piriñçizâde Sıdkı between 10 and

⁴⁰⁷ Reshid to Talaat, 27 April 1915, quoted in: Hüsamettin Yıldırım, *Rus-Türk-Ermeni Münasebetleri (1914-1918)* (Ankara: KÖK, 1990), p.57.

⁴⁰⁸ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.30.

⁴⁰⁹ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 52/234, Talaat to Reshid, 5 May 1915.

⁴¹⁰ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 52/249, Ministry of the Economy to the provinces of Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Sivas, Mamuret-ul Aziz, and Diyarbekir, 6 May 1915. Since there were no other educated clerks available, Syriac employees Aziz (son of Yakub) and George Meqdesi Nano of the Diyarbekir office of the Ministry of Economy were allowed to continue their work. The director of this office, Saib Ali Efendi, protected these two secretaries all throughout the war. Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.33. Most Armenian civil servants had already been fired and replaced by Muslims at that time. Some were still in office at the Ministry of Post. On 23 May this Ministry too took action, and ordered the dismissal of all its Armenian clerks and the transfer of the vacant functions to "trustworthy Muslims" (*emin ve müslim kimselere*). *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 53/89, Ministry of Post to the provinces of Diyarbekir, Adana, Sivas, Ankara, Van, and Erzurum, 23 May 1915. For Haleb see: *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 53/90. The day after, the Ministry had to deal with the replacement of the Armenian postal clerk responsible for the deliverance of post between Diyarbekir and Siirt. Although no other qualified employees were available, it warned that the new postal clerk should under no circumstances be an Armenian. *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 53/97, Ministry of Post to Bitlis, 24 May 1915.

⁴¹¹ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.32.

20 May. The village men were tortured with bastinado, and dozens were taken away to the capital, filling the prison and the caravanserai.⁴¹² The German charity worker Schuchardt wrote, “between the 10th and the 30th of May another 1200 of the most notable Armenians and other Christians without distinction of religion were arrested in Diyarbekir province.”⁴¹³ Reshid then imposed a death penalty on any Armenian going outside the city walls.⁴¹⁴ Diyarbekir had now effectively become an open-air prison as the persecutions also spread into the countryside.⁴¹⁵

A critical event in Diyarbekir province was the first large massacre involving the integral destruction of entire village populations. On the morning of 20 May 1915 Reshid ordered Yahya and Sıdkı to disarm Qarabash, a village a short distance north-east of Diyarbekir. The village was invaded with 50 men and thoroughly disarmed, seizing even bread knives. Its men incarcerated, its weapons confiscated, Qarabash was now completely emasculated. That same evening Yahya and Sıdkı visited the neighbouring Kurdish villages, inciting them to attack Qarabash and explicitly giving them fiat to plunder. Two days later, on 22 May, the village was invaded by mounted Kurds, who massacred its entire population with daggers, axes, and swords. Its two priests, Paulus and Behnam, were trampled to death under the hooves of the horses. The women were raped, the houses burnt, and valuables seized.⁴¹⁶ The few survivors fled to Diyarbekir city, where some of them were treated by Floyd Smith, who reported the arrival of the Qarabash survivors as follows:

May 21, 1915, there came to our compound in Diarbekir from the village of Karabash, three hours to the east, three or four wounded and the following day (May 22) over a score of wounded Armenian and Syrian women and children. They, the villagers, told of a night attack by the Kurds three days previous and that the next morning the government had sent gendarmes who refused to allow anyone to come to Diarbekir. Some managed to get away and finally all who could walk or be carried came on the dates mentioned. The wounds were practically all infected and I have classified them as follows: [...]
(c) Wounds made by heavy cutting instruments, probably axes. [...]

⁴¹² Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, pp.81, 86, 92.

⁴¹³ PAAA, R14087, director of the Deutscher Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient (Frankfurt am Main) Friedrich Schuchardt to the Auswärtiges Amt, 21 August 1915, enclosure no.6.

⁴¹⁴ National Archives, RG 59, 867.4016/77, Morgenthau to Secretary of State, 20 July 1915 (enclosure no.3), in: Ara Sarafian (ed.), *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1917* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2004), p.103.

⁴¹⁵ The persecutions were now extended to Mardin city, which was still ruled by Hilmi Bey, who had stalled and resisted anti-Christian persecutions in his district. On 15 May Reshid sent Aziz Feyzi to organize the round-up of the Christian elites of Mardin. During a secret meeting in which tens of Muslim notables participated, a plan was laid out for the crackdown on the Mardin elite. However, this was practically impossible because of Hilmi being in office. Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.33.

Talaat continued micro-managing the national persecution of the Armenian political elite. On 19 May he ordered Henchak leader Paramas court-martialled in the Diyarbekir prison and inquired about the whereabouts of Krikor Nalbandian. *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 53/58, 19 May 1915, Talaat to Reshid. On the 22nd he requested information on Agnoui, Rupen Zartarian, and their colleagues. *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 53/74, 22 May 1915, Talaat to Reshid.

⁴¹⁶ Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, p.81.

2. Two children about seven and nine years and one woman; attempted decapitations. Deep incised wounds of the nape of the neck (just below the skull), 5-8 inches long and of a depth equal to the thickness of the muscles of this region.⁴¹⁷



Photo 11: The village of Qarabash before 1915 (Kévorkian & Paboudjian, 1992)

On that same evening, the 160 families of the village of Kabiye were targeted.⁴¹⁸ The terrified villagers, comprised of some remaining men but mostly women, children, and the elderly, had taken refuge in the Mor Kiryakos church. Sıdkı had persuaded Ömer, Mustafa, and Emîn, three sons of Perikhan, matriarch of the Reman tribe, to cooperate in the raid. They had brought with them dozens of tribesmen, who combed the village for hemp rope to tie the men together. On orders of Sıdkı the men were tortured with hot iron pins, while women and girls were raped in the church. Within five hours, the militia and the tribesmen had hacked the villagers to death with axes. Many were crammed into haylofts and barns and burnt alive.

⁴¹⁷ *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) Archives*, Houghton Library (Harvard University), ABC 16.9.7, vol.25d, document 485, Floyd Smith to James Barton, 20 September 1919, quoted in: James Barton (ed.), *Statements of American Missionaries on the Destruction of Christian Communities in Ottoman Turkey, 1915-1917* (Ann Arbor, MI: Gomidas Institute, 1998), p.92.

⁴¹⁸ In the 1960s, Professor of Semitic Languages Otto Jastrow travelled to Diyarbekir and Beirut to research the local Arabic dialects, but was repeatedly confronted in his interviews with narratives of massacres. He conducted several very valuable interviews with survivors from various villages, uploaded these recordings to an online archive (<<http://semarch.uni-hd.de/>>) and transcribed them in Aramaic, Arabic, and German. For the Kabiye massacre see: Otto Jastrow (ed.), *Die mesopotamisch-arabischen Qaltu-Dialekte* (Wiesbaden: Kommissionsverlag Franz Steiner GmbH, 1981), vol.II, *Volkskundliche Texte in Elf Dialekten*, pp.309-71.

After the massacre, the Reman brothers loaded two saddle bags of money and gold and carried the goods away.⁴¹⁹ The few survivors escaped to Diyarbekir, where some were killed after all by gendarmes. One survivor stated that she survived the massacre “between the corpses of her relatives”. When she fled to Diyarbekir city, a Zaza family proposed to take her into their home, but she refused out of fear. Another survivor, a boy, had escaped death by hiding in a vineyard, which was overgrown at that time of the year. He was the only male survivor of the Kabiye massacre.⁴²⁰

In April, some Armenians had already sporadically been deported from their native regions, though this was not an empire-wide campaign. The deportation of the entire Armenian people was officially organized from 23 May 1915 on, when Talaat issued orders for the integral deportation of all Armenians to Deir ez-Zor, starting with the northeastern provinces.⁴²¹ That same day he urged the Fourth Army Command to court-martial any Muslim who collaborated with Christians.⁴²² The Third Army had been put under command of General Mahmud Kâmil Pasha,⁴²³ who had issued a similar order. His orders instructed “any Muslim who protected an Armenian hanged in front of his house, the burning of his house, his removal from office, and his appearance before a court-martial.”⁴²⁴ These widespread arrests and persecutions prompted the Entente Powers to announce a joint declaration on 24 May, denouncing CUP policies against the Armenians. The declaration vehemently criticized these “new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization” and promised “that they will hold personally responsible [...] all members of the Ottoman government and those of their agents who are implicated in such massacres”.⁴²⁵ The CUP leaders, especially Talaat, panicked and attempted to disguise the deportations, requesting permission from the Grand Vizier on 26 May to issue a temporary deportation law. Although the deportations had already begun, the Grand Vizier endorsed Talaat’s law on the 29th, rushing the bill through parliament the next day. This was the official legal cover for the

⁴¹⁹ According to Qarabashi the amount of money stolen was 150 pounds. Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, p.89.

⁴²⁰ Jastrow, *Die mesopotamisch-arabischen*, p.310. Many survivors of the Christian villages of the plain fled to the city but were not received with open arms. Survivors and scared villagers came pouring into the churches. A survivor girl related that upon arrival at the Syriac Mother Mary church, she was chased away at the door by a Syriac Orthodox priest, who cursed at her and would not even give her a morsel of bread. *Ibid.*, pp.324-25. According to the son of an Armenian survivor from the village of Satk y, this priest was B’shero Abu Tuma, who had also been forced by Reshid to act as an informer and betray houses where Armenians were hidden. Interview with David Krikorian (aged 75) from Satk y village (Diyarbekir province), conducted in Turkish in Amsterdam on 16 December 2004.

⁴²¹ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 53/91, 53/92, and 53/93, Talaat to provinces, 23 May 1915. This is the single instance in which the empire-wide nature of the deportations are reflected in one order at the most central level.

⁴²² *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 53/85, Talaat to Cemal, 23 May 1915.

⁴²³ On 12 February 1915 Mahmud Kâmil replaced General Hafız Hakkı, who had died in a spotted typhus epidemic. Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p.104.

⁴²⁴ *Takvim-i Vekâyi*, no.3540, p.7.

⁴²⁵ *PRO*, FO 371/2488/51010, 28 May 1915; *National Archives* RG 59, 867.4016/67, 29 May 1915.

deportation of Armenians to the Syrian desert, authorizing the army to proceed with the operation, and delegating its daily implementation to the İAMM.⁴²⁶

“Burn, destroy, kill”: the persecution becomes genocidal

At this stage, moral thresholds were crossed both on the national and provincial level. Talaat had assumed supervision of and therefore responsibility for a very risky operation: the deportation of an entire population. The murderous initiations on the plain of Diyarbekir, too, had crossed a boundary as entire village populations were now targeted for destruction. The relationship between these two developments remains a chicken-and-egg enigma. However, it is possible to reconstruct at least some elements of this momentum. Rafael de Nogales Mendez was a Venezuelan officer in German service, operating in the Ottoman army as a mercenary. In the spring of 1915 he had witnessed the massacres of Christians in Van and Bitlis, committed by Halil Pasha and Tahir Cevdet Bey.⁴²⁷ He visited Diyarbekir in late June and had the opportunity to speak to Reshid in private. According to Nogales, Talaat had personally ordered Dr. Reshid to unleash hell on Diyarbekir province with a telegram containing a mere three words: “Burn - Destroy - Kill” (*Yak - Vur - Öldür*). Although this order was most probably destroyed (assuming it existed at all), there was clearly no instruction for Reshid to desist. Moreover, Reshid admitted himself that he had merely obeyed Talaat’s order, who allegedly had confided to him, “j’assume la responsabilité morale et matérielle”.⁴²⁸ Reshid interpreted the order as approval of his policy, characterized by American consul Jesse Jackson as a “reign of terror”.⁴²⁹

Content with the results on the Diyarbekir plain and emboldened by Talaat’s approval, Reshid had Feyzi conduct arms searches in Mardin on 24 May. These were equally brutal and categorical as those carried out in the previous month in Diyarbekir district. The next day he took it a step further and ordered Hilmi Bey to arrest all Christian notables in Mardin. Hilmi refused by answering he could not think of any reason why he should carry out arrests in his city and openly disobeyed his superior’s order. Nevertheless, Feyzi side-stepped bureaucratic protocols and proceeded with the persecutions, backed by a group of Muslim notables and the

⁴²⁶ *BOA*, MV 198/163, 30 May 1915.

⁴²⁷ Halil (Enver Pasha’s uncle) and Cevdet (Enver’s brother-in-law) swept through Van and Bitlis after their defeats on Persian territory and in Van. During their retreat, they massacred the Armenian inhabitants of Bitlis, Van, and the plain of Muş. For an eyewitness account see: Grace Knapp, *The Tragedy of Bitlis* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1919).

⁴²⁸ Rafael de Nogales, *Four Years Beneath the Crescent* (London: Sterndale Classics, 2003), p.125. This book was first published in Spanish as *Cuatro años bajo la media luna* (Madrid: Editora Internacional, 1924), later published in German as: *Vier Jahre unter dem Halbmond: Erinnerungen aus dem Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Verlag von Reimar Hobbing, 1925). See also his: *Memorias del General Rafael de Nogales Méndez* (Caracas: Ediciones Abril, 1974).

⁴²⁹ *National Archives*, RG 59, 867.4016/77, Jackson to Morgenthau, 5 June 1915, in: Sarafian, *United States*, p.84.

militia. Together they incarcerated dozens of Christians in Mardin.⁴³⁰ The persecutions also spread to the northern parts of the province, which were closer to Kharpüt, capital of Mamuret-ul Aziz province. Reverend Henry Riggs, a missionary in that city, wrote to the American ambassador Morgenthau that the Armenian pastor of Çüngüş (Tchungkoush) had “died a violent death in prison there.” The same fate had befallen preachers in Hani and Lice.⁴³¹

By the end of May, the entire Christian elite of Diyarbekir was in prison, where some had already died under torture. Dr. Reshid administered the *coup de grace* to the elite in the last week of that month. On Sunday 25 May 1915 Major Rüşdü handcuffed 807 notables including Bishop Tchilgadian, and led them through the Tigris Gate. On the shores of the Tigris the men were loaded on seventeen large Tigris rafts⁴³² under the pretext that they would be deported to Mosul. Militiamen accompanied the notables on the rafts as they sailed one hour downstream to the “intersection of two rivers” (*serê du avê*), a violent torrent where the Batman creek joins the Tigris. This area was the home of the notorious Reman tribe, south of Beşiri. At this gorge, Major Rüşdü had all rafts moored by the left bank of the river and ordered the Christians to compose reassuring letters to their families in which they were compelled to write that they were safely underway to Mosul. The men were then stripped of their clothes and valuables and massacred by Rüşdü’s men. In carrying out the hands-on killing the militia was assisted by Kurdish tribesmen loyal to Reman chieftain Ömer, who had been induced by Aziz Feyzi. All men were slaughtered and dumped in the river, with the exception of Bishop Tchilgadian, who was forced to witness the bloodbath as a form of psychological excruciation before being led back to Diyarbekir.⁴³³ After the massacre, Ömer and Mustafa were invited to Aziz Feyzi’s house, where they celebrated their accomplishment. The men were later received at the governorship, where Reshid congratulated them for their bravery and patriotism.⁴³⁴ Reshid also appealed to the Interior Ministry to have his militia rewarded and awarded medals for their outstanding performances. His wish was granted by the Directorate for General Security, and the militia members received financial benefits and were decorated with medals.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁰ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.33.

⁴³¹ *National Archives*, RG 59, 867.4016/77, Morgenthau to Secretary of State, 25 May 1915, in: Sarafian, *United States*, p.35.

⁴³² According to one researcher, these rafts were called *Shahtur*. Yusuf Halaçoğlu, “Realities Behind the Relocation,” in: Türkaya Ataöv (ed.), *The Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 2001), p.117.

⁴³³ Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, p.128.

⁴³⁴ *Épisodes des massacres arméniens de Diarbakir: Faits et Documents* (Constantinople: Kéchichian Fr., 1920), pp.28-30.

⁴³⁵ *BOA*, DH.EUM.MEM 67/31, 27 July 1915. Deputies Aziz Feyzi and Zülfü Bey, and militia Major Şevki were decorated with honorary medals for their “great achievements”. *BOA*, DH.KMS 43/10, 11 January 1917. According to a British intelligence report, “Deputy Feyzi was received by the Kaiser and decorated with the Iron Cross”. *Foreign Office* 371/4172/24597, no.63490, folio 304.



Photo 12: Tigris rafts (Republican Archives, Ankara)

On 30 May the process was repeated with 674 Christians and thirteen rafts. This time, the murder was supervised by Veli Necdet and fifty militiamen. On arrival at the Reman gorge the victims were robbed of a total of 6000 Turkish pounds and stripped of their clothes. They were killed and thrown in the river as Ömer's tribesmen and the militia lined up on both banks with their guns. Those that managed to swim and rise to the surface were shot dead. Back in Diyarbekir city, the militiamen sold the expensive clothing they had taken from the victims at the market.⁴³⁶ Among those killed were Onnik Kazazian, a wholesaler from Istanbul who happened to be visiting Diyarbekir, and his friend Artin Kassabian, the former interpreter of the French vice-consulate. Other victims were the noted bankers Khatchadur Dikranian and Tirpandjian.⁴³⁷ The same fate befell Mihran Basmadjian, graduate of the Euphrates College in Kharput, Dikran Chakidjian, and Nalband Hagop, all of them Dashnakists, as well as Hagop Hovsepien, the negotiator Stephan Matossian, the former provincial interpreter and secondary school teacher Dikran Ilvanian, member of the municipal council and representative of Singer Missak Shirikdjian, all of them members of the

⁴³⁶ PAAA, R14087, director of the Deutschen Hilfsbundes für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient (Frankfurt am Main) Friedrich Schuchardt to the Auswärtiges Amt, 21 August 1915, enclosure no.6; Lepsius, *Todesgang*, pp.75-76.

⁴³⁷ Report of M. Guys to the French embassy, Istanbul, 24 July 1915, in: Arthur Beylerian (ed.), *Les grandes puissances, l'empire ottoman et les arméniens dans les archives françaises (1914-1918): recueil de documents* (Paris: Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1983), p.48, document no.58; Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p.48; Krikorian, *Armenians*, pp.24-25.

Ramgavar party.⁴³⁸ To the dismay of Holstein, the German vice-consul at Mosul, a week later the rafts arrived empty. Holstein later found out that the Christian convoys had been “completely slaughtered” (*sämtlich abgeschlachtet*) and he had witnessed their corpses floating downstream: “For several days, corpses and human limbs have been floating down the river here”.⁴³⁹

Bishop Tchilgadian had been forced twice to watch how his parishioners were slaughtered. Although Ambassador Wangenheim later reported to Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg that “the Armenian Bishop of Diyarbekir is said to have committed suicide out of despair,” this was certainly not the case.⁴⁴⁰ After the second massacre he was led back to Diyarbekir, where he was ordered to sign a written declaration that the murdered Armenians had died of natural causes.⁴⁴¹ When he refused he was thrown into prison and tortured to death while his wife was raped by several militiamen before being killed.⁴⁴² Finally, a large nail was hammered through Tchilgadian’s head before he was burnt to ashes in front of the Melek Ahmed mosque by officer Resul Hayri Bey. The other priests and monks were strangled to death with thick ropes. All of this happened on the orders of Piriñçizâde Aziz Feyzi.⁴⁴³

After the elimination of the Armenian elite of Diyarbekir, Reshid quickly expanded the violence to genocidal proportions. Having massacred the bulk of the male elite, the rest of the Diyarbekir Armenians were now targeted categorically. On 1 June he had his militia evacuate 1060 Armenian men and women of the Armenian neighbourhood Khanchepek and escort them to the Diyarbekir plain through the Mardin Gate. The people were gathered and a proclamation was read out loud, offering the Armenians their lives in exchange for conversion to Islam. Although the decision was not unanimous, the victims refused, whereupon they were stripped of their clothes and belongings. The militia and local Kurdish villagers then massacred them with rifles, axes, swords, and daggers. Many women were raped, some were sold as slaves to the highest bidders. The corpses were either thrown in wells or trenches, or

⁴³⁸ *Épisodes des massacres*, pp.22-23.

⁴³⁹ *PAAB*, Botschaft Konstantinopel 169, Holstein to Wangenheim, 10 June 1915.

⁴⁴⁰ *PAAB*, Botschaft Konstantinopel 169, Rößler to Wangenheim, 29 June 1915; R14086, Wangenheim to Bethmann-Hollweg, 9 July 1915.

⁴⁴¹ *National Archives*, RG 59, 867.4016/77, Morgenthau to Secretary of State, 20 July 1915 (enclosure no.3), in: Sarafian, *United States*, p.103.

⁴⁴² Chilgadian’s “martyrdom” was protracted: teeth were knocked out, his beard was pulled out, he was forced to squeeze boiling hot eggs in his palms (a common form of torture on the human skin), and his eyes were gorged out. Vierbücher, *Armenien 1915*, pp.61-62. The account of Chilgadian’s death may seem embellished with excessive cruelty but is corroborated in many other sources, such as the German reports, and Qarabashi and Armalto.

⁴⁴³ Dadrian, *To the Desert*, p.66; Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, p.129; Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p.48; *Épisodes des massacres*, p.26-28; Interview with David Krikorian.

left on the plain to rot, “the men on their stomachs, the women on their backs.”⁴⁴⁴ It did not take long for Talaat to issue the following deportation order for the Diyarbekir Armenians: “All Armenians living in villages and towns of the province, will be resettled to Mosul, Urfa and Zor, with no exceptions. Necessary measures will be taken to secure their lives and property during the deportation”.⁴⁴⁵ At the same time, the İAMM ordered the “documentation of the names and places of the Armenian villages, the number of deportees, and the abandoned property and ploughland”.⁴⁴⁶

The İAMM agent for Diyarbekir, Veli Necdet, was charged with implementing Talaat’s orders. The remaining Armenians were to be deported to the south, and consisted mainly of women, children, and the elderly. One day after her father was tortured to death by Reshid’s militiamen, Aghavni Kassabian, daughter of a noted Armenian merchant, was deported with her family:

Turkish gendarmes came to our house in the morning and told us that we were going to be put on a deportation march. We were given little time to gather a few things that we could pack on a donkey. We gathered silverware, some clothes, two rugs, a Bible, soap, some family photographs. We packed as much food and water as we could, but we expected to be able to buy food when we needed more. We hid some jewels on our bodies, and each had an allotment of money. [...] By noon we joined a long line of Armenians and were marched down the streets to the Citadel Gardens, where we met up with thousands of Armenians. Some had donkeys, some had ox-drawn carts, and most were on foot carrying packs and small children and infants. The gendarmes began cracking the whip and we began to move in a big mass toward the New Gate from where I could see a long snakish line of Armenians moving around the city walls going south. We were marched out past the Citadel and around the black city walls wavering in the heat. By the end of the day, we were sleeping on the ground somewhere on the flat, hard plateau. The tributaries of the Tigris cut ravines into the limestone ridges, and in their flanks were occasional huts built out of the rock, where Kurds lived. There was nothing but dry ground and sky and limestone ridges. Nothing.⁴⁴⁷

On the fifth day of the deportation, Aghavni’s mother had gone delirious and died of exhaustion. On the sixth day, all of their possessions were gone, either consumed or stolen by gendarmes. One night she was raped by a gendarme. Hunger, thirst, murder, and exhaustion had dramatically reduced the number of deportees by the time her convoy had reached the desert. Aghavni herself was abducted by a Kurdish nomad and she bore him two children,

⁴⁴⁴ Edward W.C. Noel, *Diary of Major E. Noel on Special Duty in Kurdistan* (Basra: n.p., 1919), part 1, pp.10-11.

⁴⁴⁵ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 54/87, Talaat to the provinces of Trabzon, Mamuret-ul Aziz, Sivas, Canik, and Diyarbekir, 21 June 1915.

⁴⁴⁶ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 54/15, İAMM to the provinces of Adana, Haleb, Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, and Diyarbekir, 14 June 1915

⁴⁴⁷ Peter Balakian, *Black Dog of Fate: A Memoir* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), pp.217-18.

before she escaped to the remainder of her extended family in the United States.⁴⁴⁸ Those that were marched further into the desert often did not even make it to Rakka. A German named Greif, living in Aleppo, reported that the convoys of Diyarbekir Armenians were reduced to virtual non-existence in the desert. He wrote that “many raped female corpses were lying around naked” and added the following detail: “Many of them had stakes driven in their anus.”⁴⁴⁹

Responses of bystanders such as ordinary Turks and Kurds ranged from collaboration, through shock and sadness, to apathy. This differentiation is exemplified well by the fate of the Armenian and Syriac secretaries and accountants of the Cemilpaşazâde dynasty, who were now rounded up from the family mansion and killed. Some Cemilpaşazâdes, such as militia leader Cemilpaşazâde Mustafa, were collaborating with the Young Turks in the destruction of the Diyarbekir Armenians. Others, such as his brother Cemilpaşazâde Fuad, the liberal mayor of Diyarbekir who had been dismissed by the CUP, “saved Christians by hiding them in the family haylofts and depots”. The Bahto and Nezo families from the village of Bahçecik were saved this way. Fuad Bey himself died in 1915 of typhoid fever.⁴⁵⁰ According to one eyewitness of the Cemilpaşazâde family, “in that pitiless period, 1.5 million Armenians were killed. I can never forget how my uncle Kasım sat down and cried when they were taken away. Because they were not guilty of anything. They were good and hard-working people. All of them, including those who worked in our mansion, were taken away. The government did it, it was the law. We were unable to protect them.”⁴⁵¹

By late June 1915, the Young Turk deportation apparatus had already depopulated the Armenian settlements of the northeastern regions of the Empire. Scores of deportees arrived at Diyarbekir, which was designated by the İAMM as one of the hubs where the Armenians were to be concentrated. From there on they were deported to the south. However, in practice the city was often the final destination for many deportees. Reshid’s militiamen and Kurdish villagers robbed and massacred them often before they reached the city gates. At the end of July, a convoy from Kharput arrived in Diyarbekir. An eyewitness summarized their fate as follows:

Having arrived in Diyarbekir they simply received nothing back, stayed in Diyarbekir for one day and had to continue traveling the next night. That’s when

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.218-23.

⁴⁴⁹ *PAAA*, R14093, Das Geheime Zivil-Kabinet des Kaisers (Valentini) an den Reichskanzler (Bethmann Hollweg), 10 September 1916, enclosure no.3.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Nejat Cemiloğlu conducted by Şeyhmus Diken, published in: Şeyhmus Diken, *İsyan Sürgünleri* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2005), pp.134-5.

⁴⁵¹ Interview with Esat Cemiloğlu conducted by Şeyhmus Diken, published in: *Ibid.*, p.154.

young women and girls were abducted by officers and gendarmes. When they left Diyarbekir, the officer who had accompanied them so far came with a couple of gendarmes and sought for himself several pretty young girls and boys, left the rest with 6 to 7 gendarmes, and took off with his loot. On the way to Mardin the gendarmes took from the expellees their few belongings, their little bread and the few remaining jewels.⁴⁵²

Aurora Mardiganian was a little girl when she was deported from Erzurum. On arrival in Diyarbekir she witnessed the slaughter of a convoy and the disposal of their bodies:

In the meantime the Jews of Diyarbekir had come out from the city, driven by gendarmes, to gather up the bodies of the slain Armenians. They brought carts and donkeys with bags swung across their backs. Into the carts and bags they piled the corpses and took them to the banks of the Tigris, where the Turks made them throw their burdens into the water. This is one of the persecutions the Jews were forced to bear. The Mohammedans did not kill them, but they liked to compel them to do such awful tasks.⁴⁵³

Many of those who did manage to slip through the murderous mesh in Diyarbekir either committed suicide or were seized from the convoys and absorbed into Muslim households.⁴⁵⁴ The Syriac monk Qarabashi witnessed the deportation of a convoy of several thousands of Armenians heading to Mosul. Between Diyarbekir and Mardin he discovered a naked ten-year old Armenian girl who had become orphaned in the preceding massacres. Deeply disturbed, Qarabashi fed the emaciated girl bread, cheese, yoghurt, and a pickle. He decided she had to hide in the bushes near the Tigris, for if she was found by militiamen she would certainly be murdered. When he returned the next day to check up on her, she was dead.⁴⁵⁵ A couple of days later Qarabashi met three Armenian women in a nearby Kurdish village. The women had been deported from Sivas and Erzincan and were serving as slaves in the household of a Kurd named Sufi Hasan. When one of them became ill, Sufi Hasan took her away and shot her

⁴⁵² PAAA, R14087, Rößler to Bethmann-Hollweg, 3 September 1915, enclosure no.4 (23 August 1915). Another eyewitness related, "When we came to Diyarbekir, all our pack animals were led away and one woman and two young girls were dragged off by the gendarmes. For 24 hours we sat in the burning sun in front of the city walls of Diyarbekir. Turks came from the city and took our children away. In the evening we had prepared for decampment when we were attacked by Turks who came from the city. At that time we left all luggage we still had and scattered, to save our lives and our honor. During the night we were attacked by Turks three more times and the girls and young women were dragged off." PAAA, R14093, Das Geheime Zivil-Kabinet des Kaisers (Valentini) an den Reichskanzler (Bethmann Hollweg), 10 September 1916, enclosure no.6.

⁴⁵³ Aurora Mardiganian, *The Auction of Souls* (London: Phoenix Press, 1934), pp.173-74. This survivor memoir, first published in 1918 under the title *Ravished Armenia: The Story of Aurora Mardiganian, the Christian Girl who Lived Through the Great Massacres* (New York: Kingfield, 1918), has recently been re-translated into Dutch: André Boeder, *Door het Oog van de Naald: Het Verhaal van Aurora, een Armeens Meisje* (Houten: Den Hertog, 2003).

⁴⁵⁴ Ara Sarafian, "The Absorption of Armenian Women and Children into Muslim Households as a Structural Component of the Armenian Genocide," in: Omer Bartov & Phyllis Mack (eds.), *In God's Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2001), pp.209-21.

⁴⁵⁵ Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, pp.73-74.

dead.⁴⁵⁶ In several instances, local authorities or gendarmes sold entire convoys to Kurdish tribesmen for sums ranging between 500 to 1000 Lira. The tribesmen, aware of the fact that the Armenians had brought along many movable assets, would then strip the clothes from their backs and either leave the deportees to die or kill them outright.⁴⁵⁷

The massacres and deportations quickly spread throughout the province. Whereas the Circassian militiamen were sent to the north of the province, Aziz Feyzi and Memduh Bey were assigned the south. This division of labour may have fluctuated somewhat since Reshid deployed his militia wherever and however he saw fit. Reshid removed the mayor of Çermik, Mehmed Hamdi Bey, for not obeying his orders to destroy the Armenians living in his district.⁴⁵⁸ Talaat later approved Reshid's replacement of the mayor of Maden by Dr. Osman Cevdet (Akkaynak).⁴⁵⁹ After the dismissal of the mayors the evacuation of the Armenian villages and neighbourhoods of Maden commenced. At first, the 35 richest families of Maden were ordered to mobilize for deportation, followed by the rest of the Maden Armenians, many of whom were miners. They were given very little time to prepare, and on the first day of deportation the men were selected and incarcerated in the large caravanserai of Maden. The convoy was then marched off to Urfa via Diyarbakir. In the process, the supervising officer stole 300 pounds from them and stripped them of many private belongings.⁴⁶⁰

The Ergani-Maden district was a station for deportees arriving from Kharput, north of Maden. When a convoy of 1500 people arrived in Ergani after a march of four days, the officer in charge selected the men, ostensibly to work in the mines. All men above the age of eleven were taken away to the caravanserai, where they joined the native Maden Armenians.⁴⁶¹ The bulk of these men were not employed in the mines, but pushed over the edge of the Maden cliff into its deep ravine. This must have happened at least before 7 July, when Mariza Kejejian, a deportee from Kharput, witnessed "heaps of corpses" (*Leichenhaufen*) on the road between Maden and Ergani.⁴⁶² Three months after the massacre, Mary Riggs, a missionary working in Kharput, was allowed to travel south and saw "unmistakable signs of horrible cruelty". Riding through the Maden gorge, Riggs looked

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.76.

⁴⁵⁷ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.68.

⁴⁵⁸ This quarrel continued during Reshid's Ankara governorship, when Reshid wired to Hamdi: "The chaos and anarchy in Sungurlu reminds me of your mayorship in Çermik I would prefer to forget. You should have remembered how you were dismissed from there. This telegram bears the quality of last warning. If you continue rule with anarchist administrative customs and harm the government's prestige and honour, your dismissal as in Çermik is as sure as death." Reshid to Hamdi, 9 December 1916, quoted in: *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, 14 January 1919.

⁴⁵⁹ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 55-A/186, Talaat to Reshid, 9 September 1915.

⁴⁶⁰ *PAAA*, R14087, Rößler to Bethmann-Hollweg, 3 September 1915, enclosure no.4 (23 August 1915).

⁴⁶¹ *PAAA*, R14087, Rößler to Bethmann-Hollweg, 3 September 1915, enclosure no.4 (23 August 1915).

⁴⁶² *PAAA*, R14093, Das Geheime Zivil-Kabinet des Kaisers (Valentini) an den Reichskanzler (Bethmann Hollweg), 10 September 1916, enclosure no.6.

down the canyon and saw “countless naked bodies in positions showing how they had been hurled from above.”⁴⁶³ Four years later, Gertrude Bell (1868-1926) visited the same khan where the Armenian men had been held. A Chaldean carpenter in that khan “described his escape from Mardin and showed me behind the Khan a deep grave where hundreds of Armenians were buried”.⁴⁶⁴

The genocide struck the adjacent region between Lice and Piran (renamed Dicle in the Republic) around mid-June. The mayor of Lice, Hüseyin Nesimi Bey, had refused to implement Reshid’s orders to persecute the Armenians. When Reshid intensified the violence, he orally communicated an order to Nesimi to murder the Armenians of Lice. Shocked by this explicit murderous desire, the mayor refused and demanded the order in writing.⁴⁶⁵ Reshid ran out of patience, removed him from office and sent Çerkez Harun to murder the disobedient mayor. Nesimi was taken from his home and escorted to Diyarbakir but was shot dead on the way by his company and buried by the roadside.⁴⁶⁶ The assassination did not go unnoticed and Reshid was asked about Nesimi’s whereabouts,⁴⁶⁷ but ignored the request. The question was reiterated a month later in a tone indirectly accusing Reshid of the murder. The Interior Ministry wrote: “It is contended by the family of the ex-mayor of Lice, Hüseyin Nesimi Bey, that he was assassinated. Please report whether he was murdered in the line of duty”.⁴⁶⁸ Reshid gave an affirmative answer but claimed that a “notorious Armenian brigand” had put Nesimi to death.⁴⁶⁹

With the elimination of the mayor, Reshid had obviated the most important obstacle to his objective: the destruction of the Armenians in the northern Lice district. He sent İbrahim Bedreddin to supervise the killings in Lice. The men were arrested, tied together with rope, led away to a cave named Gohê Gumho, stripped of their belongings, and finally had their throats slit.⁴⁷⁰ “So many ropes were required for the work that a public crier gave orders that the townspeople were to provide a stipulated quantity.” At the same time, the villages around Lice town were targeted. One by one, the villages were surrounded by the militia and Kurdish

⁴⁶³ Mary W. Riggs, “The Treatments of Armenians by Turks in Harpoot” (10 April 1918), in: Barton, *Statements*, p.33, Inquiry Document no.III.

⁴⁶⁴ *GBA*, diary entry for 21 October 1919.

⁴⁶⁵ *PAAA*, R14087, director of the Deutscher Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient (Frankfurt am Main) Friedrich Schuchardt to the Auswärtiges Amt, 21 August 1915, enclosure no.6: “Der Kaimakam von Litsche hat die durch einen Boten des Walis mündlich überbrachte Ordre die Armenier umzubringen, zurückgewiesen mit dem Bemerkten, er wünsche den Auftrag schriftlich zu haben.”

⁴⁶⁶ Hüseyin Nesimi’s son wrote in his memoirs that his family was very much aware of the fact that Nesimi had been assassinated by Reshid’s men. Abidin Nesimi, *Yılların İçinden* (Istanbul: Gözlem, 1977), pp.39-46.

⁴⁶⁷ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 56/361, Directorate for Employment to Diyarbakir, 12 October 1915.

⁴⁶⁸ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 58/46, Directorate for Employment to Diyarbakir, 17 November 1915.

⁴⁶⁹ Reshid, *Mülâhazât*, pp.86-87.

⁴⁷⁰ “Filehên Licê,” in: Amed Tigris, *Lice* (Stockholm: unpublished manuscript, 2005), pp.40-44.

tribesmen, either some hours after dark or at daybreak. The village of Henne, a village of four hundred Christian families, was invaded and rid of its male population within a day. After the militia had finished the men they returned to the village, where the terrified women had assembled together in houses. They were raped, deported, or left to die in hunger and misery. Similar events took place in the villages of Fûm, Şimşim, Cûm, Tappa and Naghle.⁴⁷¹ The vacant position for mayor in Lice was occupied by İlyas Nuri Bey, who left the Armenians alone and allowed them some respite from the massacres.⁴⁷² A number of Christian families converted to Islam to survive the genocidal persecution and indeed managed to live in Lice for several decades before migrating to Diyarbekir city, Istanbul, or Western Europe.⁴⁷³

The example of Lice was to be a model for other parts of the province. The genocide took on recurrent systematic procedures. Reshid ruthlessly and purposefully eliminated any opposition to the genocide. In July he had his Circassian militiamen Aziz and Şakir assassinate the vice mayor of Beşiri, Ali Sabit El-Suweydî in a manner similar to Hüseyin Nesimi.⁴⁷⁴ After Sabit was eliminated, Reshid's militia and the Reman chieftains razed the Beşiri valley and massacred the Armenians and Syriacs in that region. This time, Talaat personally requested information on the murders of Nesimi and Sabit.⁴⁷⁵ However, no form of litigation followed against Reshid, who continued his work with ever more zeal. He dismissed the mayor of Savur, Mehmed Ali Bey, an opportunist who had profited from the persecution against the Christians. Allegedly, Mehmed Ali was also involved in a series of gambling and sex scandals, what was worse, in the holy month of Ramadan.⁴⁷⁶ The next official to be deposed was İbrahim Hakkı Bey, mayor of Silvan. According to Reshid, he "distributed Armenian women here and there, stole Armenian property, and exempted Armenians from deportation in exchange for money".⁴⁷⁷ After his dismissal, Reshid appointed Adil Bey, brother of deputy Zülfü Bey, as mayor of Silvan. The militia then cooperated with the local Kurdish chieftain Sadık Bey to carry out the killings in the Silvan district.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷¹ Naayem, *Shall This Nation Die?*, pp.199-207. The killings in the neighbouring Piran district were routinely cruel. In that region elderly Kurds remember morbid but vivid anecdotic information from villagers who had participated in the massacres. According to them, the perpetrators would assail the villages and dispatch of their victims by slashing their throats wide open. As they operated with axes, this often lead to decapitations. After the killing was done, the killers saw that the insides of the victims' windpipes were black because of prolonged use of tobacco. Interview conducted with Ş. family (Hani district) in Diyarbekir, 15 July 2004.

⁴⁷² Reshid, *Mülâhazât*, p.84.

⁴⁷³ Interview conducted with an anonymous Armenian family (Lice district) in Amsterdam, February 2003.

⁴⁷⁴ Reshid, *Mülâhazât*, pp.83 footnote 20, 89-90.

⁴⁷⁵ BOA, DH.ŞFR 54-A/117, Talaat to Reshid, 27 July 1915.

⁴⁷⁶ BOA, DH.ŞFR 57/97, Directorate for Employment to Diyarbekir, 24 October 1915.

⁴⁷⁷ Reshid, *Mülâhazât*, pp.83-84, footnote 22.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview conducted with Meçin family (Silvan) in Ankara, 19 June 2004.

An even worse fate befell the mayor of Derik, who had refused to carry out Reshid's genocidal orders, demanding a direct order from Istanbul. The mayor was killed for his opposition to the persecutions of the Christians in his district. Reportedly Reshid personally went to inspect Derik, delegating the persecution to Halil (son of İbrahim Pasha) and Hidayet Bey. This triggered a wave of incarcerations, tortures, and summary executions.⁴⁷⁹ Finally, the militia, headed by Tefvik Bey, began massacring the Christians of Derik; they targeted the Yezidis too. A noted Yezidi chieftain was decapitated and several Yezidi families in Derik were forced to convert to Islam.⁴⁸⁰ In Derik, the Kurdish chieftains Seyid Ağa and Zülfikar Bey of Khirar village protected the Armenians and Yezidis in the village.⁴⁸¹ Those who could escape made for the caves north-east of Derik, but Reshid sent his loyal militia leader Çerkez Harun to massacre remaining Christians in the district.⁴⁸²

After these dismissals and political assassinations, the last mayor still resisting the genocidal violence was the mayor of Midyat, Nuri Bey. Reshid first attempted to have Nuri removed by appealing for a legal inquiry about his 'negligence' towards the Armenians. Reshid later claimed that Nuri had not been dealing adequately with an alleged Armenian uprising in Midyat, and wrote that the Armenians were targeting the Muslims with "the organization of quite a terrible massacre".⁴⁸³ Although this was a rather dubious assertion, Reshid still used this pretext to recommend Halil Edib, criminal judge of Mardin, for Nuri's position. However, the Ministry refused twice and stated that there was no need to replace Nuri as he had not acted irresponsibly or incompetently as a mayor.⁴⁸⁴ An inquiry was started anyway,⁴⁸⁵ but when it did not produce the rapid results Reshid had expected, he resorted to violence once again. Nuri was assassinated and Midyat too was deprived of opposition against the violence.

Another center of violence was the northern district of Palu. Of the more than 300 villages in Palu, forty-eight contained an Armenian presence. The other villages were mainly

⁴⁷⁹ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.81.

⁴⁸⁰ Interview conducted with Temel family (Derik) in Bremen, 21 March 2002.

⁴⁸¹ Noel, *Diary of Major E. Noel*, p.8.

⁴⁸² Jacques Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes! Souvenirs de la guerre sainte proclamée par les Turcs contre les chrétiens en 1915* (unpublished manuscript, Bibliothèque du Saulchoir), pp.43-44. Rhétoré was a Catholic priest who was in Mardin until 1915. The text has been translated to Italian in: Marco Impagliazzo (ed.), *Una finestra sul massacro: Documenti inediti sulla strage degli armeni (1915-1916)* (Milano: Guerini, 2000), and recently published in French as: Jacques Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes! Souvenirs de la guerre sainte proclamée par les Turcs contre les chrétiens en 1915* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2005).

⁴⁸³ Reshid, *Mülâhazât*, p.85.

⁴⁸⁴ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 54-A/300, Directorate for Employment to Diyarbekir, 7 August 1915.

⁴⁸⁵ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 57/167, Directorate for Employment to Diyarbekir, 28 October 1915.

inhabited by Kurds and Zazas, and many villages were mixed.⁴⁸⁶ According to one survivor, the violence engulfed the Palu villages on a day when the sun was eclipsed (10 August 1915), evoking images of apocalyptic doom among the Armenian villagers.⁴⁸⁷ As in other districts of Diyarbekir province, the modus operandi was first to kill the men and then deport the rest. The Armenian male population of Palu town were taken to the bridge over the Murad river, had their throats slashed, and were thrown into the water. Garabed Farshian, an Armenian boy who was orphaned, was taken to a Turkish village and saw that “there was blood flowing in the river”.⁴⁸⁸ A recurrent action in the villages was the requisitioning of rope to tie the men together and lead them away. As Noyemzar Khimatian-Alexanian of Baghin village remembered: “The soldiers went from house to house asking for rope. After that they took the males, fifteen and older and collected them. They used the rope to tie their hands. The men and teenaged boys were taken to a distant field and stabbed to death”.⁴⁸⁹ In another village, the militia rode in and collected all men into the church. The men and the boys came back out with their hands tied behind them. They were taken away to the banks of the Murad river and butchered with long knives.⁴⁹⁰ The militia then carried off pretty women and children for personal use, and did not hesitate to throw babies in the river to drown.⁴⁹¹ Finally, the decimated convoy was deported to the south. Some were able to escape the convoys by bribing officers or villagers, or by giving their children to benevolent local families. For example, the little girl Heranush Gadarian from Habab village was given to an Ottoman corporal and assimilated into his extended family.⁴⁹²

The very few Armenian men who were still alive by this time were those working in labour battalions. On 1 April 1915 the Interior Ministry ordered the Third Army to draw up a labour battalion consisting of 4000 men.⁴⁹³ A week later, the Ministry of War issued another decree, ordering the conscription of more men in order to cope with the shortage. This time, it was authorized to enlist even women into labour battalions.⁴⁹⁴ From 27 May on, the practice

⁴⁸⁶ George Aghjayan, “The Armenian Villages of Palu: History and Demography,” paper presented at the conference *UCLA International Conference Series on Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces: Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa*, University of California (Los Angeles), 13 November 1999, p.2.

⁴⁸⁷ Interview with Antanik Baloian, unpublished manuscript titled “Antanik Baloian’s Story,” by Nelson Baloian.

⁴⁸⁸ Vahé Mamas Kitabdjian (ed.), “Récit de Garabed Farchian, né à Palou en 1906 ou 1907,” reproduced in: Ternon, *Mardin 1915*, p.287.

⁴⁸⁹ Interview with Noyemzar Khimatian-Alexanian by Linda J.P. Mahdesian.

⁴⁹⁰ Interview with Katherine Magarian, as “Voices of New England: Katherine Magarian,” in: *Boston Globe*, 19 April 1998, p.B10.

⁴⁹¹ Interview with Margaret Garabedian DerManuelian by George Aghjayan in Providence, RI, February 1990.

⁴⁹² Heranush’s story was related to her granddaughter Fethiye Çetin, who attempted to trace her Armenian relatives and found them in the United States. Fethiye Çelik, *Anneannem* (Istanbul: Metis, 2004).

⁴⁹³ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 51/186, Ali Münif (Directorate for General Administration) to Diyarbekir, 1 April 1915.

⁴⁹⁴ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 51/231, Ministry of War to Diyarbekir, 8 April 1915.

of “quittance”, ensuring exemption from conscription, was prohibited by Talaat.⁴⁹⁵ The battalions became a death trap for the conscripts, as malnutrition, exhaustion and exposure had already begun to decimate their numbers. However, the greatest threat to their physical existence were not these hardships but outright massacres, perpetrated by their Ottoman superiors. On the Palu-Diyarbakir road, Reshid’s militiamen massacred 1200 conscripts on 1 June.⁴⁹⁶ A week later 160 men working in the labour battalions near Diyarbakir city were taken to the Devil’s Gorge (*Şeytandere*) and battered to death by Sıdkı and Yahya’s men. On 5 July the militia murdered another 2000 soldiers near Diyarbakir.⁴⁹⁷ By the end of August, the few labour conscripts who still remained alive in the province were serving in battalions near Siverek. Terrified of a similar fate, they inconspicuously dawdled over their work in order to postpone a potential massacre. When that fateful day arrived, a few conscripts resisted by killing a gendarme with a large stone, taking his rifle and shooting two others, including an officer. The desperate men were finally overpowered and massacred.⁴⁹⁸ The skirmish was reported to Istanbul, where Talaat interpreted it as “Armenian men who killed and wounded some of their superiors and Muslims”. He then sent an order to all provinces to “deal accordingly with this issue”.⁴⁹⁹ After this event, the fate of the Christian labour battalions was sealed: they were finished off quickly. Even if the work was as yet unfinished, a wave of brutal although selective massacres swept through the provinces. Thousands of conscripts were dispatched mostly with knives and daggers, to save ammunition.⁵⁰⁰ Travelling between Urfa and Diyarbakir, a German officer saw an entire labour battalion, laying by the roadside with their throats slit.⁵⁰¹ However, an unknown number of Armenians remained alive in the labour battalions, even after 1915.

The murderous violence against the Christian and especially Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire had long reached genocidal dimensions due to its organized, systematic, and categorical nature. While hundreds of thousands of human lives were being destroyed, little was known among the population, especially in the western provinces. Secrecy and censorship were two important regulations to be observed by the organizers of the genocide. Nobody was to speak about the events, and any news of the massacres was to be suppressed.

⁴⁹⁵ BOA, DH.ŞFR 53/131, Talaat to Mamuret-ül Aziz, 27 May 1915.

⁴⁹⁶ Noel, *Diary of Major E. Noel*, p.11.

⁴⁹⁷ Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, p.70.

⁴⁹⁸ Jacob Künzler, *Im Lande des Blutes und der Tränen: Erlebnisse in Mesopotamien während des Weltkrieges (1914-1918)* (Zürich: Chronos, 1999 [1921]), pp.47-48. Künzler was a Swiss missionary in Urfa during the war and heard about this massacre from a Syriac conscript, who had survived the killing.

⁴⁹⁹ BOA, DH.ŞFR 55-A/11, Talaat to provinces, 1 September 1915.

⁵⁰⁰ Jacob Künzler, *Dreißig Jahre Dienst am Orient* (Basel: Birkhauser Verlag, 1933), p.54.

⁵⁰¹ *Germany, Turkey and Armenia: A Selection of Documentary Evidence Relating to the Armenian Atrocities from German and Other Sources* (London: Keliher, 1917), pp.80-85.

Talaat ordered the Trabzon-based newspaper *Meşveret* closed down because it had published an apologetic explanation of the “temporary deportation” of the Armenians.⁵⁰² The government denied all national and international allegations and tried to counter these with propaganda.⁵⁰³ For disinformation to be convincing the CUP deemed some sort of visual material necessary. Since Reshid had already displayed piles of guns he had found in Diyarbekir, this formula was reapplied:

After the gendarmes had killed a number of Armenian men, they put on them turbans and brought Kurdish women to weep and lament over them, saying that the Armenians had killed their men. They also brought a photographer to photograph the bodies and the weeping women, so that at a future time they might be able to convince Europe that it was the Armenians who had attacked the Kurds and killed them, that the Kurdish tribes had risen against them revenge, and that the Turkish Government had had no part in the matter.⁵⁰⁴



Photo 13: Young Turk propaganda photo: Kurdish women are forced to weep over Armenian corpses to present the scene as Muslim victims (www.ermenisorumu.gen.tr)

⁵⁰² BOA, DH.ŞFR 54-A/181, Talaat to the provinces of Erzurum, Adana, Bitlis, Urfa, Canik, and Maraş, 29 July 1915.

⁵⁰³ See for example a book published in 1916 by the Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs: *Die Ziele und Taten armenischer Revolutionäre: The Armenian Aspirations and Revolutionary Movements: Aspirations et mouvements révolutionnaires arméniens: Ermeni Âmâl ve Harekât-ı İhtilâliyesi, Tesâvir ve Vesâik* (Istanbul: Matbaa-ı Amire, 1332). For the denialist campaign the CUP initiated in 1915, see: Hilmar Kaiser, “Dall’impero alla repubblica: la continuità del negazionismo turco,” in: Marcello Flores (ed.), *Storia, Verità, Giustizia: I crimini del XX secolo* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2001), pp.89-113.

⁵⁰⁴ Al-Ghusayn, *Martyred Armenia*, p.42.

In Istanbul, few people had reliable information of the horrors at their disposal. When Hüseyin Cahit inquired at the prestigious *Cercle d'Orient* about the events, even the Armenian members of the foundation knew nothing about the massacres.⁵⁰⁵ Only at a short distance from the club, Talaat was engaged on a daily basis in organizing the dispersion and isolation of the surviving Armenian intelligentsia.

The fate of two Armenian intellectuals indicates both Talaat's and Reshid's direct involvement in their elimination: Vartkes Serengulian (1871-1915), deputy for Erzurum, and Krikor Zohrab (1861-1915), author and deputy for Istanbul. On 12 May 1915 Vartkes dashed to Talaat's house to protest against the mass arrests of the Armenian intelligentsia. Talaat, his



Photo 14: Krikor Zohrab
(www.armenianchurch.net)

personal friend for more than a decade, calmly listened to Vartkes' fulmination, but flatly answered, "This is a question of the homeland, Vartkes. It does not allow appeals to personal relations and friendships".⁵⁰⁶ Vartkes and Zohrab were arrested in late May.⁵⁰⁷ Hüseyin Cahit recalled how he was visited early on a morning by Zohrab's wife, Clara Yazidjian. The nervous woman trembled and sobbed because of Zohrab's arrest, and asked Hüseyin Cahit to implore Talaat to release her husband. Together they went to Talaat's house and woke him up. Mrs. Yazidjian begged Talaat to exempt her husband from deportation but the Interior Minister sat in his pyjamas and heard the woman's story with indifference. He then comforted

her that Zohrab was being sent to Diyarbekir for a minor legal affair and that she had nothing to worry about. All pleas were in vain as both Zohrab and Vartkes had been deported. When they reached Adana, Talaat ordered local officials to contact them on 17 June.⁵⁰⁸ The pair were deported to Aleppo where they begged Cemal Pasha to intervene and save them from being court-martialled. However, Cemal Pasha's request was rebuffed by Talaat, who insisted they be sent to Diyarbekir. Finally, between Urfa and Diyarbekir the two were murdered by Çerkez Ahmed, on orders of Reshid. Çerkez Ahmed later confessed that he personally shot Vartkes dead with a single bullet to his head and shattered Zohrab's head with a rock.⁵⁰⁹ The government spread the story that Zohrab had died of a heart attack. The German journalist

⁵⁰⁵ Yalçın, *Siyasal Anılar*, p.234.

⁵⁰⁶ Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *Tanıdıklarım* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2002), pp.49-50.

⁵⁰⁷ Beylerian, *Les grandes puissances*, p.40.

⁵⁰⁸ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 54/48, Talaat to Reshid, 17 June 1915.

⁵⁰⁹ Refik, *İki Komite, İki Kıtıl*, pp.175-76.

Von Tyszka refuted this, claiming that at least Vartkes was “jedenfalls kerngesund” but nevertheless had not arrived in Diyarbekir either.⁵¹⁰

Alongside these assassinations, witnesses to the explicit killing had to be silenced in order for state secrecy to be tight. The CUP had lost control over some of its Special Organization operatives, who did not fully perform the program as they wished. These loose cannons would for example brag about their genocidal accomplishments, or abuse their license to kill by shooting people for fun. They had gone out of favor.⁵¹¹ When the CUP felt it did not require their services any longer, local officials disposed of them by summarily executing them, many of them in the autumn of 1915. For example, Talaat requested the aforementioned Çerkez Ahmed to be sent to Istanbul, as he and his gang would affect security conditions in Urfa.⁵¹² When this did not happen, Talaat issued a decree that his “elimination is required”. Ahmed was deported to Damascus and hanged on Cemal Pasha’s order.⁵¹³ Yakup Cemil, one of the CUP’s most important gangsters, had acquired so much power in the war that he imagined he could get away with practically anything. He went too far when he openly threatened Enver Pasha, whereupon Enver had him arrested and executed in front of a firing squad.⁵¹⁴ The Reman brothers Ömer and Mustafa were killed in September 1915 by Reshid’s assistant Çerkez Şakir, who ordered his Circassian militia to murder the tribesmen with daggers. A peasant who happened to walk by coincidentally saw the violent settlement and was killed as well, in order to silence potential witnesses.⁵¹⁵ Militia member Zaza Alo was first deployed on the Syrian front but deported to Çankırı, where he was later killed in a skirmish with gendarmes.⁵¹⁶ At the same time, Major Rüşdü of the Diyarbekir militia was accused of corruption, embezzlement, and personal enrichment – which was still forbidden, at least officially. He escaped elimination and prosecution owing to protection offered by his superior Reshid, and continued his work in the province.⁵¹⁷

By autumn 1915, the Christian population of Diyarbekir province was thoroughly dispossessed, deported, and critically reduced in numbers. On 18 September Reshid wired a telegram to Talaat, reporting that “the number deported from the province amounts to

⁵¹⁰ PAAA, R14088, Von Tyszka to Zimmermann, 1 October 1915, enclosure no.1.

⁵¹¹ One of the most infamous killers was Çerkez Ahmed, who vaunted himself as follows: “I served this country. Go and look, I turned the areas around Van into Kaaba soil. You won’t find a single Armenian there today. While I’m serving this country, bastards like Talaat are drinking ice-cold beer in Istanbul, and place me under arrest, no, this is damaging my honour!” Refik, *İki Komite, İki Kıtıl*, p.175.

⁵¹² BOA, DH.ŞFR 55/132, Talaat to Reshid, 21 August 1915.

⁵¹³ Refik, *İki Komite, İki Kıtıl*, pp.176-77.

⁵¹⁴ Mustafa R. Esatlı, *İttihat ve Terakki tarihinde esrar perdesi ve Yakup Cemil niçin öldürüldü?* (Istanbul: Hürriyet, 1975).

⁵¹⁵ *Épisodes des massacres*, p.30.

⁵¹⁶ BOA, DH.EUM.AYŞ 24/2, 11 October 1919.

⁵¹⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR 57/5, Talaat to Karesi province, 14 October 1915.

approximately one hundred and twenty thousand”.⁵¹⁸ According to the French missionary Jacques Rhétoré, during the persecutions of 1915-1916 a total of 144,185 Christians disappeared, of which 58,000 Gregorian Armenians, 11,500 Catholic Armenians, 10,010 Chaldeans, 3450 Catholic Syriacs, 60,725 Jacobite Syriacs, and 500 Protestants.⁵¹⁹ A higher estimate was calculated by Major Noel, who wrote that the total number of victims was made up of 45,000 Gregorian Armenians, 6000 Catholic Armenians, 7000 Chaldeans, 2000 Catholic Syriacs, 96,000 Jacobite Syriacs, and 1200 Protestants, all in all summing up to 157,000 people victimized.⁵²⁰ Whatever their precise numbers, the Christian population of Diyarbekir province was all but eradicated. Entire villages, neighbourhoods, parishes, and extended families were destroyed or reduced to destitution in the genocidal persecution of 1915.

Center and periphery: widening and narrowing scopes of persecution

The identities of the organizers and perpetrators of the genocidal persecution in Diyarbekir province have been explored relatively well. There can be little doubt that the local CUP elite collaborated with certain families and tribes to achieve their aim of destroying the Armenian community of the province. On the other hand, little is known regarding the categorical nature of victims targeted. The notion that official CUP policy targeted only the Armenians clearly contradicts the broad diversity of non-Armenian victims, especially in the Mardin district.⁵²¹ In other words, how *Armenian* was the genocide supposed to be? The Mardin district can serve as a fitting backdrop for an exploration of this discrepancy because of the district’s religious diversity. The evidence, admittedly patchy, supports the argument that Dr. Reshid amplified the anti-Armenian persecution into an anti-Christian persecution, and by the time he was reproached for this policy, it was too late.

Most Christian notables in Diyarbekir city were incarcerated in May. By this time, there had been little persecution in Mardin, the citadel city south of Diyarbekir. As in other provincial towns, Reshid had ordered the mayor, Hilmi Bey, to arrest the Christian notables of the city. Hilmi reportedly answered that the Armenians of Mardin were Arabic-speaking Catholics, and had little in common with the Gregorian Armenians. The mayor also added

⁵¹⁸ BOA, DH.EUM, 2.Şb. 68/71, Reshid to Talaat, 18 September 1915.

⁵¹⁹ Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes!*, p.241. For specific numbers for Mardin district see: *ibid.*, p.243.

⁵²⁰ Noel, *Diary of Major E. Noel*, p.11. Compared to the demographic data in Chapter 2, these figures demonstrate that between 87% and 95% of the Christians in Diyarbekir province were destroyed.

⁵²¹ For detailed studies of the genocidal process in Mardin see: Yves Ternon, *Mardin 1915: Anatomie pathologique d'une destruction* (special issue of the *Revue d'Histoire Arménienne Contemporaine*, vol.4, 2002); David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006).

that they were unarmed and honorable citizens, and that there was no reason at all to arrest any other Christians either.⁵²² Reshid was not interested in this reply and sent Aziz Feyzi in May to incite Muslim notables to destroy the Mardin Christians. Feyzi toured the region and bribed and persuaded the chieftains of the Deşi, Mıŝkiye, Kiki, and Helecan tribes. From 15 May on, the scenario of Diyarbekir was repeated in Mardin. Memduh moved into the house of the notable Syriac family Yonan and began organizing the process of persecution. First he arrested dozens of Armenian and Syriac men and tortured them to extract confessions of disloyalty and high treason. In the meantime he extorted large sums of money from the families of the arrested men who offered Memduh financial compensation in exchange for the release of their children.⁵²³

Reshid sent İbrahim Bedreddin and militiamen Çerkez Şakir and Çerkez Harun to Mardin to organize the physical destruction of the Christian population of Mardin. Together they organized a militia of 500 men and placed them under command of the brothers Nuri and Tahir El Ensari, both of them Sheikhs of the Ensari family.⁵²⁴ While Hilmi was still in office, the group bypassed standard bureaucratic procedures and began arresting Christian notables, such as Anton Gasparian.⁵²⁵ However, Reshid and his men probably considered the presence of an uncooperative mayor an intransigent obstacle for the organization of a massacre, which was a complex undertaking. Therefore, Reshid attempted to apply his tested method of having the mayor removed, but his appeal only achieved the reinstatement of the equally unwilling official Mehmed Şefik Bey to his old district Mardin. Moreover, Talaat suggested that İbrahim Bedri be “assigned to a vacant office of district governor”.⁵²⁶ Having replaced Hilmi by Mehmed Şefik, Reshid did not respect this new constellation either. He ignored Şefik and treated his emissary Bedri as a shadow-official with the authority of a district governor. In Mardin, Bedri was assisted by Halil Edib, who was made a judge on 17 June 1915. Bedri himself officially became district governor only on 12 September.⁵²⁷ The CUP had not completely taken over the Ottoman bureaucracy, but it was sufficient for the genocidal process to be launched in Mardin.

⁵²² Sarafian, “The Disasters”, p.263.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁴ Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes!*, p.65.

⁵²⁵ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.40.

⁵²⁶ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 53/291, Talaat to Reshid, 8 June 1915. Hilmi was demoted and assigned to a minor office in the Mosul province. Just as he left for Mosul, Reshid sent out orders for him to be murdered. Hilmi escaped assassination because the mayor that was assigned this task was a personal friend who procrastinated in carrying out the order. In the meantime Hilmi crossed into Mosul province, out of the jurisdiction of the Diyarbekir provincial authorities, and thereby out of Reshid’s deadly reach. Sarafian, “The Disasters”, p.263.

⁵²⁷ Suavi Aydın *et al.* (eds.), *Mardin: Aşiret-Cemaat-Devlet* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2000), p.242. Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.33.

On 3 June 1915, at eight o'clock in the evening, Mardin was surrounded by Reshid's militiamen, headed by Çerkez Harun. Memduh Bey arrested the Bishop Ignatius Maloyan and his entire Armenian Catholic clergy and locked them up in the Mardin castle, a fortress overlooking the city. Over the next days he arrested hundreds of Christian notables, according to a French eye-witness, "all taken from various ranks of society, without differences of age, nor of rite, nor of condition."⁵²⁸ The men were all taken to prison and severely tortured for a week by judge Halil Edib. On 9 June a group of militiamen arrived from Diyarbekir with dozens of sets of chains and galloped up to the fort. The prisoners were told that they were summoned by Governor Reshid and would be taken to Diyarbekir the next morning. The notables realized at this point they were going to be killed.⁵²⁹

The treatment of the Mardin notables was a copy of that of the Diyarbekir notables, who had already been massacred in the Reman gorge by that time. The first convoy, just over 400 Christians of all denominations, left Mardin on 10 June and was marched off to Diyarbekir by Memduh on horseback. After having walked two hours in the burning heat, Memduh took away four notables (Iskender Adem, his son August, Naum Cinanci, and Iskender Hammal) and killed them.⁵³⁰ Three hours later, the convoy was halted at the Kurdish village Adirshak, near the Sheikhan caves. Memduh Bey gathered the convoy and read their death sentence out loud. He added that conversion to Islam would avert death and gave those who refused conversion one hour to prepare for their deaths. Memduh had barely finished his words when Bishop Maloyan responded he would never convert and preferred to die as a Christian rather than to live as a Muslim. The great majority of the convoy agreed, whereupon Memduh took 100 men, led them away to the Şeyhan caves and had them all murdered and burnt. After this first massacre he returned and took another 100 men off to the Roman castle Zirzawan, where he slaughtered them and threw them in large wells.⁵³¹ Those who agreed on conversion were taken away by the Kurdish villagers to their shaikh and became Muslims. Only the next day, the rest of the convoy was marched off further and halted four hours from Diyarbekir. For the last time, Memduh turned to Maloyan and urged him to convert. When he refused, Memduh pulled out his handgun and shot the bishop in the head.⁵³² He then ordered

⁵²⁸ Hyacinthe Simon, *Mardine: la ville heroïque: Autel et tombeau de l'Arménie (Asie Mineure) durant les massacres de 1915* (Jounieh: Maison Naaman pour la culture, 1991), Naji Naaman (ed.), chapter 3, pp.17-18.

⁵²⁹ Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes!*, p.70.

⁵³⁰ Simon, *Mardine: la ville heroïque*, p.64.

⁵³¹ Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes!*, p.78.

⁵³² Bishop Maloyan was later beatified by the Vatican: *Ciliciae Armenorum seu Mardinensium: Beatificationis seu Canonizationis servi Dei Ignatii Choukrallah Maloyan, archiepiscopi mardinensis in opium fidei, uti fertur, interfecti (1915): Positio super vita, martyrio et fama martyrii* (Rome: Tipografia Guerra, 2000).

the firing squad to massacre the rest of the convoy.⁵³³ The work was finished and the perpetrators rode to Diyarbekir and reported their accomplishment to governor Reshid.⁵³⁴ Two weeks later Talaat asked Reshid about the whereabouts of Maloyan.⁵³⁵

The killings in Diyarbekir province had become so explicit that national and international political actors freely began speaking about them. The genocide had definitively broken through the circle of CUP secrecy. Apart from the Catholic clergymen in Mardin, another Western observer of the massacres in Diyarbekir province was the German vice-consul at Mosul, Walter Holstein. On 10 June he wired the German embassy, expressing his abhorrence of the crimes. When Holstein spoke to the governor of Mosul about the killings, the latter responded “that only the governor of Diyarbekir bears responsibility”.⁵³⁶ However, Holstein was not content with this evasive reply and dispatched a second, more indignant telegram to the embassy two days later:

The massacre of Armenians in Diyarbekir province is becoming more and more known here every day and causes a growing unrest among the local population which, with the foolish unscrupulousness and weakness of the local authorities can easily bring about unforeseen consequences. In the Mardin district... the circumstances have grown to a veritable persecution of Christians. It is undoubtedly the government that bears guilt for it.⁵³⁷

The well-intentioned message made its way through the German bureaucracy to Talaat and most probably to Reshid too. Talaat seemingly was not moved much by these protests. He listened to the stories about the massacres and replied to an employee at the German Embassy named Dr. Mordtmann, “that the Porte wants to use the World War, to thoroughly settle scores (*gründlich aufzuräumen*) with its inner enemies – the domestic Christians – without being disturbed by diplomatic intervention from abroad.”⁵³⁸ What Holstein did not know was

⁵³³ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.47.

⁵³⁴ PAAA, R14087, director of the Deutscher Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient (Frankfurt am Main) Friedrich Schuchardt to the Auswärtiges Amt, 21 August 1915, enclosure no.6: “In Mardin wurde der Mutessarif auch abgesetzt, da er nicht nach dem Willen des Walis. Von hier hat man einmal 500 und dann wieder 300 der Notabeln aller Konfessionen nach D. bringen lassen. Die ersten 600 sind nie angekommen, von den anderen hat man nichts mehr gehört.”

⁵³⁵ BOA, DH.ŞFR 54-A/178, Talaat to Reshid, 29 July 1915.

⁵³⁶ PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 169, Holstein to embassy, 10 June 1915. This telegram contains a footnote which reads: “Herrn Kap Humann für Enver”. The note refers to Lieutenant Commander and Marine Attaché Hans Humann, a personal friend of Enver Pasha’s and a staunch advocate of Ottoman expansion into the Caucasus. According to an intimate observer, Humann had unfettered access to the CUP elite and held “an outstanding position of extraordinary influence.” Ernst Jäckh, *The Rising Crescent: Turkey Yesterday, Today, and To-morrow* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944), p.119.

⁵³⁷ PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 169, Holstein to embassy, 13 June 1915.

⁵³⁸ PAAA, R14086, Wangenheim to Bethmann-Hollweg, 17 June 1915. When Kâmil Bey, a member of parliament for Diyarbekir who opposed the massacres, traveled to Istanbul to complain to Talaat about Reshid and Feyzi’s genocidal campaign in Diyarbekir, Talaat threatened to have him assassinated if he didn’t quiet down. Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p.482.

that preparations were underway for a second convoy of Christian notables in Mardin, the day after his cable.

In the meantime, the second convoy of Mardin Christians, 266 people of all denominations, was sent off on 14 June. It was led by militia commander Abdul Kadir (a subordinate of Çerkez Şakir) and Tefvik Bey, who had eliminated the Armenians of Derik.⁵³⁹ As had been done with the first convoy, the group was halted at the Sheikhan caves where they were forced to pay tribute to the Sultan Şeyhmus cult. The men noticed that Kurdish tribesmen, armed with rifles, axes and spades, had surrounded them. The militiamen invited the Christians to descend to the cave to drink from the cold spring water, but those who went never returned. The killings went on during the night and the next day. More than 100 men were killed at the Şeyhan caves, after which the convoy was marched off to Diyarbekir. All of a sudden, the convoy came across three mounted gendarmes approaching at high speed. They reached the convoy and proclaimed that the Sultan had pardoned the non-Armenian Christians from persecution. Their hands were untied and they were allowed to drink water and eat bread. The Armenians were not fed and continued the deportation with their hands tied. The convoy was marched off again and reached Diyarbekir on 16 June, where they were sent to the caravanserai prison.⁵⁴⁰

As in Diyarbekir, after the elimination of the notables, the remaining Christians were sent off to their deaths. These were mainly women, children, and the elderly, although many men were still alive as well. On 2 July, a convoy of 600 men was taken away and slaughtered just outside the city walls. Before sending the victims down the Mardin road to the valley, İbrahim Bedri and Memduh resorted to large-scale extortion. On 13 July, Memduh negotiated with the families of the Christian men still in custody about a considerable ransom, which amounted to several hundreds of Liras per family. The men were sent off and killed on the Diyarbekir road.⁵⁴¹ After the men, their families were targeted. From late June to late October several convoys comprising hundreds of women and children were led away and destroyed. For example, on 10 August, a convoy of 600 women and children were taken through the Mardin plain further south. Some had already died of exhaustion and sunstroke when the convoy was halted in the district of the Kiki tribe. After Kurdish tribesmen had finished selecting women and children they fancied, the 300 remaining victims were massacred with

⁵³⁹ Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes!*, p.83; Simon, *Mardine: la ville heroïque*, pp.69-70.

⁵⁴⁰ Ishak Armalto was one of the survivors of this second convoy. Upon arrival at the caravanserai in Diyarbekir, Armalto and a Joseph Paul Keyip saw three woven baskets (*zembils*) filled with chopped-off human body parts. Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, pp.52-53, 103.

⁵⁴¹ Sarafian, "The Disasters", p.263.

axes and swords. A small batch of survivors was able to flee and hide in the desert caves.⁵⁴² Within a month or two, the Christian population of Mardin city had been drastically reduced.

The district of Mardin numbered several substantial villages with large numbers of Christian inhabitants. The largest among these were Eqsor (Gulliye) and Tell Ermen, each harbouring several thousand souls. Tell Ermen had already experienced some persecution and arrests by Memduh's militia, but mass violence was not applied until 1 July. On that day the militia and a large number of Kurdish tribesmen invaded the village, where the terrified villagers had fled to the church. On the orders of the militia commander and with assistance from the village headman Derwiş Bey, the church was attacked and a massacre ensued. The killers did not distinguish between men and women and decapitated many of the victims. Some were drawn and quartered, or hacked to pieces with axes. A little girl who crawled out from under the corpses was battered to death when she refused to convert to Islam. Approximately seventy women were raped in the church before being put to the sword. After the massacre Kurdish women entered the church and used daggers to stab to death any survivors.⁵⁴³ The bodies were disposed of by being thrown into wells or burnt to ashes.⁵⁴⁴ When Rafael de Nogales visited the village a few weeks later, he met a few severely traumatized survivors, and was shocked by "corpses barely covered with heaps of stone from which emerged here and there a bloody tress or an arm or leg gnawed on by hyenas".⁵⁴⁵ A German navy officer visited Tell Ermen too and saw severed children's hands and women's hair.⁵⁴⁶ A week after the massacre, a Major von Mikusch reported to Consul Holstein that he had met the militia, who had "told about the massacre, beaming with joy" (*freudestrahlend von Massacres erzählt*).⁵⁴⁷

The next day, on 2 July at 8 o'clock in the evening, Memduh Bey ordered the attack on the village of Eqsor (Gulliye), a predominantly Jacobite Syriac agricultural center on the Mardin plain. The militia was headed by Sergeant Yusuf, son of Nuri Ensari, and aided by chieftain Mohammed Ağa of the Milli tribe. Kurdish tribesmen of the Deşi, Mişkiye, and Helecan tribes, as well as some Arabs, had come over to Eqsor to participate. The village was invaded and the population was massacred. Children were thrown from roofs and mutilated

⁵⁴² Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes!*, pp.164-66.

⁵⁴³ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, pp.102-3.

⁵⁴⁴ PAAA, R14087, director of the Deutscher Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient (Frankfurt am Main) Friedrich Schuchardt to the Auswärtiges Amt, 21 August 1915, enclosure no.5.

⁵⁴⁵ Nogales, *Four years*, pp.171-72.

⁵⁴⁶ *Bundesarchiv* (Freiburg), Reichsmarine 40/434, G.B. N. 8289, Engelking to Fleet Command, 11 November 1915, quoted in: Hilmar Kaiser, *At the Crossroads of Der Zor: Death, Survival, and Humanitarian Resistance in Aleppo, 1915-1917* (London: Gomidas, 2002), p.84.

⁵⁴⁷ PAAA, R14086, Wangenheim to Bethmann Hollweg, 9 July 1915.

with axes. Many villagers were crammed together in the house of the village headman Elias Cabbar Hinno, and burnt alive.⁵⁴⁸ After the massacre, the village was burnt down, a spectacle visible from Mardin, where the inhabitants looked on in awe. According to Hyacinthe Simon, İbrahim Bedreddin watched the bloodbath too, cheering and applauding.⁵⁴⁹

During this bloody tragedy a man was seated on the balcony of his terrace, breathing the fresh morning air and gazing at the roseate glow of the fire raging on the plane: it was the governor of Mardin, it was Bedreddin Bey. The barbarians were cutting throats and burning his subjects, he was smoking his cigarette.⁵⁵⁰

Dozens of pretty women were raped and dozens more were carried off. According to survivor Abdulaziz Jacob, Yusuf Ensari had kept at least fifty women in his home in Mardin for serial rape.⁵⁵¹ The mass looting went on for two more days and by the third day the once prosperous village Eqsor had been reduced to a state of complete devastation.⁵⁵²

The massacres in Mardin were a major component of the ‘reign of terror’ that Dr. Reshid pursued all over Diyarbekir province. It is very probable that due to Reshid’s fanaticism, the CUP genocide in Diyarbekir exceeded in efficiency, scope, speed, and cruelty any other province of the Ottoman Empire. Reshid’s militia murdered without mercy, without distinction, and without consequences. His bloody rule obviously did not go unnoticed, since Vice-Consul Holstein had already denounced the governor’s policy. Other international observers were disturbed by his campaign as well. A French report noted about Reshid’s treatment of the Christians he imprisoned, “Il est difficile de décrire ici en détail les souffrances et les tortures que ces malheureux ont subies en prison pendant tout ce temps”.⁵⁵³ Likewise, Aleppo Consul Jesse Jackson wrote on 28 June that the persecution of the Armenians in his city was intensifying. Jackson informed Ambassador Morgenthau specifically about “the horrible things taking place in Diarbekir. Just such a reign of terror has begun in this city also”.⁵⁵⁴

Most protests emanated from German officials, stationed in the eastern provinces. Aleppo Consul Walter Rößler wrote about Diyarbekir province that they received “die schauerlichsten Gerüchte, welche uns ganz an spanische Inquisition erinnern”.⁵⁵⁵ Ambassador

⁵⁴⁸ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.102.

⁵⁴⁹ Noel, *Diary of Major E. Noel*, part 1, p.11.

⁵⁵⁰ Simon, *Mardine: la ville heroïque*, p.53.

⁵⁵¹ Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p.229.

⁵⁵² Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes!*, pp.195-96.

⁵⁵³ Beylerian, *Les grandes puissances*, p.49, document no.156: “Note du Département sur les massacres arméniens”.

⁵⁵⁴ *National Archives RG 59*, 867.4016/92, Jackson to Morgenthau, 28 June 1915, in: Ara Sarafian (ed.), *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1917* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2004), p.84.

⁵⁵⁵ *PAAA*, R14086, Rößler to Bethmann Hollweg, 29 June 1915.

Wangenheim forwarded to Berlin the news about “das Vilajet Diarbekir, in dem die Armenier besonders grausam verfolgt werden sollen”.⁵⁵⁶ When Holstein received the news about the Eqsor and Tell Ermen massacres, he wrote an even more indignant telegram to Wangenheim:

The former district governor of Mardin, briefly here, informed me as follows: the governor of Diyarbekir, Reshid Bey, is raging among the Christians of his province like an insane bloodhound; recently, in Mardin too he had seven hundred Christians (mostly Armenians) including the Armenian bishop gathered during a night by gendarmerie specially dispatched from Diyarbekir, and had them slaughtered like sheep (*wie Hammel abschlachten lassen*) nearby the city. Reshid Bey is continuing his bloody work among the innocents, the number of which, the district governor assured me, now surpasses two thousand. If the government does not immediately take quite vigorous measures against Reshid Bey, the common Muslim population of this local province will launch similar massacres against Christians. The situation from this point of view is becoming more threatening every day. Reshid Bey should immediately be recalled which would document that the government does not condone his infamous acts so that a general uproar here can be allayed.⁵⁵⁷

The insistence pertaining to this message impelled Wangenheim to take a stand about the reports. The next day he replied to Holstein he would convey the content of his message to the Sublime Porte. On 12 July 1915 Wangenheim slightly adjusted the telegram, translated it into French, and sent it to Talaat, who knew French. Wangenheim reproduced the exact wording of “*wie Hammel abschlachten lassen*” as “*égorgé comme des moutons*”.⁵⁵⁸

After this sequence of written communication, Talaat officially reproached Reshid for ‘overdoing’ the carnage. Several instances of reprehension are especially significant as they contain intimations of the scope of the massacres. On the same day Talaat received Wangenheim’s message about the indiscriminate killings in Diyarbekir province, he dispatched the following telegram to Dr. Reshid:

Lately it has been reported that massacres have been organized against the Armenians of the province and Christians without distinction of religion, and that recently for example people deported from Diyarbekir together with the Armenians and the Bishop of Mardin and seven hundred persons from other Christian communities have been taken out of town at night and slaughtered like sheep, and that an estimated two thousand people have been massacred until now, and if this is not ended immediately and unconditionally, it has been reported that it is feared the Muslim population of the neighbouring provinces will rise and massacre all Christians. It is absolutely unacceptable for the disciplinary measures and policies procured to the Armenians to include other Christians as this would

⁵⁵⁶ PAAA, R14086, Wangenheim to Bethmann Hollweg, 9 July 1915.

⁵⁵⁷ PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 169, Holstein to Embassy, 10 July 1915.

⁵⁵⁸ PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 169, Wangenheim to Talaat, 12 July 1915.

leave a very bad impression upon public opinion and therefore these types of incidents that especially threaten the lives of all Christians need to be ended immediately, and the truth of the conditions needs to be reported.⁵⁵⁹

In this important telegram, Talaat not only literally reproduced Holstein's words "slaughtered like sheep," but also used the euphemism "disciplinary measures and policies" to endorse what Reshid had been doing correctly so far: destroying the Armenians of Diyarbekir.

In July, Reshid's excesses became notorious among anyone who even came near his province, strewn as it was with corpses. The Governor of Baghdad, Süleyman Nazif (1870-1927), a noted intellectual hailing from Diyarbekir, traveled to his home town in this period. Nazif later wrote that the pungent smell of decaying corpses pervaded the atmosphere and that the bitter stench clogged his nose, making him gag.⁵⁶⁰ Nazif had seen only the tip of the iceberg, because most bodies were disposed of in the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. Rößler wrote that the "floating along of corpses on the Euphrates" had been going on for 25 days, adding: "The bodies were all tied in the same manner two by two, back to back."⁵⁶¹ Cemal Pasha, in charge of the Syrian region south of Diyarbekir, reproached Dr. Reshid with an urgent and personal telegram on 14 July, complaining that "the corpses floating down the Euphrates are probably those of the Armenians killed in the rebellion, these need to be buried on the spot, leave no corpses out in the open".⁵⁶² Two days later Reshid answered Cemal by pointing out that the Euphrates bore little relation to Diyarbekir province, and that the floating corpses were coming from the Erzurum and Mamuret-ul Aziz directions. Reshid noted that burials were exceptional and that "those who were killed here are either being thrown into deep deserted caves or, as has been the case for the most part, are being burnt".⁵⁶³ Faiz El-Ghusayn was a witness to the burning of dead bodies when he entered Diyarbekir province near Karapınar. He saw hundreds of bodies burned to ashes. He also saw that there were many women and children among the dead, consumed by fire.⁵⁶⁴ The rumors of Diyarbekir having become an open-air morgue reached Talaat, who ordered Reshid on 3 August to "bury the deceased lying on the roads, throw their corpses into brooks, lakes, and rivers, and burn their property left behind on the roads".⁵⁶⁵ Alongside these reports, there is photographic evidence that the two men met during the war, possibly because Reshid was summoned to Istanbul.

⁵⁵⁹ BOA, DH.ŞFR 54/406, Talaat to Reshid, 12 July 1915.

⁵⁶⁰ Kocahanoğlu, *İttihat ve Terakki*, pp.522-23.

⁵⁶¹ PAAA, R14087, Rößler to Bethmann Hollweg, 27 July 1915.

⁵⁶² Cemal to Reshid, 14 July 1915, quoted in: Kocahanoğlu, *İttihat ve Terakki*, p.519.

⁵⁶³ Reshid to Cemal, 16 July 1915, quoted in: *Ibid.*, p.519.

⁵⁶⁴ Al-Ghusayn, *Martyred Armenia*, p.20.

⁵⁶⁵ Talaat to Reshid, 3 August 1915, quoted in: Kocahanoğlu, *İttihat ve Terakki*, p.519.



Photo 15: Dr. Reshid (just right of the left pillar, with fez) and Talaat (on his left side) in front of a paramilitary group in Istanbul during the First World War (Yakin Tarihimiz, 1962)

Reshid did not pay much attention to, let alone seriously consider the wave of negative feedback, and his reputation grew more and more nefarious. The German protests became much more explicit by the end of July. An employee at the German embassy wrote to the German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg a most explicit report which read: “Since the beginning of this month the governor of Diyarbekir, Reshid Bey, has begun the systematic extermination of the Christian population under his jurisdiction, without distinction of race and religion.”⁵⁶⁶ As reports of massacres poured into Mosul province, Walter Holstein became increasingly enraged and wrote a bitter telegram to his colleagues in Istanbul:

Everyone knows that the governor of Diyarbekir... is the instigator of the terrible crimes committed against the Christians in his province; everyone rightly presumes that we are also aware of the atrocities and they are asking themselves why we allow a notorious mass murderer to remain unpunished and continue to be the governor. It would hardly suffice merely to express our disapproval of the atrocities effectively to counteract the various compromising attitudes towards us. Not until we have forced the Porte ruthlessly to demand that the criminals who are sitting in official positions in Diyarbekir, Mardin, Siirt, etc., account for these allegations and do so as quickly as possible, only then will they drop the suspicions held against us. I read in various German newspapers official Turkish denials of the atrocities committed against the Christians and am surprised at the naivety of the Porte in believing they can obliterate facts about the crimes by Turkish officials by telling blatant lies. Up to now the world has not experienced

⁵⁶⁶ PAAA, R14086, Hohenlohe-Langenburg to Bethmann-Hollweg, 31 July 1915.

such atrocities, which have provenly been and are still being committed by officials in Diyarbekir province!⁵⁶⁷

This report too was forwarded to Talaat, who began losing his patience, since he was forced to explain Reshid's compromising and embarrassing actions to German officials. Reshid obviously had taken no measures to act according to his instructions a month ago. To clear things up, two days after Holstein's cable, Talaat sent a second telegram admonishing Reshid that the persecution and massacre of all Christians in the province was not permitted. He also urged him to dismantle the militia, that was causing the provincial authorities to be held responsible for the killings.⁵⁶⁸ This was still not the end of Talaat's reprimands to his zealous subordinate. It had become clear that Reshid had not only persecuted and murdered non-Armenian Ottoman Christians, but also non-Ottoman Armenians. His indiscriminate slaughter of *ethnic* Armenians without consideration of *political* identity had become a serious problem. One of these was Stepan Katosian, an Armenian-American who had summarily been put to death in the Diyarbekir prison. The execution could have caused a diplomatic incident since the Ottoman Empire was not at war with the United States, in which case it still would have been a legal violation. Talaat therefore asked Reshid for information about Katosian's execution.⁵⁶⁹ To ensure that this was the last instance in which Reshid transgressed the rules of the genocide, Talaat ordered the consistent screening of the political identities of Armenians from then on.⁵⁷⁰ The purpose of this order was that non-Ottoman Armenians should not be persecuted. For example, an Iranian Armenian named Mıgırđıç Stepanian was allowed to leave for Persia via Mosul.⁵⁷¹

Apart from specific instructions readjusting Reshid's extreme behaviour, Talaat released several national decrees defining the categories of those to be persecuted and deported. At first, he excluded the Armenian converts to Islam from deportation to the south.⁵⁷² Most converts were not persecuted anymore and, provided they kept their silence, were allowed to continue living in their homes. Two weeks later he reincorporated the converts into the deportation program. Talaat's order read that "some Armenians are

⁵⁶⁷ PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 170, Holstein to Embassy, 14 August 1915.

⁵⁶⁸ BOA, DH.ŞFR 54-A/248, Talaat to Reshid, 16 August 1915.

⁵⁶⁹ BOA, DH.ŞFR 56/131, Talaat to Reshid, 24 September 1915.

⁵⁷⁰ BOA, DH.ŞFR 57/50, Talaat to Reshid, 17 October 1915. Talaat later specified the order and requested information on "Armenian officials employed at consulates of allied and neutral countries". BOA, DH.ŞFR 70/152, Talaat to provinces, 30 November 1916.

⁵⁷¹ BOA, DH.ŞFR 57/57, Talaat to Reshid, 17 October 1915. Whereas his superordinate Talaat was scolding him continuously, two days later Reshid received an appreciative telegram from his subordinate Halil Edib in Mardin. Edib expressed his praise on the Eid el-Adha, the important Muslim festival involving sacrifice of cattle: "I congratulate you with your Eid, and kiss your hands that have gained us the six provinces and opened up the gateways to Turkistan and the Caucasus." Halil Edib to Reshid, 19 October 1915, quoted in: Bilgi, Dr. Mehmed Reshid, p.29, footnote 73.

⁵⁷² BOA, DH.ŞFR 54/100, Talaat to provinces, 22 June 1915.

converting collectively or individually just to remain in their home towns,” and that “this type of conversion should never be lent credence”. Talaat contended that “whenever these types of people perceive threats to their interests they will convert as a means of deception”.⁵⁷³ On 4 August Talaat excluded the Armenian Catholics from deportation, requesting their numbers in the respective provinces.⁵⁷⁴ On 15 August the Protestant Armenians were excluded too from deportation to Der ez-Zor. Again, Talaat requested statistical data.⁵⁷⁵ Besides these official directions, the general methodology of the genocide consisted of killing the men and deporting those women and children who were not absorbed into Muslim households. This means that in general, Armenian women were not to be subjected to the immediate on-the-spot killing as the men were.⁵⁷⁶ Finally, a specific order excluding the Jacobite Syriacs from deportation was issued for those provinces with Syriac communities.⁵⁷⁷

There is contradictory evidence on the precise nature of Reshid’s local implementation of Talaat’s national instructions. On the one hand, Reshid observed the commands for exclusion of non-Armenian Christians from further genocidal destruction; on the other hand, he disregarded all narrowing of victim categories. According to another interpretation it is conceivable that the series of rebukes compelled him to mitigate the persecution, even though the harm was done. In other words, Reshid discontinued the persecution of the non-Armenian Christian communities when they had already been largely destroyed. These restrictions of time may have added to restrictions of location. It is also possible that this turn of events only happened in and around Diyarbekir city, since in Mardin İbrahim Bedreddin, Aziz Feyzi, and Memduh Bey had taken over the district. The most compelling example of selective persecution, steered from above, is the causal link between Holstein’s telegram of 12 June and the fate of the second convoy of Mardin notables. In that chain of events Reshid indeed seems to have followed orders and limited the scope of the genocide.

One of the first villages that had been thoroughly destroyed was Kabiye. According to one survivor from that village, a group of survivors from all over the Diyarbekir plain had

⁵⁷³ BOA, DH.ŞFR 54/254, Talaat to provinces, 1 July 1915.

⁵⁷⁴ BOA, DH.ŞFR 54-A/252, Talaat to provinces, 4 August 1915.

⁵⁷⁵ BOA, DH.ŞFR 55/20, Talaat to provinces, 15 August 1915.

⁵⁷⁶ Katharine Derderian, “Common Fate, Different Experience: Gender-Specific Aspects of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917,” in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol.19, no.1 (2005), pp.1-25.

⁵⁷⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR 57/112, Talaat to the provinces of Diyarbekir, Bitlis, Haleb, and Urfa, 25 October 1915. A year later, an even more lenient instruction was issued towards the Syriacs, requesting information about their numbers and at the same time allowing them to travel within the country for the sake of trade. BOA, DH.ŞFR 68/98, Mamuret-ul Aziz, Diyarbekir, Bitlis, Musul, and Urfa, 23 September 1916. Although tens of thousands of Syriacs had been massacred by that time, it did save a terrified and traumatized remnant of the Syriac community to live in their native regions. Still, their relative comfort was probably contingent on the appointment of Süleyman Necmi, Reshid’s successor in Diyarbekir. The new governor was very merciful compared to Reshid, and permitted the Syriacs a breath before İbrahim Bedreddin became governor of Diyarbekir province and launched a second attack against the Syriacs of Tur Abdin.

assembled in Qarabash some time after the massacre, probably around mid-June. Pirinçizâde Sıdkı had drawn up a list of these survivors and had the list read out loud in front of the group. Those with Armenian names were carefully selected from those with Syriac names. Sıdkı declared that the Syriacs were exempted from persecution on orders of the government. When a young man named Dikran was also placed into the Armenian group he protested to Sıdkı, pleading that he was a Syriac Orthodox. Although he had spoken the truth, his protests were futile as he was led away with the rest of the Armenians and butchered.⁵⁷⁸ The survivors of the second Mardin convoy had been in prison for a week when Memduh Bey arrived one day and ordered all cells opened. The prisoners were led outside, where Memduh addressed them: “Those of you who are Syriac, Chaldean, and Protestant, raise your hands and state your names”. The Syriacs, Chaldeans, and Protestants were separated from the Armenians and were allowed to go home.⁵⁷⁹ A similar selection was remembered by a Syriac survivor from a labour battalion working on road construction near Akpınar, between Diyarbekir and Mardin. On 17 June Sıdkı reportedly arrived at the road-building site where he separated the Armenians from the other Christians. An Armenian named Migirditch from Qarabash village was moved to the Armenian side but claimed to be a Syriac Orthodox. Though his identity was confirmed by a native of Qarabash, Sıdkı did not believe him and cursed at him: “Filthy dog, your name is Migirditch and you are supposed to be a Syriac?!” The unfortunate man was then sent off to his death with the other Armenians.⁵⁸⁰ A Syriac conscript in a labour battalion working between Urfa and Diyarbekir in mid-August related his tale to the Swiss missionary Jacob Künzler, who reported as follows:

“In the evening,” the Syriac recounted, “a large crowd of well-armed gendarmes had come from the city. They immediately ordered the segregation of the Armenians from the Syriacs. Thereupon the Armenians were tied together and were taken about a quarter of an hour away. Soon one heard many shots... It became clear to us, that our Armenian comrades were now being slaughtered... When the gendarmes returned to the village, we Syriacs thought that soon it would also be our turn. We were provided with lanterns and had to go towards the place of slaughter... We had to throw the murdered Armenians in a deep well. There were several among them, who were still breathing, one could even still walk, he dove into the well voluntarily. When all the dead and half-dead had been dropped down, we had to seal off the well and heap earth and ashes on it.”⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁸ Jastrow, *Die mesopotamisch-arabischen*, pp.327-29.

⁵⁷⁹ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, p.54.

⁵⁸⁰ Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, pp.69-70.

⁵⁸¹ Künzler, *Im Lande des Blutes und der Tränen*, pp.47-48.

These instances of selection of Armenians illustrate that Reshid delegated the implementation of Talaat's orders to Sıdkı. After Talaat's telegrams, some form of selective killing seems to have been applied. By that time, many Syriacs had already been murdered.

These telling examples notwithstanding, there is also evidence that runs counter to Reshid's ostensible pardon to non-Armenian Christians after Talaat's telegrams. The case of the Eqsor massacre shows that orders for differentiation between Christians were simply brushed aside. Reportedly, the executioner of Eqsor, Nuri Ensari, had personally proclaimed the "amnesty" accorded to the Syriacs, while the predominantly Syriac and Catholic village had just been exterminated and was at that time still being razed.⁵⁸² The same treatment befell the Christian women and children, who were supposed to be excluded from immediate massacre as routine. As early as in June, Aleppo Consul Jackson reported about the village of Redwan that "they even killed little children".⁵⁸³ A deportation convoy trudging to Mardin was halted by Reshid's militia at the village of Golikê, where dozens of women were first raped and then killed.⁵⁸⁴ There was even a report – though highly suspect – that Reshid himself "took 800 children, enclosed them in a building and set light to it," burning the children alive.⁵⁸⁵

The few Orthodox or Catholic Greeks were not spared either. The wife of a Catholic Greek citizen of Diyarbekir complained to German vice-consul Rößler she had not heard from her husband Yorgi Obégi ever since he, her daughter, and four of her brothers had gone into hiding with a Muslim colleague in Diyarbekir. It became known that they were found and deported, but shortly outside of Diyarbekir stripped of their valuables and killed. The Greek Orthodox priest of Diyarbekir had disappeared without a trace, and was probably murdered as well. Rößler was informed by an Ottoman officer that the then police chief of Diyarbekir, most probably Memduh Bey, had confessed the murder to him: "The commissar had told him that he had killed them himself."⁵⁸⁶ In the Silvan district, 425 Greeks out of a total 583 were killed.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸² Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p.230.

⁵⁸³ Jackson to Morgenthau, 8 June 1915, in: Sarafian, *United States*, p.60.

⁵⁸⁴ Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, p.72; There is some propagandistic evidence that Aziz Feyzi became known for his habit of collecting trophies from female victims. On several occasions he reportedly had the militia retrieve a necklace of women's nipples and a rope of women's hair. *Épisodes des massacres*, p.50; Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p.152.

⁵⁸⁵ *Morning Post*, 7 December 1918, quoted in: Vahakn N. Dadrian, "Children as Victims of Genocide: the Armenian Case," in: *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol.5 (2003), pp.430, 436 footnote 24. Dr. Reshid's reputation would hardly accord him the benefit of the doubt regarding incidents such as these. This source, however, seems highly dubious and the massacre is not reported in any of the other sources from Diyarbekir province.

⁵⁸⁶ *PAAR*, R14087, Rößler to Bethmann-Hollweg, 3 September 1915, enclosure no.2. Additionally, Memduh seems to have murdered a Russian and an Englishman. The murdered Englishman was probably Albert Atkinson, a missionary. Talaat later asked Reshid questions on his whereabouts. *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 56/238, Talaat to Reshid, 30 October 1915.

⁵⁸⁷ Noel, *Diary of Major E. Noel*, part 2, p.1.

The most compelling evidence supporting the interpretation that Talaat's orders were ignored are the massacres organized in Nusaybin and Cizre. On 16 August 1915 İbrahim Bedri sent militia officer Abdulkadir and chieftain of the Deşi tribe Abdulaziz to Nusaybin.⁵⁸⁸ They incarcerated all the Christian men of Nusaybin with no distinction of denomination: Syriac Jacobites, Chaldeans, Protestants, and Armenians. In the middle of the night the men were led away to a desolate canyon, butchered one by one, and thrown into the ravine. Many were decapitated, and each victim was urged to convert to Islam before being killed and hurled down the abyss.⁵⁸⁹ Hanna Shouha, the Chaldean priest of Nusaybin, had already been deported to Kharput and died on the road. His wife was violated and killed, his family were sent to Mardin and Diyarbekir and were eliminated either on the road or on arrival. Within two days, the population of Nusaybin dropped from 2000 to 1200, as 800 Christians were destroyed. The Jewish community of 600 persons was left unharmed.⁵⁹⁰

Almost two weeks later Cizre was targeted. On orders of Reshid, deputies Zülfü Bey and Aziz Feyzi had toured the province in April 1915 to organize the genocide. They had also frequented Cizre and had spoken to local Kurdish leaders.⁵⁹¹ On 29 August, Aziz Feyzi led a group of men including the mufti of Cizre Ahmed Hilmi and Reman chieftain Ömer in the attack.⁵⁹² All Christian men were arrested and tortured under the pretext that they had arms hidden in secret depots. They were then bound with ropes and chains, and marched out the city, where they were stripped of their belongings and murdered. The naked bodies were dumped downstream in the Tigris, for an obvious reason: the killers did not want the victims' relatives to see the corpses and panic. Two days later the families were placed on *kelek* rafts and sent off, after local Muslims had selected a number of children. Their river journey was short, as their vessels were moored at a Kurdish village shortly downstream. Most women were raped, shot dead, and thrown in the river.⁵⁹³ The pollution the decaying corpses caused to the Tigris was of such a nature that the population of Mosul was forbidden to drink from the river for a month.⁵⁹⁴ In Cizre, the only survivors were four women absorbed in a Muslim household. Three of them were killed after all. The other, Afife Mimarbashi, bribed her

⁵⁸⁸ Rhétoré, *Les chrétiens aux bêtes!*, p.220.

⁵⁸⁹ Hori Süleyman Hınno, *Farman: Tur'Abdinli Süryanilerin Katliamı 1914-1915* (Athens: n.p., 1993), pp.30-33.

⁵⁹⁰ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, pp.97-98. Qarabashi, *Dmo Zliho*, pp.124-25.

⁵⁹¹ *Épisodes des massacres*, p.14. On his way back to Diyarbekir, Feyzi reportedly visited the Reman district and convinced the brothers Ömer and Mustafa that the time had come to destroy all Christians.

⁵⁹² PRO, FO 371/4191, 9 April 1919, reproduced in: Ahmet Mesut (ed.), *İngiliz Belgelerinde Kürdistan 1918-1958* (Istanbul: Doz, 1992), p.29. For biographical information on the then Muslim clerics of Cizre see: Abdullah Yaşın, *Bütün yönleriyle Cizre* (Cizre: n.p., 1983), pp.147-65.

⁵⁹³ Armalto, *Al-Qousara*, pp.89-90.

⁵⁹⁴ Jean-Marie Merigoux, *Va a Ninive! Un dialogue avec l'Irak: Mosul et les villages chrétiens, pages d'histoire dominicaine* (Paris: Cerf, 2000), p.462.

kidnapper and fled to Mardin as the only survivor of the Cizre massacre.⁵⁹⁵ A total of 4750 Armenians (2500 Gregorians, 1250 Catholics, 1000 Protestants), 250 Chaldeans, and 100 Jacobite Syrians were killed.⁵⁹⁶ A week after the mass murder, Holstein reported to his superiors that “gangs of Kurds, who were recruited for this purpose by Feyzi Bey, deputy for Diyarbekir, with connivance of the local authorities and participation of the army, have massacred the entire Christian population of the town of Cizre (in Diyarbekir province).”⁵⁹⁷

It is evident that the indiscriminate killings were by no means spontaneous outbursts of popular bloodlust. Neither were they meticulously premeditated and prepared by conspiracy the year before. Talaat’s telegraphic reprimands had arrived late, and were not taken into consideration. As the Interior Minister, he was aware of this, as he was continuously being informed of this fact by German officials in Istanbul, who noted “that the instructions of the Turkish government to the provincial authorities for a large part defeat their purpose as a result of their arbitrariness.”⁵⁹⁸ In the summer of 1915, all Christian communities of Diyarbekir were equally struck by the genocide, although the Armenians were often particularly singled out for immediate destruction. As Norman Naimark wrote, “Protestant and Catholic Armenians could be formally exempted from deportation, even if in practice local authorities made no distinction among the various Christian sects”.⁵⁹⁹ Consul Rößler’s reported that the Ottoman government lost “control over the elements they had brought into existence.”⁶⁰⁰ These ‘elements’, as Rößler described the genocidal measures, proved particularly ferocious in Diyarbekir province. Major Noel was aware of this, as he incorrectly noted about the Syrians:

In Diarbekir itself the Syrian Jacobites were scarcely molested. Of all the Christian communities they know how best to get on with the Turks, and when the massacres were ordered they were officially excluded. In the districts, however, the Government very soon lost control of the passions they had loosed (if they ever wanted to keep them in control), with the result that the Jacobites suffered there as much as anybody else.⁶⁰¹

Contrary to Rößler’s perception, Reshid had a firm control of his murderous infrastructure. Especially in and around Diyarbekir district, most instances of massacre in which the militia

⁵⁹⁵ Sarafian, “The Disasters”, p.263.

⁵⁹⁶ PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 170, Hohenlohe-Langenburg to Auswärtige Amt, 11 September 1915.

⁵⁹⁷ PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 170, Holstein to Embassy, 9 September 1915.

⁵⁹⁸ PAAA, R14093, “Aufzeichnung über die Armenierfrage,” Berlin, 27 September 1916.

⁵⁹⁹ Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp.41-42.

⁶⁰⁰ PAAA, R14087, Rößler to Bethmann Hollweg, 27 July 1915.

⁶⁰¹ Noel, *Diary of Major E. Noel*, part 2, p.14.

engaged were directly ordered by himself. An exploration of the perpetrators involved, the timing, scope, and methodology of the killings clearly reveals Reshid's will propelling them. Due to his personal disposition, Dr. Mehmed Reshid gave a distinct shape to the genocide, configuring the range of victims from the outset, even when his superior tried to modify it.

Discussion

This chapter has addressed the destruction of Ottoman Armenians in Diyarbekir province during the First World War. In 1915, the CUP carried out a systematic campaign of genocidal persecution, the body count of which ran in the hundreds of thousands. This internal policy ran parallel to the external war effort with the Great Powers, especially on the eastern front against Russia. It was no coincidence that most of the direct killing of non-combatant Ottoman Christians occurred in the eastern provinces, where the threat of a Russian invasion backed by 'Armenian insiders' was most immediate in the paranoid minds of the Young Turk dictatorship. However, the deportations and persecutions were mostly autonomous processes and only partly linked to the ebb and flow of the war. The initiation and conduct of the persecutions were generally in the hands of Interior Ministry civil servants, not military personnel of the Ministry of War. The genocide took shape on the distant eastern front as a series of fiats issued after the invasion of Russia and Iran in December 1914. Powerful cadres within the party, government, and army formed a genocidal consensus within the empire during the months of heightened administrative networking, strategic disputes, and factional infighting in the empire's darkest hour.

No single agency or theory guided the implementation of the genocide as ethnographic experts disagreed about ethnic groups' loyalty, Talaat machinated, Reshid thrust ahead, Interior and War Ministry functionaries vacillated, brigands and thugs clashed with intellectual social engineers. And yet the direction of policy was never in doubt: the Armenians were to be destroyed. Indeed, the emergent consensus was so powerful that anomalies only solidified it, especially at a time when no foreign danger threatened the elite. If the state of war released the CUP regime from many of the constraints of the past year and a half, and shattered the old framework within which a "solution" to the "Armenian question" had been sought, it also reignited the radical tendencies within the party, that had so suddenly surfaced during the devastating Balkan wars. After November 1914 the radicals, with Talaat heading them, were freed from past restraints. When the deportations were launched, their likely outcome was known by the CUP elite. They remembered how Caucasian communities

who had been settled in the region earlier had perished in its harsh conditions. Moreover, unlike the pre-war boycotts and persecutions of Ottoman Bulgarians and especially Ottoman Greeks, which had been played out before the shocked sensibilities of Western observers, the scorching deserts of Northern Syria offered a field of activity at a conveniently discreet distance from direct observation. Defenders of what was christened “resettlement” (*tehcir*) sometimes contend(ed) that the dispersion of the entire Armenian population was simply a part of military operations against Armenian revolutionaries, indeed a necessary part. This is not how the Young Turks understood the operation. Deportation was to continue to the last Anatolian Armenian community, even if the revolutionary parties were quickly neutralized. Deportation was designed to ensure that Armenian social life of any significance could never arise again, especially in the eastern provinces.

The violence was not only directed against Ottoman Armenians. This chapter has also sought to direct attention to the wartime experiences of other ethnic groups in Diyarbekir province. Diyarbekir was a hub in the maze of deportations, not only of Armenians but also of Kurds (see chapter 5), and saw some of the most brutal massacres in the summer of 1915. It becomes clear that in the massive destruction process during World War I, not all perpetrators were Turks and not all victims were Armenians. Certain Kurdish chieftains, Arabs and Circassians also joined in with the mass murder, whereas Yezidis, Syriacs, and Kurds were subjected to persecution as well. In fact, the first villages in Diyarbekir province to suffer wholesale massacres were the Syriac villages on Diyarbekir plain. Then again, certain Kurdish subtribes and several notable families were integrally deported to central and western parts of Anatolia, where a substantial part of them perished from lack of nutrition and contagious diseases. The maelstrom of violence, counterviolence, and multiple victimization arises out of a clear context.

Why were the Armenians and Syriacs destroyed? Finding satisfactory answers to this question requires more than a limited regional focus, but also needs to take into account the victimization of Ottoman Muslims in the years preceding the war. The latter approach may seem paradoxical, but has explanatory value. How does victimization affect a group? Psychological research into groups of people who have been victimized and persecuted demonstrates that they are deeply affected by the violence. Whereas this is undoubtedly true for individual survivors, it may bear relevance for members of the victim group who were not directly affected by the immediate violence. The less affected parts of the group too, by virtue of its identifications with the ethnic, religious, or cultural group, are deeply affected by the

persecution and the attempt to eliminate the group they consider themselves members of. Survivors often feel guilt, shame, insecurity, inferiority, and perceive the world as hostile and humans as untrustworthy.⁶⁰² Most of all, the violence frustrates their need for security, precludes them from forming positive ties to others, and increases their potential for committing violence themselves. A significant part of the group may come to believe that violence is an effective, indeed necessary tool to protect themselves, as they perceive the world with a warped sense of protection and self-defense.⁶⁰³

The concept of vengeance is a key in understanding this process. Vengeance can loosely be defined as “the attempt, at some cost or risk to oneself, to impose suffering upon those who have made one suffer.”⁶⁰⁴ In his study of vengeance, Nico Frijda recognizes that the desire for vengeance is one of the most potent of human passions.⁶⁰⁵ Vengeance is primarily an emotional state of mind that exists on the individual or collective level, often for a longer period, until it is redeemed. The desire for vengeance can be subsumed under the rubric of moral emotions: “it is a state of impulse, of involuntary action readiness, generated by an appraisal, often accompanied by bodily excitement, and with every aspect of control precedence: preoccupation, single-minded goal pursuit, neglect of extraneous information, and interference with other activities”. Frijda identifies three main gains of vengeance, first of all the equalization of power. When one group willfully harms another, the act of harming is a manifestation of the power the offender had to do so, and of the lack of power of the victim to prevent it. This inequality of power is alleviated or annulled by revenge. The restoration of threatened or damaged self-esteem is a second item to be gained by vengeance, a major source of vengeful impulse that gives it much of its emotional force. Revenge can restore some of the damage done to the Self. Finally, vengeance can cause an escape from pain for the avenger. Since pain is not neutralized by inflicting an equal amount of pain but only by taking away its causes (i.e. healing), by inflicting pain upon the offender, the avenger can forget his own unbearable pain: “The nearest one can come to terminating the pain, perhaps, is to secure the object’s total destruction, removing him or her from the face of the earth, erasing him or her from the records of history.”⁶⁰⁶ One scholar has argued that this type of disproportional revenge is culturally determined as different cultures have different norms of

⁶⁰² Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, “The Aftermath of Victimization: Rebuilding Shattered Assumptions,” in: Charles R. Figley (ed.), *Trauma and its Wake* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1985), vol.1, *The Study and Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, pp.15-35; Id., *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

⁶⁰³ Roy F. Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001), pp.128-68.

⁶⁰⁴ Jon Elster, “Norms of Revenge,” in: *Ethics*, vol.4 (1990), pp.862-85, at p.862.

⁶⁰⁵ Nico H. Frijda, “The Lex Talionis: On Vengeance,” in: Stephanie H. M. van Goozen, Nanne E. van de Poll & Joseph A. Sergeant (eds.), *Emotions: Essays on Emotion Theory* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1994), pp.263-89.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, at p.279.

dealing with suffered harm.⁶⁰⁷ All in all, the social functions of vengeance are mainly to restore the power equilibrium between the offender and the offended, and to deter perceived enemies from future offenses.

The consequences of these insights for the study of mass violence and genocide are considerable. That studies of genocides often draw a sharp Manichean dividing line between “perpetrators” and “victims” and lock these immutable roles at that particular segment in history, is perhaps justified.⁶⁰⁸ But in many of those same studies, humans’ potentially multiple roles in genocidal processes are often overlooked or ignored.⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, survivors and victim communities are too often patronized as having drawn universalistic humanist lessons from their victimization and are often expected to forgive and “reconcile”.⁶¹⁰ Conversely, research on vengeance has identified how victimization and vengeance are closely related: victimized individuals and groups often feel vindictive (with or without justice), and vice versa, vengeance is almost always justified by calling attention to prior victimization. “Revenge is involved when thoughts of having suffered at the hands of the object contribute to the force of violence.”⁶¹¹ Whereas rational-choice approaches to genocide can explain the planning phase and daily conduct of persecutions, for explanations of the forces propelling genocide one has to turn to sociological accounts of how desires of vengeance among victim groups and military elites are capitalized on and propagated to broader segments of society by regimes. Once mobilized, the more such a process of collective vengeful desire escalates, the harder it becomes to reverse that process, especially if it crosses the threshold of violence and thereby becomes relatively autonomous.

In studies of the Armenian genocide and accounts of the killings, the perpetrators, from the organizing elites to the rank-and-file executioners, have too often figured as evil faceless killers, undifferentiated and unexplained. The guerrillas and tribesmen appear in the killing fields of Anatolia ex nihilo and murder people for no apparent reason other than innate (Turkish or Islamic) cruelty and malignance. This chapter has attempted to challenge this essentialist convention by problematizing the victimization of Ottoman Muslims and Young

⁶⁰⁷ Alexander L. Hinton, “A Head for an Eye: Revenge in the Cambodian Genocide,” in: *American Ethnologist*, vol.25, no.3 (1998), pp.352-77.

⁶⁰⁸ For a typical study see: Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

⁶⁰⁹ For a sophisticated, critical study see: Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). For survivor testimony of Cambodian ‘victim-perpetrators’ see: Meng-Try Ea & Sorya Sim, *Victims and Perpetrators?: Testimony of Young Khmer Rouge Comrades* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2001).

⁶¹⁰ For a critical problematization of these postulates see: Thomas Brudholm, “Revisiting Resentments: Jean Améry and the Dark Side of Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” in: *Journal of Human Rights*, vol.5 (2006), pp.7-26.

⁶¹¹ Seymour L. Halleck, “Vengeance and Victimization,” in: *Victimology*, vol.5, no.2 (1980), pp.99-114; Heather Strang, *Repair or Revenge: Victims and Restorative Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.88-130.

Turks in the Balkans, and arguing that two years later that victimization served as a motive for collective vengeance against Ottoman Christians. The roots of the Armenian Genocide can partly be traced in the loss of power, territory, war, and “honor” in the Balkans. Particularly the violent expulsion of Ottoman Muslim civilians was a harbinger of more violence. In 1913, terrified Muslims had fled Rumelia in the hundreds of thousands. The stories they brought east, and the humiliation they brought to the ranks of the Ottoman army, assured that Muslim-Christian armed cooperation was all but impossible throughout the rest of the Balkan wars and the future in general. The experience also guaranteed that there would be minimal sympathy for the hundreds of thousands of Ottoman Armenians who, two years later, would be forced to leave their homes. The popular desire for revenge did not in fact bring about the deportations, since the Ottoman population had not chosen the CUP as their leaders. But it did mean that CUP, acting on motives of their own, had a strong current of opinion to exploit. It was their goal to create an ethnically pure ‘national state’, but so long as this goal continued to resonate with broad sectors of Ottoman Muslim opinion and vindictive emotion, the deportations and killings were justified and went on relentlessly. If it is the nationalism and power struggle that explains the motivation of those who crafted the genocide, then it is the combination of trauma, revenge, and fear of victimization that energized many foot soldiers of the genocide. Ultimately, the self-destructiveness, extreme intensity, and extended duration of the wartime mass murder of Ottoman Christians can for a substantial part be explained by understanding the Young Turk desire for vengeance. This can also help explain why in 1917, when, contrary to the CUP’s expectations, the Empire did not collapse, and mass killings diminished somewhat in intensity.

“Revenge”, writes Frijda, “is the social power regulator in a society without central justice.”⁶¹² In the early twentieth century, the notion of justice was poorly anchored in the international system of states. Had some form of justice been delivered to Ottoman Muslims in 1913, there might not have been a vindictive Young Turk dictatorship that launched a genocide. The idea of the Ottoman-Turkish historical consciousness as victim granted many a necessary moral certainty that enabled mass murder. Without the element of moral certainty it was hard to imagine how fear might incite the kind of mass murder as witnessed in 1915. The perpetrators of the genocide saw themselves “as the true victims of an ongoing political drama, victims of yesterday who may yet be victims again. That moral certainty explains the easy transition from yesterday’s victims to killers the morning after.”⁶¹³ This transition from

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, p.270.

⁶¹³ Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p.233.

victims to perpetrators is marked by the fact that victims need proof of power or self-efficacy as a function of proof of a sense of Self. In other words, the destruction of the Other was the confirmation of the Self. Thus, as perverted as this sounds, destroying the Armenians was a quasi-therapeutic process for the Young Turks and gave them a renewed sense of power over their Christian subjects. Genocide scholar Jacques Semelin argued that “the act of massacring is the most spectacular practice which those in power have at their disposal to assert their ascendancy by marking, martyring and destroying the bodies of those identified as their enemies”.⁶¹⁴ From this subjective moral perspective, the genocide evolved not as a clear evil but rather as the shadow of virtue. Of course, objectively, there was nothing righteous about the mass murder, which was a showcase of humankind at its worst. Cruelty, which is at least a function of power differentials as it is of undiluted hatred and capricious sadism, fed on this process and manifested itself during the killing sessions. A particular form of vengeance that can clarify the direction and level of violence and cruelty is the puzzling phenomenon of what may be called “dislocated” or “generalized” vengeance: exacting revenge not on your direct tormentors but on others, either totally unrelated strangers or groups related to your tormentors by identity markers such as language, ethnicity, culture, religion, politics, or indeed gender: rape of women can be interpreted as an act of “vengeance toward all women enacted upon the body of one.”⁶¹⁵ Such a mechanism can explain why the Ottoman Armenians had to suffer for crimes the Bulgarian or Greek armies had committed against Ottoman Muslims. This type of vengeance did not intend to right the suffered wrong, which, the perpetrators knew, could not be undone anyway.

Did the Young Turks really feel satisfied after having destroyed the Armenians? Although the genocide was deeply repressed and ousted from the memory of Turkish national identity, it always loomed as a public secret, a taboo that never really evanesced. Besides having suffered a trauma of victimization, the Turks had now also developed a trauma of perpetration, two traumas that have become so entangled they are difficult to extricate.⁶¹⁶ The chapter on memory will deal with this problem in detail. Theoretically, the answer to this question would be negative. Psychologists who have worked with avengers argue that “people who actually commit acts of revenge, such as combat veterans who commit atrocities, do not succeed in getting rid of their post-traumatic symptoms; rather, they seem to suffer the most

⁶¹⁴ Jacques Semelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (London: Hurst & Co., 2007), p.6.

⁶¹⁵ Susan Jacoby, *Wild Justice: The Evolution of Revenge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p.193.

⁶¹⁶ Seyhan Bayraktar & Wolfgang Seibel, “Das türkische Tätertrauma: Der Massenmord an den Armeniern von 1915 bis 1917 und seine Leugnung,” in: Bernhard Giesen & Christoph Schneider (eds.), *Tätertrauma* (Konstanz: UVK, 2004), pp.381-98.

severe and intractable disturbances.”⁶¹⁷ The consummation of revenge does not seem to eliminate stress and pain. Moreover, many scholars agree that most ordinary people dislike committing mass murder and have to be pressured or even coerced to overcome their dislike of murdering. Paradoxically, the realization of vengeful fantasies has to overcome a serious psychological threshold (repulsion of killing), an emotion equally human as the very desire that propels the violence itself. If these emotions clash, then why do avengers go through with their vengeance? This remains an important question to be answered.

Scholars of genocide have argued that local dynamics can influence the course and intensity of the genocidal process. Local political or social elites can expedite and intensify, or delay and resist genocidal destruction steered from above.⁶¹⁸ The Ottoman province Diyarbekir has served as a platform for exemplifying the anti-Armenian policies at the local level, leading us to the dynamics that center and periphery played in the events of the period. Most of the deportations were micromanaged by Talaat, others by his subordinates. One would need to take a much closer look at Talaat’s specific role and the nature of the power he exercised with respect to the persecution of the Ottoman Armenians, which accumulated to full genocidal proportions by the summer of 1915. Even with the extant primary documentation on the secretive nature of the bureaucratically organized destruction of the Armenians, one cannot refrain from seeking to unearth the ‘true’ intention behind the tens of thousands of telegraphic orders he issued, some of which are deceptive enough to fool the historian. Even so, all such inconsistencies notwithstanding, the sheer magnitude of the campaign leaves not a shred of doubt about the hostile intention of the policy. Talaat’s micro-managing qualities and sharp intelligence, coupled with calculating tact and an extraordinary talent for political self-preservation, need more research. Every other step in the radicalization of existing measures was spurred by him, and Reshid’s appointment was a vitalizing force underlying the existing program for mass destruction, not a palliative.

It is inconceivable to understand the persecutions without highlighting the dynamics between national policy versus local agency. For this reason, Talaat’s relationship with governor Dr. Mehmed Reshid was a question central to this chapter. It is an example of the

⁶¹⁷ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p.189.

⁶¹⁸ For local studies of genocide see: Tomislav Dulić, *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Hercegovina, 1941-42* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2005); Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941-1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (München: Oldenbourg, 1996); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Lee Ann Fujii, “The Power of Local Ties: Mechanisms of Mass Participation During the Rwandan Genocide,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the *American Political Science Association*, Philadelphia, 31 August 2006.

evolution of CUP policy against proclaimed ‘internal enemies’, notably the Armenians. No single order to destroy all Armenians has ever been found (and will unlikely ever be found), but when the persecution gained genocidal momentum, between 20 and 30 May 1915, it is highly probable that Talaat wired the doctor-governor one or another euphemistic order to ‘act ruthlessly’. He certainly did not grant Reshid *carte blanche* to eliminate all Christians, considering future reprimands. The radically anti-Christian Ottoman patriot and Muslim nationalist Dr. Reshid interpreted the order as a license to kill all Armenians and Syrians living under his jurisdiction. It is telling that of all the Ottoman governors involved in the violence, none were rebuked for their cruelty and fanaticism as Reshid was – even if the persecutions ran more or less parallel in other provinces. Therefore, Talaat’s telegraphic reprehensions unveil a secret in the definition of the scope of the persecutions. The reproval, “do not destroy the other Christians”, was basically synonymous to the speech act, “do destroy the Armenians”, and reveals Talaat’s tacit approval of Reshid’s anti-Armenian actions. Naturally, Talaat formulated his argument without compromising himself in a written order.

On the local level too, revenge, fear of victimization and competition between elites played important roles. Dr. Mehmed Reshid, portrayed as a sadistic monster in contemporary sources, was born in the Caucasus but his family had to flee the onslaught of the Tsarist Russian army in the 1860s. Vengeance may well have been a motivating factor in his perception of the world. Circassian families like his, whose parents’ generation had been massacred and expelled, had intimate knowledge of Armenian nationalist activism in the Caucasus and, like the Balkan Muslims, were traumatized. The same would have been true for the three dozen Circassian militiamen that Reshid had employed. When the war broke out and the Russian army seemed to be effortlessly conquering its way towards Diyarbekir, it must have been hardly difficult to play into their apocalyptic fear that “the Russians are coming”, and most importantly, that their Armenian neighbours were Russian spies. Competition between urban elites was another factor that contributed to the intensity of the violence. Before the war, the main families in Diyarbekir, mainly Christians and Muslims, were engaged in a fierce struggle for political and economic power. Such a structural factor could easily be abused by the CUP dictatorship for its own ends: collaborate with us and you will be duly rewarded. The Pirinççizâde, Müftüzâde, and Direkçizâde families emerged victorious from this competition by volunteering in the militias, being more ruthless in their competitive efforts, and collaborating with the campaign the CUP regime deemed most salient, the murder of their Armenian neighbors.