

## ONE OTTOMAN SOURCES AND THE QUESTION OF THEIR BEING PURGED

### EXISTING SOURCES

One of the issues at the center of the debates about 1915 concerns which documents are available and to what degree they can be trusted. Among these sources, the official papers belonging to the Ottoman government of that time, which are found in the Ottoman Archive of the General Directorate of the Prime Ministerial State Archive of the Turkish Republic (T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi; hereafter Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive), hold a special place, and various views have been proposed on their value. Powerful evidence that the documents in this archive have been “cleansed” in a deliberate manner casts serious doubt on the reliability of the remaining documents. In order to have an opinion about this, it is first necessary to have some general knowledge of what these sources are. Below, such a list is presented in order to bring some clarity, in particular as to when and how the archival materials were purged. It is only possible to develop a correct idea about how to evaluate the available materials by relying in this way on background information. For a general overview, it is appropriate to assemble these sources into seven separate groups.

*Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive:* The first is the collection of Ottoman-language documents found in the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive in Istanbul. Among its holdings are the Interior Ministry Papers (Dahiliye Nezareti Evrakı), within which is found a great deal of information directly relevant to the subject. Papers from the Interior Ministry’s Cipher Office, as well as papers from various branches of the General Security Directorate (Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdürlüğü; hereafter EUM), were used extensively in the preparation of this work.

The official website of the Turkish State Archives provides the following information regarding the Cipher Office:

Among the bureaus connected to the Interior Ministry in the year 1914, one encounters the Cipher Office, which functioned as a separate office. . . . In the communications between the central Ottoman administration and its various provincial functionaries, telegraphic communication and its introduction [as a means of inter- and intra-ministerial communication] in particular, the “Cipher Office” gained ever increasing importance. . . . It is clear that the Cipher Office was generally the means by which communications between the Interior Ministry and its affiliated departments and offices on the one hand, and the various provinces and provincial districts on the other [took place]. But in addition to these functions, the office also acted as an intermediary bureau by means of which other ministries and state offices would occasionally encode their urgent or confidential communications. There are 20,640 documents that comprise the papers of the Cipher Office. In general these are comprised of the original “encoded” telegrams that were sent to the Interior Ministry. At present a 10-volume catalogue of the Cipher Office [documents] has been prepared and made available to researchers.<sup>1</sup>

In a telegram sent to all of the regional offices on 9 February 1914 are instructions for dispatching certain communications through the Cipher Office. This telegram, which was sent to all of the regional offices under the heading “Issues Requiring Care Regarding Coded Messages,” states the following with respect to secret communication:

in instances of high security and confidentiality of communication and in order to ensure good flow of information, approval was reached regarding the precautions necessary in all future matters. . . . [I]n matters pertaining to state political or military secrets and their communication, coded messages with content that gives rise to a need for restriction in its communication shall have the words (highly confidential, to be handled personally) written at the top.

<sup>1</sup> Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Rehberi* (İstanbul: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 2010), 375.

. . . [T]he instructions sent in telegrams using this language must be handled by you personally. The language will not be placed on coded messages containing ordinary confidentiality.<sup>2</sup>

The Cipher Office documents, which are largely comprised of short cables sent from the imperial capital to its branches in the provinces, unfortunately do not contain replies to these cables from the provinces. Some of the latter can be found scattered throughout the First, Second, and Third Departments of the General Security Directorate, but generally the great bulk of the answers from the provinces are missing.

It should be mentioned that among these provincial responses, direct information on the Armenian deportations is as good as nonexistent. Nevertheless, as will be shown below, in his function as interior minister, Talat demanded constant reports from his underlings in the provinces on subjects such as the social, economic, and political situation of the Armenian population, their actual numbers, and their relations with the empire's other ethnoreligious groups. Moreover, throughout the course of the Armenian deportation, special notebooks and registries, which reported how many Armenians had been deported, how many still remained, and so on, were sent to the capital. The fate of the documents that contained such information remains one of the great outstanding questions on this subject.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the Interior Ministry documents already mentioned here, the General Directorate of the State Archive has published a large selection of documents from the other Ottoman government offices, such as the Foreign Ministry, on the Internet. A virtual visit to the official website of the State Archive shows that more than fifteen hundred such documents are now accessible online.<sup>4</sup> Although they were no doubt specially selected for the purpose of bolstering the official Turkish government line

<sup>2</sup>BOA/DH.ŞFR, no. 49/243, Coded telegram from the Interior Ministry to the Provinces of Edirne, Erzurum, Adana, Ankara, Aydın, Bitlis, Basra, Baghdad, Beirut, Hicaz, Aleppo, Hüdâvendigâr (Bursa), Diyarbakır, Damascus, Sivas, Trebizond, Kastamonu, Konya, Mamuretülaziz, Mosul, Van, and Yemen; to the Provincial Districts of Urfa, Karahisâr-ı Sahib (Afyon Karahisar), İzmit, Bolu, Canik, Çatalca, (Der) Zor, Karesi (Balıkesir), Jerusalem, Kale-i Sultaniye (Çanakkale), Menteşe, Teke, and Kayseri; and to the commander of enlightened Medina, dated 9 February 1915.

<sup>3</sup>While working in the archives during the summer of 2006, I received no answer to my question of where the provincial replies to the ministry's cables might now be located.

<sup>4</sup>See <http://www.devletarsivleri.gov.tr>.

on the question of the Armenian deportations, the placing of so many original archival documents on the Internet for public view must nevertheless be recognized as the very significant and laudable step that it is.

In this work I have made extensive use of both the online documents and others in the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive. Despite the inevitable gaps in its holdings, this repository can be considered an extremely rich resource for illuminating the period under review—so rich, in fact, that by no means can it be said to have been fully exploited by researchers (for a variety of reasons), and its value, acknowledged as well as undiscovered, must not be underestimated.<sup>5</sup>

*Records of the Post-War Court-Martial Trials:* The second important source for this period is the group of documents dated from 1919 to 1921 of the Istanbul Court-Martial (Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî), where the leaders of the CUP and their provincial representatives were tried for various crimes committed between 1908 and 1918. The principal source of information for these trials, about sixty-three cases in all, is the daily report of the sessions and official court documents (indictments, convictions, etc.) that were published in the Ottoman gazette *Takvim-i Vekayi*. This information is far from comprehensive, however, as the published accounts are incomplete and cover just twelve of the sixty-three cases. Nevertheless, the available documents are of crucial importance and cover such topics as the indictments and witness testimonies in the cases against the members of the Unionist cabinet and members of the CUP Central Committee (Merkez-i Umumi), as well as its semisecret Special Organization (Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa; hereafter SO).<sup>6</sup> At first these groups were tried in one

<sup>5</sup> One reason why scholars have so far been unable to fully exploit this archive—particularly on the topic at hand—is that the cataloging of its vast holdings has yet to be completed; that being said, what share of the blame must go to technical difficulties, and what share to conscious government policies, remains unclear. Scholars wishing to work in the archives have occasionally been subjected to such indignities as interrogation about their intentions and research topics, denial of access to documents, and even ejection from the archives themselves. For one example, see Ara Sarafian, “The Ottoman Archives Debate and the Armenian Genocide,” *Armenian Forum* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 35–44. In recent years, however, significant changes have been made. New catalogs have been made available to researchers, and an end has been put to the aforementioned indignities. During my 2006 visit, I experienced nothing but courtesy and an effort to facilitate my work, and I would like to express my debt of gratitude to the entire archival staff and, in particular, to Mustafa Budak.

<sup>6</sup> While there are different opinions as to when this organization, which played an increasingly central role in the Armenian Genocide, was founded, according to one document in the ATASE archives, the SO was officially established by the order of Enver Pasha on 30 November 1913. The document is

large process, but later they were prosecuted in two separate cases—one for the government officials, another for the CUP members and functionaries—although they would both conclude with a single joint ruling for all defendants. All told, the two trials were conducted in fourteen separate sessions, and the minutes of these sessions appeared in full, along with the two indictments and the joint verdict, in the following day's editions of *Takvim-i Vekayi*.

Another trial, that of the so-called responsible secretaries (*kâtib-i mesuller*) who were sent to the provinces in a quasi-official capacity in order to ensure the proper execution of the committee's actual policies, also took place at this time, but only reports of the first three sessions (out of a total of thirteen) and the final verdict appeared in *Takvim-i Vekayi*. Of the remaining ten trials for which some written record is available, only incomplete records remain, such as the verdicts in the case against officials from the provincial district of Yozgat and the province of Trebizond, or the sultan's approval of the verdicts in the Erzincan and Bayburt (provincial district) trials.<sup>7</sup>

*Istanbul Press Accounts, 1918–22*: A third important source of documentation for this period is the Istanbul press between 1918 and 1922. The newspapers of this period—in particular, those published after November 1918, in light of the partial freedom enjoyed by the press during the Allied occupation of the city—contain highly detailed reports about contemporary events, above all on Ottoman government policies toward the Armenians. Among the topics taken up by the dailies were the various trials then taking place in the capital and throughout the empire. A great many documents about these cases, such as the texts of the verdicts in the aforementioned Erzincan and Bayburt trials, which do not appear in the

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reproduced in Polat Safi, "The Ottoman Special Organization—Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa: A Historical Assessment with Particular Reference to Its Operations Against British Occupied Egypt (1914–1916)," unpublished MA thesis, Institute of Economics and Social Sciences of Bilkent University, September 2006. Based on memoirs and testimonies of defendants in the military tribunal that were held in Istanbul, one may confidently assert that the SO was reorganized on 2 August 1914 in order to make Muslims in the Caucasus, Iran, India, and Africa rise up against the English and Russians, and work in Anatolia against a probable "Armenian danger." For more information on the SO, see Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 93–97, 130–40.

<sup>7</sup> For the minutes and transcripts, which were originally published in TV, see V. N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam, "*Tehcir ve Taktik*": *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi Zabıtları, İttihat ve Terakki'nin Yargılanması* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009).

pages of *Takvim-i Vekayi*, are a valuable supplement. Apart from these, the Istanbul press contained reports and transcriptions of trial testimony and recollections by individuals who were either directly involved in, or first-hand witnesses to, the events surrounding the Armenian deportations. Some of the better-known examples are those of Third Army commander Vehip Pasha, Aleppo governor Celal, and Circassian Uncle Hasan (Çerkes Hasan Amca).<sup>8</sup>

*Archive of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem*: The fourth source of information on the events in question is the Archive of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem. This repository is notable for its holdings of a number of documents from the Commission for the Investigation of Crimes (Tedkik-i Seyyat Komisyonu), which was established after the Armistice on 24 November 1918 for the purpose of assembling evidence and prosecuting the crimes of deportation and massacre against the Armenians.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the original documents and case files, both of this commission and of the courts-martial that operated between 1919 and 1922, have been lost or destroyed. Some Armenian officials who worked in the courts-martial during these years made handwritten copies of some of the documents from these files, and these copies have survived in the Armenian Patriarchate Archive.<sup>10</sup>

Although the status of these copies as primary-source documents has been disputed, due to the impossibility of determining their faithfulness to the now-lost originals, the authenticity of the material they contain can in many cases be corroborated and confirmed from various other sources. To give a few examples, a 26 May 1915 document from Talat Pasha, which is found in many Turkish sources, exists here in both the original Ottoman

<sup>8</sup>The memoirs of Aleppo governor Celal Bey were published in three parts in the daily *Vakit* between 10 and 13 December, while the account of Vehip Pasha would appear in the same newspaper on 31 March 1919. A series of articles by Çerkes Hasan Amca, titled “The True Story of the Deportations” [Tehcirin İç Yüzü], appeared in *Alemdar* between 19 and 28 June 1919; although the end of the eighth and last installment states “To be continued,” no further installments were published.

<sup>9</sup>*Vakit*, 24 November 1918.

<sup>10</sup>The archive is unfortunately not open to all researchers. For this reason it is difficult to state with any authority the extent of its holdings. There is no need to emphasize the wrongness of such an in-defensible policy as the denial of access to such a potentially valuable source. I wish to thank V. N. Dadrian, who has been allowed to work in the Armenian Patriarchate Archive, for graciously providing me with copies of some of the documents.

and an accompanying Armenian translation.<sup>11</sup> Also held by the Patriarchate is the copy of a 23 May 1915 cable from Talat Pasha to the provincial offices in Erzurum, Van, and Bitlis, which informs them of the regions from which the Armenians were to be removed and those to which they would be relocated; the original is held by the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive in Istanbul.<sup>12</sup> Also found in the Jerusalem Patriarchate are copies of the communications sent by the Interior Ministry's Office of Tribal and Immigrant Settlement (Dahiliye Nezareti İskan-ı Aşair ve Muhacir'in Müdüriyeti; hereafter IAMM or Tribal Settlement Office) to a great number of locations in Anatolia on 5 July 1915.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of these particular communications was to inform provincial and district officials that the areas of Armenian resettlement had been expanded and that the Armenians should be resettled in these places in accordance with the 10 percent principle; that is, that the resettled deportees should not exceed 10 percent of the total population.<sup>14</sup>

Yet another example is a copy of the 26 August 1915 telegram that was used in the principal indictment against the Unionist leaders; it was sent from the provincial governor of Mamuretülaziz to his counterpart in Malatya and concerns orders to remove the numerous corpses that had accumulated along the routes of deportation.<sup>15</sup> Last, there is the

<sup>11</sup> For other citations/reproductions of this document in Turkish sources, see Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1983), 228; and Muammer Demirel, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Erzurum ve Çevresinde Ermeni Hareketleri (1914–1918)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay, 1996), 52. Its classification number in the Archive of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem (hereafter AAPJ) is Carton 17, File H, Doc. no. 571–72.

<sup>12</sup> AAPJ, Carton 17, File H, Doc. no. 571–72; in the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive in Istanbul, BOA/DH.ŞFR, no. 53/93.

<sup>13</sup> Originally, the IAMM had been established in December 1913 as an office within the Ministry of the Interior. Later this office was transformed by a law on 14 March 1916. The new office, called the Ministry of the Interior's Directorate of Tribes and Immigrants (Aşair ve Muhacirin Müdüriyet Umumiyesi; hereafter AMMU), had expanded authority and was comprised of many suboffices. It would grow in power and influence as the years wore on. More information is found later in this volume.

<sup>14</sup> BOA/DH.ŞFR, no. 54/315, Coded cable from the IAMM to the governors of the Provinces of Adana, Erzurum, Bitlis, Aleppo, Diyarbakır, Damascus, Sivas, Trebizond, Mamuretülaziz (Elazığ), and Mosul; to the president of the Commission on Abandoned Property in Adana and Aleppo; and to the heads of the Provincial Districts (*Mutasarrıflık*) of (Der) Zor, Marash, Canik, Kayseri, and İzmit, dated 5 July 1915; AAPJ, Carton 17, File H, Doc. no. 585.

<sup>15</sup> AAPJ, Carton 7, File H, Doc. no. 635; for its appearance in TV, see issue no. 3540, 5 May 1919. The indictment was read at the trial's first session, which was held on 27 April 1919.

aforementioned testimony of Ottoman Third Army commander Vehip Pasha, which was subsequently published in the Ottoman daily *Vakit*. A copy of the original Ottoman text is also found at the Patriarchate.<sup>16</sup>

Another group of documents, which through comparison with other original documents can be shown to contain firsthand information, is the collection of cabled correspondence between various military functionaries, such as a copy of the 23 July 1915 cable from Colonel Halil Recai, the acting commander of the Fifth Army, to the Office of the (Ottoman) Chiefs of Staff (Başkomandanlık Vekaleti), regarding Armenian activities in Boğazlıyan and environs.<sup>17</sup> Also found there are copies of messages that would play a central role in the conviction and execution of Kemal, the county head (*kaymakam*) of Boğazlıyan. Various documents found in the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive in Istanbul either mention the content of or make reference to these telegraphic communications: many of these were read at various sessions of the Yozgat trials, and copies of them are housed in the Patriarchate's Archive in Jerusalem. That the same reference number of these telegrams is found on all three of these sources must be seen as important corroborating evidence that the contents of the Jerusalem copies are authentic.<sup>18</sup>

*Minutes of the Fifth Department:* The fifth source comprises the minutes of the Ottoman Parliament's Fifth Department (5. Şube), which was formed by the Chamber of Deputies in November 1918 in order to investigate the wartime crimes of Ottoman government members.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The entire text of the testimony was published in *Vakit* on 31 March 1919. Location number in AAPJ: Carton 17, File H, Doc. no. 171–82.

<sup>17</sup> For the original document, see *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi* 31, no. 81 (December 1982): 171, Doc. no. 1835. The location of the copy in the AAPJ is Carton 17, File H, Doc. no. 1794.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of these cables and their contents, see V. N. Dadrian, "Ermeni Soykırımını Faillerinin Türk Askeri Mahkemesinde Yargılanması: Başlıca Dört Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi Davası," in *Ermeni Soykırımında Kurumsal Roller: Toplu Makaleler*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2004), 275–319.

<sup>19</sup> The interrogatory proceedings of the Fifth Department were transcribed by Necmettin Sahir (Silan) Bey and published in book form under the lengthy title *Said Halim ve Mehmed Talat Pashalar Kabinelerinin Divanı Ali'ye sevkleri hakkında Divaniye Mebusu Fuat Bey merhum tarafından verilen takrir üzerine berayı tahkikat kura isabet eden Beşinci Şube tarafından icra olunan tahkikat ve zabt edilen ifadadı muhtevidir* [The Contents of the Investigations and Recorded Testimonies that Were Undertaken by the Fifth Department, Which Was Chosen by Lots to Determine the Truth of the Depositions Given by the Late Deputy for Divaniye, Fuat Bey, in Connection with the Delivering of the {Members of the} Cabinets of Said Halim Pasha and Mehmed Talat Pasha to the {Ottoman} Supreme Court] (Chamber of Deputies, No. 521, Third Electoral Term, Fifth Session) (Istanbul: Istanbul Meclis-i Mebusan



*Minutes of the Ottoman Parliament:* The sixth source comprises the minutes of the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies, which in November and December 1918 was the scene of numerous debates on the subject of the Armenian deportations and killings. These have been romanized and published by the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

*Memoirs:* The seventh and final source comprises the various recollections and memoirs that have appeared recently in Turkey's daily press or that are still awaiting publication.

## THE QUESTION OF THE DESTRUCTION OF INCRIMINATING DOCUMENTS

Among the various groups of documents listed above, those relating to the trials in the Istanbul Court-Martial and the Commission to Investigate (Wartime) Crimes, which was established in November 1918, have disappeared without a trace, and there is no solid information as to their possible fate. In light of the fact that Istanbul came under the control of the Ankara government after November 1922, it is not unreasonable to suppose that all documents and files belonging to the city's Martial Law Command (Sıkıyönetim Komutanlığı) would have been transferred to the offices of the Turkish General Staff (Genelkurmay Başkanlığı). But again, there is no information whether or not these documents are now to be found in the General Staff's Directorate for Military History and Strategic Studies (Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt ve Denetleme Başkanlığı, or ATASE). Due to the tight restrictions that have been put in place, the ATASE archives are as good as closed to most civilian or foreign researchers.<sup>20</sup>

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Matbaası, [1334] 1918). For a more recent publication in Latin letters, see Osman Selim Kocahanoğlu, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Sorgulanması ve Yargılanması* (Istanbul: Temel Yayınları), 1998. The fact that the investigatory proceedings were held in the Fifth Department was not due to any special characteristic that it possessed. Instead, the Ottoman Parliament had a number of "departments," and lots would be drawn to determine which one would perform the function.

<sup>20</sup>My choice of the term "closed" in regard to the ATASE archives derives from the fact that there is very tight control and review of who is allowed to work there. A prime example of this inaccessibility is the lack of so much as a standard request form specific to this archive; those researchers who wish to work there must fill out the form used by the General Staff for hiring nonmilitary personnel. Applicant scholars then find themselves forced to answer dozens of questions entirely unrelated to scholarly research, such as whether or not anyone among their relatives has ever committed a crime—a curious procedure indeed! Furthermore, even after a researcher is granted permission to work in

The figures given below concerning some of the documents contained in the ATASE archives are sufficient to show what a great misfortune it is that these archives remain closed: “The ATASE collections include 41,591 documents on [the] Tripolitanian War of 1911, 902,800 on the Balkan War[s] of 1912–1913, and 3,671,470 on World War I, all of which have a substantial amount of files on military intelligence, in particular on the Teşkilat [SO] agents and its organization. World War I catalogues where a large number of the Teşkilat’s official documents can be found (about 40,000) are arranged according to their departmental files and each file is shortly explained according to their subject.”<sup>21</sup>

Apart from the question marks surrounding the ATASE, there is also some compelling evidence that a number of the documents from this period—including some that would otherwise belong in the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive—have been stolen or destroyed. The frankest accounts regarding this matter are found in the indictment against the leaders of the CUP in the Istanbul Court-Martial. The prosecutor stated that three separate groups of documents had either been destroyed or “carried off” (*aşırılmış*). The first group, which was composed of the documents belonging to the SO, was destroyed. In the indictment during the main trial of the CUP leaders, the prosecution stated that “after investigating the case [it has been determined that] a significant portion of the papers belonging to the Special Organization . . . has been taken.”<sup>22</sup>

The second group consists of the papers belonging to the CUP Central Committee. In the same indictment the prosecution again stated that, “It has been understood that all of the documents and notebooks of the Central Committee [have been] stolen.” Similarly, in various sessions of the trial, witnesses Midhat Şükrü, Küçük Talat, and Ziya Gökalp all testified that the papers of the CUP Central Committee were taken by Central Committee member Dr. Nâzım:

*Chief Judge (Reis):* Since the Committee of Union and Progress was transformed into the Renewal Party (Teceddüd Fırkası) . . .

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the archives—and few are—the tight supervision and control continues throughout his or her time in the archives.

<sup>21</sup> Safi, “The Ottoman Special Organization,” 33.

<sup>22</sup> “Tedkikât-ı vâkıadan bu dâireye [Teşkilât-ı Mahsûsa’ya] âid evrâkdan bir kısım-ı mühimminin . . . aşırılmış,” *TV*, no. 3540, 5 May 1919; the trial’s first session was held on 27 April 1919.

had the documents and other papers previously belonging to the Union and Progress [C]entr[al Committee] also been turned over to the Renewal Party?<sup>23</sup>

*Midhat Şükrü*: Of course, Your Honor. But I unfortunately learned later on that they were taken away by Dr. Nâzım Bey. I heard this from the explanations of [various] functionaries (*memur*).

*Chief Judge*: Had the Renewal Party itself ever looked into this matter?

*Midhat Şükrü*: No, Your Honor. I was questioned about this when the Renewal Party was [first] formed; they called me to the Central Committee, and questions were asked regarding the documents, and there I learned from the functionaries that they had all been taken away by Dr. Nâzım.<sup>24</sup>

Another Central Committee member, Ziya Gökalp, would tell a similar story during his testimony:

*Chief Justice*: Are the things that are said such as this reliable, that the important documents were smuggled out by Dr. Nâzım?

*Ziyâ Gökalp*: I received news from the [party's] General Secretariat that Dr. Nâzım had wanted the documents concerning the history of the committee; I brought them from Europe, and he said that we should preserve them. Take the good ones, he said. Afterward I heard about this from Midhat Şükrü Bey. Later on, when they were brought into custody, I learned that no one was able to sort out the other papers from among them. I later learned that they had brought the documents in a chest, and that they had been taken away in this manner.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The last congress of the CUP opened on 1 November 1918 with a speech by Talat Pasha. On 5 November, the congress declared that the party itself had now come to an end and declared itself defunct, but the creation of a new party, the Renewal Party, was announced at the congress. The organizational structure and property of the CUP was transferred to the new party. At the point of the testimony cited earlier, the presiding judge was interrogating Midhat Şükrü on the question of this transfer. Zeki Sarıhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü: Mondros'tan Erzurum Kongresine*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Öğretmen Yayınları, 1986), 19, 25. For more detailed information on the Renewal Party, see Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. 2, *Mütareke Dönemi* (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1986), 92–138.

<sup>24</sup> TV, no. 3543, 8 May 1919.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

The third group is comprised of some of the papers belonging to the Interior Ministry. In the aforementioned indictment, the following information is given: “It has been proven from the content of the memo of the Esteemed Interior Minister and of his recorded testimony that the former Director of General Security Azîz, who took the files containing important information and reports [from the Interior Ministry] before the resignation of Talât Bey [from the Interior Ministry], did not return them after [the latter’s] retirement.”<sup>26</sup> Further corroboration is found in a number of memoirs from the period that claim that before his flight abroad, Talat Pasha “first [went] to the seaside mansion of a friend . . . on the shores of Arnavutköy. . . . It was reported that these documents were incinerated in the mansion’s basement furnace.”<sup>27</sup>

The Unionists were not the only ones to carry off documents. German officers also took a great many documents with them. On departing to Germany, Hans F. L. von Seekt, who had served in the Ottoman High Command during the war, removed many important records concerning the Ottoman High Command, despite having promised “that he wouldn’t take a single document with him.” In a letter dated 6 November 1918, Grand Vizier İzzet Pasha complained about this situation and demanded the return of the documents, as well as the former Unionist officials then in Germany, chief among them Talat, Enver, and Cemal. Berlin promised—but failed—to repatriate the documents.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, a number of government officials in the provinces were ordered to burn the documents in their possession. For instance, according to the above-mentioned indictment against the CUP leaders, Ali Suat, governor (*mutasarrıf*) of the provincial district of Der Zor, was in-

<sup>26</sup> “Emniyet-i Umûmiye Müdür-i esbakı Azîz Bey’in Talat Bey’in istifâsından evvel dâireden aldığı malûmât ve muhâberât-ı mühimmeye dâir dosyaları inhisâlinden sonra iâde etmediği Dâhiliye Nezâret-i celîlesinin tezkeresi mündericâtı ve şahâdât-ı mazbûta delâletiyle sübût bulunmakta(dır),” *TV*, no. 3540, 5 May 1919.

<sup>27</sup> Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Makedonya’dan Ortaasya’ya Enver Pasha, 1914–1922*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1978), 468.

<sup>28</sup> DE/PA-AA/Türkei 158/21, A48179, Cable from Ahmed İzzet Pasha to the government of Germany (submitted by the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin on 11 November 1918). The German military archive was located in Berlin during World War II. Allied bombings destroyed many of these documents. Regarding the documents taken by Seecks, see also V. N. Dadrian, *German Responsibility in the Armenian Genocide: A Review of the Historical Evidence of German Complicity* (Cambridge, MA: Blue Crane Books, 1996), 159–60.

structed by cable to burn the telegram after reading it.<sup>29</sup> During the Yozgat trial (third session, 10 February 1919), the judge read out the testimony given by the defendant, Boğazlıyan county head (*kaymakam*) Kemal, to the commission of inquiry during his time in custody. Kemal stated that telegrams sent to him had to be destroyed after reading.<sup>30</sup> At a subsequent session on 24 March the presiding judge recalled that Kemal, “in the testimony he gave before the Commission to Investigate [Wartime] Crimes,” said “that he had been given the order to burn some of the documents concerning the deportations after reading them.”<sup>31</sup>

Another bit of information about the annihilation of Armenian deportees upon arrival at their destinations was given by Ahmed Esat (later known as Esat Uras). Esat, who during the war headed the Second Department of the Security Directorate (Emniyeti Umumiye II. Şubesi Müdürü) and was later arrested by the British, said that orders regarding the killing of the deportees were sent via courier to the various provincial governors, and that after being read, the original message was to be given back to the courier.<sup>32</sup>

Ahmed Esat’s account was corroborated by Cemal, the provincial district governor of Yozgat. In his written statement to the aforementioned commission of inquiry, 12 December 1918, Cemal gave the following account: “[CUP Party secretary] Necati Bey came to Yozgat . . . he read out the contents of a letter that he was clutching, written and signed by the provincial governor Atif Bey . . . When I asked for the aforementioned letter from this Necati Bey he would not give it to me.”<sup>33</sup> Cemal would repeat this testimony at the Yozgat trial’s eleventh session, 5 March 1919.<sup>34</sup>

## OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS: “DESTROY AFTER READING”

The evidence of incineration and other methods of destroying documents is not, however, limited to extractions from Istanbul courtroom interrogations and commissions of inquiry. The Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive

<sup>29</sup> *TV*, no. 3540, 5 May 1919; report of the opening session (27 April 1919).

<sup>30</sup> *İkdam*, 11 February 1919.

<sup>31</sup> *Alemdar*, 25 March 1919.

<sup>32</sup> FO 371/4172/31307, report dated 10 February 1919.

<sup>33</sup> AAPJ, Carton 21, File M, Doc. no. 494.

<sup>34</sup> *Renaissance*, 6–7 March 1919.

also holds a number of Interior Ministry communications that recipients were instructed to burn after reading. A coded cable of 22 June 1915, signed by Talat Pasha and sent from the Directorate General of Security to several provincial governors (*vali*), provincial district governors (*mutasarrıf*), and other functionaries, gives a number of orders for the treatment of religious converts among the deportee convoys. The telegram concludes, “inform those who will be executing [the orders] of our communication; take the copy of this cable from the telegraph office and destroy it.”<sup>35</sup>

Another example is the Interior Ministry telegram of 23 June 1915 that instructed the Ottoman officials in Mosul and Der Zor to “resolve this matter personally.” This communication includes several extremely significant directives regarding the resettlement of deported Armenians:

Great care must be taken that in resettling the [arriving] Armenian population they are [broken up] and placed in completely separate locations among the district’s [local] population, that they are not allowed to open Armenian schools in their areas of settlement, but instead that their children are forced to continue to study at government schools, that there be [at least] a five hours’ journey between the various towns and villages that will be established [for them], and that they not be put at [strategic] locations that allow them control [over the surrounding area] or [the possibility of self-]defense.

In conclusion, the local officials are instructed to “destroy the telegram after informing those [who will carry out these tasks].”<sup>36</sup>

As a third and final example, a telegram of 12 July 1915 orders that the “children who most likely, during the transportation and dispatch of those Armenians who were sent to a great many [different] regions, are now without adult guardianship be distributed among the more prominent and honorable people of these towns and areas who are neither Armenians

<sup>35</sup> BOA/DH.ŞFR, no. 54/100, Cipher telegram from interior minister Talat to Cevded Bey, governor of the Province of Van; Cemal Azmi Bey, governor of the Province of Trebizond; Tahsin Bey, governor of the Province of Erzurum; Mustafa Bey, governor of the Province of Bitlis; Sâbit Bey, governor of the Province of Mamuretülaziz; Reşid Bey, governor of the Province of Diyarbekir; Muammer Bey, governor of the Province of Sivas; and Necmi Bey, governor of the Provincial District of Canik, dated 22 June 1915.

<sup>36</sup> BOA/DH.ŞFR, no. 54/122, Cipher telegram from the IAMM to the Province of Mosul and the Provincial District of (Der) Zor, dated 23 June 1915.

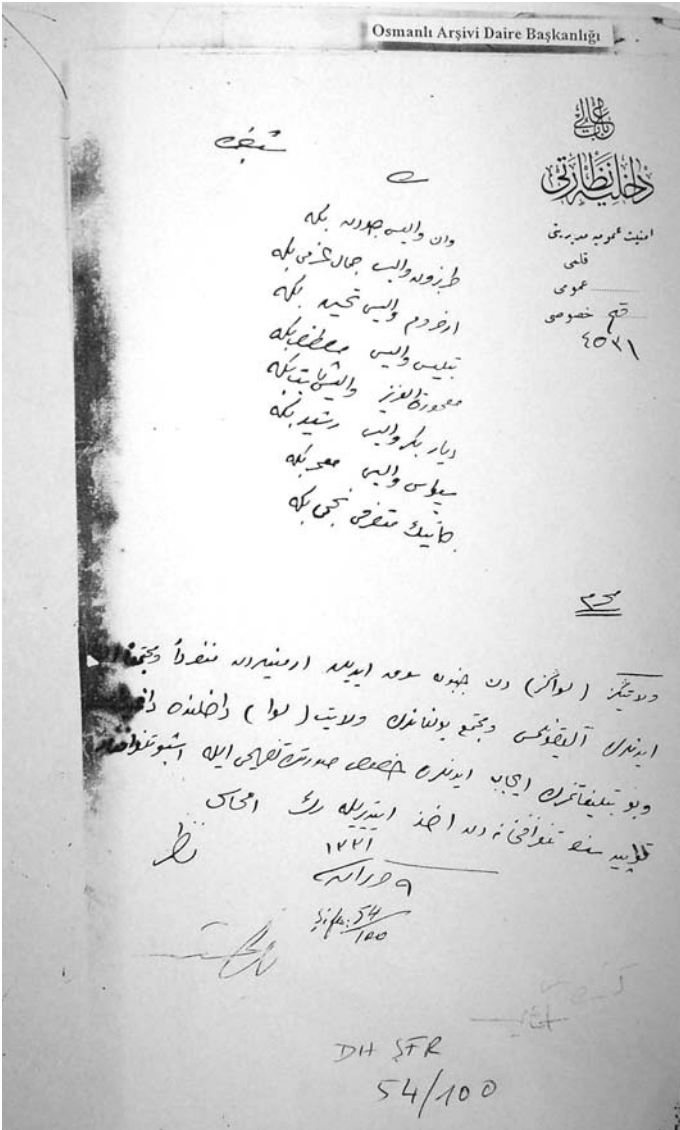


Figure 1.1. Ottoman Document 54/100. Talat’s telegram on 22 June 1915 to several provincial governors (*vall*), provincial district governors (*mutasarraf*), and other functionaries on the issue of religious conversion. It concludes, “Take the copy of this cable from the telegraph office and destroy it.”

nor foreigners, for the purposes [of] their upbringing and education,” and concludes, “it has been ordered that, after having been shown to the necessary persons, this cipher is to be completely destroyed.”<sup>37</sup>

## THE DESTRUCTION OF DOCUMENTS CONTINUES AFTER THE WAR

Attempts to destroy potentially incriminating documents took on a greater intensity once it became clear that the Central powers, including the Ottoman Empire, would lose the war. At the 3 June 1919 session of the court-martial trial of the wartime government ministers, former postal minister Hüseyin Haşim attested to the destruction of documents belonging to the Ministry of War. The exchange between Haşim and the presiding judge went as follows:

*Chief Judge:* In light of the defense testimonies during the questioning of officials in Çatalca to the effect that there had been a general directive while you were in the Postal and Telegraph Ministry regarding the burning or destruction of the original telegraphic communications: do you recall why this order was given?

*Hâşim Bey:* I cannot remember at all. But there was a communiqué from the General Staff Office (Karârgâh-ı Umumî), Your Honor, with the instructions (*tebliğ*) that military communications not fall into enemy hands, and they acted upon it. This [action] then would have been a part of this [overall effort]. One portion, some cables they didn't burn, but tore up instead, or sold [for scrap]. I had only been appointed minister two or three days earlier. The ministry had surrendered all of the accounting officials (*muhâsebe memûrîni*), and they felt that they absolutely had to be burnt. It's likely that this is connected to it, but I cannot remember.

*Chief Judge:* It was only [documents] pertaining to military communication [that were ordered destroyed], is that correct, sir?

<sup>37</sup> BOA/DH.ŞFR, no. 54/411, Cipher telegram from the IAMM to the Provinces of Adana, Aleppo, Diyarbekir, Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Trebizond, Sivas, Hüdavendigâr (Bursa), Edirne, and Mosul, and to the Provincial Districts of İzmit, Canik, Kayseri, Marash, (Der) Zor, and Urfa, dated 12 July 1915.



*Hâşim Bey*: Yes, sir, [only] those pertaining to military communications and nothing else. Communications both within the military and the General Staff Office.<sup>38</sup>

The trial at which the aforementioned exchange took place opened on 4 August 1919 and was actually against the former director of the Post and Telegraph Office Osman Nuri Effendi in Çatalca (one of the “Çatalca officials” mentioned above) for burning documents. In his testimony, the defendant stated: “I burned some papers in accordance with the order that had been given. My superiors, acting on their own authority, said to burn the papers, some from this year, others from that, and therefore so I did so.” There is no information on the ultimate outcome of the trial.<sup>39</sup> According to the Istanbul-based Armenian daily *Zhoghovourt*, Osman Bey admitted that the documents that had been destroyed were connected to the deportations and massacres of Armenians.<sup>40</sup>

The destruction of documents would continue after the Ottoman defeat and into the Armistice period. The resignation of the Talat Pasha government was followed on 14 October 1918 by the formation of a new government under Ahmed İzzet Pasha, who served as grand vizier and minister of war. In one of his first executive acts, İzzet Pasha instructed the Directorate of the SO (in the Ministry of War it was actually given the deceptive name “Office of Eastern Affairs”) to “immediately cease its activities and destroy its archives.”<sup>41</sup> The aforementioned Ahmed Esat gave a similar account to his British interrogators, claiming that “shortly before the armistice agreement [government] functionaries went on various nights into the archival department and cleaned out most of the documents.”<sup>42</sup>

The same process went on outside the imperial capital, as provincial officials were ordered to destroy the documents in their possession. Refik

<sup>38</sup> TV, no. 3573, 12 June 1919. The report is of the 3 June session.

<sup>39</sup> *Alemdar*, 5–6 August 1919.

<sup>40</sup> *Zhoghovourt*, 6 August 1919, cited by V. N. Dadrian, “Documentation of the Armenian Genocide in Turkish Sources,” in *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review*, vol. 2, ed. Israel W. Charny (London: Mansell; New York: Facts on File, 1991), 105.

<sup>41</sup> Hüsamettin Ertürk, “Milli Mücadele Senelerinde Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa” (manuscript) (Ankara: Stratejik Araştırmalar ve Askerlik Tarihi Enstitüsü, n.d.), 14, cited in Bilge Criss, *İşgal Altında İstanbul* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1983), 147.

<sup>42</sup> FO 371/4172/31307, folio 385, report by Heathcote-Smith, dated 4 February 1919.

Halid Karay, who served as director-general of the Post and Telegraph Office during the Armistice period, would years later (1948) publish his memoirs in the journal *Aydede*, where he recalled receiving a lengthy letter from H. Sadık Duran, an official who had served for years in the Post, Telegraph, and Telephone Administration. One section of the letter, which would later appear in the separately published book of his memoirs, says the following:

I wish to recall to Your Eminence an event that I witnessed in this administration during the Armistice period. As you are well aware, following the Mondros Agreement the Entente Powers began to occupy our homeland one at a time by sending their armies into enter our lands from various locations. Since it was feared that during this occupation all of the correspondence and existing documents then housed in the P.T.T. central administrative building and in its provincial provinces might be confiscated, Mehmed Emin Bey sent instructions via telegraph and in the name of the ministry to all of the [provincial and departmental] centers regarding the need to completely destroy all existing official documents, as well as both the originals of telegraph cables and any copies [that had been made].<sup>43</sup>

It appears that some of the aforementioned cables to the provinces that ordered the burning of documents had already fallen into British hands. For instance, on 24 January 1919, the British forces managed to obtain the original of a cable from the Interior Ministry to the province of Antep that requested that the provincial official destroy all original official cables sent to the region from the general mobilization (August 1914) to the present.<sup>44</sup> On 17 June 1919, foreign minister Safa Bey filed a protest of the incident with the Office of the British High Commissioner, in which he acknowledged that a circular from the Diyarbakır Telegraph Administration had instructed the province's district and county centers to destroy the originals of all documents received between 1914 and 1918.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> R. H. Karay, *Minelbab İlelmihrab (Mütareke Devri Anıları)* (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 1992), 271–72.

<sup>44</sup> FO 371/4174/15450, folio 182, as referenced by Dadrian, "Documentation in Turkish Sources," 105.

<sup>45</sup> FO 371/4174/102551, folios 108–11, cited in Dadrian, "Documentation in Turkish Sources," 105.

## INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN DESTROYING DOCUMENTS

Although the destruction of documents was for the most part carried out or directed by government institutions, there were also certain individuals, especially those who had been directly or indirectly involved in the Armenian deportations and massacres, who occasionally took the initiative to “hide the evidence.” CUP Central Committee member from Istanbul Kör Ali İhsan Bey, while on trial at the Ankara Independence Tribunal (İstiklal Mahkemesi) for allegedly attempting to assassinate Mustafa Kemal in İzmir in 1926, admitted during questioning that he had burned all of the documents in his possession.<sup>46</sup> Such frankness was not uncommon, and in succeeding years many people who had acted similarly would recall the fact in their memoirs. To give two examples:

“In response to the encouragements and urgings of members of the rival İtilaf party,<sup>47</sup> both those suspected of crimes during wartime and all the high-level Unionist politicians and functionaries were arrested and tried,” recalled prominent CUP member Ali Münif Bey (later Ali Münif Çetinkaya), the last Unionist minister of public works and a former provincial governor, county head, and provincial administrator. Sought for his role in the deportation operations in Adana Province, he would be turned over to the British for imprisonment on the island of Malta.

But Ali Münif had been warned of his imminent arrest: “They informed me that my house would be searched. Even though I didn’t think that I had left anything important, our house was raided and [I] was arrested on account of a few correspondence papers that they found there.” Regarding these incriminating documents, Ali Münif had the following to say: “In the criminal case that was brought against me regarding the Armenian deportations they attempted to show that I had [been guilty of] incitement in the matter . . . they found in the side pocket of a suitcase the drafts of some telegrams that I had sent from Adana to the

<sup>46</sup> Copy of the unpublished text of the indictment and defense testimonies in the trial of the “İzmir Conspirators” at the Ankara Independence Tribunal, 1926.

<sup>47</sup> Ali Münif is referring here to the Liberty and Concord Party (Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası), which had been outlawed under the Unionists but reemerged in the Armistice period (after October 1918).

Interior Ministry. . . . Although I had in fact destroyed the more important papers in time, I had forgotten this one in the little pocket of the suitcase . . . This document that I had failed to destroy was used against me as proof of my guilt."<sup>48</sup>

The memoirs of Ahmet Rifat Çalıka, the Nationalist government's minister of justice in Ankara during Turkey's War of Independence, were published by his eldest son, Hurşit Çalıka, who observed a striking characteristic of his father:

One aspect that differentiated him from most of the other Turkish intellectuals of his time was that he took daily notes about the events he witnessed and wrote his personal opinions and assessments of them. He did not hesitate to store away some of the documents that came into his possession so that they might be used by the generations that came after him. . . . What a shame that, for reasons that he explains in the introduction of his memoirs that follow, he was later forced to get rid of them or burn them.<sup>49</sup>

The reasons are very clear. Ahmet Rifat had earlier received word that he was being sought by the Istanbul Court-Martial. Furthermore, he had been taken into the special protection of the prosecuting attorney and judge who had questioned him, and the commander of the gendarme regiment commander who would make the arrest. As Rifat Bey recalled:

One day the prosecutor informed me . . . that a cipher telegram arrived at the Provinc[ial Governor's Office stating] that a joint commission would be coming to Kayseri to investigate the deportation [operations of 1915], and that they would be conducting interrogations and criminal investigations of those who appeared suspect, as well as searching houses. We went together to the home of one of my friends from school, where I burned [various] documents and my memoirs.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Taha Toros, *Ali Münif Bey'in Hatıraları* (Istanbul: İsis Yayınları, 1996), 96–97.

<sup>49</sup> Hurşit Çalıka, ed., *Kurtuluş Savaşında Adalet Bakanı Ahmet Rifat Çalıka'nın Anıları* (Istanbul: Printed by editor, 1992), 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 15–16.

## LIMITED SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE REPUBLICAN ERA

In light of the information presented above, it would be wrong to conclude with certainty either that Turkish archival documents have been meticulously preserved up to now or that only “sensitive” or incriminating records have been systematically removed and destroyed. Archival preservation in Turkey presents serious and fundamental problems that extend far beyond this relatively straightforward issue. Reflecting a largely negligent and complacent attitude toward history, the conscious destruction of historical material reveals the existence of a culture, a mind-set, that fails to see the importance of preserving historical artifacts of any kind, documents perhaps least among them.<sup>51</sup>

The journalist Murat Bardakçı, who is known for his works of popular history, has claimed “that of the millions of documents found in the Prime Minister’s Ottoman Archives today, there is not a single useful political document concerning [the last and deposed Ottoman] Sultan Vahideddin,” and added, “[t]he various events [of his life] that are found are the correspondence between the fifth or even tenth degree [keepers of] palace protocol, things such as bestowal of medals and honors, congratulations received on the anniversary of his ascendance to the Ottoman throne or his birthday . . . but the gravest aspect of the whole affair [is] that no one today has any idea where the political documents are that should be in the archives.”<sup>52</sup>

A similar example of apathy and complacency can be seen in the fate of the Trebizond provincial archive, which during World War I was sent for

<sup>51</sup> In the 19 December 2004 edition of the daily *Radikal*, there is a very important piece by Ayşe Hür titled “Another Archive Has Been Destroyed: How Many Is That?” [Bu İmha Edilen Kaçınıcı Arşiv], in which she gives a number of striking examples of how the documents of various archives in Turkey have been unconsciously destroyed or how officials have simply stood by passively and allowed them to be destroyed. In her article Hür does not cite her sources due to the limitations of space and the journalistic format, but the examples that she gives are nevertheless worth repeating from the standpoint of showing just how serious the dimensions of this problem are. I would like to thank Ayşe Hür for providing me with her sources for this information and for sharing this and other information with me.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Mustafa İslamoğlu, “Şahbabanın Kemikleri Sızlamaz mı?,” *Yeni Şafak*, 10 February 1999.

safekeeping to Samsun in the interior. Having survived the Russian occupation of Trebizond, it was returned to Trebizond after the Armistice, but in 1982 this five-hundred-year-old archive was “accidentally” dumped at sea!<sup>53</sup> In Konya, the provincial seat of central Anatolia since early Ottoman times, there is unfortunately no longer a provincial archive that stretches back into the Ottoman period because in 1987, seventy-six truckloads of archival documents were removed without any attempt at a scholarly or methodical inventory and then sent to SEKA, a state-owned cellulose and paper manufacturing enterprise.<sup>54</sup>

Likewise, in 1931 the Registry Office of Istanbul sold some fifty tons of Ottoman-era records from the Finance Ministry Archives to Bulgaria for “three kuruş [or kurush], ten para per *okka*.”<sup>55</sup> The documents were transferred by open-bed truck to the Sirkeci train station, leaving in their wake a long, steady stream of paper blowing across Sultan Ahmed (Gülhane) Park. The debris was collected by garbagemen and dumped into the ocean off the shore of Istanbul’s Kumkapı district.<sup>56</sup>

In 2000, Turkish newspapers reported that Ottoman-era documents, as well as the papers of various religious and charitable trusts and pious foundations (*evkaf*)—including the Haremeyn Foundation established by Sultan Beyazid II—had been retrieved by individual citizens from the trash heaps of SEKA.<sup>57</sup> Exactly who ordered these papers sent to SEKA remains a mystery, for not a single inquiry or investigation was undertaken in response to the affair, although it may be fairly assumed that their preservation was the responsibility of the Istanbul Regional Directorate for Charitable Foundations (Istanbul Vakıflar Bölge Müdürlüğü).

<sup>53</sup> Dr. Yusuf Küçükdağ, faculty member at Selçuk University’s Turkish Research Center, quoted in Enis Berberoğlu, “Dünü unutmaya yoksa soyulursun,” *Hürriyet*, 26 June 1998.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. SEKA (Selüloz ve Kâğıt Fabrikaları, or Cellulose and Paper Factories) was privatized in the 1990s and 2000s. See A. Erinç Yeldan, “Assessing the Privatization Process in Turkey: Implementation, Politics and Performance Results,” *Global Policy Network*, 12 April 2006, [http://www.gpn.org/research/privatization/priv\\_turkey\\_en.pdf/](http://www.gpn.org/research/privatization/priv_turkey_en.pdf/).

<sup>55</sup> One *okka* is 1.2 kilograms; one ton is 1,000 kilograms. In 1930 one American dollar was worth 2 liras 12 kurush. In the end the Turkish government gained about one hundred thousand dollars from this sale.

<sup>56</sup> *Bulgaristan’a satılan evrak ve cumhuriyet dönemi arşiv çalışmaları* (Ankara: Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1993); Necati Aktaş and Seyit Ali Kahraman, *Bulgaristan’daki Osmanlı Evrakı* (Ankara: n.p., 1994), xvii; Also see Doç. Dr. Fethi Gedikli, “Osmanlı Devletinin kuruluşunun 700. yılında Osmanlı Arşivlerinin Durumu,” [www.osmanli.org.tr/web/makaleler/017.asp-43k](http://www.osmanli.org.tr/web/makaleler/017.asp-43k).

<sup>57</sup> “Osmanlı Arşivi’nin Belgeleri Kâğıt Yapılsın Diye SEKA’ya Gönderildi,” *Yeni Şafak*, 17 June 2000.

This disregard of the nation's own history has at times reached such proportions as to become state policy. In 1934 a regulation, "On the Destruction of Papers and Documents Whose Preservation is Unnecessary,"<sup>58</sup> foresaw the destruction of all government documents more than ten years old. After a seemingly endless correspondence between the central state organizations and their provincial branches over the method of destruction (which had not been specified in the regulation), it was decided that those documents that had once been confidential but had since lost any relevance or importance would be sold to paper merchants.<sup>59</sup> In 1939 this process was suspended due to the chaotic manner of its implementation, and in 1957 a new "Destruction Law" superseded the old regulation. Yet here again the administration and implementation of the new law were so uneven and chaotic as to render enforcement impossible, and in 1959 it was revoked on the grounds that the Finance Ministry was unable to allocate payments for the destruction of the papers. The number of governmental and quasi-governmental units that eliminated their own archives, as well as the number of documents scrapped in the process, are literally countless, for there are no surviving records to bear witness to the scope, let alone the content, of such wholesale destruction.<sup>60</sup>

Anecdotally, it has been claimed that in the period between the revocation of the Destruction Law (1959) and the 1980s, some seventeen governmental or government-affiliated institutions destroyed their own documents with the permission of the Turkish Grand National Assembly.<sup>61</sup> Orhan Koloğlu, the former director of Printing and Publications (1974, 1978–79), recalled on a television talk show that while in office, he had requested archival research in the repositories of all speeches, official statements, and proclamations made since the War of Independence, but he

<sup>58</sup> "Muhafazasına Lüzum Kalmayan Evrak ve Vesaitin İmhasına Dair," *Resmi Gazete*, no. 2820, 4 October 1934.

<sup>59</sup> "Resmi dairelerde lüzumsuz kâğıtların ne suretle yok edileceğine dair olan 1282 sayılı nizamnamenin tefsirine dair kararname," *Resmi Gazete*, no. 2913, 26 January 1935.

<sup>60</sup> Prof. Dr. Oğuz İçimsoy, "Özelleştirme uygulamaları ve özelleştirilen kamu kuruluşlarının arşivleri," paper given at the panel on "Privatization and Institutional Archives" [Özelleştirme ve Kurum Arşivleri] hosted by the Foundation for the Economic and Social History of Turkey [Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı], October 1998.

<sup>61</sup> Atilla Çetin, "TBMM Hükümeti'nin, Osmanlı Devlet Arşivi ve Mülga Sadâret Evrakının Muhafazası Hakkında Aldığı Kararlara Ait Bazı Belgeler," *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi* (Special Issue in Memory of Professor Tayyib Gökbilgin) 12 (1981–82): 593–610.

was told that all such documents had been transferred from the archives to SEKA “when they had changed buildings.”<sup>62</sup>

After the 1980 military coup, another thorough “housecleaning” was undertaken, ostensibly to help meet the state’s need for paper, as well as to free more space in the institutions that held archival documents. Even so, it has become painfully apparent that this cleansing was carried out first and foremost with an eye toward the ideological concerns of the country’s new leaders. Purged during this period, according to former Turkish Grand National Assembly speaker Hüsametdin Cindoruk, were all of the archives of the Republican Peoples’ Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi), which had single-handedly ruled and laid its imprint on Turkey for the first quarter century of the republic’s existence (1923–50); a significant portion of the archives of its rival and ruling successor parties for much of the 1960s and 1970s, the Democrat (Demokrat) and Justice (Adalet) parties; all of the minutes of the Turkish Senate, the upper house in existence from 1960 to 1980; and a portion of the minutes of the Independence Tribunals that operated from the War of Independence through the 1920s. All had been shipped off to SEKA.<sup>63</sup>

Likewise, the archives of the Office of the General Staff’s Directorate for Military History and Strategic Studies underwent a major cleanup after the 1980 coup. A historian who knew Arabic and Ottoman Turkish was summoned to the Turkish General Staff to help sort through the papers. “We read the documents in the General Staff Headquarters and the officer who was directing us would then, on the basis of our translations, classify the documents as either ‘harmful’ or ‘harmless,’” the historian confided to me. “Those documents classified as ‘harmful’ were subsequently destroyed. I rescued a great many documents from destruction during this time by managing to have them classified as ‘harmless.’”

This pattern of wholesale disregard for its own posterity is characteristic of an authoritarian institutional culture that tends to evaluate history and historical documents as potential “threats” that may, in some cases, need to be destroyed. Finding no inherent value in preserving its own past, Turkish officialdom prefers to get rid of it. No wonder, then, that an

<sup>62</sup> I originally heard Koloğlu make this statement on television, and he later confirmed it during a phone conversation with me on 28 January 2005.

<sup>63</sup> “Devlet arşivi imha ediliyor; Cumhuriyet tarihi yazılamayacak,” *Zaman*, 17 June 2002.



Office for the Administration of the Archives of the Republic was established as late as 1976, that professional education in the art of archiving was begun only at the university level, and that a professional association of archivists was established as late as 1988. To this day in Turkey, no legislation authorizes the creation of a national archive, the obstacles to the institutionalization of the country's archives have yet to be resolved, and the directors of existing archives are forced to operate according to the restrictive regulations of the Prime Minister's Office.<sup>64</sup>

## HOW SHOULD THE DOCUMENTS FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES BE EVALUATED?

In the wake of successive archival housecleanings and the wholesale destruction of documents, there is little reason to hope that either the Prime Ministry's State Archives or those of ATASE will yield much more illuminating information on the events of 1915. As if the wholesale destruction of documents were not enough to dampen the researcher's ardor, the publication by the General Directorate of the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive of a series of well-ordered collections containing "all" of the documents and records on the Armenian question—and, coincidentally enough, *all* that would appear to reinforce the Turkish government's official version of Ottoman and Turkish history—is reason enough to view the Ottoman archives and their administration with a wary eye.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, some scholars of the period have concluded that supposedly Ottoman documents have been fabricated in order to obscure what happened. In the words of Vahakn N. Dadrian, "a closer scrutiny of the facts suggests, however, that the material thus made available is not only suspect but unreliable."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Fahrettin Özdemirci, "Arşivlerimizin Kurumsal Yapılanma Gereksinimleri," [http://80.251.40.59/humanity.ankara.edu.tr/odemirci/diger\\_sayfa\\_metinleri/fo/arsivmekanlari.pdf](http://80.251.40.59/humanity.ankara.edu.tr/odemirci/diger_sayfa_metinleri/fo/arsivmekanlari.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> Some examples of the collections published by the Prime Minister's State Archives are T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler (1915–1920)* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1995); *Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Kafkaslar'da ve Anadolu'da Ermeni Mezâlimi [Armenian Violence and Massacre in the Caucasus and Anatolia based on Archives]*, 4 vols. (1: 1906–1918; 2: 1919; 3: 1919–1920; 4: 1920–1922) (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1995–1998); *Ermeniler Tarafından Yapılan Katliam Belgeleri [Documents on Massacre Perpetrated by Armenians]*, 2 vols. (1: 1914–1919; 2: 1919–1921) (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 2001).

<sup>66</sup> V. N. Dadrian, "Ottoman Archives and Denial of the Armenian Genocide," in *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, ed. Richard Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 280. It should be stressed here that the reason for the suspicion and mistrust expressed by Dadrian and

Over time two main camps have formed with regard to the reliability of the Ottoman archives, and especially the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive in Istanbul. Not surprisingly, these two camps have largely mirrored the two main positions on the events of 1915: those who believe in the Turkish official version of the Armenian deportations tend to view the documents in the Ottoman archives as the only reliable source, while dismissing foreign archival material, such as that from Germany, Austria, and the United States, as inherently biased and untrustworthy. In contrast, a significant group among those academics who claim that the events of 1915 constitute a genocide look upon the foreign archival material as far more reliable, given the problems of strict government control, the many cases of destroyed and missing documents, and limited access to the Ottoman archives. I maintain that this latter position is sorely lacking, and that the issue ought to be reconsidered; in fact, a complete reassessment of the Ottoman documents now available is sorely needed. It is utterly wrongheaded to view all available Ottoman documents as having been fabricated to cover up the crimes of 1915. On the contrary, even after the various housecleanings and, quite possibly, deliberate sterilizations of the Ottoman archives, the material remaining therein nevertheless contains ample information that fundamentally contradicts the official version of events long proffered by the Turkish government and its allies.

In the first place, a complete purge of all potentially “damaging” archival materials is virtually inconceivable. Certainly, for an institution such as the CUP Central Committee, the destruction of party archives is not difficult to achieve, but for a vast, multibranch, and far more complex organization like the Ottoman Interior Ministry, with its constant, voluminous correspondence among the myriad divisions and departments of its central apparatus, as well as between the center and its dozens of provincial and subprovincial representatives, such a task would be well-nigh impossible. The redundancy inherent in bureaucratic government ensures a vast amount of duplication, copies, and returned and attached correspondence, all of which greatly decrease the likelihood that the simple removal of specific papers and documents from a single branch would solve the problem.

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other scholars is not unfounded. For more on the question of suspicious “manufactured” documents, see “The Defeat at Sarikamis: A Turning Point,” in chapter 6 in this volume.

Second, it should be stated that the decision or decisions to carry out the deportations and massacres of the Armenian population of the empire were fundamentally made by the CUP Central Committee. As will be shown below, the Committee (later Party) of Union and Progress developed the dual-track mechanism that it used during the deportations, whereby government channels were employed only for correspondence on the “official” dimensions of the deportations (i.e., deportation orders, dates of assembling and setting out, destinations, etc.). Orders concerning the annihilation of the deportees were sent to the relevant provinces by private channels, chief among them the Unionists’ so-called responsible secretaries. In addition, the planners of these massacres meticulously ensured that no written documentation of the crimes would be left behind.

When this fact is added to the aforementioned instances of document destruction, it becomes necessary to conclude that the likelihood of discovering clear, unambiguously incriminating documents in the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive is small indeed. Nevertheless, it must also be remembered that while the orders for annihilation and their execution may have taken place within the confines of the Unionist Party apparatus, the deportation itself was official Ottoman policy, and all the wheels of government were put into gear in order to carry it out. During the course of such a massive operation, thousands of pieces of written correspondence were exchanged between the highest offices and their provincial functionaries, and between these provincial branches and the very smallest subdistricts and townships within their jurisdiction. It is completely reasonable to assume that at least some of this written correspondence is still in existence somewhere and contains clear “inside” information about the details and manner of the deportations and massacres. This, in fact, is one of this book’s central claims, and I will attempt to show that the information in the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive clearly points in the direction of a deliberate Ottoman government policy to annihilate its Armenian population.