International

Talaat Pasha's Black Book documents his

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

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

by Ara Sarafian

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

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

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

Ottoman archives

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

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

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

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

A handwritten book

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

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

The state perspective

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

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

These statistics are supposed to reflect:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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campaign of race extermination, 1915–17

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

Questions answered

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

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

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

The Der Zor massacres of 1916

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

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

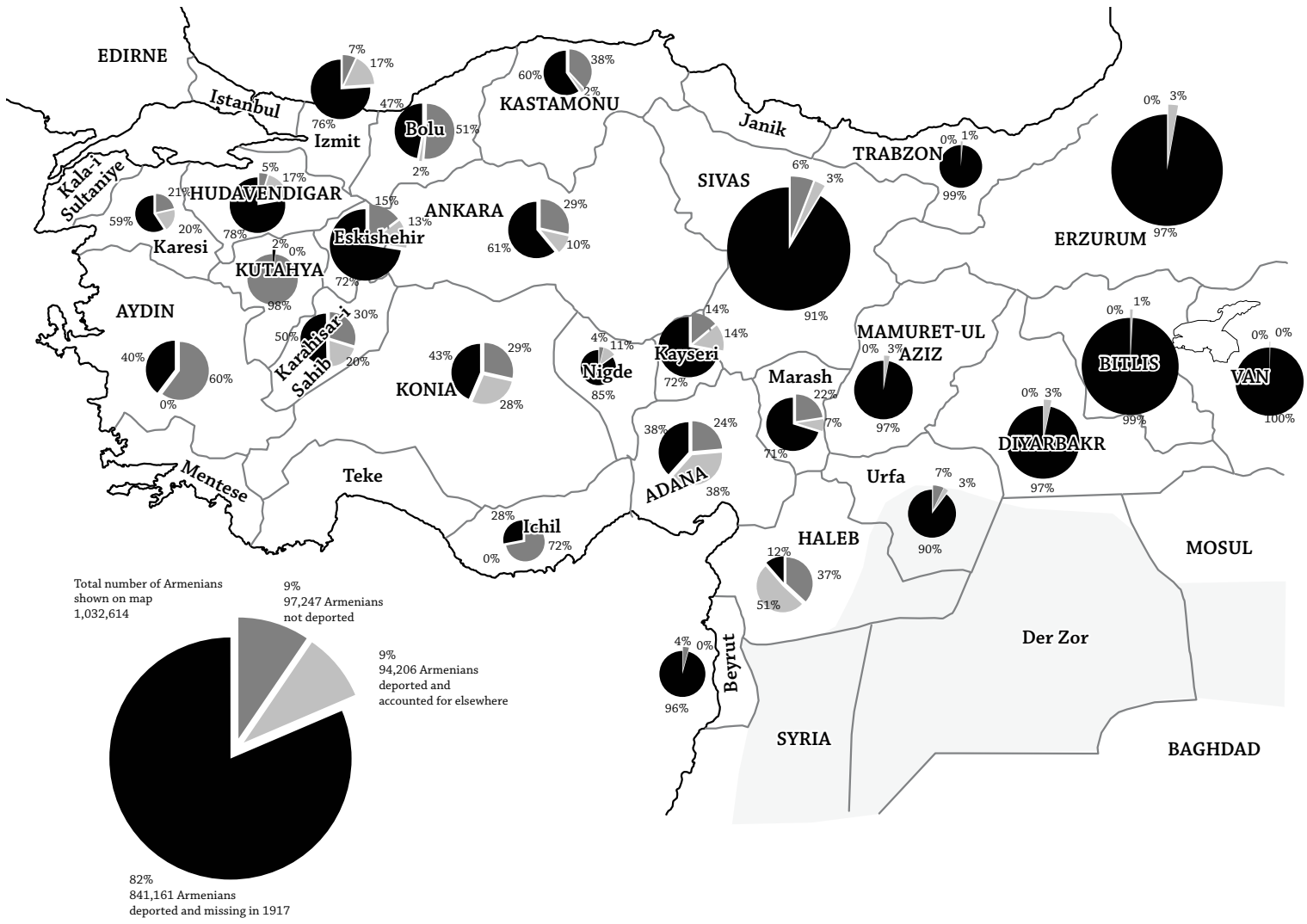
Population totals

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

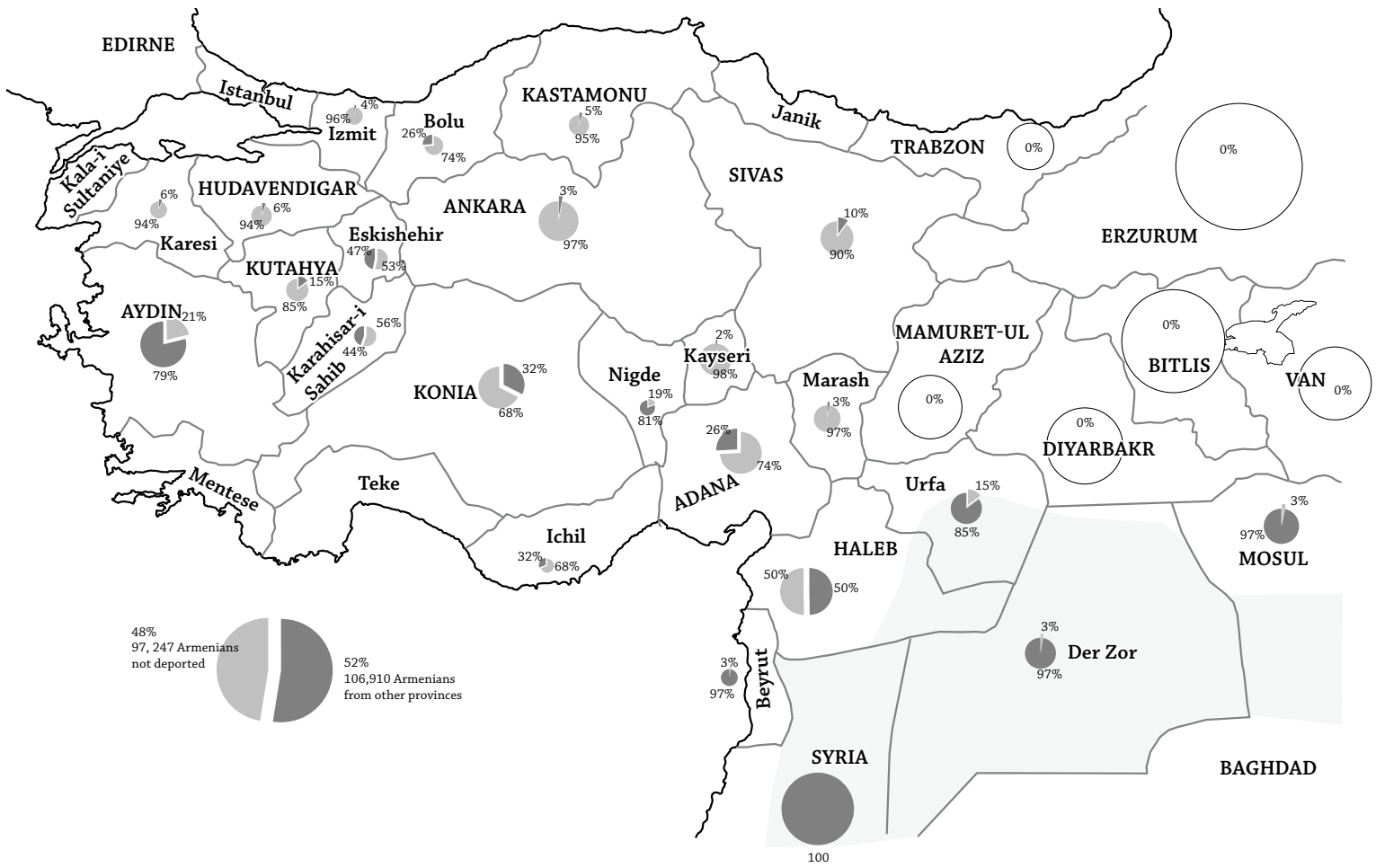
The Black Book cites official figures from the 1914 Ottoman population survey, with a note explaining that this figure, like the figures for Armenians registered in 1917, should be increased by a factor of 30 percent to account for undercounting.

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

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



In this map of the Ottoman Empire in 1917, the circles represent the Armenian population of each administrative vilayet (all caps) or sanjak, according to the 1914 census. The proportion of the Armenian population deported and missing in 1917 according to Talaat's Black Book is shown in black. The proportion not deported is shown in dark gray. The proportion of deportees accounted for elsewhere (e.g., in Syria) is shown in light gray. The circles are not strictly proportional; thus the population of Sivas was more than 10 times the population of Konya, but to keep the map legible, the circle for Sivas is not drawn 10 times larger than the circle for Konya. Map prepared with Grigor Hakobyan © 2009 Ara Sarafian.



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