

# THE BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY BLUE BOOK AND THE DENIAL OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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NOTE: The following is the paper I prepared and presented at the above symposium. It is composed of the actual paper I had prepared beforehand, as well as some of the commentary I inserted upon delivery. In my presentation I skipped some of the lengthy citations because of time constraints .

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I think we all agree that there was an empire-wide deportation programme aimed at Ottoman Armenians in 1915. However, we disagree about key aspects of these deportations: (a) What were the causes for these deportations? Were they ideological in essence or were they necessary security measures?; (b) What was the nature of the implementation of deportations? Was the massive death toll and abuse part of the criminal destruction of civilian communities or was it the consequence of wartime conditions?; and (c) What were the actual results of these deportations? How many people were killed? What were the experiences of survivors and other living victims, including those who were forced to convert and forfeit their identities as Armenians?

My paper primarily concerns the 1916 British Parliamentary Blue Book entitled *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16* and the centrality of American records for our understanding of the Blue Book and the events of 1915.<sup>2</sup> I will also address some issues raised by my colleagues at this symposium so far regarding British and American archival records.

### The 1916 Blue Book and Denial of Armenian Genocide

Why did I decide to address the Blue Book at this symposium? One reason is that, many commentators, including some at this symposium, have claimed that the Blue Book represents the root paradigm of the Armenian Genocide thesis as we know it today, and that this thesis was essentially a British propaganda fabrication that did not have intellectual integrity.<sup>3</sup>

The accusations leveled against the Blue Book by these commentators vary from claims that the 1916 publication was a complete fabrication (the documents therein were made up) to one that it was a substantially partisan work which relied on eyewitness accounts of little intellectual value.<sup>4</sup>

However, I maintain that these critics of the Blue Book have actually made their case by withholding information that is relevant to the debates that they themselves have raised, and they have introduced

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1. This paper is based on the paper I presented at Istanbul University Symposium on Future of Turkish-Armenian Relations (15-17 March 2006). It appears here with minor changes and with the addition of some additional footnotes. I agreed to participate at the symposium in good faith because I wanted to allow the possibility of public dialogue about the Armenian Genocide in Turkey. The symposium did not result in any extended dialogue—as its proceedings will show—but it was an important step in that direction. Until recently, the Armenian issue has been a proscribed subject in Turkey and I hope this symposium will prove to be the beginning of a new era.

2. My academic work related to these issues can be examined in James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee (Ara Sarafian, ed., intro. And annot.) *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16 [uncensored edition]*, (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute 2005); Ara Sarafian (ed.) and Eric Aveybury (foreword), *British Parliamentary Debates on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1918*, (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute) 2003; Ara Sarafian (comp., ed. and intro) *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917*, (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute) 2004; Henry Morgenthau (Ara Sarafian comp. and intro.), *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau, 1913-1916*, (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute) 2004.

misleading or outright false information about the work itself. I believe that one can make a very strong case against such deniers of the integrity of the Blue Book. In fact, I believe I have done so in a critical annotated re-publication of that work, first published in the year 2000 and then 2005. To date I have not seen a single critical review of my own work on the Blue Book and I look forward to such reviews in the future.<sup>5</sup>

So, what was the Blue Book about? First of all, the Blue Book was published at the end of 1916, not 1915, when one might have expected such a work to appear were it a “propaganda fabrication” as claimed. The compilation of the Blue Book in 1916 was actually undertaken under very difficult circumstances. After all, the British were at war with Ottoman Turkey. They had no representatives or nationals in the Ottoman Empire, and it was difficult to get reliable information about Armenians. Nevertheless, the Blue Book eventually included over 150 reports, including a substantial number of eye-witness accounts. According to the Blue Book, these accounts showed the systematic nature of a campaign to destroy Ottoman Armenians. The work argued that Ottoman authorities vilified and disarmed Armenians as a targeted group. Then Ottoman authorities arrested and killed community leaders in the initial stages of deportations, and then began deporting remaining Armenian populations in towns and villages throughout the Ottoman Empire.

The deportation of Armenian women, children and the elderly were accompanied by wanton abuse and in many cases large scale massacres. The British pointed out that these killings took place while the victims were in the custody of the Ottoman state—in the form of bureaucrats who identified and arranged deportations, gendarmes who accompanied these convoys, as well as irregular forces who did much of the killing. Ottoman officials also superintended the decimation of entire convoys of deportees on their way to resettlement camps.

The Blue Book argues that most Armenian conscripts in the Ottoman army were also disarmed, worked to death in labour battalions, or killed outright. According to the British report, by the summer of 1916, about 600,000 Armenians were probably killed, with a large number left in Syria and its environs.<sup>6</sup>

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3. The grandest manifestation of this position has been a letter to the British Houses of Parliament, signed by all members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The main spokesperson for this letter is Sükrü Elekdağ. In this latest position Elekdağ amalgamates and embellishes many familiar arguments against the Blue Book that are simply untrue. I already addressed most of these arguments in my own critical work, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16 [uncensored edition]*, when the 1<sup>st</sup> edition came out in the year 2000.

Elekdağ has also been criticised in the pages of the Turkish daily *Radikal* by a number of Turkish academics. The Turkish translation of the critical edition of the Blue Book includes such criticism by Taner Akçam and Ayhan Aktan from the pages of *Radikal*. Regarding the TGNA's latest letter, I have already critiqued it in a report, which should be published by the Gomidas Institute shortly.

4. See Sarafian, *The Treatment of Armenians [uncensored edition]*, p. x.

5. I believe my critical edition of the Blue Book has itself become the object of “denial”, where critics have simply ignored it, rather than critique it in an objective manner. This is astounding and cowardly given the systematic campaign unleashed against the Blue Book recently.

6. See Sarafian, *The Treatment of Armenians [uncensored edition]*, p. 647.

The subsequent report was published in the British Parliamentary Blue Book series and proved to be a powerful indictment against the Ottoman authorities. British authorities made good propaganda use of this report for their own political purposes.<sup>7</sup>

### The Blue Book, the Archival Records and the Catalogue of Denial

What was the intellectual substance of the Blue Book 1916? First of all, the Blue Book gave a very good account of itself and how it was put together by Arnold Toynbee and James Bryce. Secondly, when the Blue Book was published, it was accompanied by a confidential key that provided additional information about the main work. Toynbee stated that such a key existed in the Blue Book itself.<sup>8</sup> The Blue Book and the key actually gave detailed information of how documents were collected, where they came from, who the sources and intermediaries were, as well as the identities of individuals whose names had to be concealed because they were still in the Ottoman Empire at that time. So, there has been a full record of the Blue Book available since 1916, and this information has been in the public domain at least for the past 40 years (e.g. in reprints of the Blue Book,<sup>9</sup> the Toynbee Papers<sup>10</sup> at the British National Archives, or the declassified State Department records at the National Archives<sup>11</sup> in Washington DC). So, any criticism of the Blue Book has to take account of the key, as well as the book itself. However, deniers of the Blue Book do not acknowledge the existence of this key and make the false claim that the 1916 work withheld information about sources in order to avoid critical appraisal. They also use this ruse to criticize the British work under the guise of speculation and outright falsehoods.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, the original copy of the Blue Book, as well as the correspondence that went into compiling it, are still at the British National Archives, in the Toynbee Papers. If one looks in the Toynbee papers, one can track where the documents compiled in the Blue Book came from, the criteria used for the acceptance of these materials as genuine or worthwhile records, and how the British thesis on the Armenian Genocide was constructed from these materials. These archival records, which are directly related to appraising the integrity of the Blue Book, have been available for decades but they have been publicly disregarded by deniers of the Armenian Genocide.

If one looked at the above records, one can readily see that critical information in British hands about the treatment of Ottoman Armenians came from the United States. It was the United States of

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7. The TGNA contends that because the Blue Book was used for propaganda purposes, it had to be a forgery. Of course this line of reasoning is a *non sequitor*. The thrust of the Blue Book was based on very compelling evidence and good argumentation. It was also used for effective propaganda purposes for the same reasons.

8. See Toynbee's introduction to the Blue Book, Sarafian, *The Treatment of Armenians [Uncensored Edition]*, p. 37

9. *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16*, (Beyrouth: G. Doniguian and Sons) 1968, 1979

10. British National Archives (previously Public Record Office), Kew. FO 96 (Toynbee Papers)

11. United States National Archives, Record Group 59, Internal Affairs of States, decimal file number 867.4016/307, 309

America, a neutral power until April 1917, which, starting in October 1915 leaked information about atrocities against Armenians to the outside world. The British simply traced these sources back to their originals and then made good use of them in compiling their report.<sup>13</sup> Toynbee was meticulous how he used such materials, often asking additional questions from communicants, and only then using such information in the Blue Book. There is a clear records between the Ottoman Empire and the United States, and the United States and the United Kingdom, with the National Archives in Washington DC at the centre of our inquiry.<sup>14</sup> Deniers of the Blue Book, who have cited these archival sources, have chosen to remain silent about the content of these archives.

Any criticism of the Blue Book has to take account of this archival trail associated with it, as well as the published documentation that pertains to the work itself. Deniers of the Blue Book, some of whom cite the Toynbee Papers in their bibliographies, also do not disclose the content of these relevant materials as a matter of course. This is why I term these authors “deniers” of the Armenian Genocide.

### United States Documents

What about American documentation related to the Armenian Genocide? Yesterday we had a paper on this subject from Kemal Çiçek, and I do not think he did his subject justice when he understated the importance of American records. I'd like to disagree with him and stress why I think US documents on the Armenian issue are so important—especially as they are linked to the British understanding of events in the Ottoman Empire in 1916 and the compilation of the Blue Book. First of all, the US was a neutral power for much of the First World War as I mentioned before. Secondly, the United States had representatives in the interior of Ottoman Turkey, in places like Trabzon, Samsun, Harpout, Aleppo, Mersin, Damascus and Baghdad. These American consuls communicated with the outside world and sent information about their surrounding areas. The key consulates for our purposes were Harpout and Aleppo, though one could also add Trabzon. Harpout was important because it was in an area with a very large Armenian population. Harpout was also along one of the main deportation routes so that Americans and other observers could see the passage of deportees

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12. It is significant that most of the first tier of deniers, who serve as a reference for a second tier of deniers-through-citation, actually include the Toynbee Papers at the British National Archives or United States Department of State records related to the persecution of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire (e.g. Record Group 59) in their bibliographies. E.g. Salahi Sonyel, Justin McCarthy, Mim Kemal Öke, Kamuran Gürün, Heath Lowry. Only recently has one denier of the integrity of the Blue Book, Justin McCarthy, reportedly “discovered” the confidential key to the Blue Book in British archives. Of course this “discovery” was contrived, as the key was never lost but part of the public record. Indeed, an examination of McCarthy’s work shows that he has scrutinized both the Toynbee papers and relevant United States records containing copies of the key to the Blue Book. McCarthy’s “discovery” was undoubtedly forced by my discussion of deniers in the uncensored edition of the Blue Book, which first appeared in the year 2000. Sukru Elekdag repeated McCarthy’s “discovery” of the key to the Blue Book in his paper at the Istanbul University symposium.

13. See copy of the Committee on Armenian Atrocities press release of October 4th in *British Parliamentary Debates on the Armenian Genocide*, Appendix II, pp. 61-90.

14. See F.O. 96/205-11 (Toynbee Papers, six boxes), British National Archives, Kew.

from further north, such as those from Erzeroum and Erzinjan. We have a number of such reports which were sent to the State Department in Washington DC about the treatment of Armenians in these convoys. Some of these records ended up in the British Blue Book.

I disagree with Kemal Çiçek, who doubts the value of such eyewitness accounts as creditable documents, but these are differences which we can resolve in good time. Addressing such issues is the purpose of a symposium such as this one. I have already put my cards on the table regarding this issue through my publications.<sup>15</sup> I invite serious criticism from scholars and deniers who disagree with me.

### Harpout Plain: A Case Study

So, what does Consul Leslie Davis say about what he saw in the Harpout region? First of all, Davis personally observed the passage of Armenian deportees through the Harpout plain from further north. He observed and reported the condition of these deportation convoys. The fact that there were few men in these caravans, that the remaining convoys of mainly women, children and the elderly were force marched, in dire straits, starving, and already dying in large numbers on their way to ostensible “resettlement zones” is highly significant. Davis talked to victims of massacres, and perhaps most important of all, he personally investigated locations where mass murders were allegedly taking place. He visited these locations, after he heard about such killings from survivors who came back to Harpout.<sup>16</sup>

Where were these locations? Harpout happened to be near a major location where thousands of Armenians were taken and murdered. One of these locations was on the shores of Lake Goljuk, Lake Hazar today. Davis made at least two trips to this region, and he gave a very detailed account of what he saw. Others joined him on these trips, such as his consular cavasses and Dr. Atkinson. I would like to give two lengthy examples of the quality of documentation that is available on the Armenian Genocide from Leslie Davis. My first chosen document is dated 11 July 1915 and written by Consul Leslie Davis. The original report is still available today,<sup>17</sup> and one can see the same report in the Blue Book.<sup>18</sup> This report gives a good impression of the type of critical information that was sent to the United States from the interior of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>19</sup> It should not be surprising that such

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15. James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee (Ara Sarafian ed., intro. and annotations), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon by Viscount Bryce [Uncensored Edition]*, 2nd ed., (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute) 2005; Ara Sarafian and Eric Aveybury, *British Parliamentary Debates on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1918*, (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2005.; *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau, 1913-1916* (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2004) and Ara Sarafian (comp., ed. and intro.), *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1917* (Gomidas Institute: Princeton and London, 2004).

16. Davis seems to have heard about these massacres from American and other missionaries who ran a local hospital in the Harpout Plain. Maria Jacobsen, *Diaries of a Danish Missionary. Harpoot, 1907-1919*, (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute) 2001; Tacy Atkinson, *The German, the Turk and the Devil Made a Triple Alliance: Harpoot Diaries, 1908-1917*, (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute) 2000

17. National Archives, RG59, decimal file 867.4016/127. For a copy of the original document, see Ara Sarafian, *United States Records...*, pp. 140-144

18. Document number 65, where the key to the blue book identified the source as US Consul Leslie Davis.

reports alarmed recipients such as Ambassador Morgenthau in the Ottoman capital or State Department officials in Washington DC. Davis' description also clearly points to the protracted and intense nature of the abuses suffered by Armenians at the hands of Ottoman officials.

If it were simply a matter of being obliged to leave here to go somewhere else it would not be so bad, but everyone knows it is a case of going to one's death. If there was any doubt about it, it has been removed by the arrival of a number of parties, aggregating several thousand people, from Erzeroum and Erzingan. The first ones arrived a day or two after my last report was written. I have visited their encampment a number of times and talked with some of the people. A more pitiable sight cannot be imagined. They were almost without exception ragged, filthy, hungry and sick. That is not surprising in view of the fact that they have been on the road for nearly two months with no change of clothing, no chance to wash, no shelter and little to eat. The Government has been giving them some scanty rations here. I watched them one time when their food was brought. Wild animals could not be worse. They rushed upon the guards who carried the food and the guards beat them back with clubs hitting hard enough to kill them sometimes. To watch them one could hardly believe that these people were human beings.

As one walks through the camp mothers offer their children and beg one to take them. In fact, the Turks have been taking their choice of these children and girls for slaves, or worse. In fact, they have even had their doctors there to examine the more likely girls and thus secure the best ones.

There are very few men among them, as most of them have been killed on the road. All tell the same story of having been attacked and robbed by the Kurds. Most of them were attacked over and over again and a great many of them, especially the men, were killed. Women and children were also killed. Many died, of course, from sickness and exhaustion on the way and there have been deaths each day that they have been here. Several different parties have arrived and after remaining a day or two have been pushed on with no apparent destination. Those who have reached here are only a small portion, however, of those who started. By continuing to drive these people on in this way it will be possible to dispose of all of them in a comparatively short time.

Among those with whom I have talked were three sisters. They had been educated at Constantinople and spoke excellent English. They said their family was the richest in Erzeroum and numbered twenty-five when they left but there were now only fourteen survivors. The other eleven, including the husband of one of them and their old grandmother had been butchered before their eyes by the Kurds. The oldest male survivor of the family was eight years of age. When they left Erzeroum they had money, horses and personal effects but they had been robbed of everything, including even their clothing. They said some of them had been left absolutely naked and others with only a single garment. When they reached a village their gendarmes obtained clothes for them from some of the native women. Another girl with whom I talked is the daughter of the Protestant pastor of Erzeroum. She said every member of her family with her had been killed and she was left entirely alone. These and some others are a few survivors of the better class of people who have been exiled. They are being detained in an abandoned schoolhouse just outside of the town and no one is allowed to enter it. They

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19. Similar reports were sent from Trabzon and Aleppo as well.

said they practically are in prison, although they were allowed to visit a spring just outside the building. It was there that I happened to see them. All the others are camped in a large open field with no protection at all from the sun.

The condition of these people indicates clearly the fate of those who have left and are about to leave from here. I believe nothing has been heard from any of them as yet and probably very little will be heard. The system that is being followed seems to be to have bands of Kurds awaiting them on the road to kill the men especially and incidentally some of the others. The entire movement seems to be the most thoroughly organized and effective massacre this country has ever seen.

Not many men have been spared, however, to accompany those who are being sent into exile, for a more prompt and sure method has been used to dispose of them. Several thousand Armenian men have been arrested during the past few weeks. These have been put in prison and each time that several hundred had been gathered up in that way they were sent away during the night. The first lot was sent away during the night of June 23rd. Among them were some of the professors in the American college and other prominent Armenians, including the Prelate of the Armenian Gregorian Church of Harput. There have been frequent rumors that all of these were killed and there is little doubt that they were. All Armenian soldiers have likewise been sent away in the same manner. They have been arrested and confined in a building at one end of the town. No distinction has been made between those who had paid their military exemption tax and those who had not. Their money was accepted and then they were arrested and sent off with the others. It was said that they were to go somewhere to work on the roads but no one has heard from them and that is undoubtedly false.

The fate of all the others has been pretty well established by reliable reports of a similar occurrence on Wednesday, July 7th. On Monday many men were arrested both at Harput and Mezreh and put in prison. At daybreak Tuesday morning they were taken out and made to march towards an almost uninhabited mountain. There were about eight hundred in all and they were tied together in groups of fourteen each. That afternoon they arrived in a small Kurdish village where they were kept overnight in the mosque and other buildings. During all this time they were without food or water. All their money and much of their clothing had been taken from them. On Wednesday morning they were taken to a valley a few hours' distant where they were all made to sit down. Then the gendarmes began shooting them until they had killed nearly all of them. Some who had not been killed by bullets were then disposed of with knives and bayonets. A few succeeded in breaking the rope with which they were tied to their companions and running away, but most of these were pursued and killed. A few succeeded in getting away, probably not more than two or three. Among those who were killed was the Treasurer of the American College. Many other estimable men were among the number. No charge of any kind had ever been made against any of these men. They were simply arrested and killed as part of the general plan to dispose of the Armenian race.

Last night several hundred more men, including both men arrested by the civil authorities and those enrolled as soldiers, were taken in a different direction and murdered in a similar manner. It is said this happened at a place not two hours' distant from here. I shall ride out that way some day when things become a little quieter and try to verify it for myself.

The same thing has been done systematically in the villages. A few weeks ago about three hundred men were gathered together at Itchme and Haboosi, two villages four and five hours' distant from here, and then taken up into the mountains and massacred. This seems to be fully

established. Many women from those villages have been here since and told about it. There have been rumors of similar occurrences in other places.

There seems to be a definite plan to dispose of all the Armenian men, but after the departure of the families during the first few days of the enforcement of the order it was announced that women and children with no men in the family might remain here for the present and many hoped that the worst was over. The American missionaries began considering plans to aid the women and children who would be left here with no means of support. It was thought that perhaps an orphanage could be opened to care for some of the children especially those who had been born in America and then brought here by their parents and also those who belonged to parents who had been connected in some way with the American Mission and schools. There would be plenty of opportunity, although there might not be sufficient means, to care for children who reached here with the exiles from other Vilayets and whose parents had died on the way. I went to see the Vali about this matter yesterday and was met with a flat refusal. He said we could aid these people if we wished to do so, but the Government was establishing orphanages for the children and we could not undertake any work of that nature. An hour after I left the Vali the announcement was made that all the Armenians remaining here, including women and children, must leave on July 13th.

The evident plan of the Government is to give no opportunity for any educational or religious work to be done here by foreign missionaries. Some Armenian women will be taken as Moslem wives and some children will be brought up as Moslems, but none of them will be allowed to come under foreign influences. The country is to be purely Moslem and nothing else.

On one occasion Leslie Davis traced a 13 year old girl, Siranoush Hoghgroghian, who had relatives in the United States, to discover that she was taken by a Turkish policeman and was already pregnant by him.<sup>20</sup> The fact that Davis investigated such cases explains the depth of his knowledge about Armenian issue.

Davis also went to the locations where the killings were reportedly taking place. Kemal Çiçek made an unfair remark when he ridiculed why would deportees be taken hundreds of kilometres to be killed? The fact remains that people were taken to specific locations and killed in large numbers. One reason may have been the fact that in some areas ordinary Turks and Kurds, sometimes even officials, were not prepared to kill their Armenian neighbours, despite the propaganda against Ottoman Armenians orchestrated by the Ittihadist government. In other areas, Armenians were actually killed nearer home. Again, these are issues we can examine in greater detail in the future.

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20. Davis relates the case of a little girl about twelve or thirteen years of age by the name of Siranoush Hoghgroghian, who had come with a party from Erzingan. Her uncle in New York, Mr. Hrahad Hoghgroghian, sent a communication to me through the Department and the Embassy, asking me to protect her and saying that he would send funds for her. After considerable search my cavasses found her living with a Turkish officer. She came to the Consulate and told me to inform her uncle that she was all right and needed no money. She was well developed for her age and was a comparatively good looking girl but was beginning to show the marks of the life she was living. Young as she was, we noticed that she appeared to be pregnant and a month or two later she did give birth to a child. I reported about her to her uncle in New York, but I think my report failed to reach him and perhaps it was just as well. This is only one of thousands of similar instances that occurred in a situation where no missionary or foreign official could do much to help these unfortunate people. Sarafian, *United States Documents* p. 577

Davis also describes how Armenians in Harput did not resist their own victimization. In Harput, Armenians submitted to arms searches, arrests, and deportations. One of the first caravans to leave Harput was composed of 800 men and community leaders. Davis eventually followed their trail to the killing fields near Lake Goljuk. His account makes horrific reading, and is an indication of Davis' understanding of events:

One evening the latter part of that week Dr. Atkinson came down to the Consulate and asked me if I would like to talk with an Armenian who had just escaped from a massacre. I went up to his house and was taken upstairs into a dark room where the man was hiding. He was the pharmacist in a drug store which the doctor had in Harput. He had had a miraculous escape from death and had arrived at the Hospital exhausted and worn out after his frightful experience. Then, in the attic of the Doctor's house, we sat and listened to his story, while outside the gendarmes were patrolling the streets in search of fugitive Armenians.

He had been arrested at Harput on Monday, July 5th, without being informed of the reason and brought down to the prison in Mamouret-ul-Aziz. About eight hundred men were arrested that day in Harput, Mamouret-ul-Aziz, and the surrounding villages and put in prison without any charge being made against them. They were all searched and their money, valuables, and even much of their clothing, taken from them. Some of these were men who had been in prison before and had been released by the Vali who said they would be allowed to go with their families. About three o'clock Tuesday morning the Police Mudir (Chief of Police) came to the prison and all of these men were brought out into the court-yard and lined up in front of him. After being searched again they were tied together in groups of fourteen each by direction of the Police Mudir and marched out of the town before daybreak so that they would not be seen by the inhabitants. They were heavily guarded by gendarmes who conducted them to a Kurdish village which they reached in the afternoon. On arriving there they were put in the mosque and other buildings for the night without food or water. Some of the Kurds offered to bring them water if they would pay for it, but as their money had all been taken from them, this was a mockery. They remained there that night and the following morning were taken to a valley a few hours distance, where they were all made to sit down. Then, at noon on that day, Wednesday, July 7th, the gendarmes began shooting them. After they had fired two or three rounds and killed most of the men the order was given not to waste any more cartridges but to bayonet the rest. Those who had not been shot were then dispatched with knives and bayonets.

The young man who was telling us about this massacre said he was at the extreme end of the line and when that order was given he called out in terror for them to shoot him, as he could not endure the thought of being killed by the bayonet. In his terror he succeeded in breaking the rope and, seeing that he was free, started to run away. They shot at him several times but did not hit him. Owing to the confusion and the nature of the land, he was soon able to reach a little ravine where he dropped out of sight and then succeeded in crawling away to a safe distance, after which he ran as fast as he could across the fields. He kept on running all that day and all night, faint from hunger and thirst and the exhaustion of the previous march, but frantic with fright. When he reached Mamouret-ul-Aziz he did not recognize it, although he had lived there all his life. He had intended to go directly to the American Hospital but arrived at the other end of the town by mistake and thought it was some other place. He then went back across the fields and finally came by a different path to the Hospital, where he succeeded in

entering unnoticed about daybreak. When Dr. Atkinson found him there he took him over to his house. The young man was afterwards taken away disguised as a woman and is now safe in Russia.

Of the eight or nine hundred men who had been taken away at this time, some fifteen or twenty succeeded in escaping and several of them have confirmed the story as it was first told to me. Among those who were killed was the treasurer of Euphrates College and many other estimable and prominent Armenians who had never even been accused of any disloyalty to the government or of any crime.<sup>21</sup>

Consul Davis gave the following detailed account of what he saw on one of his trips investigating the reported mass killings:<sup>22</sup>

We started about four o'clock in the morning one day the latter part of September. We took the Diarbekir road and tried to get away without being noticed. There were dead bodies even on the outskirts of the town and we saw them all along the road. They had been covered with a few shovelfuls of dirt, instead of being buried, as the gendarmes found it easier to do this than to dig holes for them. The result was that in almost every case one could see the arms or legs or even the heads sticking out of the ground. Most of them had been partially eaten by dogs.

At Mollakeuy we left the road and crossed the plain in the direction of the lake. There were several hundred dead bodies scattered over the plain. Nearly all of them were those of women and children. It was obvious that they must have been killed, as so many could not have died from disease or exhaustion. They lay quite near a Kurdish village, which was known as Kurdemlik, and I afterwards learned that the Kurds of this village had killed most of these people. A woman from Hooyloo described the massacre to me. She had been brought there with the other inhabitants of her village and saw most of them killed. The Kurds gave her a blow and left her for dead. She lay among the dead bodies for some hours and escaped in the night. Afterwards I gave her some money with which to flee to Russia, where she is now safe. Another person who told me something about this place was a young woman from Trebizond. Her mother and brother had been killed by the Kurds, while she had been taken by one of them, named Mehmed Agha, and kept in Kurdemlik for a number of months. She finally succeeded in getting away and came to Mamouret-ul-Aziz.

Some of the bodies that we saw had been burned. I thought at first this had been done as a sanitary measure, although Kurds seldom think of such things, but was told that they had burned these bodies in order to find any gold which the people may have swallowed. I subsequently saw many others that had been burned for the same object and learned that the deported Armenians frequently swallowed their gold in their attempt to save it when they were attacked.

After leaving the village of the Kurds we climbed a very steep mountain and then descended into a valley on Lake Geoljik, in which my predecessors and the American missionaries were accustomed to camp out every summer. It is unnecessary to say that there was no opportunity for camping out during the three years that I was at Harput. Two dead bodies lay on the shore just where they pitched their tents.

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21. Ara Sarafian (comp.), *United States Records*, pp. 565-566

22. Ara Sarafian (comp.), *United States Records*, pp. 580-584

We then turned to the north and rode along the lake for about two hours. The banks of the lake for most of this distance are high and steep, while at frequent intervals there are deep valleys, almost like pockets. In most of these valleys there were dead bodies and from the tops of the cliffs which extended between them we saw hundreds of bodies and many bones in the water below. It was rumored that many of the people who were brought here had been pushed over the cliffs by the gendarmes and killed in that way. That rumor was fully confirmed by what we saw. In some of the valleys there were only a few bodies, but in others there were more than a thousand. One of the first corpses that we saw was that of an old man with a white beard, whose skull had been crushed in by a large stone which still remained in it. A little farther along we saw the ashes of six or eight persons, only a few fragments of bones and clothing remaining unburned. One red fez was conspicuous. There were also some skull bones, as they are the strongest and are always the last to be destroyed. These ashes were about twenty feet from a tree under which there was a large red spot. This upon closer examination proved to be blood, which appeared to have been there for two or three weeks. The tree had a number of bullet holes in it, indicating that the men whose ashes we saw had probably been stood up against it and shot.

Soon after that we came to a valley in which there were several hundred dead bodies. We were aware of their presence before we came in sight of them. As we approached the valley the first thing we saw from the top of the cliffs was a row of twenty or thirty heads sticking out of the sand at the edge of the water. Only the heads of these bodies could be seen. The view of them was a most gruesome sight. They appeared to have been buried and I learned that such was the case; but the gendarmes with characteristic Turkish negligence had buried the bodies in the sand at the edge of the lake because it was easier to dig and the sand had washed off and been blown away, leaving the heads exposed. There were many corpses piled up on the rocks at the foot of the cliffs, some of them in the water and some just out of it. Turning up into the valley we saw many others on both sides lying one alongside of another. In the middle of the valley was a clump of small trees and bushes covered with vines, forming a natural arbor. My Turkish companion took me to it and told me to look in. There were about fifteen or twenty bodies under the trees, some of them sitting upright as they had died. My companion said that these were people who had been sick or wounded and had been left there to perish, that when he had passed there a week before some of them were still alive, and that he had given them some bread at that time.

In most of the other valleys that we crossed there were heads sticking out of the sand on the shore of the lake and bodies lying unburied here and there. An occasional body was bloated and swollen, but most of them had begun to shrivel up. In almost every valley there were some bodies and in several of them a great many, in one, at least a thousand; in another I estimated that there were more than fifteen hundred, but the stench from them was so great that, although I tried to go up in the end of the valley, I was unable to do so at that time. I explored it more carefully a month later. This valley, like many of the others, was triangular in shape and shut in on two sides by high precipitous banks which the people when attacked were not able to climb. Two or three gendarmes stationed on each side could prevent a multitude from escaping in that way. Many bodies lay wedged among the rocks at the extreme end of the valley, showing that some had tried in vain to scale them in their attempt to escape and had been killed there. On the third side was the water. A row of fifteen or twenty gendarmes across the valley could keep the people from fleeing into the water of escaping by the narrow path which

led along the lake on either side of the valley. Thus the victims were literally penned in and butchered in cold blood. The bodies were piled one on top of another and had apparently been there between two and three weeks. This was confirmed by an old Kurd whom we saw at work near a Kurdish village which overlooked the valley. We stopped and asked him what had happened there. He told us that the gendarmes had brought a party of about two thousand Armenians there some twenty days before and had made the Kurds from the neighboring villages come and kill them. This corresponded with the departure of a large party of exiles whom I had seen passing through the town of Mamouret-ul-Aziz three weeks earlier. He acted very indignant about the matter, as he said the smell of their dead bodies was very disagreeable to him and to the other inhabitants of the village. The fact was that many of the Kurds in that vicinity died of sickness due to the unsanitary conditions around them that summer and fall. It is a wonder that all of them did not die.

I was subsequently informed more in detail about the system employed in disposing of these parties of Armenians. They were allowed to camp for a day or two in the valleys or in some convenient place. While they were there the gendarmes summoned the Kurds, as this old man told us, and ordered them to kill the Armenians, telling the Kurds they could make money in this way but would have trouble if they refused. An agreement was then made by which the Kurds were to pay the gendarmes a certain fixed sum—a few hundred pounds, or more, depending on circumstances—and were to have for themselves whatever they found on the bodies of the Armenians in excess of that sum. As I heard this explanation a number of times, I think such a system was employed quite generally in that region and perhaps in other parts of Turkey as well.

A remarkable thing about the bodies that we saw was that nearly all of them were naked. I have been informed that the people were forced to take off their clothes before they were killed, as the Mohammedans consider the clothes taken from a dead body to be defiled. There were gaping bayonet wounds on most of the bodies, usually in the abdomen or chest, sometimes in the throat. Few persons had been shot, as bullets were too precious. It was cheaper to kill with bayonets and knives. Another remarkable thing was that nearly all of the women lay flat on their backs and showed signs of barbarous mutilation by the bayonets of the gendarmes, these wounds having been inflicted in many cases probably after the women were dead. We also noticed that all the bodies in these valleys were apparently those of people who had been on the road at least one or two months, showing that they were not from Harput but were from distant places.

Leaving the lake we crossed the mountains in another place and took a narrow path which brought us to the village of Keghvenk. There were dead bodies all along the way. Some were directly in the path so that the horses were obliged to step over them. This was the path by which the post came regularly to Harput, but, of course, it was seldom traveled by any except Turks. At one place on the mountains my Turkish companion pointed to a valley alongside of the path and said a great many Armenians had been killed in that valley within two or three hundred feet of the spot where we were then standing. We could smell the dead bodies, but, as it was getting late and we had already seen so many, we did not feel like going even that distance out of our way to see any more. I visited the place, however, a year and a half later and saw the bones of hundreds of people in that valley. In the fields between the mountain and the village of Keghvenk we saw where thousands of people had been killed. Most of them had been buried in shallow graves but we saw many of their bones. This was only about ten miles

from the town of Mamouret-ul-Aziz but is said to have been one of the worst slaughter grounds in all that region. I was told that many of the men from Mamouret-ul-Aziz and Harput and from the neighboring villages, who had been arrested and put in prison before the regular deportation began, were taken out and killed right there. There were traces of large camps around Keghvenk where parties of exiles had stopped during the summer. Many of them also were probably killed in those fields. We arrived home about nine o'clock in the evening and I felt that I understood better than ever what the "deportation" of the Armenians really meant. I felt also that I had not been wrong in speaking of Mamouret-ul-Aziz in some of my reports as the "Slaughter-House Vilayet" of Turkey.

A few weeks later Dr. Atkinson of the American Hospital expressed a desire to make this trip with me. We decided to make a complete tour of the lake this time in order to see what there might be on the other side of it as well as where I had already been. We started about three o'clock in the morning one day the latter part of October, going through the deserted Armenian village of Hooyloo and then over a pass which brought us out of the south end of the lake. We passed some skeletons and bones of people who had apparently been killed or died early in the summer. On the east side of the lake, however, we found the bodies of many persons who had only recently been killed. We concluded that they must have been the inhabitants of the Armenian village of Geoljik who had probably attempted to run away from the gendarmes. This village is situated about midway along Lake Geoljik and is the only one of any size upon the lake. It lies almost directly opposite the camping ground of my predecessors and of the missionaries, which I had visited on my previous trip. On arriving at this village we found that not a single inhabitant remained. It was absolutely deserted, except for a few hungry cats which were prowling around among the ruins of the houses.

Davis made a second trip when he discovered even more corpses in the same valleys on the shores of lake Goljuk. My purpose in presenting these extensive quotations is to demonstrate the caliber of documentation on the Armenian Genocide which is simply left out of discussions by Turkish state intellectuals.

After about two hours we arrived at a large valley not very far from the point where I had left the lake on my previous trip to return home. Here there were more dead bodies than I had seen in any other place on either trip. We estimated that there were not less than two thousand in that one valley. Many of them were right on the edge of the lake and their heads showed above the sand, as I have described them in other places. One that we noticed was that of a woman and right alongside of her head was the body of a tiny infant that could not have been more than a few days old. The valley was large and bodies were strewn all over it. Most of them had been buried, but the sand that covered them had since blown away leaving them partially exposed to view. There were also the remains of camp fires and of the personal effects of the exiles, such as they had,—a few broken jugs, a few earthen bowls, some wooden spoons, and quite a number of passports. The latter upon examination showed that the people were from Erzerum and other places. There was no clothing, except an occasional sock, and nothing of any value. Everything of value had, of course, been taken by the gendarmes and Kurds. The bodies were all naked, the people probably having been made to remove their clothing before they were killed. I visited this valley again in March, 1917, and found that there were hundreds of bodies in the upper part of it that I had not seen before. They had apparently

been buried and had washed out. The whole valley, which covered several acres, was one large burying ground. I understand that this was one of the first places where the Armenians were brought and killed. I judged from the appearance of their bodies and bone that they had been brought there part at a time, the people in each group being killed and buried before the arrival of the next ones. This valley is the most accessible one on the lake, but there were so many parties of exiles that summer that it could not be used for all of them. Different parties were, therefore, taken to different valleys in order to prevent the victims from knowing the fate of those who had preceded them. Great numbers were also slaughtered around a hill, known as Shabgahan Hill, which lay a few miles back of this valley near a Kurdish village. I have been told of what happened there by Turks and by people who have escaped from those who were killed and I have passed through the village a number of times but was unable, of course, to visit every valley in that region.

We continued our journey around the lake to the camping ground which I have mentioned before, passing again the valley already described. I was able to explore them more carefully this time. Some of the bodies had been burned in the meantime, probably in the search for gold. We estimated that in the course of our ride around the lake, and actually within the space of twenty-four hours, we had seen the remains of not less than ten thousand Armenians who had been killed around Lake Geoljik. This, of course, is approximate, as some of them were only the bones of those who had perished several months before, from which the flesh had entirely disappeared, while in other cases the corpses were so fresh that they were all swollen up and the odor from them showed that they had been killed only a few days before. I am sure, however, that there were more, rather than less, than that number; and it is probable that the remains which we saw were only a small portion of the total number in that vicinity. In fact, on my subsequent rides in the direction of Lake Geoljik I nearly always discovered skeletons and bones in great numbers in the new places that I visited, even as recently as a few weeks before I left Harput.

Few localities could be better suited to the fiendish purposes of the Turks in their plan to exterminate the Armenian population than this peaceful lake in the interior of Asiatic Turkey, with its precipitous banks and pocket-like valleys, surrounded by villages of savage Kurds and far removed from the sight of civilized man. This, perhaps, was the reason why so many exiles from distant vilayets were brought in safety as far as Mamouret-ul-Aziz and then massacred in the "Slaughter-house Vilayet" of Turkey. That which took place around beautiful Lake Geoljik in the summer of 1915 is almost inconceivable. Thousands and thousands of Armenians, mostly innocent and helpless women and children, were butchered on its shores and barbarously mutilated. It is hard for one living in a civilized country to believe that such things are possible; yet, as Lord Bryce has said, "Things which we find scarcely credible excite little surprise in Turkey."

These two rides that I took to Lake Geoljik in the fall of 1915 confirmed many of the rumors we had heard about the fate of the Armenians who had been taken in that direction and showed us that our worst fears for all who were deported were not groundless. We arrived home safely and as far as I know the officials never heard of either of these rides.

It is the contention of this paper that there is compelling evidence on the destruction of Ottoman Armenians in United States archives, and such records can not be ignored or summarily dismissed as they have been ignored by some of my colleagues at this symposium. The least they should do is

acknowledge such materials and then attempt to critique it. Hiding such evidence or the content of such files as part of one's argumentation only weakens the personal standing of such commentators.

Harpout makes an interesting case study of the Armenian Genocide, as well as documentation on the genocidal process, because, other than US Consular materials, we have the diaries and private papers of other witnesses who lived in this region (American and non-American), as well as the memoirs of Armenians who survived this period and related their experiences in their memoirs.<sup>23</sup>

## ADDITIONAL POINTS REGARDING US DOCUMENTS

Yesterday Kemal Çiçek and Yusuf Halaçoğlu both cited one American Consular source to support the Turkish official thesis that Ottoman Armenians were simply deported in 1915. Their citation was a set of deportation figures from an American source, stating that 485,000 Armenians had reached Syria by the beginning of 1916.<sup>24</sup> But if one looked at this document and related materials from the same source, Consul Jackson, one would also see that Jackson stated that most Armenian deportees did not reach Syria but were killed on their way.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the figure of 486,000 represents the US Consul's calculation of Armenians who passed through Katma (north of Aleppo) on their way southwards. Of that number, 300,000 were sent to Der Zor, where practically no Armenian survived by the end of 1916. Armenian deportees were left to perish through starvation and disease in this region, while the remainder was mostly massacred.<sup>26</sup>

So, we could say that United States documents agree with Ottoman records that Armenians were deported in 1915, but they also yield information on the nature of these deportations which is at variance with extant Ottoman records. To this day, we do not have a full set of figures, for any region, where Armenians from a particular region can be shown to have been resettled in another region. This should be surprising given that historians arguing the Turkish state perspective have insisted that deportations were an orderly affair, where convoys of deportees and their properties were registered with the state, with records kept in local and central archives of the Ottoman state. Given the focus of this paper, it would be interesting to have a list of Armenian villages in the Harput plain, and a record of where the inhabitants of these villages were resettled elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. Harpout could be a test case of evaluating different sources on the events of 1915.

I am sure Kemal Çiçek and Yusuf Halaçoğlu have a lot to say about my present paper, and I look

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23. One Armenian English language source, which caused some consternation at the Istanbul University conference, is Hampartsoum Chitjian's memoir, Hampartzoum Mardiros Chitjian, *A Hair's Breadth from Death*, (London and Reading: Taderon Press, 2004 ). This book related the personal experiences of one person from Perri who survived the Genocide in the Harpout plain in 1915-19.

24. The source in question was a set of figures sent to the State Department by US Consul Jackson (Aleppo). The document in question can be found at the United States National Archives and has been reproduced in one of my own publications, Ara Sarafian, *United States Official Records* document number NA/RG59/867.48/271

25. Ara Sarafian, *United States Official Records* document number NA/RG59/867.48/271

26. See Ara Sarafian, *United States Official Records* document numbers NA/RG59/867.4016/291, 296, 301, 302, NA/RG59/867.48/420.

forward to our discussions in future. These are all issues that we can examine together in a critical manner, preferably by sharing all relevant records and without making a public performance of our work.

I would also like to take issue and engage two other colleagues, Justin McCarthy and Hikmet Ozdemir, who equated Armenian rebellions in 1915 to subsequent deportations at that time. I will limit my comment to the Ourfa region (mentioned by both authors) because there were American witnesses there whose records I have examined in United States archives. The Ourfa uprising took place at the end of summer 1915, in the wake of deportations from further north. Throughout the summer of 1915 Armenians in Ourfa could see that deportations practically meant annihilation. Americans who also witnessed these developments commented that, if the Armenians in Ourfa were ever to be deported, these Armenians would resist.<sup>27</sup> When the deportation of Armenians in Ourfa was contemplated in August 1915, they resisted. They barricaded themselves in an act of desperate self-defence, which they could not win. It was simply a case of resistance against what they saw as annihilation. The subsequent deportation of remaining Armenians in Ourfa was not the cause of the uprising, but the reverse.

I hope with this presentation I have shown that the British Parliamentary Blue Book was hardly the crude propaganda publication alleged by some commentators. Any criticism of such works has to be in earnest, recognizing the relevant records to the debate, and making a coherent argument. Simply denying the existence of key published and archival sources or making false statements about such materials has no place in an academic debate—and only undermines the standing of such authors as well as the cause they espouse alongside other colleagues. Much of the criticism of the Blue Book over the years has been of this nature.

In my own presentation I have argued that the Blue Book was a remarkable work which is of historiographical interest. That work played a key role in the articulation of the Armenian Genocide thesis during the First World War. The significance of the Blue Book was based on its documentary basis, and the argument that rested on those documents.<sup>28</sup> Since the First World War we have had access to a much wider spectrum of original records related to the treatment of Ottoman Armenians. The availability of such records support the main conclusions of the Blue Book and point to new

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27. Jesse Jackson to Ambassador Morgenthau, dated Aleppo 28 June 1915, “Now this is the fate which is in store for the Ourfa Armenians also unless some one delivers them. Having seen how the Zeitoun exiles have been treated the Ourfa Armenians have said they will never submit to exile but will die in their homes instead, and who can blame them? We greatly fear that the cruel persecuting attitude of the Gendarmery in seizing, beating and torturing the people will drive some of them to such desperation that they will resist, and that will surely provoke a general massacre.” Throughout June-August 1915, Armenians in Ourfa witnessed the passage of many convoys of deportees force marched from further north and had no reason to trust their own government when it came to their own deportation.

28. Bryce was aware that some of the documents collected may have been problematic, but he argued that the weight of the documentation pointed to one conclusion. Similarly, recognising that some of the native sources (Armenian and Assyrian) may have been weak, he pointed out that the main conclusion of the Blue Book was based on non-native sources. The native documents were only accepted because they were found to be informative and because the main thrust of the Blue Book did not rest on them.

avenues of research based on such original sources themselves and not the 1916 published work. The assertion that the Blue Book is the only basis of the Armenian Genocide thesis is itself another perversion.

I hope after this conference is over, we will be able to engage the academic process of examining the Armenian issue according to the canons of academic research, hopefully in a less antagonistic manner, and with a greater degree of cooperation amongst scholars. I thank Istanbul University for taking this very first crucial step in establishing relations between Turkish and Armenian scholars.