

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Faculty Publications, Department of History

History, Department of

---

10-2011

# The Taboo within the Taboo: The Fate of 'Armenian Capital' at the End of the Ottoman Empire

Bedross Der Matossian

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, bdermatossian2@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

Der Matossian, Bedross, "The Taboo within the Taboo: The Fate of 'Armenian Capital' at the End of the Ottoman Empire" (2011).

*Faculty Publications, Department of History*. 127.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub/127>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, Department of History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Bedross Der Matossian

## **The Taboo within the Taboo: The Fate of 'Armenian Capital' at the End of the Ottoman Empire**

---

### **Warning**

The contents of this site is subject to the French law on intellectual property and is the exclusive property of the publisher.

The works on this site can be accessed and reproduced on paper or digital media, provided that they are strictly used for personal, scientific or educational purposes excluding any commercial exploitation. Reproduction must necessarily mention the editor, the journal name, the author and the document reference.

Any other reproduction is strictly forbidden without permission of the publisher, except in cases provided by legislation in force in France.

**revues.org**

Revues.org is a platform for journals in the humanites and social sciences run by the CLEO, Centre for open electronic publishing (CNRS, EHESS, UP, UAPV).

---

### Electronic reference

Bedross Der Matossian, « The Taboo within the Taboo: The Fate of 'Armenian Capital' at the End of the Ottoman Empire », *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [Online], Complete List, 2011, Online since 06 octobre 2011, Connection on 16 mai 2012. URL : /index4411.html

Publisher: European Journal of Turkish Studies

<http://ejts.revues.org>

<http://www.revues.org>

Document available online on:

</index4411.html>

Document automatically generated on 16 mai 2012.

© Some rights reserved / Creative Commons license

**Bedross Der Matossian**

# The Taboo within the Taboo: The Fate of 'Armenian Capital' at the End of the Ottoman Empire

*'Besides [the] political argument...there was a strong economic one, supported morally by the Germans. It was to end the Armenians' economic supremacy, thereby clearing the markets for Turks and Germans.'* (Adivar 1926: 386)

## Introduction

- 1 One of the marginalized topics in the historiography of the Ottoman Empire in general, and that of the Armenian Genocide in particular, is the fate of 'Armenian capital' during World War I.\* Ottoman historians have often been inclined to highlight the great achievements that Armenians made in the field of economy in the Ottoman Empire as *sarrafs*, bankers, merchants and industrialists. However, when a scholar starts examining or questioning the fate of 'Armenian capital' in the Empire, he/she is immediately suspected of having a political or nationalistic agenda. Scholars therefore usually try to avoid dealing with this 'sensitive' issue lest they anger the 'lion in the cage' or are marginalized by their colleagues for 'venturing into minefields.'<sup>1</sup> Hence, scholars always try to choose non-sensitive issues that deal with the social and economic dimension of Ottoman history. Yet questions remain as to why discussing the issue of prostitution in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Istanbul, for example, or epidemics in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ottoman Empire, should be considered legitimate subjects for inquiry, while questioning the fate of 'Armenian capital' is labeled troublesome and sensitive. The history of the Armenian contribution to the field of economy in the Empire and the subsequent destruction of 'Armenian capital' during World War I must be discussed as a regular and legitimate subject pertaining to both the history of the Ottoman Empire and that of modern Turkey.
- 2 The use of the term 'Armenian economy' can be rather misleading. I have placed the phrase in quotes to signify that the 'Armenian economy' was an integral part of the Ottoman economy, directly influenced and nurtured by the economic, political and social transformations experienced in the Empire during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, I employ the term 'Armenian economy' to represent all those Armenians who were in some capacity involved in the economic activities of the Empire as merchants, industrialists, factory owners, middlemen, bankers, etc. This economy was specifically destroyed and confiscated during World War I because of its administration by Armenians.
- 3 Research on the fate of 'Armenian capital' in the Ottoman Empire remains in its infancy for several reasons. We know for a fact that hundreds of Armenian merchants and commercial houses existed alongside factories in the Ottoman Empire during the late 1800s (Der Matossian 2007). One would speculate that each of these entities at least kept a partial archival record of its business transactions. One such archive, that of Mr. Krikor Chatalian, is at the disposal of the author of this article.<sup>2</sup> Chatalian was an influential Armenian merchant from Sivrihisar<sup>3</sup> (Ankara) at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, trading in wool and cloths.<sup>4</sup> His private papers consist of more than one thousand documents pertaining to his business transactions during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>5</sup> In his public transactions with other merchants, he communicated in Ottoman Turkish, whereas in his private notebook he wrote in Armeno-Turkish.<sup>6</sup> The quantity as well as the quality of these documents signifies, on the one hand, the amount of trade Krikor Chatalian was involved in and on the other, his impressive administrative abilities in bookkeeping and archival recording.<sup>7</sup> A detailed examination of these documents sheds a vital light on the economic and the social history of Sivrihisar prior to the destruction of the 'Armenian economy' in the Empire.

4 The private archives of these merchants, commercial houses, commercial firms and factories, if available, would demonstrate the complexity and enormity of 'Armenian capital' in the Ottoman Empire. However, these archives have not yet been examined or were destroyed along with 'Armenian capital' during the Armenian Genocide of World War I. Thus, the paucity of archival material on Armenian businesses creates a serious challenge to historians who aim to reconstruct the history of the 'Armenian economy' during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One useful source is the history books that were written by Pan-Armenian Unions in the Diaspora during the post-genocide period. The main objective of these history-writing practices was to preserve the local identities of the Armenians. Ninety percent of these works were written in Armenian. While I would argue that much of this kind of literature presents a way of mourning the lost homeland, whatever was written during this period is unique: as far as I know there is no popular counterpart in Turkish during the same period of time. Although some of these pieces sound more folkloric than methodologically sound and historical, it does not undo the fact that they provide invaluable information on the 'Armenian economy.' For example, historians Arshag Alboyadjian, Hovakim Hovakimian, Puzant Yeghayan (Tokat, Trabzon, Adana) provide ample information on topography, Ottoman history, Armenians in Ottoman administration, and cultural and ethnographic dimensions (Alboyadjian 1952; Hovakimian 1967; Yeghyayan 1970). Another main source for reconstructing the history of the 'Armenian economy' is the Ottoman Archives, which hold a plethora of information on the economic history of the Empire. An important source in these archives lies in the documentation of the liquidation of the Armenian properties in the Empire during World War I, when a systematic process of confiscation began that ended with the appropriation of 'Armenian capital' during the Republican period. This confiscation process, which was initiated by the Abandoned Property Commission (*Emvâl-i Metruke Komisyonu*) and the Liquidation Commission (*Tasfiye Komisyonu*), was highly bureaucratized and involved keeping detailed registers of the items, properties, and capital that were confiscated from the Armenian deportees, with the claim that they would be returned to them in their "relocated" destinations.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the documentation of 'Armenian capital' during the confiscation process should be considered both an important source for the reconstruction of the 'Armenian economy' on the eve of World War I, and a blue print for population engineering in Anatolia (Üngör 2008; Dündar 2001, 2008).

## I. Historiography of the Armenian Abandoned Property

5 Despite the fact that the historiography of the Abandoned Properties remains in its infancy, the scholarship on the subject has been growing in the past decade. The earliest work that has been done on the subject of abandoned properties in the Armenian language was done by Lutfik Kuyumjian through a series of articles that he published from 1927 through 1933 in the General Almanac of the Holy Savior Hospital of Istanbul [*Endartsak Taretsuys S. P'. Hivandanotsi*]. Kuyumjian's work is important because he discusses the laws and regulations that were passed during the Republican period. The first comprehensive study of the Abandoned Properties in Armenian based on Ottoman/Turkish laws and regulations and that also covers intensively the Republican period is that of Levon Vartan (Vartan 1970). Haigazn Ghazarian has also written on the subject by bringing examples from the eastern provinces (Ghazarian 1964, 1968: 226-241). What is interesting to notice is that most of these works have targeted the Armenian audiences and they lack a thematic approach to the subject. In the last couple of years the historiography in Turkish about the Abandoned Properties has been growing. Mehmet Polatel, Sait Çetinoğlu, Nevzat Onaran, and Taner Akçam, among others, have written on the subject. Polatel's work focuses on the distribution of Armenian properties confiscated by the Ottoman government and the early Republican period. Furthermore, the study discusses this distribution through the lens of Turkish state formation. His main argument is that 'between three different periods, 1915-1917, 1918-1922 and 1920-1930, the state made use of the Armenian properties by distributing them to certain groups in alliance with the newly established state in order to get consent of society and consolidate its rule over the populace' (Polatel 2009, 2010). Sait Çetinoğlu discusses the fate of the Armenian properties through a linear historical

understanding. According to him, the process began with Abdulhamid massacres in 1895, continued with the Adana massacres of 1909, and reached its climax with the Genocide of 1915. This process continued through the burning of Smyrna and the discrimination of the interwar period, finding its end with the pogroms of 6-7 September 1955 (Çetinoğlu 2006, 2009). The most comprehensive study in Turkish on the subject is Nevzat Onaran's book on the fate of the Armenian and Greek properties. The book offers a narrative account of the confiscation and the subsequent appropriation of the Armenian and Greek properties during World War I and the Republican period. Despite the fact that the book provides a useful account on the rules and regulations passed by the Ottoman and the Republican states, it lacks a thematic approach (Onaran 2010). Taner Akçam also sheds new light on the topic in his latest book by providing a fresh analysis based on Ottoman documents (Akçam, 2008: 208-252). The forthcoming book by Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel in English provides a rare thematic approach about the confiscation of the Armenian properties during both the Ottoman and the Republican period. The book argues that, '[m]ost of all, if the Armenians' ties to Anatolia comprised their ownership of property, then to break those ties, the property needed to be appropriated. In other words, the object of Young Turk policies was not the property, but the people' (Üngör and Polatel 2011: 166). Besides discussing the ideological foundations of the confiscation process the book discusses how law and legality was used to create injustice by focusing on two regions: Adana and Diyarbakir.<sup>9</sup>

6 Hence, by deviating from the narrative account, the following article aims at discussing the mechanism of this continuum from confiscation to appropriation from a historical perspective and will provide some answers regarding the fate of 'Armenian capital' as an important component of the economic dimension in the extermination process of the Ottoman Armenians. In addition, the transfer of 'Armenian capital' from the Ottoman Empire to the Republican era does not only demonstrate a historical continuity, but also sheds light on capital movements during different political regimes and the role that this capital plays in the creation of new economic classes and in strengthening the position of local elites.

## II. The 'Armenian Economy' in the Ottoman Empire: An Overview

The effect industrially and commercially of the expulsion of the Armenians from this region is going to be throw its back in the Middle Ages. It is officially stated that ninety per cent of the trade and of the businesses carried out on through the banks is that of Armenians. Business of all kind will now be destroyed beyond the possibility of its being restored. In some trades there will be no mechanics or workmen at all.<sup>10</sup>

7 In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European merchants recognized the economic potential of Anatolia. For them, this was a land of opportunity for the export of manufactured goods from Europe and the import of agricultural products to the West (Gerasimos 1992: 7). What gave a boost to the economic relationship between the West and the Ottoman Empire, however, was the Anglo-Ottoman Convention of 1838, otherwise known as the Balta Liman Treaty. The treaty launched the beginning of free trade with Europe, with lower taxes on trade and the abolition of state monopolies. The Greek and Armenian merchants who were considered the traditional intermediaries between the European countries and the Ottoman Empire benefited from these transformations by subsequently becoming the commercial bourgeoisie class of the Empire (Pamuk 1984: 18-19).

8 In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several cities in Anatolia witnessed considerable population and economic growth. This was due to an increase in the phenomenon of urbanization,<sup>11</sup> the expansion of the communication network,<sup>12</sup> the opening of the Anatolian market to the West, administrative reforms, and an increase in social mobility. This in turn led to the increase in the size of the non-Muslim bourgeois class, especially that of the Armenians and the Greeks. The 'Armenian economy' played a significant role on three geographic levels – the central cities (Istanbul, Ankara, Trabzon), the peripheral cities (Kayseri, Harput, Tokat) and the international cities (London, Manchester). For example, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kayseri

became an important center for manufacturing and supplying goods to Adana, Yozgat, Agn, Tokat, Sivas and Istanbul. Some 15,000 Armenians lived in the city of Kayseri by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Armenian merchants played an important role in the economy of the city both locally and internationally. Soon, some of these merchants began expanding their business network to include such cities as Istanbul and Manchester. This network was controlled by such famous merchant houses as the Gulbenkians, Manugians, Frengians, Gumushians and Selians. Harput was an important center for the silk culture because of its climate and large mulberry gardens. Some Armenian students studied silk culture in Bursa's Silk School (Dalsar 1960). The production process began with the raw cocoons and culminated with the packaging of new fabric. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the two large families that controlled the silk production were the Fabricatorian Brothers in Mezere (Harput) and Effendi Kurkjian. The Fabricatorian Commercial House, for instance, was founded in Mezere by Krikor Ipekjian,<sup>13</sup> who later adopted the name Fabricatorian (Kalustian 1986: 8). The silk that was produced in this factory was of such excellent quality that it was exempted from taxes and given free warehousing and dock facilities in Istanbul. The silk cloths produced carried the label 'Fabrikator.' In 1889, Ipekjian began enlarging his factory by importing machines from Europe and America. After his death in 1902, his five sons, Minas, Dikran, Samuel, Garabed and Aharon, took over and improved the business. The Fabricatorian brothers, along with their wives and children, were all killed during the Armenian Genocide, thus effectively putting an end to their commercial legacy in Harput (Haig 1959). The Vali of the district as well as other Turkish officials took their houses (Jafarian 1989).

9 The major commercial houses in Tokat at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were in the hands of the Armenians. During this period, the main commercial houses importing *manifatura*<sup>14</sup> in Tokat were the Ibranosian Brothers, Kevork and Hagop Papazian Brothers, Mardiros Zartarian, Karatavukian, and H. Kechejian and his sons, whereas the merchants of *hurdevat* (junk dealers) were Mardiros Kesdekian, Garabed Tashjian, Karnig Naregian, and Hagop Peyniremezian. The most important house of export was the Gulbenkian firm, which, like the Ibranosian firm, had agents in all of the provinces.<sup>15</sup> Armenian merchants and industrialists were also very influential in the provinces of Trabzon. The prominent merchants of the sanjak of Trabzon were Boghos Arabian, Gayzag Arabian, Ibranosians, Marranians, H. Tahmazian, A. Minassian, Gureghian, Aslanian and the Aghnavorian brothers, who controlled the hazelnut business in the province (Der Matossian 2007; Dsotsigian 1947). Armenians in the caza of Samsun excelled in the cultivation and production of tobacco; famous merchants and tobacco producers included the Ipekians, Kherians, Ibranosian brothers, Gudugians, Meserians, Aprahamians, Bahchegulians and the Chekmeyans.

10 The situation changed, however, during the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the economic depression of 1870-1890 and the escalation of ethnic tensions in Anatolia (Pamuk 1984; Owen 1993).<sup>16</sup> The 'Armenian economy' received a fundamental blow during the Hamidian Massacres of 1894-96 as they led to a massive destruction of Armenian businesses and confiscation of Armenian properties in Anatolia. This led to the deterioration of the existing agrarian question in Anatolia and the polarization of the Armeno-Turkish conflict (Astourian 2011). The overthrow of the despotic Hamidian regime by the Young Turk revolution of 1908, however, provided new hope for the 'Armenian economy' in the Empire. The land reform became a source of contention between the Armenians and the new regime. For example, the policy of one of the major Armenian political parties, namely the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (A.R.F), towards the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) revolved around two main goals: reform and land restitution. Land restitution concerned Armenian properties that had been confiscated during the Hamidian period; reform was the unsolved issue of the reform of the Empire in general and the improvement of the condition of Armenians in particular (Kaligian 2009). Armenian hopes were so high in this period that there were even calls to concentrate 'Armenian capital' in one institution, i.e. to establish an Armenian Ottoman Bank,<sup>17</sup> but the Adana Massacres of 1909 during the counter-revolution took the lives of more than 20,000 Armenians and 2,000 Muslims and shook the foundations

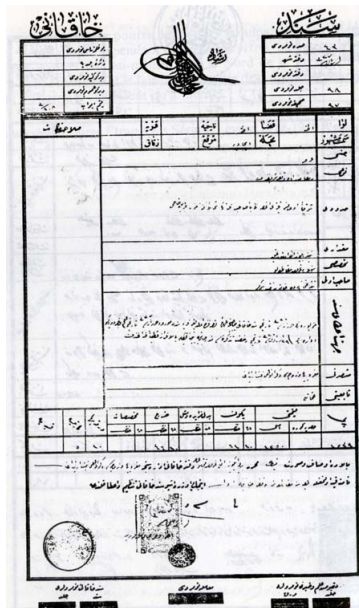
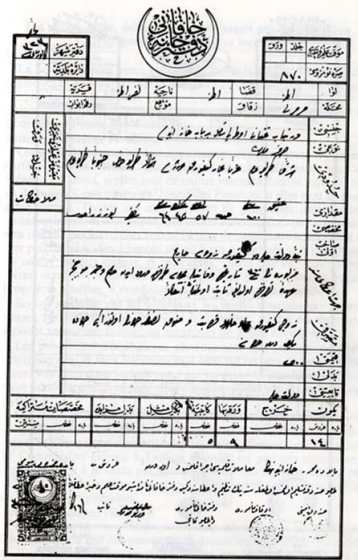
of the 'Armenian economy' yet again. In addition, the further deterioration in ethnic relations during the second constitutional period, which manifested itself in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and was followed by a massive boycotting of non-Muslim (Greek, Armenian and Austrian) products, led to the decline of Armenian trade. The radicalization of Turkish nationalism after the Balkan Wars manifested itself in changes in the CUP's policy toward the Christian populations living in the Empire, especially Armenians. Meanwhile, a theory of national economy [*Milli İktisat*] was being developed which strove to eliminate the Armenian and the Greek presence from the field of economy by calling on the Turkish element to develop a capitalist bourgeoisie that would take over the prominent role played by Armenians and Greeks (Toprak 1982; Aktar 1996, 2003, 2006; Astourian 1990). This further encouraged economic boycotts by the Turks or Muslims in general; these began during the Balkan Wars and intensified during World War I. The ensuing war and the Armenian Genocide led to the demise of the 'Armenian economy' in the Empire. Hilmar Kaiser argues that on January 6, 1916, Interior Minister Talaat categorically stated that the Ottoman economy had to become Muslim. In addition, he decreed that Armenian property must fall into Muslim hands (Kaiser 2006: 64).

### III. Legality and the Confiscation Process

- 11 The process of confiscating 'Armenian capital' is important in understanding the institutional continuity that marked the transition from empire to republic. The issue of confiscating goods – or the appropriation of 'Armenian capital' during the Armenian Genocide – needs to be examined thoroughly to demonstrate the extent to which confiscated capital played a role in the economy of the then newly-born Turkish Republic. In this case, the institutional continuity is evident as it starts during the Ottoman period (confiscation) and ends during the Turkish Republic (appropriation).
- 12 When the Ottoman Empire entered World War I, the government enacted a series of Temporary Laws<sup>18</sup> that aimed at making the government's policies malleable to the existing political situation and facilitating the attainment of its objectives (Onaran 2010: 34). Thus, a wide campaign of property confiscation took place in the eastern provinces that included almost anything that could be considered under the general category of supplies and provisions for the Ottoman Army (Vartan 1970:143-152). The first of these decrees was made on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1915 by the decision of the Council of Ministers [*Bakanlar Kurulu*].<sup>19</sup> The decision indicated that 'the Armenians, who are to be receded from the villages and towns...shall be transferred to their allocated places in comfort, their well being and possessions shall be secured during their voyage, and the expenses to be encountered in their thorough relocation to the allocated places shall be met by the immigrant funds; they shall be given properties and land in proportion to their previous financial and economic means.' This decision, along with 15 articles, was sent to the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of War, and Ministry of Finance.<sup>20</sup> On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, a Supplementary Law (SL) was enacted that contained instructions on how to register and protect the properties of the deportees and how to dispose of others through public auctions (the revenues of which were to be given to the owners upon their return from the war, according to the law).<sup>21</sup> This Supplementary Law [SL] consisting of 34 articles was classified under 'The regulations concerning the management of the land and the properties belonging to the Armenians who have been sent elsewhere as a result of the state of war and extraordinary political situation.'<sup>22</sup> The government and the officials responsible for the abandoned properties were supposed to take protective measures to safeguard the properties of the Armenian deportees through the establishment of special commissions called *Emvâl-i Metrûke İdare Komisyonları* [Abandoned Properties Administration Commissions]. These commissions were under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and were supposed to report about their activities every 15 days. Indeed, the articles of the law stipulated careful and systematic treatment of the movable and the immovable properties of the Armenians. There were special registers in which the names of the owners and the types of the goods that were confiscated were to be recorded in detail.<sup>23</sup> Later on, the local government was supposed to send these belongings to the places where the population resettled. List receipts

of the confiscated properties were given to the Armenians before their 'departure.' (See below an example of a receipt given by the commission to Mariam from Adana) (Baghdjian 1987: 287-288).

13



14

For example, article 1 of the SL indicates that, 'The management of the land and properties belonging to Armenians who had been moved elsewhere [*âher mahallari nakil icra edilen ermenilere*] will be carried out in compliance with these regulations by specially formed commissions and assigned officials whose authorities are indicated in the following articles,'<sup>24</sup> whereas another article indicated that all the buildings belonging to Armenians 'will be immediately sealed' and 'taken under protection.'<sup>25</sup> Yet, despite the fact that the SL aimed at paying great care and attention to the properties of the Armenians, it included contradictory processes. The contradiction starts with Article 11, which indicated that 'Migrants will be resettled in evacuated villages [*tahliyesi icra edilen köylere muhacir yerleştirecek*] and the existing houses and the land will be distributed [*muhacirine tevzi' edilecek*] to the migrants through temporary documents by taking into consideration the capacity of work and demands of the migrant families.'<sup>26</sup> Article 12 indicates that, 'The places of origin, settlement date, and resettlement places of the migrants [*muhacirinin*] will be registered in detail on the basis of their registers by the houses they move into. Furthermore, the houses, as well as the type, amount, and value of the land given to them, will be separately registered and the migrants will be given a document showing the quantity of land and property given to them.'<sup>27</sup> Article 14 indicates that 'Following the resettlement of the migrants, the nomads will be resettled



in the remaining villages [*muhacir iskânından mutabâqi kalan köylere civarda mevcud aşâir sayâra*] in the region, and the procedures related to the resettlement of the nomads will be similar to those applied to the migrants.<sup>28</sup> After article 10, the articles begin dealing with the resettlement of the migrants [*muhacirler*] in the evacuated villages [*tahliyesi icra edilen köylere*]. One wonders what is meant by the word 'migrants,' as it definitely does not deal with the Armenians. Rather it addresses the Muslim migrants who were going to be settled in these areas. This process of resettling was furthermore systematic, as another article of the SL indicates that 'A book showing the type, quantity and value of the land distributed to the migrants as well as their names will be kept as a basis for identity registration.'<sup>29</sup> In addition, the second half of the SL instructs how to settle the Muslim migrants in the evacuated areas.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the SL provided instructions for the systematic registration of everything that dealt with the confiscation and arguably represented a blueprint for the execution of population engineering during World War I. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1915, two days before the convention of the parliament, the Council of Ministers [*Bakanlar Kurulu*] issued a law composed of 11 articles known as the Liquidation Law (*tasfiye kanûn-ı*), which legislated the administration of Armenian properties.<sup>31</sup> The law is important as article two states that 15 days prior to the deportation any business transaction or arrangement executed by the Armenians [*Eşhâs-ı mebhûsenin*] will be cancelled [*ukûd-u vakûâ fesh ve iptal olunur*].<sup>32</sup> Though under the guise of wartime proceedings, the measures did not go unchallenged.<sup>33</sup> For instance, Ahmed Rıza, one of the prominent senators of the Ottoman Parliament, protested the Abandoned Property Law on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1915 in the following manner:

It is unlawful to designate the Armenian assets as 'abandoned goods' for the Armenians, the proprietors, did not abandon their properties voluntarily [*isteyerek terketmemişler*]; they were forcibly, compulsorily removed [*teb'id edilmiş*] from their domiciles and exiled. Now the government through its efforts is selling their goods...Nobody can sell my property if I am unwilling to sell it...If we are a constitutional regime functioning in accordance with constitutional law we cannot do this. This is atrocious. Grab my arm, eject me from my village, then sell my goods and properties, such a thing can never be permissible [*Beni kolumdan tut, köyümden dışarı at, malımı, mülküümü de sonra sat, bu hiçbir sonuç vermez*]. Neither the conscience of the Ottomans nor the law can allow it (Bayur 1983: 48).

- 15 With the aim of liquidating the Armenian properties a liquidation commission [*Tasfiye Komisyonu*] was established according to the Temporary Law of 8 December 1915.<sup>34</sup> According to Onaran the Liquidation Commissions were going to have two types of registers: the basic register [*esâs defter*] and the prevailing registers [*carî defteri*], which would follow the instructions of the Temporary Law (Onaran 2010: 73).<sup>35</sup> A critical analysis of these registers, books, and lists of the *Emvâl-i Metrûke İdare Komisyonları* [Abandoned Properties Administration Commissions] and the *Tasfiye Komisyonları* [Liquidation Commissions], if found, would shed light on the mechanism of the confiscation by area, city, village, family, religious denomination, etc.<sup>36</sup>

#### IV. What Happened on the Ground? Some Examples from the Eastern Provinces

- 16 If the registration of 'Armenian capital' was carried out in a systematic way, does this mean that the first half of the articles of the SL (1-10) was likewise implemented on the ground? American as well as European sources tell us another story than that found in the laws: most of the movable property was looted and parts of immovable properties were sold in auctions at a fraction of their original value or given as booty to Kurdish tribes to encourage them to participate in the war. In order to better understand the mechanism of confiscation I would like to bring in some examples from the provinces of Trabzon, Mersovan, Urfa, Sivas, Aintab, and Harput.<sup>37</sup>
- 17 One such report was sent by the American Consul in Trabzon, Oscar S. Heizer, to the American Embassy in Istanbul in July 1915:

The 1,000 Armenian houses are being emptied of furniture by the police one after the other. The furniture, bedding and everything of value is being stored in large buildings about the city. There is

no attempt at classification and the idea of keeping the property in 'bales under the protection of the government to be returned to the owners on their return' is simply ridiculous. The goods are piled in without any attempt at labeling or systematic storage. A crowd of Turkish women and children follow the police about like a lot of vultures and seize anything they can lay their hands on and when the more valuable things are carried out of the house by the police they rush in and take the balance. I see this performance every day with my own eyes. I suppose it will take several weeks to empty all the houses and then the Armenian shops and stores will be cleared out. The commission that has the matter in hand is now talking of selling the great collection of household goods and property in order to pay the debts of the Armenians. The German Consul told me that he did not believe the Armenians would be permitted to return to Trebizond after the war.<sup>38</sup>

- 18 Another account written by the President of the Anatolia College in Mersovan, Dr. George E. White, explains:

All the properties of the Armenians were confiscated, nominally to the state for the war fund. In this way all the Armenian houses, stores, shops, fields, gardens, vineyards, merchandise, household goods, rugs, were taken. The work was the charge of a commission, the members of which I met personally a number of times. It was commonly said that the commission did not actually receive enough for the government purposes to cover its expenses. Real estate was put up for rent at auction and was most of it bid in at prices ridiculously low by persons who were on the inside. This I know not only as a matter of common information but directly from a Turkish attorney who was in our employ and who provided himself with one of the best Armenian houses. Turks moved out of their more squalid habitations into the better Armenian houses whose owners had been 'deported.' All the property of the Armenians except some remnants left to the Armenians who had embraced Mohammedanism was thus plundered (Barton 1998: 82).

- 19 Some cities therefore did not follow the pattern by which the abandoned properties were systematically registered. For example, the Armenian community of Aintab was the wealthiest of its kind in the region and offered a splendid opportunity for pillaging. J.B. Jackson the American Consul of Aleppo reported to the American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau that the household belongings of the Armenians 'were left behind to be taken by first plunderer to arrive. Most of the merchants of the city being Armenians, their stocks are likewise disappearing. It is a gigantic plundering scheme as well as a final blow to extinguish the race, this notwithstanding the existence of a Commission appointed by the Government to safeguard the interest of the Armenians.'<sup>39</sup>

- 20 Rev. Ephraim Jernazian, an interpreter to the Ottoman government in Urfa during World War I, played the role of a translator during the confiscation process. In November 1915, the government confiscated the money and jewelry left by Armenians at the Ottoman Bank in Urfa.<sup>40</sup> In addition, all the Armenian shops were closed and government seals were placed on their locks in order to prevent looting. In his memoirs Rev. Jernazian explains that the confiscation process began with the arrival of the *Emvâl-i Metrûke Tevsiye Komisyonu* [Commission for Disposition of Abandoned Properties]. The commission's task was to sell the 'abandoned' properties of Armenians and to collect the outstanding bills of Armenian merchants to pay their debts. Rev. Jernazian was called to translate them into Turkish:

The commission began its work of disposition by breaking into Armenian stores one by one and selling their contents at auction[s]. The chairman of the commission, Nabi Bey, took me with him so that I could keep a record of the merchandise sold. With us were two policemen and an auctioneer. The ritual was the same at each store. First they examined the door seal, then broke it. Next they forced the door open, and then put up the merchandise for auction. Neither the sellers nor the buyers knew the actual value of the goods. As a result, items would sell for many times their worth, or conversely, many times less than they were worth. No one was concerned with accurate appraisals. In the evening Nabi Bey took the account records home with him. At night he juggled the accounts, pocketing a share of the proceeds. The following day, when I saw the recorded entries in the office files, the figures were in his handwriting — not my originals — and the amounts altered. Actually we found relatively little in these stores because the local government officials would enter these buildings at night through a hole made in the roof or a wall, and they would steal a large share of the goods (Sarafian 2006: 291).

- 21 In Sivas the confiscation process followed the following pattern:  
A2 Under the assumption of war tax [*teklif-i harbiye*], large quantities of goods were taken from the Armenian merchants and businessmen, down to the last artisan. In addition, about 1,000

carts of goods were collected from the villages. The army later took these carts to Enderis and then to Erzurum.<sup>41</sup>

B23 Before being deported, the majority of the people of Sivas entrusted large quantities of gold coins, valuable jewelry and bonds to the American missionaries for safekeeping as they thought that they were going to return soon. American Missionary Miss Mary Graffam reported that before setting out the Armenians of Sivas, '... brought us their jewels and other possessions to care for. They were so excited that they were almost crazy, and we had to shake some of them in order to get them to tell us their names. One man,' she wrote, 'was caught bringing his possessions and he was killed.'<sup>42</sup> At times, the idea of entrusting large quantities of gold and valuable items to the missionary had adversarial results as evidenced by the following example from Urfa. In the lead-up to World War I, the Armenians of Urfa began looking at safe places in which to deposit their money, jewelry, and other valuable items. Some hid the items in their houses; others deposited the money in the Ottoman Bank. The majority entrusted their belongings to the missionaries of Urfa like Mr. Leslie, Dr. Kuenzler and most importantly Franz Eckart. According to Rev. Jernazian, Herr Eckart convinced the Armenians to place their belongings in his hands and take refuge in the rug factory that was sponsored by the German missionaries. Herr Eckart then betrayed the Armenians by stealing their belongings and trading them off to the Ottoman government (Jernazian 1990: 91-92).<sup>43</sup>

C24 The government usurped the valuable deposits of the Armenians of Sivas that were left as security against loans taken out from the Ottoman Bank (Kapigian 1924: 153-155).

D25 When the Armenians were deported, the government confiscated their movable and immovable goods. The goods were sold at cheap prices by running a bazaar. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1915 the Ministry of Interior sent a ciphered telegram to the provinces of Sivas, Trabzon and Mamuretulaziz and to the governor of the sancak of Canik, in which it discussed the regulations concerning the safekeeping of the possessions of Armenians whose "transfer" has been decided.<sup>44</sup> Two months later, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1915, a ciphered telegram from the Ministry of the Interior was sent to the various provinces and governors of sancaks, including Sivas, claiming that the immovable properties of relocated Armenians had been sold under their real value.<sup>45</sup> It could be that this last round of telegrams was sent when the huge wave of selling confiscated properties had commenced.

E26 During deportation, the gendarmes took 30-50 gold pieces by force from each caravan as *selametlik* [safety commission]. In addition, there was a *toprak basti* [stepping on land] fee taken from the caravans whenever they entered the territories of Kurdish and Turkish beys or when they crossed into province on their way to the south.

F27 The government sent out special groups called the *Emniyet Komisyonu* [Safety Commission] who were charged with taking valuable possessions under the pretext that the roads were too dangerous and that the Kurds were continuously attacking the caravans. When the caravans reached their destination, the safety commission was supposed to return these possessions to their rightful owners, but this return never took place. The cash, gold, jewelry, stocks, bonds and other valuable items were taken from the caravans in the most vicious manner. Eyewitness accounts indicate that the safety commission officers beat the Armenians, forcing them to hand over their possessions. Ironically, the concepts of violence and safety (commissions) were conflated.

28 In the end, the Armenian properties served several goals: they were used to satisfy the needs of the Muslim refugees, to create a Muslim bourgeois class, to satisfy the military necessities during the war, to cover the government's expenses of deporting the Armenians, to satisfy various government necessities, and finally to establish irregular militias (Onaran 2010: 124-128; Akçam 2009: 223-236).

## V. The End of the War and the Ottoman Government's Initiatives towards the Fate of 'Armenian Capital'

29 The issue of abandoned properties and the damages inflicted to Armenian properties appeared on the agendas of the Ottoman Parliament, the Ottoman Military Tribunals, international conferences, treaties, and congresses several times before the establishment of the Republic

of Turkey. Thus, the phase after the war and before the establishment of the Republic of Turkey is extremely crucial in understanding how the different competing forces reacted to the fate of the Armenian properties. It is worth noting here that in the immediate postwar period in Turkey, especially after 1919, two competing centers of government evolved: one was headed by Mustafa Kemal, representing the Nationalist movement in Ankara, and the other by the sultan, who represented Istanbul. These two centers would negotiate and ultimately decide the fate of the Ottoman Empire in a critical phase of history. One of the major issues discussed between these two competing centers was the culpability of wartime perpetrators of crimes. The issue was discussed during a meeting between the two centers in Amasya on the 20th-22nd of October 1919 during which both sides blamed the CUP (Akçam 2006: 127-220). Whereas the 1918 armistice agreement marked the first concrete step toward prosecuting the perpetrators of the massacres and other subsequent war crimes, the second concrete step occurred through the measures taken by several postwar Ottoman governments. In addition to being discussed in the Ottoman press at the time, the issue of responsibility for war and the massacres was repeatedly taken up by the deputies of the Ottoman Parliament. Ayhan Aktar has demonstrated that this topic was discussed in the Ottoman Parliament long before the foundation of the Turkish Republic (Aktar 2002). In dealing with the Ottoman parliamentary debates of 1918, Aktar emphasizes that none of the Ottoman deputies at that time revealed any doubt about the actuality of the mass murder. By using the terminology *Imha edilmek* [to be annihilated], *Cinayeti azime* [macabre murder], *Ermeni kıtali* [Armenian massacre] and *Ermeni faciası* [Armenian catastrophe], the Ottoman Parliament confirmed that 'crimes against humanity' had been committed against the Armenians during World War I. During these same debates the fate of the confiscated Armenian properties was also discussed in the parliament. The deputies Matios Nalbantian (Kozan), Onnik İhsan (Izmir), Artin Boşgezenian (Aleppo), Medetyan (Erzerum), and Dikran Barsamian (Sivas) gave a contemplation on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1918, demanding the removal of the deportation (27 Mayıs, 1915), as well as of the liquidation regulations (26 September, 1915), which were carried out under the reign of the CUP.<sup>46</sup> According to an expert in the field the only serious initiative taken by the government on the subject was its proposal for urgent consultation on the Temporary Laws regarding deportation and the sale of Armenian properties, which were both still in effect (Akçam 2006: 249). At the 18 December 1918 sessions the Temporary Laws were declared illegal. A vote was then taken, as a result of which the temporary decrees issued on 27 May 1915 and 29 September 1915 concerning the Armenian deportations and the sale of the deportees' property were annulled (Akçam 2006: 254). On the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1920 the Ali Rıza Paşa cabinet, representing the Istanbul government, decreed an end to the liquidation law [*tasfiye kanûn-ı*] of the properties of the deported issued during the reign of the Unionists.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, on 14 September 1922, the Nationalists in power, i.e. those representing the Nationalist Movement in Ankara, attempted to restore the 1915 decree regarding the confiscation of Armenian property, nullified earlier by the Chamber of Deputies as a violation of the Constitution.<sup>48</sup>

30 In addition to being discussed in internal Ottoman politics, the fate of 'Armenian capital' was also discussed in international congresses and treaties. In 1919, the Armenian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference presented a report titled 'Tableau approximatif des Réparations et Indemnités pour les dommages subis par la Nation arménienne en Arménie de Turquie et dans la République arménienne du Caucase.'<sup>49</sup> The list was signed by A. Aharonian (the president of the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia to the conference in Paris) and by Boghos Nubar (the president of the Armenian National Delegation). It provides a detailed account of the damage inflicted to 'Armenian capital' during the Armenian Genocide. During the Treaty of Sèvres, too, the issue of abandoned property was raised. Article 144 reads:

'The Turkish Government recognises the injustice of the law of 1915 relating to Abandoned Properties [*Emval-i-Metroukeh*], and of the supplementary provisions thereof, and declares them to be null and void, in the past as in the future.

The Turkish Government solemnly undertakes to facilitate to the greatest possible extent the return to their homes and re-establishment in their businesses of the Turkish subjects of non-Turkish race

who have been forcibly driven from their homes by fear of massacre or any other form of pressure since January 1, 1914. It recognizes that any immovable or movable property of the said Turkish subjects or of the communities to which they belong, which can be recovered, must be restored to them as soon as possible, in whatever hands it may be found. Such property shall be restored free of all charges or servitudes with which it may have been burdened and without compensation of any kind to the present owners or occupiers, subject to any action which they may be able to bring against the persons from whom they derived title.”

31 The Treaty of Sèvres was annulled by Treaty of Lausanne, thus preventing the implementation of Article 144. Even before Lausanne, the Grand National Assembly in Angora passed another law entitled ‘Law of Abandoned Properties’ on April 15, 1923, stipulating that properties of all the non-Muslims who had left before the Treaty of Lausanne would pass to the Turkish government.<sup>50</sup> Appropriation efforts continued in the Republican period. To ensure that confiscated property could not be reclaimed the Turkish government promulgated a law forbidding the return of the Armenian deportees of Cilicia and the Eastern Provinces to Turkey after the Treaty of Lausanne was ratified. Furthermore, on May 23, 1927 a second law was passed by the government which stated that ‘Ottoman subjects who during the War of Independence took no part in the National movement, kept out of Turkey and did not return from July 24, 1923 to the date of the publication of this law, have forfeited Turkish nationality.’<sup>51</sup> In addition to this, a subsequent law passed on May 28, 1928 stipulated that ‘those who are deprived of their Turkish citizenship shall be expelled if they are in Turkey. The return to Turkey of all persons deprived of their Turkish citizenship is prohibited. Their property is subject to liquidation by the Government’ (Flourno and Hudson 1929: 571). Together all of these regulations prevented the return of the Armenian survivors and deprived them of any avenues to reclaim their property. In doing so, the Turkish government transferred the “abandoned” properties to the newly migrated population.

32 The Supplementary Law discussed in this paper covered only one dimension of the confiscation process of ‘Armenian capital.’ The following points need to be taken into consideration for future research about the fate of the ‘Armenian economy’ in the Ottoman Empire.

1) As mentioned earlier, the registers of the Abandoned Property Commission [*Emvâl-i Metruke Komisyonu*] and the *Tasfiye Komisyonu* [Liquidation Commission] must be thoroughly examined. This will give us a better understanding of the economic dimension of the Armenian Genocide and the mechanism of confiscation and will provide us with important information regarding confiscated materials in different geographical regions.

2) According to Uğur Ümit Üngör the Republican Archives in Ankara [*Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi*] offer ample documentation on the ways in which the Kemalist regime dealt with perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide (Üngör 2010).<sup>52</sup> Based on extensive research done in the Republican Archives Üngör demonstrates how the Kemalist regime generously compensated the génocidaires’ families with Armenian ‘abandoned property’ [*emvâl-i metruke*] (Üngör 2010: 5-6). Thus, the Republican archives in Ankara are vital for studying the confiscation and subsequent redistribution of the Armenian property.

3) A detailed examination of the records of the Ottoman Bank in Turkey might provide us with a better understanding of the fate of Armenian accounts, bonds and shares. In other cases, Armenians preferred to put their money in European banks. The best example of this is the French bank, *Crédit Lyonnais*.<sup>53</sup>

4) Armenian citizens of the Empire held insurance with the Ottoman Public Insurance Company [*Osmanlı Umum Sigorta Şirketi*], the Turkish National Insurance Company [*Türk Milli Sigorta Şirketi*] and other Western companies (New York Life, Consolidate Life, Gresham Life, Rus). A detailed examination of the list of names of the insurance holders will provide us with a better understanding of the number of the Armenians who held policies with Ottoman insurance companies in comparison to the European and American ones.

5) A comparative study on the economic dimension of genocides may further elucidate the system of appropriation initiated by the ruling government in different time periods.<sup>54</sup>

6) In addition, a comparative study on ‘abandoned property’ laws from the perspective of ‘nation-state building’ would be productive. Two particularly germane examples are the

Pakistani/Indian case and that of Israel/Palestine.<sup>55</sup> In both cases, states were created from previously British-ruled areas by means of UN resolutions. Both Pakistan and India were established in the context of inter-communal violence resulting from the British partition of India on August 15, 1947. The partition resulted in the deaths of more than half a million people and an estimated 14-17 million people crossed the Indo-Pakistani border, leaving behind huge amounts of movable and immovable properties (Bhusan and Gupta 1958). Both governments agreed that the issue of the abandoned property should be addressed on a government-to-government basis. As a result, negotiations took place in order to find a permanent solution to the problem. At the same time, both India and Pakistan legally appropriated the lands of the displaced population to serve in the resettlement of refugees on both sides. After the 1948 war and as a result of the expulsion and flight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, the newly created state of Israel dealt with the same issue of Abandoned Property [*nekhesim netushim*] and enacted a series of laws that legalized the appropriation of Palestinian properties and their redistribution to the newly arriving Jewish immigrants from Europe and Arab countries.<sup>56</sup> These laws were influenced by British, Indian, and Pakistani legislation.

## Conclusion

39 This article has aimed to demonstrate the fate of 'Armenian capital' in the Ottoman Empire and to identify questions and issues for further research that may elucidate the role played by this capital in the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The Supplementary Law, with its contradictory articles, represented measures for the demographic homogenization of Anatolia. As Kaiser rightly notes, the entire Ottoman government apparatus, which included several central government ministries, provincial and local authorities, as well as village elders, was involved in transferring private, ecclesiastical and community-owned Armenian property into either private or public hands (Kaiser 2006: 70).<sup>57</sup> The subsequent treaties and the laws that were passed during the Republican period after the Armenian Genocide finalized the transfer of 'Armenian capital.' This raises important questions regarding the ways in which governments use the medium of law and legality in order to rationalize the confiscation and subsequent appropriation of the properties of the expelled/transferred/exterminated indigenous populations. The aim of using law and legality is to create a degree of state control over the situation and to avoid the spontaneous seizure of 'Abandoned Property' by the local population. In the Ottoman case, despite the fact that the government proclaimed itself the sole legitimate entity in administering the confiscation of Armenian property through detailed bureaucratic registration, the reality on the ground looked quite different, as many local officials, Kurdish Aghas, and irregular troops, saw this as an unique opportunity for financial gain. They thus took an active role in looting movable Armenian property and, to a lesser extent, immovable property. I say lesser extent because it was the newly created Republic of Turkey that was going to act as the legitimate distributor of Armenian capital to the local population. In doing so, the Turkish government, like its Ottoman predecessor, aimed to create a new loyal bourgeoisie class by initiating radical spatial modifications and supporting the redistribution of 'Armenian capital' to the local elites – members of the CUP, Muslim businessmen, traditional dignitaries and land owners (Üngör 2010; Kaiser 2006: 62-64). Hence, the confiscation/appropriation continuum of Armenian property constitutes a key component in the historical continuity evident in the transition from Empire to Republic.

---

## Bibliography

- Adıvar, Halide Edib (1926) *Memoirs of Halide Edib*, New York, London, The Century co.
- Akçam, Taner (2006) *A Shameful Act: the Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, New York, Metropolitan Books.
- Akçam, Taner (2008) *Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur: Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Savaş Yıllarında Ermenilere Yönelik Politikalar*, Çağaloğlu, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları.
- Aktar, Ayhan (1996) 'Economic Nationalism in Turkey: The Formative Years, 1912 – 1925,' in *Boğaziçi Journal, Review of Social and Administrative Studies* 10/1-2, pp. 63-62.

- Aktar, Ayhan (2002) 'Son Osmanlı Meclisi ve Ermeni Meselesi: kasım-aralık 1918' [The Last Ottoman Parliament and the Armenian Question: November-December 1918], in *Toplum ve Bilim*, [Science and Society] 91, pp. 142-166.
- Aktar, Ayhan (2003) 'Homogenizing the Nation, Turkifying the Economy: Turkish Experience of Populations Exchange Reconsidered', in Hirschon Renée (ed.) *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, New York, Oxford, Berghahn Books, pp. 79-95.
- Aktar, Ayhan (2006) *Türk milliyetçiliği, gayri müslimler ve ekonomik dönüşüm* (The Turkish Nationalism, non-Muslims and the Economic Transformation) Istanbul, İletişim Yayınları.
- Alboyadjian, Arshag (1952) *Patmutiwn Ewdokioy Hayots: teghagrakan, patmakan ew azgagrakan teghekutiwnnerov* [History of the Armenians of Tokat with Topographic, historical and ethnographic information], Cairo, Publication of New York Tokat Educational Organization.
- Aly, Götz (2007) *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State*, Translated by Jefferson Chase, New York, Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt.
- Astourian, Stephan (1990) 'The Armenian Genocide: An Interpretation', in *The History Teacher*, vol. 23, n° 2, February.
- Astourian, Stephan (2011) 'The Silence of the Land: Agrarian Relations, Ethnicity, and Power', in Suny, Ronald Grigor; Göçek, Fatma Müge; Naimark, Norman M. (eds.), *A Question of Genocide: 1915: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 55-81.
- Baghdjian, Kévork (1987) *La Confiscation, par le gouvernement turc, des biens arméniens...dits « abandonnés »*, Montreal.
- Barton, James L. (1998) *Turkish atrocities : statements of American missionaries on the destruction of Christian communities in Ottoman Turkey, 1915-1917*, Ann Arbor, Mich., Gomidas Institute.
- Bayur, Yusuf Hikmet (1983) *Türk İnkilâb Tarihi*, Cilt III, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu.
- Bhusan, Jyoti; Gupta, Das (1958) *Indo-Pakistan Relations, 1947-1955*, Amsterdam, Djambatan.
- Çetinoğlu, Sait (2009) 'Ermeni Emval-i Metrukeleri Üzerine', Bırıkım, <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/birikim/makale.aspx?mid=552&makale=Ermeni%20Emval-i%20Metrukeleri%20%DCzerine>
- Çetinoğlu, Sait (2006), 'Sermayenin Türkleştirilmesi,' in Fikret Başkaya (ed.) *Resmi Tarih Tartışmaları*, Özgür Üniversite Kitaplığı.
- Der Hovannesian, Krikor (1965) *Badmakirk Sivrihisari Hayots: Deghagrakan, Badmagan yev Azkagrakan* (History of the Armenians of Sivrihisar: Topographic, historical and ethnographic), Beirut, Meshag Publication.
- Dalsar, Fahri (1960) *Bursa'da İpekçilik*, Istanbul.
- Der Matossian, Bedross (2007) 'The Armenian Commercial Houses and Merchant Networks in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman Empire', in *TURCICA*, 39, Fall, pp. 147-174.
- Der Matossian, Bedross (2009) 'The Pontic Armenian Communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', in *Armenian Pontus: The Trabzon-Black Sea Communities*, ed., Richard G. Hovannisian, UCLA Armenian History and Culture Series, 8, Costa Mesa: Mazda Press, 2009.
- Deringil, Selim (2002) 'The Study of the Armenian Crisis of the Late Ottoman Empire, or, Seizing the Document by the Throat', in *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 27, Fall, pp. 35-59.
- Dsotsigian, S.M (1947) *Arewmetahay Ashkharh* (Western Armenia), New York.
- Dündar, Fuat (2001) *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskân Politikası, 1913-1918*, İstanbul: Çağaloğlu, İletişim Yayınları.
- Dündar, Fuat (2008) *Modern Türkiye'nin şifresi: İttihat ve Terakki'nin emisite mühendisliği, 1913-1918*, Çağaloğlu, İstanbul, İletişim, 2008.
- Feldman, Gerald D. and Seibel, Wolfgang (eds.) (2004) *Networks of Nazi Persecution: Bureaucracy, Business and the Organization of the Holocaust*, New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books.
- Fischbach, Michael R. (2003) *Records of Dispossession: Palestinian Refugee Property and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- Flourno, Richard W.; Hudson, Manley O (1929) *A Collection of Nationality Laws of Various Countries as Contained in Constitutions, Statutes and Treaties*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Gerasimos, Augustinos (1992) *The Greeks of Asia Minor: Confession, Community and Ethnicity in the Nineteenth Century*, Kent, The Kent State University Press.

- Ghazarian, K. Haygazn (1964) "Hayotz Lekial Koykeru yev Galvadzneru Talane Turkeru Goghme" [The theft of the Armenian Abandoned Properties by the Turks], in *Hayrenik*, 6 October and 7 October.
- Ghazarian, K. Haygazn (1968) *Tseghasban Turkeh* [The Genocidal Turk], Beirut, Hamazkayin Press.
- Haig, Vahe (1959) *Kharpert yev anor Vosgeghen Tashduh* [Kharpert and Her Golden Plain], New York.
- Halacoğlu, Yusuf (2001) *Ermeni Tehciri ve Gerçekler, 1914-1918*, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi.
- Hovakimian, Hovakim (1967) *Patmutiwn Pontosi* [The History of Pontus], Lebanon, Meshag Publishing House.
- Issawi, Charles (1980) *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800-1914*, Chicago, London, The University of Chicago Press.
- Issawi, Charles (1982) *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- Jafarian, Boghos (1989) *Farewell Kharpert: The Autobiography of Boghos Jafarian*, ed. Leon Mangasarian, Madison, WI, C. Mangasarian.
- Jernazian, Ephraim K. (1990) *Judgment Unto Truth: Witnessing the Armenian Genocide*. Translated by Alice Haig, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers.
- Kaiser, Hilmar (2006) 'Armenian Property, Ottoman Law and Nationality Policies during the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1916', in Farschid, Olaf *et al*, *The World War I as Remembered in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean*, Beirut, Orient-Institute Beirut.
- Kaligian, Dikran Mesrob (2009) *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule 1908-1914*, Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick and London.
- Kalustian, Mark, (1986) 'The Fabrikatorian Brothers: Textile Kings of the Ottoman Turkey', in *Armenian Mirror Spectator*, Feb.1, p. 8.
- Kapigian, Garabed (1924) *Eghernabadoum Pokoun Hayots ev norin medzi mayrakaghaki Sebastio*, Boston, Hayrenik Press.
- Kardeş, Salâhaddin (2008) '*Tehcir*' ve *Emval-i Metrûke Mevzuatı*, Ankara, T.C. Maliye Bakanlığı.
- Kieser, Hans-Lukas (2000) 'Some Remarks on Alevi Responses to the Missionaries in Eastern Anatolia (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> cc.)', in *Altruism and Imperialism: The Western Religious and Cultural Missionary Enterprise in the Middle East*, Middle East Institute Conference, Bellagio Italy.
- Kuyumdjian, Lut'fik (1928, 1929, 1931, 1932, 1939), *Lk'eal goyk'eru harc'er* [The Question of Abandoned Property], General Year Book of the National Hospital, Istanbul.
- Kuyumjian, Dikran (1998) 'La confiscation des biens et la destruction des monuments historiques comme manifestations du processus génocidaire', in *L'Actualité du génocide des Arméniens*, Actes du colloque. Organisé par le Comité de défense de la cause arménienne à Paris-Sorbonne.
- Marashlian, Levon (1999) 'Finishing the Genocide: Cleansing Turkey of Armenian Survivors, 1920-1923', in Hovannisian Richard, (ed.) *Remembrance and Denial: The case of the Armenian Genocide*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, pp. 113-145.
- McDowall, David (2000) *A Modern History of the Kurds*, Revised Ed., London, I. B. Tauris.
- Owen, Roger (1981) *The Middle East in the World Economy 1800-1914*, London.
- Pamuk, Şevket (1984a) *Osmanlı Ekonomisi ve Dünya Kapitalizmi (1820-1913): Ticaret, Sermaye ve Üretim İlişkileri*, Ankara, Yurt Yayıncılık.
- Pamuk, Şevket, (1984b) 'The Ottoman Empire in the "Great Depression" of 1873-1896,' in *Journal of Economic History*; vol. 44, n° 1, March, pp. 107-118.
- Payaslian, Simon (2006) 'The Destruction of the Armenian Church during the Genocide,' in *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 1:2 Fall, pp. 149-71.
- Polatel, Mehmet, (2010) 'İttihat Terakki 'den Kemalist Ermeni Malları,' in *Toplum ve Kuran*, 3, Bahar-Yaz, pp. 113-152.
- Polatel, Mehmet, (2009) 'Turkish state formation and the distribution of the Armenian abandoned properties from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey (1915-1930)'. Unpublished M.A thesis, Boğaziçi University.
- Prime Minster Directorate (1982) *Documents*, vol. 1, Ankara.
- Quataert, Donald (2000) *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.



Sarafian, Ara (2008) *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1917*, Gomidas Institute, Princeton and London.

Toprak, Zafer (1982) *Türkiye'de 'Milli İktisat'(1908-1918)*, Ankara, Yurt.

Torigian, Shavarsh (1973) *The Armenian Question and International Law*, Beirut, Hamaskaïne.

Üngör, Uğur Ümit (2008) 'Geographies of Nationalism and Violence: Rethinking Young Turk 'Social Engineering'', in *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, URL : <http://ejts.revues.org/index2583.html>.

Üngör, Uğur Ümit (2010) 'Skeletons in the Closet? Notes on the Armenian Genocide in Turkish Republican Sources', Workshop 'The State of the Art of Armenian Genocide Research: Historiography, Sources, and Future Directions', Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Clark University, 8-10 April 2010.

Üngör, Uğur Ümit; Polatel, Mehmet (2011), *Confiscation and Colonisation: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property*, London, New York, Continuum.

Vartan, Levon (1970) *Haykakan Tasnehinke yev Hayeru Lekyal Kuykere : Knnagan agnarg esd Terkagan vaverakrereu* [The Armenian 15 and the Abandoned Properties of the Armenians : Critical commentary according to Turkish documents], Beirut, Atlas Publication House.

Yeghiayan, Puzant (1975) 'Hayoc' "Ik'eal goyk" T'urk'ioy mech', [Abandoned Property in Turkey] in *Contemporary History of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia 1914-1972* [in Arm.], Antelias.

Yeghyayan, Puzant (1970) *Atanayi Hayots 'Patmut' iwn* [The History of Armenians of Adana], Beirut, Publication of Adana Compatriot Union.

---

## Notes

1 I take the phrase 'Venturing into the Minefield' from Selim Deringil (Deringil 2002: 35).

2 According to Mrs. Arusyag the family was given the surname Chatalian due to the closeness of the four brothers in business. In Turkish *çatal* means a fork. The houses of the Chatalian brothers were built beside each other, which reminds us of the Fabricatorian brothers of Harput. Interview with Mrs. Chatalian at her residence in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem (August 5, 2002).

3 On the history of the Armenians of Sivrihisar in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Der Hovannesian (1965).

4 Chatalian brothers used to buy sheep flocks in large quantities from the villagers. They used to make a deal with the villagers whereby they would obtain the wool from the sheep and the villages will obtain the milk. The Armenian phrase for this was "*Purte indzi gate kez'i*" (the wool [is] mine and the milk [is] yours)

5 Private archives of the Chatalian Family.

6 Armeno-Turkish was Ottoman Turkish written in the Armenian script.

7 This is an important point as it shows the development of accounting and bookkeeping at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

8 The Turkish official thesis argues that the revenue from the properties of the Armenians that were sold by the Abandoned Properties commission was sent to their original owners (Halacoğlu 2001: 69; Kardeş 2008).

9 In Ottoman see *Documents*, vol. 1 (Ankara, 1982) and various publications of the Prime Minister Directorate. In European languages see Kaiser (2006); Torigian (1973); Baghdjian (1987); Karagueuzian and Auron (2009); Kuyumjian (1998); Marshlian (1999).

10 From Leslie A. Davis to the American Consul of Harput to Honorable Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador, Istanbul, June 30, 1915. Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/269. (Sarafian 2006: 459).

11 For example, in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nearly a quarter of the population of Anatolia was living in those cities of ten thousand or more inhabitants.

12 Besides the expansion of a road network that facilitated the expansion and movement of goods overland, the appearance of steamships in the Empire in the late 1830s led to a significant transformation of the nature of commerce in the Empire. The central Anatolian cities became more attached to the world economy through the ports of Trabzon and Mersin. On the development of transportation see Quataert (2000: 117-124); Issawi (1980, 1982).

13 *İpekçi* in Turkish means silk manufacturer.

14 *Manifatura* is Italian for manufactured products.

15 This was the Gulbenkian family from which emerged Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian (1869-1955), the Armenian businessman and philanthropist also known as Mr. Five Percent for owning 5% of Iraqi

Petroleum Company (IPC). Gulbenkian played a major role in the oil business in the Middle East in the first half of the 20th century.

16 According to Owen the Ottoman bankruptcy in 1870 produced a system of international financial control leading to the loss of sovereignty of the Empire. This was manifested in the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (PDA). (Owen 1993: 189-200)

17 'Haykakan Pank,' [Armenian Bank] in *Jamanag*, 5 December 1908: 1.

18 These Temporary Laws regulated such varied areas as the telegraphic and postal systems to the release of criminals. In glancing through the official gazette, *Takvim-i Vekayi*, from November 18, 1914 to November 13, 1915 one notices numerous examples of Temporary Laws. As a matter of fact, the number of Temporary Laws published under the rule of the CUP until 1918 was above 1000.

19 'Ahvâl-i harbiye ve zarûret-i fevkalâde-i siyasiye dolayisiyle mahall-i ahire nakilleri icrâ edilen Ermenilerin iskân ve iaşesiyle husûsat-i sâireleri hakkında talimât-nâme,' in Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri, 1914-1918*. Cilt I (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi), 428.

20 'Savaş hâli ve olağanüstü siyasî zorunluluklar dolayısıyla, başka yerlere nakledilen Ermenilerin iskân ve iaşeleri ile diğer konular hakkında yönetmeliktir.' See Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri, 1914-1918*. Cilt I, pp. 132-133.

21 'Harp hâli ve olağanüstü siyasî zorunluluklar dolayısıyla başka yerlere nakledilen Ermenilere ait mal, mülk ve arazilere uygulanacak idare hakkında yönetmeliktir.' See Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri, 1914-1918*. Cilt I, pp. 139-142. On the stages of the enactment of the supplementary law see Kaiser (Kaiser 2006 : 56-62).

22 'Harb ve Olağanüstü Siyasi Durum Sebebiyle Başka Yerlere Gönderilen Ermenilere Ait Mülk ve Arâzînin İdâre Şekli Hakkında Talimât-nâme.' 27 Recep 1333 and 28 May 1331 (10 June 1915). The 34 articles of the law are reproduced in Prime Ministry Directorate General of Press and Information, *Documents*, vol. 1, Ankara, 1982, pp. 6-80.

23 For the registers of the liquidation commissions see 'Emval-i Metrûke Tasfiye Komisyonlarının Esas Defteri,' in *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 28 Teşrinievvel 1331, # 2343. For the way and the methods of recording the abandoned properties see 'Emval-i Metrûke Hesab-ı Cari Defterinin Suret-i Kayıt ve İsti'mâli,' in the same source.

24 Article 1 of the Supplementary Law.

25 Article 2 of the Supplementary Law.

26 Article 11 of the Supplementary Law.

27 Article 12 of the Supplementary Law. The Abandoned Properties Commission also played the role of distributing the Armenian properties to the incoming Muslim refugees (Dündar 2001).

28 Article 14 of the Supplementary Law.

29 Article 17 of the Supplementary Law.

30 On the settlement of the Muslim migrants see Kaiser (2006: 64-66).

31 '14 Mayıs 1331 Tarihli Kanûn-ı Muvakkat Mûcibince Âhar Mahâllere Nakledilen Eşhâsın Emvâl ve Düyûn ve Matlûbât-ı Metrûkesi Hakkında Kanûn-ı Muvakkat' *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Eylül 1331 (27 Septemre 1915) # 2303.

32 *Ibid.*

33 See articles 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 17, and 21 of the Supplementary Law.

34 '26 Teşrin-evvel 1331 tarihli 14 Mayıs 1331 Tarihli Kanûn-ı Muvakkatın Suver-i İcrâiyesi Hakkında Nizâm-nâme,' *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 28 Teşrin-evvel 1331, # 2345.

35 See 'Emvâl-i metrûke hesabı carî defterin sûreti kayıt ve istimali.' The basic registers would have 14 accounts pertaining to the movable and the immovable properties (Onaran2010 : 73).

36 Taner Akçam believes that it is very difficult to find the registers of the Abandoned Properties Commission (Akçam 2009: 212). Onaran, on the other hand, believes that there should be at least 66 registers available (Onaran2010: 71-74, 103).

37 Akçam provides numerous examples from Trabzon, Sivas, and Adana on the irregularities carried out by the Abandoned Properties Commissions (Akçam 2010: 130-131).

38 U.S. National Archives, Record Group 59 (NA, RG 59), 867. 4016/126, Oscar Heizer to Morgenthau, July 1928, 1915 (Sarafian 2006: 180-181).

39 From J.B. Jackson, American Consul of Aleppo, Syria, to the Honorable Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador, Istanbul, August 19, 1915 Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/148 (Sarafian 2006: 207).

40 Rev. Jernazian argues that the Abandoned Properties Commission seized about 140,000 gold pieces that were left at the Ottoman bank as a capital fund (Jernazian 1990: 95). It is interesting to notice that the Georgian Armenian Cathedral and the Catholic Armenian Church at Erzerum were filled with goods

of various kinds which had been entrusted to the Imperial Ottoman Bank by the Armenians before they were deported. These goods were entrusted to the Bank and the keys were in the possession of the Bank. The director had told Jernazian in confidence that upon instructions from the head office he had refused to deliver up the keys to the local police authorities. From Sir Oscar H. Heizer, American Consul of Trebizond, to the Honorable Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador, Istanbul, September 25, 1915 Source: LC/HM/(Sr.)/Reel 7/718 (Sarafian 2006: 291).

41 John Antreassian (b1897), a survivor from Daşlık (Sivas), in an interview with Vazken Parseghian 1970.

42 Mary L. Graffam, 'Miss Graffam's Own Story,' 28 June, 1919, ABC 16.5, Vol.6, No. 274. ABCFM archives.

43 In 1918, upon hearing that Germany was losing the war, Herr Eckart began transporting the stolen goods to Aleppo. On one of his trips to Aleppo he was arrested by the Turkish government and was imprisoned for stealing money and property, i.e. the abandoned properties which belonged to the Ottoman government.

44 BOA.DH.SFR, nr.54/202 in Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler (1915-1920)* [The Armenians in Ottoman Documents (1915-1920)] Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1994 (Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, Yayın No. 14).

45 BOA.SFR,nr.54/381 in Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler (1915-1920)* [The Armenians in Ottoman Documents (1915-1920)] Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1994 (Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, Yayın No. 14).

46 MMZC, Kanûn-ı Evvel, 1334, pp. 112-113.

47 Âher mahallere nakledilmiş olan eşhasın 17 Zilkade 1333 ve tarihli Karâr-nâme mûcibince tasfiyeye tâbi tutulan Emvâli hakkında karâr-nâme. 16 Rebi ul Ahır 1338 ve 8 Kânun-ı Sani 1336 (8 Ocak 1920) tarihli.

48 14 Mayıs 1331 tarihli kanûn-ı muvakkat mûcibince âher mahallere nakledilen eşhasın Emvâl, düyûn ve matlûbat-ı metrûkesi hakkındaki 13 Eylül 1331 tarihli kanûn-u muvakkatin bazı mevâddını muaddel ve 20 Nisan 1338 tarihli Emvâli metrûke kanûn-ı nasih kanûn.

49 See Tableau approximatif des Réparations et Indemnités pour les dommages subis par la Nation arménienne en Arménie de Turquie et dans la République arménienne du Caucase. (Paris, Imp. P. Dupont, 1919). The table provides detailed information about the properties owned by the Armenians of Cilicia.

50 Âher Mahallere Nakledilen Eşhasın Emval ve Düyûn ve Matlûbat-ı Metrûkesi Hakkındaki 17 Zilkade 1333 ve 13 Eylül 1331 Tarihli Kanunu Muvakkatin Bazı Mevaddı ile 20 Nisan 1338 Tarihli Emval-i Metrûke Kanununu Muaddil Kanun Kanun No : 333 Kabul Tarihi : 15.04.1339. *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Kavînin Mecmuası*, C.1, p. 407.

51 Law No. 1042, of May 23, 1927 (Flourno and Hudson 1929: 596).

52 On the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 1926 the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed a law (n° 882) that compensated the families of those perpetrators assassinated by the [Armenian] committees. See 'Ermeni suikast komiteleri tarafından şehid edilen veya bu uğurda suver-ı muhtelifle ile dūçarı gadrolan ricâlin âilelerine verilecek emlâk ve arâzî hakkında kanûn.'

53 The Bank Crédit Lyonnais was founded in 1863 in Lyon by Henry Germain. It was nationalized in 1945. It opened its first branch in the Ottoman Empire in 1875 in Istanbul, followed by Izmir and Jerusalem in 1890.

54 A good study on the economic dimension of the Holocaust is Gerald D. Feldman and Wolfgang (Wolfgang and Feldman 2004) andGötz Aly (Aly 2007).

55 In both cases the Abandoned Property legislations were inspired by the British Trading with the Enemy Act (1939), which accorded sweeping powers to the Custodian of Enemy Property over the property of those defined as 'enemies.'

56 The first of these laws was enacted on June 21, 1948 and was called the Abandoned Property [*nekhesim netushim*] Ordinance No. 12 of 5708/1948. The purpose of the law was to create a degree of state control over the situation in order to avoid spontaneous seizures of refugee lands. Three days later another law called the Abandoned Areas Ordinance was passed that provided a legal basis for extending Israeli jurisdiction to 'abandoned areas' of Palestine. A third law entitled the Emergence Regulations for the Cultivation of Fallow Land and the Use of Unexploited Water Sources of 5709/1948 was passed on October 11, 1948 which gave the Minister of Agriculture the authority to assume control of any land that he deemed not being cultivated (Fischbach 2003: 20-21).

57 On the fate of the Armenian Church during the Genocide see (Payaslian 2006).

***Asterisk notes***

\* I would like to thank Ari Ariel and Banu Karaca for their useful comments. I would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their useful comments. Of course, I alone am responsible for this article.

---

***References***

Electronic reference

Bedross Der Matossian, « The Taboo within the Taboo: The Fate of 'Armenian Capital' at the End of the Ottoman Empire », *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [Online], Complete List, 2011, Online since 06 octobre 2011, Connection on 16 mai 2012. URL : /index4411.html

---

***About the author***

**Bedross Der Matossian**

Department of History, University of Nebraska/Lincoln, USA

---

***Copyright***

© Some rights reserved / Creative Commons license

---