

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Collective Sexual Violence in Turkey, 1894–1924: What we know and how we know it

Benny Morris

Ben-Gurion University, Beersheba, Israel (Emeritus)

Email: morrisbenny8@gmail.com

Abstract

The essay deals with the rape component of the Muslim Turkish massacres of Christian Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians during the years between 1894 and 1924 and the pertinent archival sources. During the three bouts of massacre, amounting to staggered genocides, in 1894–1896, 1915–1916 and 1920–1924, in which the Muslim Turks, under Ottoman imperial governments and, subsequently, under Ataturk's Nationalist/republican rule, murdered some two million Christians, tens of thousands of Christian women were raped and/or forcibly abducted to Muslim households and Islamized. While almost all Turkish official records of these events have been destroyed or slicked away, archives in the West - US, German, French and British state archives and archives of missionary societies then operating in Asia Minor - are open to researchers and abound with materials that describe and analyze the massacres and the rapes and abductions that accompanied them. The essay lays out what happened and why, and how researchers have traced what happened.

Between 1894 and 1924 there were three waves of massive anti-Christian violence in Ottoman Asia Minor/Turkey. An estimated 1.5 million to 2.5 million Christians–Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians–were murdered by the country's Muslims. These waves of mass killings amounted to multiple, drawn-out genocidal campaigns that were accompanied by the rape in towns and villages of many thousands of Christian girls and women by their Muslim neighbors, soldiers, gendarmes, Kurdish tribesmen and Arabs. Additionally, during these campaigns, many of the rape victims and other Christian women and girls were abducted into Muslim households and Islamized, and many hundreds were

ostracized by their communities after their “honor” was violated, and turned to “survival sex” and prostitution.¹

The three waves of genocidal violence occurred against a political-military backdrop. The 1894–1896 Ottoman massacres (that included mass rape) of Armenians occurred against a background of rising Armenian political consciousness and organization in Turkey, especially among the Armenian communities in eastern Anatolia and in Istanbul; Armenian political parties had emerged, calling for “autonomy” or even Armenian independence in the eastern provinces. This political groundswell was accompanied by occasional acts of terrorism against “collaborating” Armenians and, infrequently, against Ottoman officials. The massacres unleashed against the Armenians on the orders of the sultan, Abdulhamid II, in response were designed to quell this Armenian nationalist surge and weaken the Armenian community.

The violence unleashed by the Ottoman state against the Armenians during 1915–1916, amounting to genocide, was in many ways the continuation of a process that had begun with the massacres of 1894–1896. It was geared to “solving” the Armenian problem and ridding Anatolia of its Armenian communities. The genocide occurred during and against the backdrop of World War I, during which the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) government in Istanbul feared Armenian collaboration with the Allied powers, principally Russia. Such collaboration, the government believed, could subvert Turkish war-making and ultimately result in the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. The CUP leaders, who aligned themselves with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, found their Empire embattled on multiple fronts against the Russian and the British armies in the Gallipoli Peninsula, the Caucasus and eastern Turkey, Iraq and Palestine-Syria, and threatened internally by Christian minorities. They saw themselves (and their religion, Islam) as existentially threatened. Throughout 1915–1916, in city after city and province after province, the army, gendarmerie and police, abetted by civilians and tribesmen, massacred the Armenian menfolk and drove the women, children and elderly on death marches across Anatolia, toward the deserts of Syria and Iraq. As many as one million Armenians, most of whom offered no resistance, were slaughtered. During the war the Ottoman authorities also ethnically cleansed swathes of Greek villages along Anatolia’s coastlines. Many thousands were killed in the process. Both the mass murder of the Armenians and the deportations inland of Greek communities were accompanied by the mass rape of Christian women and girls.

Following the Ottoman defeat in the world war, the Turkish army was largely demobilized and parts of the country, including Smyrna (Izmir), were occupied by foreign forces. In response, 1919 saw the rise of a revanchist Turkish nationalist movement and army headed by Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), bent on reclaiming Turkish sovereignty and ridding the country of the occupiers. Nationalists viewed Anatolia’s remaining Christian communities, now

¹ In 1916 it was reported that in Constantinople, “hundreds of young Armenian girls” had been driven by destitution to prostitution: Unsigned, “Addendum to ‘Report of an Inhabitant of Athlit, Mount Carmel, Syria,’” undated but stamped “M.I.2.b, 27 November 1916,” The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), FO 371/2783.

predominantly Greek, but also Assyrian and Armenian (those who had survived the war in place or returned from exile), as abettors of the occupiers. Exploiting the military offensives against the Greek army advancing from Smyrna into Anatolia, the Russian forces occupying eastern Turkey, the French army (assisted by local Armenians) that occupied Cilicia and northern Aleppo, and the British who were encamped along the Straits and in Istanbul, Turkish nationalists sought to rid the country of its remaining Christians. Between 1920 and 1923 Ataturk's fighters and officials launched a genocidal campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Greek communities around Anatolia, murdering hundreds of thousands and ultimately expelling the remainder to Greece, while killing off the remaining Armenians and hundreds of thousands of Assyrians as the French and Greek armies were gradually pushed out of Anatolia. Across the board and on all fronts, the Turkish offensive and massacres were accompanied by wholesale rape and abduction to Muslim households of Christian women and girls. Along the eastern edge of Turkey, the warfare was accompanied by atrocities committed by all sides as Russian forces withdrew northwards.

The Greek retreat, during the summer of 1922, to Smyrna and the sea, was marked by a policy of scorched earth that was accompanied by sporadic massacres of Turkish villagers and individual cases of rape of Turkish women. The conquest of Smyrna by Ataturk's army was accompanied by a largescale massacre of Greeks and Armenians, a great deal of rape, and the expulsion of the remaining Greek population, along with some Armenians, to Greece.²

There were also a small number of atrocities against Turks by the French and local Armenians during the Franco-Turkish battles in Cilicia, which ended in late 1921. In the years that followed what the Turks called their "War of Independence," the authorities gradually expelled the remaining Greeks, Armenians and Assyrians of eastern Anatolia. Following the Nationalist victory, the sultanate (and, in effect, empire) were abolished and now almost wholly Muslim Turkey became a republic.

Documentation and the Archives

How do we know about this mass sexual violence? Not from Turkish records. It is doubtful that Ottoman and Turkish military and civilian officials and officers ever explicitly recorded the thousands of episodes of rape and abduction. Indeed, rape by Muslims was never mentioned. And, in their correspondence and reports Turkish officials routinely used euphemism or misdirection when referring to the abductions, which always resulted in death or Islamization. For example, Enis Pasha, the vali of Diyarbekir province, in one of his reports in 1896 referred vaguely to such abductees as "Armenian women who were

² Untitled memorandum by Perry, *New York Herald* correspondent, undated but from October 1922, Library of Congress, Bristol Papers 37. See also "Copy of Report Made by a Turkish Interpreter Who Accompanied Prof. J.K. Biorge on his Visit to Magnesia, Cassaba, Salikli, and Alashehir," October 8, 1922, United States National Archive (hereafter USNA), RG 84, Turkey (Constantinople), Vol. 466.

dispersed here and there during the troubles.”³ Such abductions were routinely described as voluntary conversions. At the time, Ottoman officials occasionally covered themselves by issuing explicit prohibitions against rape – while they themselves were committing such acts or while knowing full well that their subordinates were regularly engaged in such pursuits.⁴

If any explicit references or descriptions of sexual crimes were recorded in Ottoman/Turkish files between 1894 and 1924, they were purged in the successive waves of deletion and censorship of almost all the records connected to the genocide by government officials and archivists during the following decades.⁵ This pertains to the Prime Ministerial Archive (*Başbakanlık Arşivi*) – which is the core archive of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish state. The records in the Turkish Military Archive, in Ankara, the key archive containing the documentation of the armed forces of Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) during Turkey’s War of Independence – when most of the country’s Greeks were murdered or expelled – is closed to independent researchers (that is, researchers not in Turkish government pay).

In the decades after 1924 successive Turkish governments published collections of state documents relating to World War One and the War of Independence. None of these volumes contain descriptions of or references to the mass rape of Christian women between 1894 and 1924 (though there are occasional, vague references to Armenian rape of Muslim women, accusations – to the best of my knowledge – without any basis in fact).

So Turkish archives are of no use in furthering our understanding of sexual violence during these years. But researchers investigating Turkish Muslim sexual violence during those years will find a multitude of relevant documents in Western publications and archives. To begin with, over the past decades governments and scholars in the West have published volumes of documents dedicated to the events between 1894 and 1924, including much material relating to mass murder, rape and abduction of Christian women and children.

The first volumes containing some relevant material were published by the United States government in the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* series, the annual volumes containing reports by US diplomatic and consular

³ Enis to Sublime Porte, BOA A.MKT MHM 637/16, 14 Mart 1312 (March 27, 1896), quoted in Selim Deringil, “‘The Armenian Question is Finally Closed’: Mass Conversion of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 2 (2009): 344–71.

⁴ See, for example, Interior Ministry, Directorate of General Security, 16 August 1331 (August 29, 1915), from T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermenilerin Sevk ve İskani 1878–1920*, ed. Recep Karacakaya (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2007), 227, doc. 1789.

⁵ As to the waves of deletion and censorship, see Taner Akcam, “The Ottoman Documents and the Genocidal Policies of the Committee for Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki) toward the Armenians in 1915,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 1, no. 2 (2006): 129–32. With respect to the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) (Young Turks) massacres during 1914–1918 a certain amount of Turkish documentation exists and is accessible, mainly in the form of records from the post-war 1919–1921 trials of some of the perpetrators of the “Armenian Genocide.”

officials from different areas of the globe. Some of the reports touched on the plight of Christians in the Ottoman/Turkish lands, including evidence of Turkish Muslim sexual violence.

At the same time, between 1895 and 1896, the British government published a series of “Blue Books” (“Turkey No. 1,” “Turkey No. 2,” etc.) consisting of reports from their embassy in Constantinople and their consulates in the Turkish provincial capitals focusing on the first bout of Armenian massacre, which included a multitude of sexual crimes.

The core, second bout of massacre, which historians routinely call the “Armenian Genocide,” occurred during the world war, as the Western democracies and Tsarist Russia faced off against the Central Powers. As part of its political-propaganda warfare against the Central Powers, in 1916 the British government published a volume of reports, written by missionaries, businessmen, travelers and journalists, that zeroed in on the ongoing Turkish destruction of its Christian minorities entitled *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1916, Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs*. The volume, which also incidentally dealt with Turkey’s persecution of its Greek and Assyrian communities, was edited by Viscount Bryce, an eminent British jurist, assisted by Arnold Toynbee, an up-and-coming British historian.

In recent decades, Armenian scholar Ara Sarafian trawled through the United States National Archive and collected and published two volumes of documents, *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide 1915–1917* and *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau, 1913–1916* (Henry Morgenthau served as US ambassador in Constantinople). In 2014, a German scholar, Wolfgang Gust, published a similar selection of reports, deposited in the German Foreign Ministry archive, from German diplomats, officers and officials, who served in Turkey during the world war—*The Armenian Genocide, Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915–1916*. Most recently, in 2020, Robert Shenk and Sam Koktzoglou published a volume entitled *The Greek Genocide in American Naval War Diaries: Naval Commanders Report and Protest Death Marches and Massacres in Turkey’s Pontus Region, 1921–1922*. These documents graphically described the Turkish destruction of the northern Asia Minor Greek communities and they include evidence of Turkish sexual crimes.

Aside from the wartime Bryce volume, all these publications collated reports by serving officials and officers of the British, American and German governments. The reports—letters, cables, memoranda, diaries—were selected from the massive documentation residing in the national archives of the United States, Britain and Germany. The reports were produced mainly by diplomats and consular officials but also by other westerners residing in or passing through Turkey during those years who had observed what was happening and sent reports to “their” embassies and consuls.

Before, during and after the world war, America, Britain, Austro-Hungary, France, and Germany had dozens of consuls in provincial capitals around Turkey. These consuls regularly sent reports about what was happening in their regions to their ambassadors in Constantinople or directly to their foreign ministries in Washington DC, London, Vienna, Paris and Berlin. As well, the

ambassadors sent home reports of their own, summarizing what they had heard from their consuls or subordinate diplomats or information they themselves had personally picked up from various contacts. Over the following decades, when these reports were declassified and made public, Turkish officials and “historians” impugned their authors, saying that they were “Christians” and hence purveyed the Ottoman/Turkish Christians’ viewpoints and propaganda. This is nonsense. All or most of the diplomats in question were professionals who simply tried to report what they had seen and heard (though many, no doubt, were sympathetic towards the oppressed minorities they were reporting about. But such sympathy, as far as I can tell, did not give rise to fabrication and reporting falsehoods).

In addition, many dozens of Christian missionaries, most of them Americans, most of them Protestants, lived and worked around Turkey between 1894 and 1924 and were in close touch with the local Christian communities as well as local Muslim officials and officers. They sent letters to their friends and relatives back home and to their organizations’ headquarters and to “their” consuls and ambassadors reporting on events in their areas. Again, their sympathies by and large may have rested with their co-religionists but their moral code dictated truthful reporting. With both the diplomats and the missionaries, their reports were invariably internal and not for external consumption, distribution or publication (and, indeed, by and large these reports remained classified for decades).

The diplomats and missionaries, apart from what they saw and heard first-hand, were also fed periodic information by visiting countrymen or countrymen working in local organizations, such as the Baghdad Railway. Often, the missionaries and consuls themselves interviewed and debriefed victims of Turkish predation.

Lastly, apart from the diplomats and missionaries, American naval officers, serving after 1918 in the US Naval Squadron in Turkish Waters, regularly harbored in Asia Minor ports (Samsun, Trabzon, etc.) and reported to their superiors or to the American high commissioner—meaning ambassador—in Constantinople during the Turkish War of Independence. Their reports are to be found in the United States National Archive or among the papers of Admiral Mark Bristol, who served (unusually) as both high commissioner and commander of the squadron, deposited in the Library of Congress.

Outside the US National Archive, there is a very substantial collection of missionary reports from between 1894 and 1924 from Turkey in the Houghton Library of Harvard University—the papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the umbrella organization of the Protestant missions in Asia.

Rape and Abduction, 1894–1896

Kurdish (and occasional Turkish) predation of Christian women in Turkey’s eastern provinces had become an established custom during the years before the violence of 1894–1896. In the late 1880s, for example, an American, possibly

a journalist, reported after a tour of Erzurum vilayet (province): "The system of abduction of Armenian women by Kurdish agas [chieftains] and landlords was going on, and the violation of women in Armenian villages by bands of Kurds was almost general." One day, he wrote, he reached the village of Keuprukioi (Koprüköy) in the plain of Passim. It was "in possession of a band of Kurds, who had come in during the night." They had "turned the unarmed men out of their houses onto the roads, and were indulging in an orgy of outrage among the women," he reported.⁶

Hence, what happened to Armenian women during the massacres of 1894–1896 was "natural" and foreseeable by both those who unleashed and carried out the depredations and their victims. That first bout of Muslim Turkish violence against the Armenian communities in central and eastern Asia Minor and in Constantinople and its environs, claimed somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 Armenian lives (and possibly more if one takes into account the lives lost subsequently to hunger and disease generated by the Turkish depredations). Though there are no exact figures, during the massacres and in their immediate wake thousands of Armenian women were raped and/or abducted into Muslim homes.

The bout began in the wild and mountainous Sason region, in Bitlis vilayet of eastern Turkey, in August–September 1894. Some months before, in November–December 1893, a cluster of rapes were recorded in Ankara vilayet. The episode was triggered in November by the murder of a police informer by an Armenian political activist in the village of Incerli Keris. In response, according to an Armenian preacher who told an assistant of the British Ambassador Philip Currie, gendarmes arrested twenty prominent male villagers and tortured them, inflating their intestines with bellows inserted *a posteriori* and squeezing their testicles, and so on.⁷ The following month, gendarmes raided a nearby village, Kara Chair, and again arrested twenty local males. While they were in custody and being tortured, the local police chief and gendarmes entered the detainees' homes and raped six or seven women, "three of whom were virgins." These events led to a Christian protest meeting and a clash with local Muslims in the nearby town of Yozgat, in which there were casualties on both sides.⁸

British diplomats complained and Constantinople set up a special military court headed by Mustafa Pasha, an "exceedingly fanatical Turk," according to Currie. British Consul Arnold Cumberbatch attended the court hearings. He recorded that the raped women of Kara Chair were put on the stand and closely questioned by the judges. The judges, he wrote, spoke to them "severely and in very coarse language." The three victims who had been virgins at the time of the attack were "told to describe the exact details [of the rapes] ... The girls

⁶ Unsigned, "In Asiatic Turkey and the Transcaucasus in 1889–1890," undated, USNA, RG 59, 867.4016, roll 46.

⁷ Currie to Foreign Secretary Kimberley, draft letter conveying statement to one of his assistants, "Mr. Eliot," by Protestant Armenian preacher at Yozgat, Kerekine, May 17, 1894, TNA, FO 195/1823.

⁸ Cumberbatch to Nicolson, December 29, 1893, Turkey No. 6 (1896): *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Turkey, British Parliamentary Papers "Blue Books"* (London: HMSO, 1896), 3–7.

began to cry and said they could not tell a man of their own religion such things, much less Turkish officers, and one of them fainted.” However, the married women who witnessed the rapes, Cumberbatch reported, gave “full details” of the assaults to the court. In spite of this testimony, the court ruled that “as the persons said to have been assaulted refused to confirm the details, there was no case,” and no Turks were convicted of rape.⁹

Several Armenians were nonetheless tried for crimes related to the Yozgat violence.¹⁰ The proceedings were deemed by Western observers a farce. Witnesses who attended the trial later told Cumberbatch that the judges intimidated, reprimanded and harangued Armenian witnesses. One judge proclaimed: “You see, the Islamic nation is great,” and the local mufti issued a *fatwa* declaring that it was “lawful to kill, assault and falsely accuse” men who opposed the government.¹¹ Eventually, one Armenian was hanged, fifteen more were condemned to death, and dozens received long prison sentences.¹²

The British diplomats had managed to force the Turks to admit Armenian women into court as witnesses to rape, and the British consul was able to pass on to London the gist of their testimony. Cumberbatch’s reports, or quotes from them in Currie’s reports, are open to researchers in the British National Archives at Kew. But the Turkish records of the trial, or reports on the trial, are inaccessible in the Ottoman archive and may not exist, possibly destroyed by the Turkish government.

The events in and around Yozgat—presented by the Constantinople government spokesmen as Christian assaults on Muslims—reverberated around Asia Minor. The American consul in Sivas, Milo A. Jewett, informed the British consul in Trabzon, Harry Longworth, that the local vali (provincial governor-general) had declared that “I will outrage the mother of these *gaiours* [i.e., Christians] or they will outrage mine.”¹³

The events around Yozgat were a prelude to the horrors that followed in Sason, in Bitlis vilayet, where a fullscale massacre accompanied by mass rape took place. Regarding the Sason rapes we have what can be considered direct evidence—statements by the victims deposed by British diplomats soon after. Again, accessible Turkish records offer us nothing.

At Sason, in August–September 1894, after friction between Kurdish tribesmen and Armenian villagers, the tribesmen, backed by regular Ottoman troops, conquered a string of villages, murdered hundreds of their adult male inhabitants and raped and carried off dozens, and perhaps hundreds, of girls and women. After the massacre, thirty-nine local Kurdish chieftains, who had taken part in the massacre, wrote to Queen Victoria blaming Constantinople for what had happened, alleging that Turkish officials had ordered them to rob the Armenians

⁹ Currie to Kimberley, May 17, 1894, TNA, FO 195/1823.

¹⁰ Cumberbatch to Nicolson, January 22, 1894, *Turkey No. 6 (1896)*, 25; Cumberbatch to Currie, February 27, 1894, *Turkey No. 6 (1896)*, 49–50.

¹¹ Unsigned letter from Yozgat to Cumberbatch, April 24, 1894, *Turkey No. 6 (1896)*, 77–79.

¹² Cumberbatch to Currie, April 13, 1894, *Turkey No. 6 (1896)*, 69–70.

¹³ Jewett to Longworth, February 3 and 10, 1894, both enclosed in Longworth to Nicolson, February 18, 1894, TNA, FO 195/1854.

and “seize and abduct their wives and daughters.”¹⁴ The orders, they implied, had ultimately stemmed from the sultan himself.¹⁵

The assault on the Sason Armenian villages, the first in the 1894–1896 massacres, began on or around 19 August and lasted three weeks. In all, between 3,000 and 6,000 Armenians died. One survivor later told her story to British diplomats: “When the Kurds came ... I ... tried to escape with 3 other women ... We hastily hid ourselves amongst some thick bushes, where we were soon discovered ... We begged ... for mercy. But [the Kurds and soldiers] knocked us down ... and killed my three companions. Then a soldier snatched my three-months-old babe (a boy) ... threw him against a rock, then pierced him with his fixed bayonet ... The other soldiers then cut him up into pieces. They then all fell on me ... One of the Kurds, finding me young [i.e., attractive], then decided to take me with him. But I refused to follow him and become a Mohammedan. They threatened and tortured me and finally decided to kill me, but I was dressed in fine clothes, [so] they undressed me – so as not to soil them with my blood. When ... they discovered the gold coins in my head-dress and some thirty pounds in my belt, they immediately began to fight among themselves. Taking advantage of this opportunity I flew away through the dense brushwood.”¹⁶

Near Sason’s Geliguzan village Kurdish chieftains and Ottoman officers abducted and raped women. Some were gang-raped in a church in Galin village, then murdered.¹⁷ It was reported that Kurdish chieftains abducted and sold Armenian children. A chief of the Kurdish Rushkotli tribe reportedly sold a brother and sister, aged nine and eleven, for 150 piasters.¹⁸ To avoid discovery, Armenian mothers suffocated crying children or jumped with them into a raging river. “The river is said to have been red with blood for three days,” reported a missionary,¹⁹ and several survivors went mad.²⁰ One report by a missionary said that the Bekiranli tribe had taken “400” girls;²¹ another, that soldiers had raped “many others.”²² From distant Van, a missionary reported in 1895 that a local Kurdish chieftain, Hussein Pasha, had twenty girls from Sason in his harem.²³

¹⁴ Kurd petition, “Through Her Majesty the Queen of England to the Great Powers of Europe,” June 27, 1895, enclosed in Graves to Currie, July 25, 1895, TNA, FO 195/1892.

¹⁵ Unsigned report by Bitlis missionary, January 18, 1895, Records of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter Houghton, ABC), 16.10.1 vol 6; Report by French Embassy, Constantinople, to Ministry, December 26, 1894, Ministry for Foreign Affairs Archive, France, Affaires jusqu’à 1896, no. 519.

¹⁶ Statement by Hamms and his wife Altoon, from Geliguzan, and Ovig, from Talori, undated but probably from early 1895, Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter Bodl.) MS Lord Bryce Papers 208.

¹⁷ Graves to Currie, March 8, 1895, TNA, FO 195/1891, statement by Anna of Shenik village.

¹⁸ Graves to Currie, April 24, 1895, TNA, FO 195/1891.

¹⁹ Unsigned report by a Bitlis missionary, January 18, 1895, Houghton, ABC, 16.10.1 vol. 6.

²⁰ Graves to Currie, April 24, 1895, TNA, FO 195/1891.

²¹ Unsigned report by Bitlis missionary, January 18, 1895, Houghton, ABC, 16.10.1 vol. 6.

²² Hallward to Currie, October 9, 1894, TNA, FO 195/1838.

²³ H. M. Allen, “Facts and Figures from the Province of Van,” undated but from spring 1895, Bodl., MS Lord Bryce Papers 196; Hallward to Graves, March 19, 1895, TNA, FO 195/1891.

The Turks did their best to keep consuls and other foreigners away from the Sason area and lied about what had happened. The grand vizier told the British ambassador that “the Armenians had attacked Moslems” and “had desecrated their corpses,”²⁴ and told the American minister that what had occurred was an Armenian “revolution.”²⁵ The commission of inquiry the Great Powers forced the Turks subsequently to convene simply covered the perpetrators’ tracks and blamed everything on the Armenians.²⁶ During the following months Ottoman officials and Kurds continued to mistreat the Armenian survivors who had remained in the area. One consul reported that “women and girls are insulted and dishonored, dragged naked from their beds at night” by Turkish gendarmes.²⁷

After Sason, there were those who predicted that if the Great Powers did nothing to curtail or punish the Turks, “similar scenes will be repeated” elsewhere in the empire.²⁸ And they were. At Harput (today Elazığ) hundreds of Armenians were murdered in November 1895 by a mix of Turks, Kurds and soldiers, and women were raped, “the foremost ravisher being Said Effendi, the commissary of police.”²⁹ The surrounding Armenian villages were also systematically assailed. Zaptiehs (gendarmes) were “each [given] an Armenian woman for the night.”³⁰ According to the British consul, at Garemja (Zaremba) village “few women and girls ... appear to have escaped dishonor.” At Hock village (Hockn) “seventeen females ... were carried off ... and ravished by Kurds and Turks” (the victims included four girls aged between ten and fourteen). At Aivos village, forty women and girls were “outraged.” Most of the victims were allowed to remain in or return to their villages; a few were murdered or permanently held captive.³¹ The information was passed on to the British and American consuls by local priests and missionaries and was then transmitted to London and Washington. In all, some 4,000 Armenians were murdered in and around Harput; in Mamuret ul Aziz province as a whole, some 15,000 Armenians were forcibly converted to Islam, “5,530 women and girls were outraged” and “1,532” women and girls were forcibly married off to Muslims, according to a western missionary and the American minister in Constantinople.³²

²⁴ Currie to Kimberley, October 14–15, 1894, TNA, FO 195/1825.

²⁵ Terrell to Secretary of State Olney, October 24, 1895, United States Government, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, part 2* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), 1325–27 (hereafter *FRUS*).

²⁶ Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey’s Destruction of its Christian Minorities 1894–1924* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2019), 62–64.

²⁷ Hampson to Graves, August 25, 1895, *Turkey No. 2* (1896), 17–18; Hampson to Cumberbatch, October 9, 1895, *Turkey No. 2* (1896), 98–99.

²⁸ Hallward to Graves, February 2, 1895, *Turkey No. 6* (1896), 237–39.

²⁹ Fontana to Currie, April 25, 1896, and Fontana, “Summary of Evidence,” TNA, FO 195/1944.

³⁰ Gates to Terrell, November 25, 1895, *FRUS 1895, Part 2*, 1392–95.

³¹ Fontana to Currie, April 25, 1896, and Fontana, “Summary of Evidence,” TNA, FO 195/1944.

³² Unsigned, undated memorandum from late January 1896, Houghton, ABC, 16.10.1, vol. 6; statistics in Terrell to Currie, undated but from February 1896, TNA, FO 195/1949.

Similar massacres, accompanied by rape and mass conversions were recorded elsewhere in Turkey during late 1895 and 1896. In Diyarbekir vilayet upward of 500 women and girls were reportedly abducted; in the vilayet's Palu district, "a large majority" of Christian females aged twelve to forty were "violated," it was reported. In the village of Yenikoy a local Muslim potentate and his servants, who had briefly harbored Christians, "violated all the young women and girls."³³ In January 1896 the American missionary Caleb F. Gates complained that "the Palu Turks still continue to carry off girls and women, keeping them a few days and then returning them with their lives blasted."³⁴ The British consul Fontana reported from Egin as late as April 1897 that the "outraging" of Armenian women continued and wrote that "80 girls" are said to be "with child."³⁵ Most or all of the children born of these rapes ended up in Muslim households or Muslim orphanages.

Rape and Abduction: World War I

During 1915–1916 the Young Turks who ruled the Ottoman Empire, under cover of World War I, carried out a systematic genocide of Armenian and Assyrian minorities in Asia Minor, killing approximately a million people. Mass rape was part of the genocide. The Armenian urban and rural communities, starting in spring 1915, were rounded up, the able adult males shot, and the women, children and elderly driven in endless convoys eastward, toward the deserts of northern Syria and Iraq. Most of the deportees died along the way from shootings, beatings, starvation and disease; those who somehow made it to the deserts were later slaughtered in bouts of mass murder during late 1915 and spring-summer 1916. Along the routes of march, which lasted months, the women and girls were constant victims of rape by the convoy guards and Turkish townspeople and villagers. There is no evidence to suggest that Turkish rapists were ever punished by Ottoman authorities. Indeed, the abundance of rapes and abductions of Christian women into Muslim households across Anatolia indicates that the CUP and the Turkish military regarded what was happening as part and parcel of the desired elimination of the Armenian people, dovetailing, as it were, with the generated increase in Muslim numbers. Children born of such rapes were officially—in line with Muslim law—recognized as Muslims as were the children of Christian women forcibly inducted into Muslim households, where they became wives or concubines of Muslims. Moreover, the general slaughter and destitution pushed Armenian women and girls into "survival sex" and to "professional" prostitution.³⁶ Taken together, the campaign of Muslim Turkish sexual violence played a significant role in the destruction of the Armenian communities in Turkey.

³³ Hallward to Cumberbatch, March 17, 1896, Turkey No. 8 (1896): *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Turkey, British Parliamentary Papers "Blue Books"* (London: HMSO, 1896), 126–29.

³⁴ Gates to Currie, January 16, 1896, TNA, FO 195/1949.

³⁵ Fontana to Currie, April 11, 1897, TNA, FO 195/1981.

³⁶ Umit Kurt, "On the Verge of Death and Survival: Krikor Bogharian's Diary," in *Documenting the Armenian Genocide: Essays in Honor of Taner Akçam*, eds. Thomas Kühne, Mary Jane Rein and Marc A. Mamigonian (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 137.

Among the first Armenian villages targeted during the Armenian Genocide was Zeytun, in Marash vilayet, in spring 1915. Most of the villagers were sent on a prolonged trek toward Urfa. “The women, children and old men ... were clubbed and beaten and lashed as though they had been wild animals,” reported the American consular agent at Urfa, Francis H. Leslie, who watched their arrival. “Their women and girls were daily criminally outraged, both by their guards and the ruffians of every village through which they passed, as the former allowed the latter to enter the camp of the exiles at night and even distributed the girls among the villagers for the night ...”³⁷

Women were often detached from the convoys by Turkish gendarmes, officers and tribal chieftains and transferred to harems of local functionaries. One Armenian patriarchate report alleged that a customs director, Hadji Bekir Mehmed Ali Bey, “retained at Trebizond young Armenian girls and ... kept a number ... at the Red Cross hospital while he distributed the rest among the important persons of the Ittihad [i.e., the CUP] ...” Some women were simply sold by guards or officers for sex. In Mosul, the authorities set up and stocked brothels with good-looking girls from the convoys for the military’s use. “The opening of the *lupanara* was announced in official communications from the [town’s] military government.”³⁸ According to Swedish missionary Alma Johansson at Mezre “a public house was erected for the Turks – and all the beautiful Armenian girls were put in it.”³⁹ Slave markets sprung up in various towns, including Aleppo and Damascus. A British intelligence report from December 1915 stated that in Damascus “the price of an Armenian girl from 12 to 14 years of age was from 2 mejidiehs to one Turkish lira.”⁴⁰ A report from Bucharest said that the average price for an Armenian woman was 0.6 Turkish lira.⁴¹ Another report stated that “all Armenian women and girls from 7 to 40 years of age” at Vazir Keupru in Merzifon Sanjak (district) “have been sold at auction. Women were also given to the buyers even without money.”⁴²

Most of the Christian victims during the Genocide of 1915–1916 were Armenians. But Greek villagers and townspeople were also uprooted and killed in large numbers during World War I. Here, too, rape was always present. In southwestern Turkey, Greek villagers fled to the towns of Makri (today Fethiye) and Livissi (today Kayakoy). On the way, they were robbed and murdered and

³⁷ Report by Leslie, June 28, 1915, in Morgenthau to Secretary of State, August 23, 1915, USNA, RG 59, 867.4016, roll 43.

³⁸ Patriarchate report, January 21, 1920, in Malta file of Hadji Bekir Mehmet Ali Bey, TNA, FO 371/6501.

³⁹ Johansson report, undated, attached to Morgenthau to Secretary of State, November 9, 1915, *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1917*, ed. Ara Sarafian, (London: Gomidas Institute, 2019), 336.

⁴⁰ “Arabian Report,” December 13, 1915, TNA, FO 371/2781; Intelligence Report, Sir E. Grey Bart to ?, May 26, 1916, TNA, FO 371/2777. A mejidieh was worth one-fifth of a Turkish lira—and a lira was worth about four US dollars.

⁴¹ Report of ARF Committee, Bucharest, no. 6, September 5, 1915, attached to Morgenthau to Secretary of State, September 17, 1915, *United States Official Records*, ed. Sarafian, 258.

⁴² Report of ARF Bucharest, no. 7, October 28, 1915, attached to Morgenthau to Secretary of State, November 9, 1915, *United States Official Records*, ed. Sarafian, 342.

"women were violated, and their underclothes and shoes were taken away," reported survivors. In the village of Trimil, Turkish troops raped six women in a night-long "orgy." When one of their husbands complained, "he was submitted to sodomy." Near the village of Kestop, villagers raped two women for eight days; one of them later died.⁴³ Procope, the Greek Orthodox metropolitan of Konya, wrote in February 1915: "It is no exaggeration to say that the suffering of the Christians here surpasses those of the Hebrews in [Pharaonic] Egypt."⁴⁴

During the Armenian Genocide Greek communities along the Black Sea coast and Edirne (Adrianople) vilayet were also targeted. At Unye on the Black Sea batches of Greek men were murdered and "the nice-looking women and girls ... were raped and dishonored."⁴⁵ Near Trabzon (Trebizond), according to a Greek report, twenty-six women and girls, "to avoid dishonor," threw themselves into a river near Gephira. Elsewhere in Trabzon vilayet, the Turks rounded up women and took them to Vazelon Monastery, where they "first violated them, and then put them to death."⁴⁶ Armenian women and girls in and around Trabzon were serially raped and murdered, sometimes by poison, their bodies often dumped into the Black Sea.⁴⁷ Others were deported in convoys inland where, according to the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Germanos, "a large number of women and children were killed, the young girls outraged ... These girls had to march thirty or forty days across snow-covered mountains and sleep by night in the open ... The majority, of course, died on the road."⁴⁸

Occasionally, Muslim Turkish officials and officers broke ranks and told Western diplomats or officers about this sexual violence. After the war, Shefik Bey, the kaymakam (sub-district governor) of Blanik in Bitlis vilayet, told his British captors that Hodja Ilias, a parliamentary deputy from Marash (today Kharamanmaras), "was addicted to raping Christian girls; it was so well known that it became a scandal among the Muslims, more especially as he wore a turban" (a sign of religious office).⁴⁹ In a rare Muslim Turkish statement to British diplomats, Ottoman Army lieutenant Sayied Ahmed Moukhtar Baas said that in 1915 "government officials at Trebizond picked up [out?] some of the

⁴³ Gough-Calthorpe to Balfour, February 3, 1919, and attached memorandum by "Representatives of Makri and Livissi," "Persecution and Annihilation of the Makri and Livissi Communities," January 27, 1919, TNA, FO 371/4172.

⁴⁴ Greek Patriarchate, "Persecution of the Greeks in Turkey, 1914-1918," undated but probably from 1919, Bodl., MS Toynbee Papers 57, 94-96.

⁴⁵ Jackson (Washington DC), untitled memorandum, March 4, 1918, USNA, RG 59, 867.4016, roll 46.

⁴⁶ Greek Foreign Ministry, "Persecution of the Greek Population ...," 33 (report by Greek Legation in Petrograd, August 30, 1916); Greek Patriarchate, "Persecution of the Greeks," 110-11.

⁴⁷ See Anna Aleksanyan, "The Victims of 'Safety': The Destiny of Armenian Woman and Girls Who were Not Deported from Trabzon," in *Documenting the Armenian Genocide*, eds. Kühne, Rein and Mamigonian, 23-37.

⁴⁸ Tessa Hofmann, "Cumulative Genocide: The Massacres and Deportations of the Greek Population of the Ottoman Empire (1912-1923)," in *The Genocide of the Ottoman Greeks*, eds. Tessa Hofman, Matthias Bjørnlund and Vasileios Mechanetsidis (New York and Athens: Caratzas, 2011), 57-58.

⁴⁹ Testimony of Shefik Bey in Malta file of Hodja Ilias, deputy for Marash, TNA, FO 371/6501.

prettiest Armenian women of the best families. After committing the worst outrages on them, they had them killed.”⁵⁰

Alongside the genocide in Asia Minor, Turkish troops and Kurdish auxiliaries in January 1915 invaded the Urmia Lake area in northwestern Persia, which had a large Assyrian Christian population. They occupied the area until May 1915. During these months, alongside occasional massacres, there was continuous rape. At the village of Ardishai seventy-five women and girls ran into the lake to escape the Turks and were shot in the water.⁵¹ According to another report by missionaries, “one of the most terrible things ... was the treatment of Syrian [i.e., Assyrian] women and girls by the Turks, Kurds and local Mohammedans. After the massacre in the village of —, almost all the women and girls were outraged, and two little girls, aged eight and ten, died in the hands of Moslem villains. A mother said that not a woman or girl above twelve (and some younger) in the village of — escaped violation ... One man ... openly boasted of having ruined eleven Christian girls, two of them under seven years of age Several women from eighty to eighty-five years old have suffered with the younger women.”⁵² Many women were taken off to harems. A missionary quoted a girl named Lucy from Tchargousha village about what happened in the village of Gulpashan, to which Lucy had fled: “[The Kurds came.] In the yard [Lucy] saw her younger sister Sherin, a pretty girl of fifteen, being dragged away by a Kurd. ... Lucy was helpless [to save her]. [Sherin] tried to conceal her face and daubed it with mud, but she has such beautiful dark eyes and rosy cheeks! The Kurds grabbed the young women and girls, peering into their faces, till each one found a pretty one for himself, then dragged her away.”⁵³

In September 1915 American consul general in Aleppo Jesse B. Jackson reported on the massacre of those Armenians who had survived the deportation columns and had reached the Syrian Desert. “The Mutessarif [district governor] of Der el-Zor had arranged and carried out the massacre ... Before the end, all the presentable women and girls were outraged by ... the Arab tribes there whose participation was at the invitation or command of the Mutessarif.”⁵⁴

Rape and Abduction, 1919–1927

World War I ended in defeat for the Ottoman Empire, its representatives signing an armistice agreement—in fact, an instrument of surrender—at Mudros on 30

⁵⁰ “Report by Eyewitness Lt. Sayied Ahmed Moukhtar Baas,” undated but stamped “26 December 1916,” TNA, FO 371/2768.

⁵¹ “Urmia: Narrative of Dr. Jacob Sargis Recorded in a Despatch Dated Petrograd, 12th February 1916, from the Correspondent at Petrograd of the American ‘Associated Press,’” in *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915–1916, Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs by Viscount Bryce*, ed. Viscount Bryce (London: HMSO, London, 1916), 160.

⁵² “Urmia: Extracts from the Annual Report (for the Year 1915) Presented by the Medical Department at Urmia to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.,” in *Treatment of Armenians*, ed. Bryce, 161.

⁵³ Entry for January 20, 1915, “Urmia during the Turko-Kurdish Occupation: Diary of a Missionary edited by Miss Mary Schaffler Platt ...,” in *Treatment of Armenians*, ed. Bryce, 125–26.

⁵⁴ Jackson report, September 3, 1916, cited in Hoffman Philip to Secretary of State, September 15, 1916, *United States Official Records*, ed. Sarafian, 550–51.

October 1918. The CUP leaders fled the country, much of the Ottoman army was disbanded and hundreds of party stalwarts, including mass murderers, were detained by the British authorities and transferred to Malta (though almost all were eventually released without punishment in exchange for British hostages taken by the Turks). Allied forces deployed in parts of Turkey, including Constantinople, and survivors of the Armenian and Greek refugee columns began to trickle back to their homes—or at least to their towns and villages, their homes almost invariably in ruins, occupied by Muslim squatters or confiscated by Muslim officials. But within months, a Turkish Nationalist movement surged in eastern and central Turkey mobilizing around the figure of war hero Mustafa Kemal, later called Atatürk. By the start of 1920 the Kemalists were waging war—what the Turks subsequently called the Turkish War of Independence—against the foreign occupiers, principally the French forces in Cilicia and the Greek army, that had landed in Smyrna (Izmir) in May 1919 and subsequently advanced eastward, toward Ankara. The remaining Christians of Asia Minor, mainly the country's Greek minority, centered in the Pontus region along the Black Sea coast and in towns in the south (Cappadocia) and west (Ionia) of Asia Minor, and the remaining Armenians and Assyrians bolstered by returnees, were inevitably caught up in the struggle. Whether or not they supported or made common cause with the foreign invaders, the nationalists viewed them as a pro-Western fifth column or potential fifth column and resolved to rid the country once and for all of all its Christians.

In several waves between 1920 and 1922, the nationalist forces systematically uprooted the Christian communities—this time mainly Greeks—and sent them marching in endless convoys through the mountains and wastelands of central and eastern Turkey after systematically murdering or incarcerating in sub-human conditions the adult males. The process was like that applied to the Armenians in 1915—except that now, the Turks had no eastern deserts to which to deport the Christians (Syria had come under French, and Iraq under British, rule). Toward the end of 1922, nationalist policy changed and the Christians in organized fashion were driven to the Black Sea and Mediterranean ports and expelled to Greece while a minority, mainly Armenians, were dispatched southward, by land, to Syria and Lebanon. Between 1920 and 1923 hundreds of thousands of Greeks were murdered. And, as in the world war, the massacres and deportations were accompanied by massive sexual violence.

The nationalist assault on French-held Cilicia and its Armenians began in January 1920 in Marash. “Hundreds of men, women and children [were] massacred daily,” an American missionary cabled from the besieged town.⁵⁵ Many were first caught and then murdered. The Turks were said to be burning the bodies “to hide the fact that they have stolen [i.e., raped] the young girls,” reported an American missionary from the town.⁵⁶

But the major national-religious post-war ethnic cleansing campaign was directed against the Greek minority. Two important eyewitnesses to the process

⁵⁵ Wilson to Jackson, February 1, 1920, Houghton, ABC, 16.9.3, vol. 52.

⁵⁶ Marion Wilson, “Marash. (Written as a Diary). Siege of Marash. Fourteenth Day. Feb. 3,” USNA, RG 84, Turkey (Constantinople), vol. 419.

were American missionaries Dr. Mark Ward and Major F.D. Yowell, both based in Harput. In reports that they sent to the American and British governments, they noted that sexual predation against the women in the Greek convoys was frequent. "All along the route Moslems visit the various groups and take of the women and girls whomsoever they want for immoral purposes."⁵⁷ A Greek observer reported that "many parents kill their sons and daughters, unable to see them violated by the Turks."⁵⁸ Predation also characterized the subsequent period, in late 1922 and 1923, when the Greeks were concentrated in the port cities while awaiting boats that would ferry them to Greece. An American naval officer reported from Mersin, on the Mediterranean: "The Turkish military entered the churches and refugee dumps and take young girls. Five were taken from [the Georgian Greek] Church last night. Three returned this morning and complained to the Spanish consul ... The other two have not yet returned." The officer interviewed one of the girls who had returned: "She appeared about twenty years of age and was a cumberly [sic, comely?], buxom lass. She stated ... she was taken [by four gendarmes] to a Turkish house where there were two more gendarmes and a civilian. She ... said they used her repeatedly, until this morning when she was released." Another of the girls, a twenty-year-old originally from Denizli, told a similar story. Two of her rapists were soldiers, "Suleiman Onbachi and Imzebeit Tehaouchou." The American officer was also told that "bands of civilians" waylaid Christian women who went to lavatories situated outside the refugee compounds. The assailants "would throw a shawl over the woman's head and drag her to their harems ... At the rate of the stories I have heard the harems should now be overflowing," commented the officer. The American officer also recorded the text of a Turkish poster hung on walls in the city: "To the Greeks and Armenians. Ingrate Criminals of Mersina. The nationalist government has pardoned you for the innumerable atrocities against Mussulmen during the [French] occupation ... You have ... soiled the honor of our daughters and wives ... All the blood in our veins cries unmercifully for revenge ... Mussulmen do not want to see you in their country ..." The American officer noted that he had formerly been "pro-Turk" but now considered the Turks "savages and barbarians."⁵⁹

In their complaints about violation of Muslim women by Greeks, the Turkish authorities were certainly exaggerating. In various locations, atrocities were committed, although there is no evidence that this was Greek army policy or that rape was sanctioned by the high command. As the Greek army advanced eastward, toward Ankara, the nationalist capital, it overran Turkish villages. Turkish guerrillas attacked the Greek supply columns, triggering Greek reprisals that sometimes included the rape of Turkish village women.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ward and Yowell to Jackson, April 5, 1922, USNA, RG59, 867.4016, roll 46.

⁵⁸ John P. Xenides, "The Recent Greek Deportations and Other Atrocities in Asia Minor," undated but from November 1921, USNA, RG 59, 867.4016, roll 46.

⁵⁹ USS *Overton*, Diary, entries for November 27, 28 and 30, 1922, USNA, RG 84, Turkey (Constantinople), vol. 463.

⁶⁰ General F. Milne, C-in-C Army of the Black Sea, to UK High Commissioner, Constantinople, April 13, 1920, and attached "Extracts from Various Reports received from Advanced HGQ, Smyrna, during the Months of February and March 1920 ...," TNA, FO 371/5133.

In the Yalova-Izmit area along the Sea of Marmara during March-May 1921, Greek troops, according to an Allied commission of inquiry, committed rape and other acts of violence. Several women testified that they had been "raped five times."⁶¹ The most serious allegations of rape by Greek troops and the best-reported were those relating to the Greek retreat to Smyrna and the coast after their defeat in Afyon Karahisar in August 1922. During the retreat, Greek troops razed Turkish villages on their route of march and, as reported by Turkish witnesses, raped hundreds of Muslim women.⁶²

Perhaps the most concentrated episode in the ethnic cleansing of the Greeks from Asia Minor during the Ataturk years was the destruction of the Christian communities of Smyrna in September 1922, when the Christian quarters were torched. Many thousands of Christians, primarily Greeks, were murdered and hundreds of thousands were expelled to Greece or, in columns, to the interior of Anatolia, where most died. Among the "outstanding features of the Smyrna horror [was] the wholesale violation of women and girls," wrote the American consul-general in the city, George Horton. He based this, he said, in part on the findings of an American physician, M.C. Elliott, who examined "hundreds" of girls during and after the massacre.⁶³

Among the witnesses to the Turkish atrocities in the city were American naval officers who came ashore from gunboats anchored in the bay. Lieutenant Commander H. E. Knauss described a rape-murder witnessed by one of his subordinates: "The Turks had taken her from her father and mother into an alley. Her shrieks were plainly heard, then the Turks returned and one of them wiped a bloody knife on the mother's forearm, then led them [i.e., the parents] down the street."⁶⁴ The New Zealand-born Anglican pastor, Charles Dobson, recorded that aboard the British steamship the *Bavarian* in the harbor, he had met "a woman and her daughter, each of whom had been ravished by fifteen Turkish soldiers." A day or two before, in Smyrna, he had seen cartloads of "bodies of women and babies and also of young girls who had [he wrote] patently been violated before being killed."⁶⁵

⁶¹ "Commission of Inquiry for the Ismidt Peninsula to Sir H. Rumbold," May 18, 1921, and attached "Schedule," both enclosed in Rumbold to Curzon, May 20, 1920, TNA, FO 371/6514. The commission concluded, however, that Turkish crimes in the area had been "more considerable and ferocious": "Report of the Ismid Commission of Enquiry," June 1, 1921, in "Turkey No. 1 (1921), Reports on Atrocities in the Districts of Yalova and Gumelek and in the Ismid Peninsula," Cmd. 1478, 1921, Bodl., MS Toynbee Papers 52.

⁶² Untitled memorandum by "Perry," a *New York Herald* correspondent, undated but from October 1922, Library of Congress, Bristol Papers 37. See also "Copy of a Report Made by a Turkish Interpreter who Accompanied Prof. J.K. Biorge on his Visit to Magnesia, Cassaba, Salikli, Alashehir," October 8, 1922, USNA, RG84, Turkey (Constantinople), Vol. 466.

⁶³ George Horton, *The Blight of Asia: An Account of the Systematic Extermination of Christian Populations by Mohammedans and the Culpability of Certain Great Powers; and the True Story of the Burning of Smyrna* (1926; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, IN, 1953), 162–64.

⁶⁴ Knauss, *USS Simpson*, Diary, entry for September 11, 1922, USNA, RG 84, Turkey (Constantinople), vol. 463.

⁶⁵ "Report by the Rev. Charles Dobson on Smyrna," undated but from late October 1922, TNA, FO 371/7949.

During the days in mid-September when the bulk of Smyrna's Christians huddled, tightly-packed, on the quay awaiting salvation by the Allied boats in the bay, Turkish troops plucked out girls and young women from the mass and many were never seen again.⁶⁶ The American vice-consul in the city, E. C. Hole, noted in his report on the devastation of Christian Smyrna that the British warship *HMS Serapis* took aboard a large number of women and girls but almost none between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five.⁶⁷

While these events occurred in western Asia Minor, Armenian and Assyrian families, mostly from Cilicia, were busy making their way southwards, toward French-ruled Syria, in convoys. They were systematically robbed by Turkish troops and brigands *en route*; many were subjected to rape. American Consul general Jackson related that near Katma, inside Syria near the Turkish border, a caravan was stopped and the three daughters of Protestant pastor Assadoor Yeghoyian were raped by gendarmes and robbers.⁶⁸

Even after the end of the Turks' War of Independence, Turkish troops carried out similar atrocities. In October 1925, the Turks forcibly deported the last remaining Assyrians of southeastern Turkey inland, away from the border with Iraq. The Turkish troops, reportedly, raped or sold into concubinage some 200 women and, at night, raped Assyrian girls in the fields. According to survivors, at one convoy stop Turkish officers sold ten girls to Muslim villagers.⁶⁹ The following year the American consulate in Baghdad reported that the Turks were deporting Assyrians and Armenians to Iraq, with mass killings accompanied by mass rape.⁷⁰

Conclusion

In all three bouts of mass murder in Asia Minor, Constantinople and Edirne vilayet between 1894 and 1924 the Ottoman and, later, the Turkish governments denied that they had carried out or were carrying out massacres, let alone a cumulative genocide, arguing that they were reacting to Christian attacks on Muslims or suppressing Christian revolts. They always denied that Muslim soldiers, gendarmes and civilians raped Christian women and girls and occasionally charged that, on the contrary, Christians were busy defiling Muslim women.

Successive Turkish governments purged from their archives documents that would support the narrative that the Turks, in Ottoman and republican times,

⁶⁶ Marjorie Housepian Dobkin, *Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City* (London: Faber, 1972), 184.

⁶⁷ "Memorandum by Mr. Hole on Events in Smyrna," September 18, 1922, USNA, RG 84, Turkey (Constantinople) vol. 466.

⁶⁸ Jackson, "Emigration of Christians from Turkish Territory," December 11, 1922, USNA, RG 84, Turkey (Constantinople), vol. 459, and attached affidavits by Sarkissian, Yeghoyian, and Arakelian.

⁶⁹ George Seldes, "Chaldeans Outraged and Massacred by Turks," datelined 18 October, Mosul, *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1925.

⁷⁰ John Randolph to Secretary of State, April 14, 1926, and Randolph, "Alleged Turkish Persecution of Minorities Continues in Azakh Village North of Iraq Frontier," March 15, 1927, both in USNA, RG 59, 867.4016, roll 48.

carried out massacres of Christians and raped Christian women *en masse*. It is possible that such documents, perhaps a multitude of such documents, were not destroyed and were simply squirreled away in vaults that one day may be opened to researchers. Meanwhile, few Turkish documents have surfaced in archives in Istanbul and elsewhere in Turkey showing that the Turks deliberately massacred Christians, and I have seen none that show that Turks—soldiers, officials and civilians—raped Christian women and girls between 1894 and 1896, 1915 and 1918 and 1919 and 1924.

But the documentation accessible in Western archives are another matter. As we have said, there were hundreds of Christian-American but also British, Canadian, Scandinavian and German-missionaries and dozens of Western consuls and diplomats in Turkey during the three bouts of mass murder and mass rape discussed here. All reported regularly to their headquarters on what they had seen and heard. While the Turks almost invariably carried out massacres and rapes far from prying western eyes, Turkish officials and officers in the various localities, and survivors of both massacres and rapes talked-to missionaries, consuls, naval officers and western travelers—and their stories appear in the documentation that is available in Western archives, primarily in the United States, London and Germany. Occasionally, one encounters depositions by rape or massacre survivors taken by Western consuls. And once in a while there is direct testimony by Turks who witnessed or even participated in anti-Christian atrocities and gave evidence to Western diplomats or missionaries.

But, to be sure, the available documentation covers only part of the story, especially when it comes to rape and abduction of women and girls into Muslim households. Many victims of rape were subsequently killed by their assailants or otherwise died without passing on their stories; and, no doubt, most victims, if alive, preferred to remain silent about what they had undergone, deeming it shameful. As the consuls or missionaries wrote, these rape survivors' lives had been "blasted." Certainly, women and girls—and there were many thousands of them—who ended up in Muslim homes (as servants, wives, concubines) kept silent, their lives and futures dependent on those who now fed and housed them. Some may even have come to love or at least care for their Muslim spouses. They probably had children whose lives and futures they wished to safeguard, and ratting on their rapists or abductors would have undermined their lives and wellbeing.

In short, while there are few accessible Ottoman/Turkish contemporary sources describing or even relating to the massive sexual violence exercised by Turkish Muslims and their agents against Christian women and girls between 1894 and 1924, the evidence from reliable Western—mainly diplomatic and missionary—sources is overwhelming and clear: As part of the effort by the successive Ottoman/Turkish governments during these three decades to rid Asia Minor, Edirne vilayet and northern Aleppo vilayet of their Christian inhabitants, the authorities unleashed massive sexual violence against the female Christian inhabitants of these regions, primarily rape and abduction and induction into Muslim households. The purpose of this state-orchestrated violence was to physically reduce the number of Christians, to increase Muslim

numbers (the impregnation by Muslims of Christian women produced, by law, Muslim offspring) and to demoralize the Armenian, Greek and Assyrian minority communities as part of the effort to eradicate them. The events and cases described in this article are representative of what transpired and convey with clarity the enormity of what happened in Turkey in the three decades between 1894 and 1924.

Cite this article: Benny Morris, “Collective Sexual Violence in Turkey, 1894–1924: What we know and how we know it,” *Law and History Review* (2025): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248025101120>