

LESLIE A. DAVIS

*Report on Armenian Genocide**June 30, 1915*

While serving as U.S. consul in Harput, Turkey, from 1915 to 1917, Leslie Davis witnessed firsthand the Ottoman Empire's treatment of its Armenian inhabitants. He went into the countryside and saw bodies as well as other evidence that the "relocation" of the Armenian population was actually something far more pernicious. His report received little notice at the time but remains an important eyewitness record of this atrocity.

AMERICAN CONSULATE
MAMOURET-UL-AZIZ (HARPUT)
JUNE 30, 1915

Honorable Henry Morgenthau,
American Ambassador
Constantinople

Sir:

I have the honor to report to the Embassy about one of the severest measures ever taken by any government and one of the greatest tragedies in all history. If the Embassy had not already learned about it from other sources, my telegrams of June 27th and 28th and my brief dispatch of June 29th will have brought the matter to the attention of the Embassy. . . .

As stated in some of the above mentioned dispatches, a revolutionary movement on the part of some of the Armenians was discovered and severe measures were taken to check it. These were undertaken in a wholesale matter [*sic*], little distinction being made between people who were entirely innocent and those who were suspected of being participants in the movement. Practically every male Armenian of any

From Leslie A. Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province: An American Diplomat's Report on the Armenian Genocide, 1914-1917*, ed. Susan K. Blair (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1989), 143, 146-49.

consequence at all here has been arrested and put in prison. A great many of them were subjected to the most cruel tortures under which some of them died. Several hundred of the leading Armenians were sent away at night and it seems to be clearly established that most, if not all, of them were killed. Last week there were well founded rumors of a threatened massacre. I think there is very little doubt that one was planned.

Another method was found, however, to destroy the Armenian race. This is no less than the deportation of the entire Armenian population, not only from this Vilayet,¹ but, I understand, from all six Vilayets comprising Armenia. There are said to be about sixty thousand Armenians in this Vilayet and about a million in the six Vilayets. All of these are to be sent into exile; an undertaking greater, probably, than anything of the kind in all history. For several days last week there were rumors of this but it seemed incredible. . . .

It is impossible for me to give any adequate idea of the panic . . . that has resulted from the announcement of this order of expulsion. The people have been given four or six days to dispose of everything they have and leave. For the merchants to wind up their affairs in that short time is difficult. It is also difficult for householders to dispose of their household and personal effects. The result has been a panic such as has never been known here or in few other places. Every one who is obliged to leave is trying to get together a little money to take on the journey. The Turks are, of course, taking advantage of the situation to get things at practically nothing. Robbery and looting were never undertaken in a more wholesale manner. Turkish men and Turkish women are entering the houses of all the Armenians and taking things at almost any price. As nearly half the population are leaving they have to take what they can get. This is rarely more than five or ten per cent, of the value. All the furniture in a house, costing originally one or two hundred pounds will be sold for ten or fifteen pounds. Rugs that cost five or ten pounds are sold for fifty or seventy-five piasters. The people are glad to get anything at all for their merchandise or effects. The streets are full of camels carrying off the loot and of rich Turks and Turkish women dressed in their finest gowns, who are making a holiday of the occasion. The scene reminds one of a lot of hungry vultures hovering over the remains of those who have fallen by the way. A more disgusting sight than that which is taking place here now can scarcely be imagined. . . .

In my telegram of June 27th, I asked the Embassy to wire me also if it would be possible to secure exemption for the naturalized American

¹The *vilayets* (the proper Turkish plural is *vilâyetler*) were the main administrative subdivisions of the Empire starting from the second half of the nineteenth century.

citizens who are here. I spoke to the Vali about this at once but he has been very evasive. I hope to receive some reply from the Embassy in time, if it [is] going to be possible to do anything to save any of these people and their children. There is one class of citizens who are certainly entitled to protection. There are women whose husbands are naturalized American citizens and are now in America, while they have returned here for a short time to visit relatives. There are several of these and nearly all of them have children with them who were born in America. I shall certainly do everything possible to save these.

Tomorrow the exodus of one-half of the population of this region commences. Were the people not so entirely subdued I should expect to see some stirring scenes. As it is, I can hardly think it possible that the authorities will succeed in sending everyone into exile, but as yet there does not seem to be any sign of their relenting or of their granting many exemptions.

I HAVE THE HONOR TO BE, SIR,
YOUR OBEDIENT SERVANT,
/SIGNED/
/LESLIE A. DAVIS,/

CONSUL.

25

VISCOUNT BRYCE REPORT ON ATROCITIES AGAINST ARMENIANS

Narrative of an Armenian Lady

November 2, 1915

As was the case with reports of atrocities committed by German troops in France and Belgium, the British government sought to document abuses conducted by the Ottoman Empire against its own population. A former professor of law and, in the decade before the war, the United Kingdom's ambassador to the United States, Viscount James Bryce (1838–1922)

From Viscount James Bryce, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–16: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs*, by Viscount Bryce (London: Sir Joseph Causton & Sons, 1916), 271–75.

was given responsibility for compiling evidence about abuses against civilians both in Belgium in 1915 and later in the Ottoman Empire. Both reports came under attack, especially after the war, for being propaganda riddled with lies. Yet when published in 1916, the official volume on massacres in the Ottoman Empire attempted to gather a wide range of evidence about abuses committed against Armenians. There were, of course, political motives to the gathering of evidence designed to discredit and condemn enemy nations. However, the evidence recorded here provides an important glimpse of what has long remained a forgotten and devastating act of total war: deliberate attacks on categories of persons—women, children, the elderly—meant to be protected during wartime. This first-person account by a female survivor could not be verified at the time, but its publication in an Armenian journal in New York in January 1916 contributed to the kinds of information publicly circulating about these attacks.

Shortly after last Easter (1915), the Turkish officials searched the Armenian churches and schools of G., H., C., AQ., AR., AS.¹ and the surrounding villages, but without finding anything incriminating. Afterwards they took the keys of these buildings, and filled them with soldiers. They also searched private houses on the pretence of looking for arms and ammunition, but they did not find anything. After that the Town Crier announced that all arms were to be handed over to the Government, and by this means a number of arms were collected. . . .

The Town Crier proclaimed that on the following Tuesday those from B. and C. Streets in the Town of H. would be deported, on Wednesday the Armenians from AQ., on Thursday those from AR., and so on.

CJ. and two hundred other Armenians were deported ten days before we were, that is on Wednesday, the 23rd June; we do not know their destination. Their party started at midnight. Some of them dropped cards asking for money, and at AT. money was conveyed to them. But the following Monday, the 28th June, when the Armenian women of AT. went to the river, they saw some Turkish women washing blood-stained clothes. The Armenian women took the clothes from the Turkish women and brought them to the Governor at G. The Governor on hearing this went to AT. and found that the Bishop [of H.] and the 200 Armenians had been killed. . . .

¹Throughout this document, the names of people and places were obscured with a simple encryption to maintain confidentiality.

All the people of C. started the same day. I think we were about 600 families. We had with us all our cattle and all our property. The first night we reached AU. and slept that night in the fields. The next day we passed many corpses heaped together under bridges and on the road; their blood had collected in pools. Probably these were the Armenians that were killed with the Bishop, for the corpses were all those of men. We spent the night near AV. in a valley, and that night we had to drink water polluted with blood. We promised our guards money if they took us [to] a better road and gave us clean water. The third day they again made us travel past corpses, and on Wednesday we reached A. . . .

We were already within a short distance of Diyarbekir when two soldiers came from the Governor, to find out where we had been during the last nine days. Here the gendarmes that were with us took away all our cows and cattle; they also kidnapped one woman and two girls. Outside the walls of Diyarbekir, we had to sit in the burning sun for 24 hours. That same day a number of Turks came from the city and kidnapped our little girls. Towards evening again we went on, still crying; more Turks came to carry off our girls and young brides, and would not let us even open our mouths to protest. Then we left all our cattle and everything we had, to save our honour and our lives. It was already night when the Turks from Diyarbekir attacked us three times and carried off the girls and young brides who had fallen behind. After this we lost all sense of time. The next morning again the gendarmes searched us all over, and then made us march six hours. During these six hours we found no drinking water, and many women sank on the way from thirst and hunger. The third day after that they robbed us, and violated us near a place where there was water. Some days after, two Turks dressed in white coats followed us, and, every time they had a chance, carried off still more of our girls. The wife of CS. Effendi from C. had three daughters, one of whom was married. A coloured gendarme who was with us wanted to take these girls. The mother resisted, and was thrown over a bridge by one of the Turks. The poor woman broke her arm, but her mule-driver dragged her up again. Again the same Turks threw her down, with one of her daughters, from the top of the mountain. The moment the married daughter saw her mother and sister thrown down, she thrust the baby in her arms upon another woman, ran after them crying "Mother, mother!" and threw herself down the same precipice. Some said that one of the Turkish officers went down after them and finished them off. After that Mrs. CS.'s remaining daughter and I disguised ourselves, and, each taking a child in our arms, abandoned everything and walked to Mardin. There our party joined us again. We stayed there eight days. There was an artificial lake there, and every night they

opened the sluices and flooded the ground, so that in the panic they might kidnap some of the girls. They also attacked us every night and kidnapped little children. At last, one evening, they drove us on again and left us among the mountains. They wounded a woman because she did not wish to give up her daughter. When they were going to carry off another girl, I asked CT. Tchaoush, a Mardin man, to help us. He stopped them at once, and did not let them take her away.