

BOOK REVIEW

Sarkis Y. Karayan, *Armenians in Ottoman Turkey, 1914: A Geographic and Demographic Gazetteer*, London, Gomidas Institute, 2018, 674 pp., maps, photos

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The question of the number of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire prior to and after the Armenian Genocide continues to attract widespread attention of many scholars. Besides being purely of an academic nature, this interest is also due to the Turkish government's continuous efforts to use these population figures as a keystone of its policy of genocide denial. Thus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, in one of its official publications, connects these two questions in the following way: “*Demographic studies prove that prior to World War I, fewer than 1.5 million Armenians lived in the entire Ottoman Empire. Thus, allegations that more than 1.5 million Armenians from eastern Anatolia died must be false.*”¹

The vast majority of Turkish and some international scholars try to justify the Turkish state's official position by taking the Ottoman census data on Armenians for granted. They also dismiss data provided by Armenian sources, particularly the statistics provided by the Constantinople Armenian Patriarchate, which usually provide higher figures for the Armenian population than that of the Ottoman ones.²

Under the pressure of this wave of denialist scholarship concerning these figures, Armenian scholars in the West who deal with this topic mainly take a defensive stance. Thus, the late Vahakn Dadrian, a distinguished scholar of the Armenian Genocide, points out the systematic character of the mishandling of the Armenian population statistics by

1. “*The Armenian Allegation of Genocide: The issue and the facts,*” accessed 20.04.2018, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-armenian-allegation-of-genocide-the-issue-and-the-facts.en.mfa>.

2. Almost every denialist historian surveying work on the Armenian question and the Armenian Genocide has a chapter or two dealing with Armenian population figures and the controversy over the number of Armenian casualties. See particularly: Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi* (Ankara: Yeni Matbaa, 1950), and English translation Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question* (Ankara: Documentary Publications, 1988); see also Kamuran Gürün, *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed* (Nicosia and London: K. Rustem and Brother and Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985); for more recent example of this denial approach see Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey. A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2007). Some Turkish and American denialist scholars have a special interest in late Ottoman demography issues (see particularly, Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); see also Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities. The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 1983). At the same time, Justin McCarthy, while praising Ottoman official statistics and basing his counts on the data they contain, is forced to make some adjustments and corrections, usually estimating the Ottoman Armenian population number higher than it is recorded by the Ottoman state.

the Ottoman authorities during the Armenian reforms era (1878-1914), as well as other discrepancies and fallacies connected to Ottoman statistics related to the ethnic distribution of population in the six provinces of Western Armenia (*Vilayet-i sitte*).³ Levon Marashlian, another Armenian scholar with a special interest in Ottoman Armenian demographic issues, while criticizing denialist scholars' (Justin McCarthy, Kemal Karpat et al.) methodological and factual fallacies in their approach to the Armenian population figures of the empire, uses statistical data provided by Armenian compatriotic studies on Ottoman Armenian communities and other unofficial Armenian sources and argues that prior to the Armenian Genocide there were at least 2,000,000 Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire.⁴ It is important also to mention here the French-Armenian scholars Raymond H. Kevorkian's and Paul B. Paboudjian's detailed study of the pre-WWI Ottoman Armenian population. Based on census provided by the Constantinople Armenian Patriarchate in 1913 they put the number of the Armenian populations at 1,914,620 Armenians living in 2,925 localities on the territory of the Ottoman Empire.⁵

Sarkis Y. Karayan's study is a new major attempt to break down this academic stalemate in the field of Ottoman Armenian demographic studies, by providing a detailed and scrupulous calculation of the number of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire prior to the Armenian Genocide. He does so on the basis of precise scientific methodology and comparison of statistical data provided by different sources.

Karayan's book consists of two sections which are unequal in their size, as well as Appendices 1-3, a Bibliography, and Index. Part 1 of the book (pp. 3-67) deals with the methodology used by the author. By providing a survey of the main statistical source, Karayan examines the figures before and after the genocide. These sources are: 1. Constantinople Armenian Patriarchate figures for 1882-1912; 2. Turkish official figures on Armenians; and 3. European sources on the population of the Ottoman Empire. Following this information, the author furnishes data on the number of Armenians in the diaspora from 1914 and after 1918, as well as the number of Armenian lives lost in Turkey and the Caucasus from the end of World War I to the final establishment of Kemalist rule in Turkey (December 31, 1922).⁶ In his conclusion to Part 1, Karayan presents a summary of his findings for the Armenian population in 1914 as well as his final figure of the total number of Armenian lives lost during 1915-1918. These are presented and summarized by vilayets [Ottoman provinces] in comparison to the Constantinople Armenian Patriarchate and Ottoman government's official figures.

Section two (pp. 70-566) of the book which is considered as the main portion of the

3. Vahakn N. Dadrian, *Warrant for Genocide: Key Elements of Turko-Armenian Conflict* (New Brunswick: N.J., Transaction Publishers, 1999), 171-190 (Appendix entitled "The Questionable Features of the Ottoman Calculus of the Demography of Armenians.")

4. Levon Marashlian, *Politics and Demography: Armenians, Turks, and Kurds in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge Mass.: Zoryan Institute, 1991).

5. Raymond H. Kévorkian, Paul B. Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire Ottoman à la veille du génocide* (Paris: Editions d'Art et d'Histoire ARHIS, 1992). See also Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 265-278.

6. In accordance to his methodology, Karayan uses these figures in calculation of the Armenian death toll during the Armenian Genocide.

study, deals with the population figures of the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire in 1914. In this section Karayan provides a long and detailed analysis of over 4,000 Armenian populated settlements. He groups them according to the administrative divisions of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century: vilayets, sanjaks, kazas, and, in some cases, nahiyes. The names of the administrative units presented within the book are given in alphabetical order. The tables of these data consists of five columns: 1. Place, name, and position, 2. Modern Turkish name, 3. Number of families, 4. Number of persons and a code, from A to E, referring to the given settlement mentioned in the U.S. maps and Gazetteer⁷ of Turkey.

Karayan's research determines the total number of Armenians worldwide in 1914 as 4,800,787 (including 2,534,784 in the Ottoman Empire, 2,026,000 in the Russian Empire, and 240,003 in the diaspora) and total number of Armenians worldwide in 1923-27 as 2,203,206 (including 150,000 in Turkey, 1,568,900 in the Soviet Union (including Armenia), and 484,316 in the diaspora). By subtracting the second figure from the first, the author provides the following final figures of the total Armenian lives lost during 1914-1923 as 2,597,581 of which Armenian lives lost between November 11, 1918 and December 1923 as 412,791, and total losses in 1914-1918 as 2,184,790 (by rounding up: 2,185,000.) (p. 67).

Thus, based on this extensive research, Karayan provides the numbers of Ottoman Armenians in 1914, diaspora Armenians in 1914, and diaspora Armenians in 1927, as well as the number of Armenian lives lost between November 11, 1918 and December 1923.

As the main bulk of the study is dedicated to the calculation of the number of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1914, it would be reasonable in the limited scope of this review to focus on the analysis of these figures through examining both the methods used by the author and their reliability.

First, it should be pointed out that both the Ottoman government and Constantinople Armenian Patriarchate sources provide different figures even for smaller administrative units such as the sanjak and kaza. Hence, there is no other reliable way to determine the number of Ottoman Armenians prior to the genocide than by counting the Armenian population, settlement by settlement, using the most important sources. Karayan uses this particular method which situates his work on a methodologically firm basis.

The bulk of sources used by the author to give the Armenian population figures on the settlement level are the following: 1. Data from the books about particular Ottoman Armenian communities published by diaspora Armenian compatriotic unions and Armenian Genocide survivors; 2. Census figures provided by the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1912, taken from the book *Koghkota Hay Hokevoraganutian yev ir Hodin 1915 Aghedali Dariin* [The Golgotha of the Armenian Clergy and its Faithful in the Catastrophic Year of 1915], compiled by Teotig [Lapjinian] in 1921 and printed in New York in 1985;⁸ 3.

7. Geographical dictionary or directory used in conjunction with a map or atlas.

8. Elsewhere the author dates Teodig's data at 1914 (see, for example, Bitlis kaza figures, 173). This census was taken in 1913, as it is justly mentioned in the note by Ara Sarafian (Gomidas Institute), the publisher of Karayan's study (p.vii). This confusion probably originates from the fact that the Armenian Patriarchate had actually prepared Ottoman Armenian population statistics in 1912, which were partially published by the Ottoman Armenian writer and public figure Grigor Zohrab under the pen name, Marcel Leart in 1913 (see Marcel Leart, *La Question Armenienne a La Lumiere des Documents* (Paris:

Population figures collected by certain individuals concerning specific provinces and published around 1910; 4. Armenian periodicals and journals published in the diaspora; 5. Official Ottoman population figures for 1914 (these are used whenever figures are not available from other sources); 6. The Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia (12 volumes, around 8,500 pages) and Geographical dictionary of historical and modern Armenia (5 volumes, around 4,000 pages) (pp. 5-9)⁹.

It should be noted that Karayan's statement that he "*presented and examined practically all available figures provided by different authors*" (p.7), for the 1914 Ottoman Armenian population does not do justice to the scholarship. For example, the author does not use the groundbreaking study Kevorkian and Paboudjian mentioned above which provides complete data of the Armenian population figure based on the the 1913 census survey lists which are kept in the Nubarian library in Paris. While Karayan's available source for this census (Teodig) provides only the number of households or families for each particular settlement by multiplying them by 7 in order to obtain the number of persons, Kevorkian and Paboudjian's work provides the precise number of individuals as they were recorded in these lists.

The main methodological weakness of the Karayan's approach to the population is that, as a rule, only one source is used for each settlement. This makes the author's calculation dependent on the reliability of that particular source and creates serious discrepancies. In some cases the author provides two or more village lists for the given administrative unit, but there is no indication on which criteria he chooses one of them to be the main source. Hence in some cases, he selects less trustworthy source as a basis for his calculations. By doing so his figures again become less reliable.

Let us provide some examples in order to illustrate the latter point. For the Armenian population of the kaza of Kharzan in the sanjak of Si'irt, Karayan uses the inflated figures provided by V. Bedoyan according to which the kaza had 2,131 families (17,048 persons for the administrative unit). If we compare these figures to the ones provided by Teodig (1913), we see that the latter provides a very low figure (1,000 families). It is highly probable that Bedoyan's numbers are inflated, thus affecting Karayan's calculation.¹⁰ Another example is the case of the city of Diarbekir for which Karayan estimates the number of the Armenian population to be around 45,000, whereas others provide much lower figures of 15,000-26,000. Despite the fact that the author attempts to justify his choice of the higher figure, almost all of his arguments are problematic and are essentially guesstimations (pp. 272-273).¹¹

Librairie Maritime et Colonial, 1913) and in a complete form in 1922 by the same Teodig in *Amenoun Taretsoys* [Annual calendar], 261-265, where data on the Ottoman Armenian population as of April 1, 1921 is provided. Karayan is aware of this key source, but, surprisingly, uses it only for his counting of Armenian Genocide survivors.

9. A more accurate translation of the name of the mentioned book is "Dictionary of Localities in Armenia and the Neighboring Regions" («Հայաստանի և հարակից երկրների տեղանունների բառարան»).

10. Karayan, actually mentions Teodig's figures, but provides no clue as to why he decided not to use them as a basis for calculating the population figure of the Kharzan district (p. 213).

11. If indeed there were about 45,000 Armenians in the city of Diarbekir, as the author claims, this town would be the largest Armenian-populated in six vilayets of Western Armenia (behind the cities of Van,

Unfortunately, this fallacy is also inherent in some of the author's other figures for the vilayet of Diarbekir, particularly those for the sanjaks of Mardin and Severag, where he provides the figures of Armenians at 44,833 and 37,355 respectively. As a result, the author's estimate of 194,398 for the Armenian population of the vilayet of Diarbekir is most likely an exaggeration. The most reliable sources at our disposal (Constantinople Armenian patriarchate's estimate of 1912, and Thomas Mgrdichian) provide figures between 125-150,000 for the Armenian population of the vilayet of Diarbekir.

At the same time, the author's estimate of 123,832 Armenians for the vilayet of Van at most an underestimation. Reliable independent sources (Armenian Patriarchate statistics for 1912-1914, Armenian Genocide refugee counting data, among others) provide figures ranging between 150-200,000 and even higher for pre-genocide Armenian populations of this province.

To conclude, despite some discrepancies in the figures provided by Karayan, most of his calculations and estimates are sound. However, the calculation errors mentioned above, as well as others not mentioned, could have an impact on the reliability of Karayan's estimates for particular provinces that affects his total figure for Ottoman Armenian population.

Thus, despite all his efforts, the author's calculation does not provide definitive and conclusive answers to the question on the number of Armenians in all the Armenian-populated provinces of the Ottoman Empire before the genocide and the consequent question of the figures of the Armenian Genocide death toll. Perhaps, it is a *mission impossible* for any specific researcher who would dare to undertake a task of similar magnitude and depth. Nevertheless, most certainly, Karayan's book contains a massive treasure trove of information, which could and should be used as an indispensable reference book by any future researcher in the field of the Ottoman Armenian demography.

Erzeroum and Sivas), something that does not hold ground based on all the available sources. Taking into account the similarity between figures 15,000 and 45,000 we cannot rule out the possibility that the figure of 45,000 in the original source used is a result of simple typographic error.