

Exile and Memory: Arabs in the Ottoman Great War

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The First World War was a time of great dislocation and upheaval for Arab subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Emergency wartime measures, such as conscription, requisitioning of crops and animals, rationing, and the introduction of paper money placed a heavy burden on all Ottoman subjects. Moreover, the growing mistrust between the Ottoman authorities and their Arab subjects gave rise to punitive measures that caused particular suffering in the Arab provinces, including imprisonment, executions, and, most commonly, exile.¹ An estimated 50,000 people were deported by the Ottoman authorities in the course of the war.² Those suspected of harbouring Arabist leanings, or Christian communities that had formerly enjoyed the protection of the Entente Powers – Britain, France, or Russia – were the prime targets of this policy. Others were sent on the road to exile as a means to extort ransoms from their families, or for the state to expropriate their wealth. Men denounced their enemies, often without cause, to demonstrate their loyalty to the Ottoman state and to eliminate a rival. As such, the policy of exile proved deeply divisive of Arab Ottoman society, provoking cleavages between Arab subjects and their Ottoman rulers, and among members of the same towns and quarters.

Exile was a means to disconnect an individual from his or her networks, a policy of disempowerment by alienation. The individual in exile was a stranger in the place of exile, forced to live off personal resources and survive until such time as the state allowed a return to the homeland. The logic of the situation forced their relatives and associates to demonstrate greater loyalty to the state in the hope of gaining the

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1. M. Talha Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria: Cemal Pasha's governorate during World War I* (London: Routledge, 2014), 47–56.

2. Eliezer Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 38.


return of their loved ones. As a punitive measure, exile imposed little or no cost on the state (as would imprisonment), and was distinctly less draconian than the hangings which stained Jamal Pasha's rule in Syria.³ While exile did not make martyrs, the policy is remembered among the cruel hardships endured by Arabs in the First World War.

Or was it? Alongside the predictable narrative of exile and alienation, a counter-intuitive narrative is told by other Syrians with stronger ties to the Ottoman world. Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, the Damascene journalist, recounted the following exchange in his memoirs, in a chapter entitled "Turkish hatred of the Arabs":

I spoke with my friend, Ilyas Bey Mutran, whom I saw in Beirut before the end of the Great War [*al-harb al-'ama*]. Jamal Pasha had exiled him to Anatolia along with a group of Syrians. When I asked him how he had fared in exile, he said he was very glad for the experience and grateful to Jamal Pasha. He had gained a real knowledge of the Turkish people and was convinced that they had few equals in character and quality. He could not adequately express his thanks for all that he had witnessed of the kindness of the Turks and the goodness of their hearts. "For the length of my stay with them they did not wish for me to leave, so that they could offer more hospitality. They kissed my hand, eye, and knee and asked me to bless them. I told them I was a Christian, but they replied, 'aren't you an Arab from the land of Muhammad (peace be upon him)?' I wept and they wept! This is the Turkish people I was pleased to see in their own land. Should I not be thankful to he who exiled me after seeing what I saw?"⁴

In Kurd 'Ali's view, these gentle rural Turks of "sound character" were the exception. He believed Turkish intellectuals and government employees to be least tolerant of the Arabs. However, other Arab contemporaries who experienced the pains of exile, like the Damascene 'Abd al-Qadir al-'Azm,

3. Jamal or Cemal Pasha was the commander-in-chief of the Ottoman Fourth Army in Syria and one of the three ruling figures of the CUP regime. Formerly Minister of Marine, Cemal was nicknamed "*al-saffah*," or "the shedder of blood," for his repressive policies.

4. Muhammad Kurd 'Ali,  *Tudhakkarat*, vol. 1 (Damascus: Dar al-Taraqqi, 1948), 158-159.

and the Christian rural notable, ‘Odeh al-Goussous (also written as ‘Awda al-Qusus), seemed to survive, even to thrive, precisely because of their connections to the networks of educated elites and government officials. For these men, exile had the unexpected consequence of reinforcing their sense of attachment to the Ottoman world on the eve of its dissolution.

Targets of exile

Very different types of people were singled out for exile by the Ottoman authorities. The primary targets of deportation were Arab subjects whose loyalties to the Empire were in doubt – Arabists⁵ and Christians with close ties to the Entente Powers. Others were exiled on more opportunistic grounds, falsely denounced to the authorities by local rivals or charged by the authorities as a pretext to expropriate their wealth. These were not discrete categories, and as the evidence suggests, people were denounced by rivals on allegations of double loyalties or separatist aspirations, and sent down the road to exile.

On the outbreak of the First World War, Jamal Pasha was quick to clamp down on Syrians suspected of Arabist leanings. Falih Rifki Atay, a journalist serving as an intelligence officer in Jamal’s general staff, witnessed the governor general condemn a group of notables from the Palestinian town of Nablus. After leaving the notables in his waiting room for what must have seemed to them an eternity, Jamal suddenly ordered the group into his office.

“Are you aware of the gravity of the crimes you have committed against your sovereign state?” he asked in an intimidating voice.

“In God’s name, forgive us,” they begged.

“Do you know the punishment for such crimes?” Jamal continued. “You deserve to be hanged. Yes, hanged – but give thanks to the merciful generosity of the Sublime Porte. I will be satisfied, for the moment, to exile you and your families to Anatolia.”⁶

5. The term “Arabist” is used here to refer to proto-nationalist ideologues who sought either greater autonomy or independence for the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire.


6. Falih Rifki Atay, *Le Mont des Oliviers: L’Empire ottoman et le Moyen-Orient 1914–1918* (Paris: Turquoise, 2009), 29–30.

Jamal later boasted to Atay with a smile: “There are people I have personally exiled everywhere.”

Syrian Christians also paid a high price for their historic ties to the Entente powers. Russia had extended its protection to Orthodox Christians in Ottoman lands, France had served as the protector of the Catholic communities, and Britain extended its support to the small Protestant churches in the Arab world. Jamal Pasha was particularly critical of alleged Christian disloyalty to the Ottoman state. In a meeting with the Ottoman governor of Mount Lebanon, an Armenian Christian named Ohannès Pasha Kouyoumdjian, Jamal Pasha railed against the disloyalty of the Lebanese Christians. Ohannès Pasha had been called to Damascus to meet with Jamal Pasha, recently arrived from Istanbul in November 1914, and found the Young Turk commander in an agitated state. Jamal Pasha had slammed his hand down on a copy of a book by a Syrian Christian lying open on his desk and said:

I will invoke their own testimony against them. In nearly every page of this publication I find manifest proof that the Lebanese, and notably the Maronites, are traitors and felons to their Sovereign. This harmful attitude must be dispelled for good. It is time to squeeze these disloyal subjects up close and to make them feel that they have no other means of safety except through sincere submission to Ottoman power.⁷

Jamal then showed Ohannès Pasha a list of names of forty Ottoman civil servants “whose presence in Lebanon was, it seemed, harmful to the security and the interests of the Ottoman state.” Jamal Pasha elaborated: “All of these people are agents or clients of the Entente powers. They owe their official posts to the protection of the consuls. I can no longer tolerate their presence in Mount Lebanon. I demand that they be sent to Damascus as soon as possible, where they will be held under police surveillance until further orders. Those with an official post will be

 7. The book was K. T. Khairallah's *La Syrie. Territoire. Origines ethniques et pontiques, evolution. Esquisses: La vie sociale et littéraire. La vie politique en Syrie et au Liban* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1912). Ohannès Pacha Kouyoumdjian, *Le Liban à la veille et au début de la guerre. Mémoires d'un gouverneur, 1913-1915* (Paris: Centre d'histoire arménienne contemporaine, 2003), 113.

stripped of their duties immediately.” Though Ohannès Pasha pressed the Ottoman commander for confirmation of the allegations, Jamal Pasha refused to disclose his source. The governor of Mount Lebanon had his own ideas on the authorship of the list: “Most of those proscribed were the enemies or the adversaries of the Druze chief to whom I alluded in an earlier chapter,” Ohannès Pasha wrote, a reference to the **Adir** Shakib Arslan.⁸ If true, Ohannès Pasha’s allegation is all the more remarkable given Arslan’s later criticisms of Jamal Pasha’s wartime measures. An avowed Ottoman loyalist, Arslan dated his disaffection from Ottoman rule to measures taken against Arabists by Jamal Pasha. In his memoirs, Arslan specifically condemned the deportation of Lebanese notables, including bishops and clergy.⁹

Political activists who sought independence or greater autonomy for the Arab provinces, such as the military men of *al-ʿAhd*, the intellectuals of the Young Arab society, *al-Fatat*, and the members of the Ottoman Decentralization Party were among the early targets for deportation. By the outbreak of the First World War, these and other organizations in the Arab provinces were militating for greater political independence from Istanbul’s control, often in connivance with European powers.¹⁰ The Ottoman authorities drew on their own surveillance network, aided by their German ally, to uncover Arabist cells.

On the outbreak of war, the French consulate in Beirut closed its doors and left its archives in the safekeeping of the American consulate, still a neutral power in the expanding world war. The Ottoman authorities seized the French papers in November 1914 and found extensive documentation on contacts between local activists and the French consulate. A contemporary French intelligence report noted:

A petition from leading Christian and Muslim personalities from Beirut and the Lebanon was found among the papers seized [by the Ottomans], in which they request the French government to append the city of Beirut and the plain of the Bika’ up to Ba’albeck to Mount Lebanon, thus to form a small, self-sufficient principality under a French protectorate.

8. Kouyoumdjian, *Le Liban*, 115–116.

9. Shakib Arslan, *Sira dhatiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali’a, 1969), 147–159, 215.

10. Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I*, especially chapters 1 and 2.

This petition was naturally covered in signatures, and now provides the Turks a list of people to proscribe.¹¹

The Ottomans arrested scores of suspects on the basis of this documentation and convened a court martial in 1915 in the Lebanese mountain town of 'Alay, where they interrogated and tortured suspects. Contemporary French sources claimed that fifty-five signatories to the petition were sentenced to death, and that fourteen men had been executed in Beirut, eight in Damascus, and seven in Haifa in May 1916 alone.¹² Later in 1916, Jamal Pasha published a volume of the incriminating documents in French, Arabic, and Turkish editions. The book documents the cases against forty-four men convicted of crimes against the state, thirty-four of whom received the death penalty.¹³

Jamal Pasha's policy of snap executions served to intimidate the people of Greater Syria, though at a high cost to popular mobilisation for the Ottoman war effort. The executions of known and suspected members of Arabist societies are said to have been a deciding factor in the timing of the Hashemite call for an Arab Revolt. Whether he believed he had eliminated those who represented the gravest threat to the state or was fearful of turning public opinion against the government, Jamal did not continue his policy of executions, but chose to expand the practice of deporting suspected enemies of the state instead.

Four of the 'Alay convicts spared from the gallows were condemned to exile: Rida Bey al-Solh and his son Riyad al-Solh (later prime minister of Lebanon) were sentenced to life in exile for their expressions of support for the British. As'ad Bey Haydar and Husayn Bey Haydar were given lighter sentences of two years exile on suspicion of links to the Ottoman

11. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (MAE), Note 33, Saint Quentin to Paix, 20 May 1916, appendix V. I am grateful to Henry Laurens for providing copies of French wartime intelligence reports. See also Arslan, *Sira dhatiyya*, 133–135.

12. MAE, Note 33, 20 May 1916, appendix V. Tauber lists eleven men sentenced to death on 21 August 1915 and another twenty-one sentenced to death on 6 May 1916. *The Arab Movements in World War I*, 54–55.

13. *La vérité sur la question syrienne*, published in Arabic under the title *lydahat 'an al-masa'il al-siyasiyya ilati jarrat tadqiqaha bi-diwan al-harb al-'urfi al-mutashakkal bi-'Alay* (Istanbul: al-Tanin Press, 1334/1916).

Decentralization Party.¹⁴ Many others implicated by the French consular documents in Beirut were sentenced to exile. French sources maintain that some eighty-two Beirut families and sixty families from Mount Lebanon had been sent into exile, principally to Ankara.¹⁵

The Germans, who had no Christian clients in the region, warned their Ottoman ally of the danger posed by Christian double loyalties. An intelligence report prepared by a German Orientalist named Curt Prüfer, following his tour of Haifa, Beirut, and Damascus in 1915, warned that “the Christian population is nearly unanimous in its support for the Entente powers.”¹⁶ Prüfer pointed to the role of French and British schools in turning Christian loyalties from the Ottomans to the European powers. While he believed Christian attachment to the Entente Powers too deeply rooted to reverse, he dismissed the Christians as too cowardly to pose a threat to the state. The main conclusion of Prüfer’s report was that there were not sufficient internal threats to the Empire to warrant the establishment of a “surveillance service” in Greater Syria. However, he attached a list of individuals whose exile would be advisable in the event of the landing of Entente troops in Syria. The list included twenty-nine individuals or families from Beirut, seventeen from Haifa (in addition to “the Arab Carmelite fathers and the entire Greek Catholic clergy”), and four from Jaffa (in addition to “all heads of the Zionist party”). Prüfer recommended the exile of all teachers in the Alliance Israélite schools and of the native Catholic clergy from all Syrian coastal towns.

The compromising politics of foreign protection are well demonstrated by the wartime experiences of the village of Madaba, then part of the Province of Syria, now in modern Jordan. Madaba was a Christian settler village established in the early 1880s by Latin and Orthodox families

14. *La vérité sur la question syrienne*, 166–167.

15. MAE, Note 33, 20 May 1916, appendix V.

16. Prüfer to Cemal Pasha, Damascus, 5 December 1915. Document from the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office, Berlin, File R21138, A37609, cited in Tilman Lüdke, “Jihad Made in Germany: Ottoman and German Propaganda and Intelligence Operations in the First World War” (D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford 2001), 195–196. With thanks to Dr. Lüdke for sharing this document. See also Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power, 1898–1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2010), 293–95.

displaced by a feud in their native town of Karak. Roman Catholic missionaries played a prominent role in the foundation of the village, and they regularly sought French protection in their quarrels with the Ottoman authorities.

In 1911, a major dispute broke out within the community of Madaba over a marriage.¹⁷ When the contending parties threatened the priest who had blessed the union, he sought the Ottoman government's support. The local mayor [*mudir*] refused to intervene in a domestic dispute. The priest, Don Panfils, then sheltered the bride in his mission and, when he saw the disputing parties threaten his home, raised the French flag. The Ottoman authorities were outraged. The district governor [*kaymakam*] came from the nearby town of al-Salt as the situation escalated and reminded the priest that "the Latin community of Madaba is not French, but Ottoman." However, the authorities did not dare violate what the priest was in effect declaring French sovereign territory. The priest, of Russian origins, acknowledged the local Latin community was Ottoman, but reminded the district governor that "whomsoever takes refuge against danger in the Latin convent places themselves under the protection of France." The Ottoman authorities laid siege to the convent for ten days as the focus of attention shifted from the marital dispute to the ill-advised raising of the French flag. In the end, the besieged priest was relieved by an official sent from the French consulate in Damascus, who escorted Don Panfils to Damascus, and a new missionary was sent from Jerusalem to direct the convent in Madaba. While this resolved the immediate dispute, the priest's actions put the Christian community of Madaba in real danger, which only became apparent on the outbreak of war.

The Dominican priest, Antonin Jaussen, an archaeologist and scholar of the Hijaz and southern Transjordan based in Jerusalem, offered his services to French intelligence on the outbreak of war. Jaussen had spent a great deal of time in and had written extensively about prewar Madaba in

17. The detailed report of the Catholic priest, Don Panfils, "Rapport sur l'Affaire de Madaba" (22 Sept - 3 Oct 1911) is held in the MAE, Archives diplomatiques: Correspondance politique (turquie, Jerusalem), vol. 133, pp. 208-232. Quoted in extenso by Andre Mazroui, "L'Affaire de Mâdabâ, 1911: Mikhâïl, Mariam et le Curé Latin - Quelques Perspectives Historiques et Sociologiques sur les Bédouins Arabes Chrétiens en Transjordanie Ottomane" (unpublished paper).

his remarkable ethnographic study, *Coutumes des Arabes au Pays de Moab*. In one of his intelligence reports, Jaussen reported that “the principal members of the Christian community of Madaba were exiled to Ankara from the start of the war . . . accused of sympathy for France.”¹⁸ He drew a direct connection to the events of September-October 1911:

The Turks were in the wrong and had been condemned, but the employees did not forget their defeat. Once war broke out they accused the Catholic population of being French, of having taken shelter under the French flag, and of making efforts to deliver Transjordan to French troops. As a result of these accusations, the principal families [of Madaba] were deported to Ankara and Konia and their goods seized. Those who escaped deportation were forced to hide in the desert and witness from afar the pillaging of their homes.¹⁹

The Christians of Madaba, like those in Lebanon, were condemned for their close relations to France. Exile served as a means both to scatter a suspected French ally and to impress on their families the importance of demonstrating loyalty to the Ottoman state. If Jaussen’s accounts are taken at face value, exile also provided a pretext to expropriate the goods of those condemned, doubling the burden on those left behind. Many Syrian families faced starvation as a result, contributing to the growing threat of famine in wartime Syria.²⁰

The events surrounding Madaba’s fall from grace were quite particular, though evidence suggests that Christian communities more generally were suspect in Ottoman eyes. Official suspicions and punitive actions against Syrian Christians can be taken as a microcosm of the Ottoman state’s actions against Armenian Christians in Eastern Anatolia. However, the road to exile for Syrian Christians did not hold the prospect of the death marches which faced the Armenian exiles.

The deportations were not confined to political activists and suspect

18. SS Marine Q86, 3 February 1918. With thanks to Henry Laurens.

19. SS Marine Q79, Service d’information de la marine dans le Levant, Port Said, 31 December 1918.


20. On the wartime famine, see Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, “The Famine of 1915–1918 in Greater Syria,” in John Spagnolo, ed., *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1992), 229–258.

Christian communities. Syrian Muslims with none of these associations were also sent down the road of exile. In Damascus, French intelligence sources claimed, exile was used as a means to expropriate wealthy Muslim notables. Some eighty of the most prominent Damascene Muslims were exiled to Urfa or Ankara and their wealth confiscated by the state.²¹ This link between exile and expropriation, if true, suggests that exile was used as a means to other ends than just the disruption of Arabist networks and activities. Indeed, exile, permission to return from exile, and the threat or actual sentence to renewed exile were strategies pursued by the Ottoman government alternately to intimidate and ingratiate their Arab subjects.

The experience of exile

The policy of exile can be treated in general terms, drawing on statistics, laws, and government policy. Not so the *experience* of exile, which by its very nature was both personal and particular. Given the tens of thousands of Syrians who were exiled in the course of the First World War, it is surprising how few detailed accounts have survived of life in exile. Three different autobiographic narratives will be presented here, representing the diversity of Syrians exiled during the First World War: a Muslim notable of Damascus in the Ottoman civil service, a Christian emigrant of Jerusalem who had returned from the United States, and a rural Christian notable from the Jordanian town of Karak. While these three accounts are idiosyncratic, and cannot be taken to represent anything more than the views of their authors, they shed light on the resources and strategies that Ottoman Arabs could deploy to survive their period of exile and return safely to their families by war's end.

‘Abd al-Qadir al-‘Azm of Damascus


‘Abd al-Qadir al-‘Azm was a member of one of the most prominent Damascene notable families. A Sunni Muslim, trained in Istanbul's famous Mülkiye civil service academy, ‘Abd al-Qadir entered government service in 1904. On the outbreak of war in 1914, ‘Abd al-Qadir was governor  **makam** of the Duma district of the Province of Syria. He was, by his

21. MAE, Note 33, 20 May 1916, appendix IV.

own account, efficient at his job and worked closely with the Ottoman commander-in-chief in Syria, Jamal Pasha, in reorganizing the transport of provisions to the Ottoman Fourth Army. Despite his personal record of good service, ‘Abd al-Qadir’s career was derailed by a family member. His father-in-law, Shafiq Mu’ayyad al-‘Azm, was named as an Arabist in the French government documents seized from the American consulate in 1914. He was tried and convicted of treason. Unaware of the gravity of the situation, ‘Abd al-Qadir was called to Damascus and ordered to accompany his father-in-law’s family to Bursa, where Shafiq Mu’ayyad al-‘Azm was to join them in exile. It was only after his arrival in Bursa that ‘Abd al-Qadir discovered that his father-in-law and two of his own best friends had been executed in May 1916, and that in spite of his own unblemished record of service, he was to share his family’s exile. “I changed in that moment from a sincere Ottoman, faithful to the state with all sincerity, to an enemy, loathing her with all hatefulness.”²²

Yet ‘Abd al-Qadir could not afford to allow his anger to show. Even in exile, he had sufficient influence to petition Ottoman Minister of Interior Talat Pasha to request suitable quarters for himself and his father-in-law’s family. Talat offered to appoint ‘Abd al-Qadir to an administrative post in another city, which would give him a proper residence. ‘Abd al-Qadir was loath to cooperate with the Ottoman civil service after the government had executed his friends and family and exiled him. However, he was visited by an official responsible for military conscription, and the threat of army service was enough to make ‘Abd al-Qadir agree to an administrative post in one of the districts near Bursa.

‘Abd al-Qadir’s memoirs reveal the importance of connections with the central government and links to the “old boy network” of the prestigious Mülkiye academy in enabling the ‘Azm family to spend their years of exile in relative comfort. When it came to securing a good post in the provincial administration of Bursa, ‘Abd al-Qadir turned to the head clerk “because he was among the sons of our school, the imperial *Mülkiye* in Istanbul.” When he sought a transfer to a better post several months later, he turned

22. ‘Abd al-Qadir al-‘Azm,  *udhakkarat* (Damascus: n.p., 1962), cited in Corinne Blake, “Training Arab-Ottoman Bureaucrats: Syrian Graduates of the Mülkiye Mektebi, 1890–1920” (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1991), 215.

to the undersecretary of the interior ministry, Mustafa Abdülhalik, whom he described as “my colleague in the imperial *Mülkiye Mektebi*, my close friend, a very cultured man with a most pleasant disposition.”²³ Through his interventions, ‘Abd al-Qadir received a posting to Şarköy on the Marmara Sea, where he served out the rest of the war, returning to Syria only after the end of the war. While at Şarköy, ‘Abd al-Qadir played a major role in gaining the return of property expropriated by the state from the local Orthodox Christians who had been slated for deportation. This was, perhaps, his final act as an Ottoman bureaucrat. ‘Abd al-Qadir in exile was as concerned about public welfare as that of his family. Alienated from the CUP regime by its repressive measures in his native Syria, and frustrated by an unjust exile, ‘Abd al-Qadir nonetheless continued to play on his networks and loyalties to preserve his standing and provide for his family in exile.

Khalil al-Sakakini of Jerusalem

“I have no idea why the Ottoman government wants to deport me from Jerusalem,” Khalil al-Sakakini wrote in his diary on 3 December 1917. “Does it think that the British might need my ilk, someone who is only suitable as a teacher and only happy when busy with work?”²⁴ In fact, Sakakini had been arrested by the authorities for harbouring a suspected American spy, the Jewish poet Alter Levine, who had sought refuge in Levine’s house one week earlier. “I was trapped: should I admit him [i.e., the fugitive Levine], thus disobeying the orders of my government and making myself subject to its wrath and vengeance, particularly at a time when it had lost its sense? Or should I send him back to whither he came, thus breaking with the social graces of my cultural idiom . . . ?” In the end, Sakakini sheltered Levine and suffered the consequences.

The two men were arrested and held in the police station in Jerusalem. When Sakakini was taken before the chief of police for questioning, the police chief “looked at me up and down with a stern challenge in his

23. Blake, “Training Arab-Ottoman Bureaucrats,” 217.

24. The full narrative of Sakakini’s wartime exile is published in Akram Musallam (ed.), *Yawmiyyat Khalil al-Sakakini* vol. 2, 1914–1917 (Ramallah and Jerusalem: Institute for Jerusalem Studies, 2004), 191–366. Excerpts have been translated in “Khalil Sakakini’s Ottoman Prison Diaries, Damascus (1917–1918),” *Jerusalem Quarterly File* 20 (January 2004), 7–23. All quotes here taken from “Sakakini’s Ottoman Prison Diaries.”

eye and shook his head as if to say, 'You double-crossing traitor, you've fallen into our hands now.'" Sakakini feared the worst. Jerusalem was about to fall to the British forces and the Ottomans were resorting to summary justice. However, Sakakini was not to be executed, but was bound and marched to Damascus with Levine and eight other prisoners – three Turks, an Egyptian, two gendarmes, and two natives of Jerusalem. Sakakini described in great detail the fear and uncertainty he and his fellows experienced. He was also deeply humiliated to be marched out of his native town, bound like a common criminal. "Every passer-by turned us a blind eye and a deaf ear. They had every right to do so, in order to not be taken as guilty by association with us." However, one of Sakakini's former students approached him and gave him food and money to sustain him on his long journey.


Sakakini's journey led from Jerusalem to Jericho and across the Jordan to al-Salt and Amman, where he and his companions were again put in prison. "As we entered, I saw some people I knew and called out to them, but they shunned us . . ." In Amman, the prisoners were put on a train heading north to Damascus. Before parting from his guards, Sakakini made a remarkable observation. "As we were leaving Jerusalem, our guards, strong Albanians, had only eyed us fiercely. But after the passing of two or three days, we all became like brothers. If all Ottoman soldiers were like those guards, the Ottoman Empire would be more powerful, vigorous, and intrepid." After three days of fear and ostracism, he had not only come to admire his captors, but seemed to wish them and the Empire they served well.

Yet Sakakini made no secret of the pain of exile. In Damascus, he saw one of his teachers and exchanged a verse of poetry with him. Sakakini recited the first couplet: "To suffer at once imprisonment, ruin, longing, exile, and separation from the beloved," and his teacher replied from the other side of the metal bars, "is too much to bear!" as his eyes filled with tears. Sakakini was released from prison on bail in January 1918, and spent the rest of his exile under house arrest in Damascus. While pleased to have freedom of movement, he was eloquent on the pain of exile: "Every parting other than exile is insignificant and bearable, but I left my loved ones without even being granted a final glance from them. They don't know anything about me and I don't know anything about them.

It's as though they have buried me." Without connections to the Ottoman administrative hierarchy, Sakakini suffered total isolation in exile. In this, Sakakini's account stands in vivid contrast to those of 'Odeh al-Goussous, an Ottoman Arab of neighbouring Transjordan.

'Odeh al-Goussous of Karak

'Odeh al-Goussous was a Greek Orthodox Christian from the frontier town of Karak, in modern Jordan. Since 1893, Karak had been the seat of a regional governorate [*mutasarrifiyya*] within the Province of Syria. Its new prominence as a centre of government authority had given rise to a range of administrative offices, and 'Odeh, as an educated local notable, had worked his way through the bureaucracy and court system to a position of prominence on the Administrative Council of the *Mutasarrifiyya*. Before the outbreak of war, 'Odeh moved comfortably through the upper echelons of provincial administration, representing the views of Karakis to the governor in Damascus and other top officials in the province.

On the outbreak of war, 'Odeh and his family came under government scrutiny, along with the other Christians of the town.²⁵ His home and his uncle's home were searched by officials who suspected them of hoarding food and goods against government requisitions. His brother Hanna, a graduate of the American medical college in Beirut, wrote to complain to the authorities in Damascus. He was arrested for his pains and sentenced to exile in Adana. His family pulled every string and paid a heavy fine to get Hanna's sentence lifted. Against this background of distrust and oppression, it is noteworthy that the Ottoman government appointed 'Odeh to assist in provisioning Ottoman troops in Medina, following the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in June 1916. Given his local connections, 'Odeh was entrusted with buying grain from local producers and dispatching it to Medina by rail. In May 1917, he was called to Damascus and decorated with the  *ciidiyye* Fifth Class for his services.²⁶

25. Nayef G. al-Goussous al-Halasa and Ghassan S. al-Shawareb al-Halasa (eds.), *Memoirs of 'Odeh al-Goussous al-Halasa (1877–1943)* [in Arabic] (Amman: privately printed, 2006), 82–89.

26. Ottoman documents show the award of the medal to 'Odeh al-Goussous in August 1917; BBA, DH-KMS 46-2/15.

Yet in November of that year, ‘Odeh was arrested by the authorities and sent to Damascus. ‘Odeh attributed his arrest to betrayal by a leading Muslim notable of Karak, Husayn al-Tarawna. He and a group of Karaki Christians were taken by train to Damascus. While he was viciously abused by his guard on the train, ‘Odeh’s account focuses instead on the many kindnesses he met along the way. In Dar‘a, he met a friendly acquaintance, Mazhar Bey, who had previously served in Karak. In Damascus, he and his fellows were billeted in a beautiful house in Suq Saruja by a Turkish official who had served four years in Karak. Sadek Efendi “welcomed us and received us warmly.”²⁷ While detained in Damascus, he was visited by the commander of the detention centre, who asked for ‘Odeh by name:

He came over and said to me: “I didn’t recognize you. You are my friend.” Then he embraced me. I gave him coffee and asked how we were connected. He answered that when he had served in Karak as a sergeant [*çavuş*] he had been implicated in a criminal case and that I had extended assistance to him and sided with him, which was something he would never forget. He added that he had come to visit me to offer any assistance I might need. I thanked him for this kindness and answered that I did not need a thing. He ordered the sergeant major [*başçavuş*] to treat us well, said goodbye and returned to work.²⁸

Alarming news began to filter in to the detainees of the deportation of clergy and Christians in general. Clearly British advances in Palestine and the fall of Jerusalem had caused this hardening in Ottoman attitudes towards Syrian Christians. But ‘Odeh and his companions did not know of this. They were given no information on the reasons for their detention, nor were they subjected to any legal procedure. ‘Odeh wrote to the governor in Damascus. “I reminded him of my former services to the government and of his promises to me of compensation. I asked him to reveal the reasons why I should be treated in this fashion. My letter was returned with his response appended at the bottom, saying: ‘Even if you hadn’t a speck of guilt, yet the government in its wisdom requires this.’”²⁹

27. Al-Goussous, *Memoirs*, 92.

28. Al-Goussous, *Memoirs*, 94.

29. Al-Goussous, *Memoirs*, 95.

After two weeks detention in Damascus, ‘Odeh and his fellows were interviewed by a commission to confirm their identities. They were then taken to the train station, inoculated against cholera, and sent on to Aleppo. “There we saw Rashid Bey al-Husami, who had served in al-Karak and was moved to the appeals court in Aleppo, who showed sadness when we told him of our situation.”³⁰ After a brief stay in Aleppo, ‘Odeh and his fellow townsmen were sent on to Adana, where they made contact with the head of the local Greek Orthodox community. They were photographed and registered by the local police, and forbidden to travel outside the city of Adana, where they stayed for two weeks. They were then sent on to the town of Sis, the capital of the Cilicia region, where they remained for the rest of their period of exile.

Even at such a distance from his native Karak as Cilicia, ‘Odeh continued to meet friends and acquaintances, reaffirming his Ottoman network.

While we were in the hotel a townsman named Khalil Efendi came and asked for me. He drew close to me after being introduced and said: “I came to visit you because you are a friend of my brother Izzet Efendi, who was an Islamic court judge in Karak. He always talked about his friends, and you are one of them. I am at your disposal to assist you in any way I can.” He added that he worked as a chief clerk in the Islamic court in Sis, not for the money, but to avoid military service. He asked me to call on him in his office. I called on him the next day and he introduced me to the judge and the mufti, who were both distinguished men of learning. They appeared to be concerned about the consequences of Cemal Pasha’s savage acts in the Arab lands.³¹

On the strength of these new connections, ‘Odeh petitioned to have all Karak exiles in the Adana region moved to Sis for their safety. The Mutasarrif promised his assistance, and in time a number of the Karak exiles were reunited. Some of the Karakis fled in an attempt to return home from exile, while those who remained were rewarded by a pardon. On 11 May 1918, ‘Odeh and his friends received word that they were free

30. Al-Goussous, *Memoirs*, 96.

31. Al-Goussous, *Memoirs*, 98.

to return to Karak.

Getting home was easier said than done. Soldiers and people were on the move, and the train system was clogged in all directions. It took 'Odeh and his companions ten days just to get out of Sis. The stationmaster in Aleppo was overwhelmed and barred the Karakis entry to the platform until he heard they were from Karak and asked if they knew 'Odeh al-Goussous. 'Odeh introduced himself and the officer declared another friendship connection and immediately placed the exiles on the wood tender of the next train. In Raqqa, 'Odeh called on another of his friends to secure a place on a train to Damascus. From Dar'a southwards, insecurity on the rail lines forced the exiles to ride under Druze escort back to Karak, bringing their ordeal to an end.

'Odeh al-Goussous's narrative of exile is full of examples of Ottoman cruelty and arbitrariness. Yet it is striking how many examples he gave of friendship and connections to the Ottoman world. On the one hand, this is not surprising. 'Odeh clearly was flattered to be received so warmly by near total strangers so far from home. The fact that his name had such recognition value, and that he was so well connected to the Ottoman world, was no doubt dearer to the narrator than lachrymose tales of suffering in exile. The end result is to leave the reader with a clear sense of loyalties to the Ottoman world ironically reinforced by the experience of exile. Stripped of family, position, and possessions, at his most vulnerable, 'Odeh al-Goussous nonetheless enjoyed friendship, hospitality, and respect, even access to people of influence, because of his Ottoman connections.

Conclusions

Three individual narratives confirm the fear and hardship that accompanied wartime exile. None of the men whose narratives were related here was in fact guilty of disloyalty to the Ottoman state. They were sentenced without due process, with no explanation, and not given the chance to defend themselves against accusations that in any event had never been specified. As the fortunes of war turned against the Ottomans and their German allies in 1917 and 1918, military officials were turning to summary justice and exiled Arabs had real reason to fear for their lives. They had been shocked by the hangings of nationalists in 1916, they had

encountered Armenians who had survived atrocity, and they did not know the limits of government action. Most of those exiled were not given the chance to pack or take money to maintain themselves in exile. The war years were a time of grave shortage across the Ottoman Empire, where the economy had been shattered by requisitioning and hyperinflation resulting from the introduction of paper money. The blockade of the Syrian coastline, combined with such natural disasters as drought and locust plagues, had produced a terrible famine that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. These were not easy times for uprooted people to live off the land.

Against this background, the narratives of such different men as ‘Abd al-Qadir al-‘Azm, Khalil al-Sakakini, and ‘Odeh al-Goussous are all the more striking for the relative empathy they conveyed with the Ottoman world. In this, they concurred with the anecdote related by Kurd ‘Ali, whose friend expressed ironic gratitude to Jamal Pasha for exiling him to the hospitality of Anatolia. Even Sakakini, whose separation from his beloved wife Sultana and his remarkable circle of friends in Jerusalem left him bereft, wrote of real fellow-feeling for his Albanian Ottoman guards. What is more, none of these men turned their war-time suffering to political ends by espousing an Arabist or Arab nationalist hostility to the Ottoman Empire. ‘Abd al-Qadir al-‘Azm, whose father-in-law and friends had been hanged, expressed great hatred towards the Ottoman state – but continued in loyal service. True, his service was motivated more by a wish to avoid conscription than any sense of loyalty. Yet his anger with the state seems to have been mitigated by the consideration he was shown by Ottoman officials from Talat Pasha, the minister of interior, through the ranks of the bureaucracy. Moreover, as a district governor, he genuinely applied himself to provide for the welfare of the *Anatolian* citizens under his authority. Even his anger did not take an Arabist bent. How can this be explained?

Two factors seem most relevant in explaining the reflections of Ottoman Arabs on their period of exile. Clearly, the better connected an individual to the Ottoman state, the easier their experience of exile. Both al-‘Azm and al-Goussous mitigated the pains of their situation through their associations – the Mülkiye Academy for al-‘Azm, and the court system for al-Goussous. Their sense of the state’s injustice was compensated

by a shared Ottoman society, and the links they had with the Ottoman world were only reinforced by the experience of exile. In other words, forced back onto their Ottoman networks (social and professional), exiled Arabs returned home with a sense of belonging to the Ottoman world when alienation would seem the more reasonable reaction. Perhaps more fundamental, though, is the way these testimonies reflect the end of a pre-national age in the Arab Middle East. If we are to judge by the evidence of three men from very different walks of life, "Arab" simply was not yet an operative political concept. Following the Ottoman retreat from Arab lands in October 1918 and the advent of European military occupation and colonial rule, a distinct Arab national identity was quick to gain ascendancy.