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REVIEW ESSAY: KILLING ORDERS: TALAT PASHA’S TELEGRAMS AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

(DEĞERLENDİRME YAZISI: ÖLDÜRME EMİRLERİ:
TALAT PAŞA’NIN TELGRAFLARI VE ERMENİ SOYKIRIMI)

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Taner Akçam, *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha’s Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 261.

In his recently published book “*Killing Orders: Talat Pasha’s Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide*”, Taner Akçam contends that the telegrams and letters that were published 98 years ago by Aram Andonian and which are attributed to several high-ranking Ottoman officials, particularly the Ottoman Minister of the Interior Talat Pasha, are in fact genuine and authentic. Akçam’s book at hand is the revised English translation of his Turkish-language book *Naim Efendi’nin Hatıratı ve Talat Paşa Telgrafları* (*The Memoirs of Naim Efendi and Talat Pasha Telegrams*) that was published in 2016.¹

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1 For that book, the Honorary President of the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Ömer Engin Lütem, had penned an extensive article analyzing Akçam’s Turkish-language book: Ömer Engin Lütem, “An Assessment On Aram Andonian, Naim Efendi And Talat Pasha Telegrams,” *Review of Armenian Studies*, Issue 34 (2016), p. 129-156. Many of the points that had been raised by Lütem for that book are almost entirely applicable to the revised English translation book as well. However, as Lütem unfortunately passed away on January 2018, I have taken upon the task of updating Lütem’s analysis for the revised English translation book. In order to properly credit the previous work carried out by Ömer Engin Lütem, his name has been listed as one of the authors as well for this article.

Akçam's main argument is based on the assertion that the book *The Talat Pasha Telegrams: Historical Fact or Armenian Fiction?*, which was published in 1983 by Şinasi Orel and Süreyya Yuca (the English version of this book is titled *The Talât Pasha Telegrams: Historical fact or Armenian fiction?*) and which examined the documents in detail and concluded that they must be forged, is full of errors and that the charges leveled against Aram Andonian and the documents themselves are unjustified.

In addition, the materials published by Andonian and Akçam are actually photographs of photographs. We thus lack the originals of the all the disputed documents and texts. It is therefore not possible to subject them to a forensic examination either. Thus, Akçam's impassioned efforts to authenticate the documents are tenuous at best.

Contrary to Orel's and Yuca's claims, Akçam argues that there was an Ottoman official by the name of Naim Efendi and that it was actually him who provided Andonian with the documents in question. Moreover, according to Akçam, the memoirs published by Andonian were personally written by Naim Efendi. In order to buttress his claims, Akçam refers to three "archival documents" which he falsely characterizes as "Ottoman Archival Documents." Furthermore, Akçam annexed to his book the text of memoirs which he claims to have been written by Naim Efendi and which he found in the private papers of Krikor Guerguerian. According to Akçam, Krikor

Guerguerian found these memoirs in the Boghos Nubar Library in Paris and copied them by photographing.

It is necessary to remind readers at this point that there is actually no indication whatsoever (such as a name, signature, paraph, dates etc.) on the text of the memoirs, demonstrating that these memoirs were in fact written by Naim Efendi. Furthermore, even if the memoirs were in fact written by Naim Efendi, there is no information on whether changes were subsequently made on the text or whether the text was edited by someone or some people. It is also necessary to point out that there are no available samples of the handwriting of Naim Efendi other than the text produced by Akçam. It is therefore impossible to compare the handwritings. In addition, the materials published by Andonian and Akçam are actually photographs of photographs. We thus lack the originals of the all the disputed documents and texts. It is therefore not possible to subject them to a forensic examination either. Thus, Akçam's impassioned efforts to authenticate the documents are tenuous at best.

A more interesting point is that the text published by Akçam as the "memoirs of Naim Efendi" does not actually resemble the "memoirs" that historians

know of. The so-called “memoirs” do not provide a narrative of Naim Efendi’s role inside the events, contain no dialogues with others, and do not cover events in a sequential-chronological manner. Perhaps the strangest of all, the “memoirs” do not contain any biographical information on Naim Efendi himself and his occupation, or the post he was serving at.

Classically, a memoir would provide some biographical data on its author and the author’s place inside the events and would provide plenty of details about his/her interactions with other persons involved in the events covered by the memoirs. Unfortunately, the text offered by Akçam as “Naim Efendi’s Memoirs” does none of these. The “memoirs” merely provide a text that is alleged to be official correspondences between various state officials and include occasional commentaries on these correspondences. Moreover, the events are presented in a completely haphazard manner as the text does not follow a chronological order. For instance, telegrams dated September 1915 are provided following telegrams dated January 1916, and this continues to be the case throughout the text of the so-called memoirs. Again, a telegram dated February 1917 is followed by other telegrams dated 1915 and 1916. Moreover, throughout the text, there is no indication on what Naim Efendi’s duty was and where he served. In this respect, as mentioned above, the text do not resemble the texts of standard memoirs, and give the impression of a custom-made work that would serve a specific agenda.

The text published by Akçam is also strikingly different from the text of the memoirs published by Andonian in 1920. For instance, while the text published by Andonian contains statements about the places and positions in which Naim Efendi served, no such statements are contained in the text published by Akçam. Thus, the obvious suspicion which arises is that the text might have been changed by Andonian (and by the Armenian Bureau in London and the Armenian National Delegations in Paris who made changes on the text as mentioned by Andonian in one of his letters) in line with their interests. However, as Akçam is completely taken in with the authenticity of Andonian narrative and published documents, he does not even consider and discuss this possibility. Akçam cannot bring himself to question and critically analyze the accuracy of Andonian’s narrative and insists that Andonian’s narrative must be the sole truth. In order to explain discrepancy between the two texts, Akçam makes the assumption that there must be still another “memoir text” in addition to the one he published and Andonian must have published that other text and this would explain why there actually two different texts. However, Akçam fails to provide any indication, let alone evidence, supporting this possibility. As a matter of fact, it is actually this approach by Akçam that constitutes the book’s main problem. In fact, in cases where there is no evidence to prove the authenticity of these documents, Akçam

consistently tries to explain away inconsistencies and suspicions by making one assumption on top of another assumption.

It would be useful to remind readers that Andonian's explanations and comments, made on different dates, about the same events and people do not always conform and even frequently contradict each other. It is therefore extremely problematic to unquestioningly take Andonian's statements at face value and accept them as departing points. For instance, Andonian depicted the so-called Naim Efendi as a kind-hearted and charitable person, and wrote that Naim Efendi, despite his poor financial situation, provided him with these documents without expecting anything in return simply to ease his own conscience.² However, in a letter he wrote in 1937, he describes Naim Efendi as "an alcoholic and gambler" and "an entirely dissolute creature", and states that the documents were acquired from Naim Efendi in return for money.³

Similarly, Andonian, in his letter dated 1937, claims that the authenticity of the documents he published were confirmed by the German Court in Berlin in 1921 during the trial of Soghomon Tehlirian who had assassinated Talat Pasha. However, when the proceedings of the court are checked, it can be seen that this is not the case. According to the court proceedings, despite Tehlirian's attorney's request to submit five documents from Andonian to the court, it is seen that he dropped his request following German prosecutor's objections. According to the prosecutor, it was not for the court to decide whether Talat Pasha was guilty or not, and such determination necessitated a historical research. This effort necessitated the examination of materials different from those that were present. According to the prosecutor, the fact that the accused Tehlirian had been convinced of Talat Pasha's guilt was sufficient in terms of revealing Tehlirian's intention to murder him. In the face of these objections, Tehlirian's attorney Adolf von Gordon abandoned the request to submit the documents to the court.⁴ Furthermore, during the trial in Berlin, the prosecutor had a distanced and reserved approach towards these documents, and had taken into consideration the possibility that they could be forged:

"The use of the forged documents cannot also lead me into error... I am familiar with the history of how, in the chaos of the revolution, we came to possess documents bearing the signatures of high ranking individuals, and how it was subsequently proved that they were forged."⁵

2 Şinasi Orel ve Süreyya Yuca, *Ermenilerce Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların Gerçek Yüzü* (Ankara Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1983), p. 7.

3 Orel & Yuca, *Ermenilerce Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 8.

4 Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2007), p. 66 ; Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 18

5 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 19.

At this juncture, it should be stated that these comments by the prosecutor were legitimate observations. Indeed, at the end of the First World War, several groups, including foreign intelligence services, ambitiously embarked on a quest to find documents in order to accuse and try the Union and Progress Government. As mentioned by a British intelligence officer, this state of affairs had created “a very large market” of salable documents and had resulted in the “regular production of forgeries for the purposes of sale.”⁶ Ultimately, the authenticity of the documents was not in any way verified by the Court.

It could be concluded from these instances that Aram Andonian did not always tell the truth. Therefore, it would be appropriate for serious historians to approach Andonian's words with a degree of caution. Taking Andonian's allegations at face value without making any verification is problematic from the point of view of historical methodology. However, Akçam, in his book, accepts the claims of the Naim-Andonian narrative without any questions and forms his arguments based on a set of assumptions.

Akçam also faults Orel and Yuca for claiming that the encrypted telegrams published by Andonian do not match with the encryption techniques and number groups used by the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior, and that therefore these telegrams should be considered fake. Furthermore, Akçam claims that the objections raised by Orel and Yuca regarding the type of paper used in Andonian's documents are completely groundless. Giving several examples about these objections, Akçam concludes that both the type of paper and “the encryption techniques found in the telegraphic cables that Naim sold to Andonian are the same as those used by the Ottoman Government” and that these instances do not actually “bring into question their authenticity, but instead confirms it” (p. 100-101). In addition, Akçam also takes issues with Orel and Yuca's claims that the signatures, allegedly belonging to Governor of Aleppo Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey, contained on Naim-Andonian documents were fake by providing some other samples of the governor's signatures. Stretching the issue further, Akçam further claims that inconsistent dates used on Naim-Andonian documents cannot be considered as a basis for claiming that the documents should be fake and concludes that they must be, to the contrary, be considered as indications of their authenticity (p. 102-114).

In a follow-up chapter following these polemics, Akçam claims that certain events and individuals mentioned in the “memoirs” of Naim

6 Lewy, *A Disputed Genocide*, p. 49.

Efendi and in the documents published by Andonian can be found in Ottoman archival documents. Accordingly, on the basis of these similarities, Akçam concludes that these documents must be authentic (p. 123-163).

The substance of Akçam's assertions and the method and evidence he uses in the support these assertions will be examined in detail below. However, before proceeding to a detailed examination of these claims, an important problem concerning Akçam's book must be highlighted. Throughout his book, when presenting and summarizing the findings of Orel and Yuca in their studies about Andonian's documents, Akçam consistently oversimplifies, misrepresents, and distorts these findings and attributes false assertions and opinions to Orel and Yuca that were never raised by them to begin with. He then attempts to refute these assertions that he claims were made by Orel and Yuca, and based on this, he concludes that the study by Orel and Yuca are unreliable and full of mistakes. Through such shrewd manipulations, he concludes that objections raised by Orel and Yuca about the forged nature of Naim-Andonian documents are not insignificant and can be "easily refuted."

It is possible that some of Akçam's claims might impress readers who are not familiar with Orel and Yuca's work and the debate, and who find out about the objections concerning the authenticity of these documents only through Akçam's misrepresentations. However, readers who personally read Orel and Yuca's work will see that many of Akçam's accusations are both unfair and inaccurate. By taking these reservations into consideration as well as analyzing Akçam's contentions in some detail, this review article aims to provide readers with a more balance perspective on the Naim-Andonian documents.

The Existence of Naim Bey

Akçam, at the very beginning of his book, refers to arguments about whether the documents published by Aram Andonian are authentic and whether Naim Bey who is claimed to have provided these documents to Andonian was a real person. According to Akçam, the claims by Şinasi Orel and Süreyya Yuca may be summarized as follows:

"The authors based their claims on three main arguments: (1) It was unlikely that there was an individual by the name of Naim Efendi; (2) a non-existent person cannot write a memoir, and such memoir cannot therefore exist; (3) the telegraphic cables attributed to Talat Pasha were falsified. They thus concluded that both the memoirs and the documents

are forgeries perpetrated by Armenians, most likely by Andonian himself.”(p. 36)

The striking problem here is the presentation of the arguments of Orel and Yuca in such a grossly inaccurate and oversimplified manner. To begin with, Orel and Yuca did not in any way allege that “it was unlikely that there was an individual by the name of Naim Efendi” and that “a non-existent person cannot write a memoir, and such memoir cannot therefore exist.” According to Orel and Yuca, there might be different possibilities on this issue. However, given the limited knowledge available on the issue, it is not possible to arrive at a conclusive judgement. In discussing whether there was actually an official by the name of Naim Efendi, Orel and Yuca provide the following discussion:

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“...it can be said that there are three possibilities regarding Naim Bey:

- a) Naim Bey is a fictitious person.
- b) Naim Bey is an assumed name.
- c) Naim Bey is an actual person.

In these circumstances, it seems impossible to make a definite judgement on whether Naim Bey was an actual person or not. [emphasis added] The only point which can be made with certainty is that if Naim Bey actually existed, he was undoubtedly an unimportant official. Indeed, Andonian confirms this in his letter of 26 July 1937, where he writes:

‘Naim Bey was an entirely insignificant official...’⁷

As might be seen above, Orel and Yuca clearly state that in the light of available information, it is not possible to arrive at a conclusive judgement on the subject. However, if an official by the name of Naim Bey indeed existed, they reach the conviction that he must have been a very low-ranking official who would not have had access to top secret documents.

7 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 23-24.

Having misrepresented the arguments of Orel and Yuca, Akçam then proceeds to refute the claims he falsely attributed to Orel and Yuca. Referring to three different documents (which he presents as “Ottoman Documents”) that mention an official by the name of Naim Efendi, Akçam attempts to give the impression that one of the basic arguments of Orel and Yuca was incorrect and that he thus proved Orel and Yuca wrong. This attempt of course remains desperately unconvincing when one checks the original account of Orel and Yuca.

Furthermore, it is rather problematic, to say the least, to present the three documents Akçam refers to as “Ottoman Archival Documents”, since one of these documents is actually a document published by Aram Andonian -the authenticity of which is under doubt. Incredibly, Akçam attempts to validate the controversial Naim-Andonian documents by referring to Naim-Andonian documents themselves. The other two documents referred by Akçam are also unpublished Naim-Andonian documents that are preserved in the Andonian Collection contained in the Nubar Library in Paris. These are not Ottoman archival documents. Thus, Akçam uses one set of Naim-Andonian documents to authenticate another set of Naim-Andonian documents, and in the process misrepresents these documents as “Ottoman Archival Documents”.

Another source utilized by Akçam to prove that Naim Efendi was a real person is a document⁸ that makes a reference to an official by the name of Naim Efendi. The document itself is the testimony of a former dispatch officer named Naim Effendi and his testimony was required for his involvement in a corruption case that took place in the region.

Before proceeding to the testimony itself, the document provides a brief description of the official named Naim Efendi:

“The testimony of Hüseyin Nuri’s son Naim Effendi, 26, from Silifke, married, the former dispatch officer at Maskanah, currently employed as the grain cellar official of the municipality. (November 14-15, 1916).”⁹

In his book, Aram Andonian mentioned that the individual whom he refers to as Naim Bey had at one point served at Maskanah. For this reason, there is a possibility that the Naim Efendi mentioned in the testimony could be the same

8 Contained within the seventh volume of the document collection titled *Armenian Activities According to Archive Documents (Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri)* published by the Directorate of Military History and Strategic Research (ATASE) of the Turkish General Staff in 2007: T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Arşiv Belgelerinde Ermeni Faaliyetleri, Cilt VII*. Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt (ATASE) Başkanlığı Yayınları (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 2007).

9 T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Arşiv Belgelerinde Ermeni Faaliyetleri, Cilt VII*, p. 264.

person as Andonian's Naim Bey. However, there is no evidence or indication to verify that these two individuals are one and the same person. Furthermore, as Orel and Yuca indicates, serious question marks exist as to how an individual who was a minor civil servant in a small district such as Maskanah and who had been dismissed shortly afterwards from his duty on charges of corruption could have gotten his hands on top secret communications between the Minister of the Interior and the Governor.¹⁰

According to Akçam, Naim Efendi served in Aleppo as the head clerk of the Director-General of Dispatches, Abdülhad Nuri Bey, and it was through this position that he might have obtained the documents. However, apart from the narrative of Naim-Andonian book itself, there is no evidence to indicate that Naim Efendi served in this position. The only source about this is the sentence attributed Andonian to Naim Efendi: "I have been appointed to the head clerk position of Abdülhalad Nuri Bey," allegedly uttered by Naim Efendi after he came to Aleppo. Apart from the sentence quoted above, no evidence has so far surfaced to verify this sentence. The text of the memoir published by Akçam also does not contain any statement or information in this direction.¹¹

Serious problems arise even if we assume that the Naim-Andonian narrative is accurate, since according to the document published by ATESE, as of November 1916, the individual named Naim Efendi's duty was that of a municipal grain cellar officer. The explanation based on this assumption would have made sense to a certain extent if the documents published in the Naim Efendi collection covered events only before this date. However, the Naim-Andonian documents and the so-called memoirs of Naim Efendi cover a period until February 1917. Then remains the critical question of how Naim Efendi, as a municipal grain cellar officer, could he have obtained the alleged top secret communication between the governor and the minister of the interior? This question becomes even more critical when one considers that Naim Efendi's testimony on allegations of corruption was taken during the dates in question. Starting from November 1916, Naim Efendi served in a position in which, unequivocally, he could not have reached the mentioned correspondences. Also, due to the charges of corruption, he must be viewed with skepticism as someone unreliable whose statements was quite difficult to be believed in. We must accept that, under normal circumstances, it would not be expected for such an official to have access to the correspondence in question. However; Akçam, by making one assumption on top of another

10 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 11-12.

11 For the full text of the alleged "memoirs", see Appendix A in: Taner Akçam, *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 176-196.

assumption, takes the Naim-Andonian narrative entirely at face value and finds entirely plausible that Naim Efendi would have access to these documents during aforementioned dates and reaches the conclusion that his memoirs must be authentic.

In conclusion, Akçam misrepresents Orel and Yuca's arguments concerning Naim Efendi and attributes assertions to Orel and Yuca which were never advanced by them to begin with. Subsequently, Akçam attempts to refute these false claims never made by Orel and Yuca by referring to a single document mentioning a certain "Naim Efendi". Only through a great deal of twisting and misquoting, Akçam arrives at the dubious conclusion that the findings of Orel and Yuca are entirely wrong. When one checks the original account of Orel and Yuca, Akçam's contentions (which may impress readers who are not familiar with the debate) remain rather trivial and insignificant. In addition to these issues, Akçam, by unquestioningly accepting the entire Naim-Andonian narrative, assumes that the official named "Naim Efendi" was all omnipotent to reach every relevant information and correspondence. Given problems summarized above, it seems clear that Akçam's assumptions stand on very shaky ground.

Ciphering Techniques

A significant portion of Akçam's book is devoted to the encrypted telegrams used by the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior. In their work, Orel and Yuca argued that the number groups used for ciphering in Naim-Andonian telegrams do not conform to the number groups used in the telegrams of the Ottoman Archives, and that these number groups were constantly changed at certain time intervals for security reasons while Naim-Andonian telegrams use the same ciphers in a period spanning over two years. In the relevant section of his book, Akçam claims that the encrypted telegrams used two, three, four, and five-digit number groups at the same time and in a mixed way throughout the war. On the basis of his findings, Akçam argues that Orel and Yuca's claims concerning encryption methods of the Ottoman Interior Ministry "are entirely incorrect and are without any material basis" (p. 79).

In order buttress his contentions, Akçam refers to a number of archival documents. In 1983, Orel and Yuca noted that in the documents they found during their research, the two, four, and five-digit numbers were used at certain times and were regularly changed during the war. In this respect, the telegrams using three-digit numbers found by Akçam is a new information.

It would be necessary to remind readers at this point that Naim-Andonian documents contains a number of telegrams using two and three-digit ciphers in the alleged correspondence between the governor of Aleppo and the Ottoman minister of the interior. Relying on the existence of two and three digit numbers used for encryption amongst the documents he found at the archives, Akçam arrives at the conclusion that the documents published by Andonian and the Ottoman Archival documents conform to each other and that there is no discrepancy between them (p. 78-96).

Despite this new piece of information provided by Akçam, there is an important issue that needs to be taken into consideration here. Documents utilized and the facsimiles of which have been published by Orel and Yuca are composed of telegrams sent from the center to the provinces. However, all documents referenced by Akçam in his book (he uses the facsimiles of some of them as well) were sent from the provinces and various commissions in the provinces to the center, thus to the Ministry of the Interior (p. 78-96). This situation will only gain clarity if all the numbers used in ciphered telegrams to the Aleppo Province from the Ministry of the Interior are analyzed in their entirety. Furthermore, as can be understood from telegram numbers in the archives, the telegrams sent from the provinces to the center and used in Akçam's book had not yet been classified at the time of Orel and Yuca's work, and were documents that were classified and made available to the readers later on. That is to say, during the period in which Orel and Yuca conducted their research, they might not have had the opportunity to examine these documents. As such, this issue should not be overlooked when criticizing Orel and Yuca's work. A more crucial problem with Akçam's handling of the encrypted telegrams is his complete lack of understanding concerning the occasions in which the two or three-digit numbers used for encrypting a telegram. These instances are typically occasions where personal encryption codes were given to high-ranking civil or military officials (such as inspectors) to communicate with the center on issues including, but not limited to, dismissal or criticism of the provincial or district governors. In such circumstances, the official in question needed to use an encryption different from the provincial authorities so as to relay their judgement and criticism to the center without any concern that their communication might be read by the provincial authorities themselves. Akçam completely misses this point. In fact, this point becomes clearer if one considers the fact that all of the correspondence between the governor of Aleppo and Ministry of the Interior uses four or five-digit numbers for encryption. Akçam fails to provide a single sample telegram from the correspondence between the governor of Aleppo and Ottoman Ministry of the Interior using three or two-digit groups.

In addition, digit groups were not the only source of doubts concerning the authenticity of the encrypted telegrams contained in Naim-Andonian documents. In Naim-Andonian documents, one can see that “two-digit” and “three-digit” numbers are used in the same document in a manner that belies logic and encryption methods. For instances, although the telegram dated 29 September 1915, attributed by Andonian to Minister of the Interior Talat Bey, was written with an encryption code composed of three-digit numbers; the first, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh lines of the telegram contain two-digit numbers for encryption.¹² Likewise, the telegram dated 26 December 1915, attributed to Abdülhad Nuri Bey and composed of with two-digit numbers for encryption on the whole, contains three-digit numbers in the first, eleventh, and fourteenth lines.¹³ Similarly, the telegram dated 20 March 1916 attributed again to Talat Bey, although consisting of three-digit numbers, contains two-digit numbers in its sixth line.¹⁴

Using both two-digit and three-digit number groups in the same telegram necessitates two separate encryption keys for the decoding of a telegram. Yet, as Orel and Yuca underlines, the decoding of such a telegram is not possible due to encryption techniques. In none of the authentic telegrams for which Akçam gives examples (he provides facsimiles for some of the telegrams) in his book based on the Ottoman Archive is there a similar case, meaning that a three-digit encryption used alongside with a two-digit number in the text of the same telegram. Akçam fully overlooks this obvious and striking discrepancy between the authentic documents in the Ottoman Archive and Naim-Andonian documents, and argues that there is no contradiction and discrepancy between them. He then claims that Naim-Andonian documents could be authentic. Significantly, there is simply no archival telegram with different digit numbers being used within the same text including in those which were provided by none other than Akçam in his book. One can thus conclude that there is a serious difference between the Naim-Andonian Documents and the Ottoman Archival documents that begs explanation. Yet Akçam simply ignores this crucial discrepancy.

The Use of Lined Papers

According to Akçam, one of Orel and Yuca’s main assertions to conclude that Naim-Andonian documents were forgeries was “has to do with the paper on

12 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 74-75.

13 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 59.

14 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 65-66.

which they are written. They claim that the fact that one of them is written on lined paper is proof of it being a forgery” (p. 98). Akçam goes on to quote Orel and Yuca as stating the following in their book:

“One of these ‘documents’ was written on a piece of paper bearing the document number 76 but does not bear any official mark. Such a piece of paper, which more greatly resembles the type used in calligraphic lessons at French schools, cannot be expected to be found in use as official stationery in Ottoman [administrative] offices.”(p. 98)

This is a classic example of how Akçam practices deception. In the above quote, Akçam allegedly quotes Orel and Yuca verbatim, presenting their text in an indented quote. Yet he leaves out inconvenient parts of their argument and does so without giving the readers any indication such as ellipsis “(…)” to indicate that he left out parts of the text. Considering his previously-demonstrated questionable conduct, this is a deliberate attempt to manipulate what Orel and Yuca said in the first instance. In the original text, Orel and Yuca’s objection regarding paper type center on the fact that the paper used was “double lined.” Yet Akçam entirely left out this part of their objections. This is what Orel and Yuca actually wrote:

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“Among the ‘documents’, the one numbered 76 was written on a double lined paper [emphasis added] and one that does not bear any official signs. It cannot be expected that a paper that rather looks like the type used in calligraphy classes in French schools to be in use in Ottoman [administrative] offices as official papers.”¹⁵

In Akçam’s version, Orel and Yuca’s objections concerning the double-lined paper are deliberately left out even though the text is presented as a verbatim quote. In his subsequent discussions, Akçam distorts Orel and Yuca’s objections and claims that Orel and Yuca objected to single-lined papers and this claim

15 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 60.

has no basis in fact and that it was certainly odd for Yuca and Orel to make that assertion:

“The authors’ judgment that lined paper ‘cannot be expected to be found in use as official stationary in Ottoman [administrative] offices’ and their use of this fact as evidence of forgery is simply incomprehensible. Lined paper was in fact used within the Ottoman bureaucracy during the period in question...”(p. 97)

Following this, Akçam notes that lined papers were used quite often in the Ottoman Archives and he refers to a numbers of documents from the Ottoman Archive using lined papers. After all these arguments, Akçam arrives at the following bold conclusion:

“As will be understood below, Orel and Yuca’s claim is entirely wrong that the lined paper found in one of Naim’s documents proves it to be a forgery. Encrypted correspondence was not smooth or straight, so using lined paper provided a useful foundation for such. Thus, the fact that one of the documents provided by Naim was on lined paper does nothing to prove that it is a forgery—on the contrary, it far more shows it to be authentic.”(p. 98)

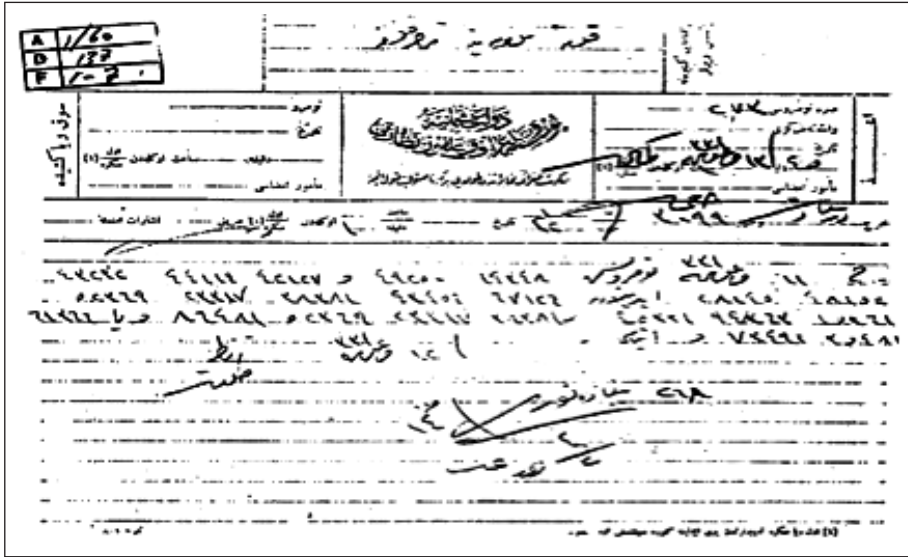
However, as indicated above, Akçam distorts here another important objection of Orel and Yuca concerning the Naim-Andonian documents by twisting their words and arguments. In their work, Orel and Yuca do not in any way claim that “a telegram written on a lined paper” is the “proof” that it must have been forged. As will be elaborated in more detail below, Orel and Yuca’s main objection is based on the fact that this document was written on a “double lined paper” that “bears no official inscription.”

Orel and Yuca raised no objection to the single lined papers that were used as a standard in the encrypted telegrams. When one examines the documents used in Orel and Yuca’s work (in which they even provided the facsimiles of these documents), Akçam’s assertion became grotesque, placing Akçam in an embarrassing position. A perusal of Orel and Yuca’s study makes it clear that the encrypted telegrams that Orel and Yuca obtained from the archive (and produced exact photos of) are written on single lined papers.

In line with this, telegrams dated 26 August 1915 and 11 December 1915 that were sent by the Minister of the Interior Talat to certain *sanjaks* (sub-divisions of provinces) that were published by Orel and Yuca in their books should constitute good example for this:

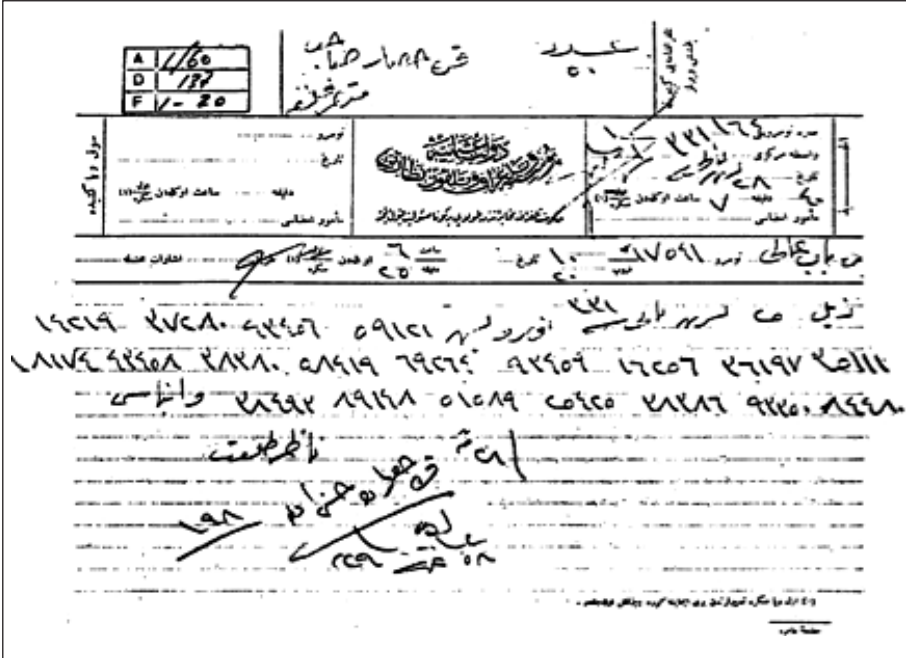
Document 1

The copy of the ciphered telegram which was written on official “single lined” paper dated 26 August 1915 that was published by Şinasi Orel and Süreyya Yuca in page 77 in their book. This telegram was sent by Minister of the Interior Talat Bey to Lieutenant Governorship of Çanakkale.



Document 2

The copy of the ciphered telegram which was written on official “single lined” paper dated 11 December 1915 that was published by Şinasi Orel and Süreyya Yuca in page 78 in their book. This telegram was sent by Minister of the Interior Talat Bey to Lieutenant Governorship of Karahisar-ı Sahip (Afyon).



As can be seen in authentic telegrams that are taken from Orel and Yuca’s book, Orel and Yuca themselves published documents containing telegrams that were written on single lined papers. The objection of Orel and Yuca on this issue is not about the papers being single lined as might be seen from the following passage: “among the ‘documents’, the one numbered 76 was written on double lined paper that contains no official inscription”¹⁶ [emphasis added]

Thus Orel and Yuca’s words make it clear that what they objected was the use of “double lined papers,” and more importantly, the paper’s “lack of any official inscription” in contrast to Ottoman Archival documents. Akçam completely ignores the objection concerning the lack of any official inscription on Naim-Andonian documents and makes no comment on this point. In addition, by

16 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 60.

distorting Orel and Yuca's objection concerning "double lined paper", Akçam argues that they, instead, claimed that "lined paper" was not used by the Ottoman bureaucracy. Only through distorting and twisting the arguments of Orel and Yuca is Akçam able to arrive at the conclusion that their arguments are "incomprehensible" and "entirely wrong."

However, as can be seen in the copies of the telegrams presented above, Orel and Yuca do not object to the single lined papers, and they even published documents written on single lined papers. Akçam here first distorts Orel and Yuca's arguments, then attempts to refute these false arguments that were never advanced by Orel and Yuca to begin with. Within such confusion, Akçam overlooks and tries to hide away Orel and Yuca's objections about the papers being "double lined" and about the absence of official inscriptions on these papers unlike the authentic Ottoman Archival Documents.

Telegram Numbers

In 1983, Orel and Yuca drew attention to the fact that the telegrams amongst the Naim-Andonian documents are different from the Ottoman Archival documents in terms of telegram numbers as well. According to Orel and Yuca, there is absolutely no relation whatsoever between the telegram numbers used in the Naim-Andonian documents and the heading numbers of the authentic telegrams (contained in the Ottoman Archive) that were sent on the same date. Thus the heading numbers that are used in the Naim-Andonian documents and Ottoman Archival documents contain great discrepancies. Furthermore, there is no record on Naim-Andonian documents in the incoming-outgoing documents log of the Aleppo Province. Amongst the telegrams that are present in the Ottoman Archive, even though from time to time one comes across telegrams that were sent during the same time as the Naim-Andonian telegrams, it can be seen clearly that both in terms of the telegram numbers and their contents, these two sets of telegrams are completely different from each other.

According to Akçam, Orel and Yuca were wrong with their assertions on this subject. According to Akçam, the Ottoman Minister of the Interior Talat Bey had had installed a telegram machine in his own house, and from time to time communicated with governors through it and sent telegrams to provinces from his house. Again, according to Akçam, it is impossible to know what kind of heading numbers was used in these telegrams that were sent from the house of the Minister of the Interior (p. 76-77). Therefore, according to Akçam, the discrepancy exhibited by the Naim-Andonian documents' numbers with that

of the archival documents is not a proof of the Naim-Andonian documents' being forgeries.

First of all, again with no evidence, Akçam makes the assumption that all Naim-Andonian documents were sent from the house of Minister of the Interior Talat Bey. Both in the explanations made by Andonian about the documents, and in the text of the "memoirs" alleged to have belonged to Naim Efendi, there is simply no indication that the telegrams were sent from Talat Bey's house. On the contrary, it is clearly indicated that these documents were sent from the Office of Ministry of the Interior (*Dâhiliye Nezareti Celilesine*). Additionally, the wording of the telegrams leaves no room for doubt that the telegrams from Aleppo to the center were sent to the Office of the Ministry of the Interior, and they include no indication such as "Addressed to Minister of the Interior Talat Bey" (*Dâhiliye Nazırı Talat Beyefendi'ye*) to suggest that they were sent out to his private house.

Under these circumstances, the argument that the entire correspondence must have been sent out from Talat Bey's private house is an exercise in stretching the argument beyond logic and to do so merely on the basis of assumptions and without any evidence shows Akçam's impassioned attitude in considering the documents' authenticity.

Additionally, the inconsistency regarding the heading numbers given to the telegrams are not only valid for the ones alleged to have been sent from the Ministry of the Interior to the Aleppo Province. The same inconsistency is also visible in the telegrams alleged to have been sent from Aleppo to the Ministry of the Interior. Amongst the Naim-Andonian documents, the telegram attributed to Adbülhad Nuri Bey numbered 76 and dated 7 March 1332 (20 March 1916) is the most striking example. According to the Rumi Calendar used by the administrative system of the Ottoman bureaucracy, the new year starts at 1 March 1332 (14 March 1916). Accordingly, in order for the telegram attributed to Adbülhad Nuri Bey to be numbered 76, he would have had to send 76 ciphered telegrams to Istanbul between the dates 1-7 March 1332 (14-20 March 1916), meaning in just seven days.¹⁷ In this regard, the inconsistency on the heading numbers in the Naim-Andonian telegrams are valid for both the telegrams sent from Ministry of the Interior to Aleppo, and the ones sent from Aleppo to the Ministry. In the relevant section of his book dealing with this question, Akçam once again completely overlooks this and does not provide any plausible explanation for the telegrams sent out from Aleppo province to the center.

17 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 60.

Similarity with Ottoman Documents

An important portion of Akçam's book is devoted to the efforts to prove the presence of similarities between the memoirs allegedly belonging to Naim Efendi and the Ottoman archival documents. In this respect, the author gives ten separate examples in order to prove his argument that there are great similarities between what is being told in the memoirs of Naim Efendi and the events that actually took place as recorded by the Ottoman archival documents. On the basis of this, the author arrives at the conclusion that the so-called memoirs and the documents must be genuine and authentic. It is not possible to reach a judgment on the veracity of Akçam's arguments without individually examining each document that Akçam refers to. However, even if we were to take all of Akçam's allegations at face value, the similarity between the Ottoman archival documents and the Naim-Andonian materials is not a proof for the authenticity of these documents. First of all, there is nothing new or surprising about Akçam's arguments. In fact, Orel and Yuca pointed that out as early as 1983 that some of the events and individuals "said by Andonian to have been employed in Aleppo and its vicinity during the relocation of the Armenians, do appear in the archival documents" (p. 123-163). If someone is producing forged documents for the purpose of making money and if he is above a certain level of intelligence, that person will certainly make every attempt to make the documents and the memoirs look as realistic as possible to give them some appearance of authenticity. The literature on forged documents memoirs diaries etc. provide ample instances on this.

Another forged document concerning the Armenian Question and similarly produced for money, and simply known as the "Ten Commandments", demonstrates this case. Canadian historian Gwynne Dyer has characterized it as an attempt "to reconstruct what might have been said, had the actual events of April 1915-mid 1916 all been foreordained in a single comprehensive official document."¹⁸ In a similar vein, Dutch historian Erik Jan Zürcher noted that it should come as no surprise that the contents of forged documents resemble to actual events. According to Zürcher "any insider forging a document to make money would have taken care that it did [resemble to actual events] and inserted it among genuine documents of the period."¹⁹

Luckily, the examples similar to this are not confined to the Armenian Question. It is not unusual for forged documents produced for various purposes

18 Gwynne Dyer, "Correspondence," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 9 (1973), p. 377.

19 Erik Jan Zürcher, "Ottoman Labour Battalions in World War I." in Hans-Lukas Kieser (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah* (Zürich: 2002), p. 194 n.1.

and covering different topics to contain a certain amount of true information about actual events and people. The most striking example of this is the so-called “Hitler Diaries” which created quite a sensation in the 1980s. In the forged diaries, Adolf Hitler’s various speeches, notes, and meetings are contained in a way that is similar to the actual ones. Moreover, the forged diaries provide verbatim texts of certain speeches or meetings of Hitler, exactly as they appear in some genuine documents and studies. This was enough to mislead some historians; taking into account all the similarities, the details, and the variety of the materials, some historians -including the celebrated British expert on Nazi Germany Hugh Trevor-Roper and Gerhard Weinberg- initially expressed their confidence in the diaries’ authenticity. However, as a result examination conducted by German forensic science experts, it was revealed that the “Hitler Diaries” were fake²⁰ and that certain ingredients of the diaries such as the papers, bindings, adhesives etc. were not yet actually in use during the period when Hitler lived.²¹

A similar case involves the forged diary of Maxim Litvinov, the famous Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs. In 1950s, a diary journal allegedly belonging to Litvinov surfaced in Paris for the purposes of sale. After examining the diary, E. H. Carr, the celebrated British historian of the Soviet Union, concluded that the diary must be authentic. He did so again on the basis of the details and accurate information provided by the diary. Yet the subsequent examiners established that the diary was forged and that it added to the knowledge of the scholars “as much as a forged banknote adds to our wealth.”²²

If the verification logic employed by Akçam for the Naim-Andonian documents were to be applied to the “Hitler Diaries” and “Litvinov Diary”, it would result in the odd and erroneous conclusion that these forged diaries must be authentic. According to Akçam’s logic, the fact that some of the information contained in the diaries is congruent with other sources must point to the authenticity and genuineness of the diaries. As indicated above; however, as a result of the examination of German forensic experts and other experts on the Soviet Union, it was established beyond any doubt that both the Hitler Diaries and the Litvinov Diary are fake documents produced by some people to earn money. The rather obvious conclusion is that some forged documents might contain information similar to the actual events or authentic sources speeches

20 Robert Harris, *Selling Hitler: The Story of Hitler Diaries* (London: Arrow Books, 2010).

21 For an analysis of the content of the fake diaries, please see: Josef Henke, “Revealing the Forged Hitler Diaries,” *Archivaria*, Volume 19 (1984), p. 21-27.

22 Hiroaki Kuromiya, “Guide to Emigre and Dissident Memior Literature,” in Sheile Fitzpatrick & Lynne Viola (ed.), *A Researcher’s Guide to Sources on Soviet Social History in the 1930s* (Armonk, N.Y, 1990), p. 258.

etc., but this does not necessarily mean that such documents must be authentic. Historian Hiroaki Kuromiya, an expert on Soviet history, notes for instance that “being consonant” does not “necessarily guarantee the reliability of the memoirs as sources of information.” He considers that The Litvinov Diary case “may have been a fortunate case because... it was closely examined by many experts who knew at least something about Litvinov.” Kuromiya concludes that “historians, who deal with much less known ordinary people and their lives, would have to take extra caution in using memoir literature.”²³

The key question concerning the dispute of whether the documents are authentic is not the similarities, but the inconsistencies among the authentic and disputed materials. In the dispute over the Hitler Diaries or Litvinov Diary; historians, while drawing attention to the similarities they have to the actual speeches and some sources written about Hitler or Litvinov, nonetheless came to the conclusion that the diaries are forgeries by pointing to a series of contradictions and rather absurd errors within the diaries.²⁴

Akçam's work is essentially quite weak on this point. Below, a more balanced picture will be drawn for the readers by examining the points ignored by Akçam.

The key question concerning the dispute of whether the documents are authentic is not the similarities, but the inconsistencies among the authentic and disputed materials. In the dispute over the Hitler Diaries or Litvinov Diary; historians, while drawing attention to the similarities they have to the actual speeches and some sources written about Hitler or Litvinov, nonetheless came to the conclusion that the diaries are forgeries by pointing to a series of contradictions and rather absurd errors within the diaries. Akçam's work is essentially quite weak on this point.

The Issues Ignored by Akçam

Akçam remains completely silent on a number of subjects concerning the points raised by Orel and Yuca: the chronological discrepancies of the Naim-Andonian documents, the signature attributed to the Governor of Aleppo being different from the actual one that is contained in the Ottoman Archive, Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey's signing of some documents with the title “Governor” before he had actually been appointed to that post as a governor, and both Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey'in and Abdülahad Nuri Bey adding notes to the documents

23 Kuromiya, “Guide to Emigre and Dissident Memior Literature,” p 258, 260.

24 Henke, “Revealing the Forged Hitler Diaries,” p. 21-27 ; Kuromiya, “Guide to Emigre and Dissident Memior Literature,” p. 257-260.

and signing them during dates when they were still in Istanbul and had not yet reached Aleppo. A similar problem remains for the letters attributed to Bahaettin Şakir Bey, which were allegedly sent from Istanbul to Adana in February and March 1915, even though during those dates Bahaettin Şakir Bey was not actually in Istanbul but in Erzurum. Additionally, while the Ottoman archival documents used by Akçam as examples are all written on papers bearing official inscriptions, the papers on which Naim-Andonian documents are written do not. These points are completely ignored by Akçam.

It must be pointed out that the signatures attributed to the Governor of Aleppo Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey occupy a special place in the dispute over whether or not the documents are authentic. This subject will be touched upon in more detail below. Before moving forward to this subject; however, it must be indicated that there are errors and inconsistencies in the Naim-Andonian document that are ignored and never mentioned by Akçam.

All the telegrams from the Ottoman Archives that Akçam uses as reference point (and provides facsimiles for some of these telegrams) have been written on headed papers bearing official inscriptions.²⁵ However, the telegrams and documents in the Naim-Andonian documents are different in this respect. Some of them have been written on blank papers bearing no official inscription whatsoever and which are different from the ones used by the Ottoman bureaucracy. Akçam makes no comment on and remains silent about this apparent inconsistency between the papers on which the Ottoman archival documents and the papers on which the Naim-Andonian documents are written.

Again, in Akçam's book, the cipher number groups used in all the ciphered telegram texts are composed of the number digits. For example, in a telegram using four-digit ciphers, all number groups are four-digits and number groups with different amount of digits are not used in the text. The same is true for telegrams using two, three, and five-digit numbers, and number groups with different amount of digits were not confused with each other within the telegrams.

As previously mentioned, however, the telegrams among the Naim-Andonian documents use both two-digit and three-digit numbers in a mixed and haphazard manner within the text of the same telegram. As explained above, this is a telegram not possible to decode in terms of encryption techniques, because it will require two different code keys for the telegrams to be decoded

²⁵ See all the documents provided as facsimiles in: Akçam, *Killing Orders*.

and will create great complications and misunderstandings.²⁶ This clear inconsistency between the Ottoman archival documents and the Naim-Andonian documents is yet again ignored by Akçam throughout his book and this problem is thus evaded with silence.

The inconsistencies in the Naim-Andonian documents are not limited to this. Among the Naim-Andonian documents, in telegrams allegedly sent on 3 September 1331 (16 September 1915) and on 5 September 1331 (18 September 1915) by Minister of the Interior Talat Bey to the Governor of Aleppo; Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey writes some notes on the telegram paper and puts his signature underneath it as the governor.²⁷ Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey addresses Abdülahad Nuri Bey in these notes and asks him to do certain things. However, in the dates during which those telegrams were sent, the notes were written, and the signature was put, the governor of Aleppo was Bekir Sami Bey, not Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey.²⁸ Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey was only appointed as the Governor of Aleppo by 10 October 1915. This means that if the documents were actually authentic, it would have been Bekir Sami Bey, and not Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey, who signed the telegram sent on 16 September 1915. Also, despite the note dated 18 September 1915 addressed to Abdülahad Nuri Bey, Abdülahad Nuri Bey had not yet been appointed to his position in Aleppo by that date. According to the Ottoman archival records, in a telegram he sent on 14 October 1915, the Minister of the Interior Talat Bey asks Şükrü Bey, the Director of the office for the Settlement for Tribes and Refugees (*İskân-ı Aşairin ve Muhacirin Müdürü*), about his opinion of Abdülahad Nuri Bey since the latter was being considered for appointment to Aleppo.²⁹ In other words, as of the date of 14 October 1915, Abdülahad Nuri Bey had not yet been appointed to his position in Aleppo, and the decision process about him had been still ongoing, and other bureaucrats had been asked about their opinions on him.

Thus, in this so-called document, there is a correspondence between a governor and a civil servant, both of whom had not yet been appointed to their posts. This chronological inconsistency regarding the posts and the terms of office of these individuals is one of the serious evidences that prove these documents being forged. However, Akçam never touches upon this issue and in fact remains silent with regard to these inconsistencies throughout his book.

26 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 59, 65-66, 74-75.

27 Aram Andonian, *Documents Officiels Concernant les Massacres Armeniens* (Paris: Imprimerie H. Turabian, 1920), p. 109.

28 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 54.

29 BOA DH DŞR 56-385. Telegram dated 13 October 1915 *Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdüriyeti* to Şükrü Bey.

As indicated above, Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey was only appointed as Governor to Aleppo by 10 October 1915. Therefore, it can be argued that the signatures attributed to Governor of Aleppo Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey in the Naim-Andonian documents after 10 October 1915 (27 September 1331) are rather less suspicious. There is another document in Naim-Andonian documents sent from the Ministry of the Interior in 29 September 1331 (12 October 1915). Similarly, four days after this telegram, on 3 October (Teşrin-i Evvel) 1331 (16 October 1915), Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey seemingly noted down his name as Governor of Aleppo and signed the document.³⁰ Therefore, since Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey was appointed as governor six days before this telegram, this document seems comparably less suspicious.

On the other hand, when one looks at the Ottoman Archive registries, although Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey was appointed as governor on 10 October 1915, it can be seen that he was in Istanbul until 1 November 1915, and that he only arrived to Aleppo on 8 November 1915. The same applies to Abdülahad Nuri Bey as well. The then-recently appointed Governor of Aleppo Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey and Abdülahad Nuri Bey left Istanbul together for Aleppo on Monday, 1 November.³¹ A telegram stating that the two officials would arrive to Aleppo on 8 November was sent to Istanbul.³² Thus, it is impossible for Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey and Abdülahad Nuri Bey to have written down notes or to have signed documents in Aleppo as of September and October 1915. This is clearly and undisputedly the case because they had arrived to Aleppo only in 8 November. This is another serious evidence that the documents are fake.

The same inconsistency can be found in a letter attributed to Bahaettin Şakir Bey and which was supposedly sent by the Central Committee of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) to CUP's Adana delegate Cemal Bey on 2 March 1915.³³ On the date in which the letter was sent, Bahaettin Şakir Bey was not in Istanbul but in Erzurum, and remained there until 13 March 1915.³⁴ Thus, this is yet another indication that the Naim-Andonian documents are fake and have serious discrepancies with the authentic documents and chronology of events.

30 Andonian, *Documents Officiels*, p. 110.

31 DH ŞFR 57/191. In the telegram dated 31 October 1915 sent to Şükrü Bey, it is requested that "since Governor of Aleppo and Abdülahad Nuri Bey will set out for their journey on Monday, be present at Aleppo on their arrival."

32 BOA DH ŞFR 496/53. Telegram dated 8 November 1915 from İsmail Bey to the Ministry of the Interior.

33 Andonian, *Documents Officiels*, p. 96-98 ; Aram Andonian, *Memoirs of Naim Bey* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1920), p. 49-51.

34 Ali İhsan Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım: Birinci Cihan Harbi, Cilt II* (İstanbul: Nehir Yayınları, 1990), p. 378.

The Question of Signatures

Naim-Andonian documents include a number of signatures attributed to Governor of Aleppo Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey, which he allegedly signed as “Mustafa Abdülhalik.” The signatures attributed to Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey has a particular role in the dispute over the authenticity of the Naim-Andonian documents. This is because in a letter written in 10 June 1921, Aram Andonian himself defended the authenticity of the documents on the basis of the signatures attributed governor Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey:

“There is no doubt that these documents were taken out of the files of the Assistant Directorship of the Deportation Office in Aleppo. The Governor of Aleppo, after having had the orders he received from the Minister of the Interior (Talat Pasha) concerning the Armenians deciphered, appended a note with his signature to them in which he referred them for implementation to the Assistant Directorship of the Deportation Office where Naim Bey was a secretary.

When Naim Bey agreed to provide us with these documents, the Aleppo Armenian National Union, which was an official organization, had the handwriting and signatures (appended to the documents in question), examined. This examination lasted exactly one week. Other documents to which the Governor Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey had appended notes and his signature were examined, and even the smallest details were subjected to comparison. Finally, it was determined without any possibility of doubt that the handwriting and signature in the notes added to the documents belonged to the Governor Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey. This erased even the slightest suspicion as to the authenticity of the documents...”³⁵

As might be clearly seen from the above quote, the main basis for the authenticity of the documents in question was the assumption that the signature on the documents attributed to Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey was genuine.

In order to test the validity of the Andonian's claims, in 1983, Orel and Yuca compared the signatures attributed to Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey on Naim-Andonian documents to the original signatures of him contained on the Ottoman archival documents. Their comparison revealed that, contrary to what Andonian claims, the original signatures from the Ottoman archival documents and those from the Naim-Andonian documents were significantly different.

35 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa'ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 13.

On these grounds, Orel and Yuca concluded that the comparison of the signatures “clearly establishes that the ‘signatures’ on Andonian’s ‘documents’ are forged, because they bear no relationship to Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey’s actual signature.”³⁶

In his book, Akçam also provides a number of samples from the signatures of Governor Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey. Akçam notes that whereas Orel and Yuca only presented samples from documents which the governor signed as “Mustafa Abdülhalik,” he himself found other documents which he signed as “Abdülhalik” using only one of his names. This leads Akçam to believe that

The consistent and marked differences between two set of signatures clearly establishes that the signatures contained in the Naim-Andonian volume do not jibe with the authentic signatures from the Ottoman archival documents and must therefore be considered fake.

the governor used different signatures and on the basis of different signatures the governor used, Akçam concludes that “one cannot use these differences in signatures alone to decide the authenticity of the documents containing them” (p. 107). Akçam’s conclusion is clearly an erroneous one not only because he attempts to blur and gloss over the significant differences between the signatures but also because he misses the main point; that Andonian himself in the first place argued that the authenticity of the “sold documents” had been established by a comparison of the signatures and that even “even the smallest details were subjected to comparison”, and

they “determined without any possibility of doubt” the signatures in question were the same and that this “erased even the slightest suspicion as to the authenticity of the documents.” Akçam thus seems to have forgotten Andonian’s own words.

After serving as the governor of Aleppo, Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey was appointed as an undersecretary to the Ministry of the Interior in 1917. During this period, the volume of documents that he had to sign significantly increased. Presumably as a result of the high number of documents he had to sign on a regular basis, during his tenure as undersecretary he used only “Abdülhalik” when signing documents.

In the tables presented below, the readers will see a comparison of the authentic signatures of the governor and those attributed to him in the Naim-Andonian documents. To be more precise, Table-1 compares authentic documents which

36 Orel & Yuca, *Talat Paşa’ya Atfedilen Telgrafların...*, p. 13.

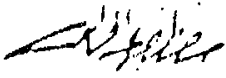
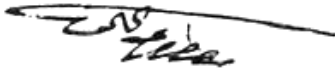
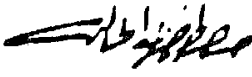

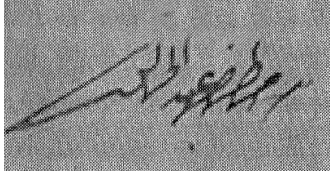
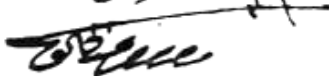
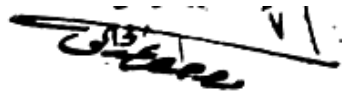
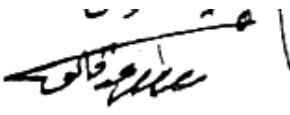
the governor signed as “Mustafa Abdülhalik” to those attributed to him in Naim-Andonian. Table-2 compares the documents the governor signed merely as “Abdülhalik.” Finally, Table-3 table highlights the differences in authentic signatures, whether signed as “Mustafa Abdülhalik” or merely as “Abdülhalik,” in comparison to those contained in Naim-Andonian volume. This detailed comparison will enable readers to see the differences between the authentic signatures of the governor on the one hand and those attributed to him in Naim-Andonian volume on the other. The consistent and marked differences between two set of signatures clearly establishes that the signatures contained in the Naim-Andonian volume do not jibe with the authentic signatures from the Ottoman archival documents and must therefore be considered fake.

The names or numbers within the boxes indicate the sources from which the signatures has been taken. The numbers indicate the archival references to documents from the Cipher Office collection of the Ottoman Archives' Ministry of the Interior papers (*Dahiliye Nezareti Şifre Kalemi*):

Table 1: Signed as Mustafa Abdülhalik

Samples from Authentic Signatures

Samples from Naim-Andonian

<p>Orel & Yuca</p> 	<p>Naim-Andonian</p> 
<p>Orel & Yuca</p> 	<p>Naim-Andonian</p> 
<p>Orel & Yuca</p> 	<p>Naim-Andonian</p> 
	<p>Naim-Andonian</p> 
	<p>Naim-Andonian</p> 

As might be evident from the Table-1, the authentic signatures (presented on the left side of the table) are significantly different than the fake signatures (presented on the right side of the table) that were attributed to Governor Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey in the Naim-Andonian documents. In the authentic samples, the tail at the left end of the signatures is longer than the ones on the fake signatures. What is even more striking is that the authentic samples' tail -which starts at the left and extends to the right over the main body of the signature- never extends beyond the main body of the signature. However, in the fake samples, the tail extends way beyond the main body of the signature. In addition, the connection between ق (kaf) -the last letter of the signature- and the main tail of the signature are starkly different on both sets of signatures. On the authentic signatures, as the letter ق (kaf) ends it moves slightly upwards and connects with the main tail to the left; whereas on the fake signatures the tail of letter ق (kaf) goes up and makes a rightwards curve and then connects with the main tail of the signature.

Below the table compares the signatures signed merely as “Abdülhalik”.

Table 2: Signed as Abdülhalik

Samples from Authentic Signatures

Samples from Naim-Andonian


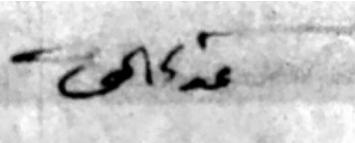







77/59	Andonian-Nubar Library
	
77/95	
78/8	
78/158	
78/178	
79/74	
79/132	

Table 2 Continued

Samples from Authentic Signatures Samples from Naim-Andonian

<p>79/186</p> 	
<p>79/188</p> 	
<p>79A/28</p> 	
<p>80/15</p> 	
<p>80/18</p> 	
<p>80/29</p> 	
<p>80/71</p> 	

Again, as will be seen from the Table-2, the authentic signatures (presented on the left side of the table) are significantly different than the fake signatures (presented on the right side of the table) that were attributed to governor Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey in the Naim-Andonian documents. As with the signatures on Table-1 previously presented, the signatures bear the same characteristic differences on table two. Again, in the authentic samples the tail at the left end of the signatures is longer than the ones on the fake signatures while the connection between the letter ك (kaf) and the main tail of the signature bears the same difference highlighted on Table-1. Yet again, the authentic samples' tail -which starts at the left and extends to the right over the main body of the signature- never extends beyond the main body of the signature. However, in the fake samples, the tail (although its right-end section is faint) extends way beyond the main body of the signature.

A further stark difference between the authentic signatures and those of the Naim-Andonian documents is the consistent manner in which both set of signatures connect ه (ha) and ل (lam) letters when composing the signature. The difference regarding the connection points of the two letters between the group of signatures are presented on Table-3 below.

Table 3: Signed as Both Mustafa Abdülhalik and Abdülhalik

Authentic Signatures		Naim Andonian
		
		
		
		
		
		
		
		

Again, as will be evident from the Table-3, both set of signatures connect \sphericalangle (ha) and \cup (lam) letters are strikingly different when composing the signature. In the authentic ones, Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey extends the tail of \sphericalangle (ha) upwards and by drawing a curve backwards/rightwards it starts drawing the letter \cup (lam) from behind that curve (which makes it take on the shape of a cancer awareness ribbon). In signature after signature, the authentic samples follow the same, consistent ribbon pattern. However, in the fake signatures of Naim-Andonian documents, the drawing and connection of the two letters are quite different. In the fake signatures of the Naim-Andonian documents, the forger extends the tail of \sphericalangle (ha) upwards and without drawing curve back/right, it goes left and starts drawing the letter \cup (lam). Thus, the connecting point of the two letters on Naim-Andonian signatures resemble a horseshoe as displayed on the right-hand side of the Table-3, whereas on the authentic signatures from the Ottoman archives, it resembles a ribbon as indicated above. Table-3 above highlights the relevant connecting points of the two letters by showing them within red circles.

The readers might see that while authentic signatures from the Ottoman Archives are quite similar and consistent with each other, they are significantly different from those signatures displayed on the Naim-Andonian column. Naim-Andonian documents are also consistent in themselves, making it obvious that, regardless of whoever the forger might have been, they took enough care to compose signatures in a consistent manner to avoid suspicion. In signature after signature, the forged samples connect the letters of \sphericalangle (ha) and \cup (lam) in a way that resembles a horseshoe and, in a manner, completely and starkly different from the authentic signatures of Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey. Moreover, this continues to be case both in documents signed as “Mustafa Abdülhalik” or merely as “Abdülhalik”, which demonstrate that Akçam’s claims concerning the different signatures used by governor is desperately unconvincing.

Editorial Shortcomings

Beyond the myriad of manipulations and distortions present in Akçam’s book, one can also come across some note-worthy editorial mistakes and shortcomings within the text of the book. These include:

- a) Books containing academic research are expected to have chapter numberings, as such numbering provide a proper structure to such serious works. However, Akçam’s book lacks such chapter numbering (the Turkish version published by İletişim Yayınları in 2016 lacks chapter numbering as well).

- b) The signature table on page 106 titled: “Image 6 – Table of signatures of Governor Mustafa Abdulhalik” has a Turkish entry (“Bogos Nubar ve Andonyan) despite the book being in the English language.
- c) One of the book’s appendixes titled “Appendix A.1: The Ottoman-Turkish Original of Naim Efendi’s Text” starting on page 176 in fact contains an English text rather than the “Ottoman-Turkish original” as indicated by the title.
- d) Note 76 on page 72 states “emniyeti İsmail Canpolat” when it should have stated “emniyet-i umumiyye müdüri İsmail Canbolat” (his last name has been misspelled and his title is incomplete). His last name has also been misspelled in pages 148 and 259 (index section).

These are the kinds of the editorial mistakes and shortcomings that one would not expect from a publication house as prestigious as Palgrave Macmillan and suggests that Akçam’s book was not edited properly in line with the publication house’s standards.

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Conclusion

As the detailed analysis provided above indicates, Akçam’s arguments on Naim-Andonian documents are based on the oversimplification and even worse on the distortion of Orel and Yuca’s previous findings. In order to bring credibility to his claims, Akçam presents Orel and Yuca’s findings in a distorted manner and ignores these writers’ most basic objections. Having presented these objections and findings in an oversimplified and distorted manner, Akçam then goes on to refute the arguments and objections which Orel and Yuca never made to begin with. Claiming that he easily refuted Orel and Yuca’s objections, Akçam then attempts to prove the authenticity of the Naim-Andonian documents by resorting to various manipulations.

However, as has been examined above, while listing his allegations, he bases his arguments on serious logical errors and obvious distortions. Apart from these, in his book, Akçam remains completely silent on a number of issues for which no explanation can be given, such as: the chronological discrepancies

in the Naim-Andonian documents, the signature attributed to governor of Aleppo being different from the genuine signature of the governor contained in the Ottoman Archive, Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey's signing of some documents with the title "Governor" before he had actually been appointed as a governor, and also both Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey'in and Abdülahad Nuri Bey adding notes to the documents and signing them during dates when they were still in Istanbul and had not yet reached Aleppo. Unable to present credible evidence to explain the inconsistencies and discrepancies of the Naim-Andonian documents, Akçam resorts to several assumptions to be able to argue that the documents must be authentic, assumptions for which he does provide any evidence for most of the time.

On top of all this, Akçam does not present convincing explanations for the most basic objections (fake signatures, the type of paper used by the Ottoman bureaucracy, chronological discrepancies etc.) directed by Orel and Yuca towards the Naim-Andonian documents and ignores many of these objections. For these reasons, it is apparent that Akçam's study cannot be taken as a credible and balanced work of scholarship that makes a meaningful contribution to the debate on the concerning the authenticity of the Naim-Andonian documents.

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