

## Reading 3 — THE ROUND UPS BEGIN

While the ministry of war coordinated propaganda, Talaat, the minister of the interior, coordinated the mass murder of the Armenians. In January 1915, Talaat warned the Greek Patriarch that there was no room for Christians in Turkey and their supporters should advise them to clear out. Orders announcing the Committee of Union and Progress's plans for deportation began to circulate in late February 1915. By March, Armenian men in the Turkish army were being disarmed, placed in labor battalions, and killed.<sup>70</sup> Quietly, deportation had already begun in several communities. Armenian resistance was labeled sedition and used as propaganda to justify the murder and deportation of ordinary Armenian men, women, and children. By April, Armenian schools were closed. Later that month, on the night of April 23 and all through April 24, Armenian leaders and intellectuals in Constantinople were arrested and led outside of the city, where they were subjected to torture and many were executed.

One of the survivors, the priest (later to become Bishop) Krikoris Balakian recalls how he and others were resting after Easter celebrations while a secret project was being carried out near the central police station.

*Blood-colored buses were already transporting groups of Armenians who had just been arrested from the near and far suburbs and neighborhoods to the central prison. Chief of Police, Betri, had sent official letters weeks earlier in sealed boxes to all the Guard offices with orders to open them on the same day and to carry out the assignments with precision and in secret.*

*The letters contained the blacklist of Armenians to be arrested—a list which had been compiled with the help of Armenian traitors, and in particular by Artin Mkrtchian, as well as the neighborhood Ittehatist [Young Turk] clubs. Those listed for death were the Armenians who had played vital roles as social reformers or non-partisans, and were deemed to be able to incite revolution or resistance.<sup>71</sup>*

[Balakian and eight friends were arrested and put in the central prison.]

*Every few hours until morning, newly arrested Armenians were brought to the prison. Behind the fences of the prison, there was a strange hustle and bustle to the growing crowd of prisoners. Like some dream it seemed as if on one night, all prominent Armenians of the capital—assembly men, representatives, progressive thinkers, reporters, teachers, doctors, pharmacists, dentists, merchants, and bankers—had made an appointment in those dim cells of the prison. More than a few people were still wearing their pajamas, robes, and slippers, and it made the whole scene seem even more dreamlike.*

*On the Sunday the prisoners were subjected to searches and were crowded on buses under police escort and taken in the direction of the sea shore near Sirkedji. The buses then entered the area of the Saray-Bournou orchards where in the 1890s hundreds of young... Armenian intellectuals had been*

*killed. From there they were crowded on a steam ship under armed army and police officials as well as army spies.*

*For a moment we were so shaken, we were convinced that we were being taken out to the Sea of Mavmara to be drowned. Many of the men were crying, many were remembering their loved ones, as we sailed toward the open sea. In a few months, many of us would regret that we had not thrown ourselves into the sea that night. Because death by sea would have been kinder than the torture the Turks did to us with axes and hatchets in the places they would later take us.<sup>72</sup>*

Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Courtesy of anonymous donor



**Armenians being marched to prison in nearby Mezireh under the guard of armed Turkish soldiers, Kharpert, Historic Armenia, Ottoman Empire, 1915.**

## CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Why do you think the Young Turk government singled out intellectuals and professionals for arrest and deportation?
- ❖ What choices were available to Balakian and other leaders of the Armenian community? If they had chosen to resist, what do you think would the consequences for the rest of the Armenian community have been?
- ❖ Balakian uses the phrase “Armenian traitors” to describe the Armenians who cooperated with the Young Turks. What options were available to Armenians who were asked to cooperate with Young Turk authorities? Were they traitors, collaborators, or just trying to survive?