



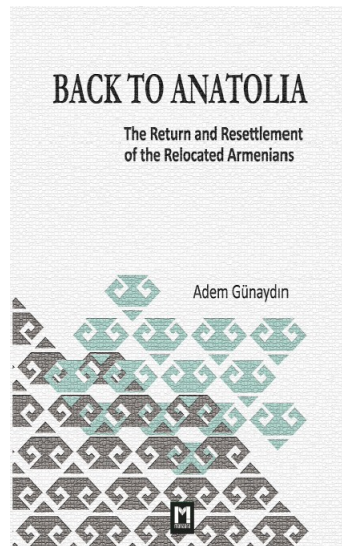
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Reading of:

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Back to Anatolia

**The Return and Resettlement of the Relocated
Armenians**



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2.

THE CAMPAIGN OF RETURN

The return of the Armenians emerged as a sensitive question while the Empire was trying to overcome the disastrous consequences of the WWI. At the time, the Empire was also struggling to cope with the postwar Allied pressure. Without doubt, the return of the Armenians would not be easier than their relocation, that is, a great amount of money would be needed for the expenses of return, great effort would be needed to organize the return and resettlement of the returnees and great endeavor would be needed to make peace between the settling Muslims and Armenian returnees, as well as the Muslim immigrants and refugees.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some of the relocated Armenians as well as the Greeks and the Arabs had travelled back home without waiting for the completion of government preparations and permission for return. It was necessary for the government to take measures against such movements as they caused disorder in the areas of return. One of the measures taken was a warning to the administration of the migration areas not to allow flight of the relocated people to other places without the permission of the Ministry of Interior. For example, a message sent by the government to the provinces of Halep and Mamuretülaziz and the sanjaks of Kayseri, Urfa and Zor warned the authorities about the escape and return of some relocated Armenians without permission from these centers to Gürün and Kangal, districts of Sivas.⁸⁰ Another measure taken by the government was sending such escapees back to their relocation residences in order to discourage others from doing the same. In some cases, returning people had to travel back without the intervention of the government because they were not able to find anywhere to settle. For instance, relocated people of Yeniköy who arrived in their hometowns before permission was granted by the government had to make a second trip back to their relocation residences because there were no houses to reside in.⁸¹

⁸⁰ BOA., DH. ŞFR., 88/272.

⁸¹ *İSUM*, number 165, 15 Eylül 1334 [15 September 1915], cited in Atnur, *Tebcirden Dönen...*, p. 30.

Before the government's decision for the return in October 1918, relocated Armenians who were over sixty or who were in situations of need had been given permission to return. However, they were few in number and did not encounter as many problems as the subjects who returned in accordance with the above decree. The Armenians travelled to their hometowns together with many questions. They were returning to areas that held more than one million frustrated and homeless Muslim refugees and immigrants.

2.1. ORGANIZATION OF THE RETURN

The Ottoman Empire had seventy years of experience in the issues regarding the immigrants. The first government body was established in 1849 in order to deal with immigrants coming from Hungary. After the Crimean War, this body was developed into a new form under the name of the *Muhacirin Komisyonu* (Commission for Immigrants). Then, in 1878, subsequent to the defeat of the Empire in the 1877-1878 war, waves of immigrants from the Balkan and Caucasian lands necessitated the foundation of an all-embracing institution, the *İdare-i Umumiyye-i Muhacirin Komisyonu* (Commission for the Management of the Affairs of Immigrants) in 1878. This commission also organized and managed the movement of the immigrants into the remaining Ottoman lands after the defeat in the Balkan Wars. The relocation of the Armenians was also fulfilled by this institution. *İskan-ı Aşair ve Muhacirin Müdiriyyet-i Umumiyesi* (The General Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants) was established at

the beginning of 1914. In March 1916, under the Ministry of Interior it was transformed into the *Aşayir ve Muhacirin Müdiriyyeti Umumiyesi* (The General Directorate for Tribes and Immigrants) as the authority responsible for all issues regarding immigrants.⁸² The return and resettlement of the Armenian immigrants were also among its duties.⁸³

Before the official declaration of the permission for return, the General Directorate for Tribes and Immigrants (AMMU) began to preparations so as to ensure the return of the Armenians without victimizing the returnees and the settled Muslim refugees and immigrants. The registers which had been kept during the relocation including the transactions about the abandoned properties and the statistics listing the settlement of Muslim immigrants and refugees on the said properties were of quite useful for AMMU's return organizations. Principally, AMMU's initial operations based on the matching of the lists from the governorates indicating the number of the Armenians who were willing of return, with the registers showing the status of the original residences of the Armenians.⁸⁴ In the cases that the residences were available, their owners were allowed to return. In the other case, the return was delayed till evacuation of the residences or completion of the necessary preparations.

⁸² Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin ...*, pp. 57-61.

⁸³ BOA., DH. HMŞ., 4-2, 11-20, cited in Dündar, p. 88.

⁸⁴ *İSUM*, number 165, 15 Eylül 1334 [15 September 1915], cited in Atıncı, *Tebcirden Dönen ...*, p. 30.

With the declaration of the permission for return on 18 October 1918, the activities of the AMMU gained momentum. The primary goal was ensuring the safety of the returning people during their journey back home and providing them with facilities for settlement and food at the places they intended to go.⁸⁵ Parallel with these goals, AMMU sent orders to the governorates of the provinces and sanjaks directing that returning people should be given food throughout their journey, an outline of the necessary measures that would be implemented in order to protect the Armenians from any sort of attacks on their journey, and direction that utmost care would be taken to ensure local order and security.⁸⁶

The AMMU continuously delivered further messages about the essentials of the return and the measures to be taken by the local administrators. The government was willing to have all the people who had been transferred to other places due to the conditions of war return to their homes, but their safety during their travel was absolutely imperative. Therefore, the AMMU declared the following points as essential and to be kept in consideration:

1. How many population and families are there in the centres and the subordinate administrative units of each province and sanjak and where are they from who are willing to return to their homes?

⁸⁵ BOA., DH., ŞFR., No: 92/235.

⁸⁶ BOA., HR., SYS., 2569/1.