

For release, February 2015

Tadem, My Father's Village

Extinguished during the 1915 Armenian Genocide

By Robert Aram Kaloosdian

Peter E. Randall Publisher

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100 years after the Armenian Genocide, new eyewitness accounts

In April 1915, in the midst of World War I, the Young Turk government set off an explosion of violence against the Armenians in the eastern part of the country. Accustomed to pogroms, mass looting, and mob violence, the Armenians failed to understand this time was different. **This time, by government decree, the goal was not intimidation, rape, or robbery—the goal was their complete extermination.**

Drawing on more than a dozen eye-witness accounts of The Armenian Genocide, most never before published, the author recounts the life and death of an Armenian village from the first intimations of violence through deportations, family separations, massacres, and escapes, to the establishment of diasporal communities in the United States and elsewhere.

Praise for Tadem, My Father's Village

"Tadem's story mirrors the tale of hundreds of other Armenian towns and villages in the Ottoman Empire. **Robert Aram Kaloosdian has made a lasting contribution through his meticulous combination of historical sources, memoirs, and oral histories.**"

Richard G. Hovannisian, University of California, Los Angeles and Shoah Foundation Institute

"Kaloosdian has etched his name on a significant achievement...**he has developed a new form of local history.**"

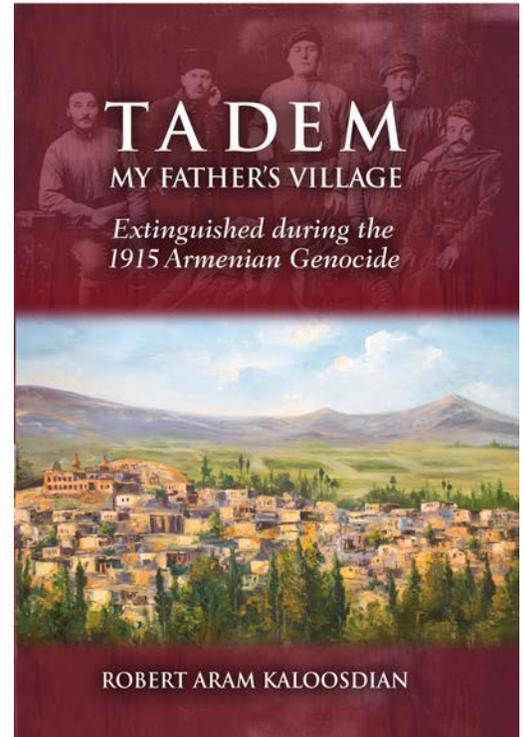
Taner Akçam, Ph.D., Professor of History and Armenian Genocide Studies, Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Clark University

"This micro-history of the Armenian Genocide **closes a critical gap in our knowledge.**"

Hilmar Kaiser, Ph.D., author of *The Extermination of Armenians in the Diarbekir Region*

About the Author

Robert Aram Kaloosdian was raised in Watertown, Massachusetts, and graduated from Clark University and the Boston University School of Law. His father was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. A leader in Armenian-community affairs in the United States and abroad, Kaloosdian has devoted much of his life to the recognition and study of the Genocide. He was a member of the Armenian National Institute and a founder of the Armenian Assembly of America. A lawyer for more than fifty years in Greater Boston, he participated in the defense of a school curriculum guide against Genocide deniers in federal court. Kaloosdian practices in Watertown and lives in Belmont, Massachusetts, with his wife, Marianne.



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The 1915 Armenian Genocide – Quick Facts Guide

The term “genocide” was first coined (by Raphael Lemkin) to explain the crimes committed against the Armenians. Genocide is “the organized killing of a people for the express purpose of putting an end to their collective existence.” Genocide requires government-level planning to succeed.

The 1915 Armenian Genocide was a series of atrocities planned and carried out by the Ottoman government with the objective of exterminating all Armenians living in the Anatolia (modern-day Turkey). Carried out in the midst of World War I, it included mass murders and massacres, abductions, starvation, and so-called “deportations,” when thousands were driven into the desert to die of exposure.

The Genocide was instigated by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), known as the “Young Turks,” which controlled the Ottoman government. The Ottoman Empire collapsed during WWI. The conspirators were indicted for The Genocide by the successive Turkish government, but most escaped to Germany to avoid their death sentences. Atrocities against the remnant Armenian population resumed 1920–1923 under the nationalist government.

Series of events:

- 1894–1896. Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II orders a pogrom against the Armenians, murdering hundreds of thousands. This is known as the Hamidian Massacres.
- 1908. The Young Turk Revolution. Ottoman army officers depose Abdul Hamid II in a coup. A counter-revolution seeking to impose Islamic law targets Armenians in massacres in Adana.
- November 1914, the Ottoman Empire joins WWI as a German ally. Mass conscription begins for all men 18 – 45, including Armenians within the empire.
- February 1915. Armenians in the Ottoman army are disarmed and assigned to “labor battalions.” Those in the work battalions are either worked to death or simply executed.
- April 19, 1915. Open hostilities break out between Turks and Armenians in Van, Turkey.
- April 24, 1915, is considered the start of The Genocide. The Turkish CUP government arrested hundreds of Armenian community leaders in Istanbul and elsewhere. Most were subsequently executed. Massacres of Armenians commence throughout the country.
- May 29, 1915, the CUP passes the Tehcir Law, giving legal cover to murder Armenians and seize their property. The Armenian Genocide is carried out over the next few months by military and paramilitary forces, as well as the Armenians’ Turkish and Kurdish neighbors.

Aftermath:

- An estimated two million Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire in 1915. Estimates suggest as many as three-quarters of these perished. Over a million were “deported” and hundreds of thousands of others rounded up and butchered in mass killings.
- In 1915, 20% of the population of Anatolia was non-Muslim. By 1923, less than 1% remained.
- The genocide was observed and documented by U.S. missionaries and diplomats, including Henry Morgenthau, U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire.
- Despite the convictions of the CUP leadership, subsequent Turkish governments have consistently denied the genocide occurred. Questioning official denials carries significant risk in contemporary Turkey. The Turkish government continues to exert political pressure to squelch unbiased examination of what happened to the Armenians—as a result the U.S. government has never officially acknowledged the event as a genocide.

Useful sources:

- Armenian National Institute <http://www.armenian-genocide.org/>
- The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, Yerevan <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/>
- Armenian Genocide, History.com <http://www.history.com/topics/armenian-genocide>

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Q&A with Robert Aram Kaloosdian (pg1)

Briefly, what was the Armenian Genocide?

At the beginning of World War I, about two million Armenians lived in eastern Anatolia, modern Turkey. During the war, the Turkish government was under a group—the Young Turks—obsessed with creating a “pure” Turkish state. As a step they undertook the intentional policy of exterminating the Armenians. They did it in stages—rounding up “trouble-makers,” disarming the villages, drafting the men into the army but actually treating them as slaves or simply killing them. When the villages were reduced to women, children, and the elderly, at that point the Turks rounded them up and massacred them, or marched them into the desert to die. About one and a half million people died, and the Armenians disappeared from their historic homeland.

How did you become involved in this project?

In the post-WWII period, people who'd been teenagers at time of genocide were starting to die. Realizing this, several groups began to accumulate extensive oral histories, as did some scholars. I was motivated by this, and I asked my father if I could interview him. I did, and that was the beginning. Then he indicated a local man who'd survived and we visited him and got into the details. After that, I felt compelled to continue, and I began to learn the specifics from relatives and other survivors.

How did your status as the child of a survivor, as well as an attorney, guide your work? What were some of the challenges in collecting their stories? What techniques did you find most successful?

My book is the story of eye-witnesses; it's not my story. In interviewing survivors, one of the first things I realized was that they had a story to tell. They weren't there for me to interrogate or cross examine them. Too many questions from me would get them off their game. They had a story in their mind already and they wanted to tell it, knowing they were of an age it would be lost otherwise.

We did it in their homes, and I sat there with my tape recorder letting them speak. Often their relatives were present, and those people would hear the story for the first time, too. At some point, the speakers would break down. Several asked, “Would you like to feel where they struck me?” They had me feel the scars or the indents on the back of a skull, a back, or a leg where they'd been hacked with swords.

After doing a number of interviews, I saw there was a continuity going on, a progression of events. Telling the story of the Genocide itself is built up from the micro level. From the micro-micro level really: from the individual, to the village, to the region, to the whole population. There was a definite pattern these people were telling me about. Their experiences with the event let me compare stories to discover the macro narrative.

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Q&A with Robert Aram Kaloosdian (pg2)

A feature common to genocides is denial that they happened. Given how well-documented the Armenian Genocide is, what do you think drives this urge to hide the truth?

Some people in Turkey are probably influenced by state propaganda, but scholars who deny that what happened was a genocide resulting from intentional government policies to exterminate the Armenians clearly know better. I mean, most of those involved admitted it—we have their letters! I think the denialists are motivated by access in Turkey and by other self-interests.

The nation-state of Armenia borders Turkey. A few Armenians continue to live in Turkey. How can Armenians reach a détente with Turks on a personal as well as a nation-to-nation basis? Is there anything to be learned from the attempts at reconciliation in the aftermath of other genocides?

Germany has come to terms with its past; America has made progress with respect to slavery. Turkey needs to be strong enough to come to terms with how the country came to be before it can move forward. We need a reconciliation between nations and peoples, but that forgiveness has to be two-sided. Turkey has to come to terms with its own history. At the moment, there are many voices in Turkey that recognize this, but they are stifled. Turkey still has these laws that make it illegal to “insult Turkishness.” In practice, this makes it dangerous to discuss controversial or uncomfortable topics there.

What is something you learned in researching and writing story of the Armenian Genocide?

Researching this book taught me is what it really means to be conquered. We read about conquered nations in history—what the Romans did to the Gauls, for instance—but we don't understand what it means. Conquered means to be smashed, destroyed, utterly scattered. The conqueror gets everything that used to be yours and everything that used to be you—your land; your traditions; even your DNA when he kills off the men, seizes the women as wives or concubines, and takes your orphans to raise in his own house. A conquered people no longer exists. The survivors' only hope is to adopt the identity of the conquerors and live as one of them in their own land. This is what happened in Western Armenia. Thousands of years of continuous identity were erased overnight. That is what genocide means.

In the specific case of the Armenian Genocide, what can be done to stop the truth from being edited out of history?

The mass murder of the Armenians has been the forgotten genocide. It took one hundred years—from 1915 to today—but it's no longer forgotten. The victims can never be avenged, but they can be remembered. Being remembered is at least some measure of justice.

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Advance praise for *Tadem*

Aram Kaloosdian has etched his name on a significant achievement. He has written the story of an Armenian village called Tadem, which combined oral history records (accounts related by elders) with his own research. This is a new step and adds a new piece of local history to Armenian historical writings. Before, all one could look to were the memoirs written by survivors. Even if they were describing a collective catastrophe, in the end each represented an individual memory about the event. **Kaloosdian documented the collective memory of anyone and everyone that he could reach who had lived in a specific region. Taking each of these personal accounts and combining it with research that he had conducted, he has developed a new form of local history.** The book you hold in your hands contains the collective memory of an Armenian village called Tadem and it is a significant achievement for this reason.

Tadem is only one of the thousands of Armenian villages that were destroyed without leaving behind a trace. It is a small example of the forced removal from their homes and annihilation of the Armenians who had lived on their own land for centuries and **it presents a microcosm of what happened to Armenians in what was then the Ottoman Empire, Turkey today.**

The example that Tadem presents teaches us many things. First of all, it teaches us what a destructive weapon religious hatred and ethnic prejudice can be. The destruction of a people does not rely on orders coming from a central authority. Even when such a thing exists, it's the presence of people in the local levels willing to do the bidding of these orders that's the determinative factor. There were people who jumped at the opportunity to terrorize and murder the Armenians in Tadem. What this shows us is that the origin of the "Armenian problem" was not the Sultan alone, nor was it his ministers and generals or the lack of governmental responsibility. The problem in Tadem, as in hundreds of other village and towns that were plundered and burned, and whose inhabitants were murdered by the thousands, was the local people who were given protective cover by the Ottoman authorities to terrorize, rob and subjugate the Armenians. **This is a book that you must read.**

—Taner Akçam, Ph.D., Professor of History and Armenian Genocide Studies, Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Clark University

The story of Tadem, a village in the Golden Plain of Kharpert, its daily lifestyle and routines, and the violent disruption of that familiar rhythm in 1915 mirrors the story of hundreds of other Armenian towns and villages in the Ottoman Empire. Robert Aram **Kaloosdian has made a lasting contribution through his meticulous combination of historical sources, memoirs, and oral histories to offer a glimpse into the life and death of his father's beloved village—Tadem.**

—Richard G. Hovannisian, University of California, Los Angeles, & Shoah Foundation Institute

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Aram Kaloosdian's oral history of Tadem and its Armenian population is an outstanding contribution. It provides a precise and detailed account of the village's extermination. In 1915 most Ottoman Armenians lived in rural villages but both official Ottoman and western documents rarely cover such places. Thus, **this micro-history of the Armenian Genocide closes a critical gap in our knowledge. It reveals the stories of ordinary women, children and men during the massacres and deportations.** While paying careful attention to gendered experiences, the book also tells the unique fate of Armenian ox-cart drivers who passed through some of the worst slaughter houses. Another group of deportees survived the exceptional deportation from Der Zor to Mosul. In short, the very readable account offers important new information and insights. It tells the story of survival against all odds. In sum, **it is mandatory reading for all scholars and students of the Armenian Genocide.**

—Hilmar Kaiser, Ph.D., historian specializing in late Ottoman social and economic history and the author of *The Extermination of Armenians in the Diarbekir Region*

Armenian America is not only the immigrant success story of hard working photoengravers, shoemakers, farmers, and grocers; of brilliant musicians, movie directors, writers, professors, and surgeons. **It is also the ghostly echo and image of the hundreds of towns and villages devastated by the genocide of 1895 to 1922.** These were the little Armenias of a family, a clan—and the precious memorial books (*hushamadyan*) of towns such as Tadem are the corresponding written records that preserve the local histories, songs and prayers, sacred places, arts and crafts of the homeland. Long available only in Armenian, these volumes have begun to be translated into English; and they can now speak to the ethnographers, folklorists, anthropologists of the New World, as well as to the future generations of Armenian Americans. Enjoy this book, but piously avert your eyes as you hurry past the sinister hill of the Shvod spirit and its dark spring. Welcome to Tadem!

—James R. Russell, Mashtots Professor of Armenian Studies, Harvard University

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