

The Historical Significance of Tadem

In his book *Tadem, My Father's Village: Extinguished during the 1915 Armenian Genocide*, author Robert A. Kaloosdian invites us to remember a small Armenian village of the Anatolian region of Kharpert, and the horrors that befell it in the years leading up to and including World War I. Why the village of Tadem? The reason for the subject is personal: Tadem is the childhood village of Kaloosdian's father and other relatives, the setting of much family lore that first captured Kaloosdian's imagination as a child. But whatever personal reasons motivated Kaloosdian to write about the village of Tadem, it is clear that Tadem is also of independent historical interest, most notably for its Christian religious heritage, its prosperity, and its longevity.

Perhaps the most significant historical site in all of Tadem is its seventh-century Christian monastery. Named *Surb Asdvadsadsin*, or "Holy Mother of God," Tadem's monastery is reputed to have been built by the Apostle Thaddeus, an evangelist of the Armenian region. In addition to the monastery, for a time Tadem also enjoyed a Christian church by the same name, built much later. Today, the monastery remains partially intact, while few if any remnants remain of the church.

The monastery and church, while of interest for their role in the cultural and religious life of Tadem and surrounding areas, are also of interest insofar as they are indicators of historical Tadem's relative wealth. There are a few other such indicators. One is that Tadem used to be host to an ancient fortress or citadel, referred to by villagers as the *Pert*. The *Pert*, used primarily for defense against invaders, was built on an enormous man-made earthen mound called a *tumulus*, and was surrounded by a wall with four stone towers over 80 feet high. Another clue pointing to Tadem's prosperity is the fact that the village was along the route of caravans

engaged in trade expeditions. Indeed, Kaloosdian's father, as well as another survivor from Tadem, remembers seeing caravans of camels pass near the village.

While the village appears to have had its fair share of craftspeople, the bedrock of Tadem's prosperity has always been its agriculture. With mountain ranges both to the north and the south, which during the warm season deposit water from the melting snow of their peaks into the headwaters of rivers such as the Euphrates, the plains around Tadem enjoy an abundance of fresh water. Tadem even has a constant spring called *Surb Hovhannes Chur* (the Spring of Saint John), which delivers water directly into the village and surrounding farmland. With its well irrigated and highly fertile soil, Tadem farmers have traditionally grown an array of crops including various vegetables, wheat, barley, watermelons, apricots cherries, mulberries, and walnuts, as well as grapes for winemaking, and cotton for textiles. The land around Tadem is so productive that even as far back as 2,000 years ago, during the era of the Roman Empire, it was referred to as the "Golden Plain."

Besides being a prosperous village and an important site for early Christianity, Tadem is also notable for its longevity. While the origins of the village may never be fully uncovered, we know that Tadem dates back well into pagan times. For one thing, its name has been documented in historical records from well before the Christian era. Furthermore, scholars maintain that Tadem's tumulus, the mound on which the Pert is built, predates the Christian era by at least 2,000 years. But it's not just the fact that Tadem has existed since antiquity that is of interest here—it's also the village's longstanding cultural identity. For, as far as is known, Tadem has been continuously inhabited by Armenians all the way from its ancient founding to the early twentieth century, when it was cruelly extinguished by genocide.

So although Robert Kaloosdian set out to write a book about the destruction of his father's village, and not a book about the destruction of a village with a long and vibrant history *per se*, the fact of Tadem's historical significance only deepens the story. In reading *Tadem*, we grieve not just for the loss of a twentieth-century village and its people, but also for their lost heritage.