

I've Been Reading *Tadem, My Father's Village*

By William Edgecomb

Let me tell you about this book I've been reading on the Armenian Genocide. Well, to say the book is on the Armenian Genocide is actually to construe its subject a little too broadly. Readers won't find here an extensive account of the greater historical phenomenon, nor will they find explicit theorizing or argumentation about how best to understand what happened to the Armenians during that fateful period surrounding the Great War. The subject of this book is rather more focused, and is also deeply personal. Part oral history, part biography, and part memoir, this book is about the horrors that befell a small Armenian village in eastern Turkey called 'Tadem', and the aftermath for its survivors. What makes the book especially personal is that Tadem is the boyhood village of author Robert A. Kaloosdian's father Boghos, a survivor of the genocide and émigré who would come to raise his family in the diasporal Armenian community of Watertown, Massachusetts. It's title? *Tadem, My Father's Village: Extinguished during the 1915 Armenian Genocide.*

Part of what makes *Tadem* so compelling is the intimate detail in which the narrative is constructed. Although notable for its fertile farmlands, its seventh-century Christian monastery, and its position along historic trade routes, Tadem was still one small agrarian village among many peppered throughout twentieth-century Armenia, and is not of particular historical significance for its involvement in the genocide. So the fact that we are given such a focused account of what happened to this community is a remarkable development in itself. The explanation for what enabled this conspicuous documentation of Tadem is twofold. One reason of course is the author's personal interest in Tadem combined with his unyielding dedication to its research. The other reason was the availability of first-hand accounts. Through personal

interviews, Kaloosdian was able to collect detailed testimony from a number of Tadem survivors, who although were mostly in their seventies or older at that time, recalled the long-past events with remarkable clarity.

While not unusual to utilize eyewitness accounts in the construction of historical volumes, this book is quite unique in how it makes them the principal source for the narrative of a whole community, weaving them together skillfully to, in the author's words, "blend one story into another in a tapestry of inhumanity." The oral history presented in *Tadem* thus gives us an unprecedented opportunity to imagine history from the perspective of those who lived it.

While the subject matter of the book is mostly grim, detailing the systematic destruction and plunder of Tadem and the killing and subjection of its Armenian inhabitants, the theme of tragedy does not pervade every page. There are also tales of bravery and perseverance as we follow the escape of Boghos Kaloosdian through treacherous mountains and hostile territories, as well as tales of rejuvenation as the Armenian diaspora set up communities in America and elsewhere. It is here that we even get a dose of childhood memoir as the author describes some of his experiences growing up in the Armenian-American community of Watertown, Massachusetts. More generally, the comfort one finds in reading *Tadem* is in knowing that the story of Armenian Tadem and its people has been so well documented, and is being shared. Kaloosdian's book gives new life to a village that all too easily could have been lost to history.