



The Longest Genocide

The Destruction of Christian Minorities 1894-1924

Morris and Ze'evi expand the years of the Armenian genocide from 1894 to 1924 by including ethnic-religious cleansings, large-scale massacres, systematic expulsions, forced conversions, and cultural annihilation. In 1900, Asia Minor's Christians made up 20 percent of the population, but by 1924, they accounted for only 2 percent.

The authors rely on documents from a dozen archives covering periods including Abdulhamid II's massacres in 1894-96 in which 200,000 Armenians died; the Young Turks' Adana pogrom where 30,000 were slaughtered; the core genocide from 1915-18, which murdered as 1 to 1.5 million; and Atatürk's massacres of Armenians and Greeks in 1919-24, which left many thousand more dead. Overall, the Ottomans likely killed between 1.5 and 2.5 million Christians in the period from 1894 to 1924.

Both authors report that the Ottomans' use of special death squads or brotherhoods was common in these atrocities. The 1894-95 massacres involved attacks on Armenian quarters from several directions, implying that the killers had strategized beforehand; indeed, local officials summoned Kurdish tribesmen to move into position. In 1915, the Special Organization was converted from a military combat unit to a domestic death squad. In 1919, dozens of Anatolian muftis issued a fatwa authorizing jihad against "infidels" while the exiled Libyan chief Ahmad ash-Sharif as-Sanussi toured to drum up support for jihad.

The scholars argue that events in the 1880s persuaded Ottoman heads that genocide worked: populace and troops did the killing, the great powers did not interfere, and the Armenians did not resist. Key Germans also learned these lessons. The evidence cited in this well-researched book is overwhelming. The reader might conclude that an "attempted and realized de-infidelization" of the Ottoman Empire was a central element of World War I. Thus, it was no coincidence that the Egyptian Abd al-Malik Hamza of the Young Turk's German-Ottoman circles published his "theory of Islamism" in 1916 in Berlin. He demanded the unification of all Muslims into one global brotherhood "to overcome all hostile elements according to the teachings of Islam."^[1]

The Ottomans described their victims as a "cancer, microbes, or scum," descriptions not coincidentally later echoed by the Nazis referring to Jews. Former Arab Ottoman officers, such as the Jerusalem grand mufti, Amin al-Husaini, continued to spread such epithets long after World War II. By looking at prior isolated actions in a broader view, Morris and Ze'evi open new horizons on these events. What they reveal has global implications.

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[1] Abd al-Malik Hamza Bey, "Der Panislamismus," *Die Islamische Welt* (Berlin, #1, Nov. 1916), p. 18-20.

Benny Morris, Dror Ze'evi: *The Thirty-Year Genocide. Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities 1894-1924*, 672 S., Harvard UP, Cambridge 2019. This review first appeared in *Middle East Quarterly*, 28(2021)2, here updated.