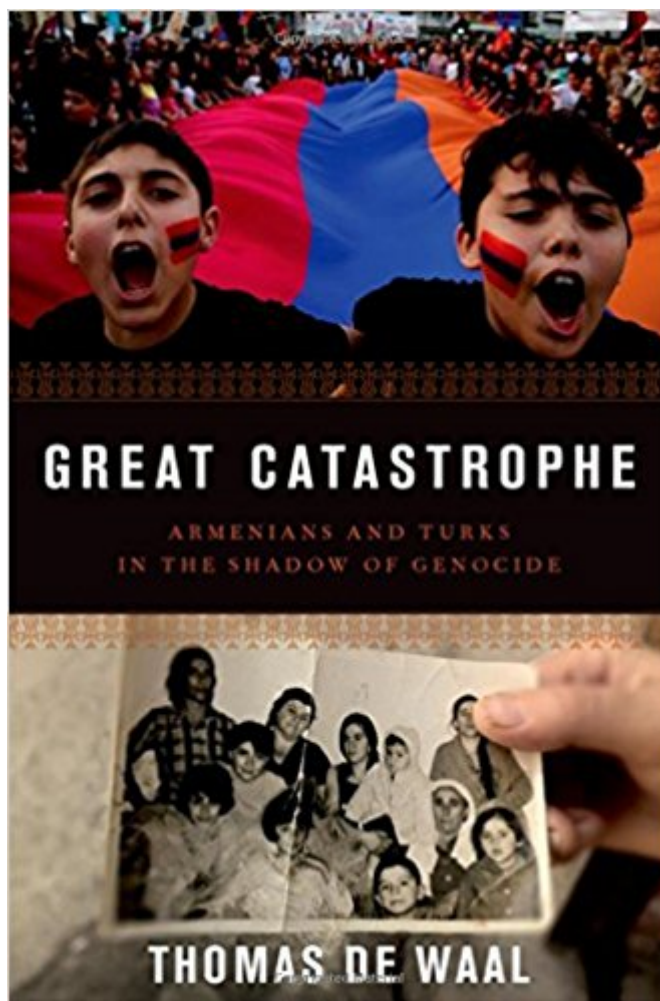


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Great Catastrophe: Armenians And Turks In The Shadow Of Genocide



Synopsis

The destruction of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire in 1915-16 was the greatest atrocity of World War I. Around one million Armenians were killed, and the survivors were scattered across the world. Although it is now a century old, the issue of what most of the world calls the Armenian Genocide of 1915 is still a live and divisive issue that mobilizes Armenians across the world, shapes the identity and politics of modern Turkey, and has consumed the attention of U.S. politicians for years. In *Great Catastrophe*, the eminent scholar and reporter Thomas de Waal looks at the aftermath and politics of the Armenian Genocide and tells the story of recent efforts by courageous Armenians, Kurds, and Turks to come to terms with the disaster as Turkey enters a new post-Kemalist era. The story of what happened to the Armenians in 1915-16 is well-known. Here we are told the "history of the history" and the lesser-known story of what happened to Armenians, Kurds, and Turks in the century that followed. De Waal relates how different generations tackled the issue of the "Great Catastrophe" from the 1920s until the failure of the Protocols signed by independent Armenia and Turkey in 2010. Quarrels between diaspora Armenians supporting and opposing the Soviet Union broke into violence and culminated with the murder of an archbishop in 1933. The devising of the word "genocide," the growth of modern identity politics, and the 50th anniversary of the massacres re-energized a new generation of Armenians. In Turkey the issue was initially forgotten, only to return to the political agenda in the context of the Cold War and an outbreak of Armenian terrorism. More recently, Turkey has started to confront its taboos. In an astonishing revival of oral history, the descendants of tens of thousands of "Islamized Armenians," who have been in the shadows since 1915, have begun to reemerge and reclaim their identities. Drawing on archival sources, reportage and moving personal stories, de Waal tells the full story of Armenian-Turkish relations since the Genocide in all its extraordinary twists and turns. He looks behind the propaganda to examine the realities of a terrible historical crime and the divisive "politics of genocide" it produced. The book throws light not only on our understanding of Armenian-Turkish relations but also of how mass atrocities and historical tragedies shape contemporary politics.

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Customer Reviews

The latest work by Thomas De Wall comes right in time for the great tragedy's 100th anniversary and is unique in both its perspective and coverage. Interestingly, the main title of the book may sound misleading, since only the first couple of chapters are devoted to the actual Crime that happened between 1915 and 1923. This leads me to believe that by 'Great Catastrophe', the author refers to the aftermath of the Genocide as an essential part of the tragedy itself. Therein lies the great value of the book; unlike vast majority of published works covering the Genocide in detail, De Wall focuses on what happened after it, providing critical chronology and context for the events spanning the last 100 years. Indeed, by meticulously collecting data from a variety of sources and documenting the most significant developments - together with the larger context in which they were occurring - the author reveals how Turkish-Armenian 'bad blood' (rooted in Armenia's centuries-long occupation and oppression) had been manipulated by the world powers (and different forces within those powers) to pursue various political agendas of the day and to exert pressure on respective Turkish governments - all the way to modern day dramatic events surrounding the latest push for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation and its spectacular failure. The results are catastrophic; for Armenians who lost vast majorities of the population, lands and property; for Turks tainted by the stigma of Genocide perpetrators for generations; and ultimately the entire region haunted by deep division lines that cripple its development.

Few issues in 20th century history are as intensely disputed as the tragic fate of Armenians in the dying Ottoman Empire a century ago. Armenian scholars use the word "genocide." Turkish historians and their government agree that mass killings of Armenians took place in 1915, but strongly dispute the term "genocide" because they contend the killings were not systematically planned. Also the number of deaths is contentious: Armenian sources say 1.5 million; the Turkish government says 300 thousand; neutral historians say very likely more than 500 thousand and

possibly over a million -- but since neutral scholars have only recently been able to work with Turkish primary sources there is still much uncertainty over the number of deaths. Most, but not all, scholars of the period who are neither Turkish nor Armenian agree that the word "genocide" probably is appropriate. Recently the Pope used that word, and at present there is a diplomatic row between Turkey and the Vatican in progress. Thomas de Wall is a British journalist who has spent much time in the Caucasus region reporting on the conflict in the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh. As it happens, I visited this region not long before the USSR ceased to exist. Even in a short visit, it was obvious to me that ethnic tensions between Armenians and Azeris --- which had been suppressed during the Soviet period -- were exploding as the ability of the USSR to suppress them was coming to an end. In Baku and in Yerevan, people were clearly ceasing to think of themselves as Soviet citizens. When an empire falls, what emerges from its fall is not only sweetness and light. For much of the 20th century, serious study of primary sources was not possible.

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