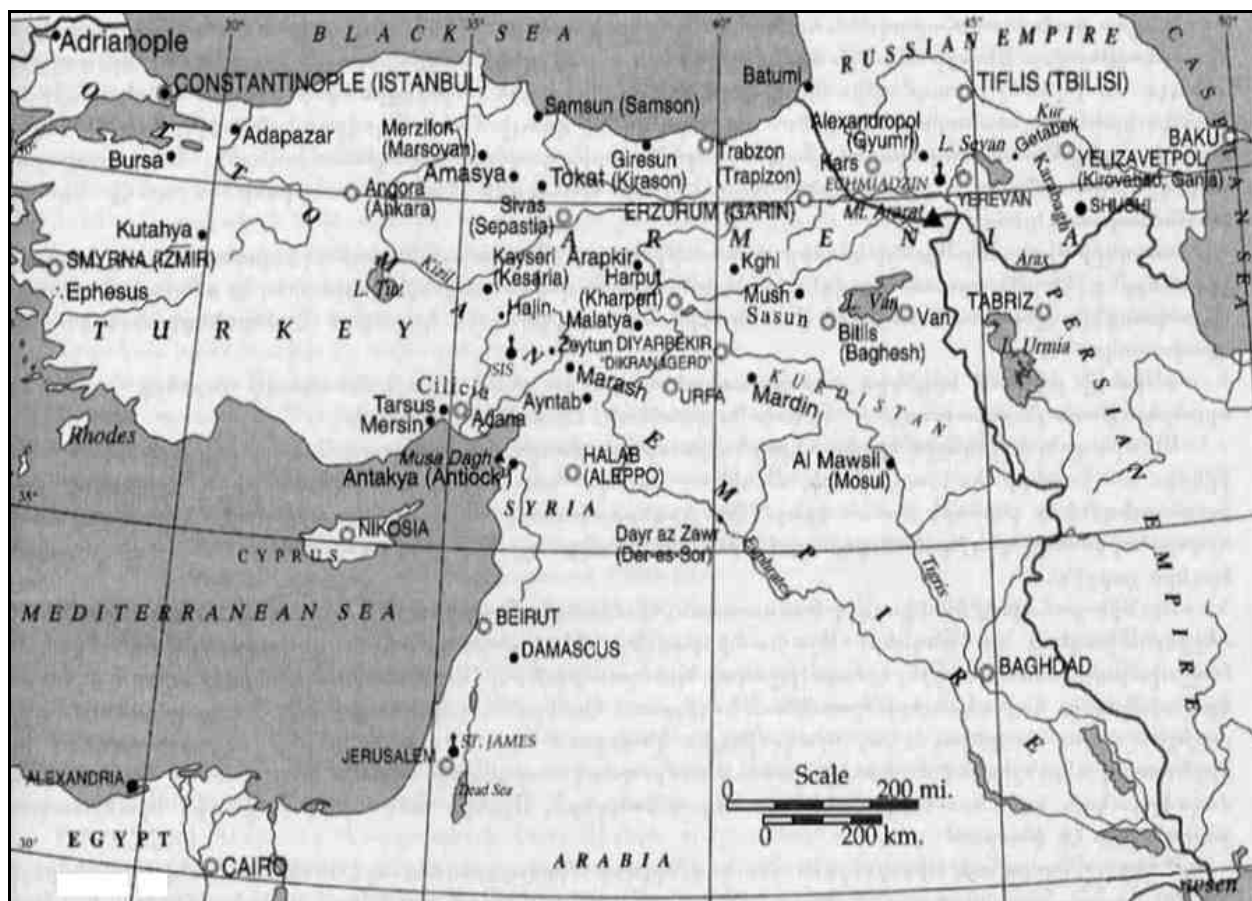


Who Remembers the Armenians?

You have a valid passport, but Turkish officials will not let you into the country because you have an Armenian surname. They tell you that they fear Armenian terrorist attacks. No Armenians at all—regardless of their citizenship—are allowed into the country.

A guide takes you into the mountainous region of eastern Turkey. Here you see stone bridges gracefully arching over some of the streams. If you ask who built them, your guide will say, "The Armenians did. " But if you ask how many Armenians live in Turkey. Your answer might be a shrug of the shoulders. Or your guide may say: "Officially, very few. And those who do live here won't admit it. "

Both of these situations can—and sometimes do—take place in present-day Turkey. The explanation behind such incidents, however, lies at the start of the 1900's, at a time when the Turkish government set out to destroy the Armenian population.



Ottoman Empire in 1914

Armenian Hopes for Independence

The ancient kingdom of Armenia lay nestled in the rugged region spreading across much of what is now eastern Turkey. By the start of the 1900's, however, Armenia had disappeared from the map, with its lands divided up among the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and Russia. Nonetheless, the Armenian people still clung to their Christian faith, their culture, and the dream of regaining their homeland.

Dispersed throughout the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians numbered about 1.8 million, or 8 percent of the total population. Physically, the Armenians looked like the Turkish majority. Culturally, however, they differed greatly. The Armenians were Christians; the Turks were followers of Islam. The Turks belonged to one of two groups—a small wealthy class or a large class of nomadic farmers or herders. The Armenians belonged to a middle class of artisans, bankers, merchants, or permanent farmers.

For many years, the Armenians and Turks coexisted. Then, in the late 1800's, the Sultan allowed the Kurds—a Muslim group who also claimed eastern Turkey as their homeland—to massacre Armenians. This led many Armenians to call for independence.

As the 1900's opened, the Armenians fixed their hopes on the Young Turks, who promised to modernize the Ottoman empire—the "sick man of Europe." They thought the Young Turks might bring a more enlightened regime to Turkey and perhaps even grant the Armenians their own country. Thus, when the Young Turks overthrew the Sultan in 1908, the Armenians supported them.

The Young Turks introduced a liberal constitution to Turkey and promised to promote unity within the empire. This situation changed abruptly when the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 erupted. The conflict cost Turkey most of its European holdings, including Albania, Macedonia, and western Thrace. Only a small area around Constantinople remained Turkish territory in Europe.

The Young Turks blamed their losses on their former liberal policies—and on the Armenians. The Armenians, claimed the Young Turks, refused to be assimilated, or merged, into Turkish society. By staying apart, they weakened the empire.

1. Where was the ancient Kingdom of Armenia located?
2. How many Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th Century?
3. Why did the Armenians support the "Young Turks"?
4. Why did they soon decide it was a mistake?

World War I

When World War I broke out in 1914, the Young Turks allied with Germany in the hope of rebuilding their empire. Turkey's entrance into the Great War spelled doom for the Armenians. The Turks used the war as an excuse to persecute the Armenians. They claimed some 200,000 Armenians had fled Turkey to fight on the side of the Russians on the eastern front.

On April 7, 1915, the Turks obtained evidence to support charges of Armenian disloyalty. On that day, the Armenians in the town of Van revolted against the brutal Turkish governor Djevdet Bey. Although Turkish troops surrounded the city, the Armenians held out until an approaching Russian army forced them to flee. The Turks used the incident to argue that the Armenians must be removed from all war-sensitive areas.

The Armenians saw the situation differently. They stressed the support formerly given by the Armenians to the Young Turks. They also cited medals won by Armenian troops fighting for Turkey. When the persecution continued, some Armenians suspected that the Turks wanted to break the economic power of the Armenian middle class. Armenian business owners, for example, controlled about 50 percent of the nation's trade. The war, said some Armenians, gave the Turks an excuse to seize their businesses.

5. Who did the "Young Turks" ally with and why?
6. What complaint did the Turks make against the Armenians?
7. What was the "Armenian reason" for the response by the Turks?

Deportations and Executions

In 1915, the Turkish government began a massive program of deportation, or removal, of the Armenians from Turkey to camps in the Syrian Desert. To carry out the deportation, the government released convicts from prison and organized them into "Butcher Battalions." It also encouraged peasants and Kurds to participate.

In Istanbul, only about 30,000 Armenians out of a population of 200,000 were seized. Armenians living farther east and on the Anatolian Plateau, however, fared much worse. In some places, firing squads executed the population of entire villages. In towns near railroads, armed guards shoved men, women, and children into packed cattle cars and shipped them to Syria. Some people suffocated before reaching Syria.



Many Armenians were forced to travel to Syria by caravan. People on these forced marches died in even greater numbers. In places, bandits fell upon them, killing them with knives or axes. Elsewhere, Muslim villagers attacked the Christian Armenians in a kind of holy war. Disease also swept through the caravans. "It was a terrible thing to go through," recalled one woman. "Everybody was sick, and so many died. . . . I remember [once],. . . I looked back and saw so many people lying there dead."

Many people who endured the cattle cars and death marches did not survive life in the desert camps. Some died of exposure to the scorching sun and cold nights. Others fell victim to hunger and thirst.

A few Armenians resisted the persecutions. On the mountain of Musa, near the Mediterranean Sea, 4,000 men, women, and children held off 15,000 Turkish troops for 53 days. On September 15, 1915, a French ship rescued them. Many others fled across the border into Russia.

By 1916, most of the deportations stopped, but the persecution continued until 1922. The Turkish government claimed that "only" a half million Armenians had been killed by overzealous citizens. The Armenians cited 1.5 million. Although exact figures are hard to determine, probably at least one million people died in 1915 alone.

8. What were "Butcher Battalions"?

9. How did many Armenians die?

10. What happened at Musa?

11. What are the "conflicting statistics" concerning the deaths of the Armenians?

World Reactions

Nations around the world reacted differently to the news of mass executions in Turkey. Germany declared the massacres an "internal affair" and did not interfere. Other nations, including Russia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and the United States, welcomed Armenian refugees.

The United States ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau, worked feverishly to end the atrocities. "Suppose a few Armenians did betray you," he said to one of the Young Turks. "Is that a reason for destroying a whole race?"

Morgenthau recounted stories about women and children living on scraps of food. He wrote of Kurdish women killing half-starved Armenians with butcher knives. Such moving accounts led United States citizens to contribute \$25 million to a relief fund. President Wilson pledged to help create an independent Armenian homeland after the war.

The British and French governments also expressed outrage. The two governments collected volumes of testimony describing the massacres. The most notable study was a British report written by political theorist Viscount James Bryce and classics professor Arnold J. Toynbee.

An outpouring of worldwide sympathy led the Allies to set up an Armenian state when the war ended in 1918. For a brief period, the Armenians looked forward to regaining their ancient homeland in eastern Turkey. Their hopes vanished as new problems arose.

12. How did Germany regard the executions of the Armenians?

13. What did the United States ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau, describe concerning the atrocities?

14. What did the Armenians gain upon conclusion of the war in 1918?

World Betrayal

Following the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire, a new Turkish leader, Mustafa Kemal, toppled the Young Turks. Kemal waited while the Allies debated the fate of Turkey at the peace conference in Versailles. As the months dragged on, the United States tired of peace negotiations, and the Senate refused to ratify the Versailles Treaty.

Kemal now refused to cede any territory to the Armenians. To create an independent Armenia, the United States would have had to use force. In the meantime, however, it had lost interest in Armenia-and in the world as a whole. Tired of war, the nation turned to isolation. Exhausted by the fighting, Britain and France could offer no help.

With the threat of foreign intervention removed, Kemal allied with forces leading the Russian Revolution, which had erupted in 1917. Together they crushed Armenia. In March 1921, the short-lived Armenian Republic became the Armenian Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union.

The Turks went on to recapture their former territory in western Turkey, including the city of Smyrna. French forces stationed in the Mediterranean refused to intervene. In September 1922, Turkish forces slaughtered the city's Armenian minority.

In July 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne gave Turkey most of the lands it had held under the Ottoman Empire. Although the treaty also required the Turks to protect the few Armenians who remained in Turkey, these provisions were never enforced. Of the nearly 2 million Armenians who had once lived in Turkey, only 40,000 remained in Istanbul.

In a matter of years, a 3,000-year-old culture had nearly been destroyed. Some Armenians escaped, carrying their heritage with them. Explained the 17-year-old granddaughter of one of the survivors: "Trying to annihilate a whole race of people will never work. Because as long as one survives, especially as strong as my grandmother, . . . the plan will never work "

15. Who was Mustafa Kemal? How did he take advantage of the post-war situation?
16. How did world opinion change after the Treaty of Versailles?
17. What happened to the independent Armenia?
18. What were the conditions of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne?

19. How many Armenians remained in Turkey?

Today

The passing of original eyewitnesses, foreign and Armenian, and a new militancy by the Turkish government have handicapped Armenian efforts to introduce the genocide into the diplomatic arena. The Republic of Turkey has directly funded lobbyists (sums over \$1,000,000 per lobbyist) to enter the halls of the United States congress to lobby against Armenian Genocide recognition. Turkish lobbying prevented the inclusion of Armenians in Human Rights reports of the United Nations. Non-governmental groups including the World Council of Churches and the European People's Tribunal have authenticated the Armenian claims, but have little diplomatic leverage.

Turkey has not been willing to face its own history and has maintained a continual campaign of denial, repudiation, and vilification, in effect acting as an "accessory after the fact" in the extermination of the Armenians. Taking advantage of its strategic geopolitical and military importance, the Republic of Turkey has repeatedly impressed on other governments its opinion that remembering a complex but no longer relevant past would be unproductive, disruptive, and unfriendly. The Armenian Genocide, formerly recognized as an incontestable fact, is now described in the media as "alleged" or "asserted."

20. The term *genocide* was not used until World War II. Define **genocide** and explain whether you think the term applies to the Armenian case.