

BAKU MASSACRES OF 1905

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Excerpt from history

A short excerpt from British historian-journalist Simon Sabag Montefiore's "Young Stalin".--Editor.

Nineteen-hundred-and-five began and ended with slaughter. It was the year of revolution in which young Stalin, for the first time, commanded armed men, tasted power, and embraced terror and gangsterism. On 6 February, he was in Baku when some Armenians shot a Tartar in the centre of the city. Azeri Turks--or "Tartars" as they were often called--retaliated. The news spread. The authorities who had long resented Armenian wealth and success, encouraged the Muslim Azeri mobs to pour into the city.



For five long days, Azeri gangs killed every Armenian they could find, with the frenzied hatred that comes from religious tension, economic jealousy and neighborly proximity. Baku descended into an orgy of ethnic killing, burning, raping, shooting and throat-cutting. The Governor Prince Nakashidze and his police chief did nothing. Cossacks handed over Orthodox Armenians to be slaughtered by Azeri mobs, armed by the police. One Armenian oil baron was besieged in his palace by an Azeri mob, whom he picked off with a Winchester rifle until he ran out of ammunition and was torn to pieces. Eventually, the Armenians, wealthier and better armed, started to fight back and massacre Azeris.

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pieces. Eventually, the Armenians, wealthier and better armed, started to fight back and massacre Azeris.

"They don't even know why they're killing each other," said the mayor as thousands of dead lay in the streets...everywhere women with mad eyes sought their children, husbands were moving heaps of rotting flesh. At least 2,000 died.

Stalin was there to see infernal and apocalyptic sights. He had led a small Bolshevik Battle Squad in Baku. Now he gathered this mainly Muslim gang and ordered them to divide the two communities wherever possible while simultaneously taking the opportunity to steal any useful printing equipment--and raise money for the Party by protection-rackets.

Stalin, who according to his first biographer, Essad Bey, who grew up in Baku, 'presented himself to the head of the household and gravely informed him that the time was near when the household would fall beneath the knives of the Muslims, but after a donation to Bolshevik funds, Stalin conveyed the Armenian merchants to the countryside.

Afterwards Stalin hurried back to Tiflis, where there was every danger of an ethnic bloodbath between Georgians and Armenians or Christians and Muslims. The city was paralyzed by strikes; the police arrested revolutionaries and Cossacks charged demonstrators on Golovinsky Prospect.

Stalin helped organize a demonstration of reconciliation to prevent a massacre and wrote a passionate pamphlet which, printed and distributed by Kamo, warned that the Tsar was using "pogroms against Jews and Armenians to buttress his despicable throne on the blood, the innocent blood of honest citizens, the groans of dying Armenians and Tartars."

