

# THE MASSACRE THE WORLD FORGOT

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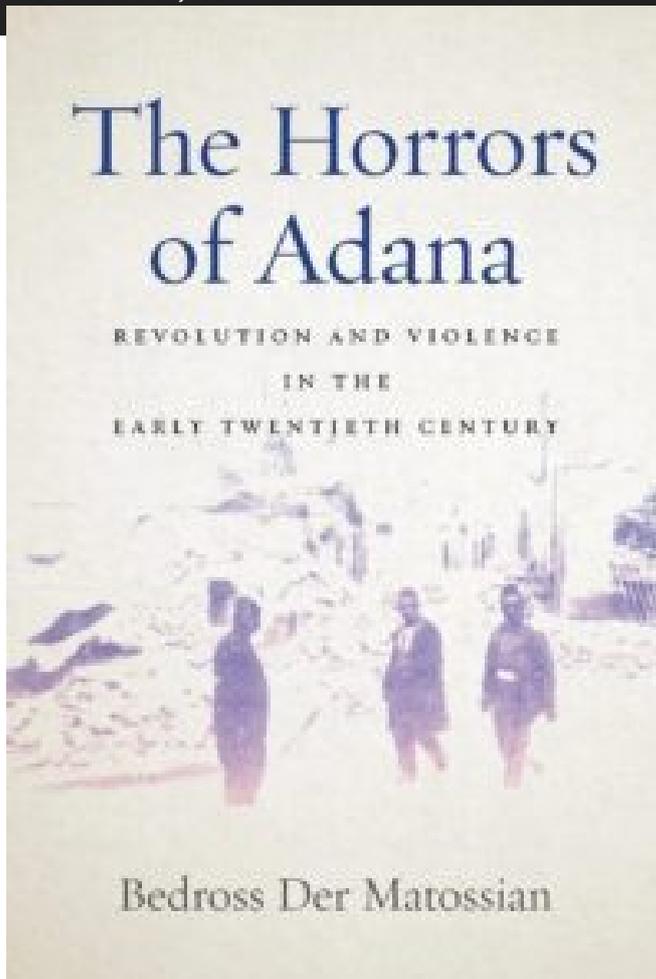


**By Jirair Tutunjian**, Toronto, 29 June 2022

Bookended by the Hamidian massacres of the 1890s and the Genocide of 1915, the Adana Massacre of 1909 has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. Even Armenian historians have been negligent in investigating the massacre of 20,000 Adana Armenians. That was the core message of Prof. Bedross Der Matossian's talk at the Toronto AGBU hall on June 24. The history professor (University of Nebraska at Lincoln) said he had written "The Horrors of Adana: Revolution and Violence in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century" to address the gap in the study of the horrific event.

Having established that historians have largely ignored the massacres, the Jerusalem-born historian concentrated most of his speech on the diverse reasons which led to the murder of 20,000 Armenians.

The psychological condition (fear and anxiety) of the massacre perpetrators can't be overstated since it was a key motivator, said Der Matossian. Envy of Armenians and ignorance of Armenian intentions were also major motivators for the violent Turkish outburst. Malicious rumors and the



illegating Turkish immigrants. Armenians also contributed to the climate of hostility. Changes in land codes, fear (leading both communities to buy weapons), Turkish suspicion that the European armies were about to establish an Armenian political entity in Cilicia, and unemployment as a consequence of technological advances in the production of cotton, the largest local industry, were further contributors to the tension between the two communities.

Traditional anti-Armenian racism was compounded by the significant Armenian economic dominance, especially in the cotton industry. The Turkish resentment turned into palpable hatred when Armenian landowners and cotton refining factories introduced modern technologies causing unemployment among the largely Turkish masses. The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that some 120,000 seasonal workers from neighboring regions traveled to the Adana province during the tilling and harvesting season. Most became unemployed as a result of technical innovations in cotton production.

The Turkish old guard had its own reasons for joining the anti-Armenian camp. They opposed the Young Turk's constitution which had erased their power and privileges while granting equality to Armenians. As a result of the new constitution, many among the elite had lost their jobs. Meanwhile, euphoric Armenians believing in the equal-rights promises of the new constitution had begun to exercise their right as free citizens. One expression of that optimism was the assertion of their ethnic identity. They staged plays about the glories of the medieval Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia while the Hnchag and Tashnag parties became more active in the region. As "free" citizens, Armenians also

exercised their right to buy guns just as Turks had always done.

Turks, who knew little about the Armenian psyche or intentions, believed Bishop Mushegh Seropian, the prelate of Adana, was to become the king of the revived Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. Ignorant of the Armenian Church, they thought the ornate clerical vestments of Seropian were the traditional uniform of Armenian kings. The Turkish misconception was enflamed by malicious rumors which often originated in the local Turkish newspapers and were echoed by at least one leading *mufti* (religious leader).

One can't overstate the negative "contributions" of the prominent public figure named Abdulkadir Bagdadizade. His anti-Armenian rants and rumor-mongering further increased tensions. His "twin" agent provocateur was the editor of "Itidal" newspaper.

The illegal settlement of Turkish refugees on Armenian lands was naturally resented by Armenians who were also concerned the infusion of Turks would change the demographic balance of the province and put Armenians at a further disadvantage.

Because a number of European ships were hovering in the waters on the western coast of the Adana province, Turks assumed the Europeans were about the land and restore the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. Turks also believed a secret army of 12,000 Armenians was about to take over the province.



The above situation exploded when an Armenian was accosted by several Turks. The Armenian shot and killed one of the Turks and injured the second. He then fled to Cyprus. The massive funeral of the slain Turk was followed by Turkish mob attacks (April 14 to 16) on the Armenians. Although Armenians put

up a stiff defense, 2,000 to 3,000 Armenians were killed. Initially, Turkish casualties were a few hundred. While in the days following the massacre some people believed the fighting had come to an end, Turkish agent provocateurs continued to spread rumors that heavily-armed Armenians were preparing an uprising to establish an Armenian Cilician Kingdom in Adana.

The three battalions the central government sent to establish peace joined the Turkish mob and helped launch a second wave (April 25 to 27) of attacks on Armenians. In the second wave, as in the first, there was rampant looting of Armenian properties. At the end, the Armenian Quarter was reduced to a heap of ashes. When the fighting stopped, an estimated 20,000 Armenians had been killed. Turkish deaths were around 2,000.

The government's investigation was a sham. A prominent Constantinople Armenian (Member of Parliament Hagop Babigian) who had traveled to Adana to investigate the massacre, wrote a detailed report of his findings. Within days, he was dead and his manuscript vanished. It's more than likely he was poisoned by Turks who feared the publication of Babigian's report.

The investigations were followed by court martial. Most of the charges were for murder, extortion, rape, and arson. Nearly 350 persons were convicted. Thirty Turks and six Armenians were hanged. Although Armenians were defending themselves, they were treated like the rampaging Turks. The rest of the arrested Turks were handed light sentences (15-day imprisonment, temporary exile). The real culprits (the hate inciters, people who spread malicious rumors) were not punished. Perhaps worried about the widespread negative reaction to their revolution, the Young Turk leadership wanted to close the book on the massacres. The massacre also shook the confidence of Armenians in the Young Turk regime.



In his book, Der Matossian provides voice to all the participants: victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. The book also aims at situating the Adana massacre in the global perspective by

demonstrating the commonalities and differences with other massacres.

One hopes Der Matossian's impressive research will be an incentive to historians, particularly Armenian and Turkish, to delve deeper into researching the massacre historians forgot.

Some 80 people attended the speech. The historian-author was introduced by Anna Maria Moubayed. Der Matossian's speech was preceded by Arno Babajanyan's "Eligea" played on the piano by Hrag Karamandian. The speaker thanked AGBU Toronto Executive Director Salpi Der Ghazarian for organizing the event. Der Matossian's book can be purchased at the AGBU Toronto offices.

## Comments



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While aware of the Adana massacres, this well researched detailed presentation by Dr. Der Matossian needs to be taught at school levels and sent to public libraries all over the globe. It is a "peep hole" to the turkish anti Armenian psyche. And as importantly, the ignorance and naïveté of Armenians. It is unforgivable that we never learn from our mistakes.



**ANTOINE STEPAN TERJANIAN** – 2022-07-01 06:43:07

Thank you for clearly summarizing the facts of these massacres, and for clarifying how we got there. Excellent article!