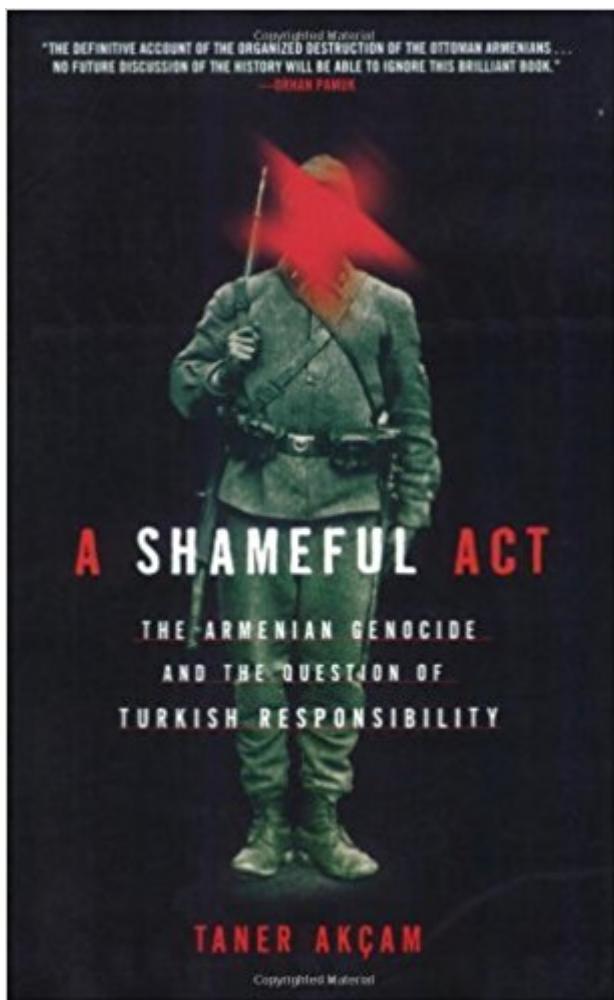


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# A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide And The Question Of Turkish Responsibility



## Synopsis

"The definitive account of the organized destruction of the Ottoman Armenians . . . No future discussion of the history will be able to ignore this brilliant book." —Orhan Pamuk Beginning in 1915, under the cover of a world war, some one million Armenians were killed through starvation, forced marches, and mass acts of slaughter. Although Armenians and the judgment of history have long held the Ottoman powers responsible for genocide, modern Turkey has rejected any such claim. Now, in a pioneering work of excavation, Turkish historian Taner Akçam has made unprecedented use of Ottoman and other sources—military and court records, parliamentary minutes, letters, and eyewitness reports—to produce a scrupulous account of Ottoman culpability. Tracing the causes of the mass destruction, Akçam reconstructs its planning and implementation by the departments of state, the military, and the ruling political parties, and he probes the multiple failures to bring the perpetrators to justice. As the topic of the Armenian genocide provokes ever-greater passion and controversy around the world, Akçam's work has only become more important and relevant. Beyond its timeliness, however, *A Shameful Act* is sure to take its lasting place as a classic and necessary work on the subject.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. The story of the Ottoman Empire's slaughter of one million Armenians in 1915—a genocide still officially denied by the 83-year-old modern Turkish state—has been dominated by two historiographical traditions. One pictures an embattled empire, increasingly truncated by rapacious Western powers and internal nationalist movements. The other details the

attempted eradication of an entire people, amid persecutions of other minorities. Part of historian Akçam's task in this clear, well-researched work is to reconcile these mutually exclusive narratives. He roots his history in an unsparing analysis of Turkish responsibility for one of the most notorious atrocities of a singularly violent century, in internal and international rivalries, and an exclusionary system of religious (Muslim) and ethnic (Turkish) superiority. With novel use of key Ottoman, European and American sources, he reveals that the mass killing of Armenians was no byproduct of WWI, as long claimed in Turkey, but a deliberate, centralized program of state-sponsored extermination. As Turkey now petitions to join the European Union, and ethnic cleansing and collective punishment continues to threaten entire populations around the globe, this groundbreaking and lucid account by a prominent Turkish scholar speaks forcefully to all. (Oct.)

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Akcam has attracted considerable attention for being one of the first Turkish intellectuals to devote his career to studying the systematic slaughter of one million Armenians during World War I. For this reason, he has been harshly criticized by those who would deny the existence of an Armenian genocide. Akcam's earlier work, *From Empire to Republic* (2004), contextualized the genocide within a climate of Turkish nationalism and attempted to provide the basis for a Turkish national conversation about trauma and culpability. Although essentially similar to that book in its analysis of Turkish culpability, his latest study is considerably broader in historical scope. He seeks to harmonize the conventional narrative of the collapsing Ottoman Empire with victims' perspectives of Turkish dominance over minorities. He does this by showing a state--rent by internal power struggles and terrified of being partitioned--that pursues genocide as a way of avoiding catastrophic collapse. Clearly a companion to Peter Balakian's *Burning Tigris* (2003) and other accounts of the genocide, this book also deserves to be read in concert with recent works analyzing the politics of genocide and national shame in Germany. Brendan Driscoll

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This book is a wonderful history of pre WWI Armenia

Finally a brave and matter-of-fact account of the history of WWI Ottoman Turkey and the evil Tehcir Law which led to the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1916 and the extetmination and forced deportation of Ottoman Armenians from Turkey. *Afakam* indeed Dr. Akçam makes no excuses or rebuttals for justifying the massacres and atrocities but rather in full honesty retells the

true history of the Armenian massacres of WW1 on the lands of Ottoman Turkey based on his own research and to-date unrevealed Ottoman historic archives and documents from the 1913-1921 period. This is a must-read for all Ottoman historians, particularly for liars and deniers of truth such as Justin McCarthy and Stanford Shaw's bastards that are alive today.

a very good, well researched and to the point account of the planning and execution of the first genocide of the twentieth century. We have the moral obligation not to ignore and to remember these "dark sides" of the history of humankind

Under the cover of WWI the Turkish (Ottoman) government set about deliberately wiping the Armenian people from the face of the earth! With careful planning they were able to kill about 2,000,000 Armenians.....primarily in a religious pogrom.....but also under the guise of resisting an insurgency, a fight for independence for a people who had been subject to repression for several hundred years, not only by the Turks but by countless other nations over millenia. Living as they do at the meeting of Asia and Europe they had been trampled by invaders since the days of the Persian Empire! As the Ottoman Empire crumbled, losing the Balkan states, then the north African part of their empire the Turks felt threatened when the Armenians started agitating for independence. Using "Turkish" identity as an excuse, they very nearly wiped Armenia and its population from the map! This is another story of how nationalism, patriotism and religion can be used to justify the demonisation and objectification of a whole population and allow one group of people to attempt to wipe out another. This has happened throughout history, but so many times in just the 20th Century! Will we never learn?

This is an extremely well-researched book by a Turkish scholar who is obviously trying his best to make his countrymen see that denying the obvious will not advance their cause. It attempts to provide them with a reasonable (and more advantageous) route to acceptance and respect than does simply throwing money at American professors and congressmen to spout their propaganda. But apparently most Turkish readers are too thick to get it: either they haven't bothered to wade through the admittedly turgid writing to see what he's actually saying, or their knee-jerk reactions to his "anti-Turkishness" get in the way of their comprehension. ((Hey, Turks! Psst! He's actually provided you with the first and only plausible excuse for claiming ignorance of the facts! Read up!)) Unfortunately for the Turkish government, this excuse does not apply to them, most of them being at first the same cast of characters (with a change of name) as the perpetrators of the genocide, and,

later, their descendants. But for the majority of the Turkish people, an explanation of sorts is made: In 1915, 95% of all Turks were illiterate. (Armenians, on the other hand, were not, education being a very basic and highly prized value.) After WWI, among the sweeping reforms instituted by the Young Turks was the switch from an Arabic to a Roman alphabet, thus rendering most original documents of the era incomprehensible even to educated modern-day Turks. Of COURSE they're going to deny such barbarism, butchery and inhumanity as being part of their recent history! Who wouldn't?! Who would willingly claim it? (I'm sure their grandparents came home and boasted of their cruelty!! "TODAY? Oh, I raped and beheaded a few 14-year-old Armenian girls and made their little brothers watch before raping them too and throwing them all into the river. How was YOUR day, dear?" Not.) Also worth noting: the grandchildren of Kurds living in the formerly Armenian towns of the Anatolian plateau are open with their admission of their grandfathers' complicity in the genocide: apparently these grandfathers complained to their families that they were promised a gold coin for each Armenian head, but the Turkish government never paid up! (And even now the Turks are trying to wipe out the Dersimi Kurds again (a repeat of their genocidal actions against the Kurds in 1934) by destroying the unique, beautiful and very fragile eco-system of the region by creating unnecessary dams - really just to cover up the evidence of their bloody past against both Armenians and Kurds. Somebody please stop them.)

This obviously is a political book on a controversial past event. Since I know little on this subject so I bought this book to learn more on this subject but unfortunately it means that I cannot assess the facts of the book properly. The argument of the writer is that a dangerous shift took place in the Ottoman Empire and its policy changed to a Turkish nationalism. To these Turkish nationalist the existence of the Armenians in Turkish areas was a threat to this state so from about 1915 to the early 1920's they created a planned genocide of the Armenians. After reading the book which I found tedious in parts, I am not convinced that he has proved his argument that a genocide took place. Genocide surprisingly is a difficult case to prove. Partly because fortunately we have few examples as they are not that common. However also because the evidence is suppressed and denied for example during WW2, the Nazi destroyed the evidence while they did it and after almost all senior Nazis denied knowledge or responsibility for it. What the book does show is that last scale deportations of the Armenians took place and that these did result in large-scale crimes against them which include robbery, kidnapping and a million murders. Having said this, I am not so sure it matters whether a genocide took place, clearly many people were murdered because they were Armenians. After 1920s when they should have some justice, it was denied. It is a shame that so few

people that did these robbery, kidnapping and murders were punished.

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