



THE SON OF THE OLIVE MERCHANT (LE FILS DU MARCHAND D'OLIVES)



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The Son of the Olive Merchant follows the journey of award-winning filmmaker, Mathieu Zeitindjioglou, and his wife, Anna, as they travel to Turkey for their honeymoon. Camera in hand, they set out to learn about Mathieu's Armenian heritage and reveal what modern day Turks think about the Armenian Genocide that occurred in 1915. Sadly, Turkey denies the genocide and instead accuses the Armenians of committing crimes against the Turks. Created with footage from Mathieu and Anna's trip, in addition to interviews, news footage, historical documents and animation, this documentary is one of the most powerful films ever made about the Armenian Genocide.

History of the Armenian people

Armenia—officially called the Republic of Armenia—is a landlocked country located between southwestern Europe and southeastern Asia, an area also referred to as Anatolia. It is bordered by Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkey. While the modern nation of Armenia has only been in existence since 1991, the Armenian people have lived in Anatolia for thousands of years. Over that time, Armenians have sometimes been an independent nation as they are today, and at other times under the control of various other empires including the Arabs, Greeks, and Byzantines.

Over their thousands of years of history, the Armenian people have amassed a rich culture, including a distinctive language, literature, art, and architecture. The majority of Armenians are Christians. In 301 A.D. the country became the first in the world to adopt Christianity as its national religion.

The Rise of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire no longer exists, but it was also located in Anatolia, where it was founded in approximately 1300 by Muslim Turks. It eventually became one of the largest and most powerful empires in the world, and at the height of its power—during the 15th and 16th centuries—it extended into the Balkan region, southeastern Europe, Greece, and parts of the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula. However, after reaching this peak, the empire began to decline, finally collapsing in 1923, when it was replaced by the Turkish Republic and other smaller states in southeastern Europe and the Middle East.

Like many other ethnic groups in the area, the Armenian people were absorbed by the powerful Ottoman Empire as it expanded. The Ottomans were primarily Muslim, and while the Armenians that became part of the Ottoman Empire were allowed to practice their Christian religion, they were often treated as inferior to the Muslim majority among which they lived. For example, they did not have the same legal and political rights as their Muslim neighbors, and they often had to pay higher taxes.

In addition to being treated as inferior, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were sometimes treated with resentment and suspicion. One reason for this was that some Armenians merchants

and industrialists were relatively wealthy, and were thus resented by neighbors who were less well-off. Attempts by some Armenians to gain civil rights also caused resentment. As a result of the resentment and mistrust that many Ottomans felt towards the Armenians, there were a series of massacres between 1894 and 1896, in which historians estimate that tens of thousands of Armenians were killed. These were not the only Armenian massacres. For instance, an estimated 20,000 were killed in 1909 after attempts to win autonomy.

The Young Turks and World War I

In 1908, as the Ottoman Empire continued to crumble, its government was overthrown by a political group known as the Young Turks, also called the Committee of Union and Progress. In order to prevent the further disintegration of the empire, the group promoted something called Turkification, which meant the elimination of minorities, and the creation of a homogenous Turkish state. The Armenians were an obstacle to Turkification. However, it wasn't until the Ottoman Empire entered World War I, that it finally took action to eliminate its Armenian population.

It entered the war in 1914, allied with Germany and the Central Powers. One of its enemies was Russia, with which it shared a border. At this time, distrust of the Armenian population increased further. Some Ottomans were afraid that the Armenians would be more loyal to Russia, which had a Christian government. In fact, there is evidence that some Armenians did help Russia during the war.

The Armenian Genocide

Distrust, resentment, and hatred finally culminated in the Armenian genocide, which began in 1915. Most people see the genocide as officially beginning on April 24, 1915, when the government arrested and later killed several hundred Armenian doctors, writers, scientists, and other intellectuals. After that, Armenians throughout the empire were killed by the hundreds of thousands through massacres and mistreatment that was carried out by both the military and civilians.

Thousands of Armenians were rounded up and sent on death marches into the desert, without food or water, and many died from hunger, thirst, and exhaustion. Thousands more were murdered by killing squads and buried in mass graves. In addition, Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire were attacked and beaten, raped, tortured, and killed in numerous other ways. Their property was confiscated. Many Armenian children were kidnapped, converted them to Islam, and put into Turkish homes. There is extensive evidence of these atrocities including eyewitness accounts, the testimony of survivors, reports from foreign diplomats, and even photographs.

The overall death toll was high. Most researchers believe that there were approximately 2 million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire before the genocide started in 1915. They estimate that

approximately 1.5 million were killed, leaving only less than half a million behind. Many people call this the world's first genocide. Armenians also call the genocide the *Medz Yeghern*, which means "great catastrophe."

Refusal to Acknowledge the Genocide

In 1918 the Ottoman Empire surrendered to the Allied powers and signed an armistice treaty, which ended its participation in World War I. When the war ended, there were some attempts at bringing the perpetrators of the genocide to justice. For instance, between 1919 and 1920, some senior officials from the Ottoman government were tried and executed for mass killings of Armenians. However, other leaders escaped the country before they could be tried. For example, the leaders of the Young Turks escaped to Germany, which agreed not to prosecute them for the genocide. A group of Armenians created a group that they called Operation Nemesis in another attempt at justice. The group's goal was to find and kill the leaders of the Young Turks. In 1921, one of these leader was shot and killed in Berlin, in front of witnesses. The gunman was later acquitted by a jury.

While most historians agree that the Armenian genocide occurred, Turkey's government has always denied it. Instead, it has argued that while Armenians did die during the war, the number of dead has been greatly exaggerated. Turkey also insists that there was never a master plan to eliminate the Armenians and that this means that the deaths that did occur cannot be called genocide. Under Article 301 of the Turkish penal code, it is actually against the law to talk about an Armenian genocide. Article 301 prohibits anyone from criticizing Turkey or its government. Numerous writers, intellectuals, and others have been prosecuted under this law.

As a result of their history of conflict, and the refusal of Turkey to acknowledge the genocide, relations between Armenia and Turkey are poor. The border between Armenia and Turkey was closed in 1993, and has remained closed since then.

Around the world, there has also been widespread reluctance by other countries to publicly acknowledge the genocide, because of fears of damaging political relations with Turkey. Some nations that have publicly acknowledged the genocide have been subject to threats from Turkey. For example, when Austria did so in 2015, Turkey responded by warning that Austria's declaration would permanently damage relations between the two countries. Overall, the Armenian National Institute reports that only 28 countries have officially recognized the Armenian genocide.

Armenia Today

Armenia declared itself as an independent nation in 1918, but in 1922 it was incorporated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In 1991, it once again declared independence, and has remained an independent nation since then.

The country is estimated to have a population of about 3 million, with the vast majority being ethnic Armenians. There are an even greater number of Armenians living in other countries around the world, though, largely the result of the fact that so many were forced to flee as a result of the genocide. It is estimated that approximately 8 million Armenians live in other nations around the world, with some of the largest Armenian communities in Russia, France, the United States, Iran, Canada, Syria, and Lebanon.



Glossary

- **Aegean Sea:** A part of the Mediterranean Sea that is located between Greece and Turkey.
- **Aleppo:** Aleppo is a city in Syria. Some of the Armenians who survived the forced deportations that occurred during the Armenian genocide ended up in Aleppo.
- **Anatolia:** Also called Asia Minor, this peninsula of land is the westernmost part of Asia, and is the point where the continents of Europe and Asia meet.
- **Ani:** Ani was an important medieval city, and at one time it was inhabited by nearly 100,000 people and was an Armenian capital. It is located in northeastern Turkey, near the Turkish-Armenian border. Today only ruins are left. In 2016, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized it as a World Heritage site.
- **Ankara:** Ankara is the capital of Turkey, and the country's second largest city.
- **Article 301:** Part of the Turkish penal code, Article 301 makes it against the law to criticize Turkey or its government. Numerous writers, intellectuals, and others have been prosecuted under this law.
- **Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938):** Atatürk was the founder and the first president of the republic of Turkey.
- **Blue Mosque:** The Blue Mosque is an historical mosque located in Istanbul, and has blue tiles on its interior walls. It is both a popular tourist attraction and a functioning mosque.
- **Committee of Union and Progress (CUP):** The Committee of Union and Progress, also known as the Young Turks, was a political group that seized power of the Ottoman government in 1908.
- **Deir ez-Zor:** Concentration camps in the Syrian desert, into which thousands of Armenians were forced during the Armenian genocide.
- **Erzurum:** A city in eastern Turkey. Prior to the genocide, this city had a large Armenian population.
- **European Union:** An economic political union of twenty-eight countries, most of which are located in Europe. Turkey is not a member of the European Union.
- **genocide:** The deliberate killing of a group of people based on their nationality or ethnicity.

- **historical revisionism:** A reinterpretation of the historical record. In some cases, this is done in order to deliberately distort the facts of what really happened.
- **institutionalized denial:** The Turkish government is accused of practicing institutionalized denial by deliberately altering and distorting the historical record in order to perpetuate the belief that the Armenian genocide never occurred.
- **integration:** Integration is when separate groups of people are brought together into one group.
- **Istanbul:** Formerly known as Constantinople, Istanbul is the largest city and the largest port in Turkey. It is located in the northwestern part of the country, and it straddles the Bosphorus Strait, which separates Europe and Asia. This makes Turkey the only city in the world that is built on two continents.
- **Izmir:** The city of Izmir is located on the coast in the west of Turkey. It is the country's third largest city, and important port in the Aegean Sea.
- **Jesse Benjamin Jackson (1871-1947):** Jackson was the U.S. Consul at Aleppo in 1915. He witnessed some of the atrocities of the Armenian genocide, and wrote to his government about what he saw.
- **Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959):** A Polish-Jewish lawyer who coined the term "genocide" in 1943 to describe the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews during World War II.
- **Bernard-Henri Lévy (1948-present):** A French intellectual who has publicly spoken against historical revisionism.
- **Ottoman Empire:** The Ottoman Empire was founded in Anatolia in the late thirteenth century by Muslim Turks. It was one of the largest and most powerful empires in the world during the 15th and 16th centuries. It lasted until 1923, when it was replaced by the Turkish republic.
- **pogrom:** A violent riot against a certain ethnic or religious group, often causing death and the destruction of property.
- **Sultanahmet:** This neighborhood in Istanbul contains a number of popular tourist attractions, including the Blue Mosque.
- **terrorist:** A person who uses violence and intimidation to achieve political goals.
- **Turkey:** Turkey was founded in 1923, from the Ottoman Empire. It is located in Southeastern Europe and Southwestern Asia. Turkey shares a border with Armenia,

Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. It has a population of almost 80 million people.

- **Turkification:** The process through which existing local cultures were transformed into part of the Turkish empire and its culture.
- **Young Turks):** The Young Turks, also known as the Committee of Union and Progress, were a political group that seized power of the Ottoman government in 1908.



Timeline

- 301 A.D.: Armenia becomes the first country in the world to make Christianity its official state religion.
- 1894-1896: The Ottoman government sanctions the murder of thousands of Armenians.
- 1908: A political group known as the Young Turks, or the Committee of Union and Progress, seize power in the Ottoman capital of Constantinople.
- 1909: Thousands of Armenians are massacred by the Ottoman government.
- 1914: World War I begins; The Ottoman Empire enters the war on the side of Germany and the Central Powers; Russia declares war against the Ottoman Empire; Some Armenians are accused of siding with Russia.
- 1915: There are an estimated 2 million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire; The Armenian genocide begins with the arrest of several hundred Armenian intellectuals, quickly followed by mass deportations and killings of Armenians all over the Ottoman Empire.
- 1916-1917: Hundreds of thousands of Armenians are massacred in mass killings and forced marches.
- 1918: The Ottoman Empire surrenders to the Allied powers. The leaders of the Young Turks flee to Germany. Armenia declares itself an independent republic.
- 1919: In 1919 and 1920, a number of Ottoman government leaders are tried and found guilty in absentia for their involvement in the Armenian massacres.
- 1920: The independence of Armenia is formally recognized by the Allied powers.
- 1921: One of the leaders of the Young Turks is shot dead in Berlin. A jury later acquits the shooter.
- 1922: Less than 500,000 Armenians are left living in the Ottoman Empire. Armenia is incorporated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).
- 1923: Turkey becomes a republic under Kemal Atatürk.
- 1943: Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin invents the word “genocide.”
- 1987: The Armenian genocide is recognized by the United Nations and the European Union.
- 2012: France makes it a crime to deny that the Ottomans committed genocide against the Armenians. Turkey warns that it will retaliate.
- 2015: The killing of Armenians by the Ottomans is described as genocide by Pope Francis. Turkey recalls its envoy to the Vatican.
- 2016: The German parliament adopts a resolution to officially recognize the Armenian genocide.

Additional Resources

Books:

- Ronald Grigor Suny (2015). *“They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else:” A History of the Armenian Genocide*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Margaret Ajemian Ahnert (2007). *The Knock at the Door: A Journey Through the Darkness of the Armenian Genocide*. New York: Beaufort Books.
- Taner Akcam (2006). *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Thomas De Waal (2015). *Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Raymond H. Kévorkian (2011). *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Vahakn N. Dadrian (2003). *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Online Sources

- Armenian Genocide Museum of America. <http://www.armeniangenocidemuseum.org>
- Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. <http://www.genocide-museum.am>
- Armenian National Institute. www.armenian-genocide.org
- Genocide1915.org. <http://www.genocide1915.org/>
- The Genocide Education Project. <https://genocideeducation.org>
- History.com, “Armenian Genocide.” <http://www.history.com/topics/armenian-genocide>
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “The Armenian Genocide (1915-16): In Depth.” <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10008189>

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