

GENOCIDE OF THE ARMENIANS, 1915-1923

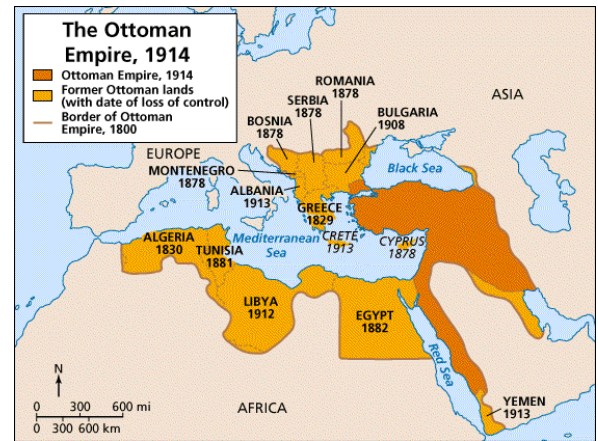
Where?

The Ottoman Empire existed in the Balkan region of the Middle East from 1300-1923. Armenians lived in the region for more than 4,000 years. During the time of the genocide, the Ottoman Empire bordered Bulgaria and Greece in the west, the Mediterranean Sea in the south and southwest, the Black Sea in the north, Iraq and Syria in the southwest, and the Russian empire in the east and northeast.

When?

Armenians had always been treated as second-class citizens in the Ottoman Empire. Armenians were allowed the freedom to practice their faith; however, mass persecution of Armenian citizens was a regular occurrence and Armenians were often blamed for misfortunes which befell the Ottoman Empire. In 1908 a reformist and nationalist party called the “Young Turks” was founded and in 1913 they overthrew the government with the aim of creating a united Turkish empire with one language and one religion.

Most of the killing took place during World War I, 1915 to 1918, but it continued until 1923 when the newly-founded Republic of Turkey had become virtually free of all Armenians. During the genocide, the majority of the Armenian people were either killed outright or “ethnically cleansed” (removed by force) from their ancestral homeland; others escaped to neighboring countries or remained in the newly established Soviet Republic of Armenia. Laws were later enacted to prevent displaced Armenians from returning to their former homes.



Ottoman Empire



Armenian victims

How?

By 1914, Ottoman authorities had created an empire-wide propaganda campaign in which Armenians were presented as a threat to Ottoman nationalism and state security. Armenian leaders and intellectuals were arrested. The Armenian people were left without leadership, governmental representation, and with no defense against the Ottoman Turks. Armenians were discharged from military service, deported from their homes, and their property was confiscated. The Ottoman military forced them to march for hundreds of miles without food or water to the desert of modern-day Syria. Hundreds of thousands of people died on these forced marches. People were massacred indiscriminately: men and women, old and young. Mass shootings occurred at random. Pillaging, persecution, torture, rape, and other sexual abuses were commonplace.

Despite international awareness of these atrocities, there was no intervention to stop the genocide.

Response?

Contemporary scholars estimate that as many as 1.5 million Armenians were killed in the genocide along with approximately 500,000 Assyrians and 350,000 Anatolian Greeks. There were also thousands of displaced Armenians. The displaced survivors were largely unable to return to their former homes, as their land and property now belonged to the new Turkish government or to the Soviet state of Armenia.

To this day, the Republic of Turkey’s official stance is that the deaths of Armenians during their ‘relocation’ cannot accurately be deemed as ‘genocide,’ essentially denying the intentional nature of the atrocities. This denial has dramatically hindered Turkish foreign relations and is currently a factor in Turkey’s restriction from the European Union. Most scholars around the world acknowledge that the tragedy was, indeed, genocide, and many nations also have acknowledged the genocide.