

Letter to the Editor of the Times Literary Supplement

Andrew Mango's Review of "The Burning Tigris" in the TLS of 17.9.04

Dear Sir,

I am led to understand that Andrew Mango is well known as a 'Turkophile' purveying the Turkish Government 'version' of denial of the Armenian Genocide. Not being a historian myself, I do not presume to challenge the accuracy of Mango's information in his review of Peter Balakian's book "The Burning Tigris". However, it seems to me to have been highly selected and is therefore unconvincing. For an impressively scholarly elucidation of the Armenian Genocide I would recommend Rouben Paul Adalian's chapter in "Century of Genocide" edited by Samuel Totten, William Parsons and Israel Charny, second edition 2004, Routledge. Adalian gives a balanced neutral account and discussion with additional eye-witness accounts.

One point on which I would take issue with both Mango and Balakian for ignoring it, is that the Armenian Genocide was, tragically, not the first genocide of the 20th century. The same book of critical essays and eyewitness accounts begins with a chapter on the genocide of the Hereros in 1904, by the German colonisers, written by John Bridgman and Leslie Worley. The moral failure of the German Government at that time almost certainly contributed to the impunity with which the Young Turks executed their carefully planned annihilation of the Armenians in 1915 - while the German Government, as Turkey's ally in WWI, did nothing to contain the atrocity and may have encouraged it.

Failure of the Allies to bring the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide to justice after the end of WWI certainly added to Hitler's impunity and enabled him to say to his generals on the eve of WWII, "Who now remembers the Armenians!" Recognition of the Holocaust as genocide was a 50 years battle against the forces of denial. Had this acknowledgement been won sooner, some of the many genocides in the second half of the 20th century might have been curtailed if not prevented. Failure to recognise and mourn all the previous genocides makes future genocide much more likely.

Perhaps Mango has not read or understood the growing literature on genocide and trauma. Denial of genocide is the last phase of the genocide itself. The survivors, and there are always at least a few, and their offspring continue to suffer the murder of their ancestors a second time by the wiping out of their memory. It is time that we recognise and memorialise each and every genocide of the past so that we can mourn the losses to humanity and move on, hopefully to prevent future genocide in the early stages.

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