

The Burning Tigris – The Armenian Genocide by Peter Balakian.
William Heinemann 2004.

If, like me, you have read such a surfeit of books on the Nazi genocide of European Jewry that you believe yourself to be above being shocked by anything else – on the grounds that nothing can be more disturbing than this – then *The Burning Tigris* will come as a profound jolt to your complacency.

The author, a history Professor in America of Armenian descent, has written what must rank as the definitive work to date on the desperate evil visited on the Armenian people by the Turks in the early years of the 20th century. Peter Balakian describes in unsparing and chilling detail the way in which the Armenians were marginalised, picked upon, persecuted and then murdered by a corrupt and despotic Turkish government while the world stood by and did nothing.

He describes the plight of individual Armenians, those who stood up for them in foreign lands, the ambassadors and in Turkey itself diplomats – notably the Jewish American Henry Morgenthau – who tried to arrest the chosen course of the Turkish government, and the shameful way in which the great powers were seduced by the lure of the region's oil so that the fate of an entire people was deemed of lesser account.

The Burning Tigris is compulsive reading even if, in the cruelty it describes, it is almost unbearable. But anyone who wishes to understand how the Nazis were able to replicate, stage by stage, with the Jews what the Turks did with the Armenians, and how utterly hollow that obscenely repeated phrase 'never again' truly is must read this book. Peter Balakian has written one of the great works on human evil of the last three decades, as well as denying any future murdering dictator the opportunity to claim, as did Hitler, 'who, after all speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?'

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