

# The Armenian Genocide

The Essential Reference Guide



ALAN WHITEHORN, EDITOR

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## *Skylark Farm*

Siamanto. *Bloody News from My Friend*. Translated by Peter Balakian and Nevart Yaghlian. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996.

### *Skylark Farm*

*Skylark Farm* (original title *La Masseria delle allodole* [The Place of Massacres], 2004) is an Armenian Genocide novel by Italian Armenian writer Antonia Arslan. The best-selling book is a result of an intergenerational transmission of trauma and memories. The author recounts the story of her family, which she heard from her grandfather Yerwant retelling the story of his family. Arslan begins the novel by introducing her grandfather, an important physician and surgeon living in Italy who, after 40 years, hopes to reunite with his Armenian family and brother Sempad, a successful pharmacist in a little city in Anatolia. But World War I ignites, and the ruling Young Turk dictatorship closes the border of the Ottoman Empire. Yerwant's dream swiftly vanishes. He will never be able to return to his country of origin. He will never see his Armenian family again, as they will be exterminated almost entirely by the Young Turk regime.

*Skylark Farm* belongs to a complex genre that mixes autobiography and biography, history and fiction, documentary and memory. In the first half of *Skylark Farm* the text often goes into italics and flashes ahead to when its characters are on deportation marches. When it mentions Azniv (one of the main characters of the novel) receiving a silk garment as a present, the text goes on to say "This silk will end up in the desert and serve as a blanket." Antonia Arslan's use of premonitions such as seeing an "archangel... surrounded by fire" and "smelled blood in the air, caught the scent of evil" adds mysticism to the experience of the book and foreshadows the horrible atrocities about to come.

The second part of the book describes the deportation of women to the Ottoman-controlled Syrian desert, with Arslan's heartbreaking choice of words: "Every so often, a piece of bread was thrown to the Armenians as if they were dogs, from on high. Every so often, a spring, a little water. They always had to drink after the horses of the *zaptiehs*, and on all fours like animals." However, reading about Sempad's wife Shushanig and their children's rescue by the Greek wailer Ismene and Turkish beggar Nazim brings some comfort to a disheartening situation.

Winner of many prestigious awards in Italy and worldwide, the novel has been translated into Dutch, English, Eastern Armenian, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Japanese, Romanian, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish (translated, but not published yet), and Western Armenian.

The novel was made into a film by the Italian directors Paolo and Vittorio Taviani with the title *The Lark Farm* and presented at the Berlin Film Festival in 2007. The film was a coproduction by Italy, Spain, Belgium, France, and Eurimages, with a cast that included Paz Vega, Moritz Bleibtreu, Alessandro Preziosi, and Arsinee Khanjian. The film was widely circulated in many European countries and screened across the world, often accompanying presentations of the novel. It is also shown in many Italian schools.



The book *Skylark Farm* is part of a trilogy. The second volume is entitled *La Strada di Smirne* [The Road to Smyrna] (2009) and has been translated into Armenian. The third volume is in progress.

Sona Haroutyunian

#### See also

Arslan, Antonia; Deportations; Feature Films; Literature

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## Smyrna, 1922 Destruction of

The great fire, murder, rape, and pillaging of the European, Greek, and Armenian sections of the city of Smyrna during September 9–30, 1922 destroyed it and transformed this highly western, cosmopolitan center of tolerance and international commerce into present-day Izmir. This deliberate act symbolized and was in many respects the culmination of a long process of Turkification initiated by the Ottoman government and its Kemalist successor state which sought to eliminate Turkey's large non-Muslim minorities and create what a contemporary slogan called a "Turkey for the Turks." Despite an abundance of eyewitness testimonies and the publication of recently declassified official documents, especially from the American and British archives, some historians still claim that the city's destruction was the unintended result of the warfare and ethnic conflict resulting from the aftermath of World War I and Greece's ill-conceived Anatolian expedition and occupation that was sanctioned by the Treaty of Sèvres. This perspective is still the official view of the Turkish government, which has systematically resisted international attempts by various governments to recognize what took place as genocide, whether the focus is placed on either Armenian, Greek, or Assyrian minorities that existed in Anatolia and European Turkey. In the aftermath of the Smyrna holocaust, the forced expulsion of over a million of the Christian survivors of massacres and deportations was given legal sanction by what was termed an "exchange of populations" between Greece and Turkey through the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which finalized the destruction and ethnic cleansing of the millions of Anatolian Christians. As a result, non-Muslim urban centers and rural communities that had survived for centuries were wiped out.

While it was happening, the destruction of the city and the murder of a large portion of its Christian population made worldwide headlines. For almost a month, half a million