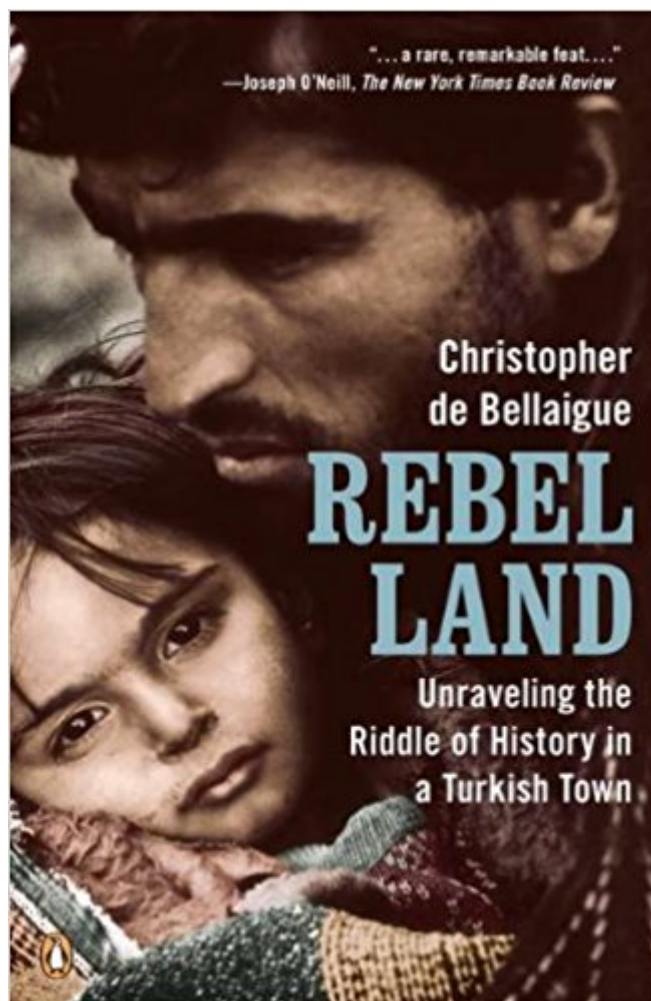


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# Rebel Land: Unraveling The Riddle Of History In A Turkish Town



## Synopsis

"A finely written, brave, and very personal book." -Orhan Pamuk In 2001, Christopher de Bellaigue wrote a story for The New York Review of Books, in which he briefly discussed the killing and deportation of half a million Armenians from Turkey in 1915. These massacres, he suggested, were best understood as part of the struggles that attended the end of the Ottoman Empire. Upon publication, the Review was besieged with letters asserting that this was not war but genocide. How had he gotten it so wrong? De Bellaigue set out for Turkey's troubled southeast to discover what really happened. What emerged is both an intellectual detective story and a reckoning with memory and identity. Rebel Land unravels the enigma of the Turkish twentieth century-a time that contains the death of an empire, the founding of a nation, and the near extinction of a people.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Turkey is still hoping to join the European Union, but the issue of Turkish treatment of minority Kurds, as well as the ongoing refusal of the government to acknowledge the mass slaughter of Armenians in 1915 are issues that refuse to disappear. De Bellaigue, a former foreign correspondent for the Economist and the New York Review of Books, found himself ensnared in controversy when he wrote a pro-Turkish article that seemed to diminish Armenian claims of "genocide." Startled by the negative reaction, de Bellaigue decided to reconsider his acceptance of the usual Turkish narrative of past and current controversies. He chose to leave behind cosmopolitan Istanbul and Ankara and repeatedly visit the town of Varto in southeastern Turkey, where the cultures of Turks, Armenians, and Kurds have intermingled and clashed for

centuries. The result is a revealing and stunning examination of Turkey's past and present that also poses interesting questions about ethnic and national identity. De Bellaigue utilizes oral stories of villagers, government propaganda, and various primary sources and makes a strenuous effort to sift truth from fiction. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Christopher de Bellaigue was born in London and spent the past decade in the Middle East and South Asia. He has worked as a foreign correspondent for a number of publications, including the Financial Times, The Economist, and The New York Review of Books. His previous book, *In the Rose Garden of the Martyrs*, was shortlisted for the 2004 Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

All you want to know about east Turkey, and much more. This was not an easy book for me because of the minute detail. But because I am in Turkey 6 months a year, and as a gesture to my many Turkish friends, I persisted in reading, and I'm glad I did because I now have a better understanding of the Armenian affair. I thought the author was biased toward the Armenians, and disliked Ataturk. But I can recommend it to any one interested in the events in eastern Turkey in the first part of the 20th century, and how those events effect current events here. PS I got the book on my Kindle because it easier reading for me than the book.

Rebel Land is a well written book that presents a personal view of an area and a people that everyone but the Turkish state seemingly has forgotten. The tragedies here are soaked in blood and nurtured in the soil that was once Armenian, now Kurdish, and always contested. The consistent factor, however, is that since the turn of the twentieth century whatever people have inhabited this rebel land have been rebels of necessity. No matter what the government, what the party or what era, the oppression that has visited the people of Eastern Turkey is thoroughgoing and barbaric. The only flaw in the book--and it's a small one--is that that author thinks he sees in the current government a lurch in the direction of hope. That should be allowed but simply cannot be.

Good read but could have been edited better, the second half of the book became a chore to read which is a shame as I make a point of searching out this author. The history and very complex relationships resonate to this day. Still a book people should read to better understand today's current events.

After reading a review of Rebel Land in the International Herald Tribune, I was intrigued enough to buy the book. The author it seemed had moved to Turkey as a young journalist and had rather literally gone native. He had written an historical essay, which triggered a venomous response from an Armenian professor. Subsequently and somewhat remorsefully he undertook this investigative book to learn the sordid details of the region in Eastern Turkey where the 'cleansings' took place and where today Kurds live under continuing pressure from the Turkish government. Given the subject and the desire of American and European parliaments to pass judgement on this history, the topic is obviously still relevant. The book is very well written; the author's perspective now clearly neutral and objective. Parts of the narrative are, despite the tragic subject matter, quite poetic. Let me just note a few examples: \* The Great Monastery of Surp Karapet, the sum of fifteen centuries of labour, accretions, modification and repair, has been reduced to its separate parts. Black stone smoothed by the centuries, ... \* The fractures running through this society mean that dramatically different versions of history are being recounted in neighbouring villages... Vartolus use the past to acquit their ancestors and string up their enemies. \* I got a new impression of the past as a chaotic series of emotions, of outrage and guilt, scornful of chronology and often founded on gossip or hagiography. \* ...the mass graves are planted with trees, a pleasant park grows over the bones. The author has recounted the history of this region from the late nineteenth century when the Ottoman Empire came unravelled until the present. As the empire tried to hold on against the historical trends and encroaching powers, they effectively 'cleansed' the area of Christian Armenians through genocide and forced resettlements. The Kurds moved into the vacuum and became the majority of the population. Today the Kurds themselves are under cultural pressure to accept an identity as Turkish nationals and to give up any dream of a Kurdish nation. The history is presented, but it is depicted in the author's on-site research through discussions with current residents and later generations of Armenian refugees. In many ways the book reads as a non-fiction novel. I have already commended the author for his objective neutrality. However, I wish to qualify that and to offer one brief critique. There is one very beautiful passage which introduces the chapter, "The Siege of Varto." That passage poignantly captures the tragedy of mass murder. But the passage also reveals the author's own belief system. He approaches a truly neutral perspective on the world, but then lapses into a romantic acceptance of ethnicity as though it were a substantive thing and not merely ephemeral. The modern world, just as the author relates, has followed a tragic path from a period of empires with broad regions of various subject peoples to today's 'myths' of national identity, where minorities are eliminated, suppressed or acculturated and absorbed. While Turkey is

in the news once again regarding the Armenian genocide, they are not the only nation to have employed such nation-building tactics. Americans `cleared' North America of its Indian tribes and Israel is presently suppressing Palestinians. No nation is free of guilt. And yet every group that chooses death for the sake of culture, language or religion has made a tragic choice. There is no reason to do so other than for the vain preservation of ancestral traditions. There must be a better path to the future. Unfortunately the tragedy of contemporary politics is that there is no political process available to pursue an alternative path. Essentially the UN recognizes present national boundaries, while respecting minority rights and the sovereignty of national governments at the same time. The contradictions are evident but not addressed. The UN is powerless and resolution of minority problems reduces very simply to a question of which power, be it the USA, Russia or China, believes it has a right to intervene to defend its interests. For someone of the author's diverse background and obvious sensitivities I would have hoped that he might delve just that bit deeper. David Hillstrom, Author

Interesting subject matter. The information/story was a little confusing at times, perhaps due to the complexity of the subject matter.

An interesting look into the current situation in Easter Turkey and the Kurdish areas.

I am astonished to see a reviewer calling the author objective. Rather he is passionate, as in blinded by passion, and this is easily seen by his biased adjectives. As he ironically says, "Rare is the travel book . . . that does not read like a mirror on its author." Furthermore, anyone looking for a book on the Armenian massacres should not expect this book to satisfy as only a relatively small part of the book discusses the Armenians. Most is on the relation between the ethnic Turks and the Kurds, both Sunni and Alevi, all at a very micro scale, perhaps with limited general significance. The author becomes so identified with the Kurds that at the end of the book he is clearly disappointed when many of them do not vote the straight ethnic line. In fact, as he sorrowfully explains, the diaspora of Kurds throughout Turkey has meant that they no longer have a single ethnically-driven viewpoint. Surely that is to be a matter of joy, given how troublesome ethnic identity has been in Europe in the last century or so. Certainly this is preferable to the author's radical chic nostalgia for the glory days of the PKK.

I was initially intrigued when I started reading this book, and liked how the author delved in to the

history of a region that I was not that familiar with. However, I thought the premise of the book was that the author was investigating the history/cover up of the Armenian genocide in a little known region of Turkey. Midway through the book though the focus seems to switch more to the question of Kurdish/Turkish ethnic identity in the eastern region of Turkey and the various political/ethnic conflicts associated with that. It was informative, since I wasn't previously aware of the state of Kurdish suppression in Turkey, or about the Alevi/Sunni conflict. I wish however that the author had spent more time focusing on the history of Armenians in eastern Turkey and the aftermath of the Armenian genocide as he started to in the beginning of the book.

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