



## Paradise Lost: Smyrna, 1922

By Giles Milton

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On Saturday, September 9, 1922, the victorious Turkish cavalry rode into Smyrna, the richest and most cosmopolitan city in the Ottoman Empire. The city's vast wealth created centuries earlier by powerful Levantine dynasties, its factories teemed with Greeks, Armenians, Turks, and Jews. Together, they had created a majority Christian city that was unique in the Islamic world. But to the Turkish nationalists, Smyrna was a city of infidels.

In the aftermath of the First World War and with the support of the Great Powers, Greece had invaded Turkey with the aim of restoring a Christian empire in Asia. But by the summer of 1922, the Greeks had been vanquished by Atatürk's armies after three years of warfare. As Greek troops retreated, the non-Muslim civilians of Smyrna assumed that American and European warships would intervene if and when the Turkish cavalry decided to enter the city. But this was not to be.

On September 13, 1922, Turkish troops descended on Smyrna. They rampaged first through the Armenian quarter, and then throughout the rest of the city. They looted homes, raped women, and murdered untold thousands. Turkish soldiers were seen dousing buildings with petroleum. Soon, all but the Turkish quarter of the city was in flames and hundreds of thousands of refugees crowded the waterfront, desperate to escape. The city burned for four days; by the time the embers cooled, more than 100,000 people had been killed and millions left homeless.

Based on eyewitness accounts and the memories of survivors, many interviewed for the first time, *Paradise Lost* offers a vivid narrative account of one of the most vicious military catastrophes of the modern age.

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Smyrna was a prosperous, cosmopolitan port on Turkey's Aegean coast where Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Jews and other nationalities lived in harmony. In his searingly vivid account of Smyrna's destruction by the Turks in 1922, acclaimed popular historian Milton (*Nathaniel's Nutmeg*) begins with a fairy tale–like description of the city focused lopsidedly on the wealthy European dynasties known as Levantines. But Milton renders an astute account of the clash of Greek and Turkish nationalisms and the unhelpful meddling of Western powers, particularly Britain, which supported a Greek incursion into Turkey. When the defending Turkish troops under Mustafa Kemal (aka Atatürk) took Smyrna in September 1922, a horrific killing spree of Greeks and Armenians began, and hundreds of thousands of refugees were trapped on the quayside between the sea and a city willfully torched by the Turks as a score of foreign vessels looked on. Milton draws on eyewitness accounts to render these events in all their horror, and ends with an almost incredible rescue led by an unlikely hero. Milton powerfully renders this tragic tale of an army that came to liberate Smyrna and instead massacred its citizens and burned their prize to the ground in a vengeful frenzy. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [The New Yorker](#)

In September, 1922, after the Turkish forces of Mustafa Kemal defeated a Greek army that had recklessly occupied the Anatolian city of Smyrna, members of Smyrna's Greek, Armenian, and expatriate communities were killed, raped, and robbed. Soon, a half million people were trapped on the port's narrow wharves, the city in flames behind them; "The streets were stacked with dead," a British officer wrote. Milton weaves the Armenian genocide, the birth of modern Turkey, and the tragic inanities of Versailles into his story, but his focus is the destruction of the multi-ethnic, religiously diverse cosmopolis of Smyrna (now the Turkish city of Izmir). He has a tendency to idolize the Levantines, dynasties of European "merchant princes" who remained oblivious as Greeks and Turks committed atrocities closer and closer to their enclave. Milton's more compelling hero is Asa Jennings, a five-foot-tall Y.M.C.A. administrator who, by bluffing, begging, and desperately improvising, single-handedly saved tens of thousands of lives.

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From [Booklist](#)

One of several wars to rumble on after World War I formally ended, the Turkish-Greek War of 1920–22 was, as far as the inhabitants of Smyrna (modern Izmir) were concerned, a catastrophe. Historian Milton here dramatizes the course of events as the victorious Turkish forces of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) swept into the Aegean port city, and builds his narrative on an impressive foundation of original research into letters, diaries, and memoirs of witnesses. Wistfulness tangibly wafts through Milton's account: ethnically, linguistically, and religiously polyglot, wealthy Smyrna and its tolerant commercial atmosphere became incongruous with the nationalist passions unleashed by WWI. How much Smyrna's citizens recognized the threat posed to their lives and fortunes by the Greco-Turkish clash lends the story its tragic element, as many initially remained until fires, pillage, and murder drove out Smyrna's non-Turkish population en masse. (Turks in Greece were later expelled, too.) One of the twentieth-century's curtain-raising examples of ethnic cleansing, Smyrna's destruction is rendered with a sympathetic sense of loss in Milton's well-wrought profile of a world departed. --Gilbert Taylor

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