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Anna Phostropolou.

BANISHED FAITH: THE EXILE OF CHRISTIAN PONTUS

by George Andreadis

The Greek Christian Emigration to Russian Kars

Part II of *The Crypto-Christians of Pontus* concludes the remarkable narrative of over 300 years of secret Christianity under the Ottomans, and the 20th-century revelation, persecution, and exile of the Greek Orthodox of the Black Sea coast.

Under the 1856 Ottoman *Hatti Humayun* decree, citizens of the Ottoman Empire were granted freedom of belief and the right to change their religion, allowing tens of thousands of crypto-Christians, whose families had appeared outwardly Muslim for centuries, to openly profess their faith. Churches, schools, and charitable foundations sprang up to minister to the growing population of newly-revealed Christians, but the flowering was not to last. World War I, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and Turkish nationalism would culminate in the 1923 Exchange of Populations that displaced the 3,000-year-old Greek culture of Asia Minor.

When the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 was concluded by the Treaty of San Stefano and the Armenian region of Kars transferred from Ottoman to Russian control, Tsar Alexander II created Karskaya Oblast, a secure area for the Ottoman Empire's beleaguered Christians. The region's high elevation was good for animal breeding, and gold and silver had already been found. Insisting on a balanced population of Muslims and non-Muslims,

Photos in *Banished Faith* and *Return to Kromni*, courtesy of George Andreadis.

the tsar invited Armenians and Greeks to emigrate to the newly-held territory, replacing thousands of Muslims who were returning to Turkey. A number of Russians also settled in Kars: army troops, public administrators, school teachers, and merchants. Many Greeks, particularly former crypto-Christians, accepted the tsar's invitation.

Under the Russian administration, churches and schools were built, and pan-Slavism became so prevalent that, within a generation, young Greeks were speaking Russian in lieu of Greek from attending Russian schools. There were 79 Greek villages in the Kars region, and the capital city was crowned by the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Transfiguration (*Metamorphosi*), to which Tsar Nicholas II donated a bell weighing 3,200 kilos (over 7,000 lbs.) with a rich tone that could be heard for many miles.

The Kars refuge lasted until the Russian troop withdrawal of 1918, and in 1921, eager to regain their lost territories, Turkey quickly came to terms with the young revolutionary Russian government. Lenin returned the region to Turkey as part of the settlement of the Treaty of Kars, saying, "The Greeks are servants of imperialism in Asia Minor, and Mustafa Kemal [Ataturk] is our future friend and collaborator."

For the most part, those Black Sea Christians who chose to remain in Pontus co-existed peacefully with their Muslim neighbors. Living side by side in small villages, political or religious friction that would upset the balance of village life was discouraged. A single tractor or cultivator often served the entire village, both Greek and Muslim fields; where neighbors were dependant on one another, it was difficult to create lasting enmity. Later religious tensions and mistreatment of Christians were rarely initiated locally, but by regional or national governors, militant Turkish nationalists, or roving bands of thugs, while local Muslims often attempted to curtail the intimidation and violence.

Metropolitan Gervasios Soumelides

One well-known Kromnian of this period after the revelation of the crypto-Christians was Gervasios Soumelides, born in 1820 to a family of professed Christians in Varenou, the village where my ancestor, Mullah Molasleyman, simultaneously served as both the local mullah and the crypto-Christian priest. Until 1836, Gervasios worked as a stone-carver in the mines of Ala Dag in Cilicia, but after permanently injuring his leg, he returned to Pontus and

became a monk at the monastery of Panagia Soumela. He later attended the Theological School in Halki, served in Constantinople, and in 1864 became Metropolitan of Chaldia, eight years after the *Hatti Humayun* allowed the crypto-Christians to reveal their Christianity.

As metropolitan, he helped fill the Kromni area with churches and schools, and out of his own salary paid for more than forty-five young men to study in French and German universities. They became doctors, lawyers, and engineers. He also took up the cause of women's education, complaining to the local assembly, "We increase the number of scholars and scientists, but there is no education for the girls. They must study also." The men objected, "But who will marry my daughter if she is educated?" In response, the metropolitan instituted a school for orphan girls, to which no one could object, and from there, women's education spread. My maternal grandmother, Parthena Orologia, and her brother Gervasios were small children when their parents died, and both lived at the orphanage. My grandmother became a teacher and was later director of the Girl's School of Argyroupolis (now Gümüshane), and her brother became bishop of Caesarea. He was afterwards transferred to Korca in Albania, and finally to Ioannina in northern Greece where, in 1914, during his episcopacy, the Greek army marched in and Ioannina was freed from four centuries of Ottoman rule. Thanks to Metropolitan Gervasios, all of the men of my mother's family received a good education.



Metropolitan of Chaldia, Gervasios Soumelides, of Kromnian descent.

Uncle Epaminondas and Faruk of Argyroupolis

There is an amusing story from this time, told years later by my mother's brother, Epaminondas Sotiriadis, who, as a youth in 1903-4, was summoned from Gümüshane to Ioannina to study near his uncle, this same bishop of Ioannina. He made the journey from Trebizond to Constantinople, and from Constantinople by Italian freighter to the port of Agioi Saranda (now Albania). The last leg of his journey was by Austrian post carriage traveling from Agioi Saranda to Ioannina with the mail. High in the mountains they stopped at a village inn. Shocked, he wrote home, "Imagine the poverty! Here I have seen my own Greek people cooking eggs with olive oil!" This was

because the good grazing lands near the Black Sea supported many cows, and everyone ate butter.

Later, my uncle studied law at the University of Istanbul, where he shared a room with a Muslim medical student named Faruk. This did not present a problem because Faruk was from Argyroupolis, near Kromni, and their relations, like that of their families, was that of brothers.

When the Russian army occupied Trebizond and Argyroupolis in 1916, the Turks panicked at rumors that there were many Armenians serving in the Russian army who thirsted for revenge after the Armenian massacres of



Epaminondas Sotiriadis.

the previous year. The wealthy Turks, and even poorer Turkish men, left in a panic, closing and sealing their homes and giving the keys to their Greek friends and neighbors. Faruk's family was well-off, and they also sealed their home and gave the keys to my grandfather, Sotiris Sotiriadis. The evil period passed, but many of the Turks were not able to return for several years, and towards the end of 1922, when the Greeks were finally told to leave Argyroupolis at the Exchange of Populations, my relatives opened Faruk's home,

put all of his carpets, valuables, and everything else they could carry (except his library) into carts and took them with them, leaving a note that they would be in Batum, Georgia.

In 1923, the Turks occupied Batum for a short period, and Faruk was sent there as a military doctor with the Turkish army. Faruk and my family met again with great pleasure. He told them that thieves had broken into his family home in Argyroupolis and had stolen everything that was left, even his medical diploma. His family valuables and furniture, though, had been kept safe for him in Batum and in 1938, Faruk wrote to tell us that by a strange coincidence he had found his medical diploma for sale in an antique shop in Istanbul! Sadly, before the Second World War, we lost all trace of each other.

World War I:

Persecution of Armenian and Black Sea Greek Christians

In 1914, when Turkey entered World War I on the side of Germany, the government ordered a general mobilization of all able-bodied Turkish men



Charalampos and Irene Mouzidou.



Domna Koykalidou.

from age 15 to 50. The rule of Ottoman centuries held that Christians could not bear arms, and they were relegated instead to unarmed “labor battalions,” that broke stones and built roads under such dismal conditions that few returned alive.¹ Many emigrated to Russia and Georgia to avoid conscription. Those who deserted the forced-labor gangs were unable to return home without endangering their families and villages, and so often joined partisan bands hiding in the mountains. As the war dragged on, the sultan’s power weakened daily, with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Young Turks, and various nationalist groups waiting in the wings to topple the Ottoman dynasty. Bands of Turkish bandits and extortioners arose, and using the mobilization law as a weapon, they threatened Christian villages, whose men had not yet served in the army, with exposure and imprisonment unless they paid heavy bribes.

One such thug was Topal Osman², a Turk from Gerasus, who organized the *tseteler*, gangs of armed bandits who plundered and burnt Christian homes and villages along the Black Sea coast for over a decade. After an initial appointment to the National Assembly when the Young Turks came to power, Osman was hung for participating in a failed conspiracy against Atatürk, but in the years preceding his death, he and his men were the scourge of Pontus’ Christians. In the village of Khabak, the *tseteler* took money from the Greeks “to keep their sons out of prison,” and then massacred the entire Christian population. In Havza, they put the villagers inside the village church and burnt them alive. Only on the eastern end of the Turkish Black Sea coast were the Christians protected, as we shall see later, through the policies of Bishop Chrysanthos of Trebizond.

Massacres and forced marches of Armenian, Syriac and Orthodox Christians in and near Turkey had been initiated in the previous century, but for the Pontians, persecution of the Armenians was felt only in 1915, when local Armenians were targeted. The Pontian Greeks’ own Golgotha began in February of 1916, when allied imperial Russian troops occupied the eastern Black Sea coast during World War I, and the Ottoman government, fearing collaboration with the tsarist forces, wreaked retribution on Turkey’s native Greeks. Until the final displacement of the Greeks in 1923, however, even the harshest government policy could not eradicate the ties

¹ For centuries previously, Christians under the Ottomans were not allowed to do military duty, but were instead assessed heavy additional taxes to equip the empire’s all-Muslim army.

² Topal Osman: Feridun Zade Osman Aga, nicknamed “Topal,” meaning, “the cripple.”

that many Pontic Christian and Muslim villagers had maintained for centuries. Neighbors remained neighbors until the end.

Parthena Eleftheriadou

At 80 years of age, native Kromnian Parthena (Telidis) Eleftheriadou, the daughter of George and Maria Telidis, spoke freely of her childhood memories of Turkish neighbors in Trebizond when she returned to Kromni from Greece on a group pilgrimage in 1988. Recalling the spirited Trebizond celebration of Theophany, she said, “In our neighborhood of Exotiha, we had no differences with the Turkish children. Of course, they were not supposed to participate at the Cross festival, but all year long we played together because we were from the same neighborhood. We also played at throwing stones – mainly the boys, but I was also a bit like a boy and I also threw stones. But we were all together, Greeks and Turks from the same neighborhood, and our stones were thrown at other children, Greeks and Turks of another neighborhood.”

Parthena also recalled her mother’s arrest after helping an Armenian during the period of Armenian persecution by the Turks:

In May of 1915, most of the women and children went to Russian, our village in Kromni, for the summer. The men stayed in Trebizond to work and could only join us in August. After our arrival, the Turks accused the Armenian Christians of preparing for revolution and began rounding them up, closing the roads and forbidding all transport, to make their capture easier. But this also meant that we could not get food or supplies, and as the weeks went by, the women began to worry. We rationed food, until finally we were living only on bread. My mother was sitting in our garden one day, thinking how to obtain more flour, when a beggar approached with very dirty clothes, saying, *Bir az ekmek istiyoru*. “Just give me a small piece of bread.” He was an Armenian hiding in the mountains of Kromni, whom hunger and the smell of fresh bread had driven to our door. Mother thought that he certainly would not be alone, and gave him three of our five newly baked loaves.

Someone in the village saw her, however, and reported her to the police. This was a serious offense, as a proclamation had been posted and read aloud that anyone assisting or giving food to an Armenian would be punished by death.

My mother was taken to the court in Adassa, where the judge demanded to know why she had helped the Armenian. Her death seemed certain. But my mother was clever: “Your Honor, I did not know that the beggar was an Armenian. Even if it was written on his forehead that he was an Armenian, I wouldn’t know, because I can’t read or write.” After a lecture against helping bad people, the judge set her free.

Others were not so fortunate. One prominent Greek of Trebizond, Achilles Lazaridis, hid an Armenian friend, Agop, in his cellar and told him not to leave. Agop, however, believed the lies the Turks spread that any Armenian turning himself in would be sent back to Greater Armenia, and when he did so, he was not only captured and executed, but Achilles as well. When Sofia Lazaridou opened her door the next morning, she found her husband’s head and dismembered body in a sack on her doorstep.

Parthena Eleftheriadou continues:

For us in Kromni, the weeks went by, but the roads remained closed. In Russian, we gathered all the flour from every house and made bread for the whole village. The situation was serious because autumn was approaching and soon there would be snow in the mountains.

Near Russian was a village called Molali, which was all Muslim, but we did not feel them to be strangers, nor did they feel us so. We were compatriots and the Pontian dialect was also their mother tongue. One day the elder women of Molali came to discuss with our elder women what was to be done. The Molali women proposed that the women and children of both villages go down to Trebizond together by back roads. At that time there were many thieves and resistance fighters in those mountains, as the political disturbances enabled them to prosper, but the women of Molali thought that if both villages went together, if we were set upon by Christian robbers, we could protect the Muslim neighbors, and if there were Muslim robbers, the women of Molali could protect us. The proposal was logical and it was agreed upon.

The two villages collected what supplies they still had and set out on the 130 kilometer trek. The first night we slept out under the open skies. The next day most of our way was green and heavily forested, but the last part was somewhat open and barren. We hurried to reach the next forested area, but suddenly someone jumped out at us with a gun, shouting loudly in Turkish, “Dur!” that is, “Stop”. My mother was

the one who had the courage to face him, and, as I was used to holding onto her dress and following in her steps, I went along as well.

As we approached the gunman, my mother recognized him, a Christian. It was one of the commanders of the Greek resistance in Santa.³ “Eukleidis, isn’t it?” she asked. “Silence!” said Captain Eukleidis. “Go back and tell them that we are Turks and that you are to give us half of your supplies, so that we can survive as well.” Mother returned and said that he was a Turk and wanted half of the supplies. These were simple, honest women, and to save their lives, they agreed and gave half of the food. The robbers collected it, and then left us free to go on our way to Trebizond, but the women of Molali were unsatisfied. The eldest of them finally turned to my mother and said, “Telava, those were not Turks. Those were *Rums* (Christians). If they were Turks, they wouldn’t have asked for half, but would have taken everything.”

Metropolitan Chrysanthos and Russian-Occupied Trebizond

When the Russian army occupied Trebizond in 1916 as part of the Allied forces of World War I, there was a strong desire in the Greek community to



Russian officers with Metropolitan Chrysanthos of Trebizond.

rebuild the city as a Greek Christian stronghold and, in particular, to reclaim the historic Church of St. Eugenios,⁴ dedicated to the city’s patron saint, which had been used as the Yeni Cuma mosque for centuries. Metropolitan Chrysanthos Philippides, the leader of Trebizond’s Christians, held back the eager young Greeks who wanted to force change by confiscating Turkish proper-

³ The seven villages making up the famous district of Santa refused to surrender, even when surrounded by armed Turkish troops. When it was clear that a special detachment had been sent to move them, 800 women and children escaped to the mountains. Those remaining in the villages were marched on foot to the desert near the Syrian border where most died of thirst. The women and children and the partisans guarding them resisted until the Exchange of Populations, and left their mountain stronghold for Greece only once they were given international guarantees of safety.

⁴ St. Eugenios of Trebizond: A martyr under Diocletian, his relics were uncovered by Alexius Comnenus (1204-1222), Emperor of Trebizond and grandson of Byzantine Emperor Andronicus I and great-great grandson of King David the Builder of Georgia. Alexius declared St. Eugenios the patron of both Trebizond and the Comnenan dynasty. The skull was enshrined with jewels and his other relics were entombed under marble in the front of the church. Both disappeared in the following centuries.



Eleni Vafeadou with her granddaughter, Sophia.



Greek Christian of Trebizond. Late 19th century.

ty. Perhaps recalling the Russian withdrawal of 1828 and knowing that the region might again revert to Turkish rule, the hierarch insisted, “No, wait until the end of the war.”

Understandably, the poor Muslim Turks left behind in Trebizond were afraid. Even if they were good people – and many were – the Russian occupiers were accompanied by an influx of Armenians just months after the 1915 Armenian genocide. What Armenian, thirsting for revenge, would believe the Turk who said, “I am a good man?” So the rich Turks took their families and moved west, while among the poor, only the men left Trebizond. Ten thousand lower-class Turkish women and children were left behind.

In 1916, there were only three Greek schools of higher learning in Turkey, “The School of the Nation” in Istanbul, “The *Evangelismos* (Annunciation) School” in Smyrna (Izmir) and in Trebizond, the so-called “*Frontestirio*.” The first public grammar school in Turkey was established during the Russian occupation by Metropolitan Chrysanthos for these poor Turkish children who had been left behind in Trebizond.

He also set up a public kitchen to feed the Moslem families and to provide them with clothes and bedding. In his memoirs, he wrote, “I learned then how difficult it was to organize the Turks...” The Greeks had a strong community life, and if, for instance, the Turkish tax collector came, one person spoke for everyone: “This person is a widow, we will pay her share,” and other Christians made up her amount.” Now Metropolitan Chrysanthos told the Turks, “Don’t come one by one. Have someone represent you who will say, ‘We need so many blankets, we have so many orphans...’ Come like this.” So the poor Turks of Trebizond were provided for throughout the city’s Russian occupation by the Greek Orthodox hierarch, a charity much appreciated by the Turks when they regained the rule of the city.

A strange incident occurred in 1917 during the Russian occupation of Trebizond when, long after the crypto-Christians had been revealed, Metropolitan Chrysanthos was invited to visit the Ofis River region, one of the two Greek-speaking Muslim areas which had given up their crypto-Christianity and were now “more Muslim than the Muslims.” Lacking their own crypto-Christian priests and bordered by both the fierce Laz Muslims and the Ottomans, they had succumbed to Islam a century before and were known to be so fervent that they had founded a *medrese* to educate Muslim clergy. On this visit, however, the metropolitan was welcomed by the mayor and 300 elders of the area, who asked him to arrange for their return to the

Christian faith. The metropolitan advised them to wait, so that he wouldn't be accused of proselytism if Trebizond was retaken by the Turks. With the fortunes of war, their conversion never came about, and whether the request was sincere or not, we will never know.⁵

The Russian occupation ended in 1918 and, after the Russian Revolution, Lenin returned Karskaya Oblast to Turkey. Topal Osman rode into Trebizond soon after the Russian withdrawal with a hundred *zipcali* (armed fighters), intending to destroy the Christians. He made the coffee house of Tefik his headquarters, saying, "I have an 'invoice' to finish this place off in three days." The city's high-ranking Turks formed a committee and went to Osman saying, "If the Christians here need to be killed, we can do it ourselves, we don't need you. Bishop Chrysanthos rescued our people; if you love your own life, go away." He gathered his troops and left.

Metropolitan Chrysanthos later became Archbishop of Athens and All Greece (1938-1941), only to be deposed during World War II for his refusal to acknowledge the German occupation of Greece, publicly declaring, "This government does not represent the Greek people." Nor did he try to recover his position after the war, telling his supporters that the Church should remain at peace to fulfill her destiny.

The Turkish Woman

Parthena Eleftheriadou, who was quoted above, also spoke of the Turkish evacuation of Trebizond during the Russian occupation: "One afternoon I found a Turkish woman sitting on the front steps of our house. I was touched by her sorrow and went in and told my mother, "A Turkish woman is outside crying, but she doesn't look like a beggar." My mother brought her into our house and tried to calm her, telling her that her husband would return. She stayed with us for 19 months. The only way into Trebizond was past our house, and when the Turks finally returned, this woman sat at the window every day for weeks, watching them pass. Finally her husband came as well.

I wouldn't have spoken about this because when you do something good you should always throw it into the sea, but there is another part to this story. When our time came to leave in 1923, our men were not back yet from

5 Ed. note: According to one contemporary Russian source, as late as 1917, when Trebizond was occupied by Russian troops, Russian military committees went from house to house commandeering living space. On several occasions, they were begged for clemency by prominent Muslim Turks, who, declaring themselves Christian, showed hidden family icons or, more rarely, entire concealed chapels.

their places of exile. We had no one to help us and who knows what would have become of us, except that the husband of this Turkish lady himself brought all of our goods to the ship to Greece."

The White Death Marches

In November of 1919, after recovering the Turkish Black Sea coast, the Turks initiated a secret plan called *White Death*: forced death marches of the Christian population from Tripolis to Samsun, Sinope and Bafra over snow-covered mountains. According to a German military attaché, Ismail Enver, the Turkish Ottoman Minister, had declared in 1915 that he would "solve the Greek problem during the war... in the same way he believed he solved the Armenian problem."⁶ Persecutions, massacres, and forced starvation marches in Christian areas continued sporadically throughout Turkey until the Exchange of Populations in 1923, particularly escalating after the Allied-backed Greek occupation of Smyrna. The tragic deaths of hundreds of thousands of Pontian Christians was chronicled by contemporary foreign ambassadors to Turkey and many outside witnesses.

One example of this was the village of Espye near the Black Sea coast. Turkish authorities arrived on Sunday, November 16, 1919 and called the village's 483 Christians to the Church of St. George. "Because we are at war with Christian Russia, for your own safety, the government has decided that you will leave the coast and move fifty kilometers inland. Don't take many things. The fighting will be over soon and you will return. The government guarantees the safety of your homes and belongings. Because you are Turkish citizens, food and shelter will be provided for you along the way and at your destination." The fifty kilometers, however, turned to five hundred, and there was little food and no shelter except what the exiles found along the road.

Espye's Muslims were horrified by the uprooting of their neighbors and friends, families with whom they had lived and worked for generations. An hour after the Greeks left Espye, the *tseteler* arrived on horseback, broke down the doors of the Greek homes, took what they wanted, and burnt the houses to the ground. When Ibrahim, a Muslim village elder and life-long friend of Espye's Greek Orthodox priest, Papa Ioannis Kotrides, saw them looting the priest's house, he left his yard and approached the vandals, say-

6 Quoted by Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West*, NY, Penguin Press, 2006, p. 180.

ing, “*Allahtan bul!*” (God will repay!) Shot through the forehead, he died instantly.

Espye’s Christians were driven across the snow-laden Pontic Alps, towering peaks that are barely passable at the height of summer. The survivors straggled into old Sebastia (now Sivas) in February, three months later. Out of 483 people, only 38 remained alive, mostly children ten to fifteen years old, who lived as beggars until they were taken in by Moslem families or eventually rescued by fellow Christians. Some were only able to acknowledge their Christian identities sixty or seventy years later.⁷

Many were not even given the possibility of a death march. In Amaseia, all of those found within the Turkish territory were hung, including two 16-year-old high school students, who were accused of wearing blue and white gym clothes, which happened to be the colors of the Greek flag; this had never been a crime.

Hambil Bey

Although many Turkish villagers stood by unwillingly, fearful of their own lives if they protested the persecution of Christians by the nationalist *tseteler*, others were all too aware that they stood to inherit the property of abandoned Christian villages. But even in this terrible time, there were heroes on both sides, ready to sacrifice their lives for their friends. At the height of the ethnic cleansing, the *tseteler* planned to destroy a Christian village near Samsun, and the preparations were discussed secretly in a nearby Turkish village. However, one Turkish man, Hambil Bey, could not sleep that night. He had too many Christian friends in the village, and although a devout Muslim, the idea of “Turkey for the Turks” by murder was appalling. Arising from bed at midnight, with a loud “No,” he dressed himself and crept down to the Christian village where he informed his neighbors of the deadly plans. They escaped that very night to a mountain stronghold of Greek partisans. Knowing that his life was forfeited by his warning, Hambil Bey accompanied the Greek villagers into the mountains, and during the Exchange of Populations he emigrated as well, settling in the Macedonian village of Dysbaton with his Christian friends. When he died in 1926, the villagers brought a Muslim hodja from Xanthi for his funeral, and erected a fine marble memorial stone over his grave, that is faithfully tended until now.

⁷ For a fuller account of this period see: Andreadis, George, *Tamama, The Missing Girl of Pontos*, 1993, Gordios, Athens.

The Last Days of Greek Pontus

Approximately 353,000 Pontic Orthodox Christians, over half of the Christian population, were lost in the genocides and forced marches after 1916.⁸ This figure is based on two very different sources. One was the extremely accurate Greek Orthodox diocesan reports of Asia Minor, that kept a census of the number of Christians in each village, as well as of the schools and school-children. Before 1916, the Christian population of Pontus was 700,000. At that time, the newly established National Turkish Assembly was required to accept proportional representation from every ethnic group. They had no reason to believe the Church’s figures, but they also determined the number of Christian representatives from the Black Sea region on the basis of 700,000 people. The two sides agreed. We can calculate the losses because we know how many Greeks were transferred to Greece at the Exchange of Populations in 1923, as well as the number of Greeks who stayed in Constantinople under the Lausanne Treaty.

After the First World War’s Allied defeat of the Ottoman Empire (which had aligned itself with Germany) the new Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was granted official recognition. The victorious European allies convened a peace conference in Paris, according to which, several independent regions of Asia Minor were to operate as a federation, with no one party ruling the government or the army. One of these regions was to be the “Independent Republic of the Black Sea.” Anticipating the treaty’s implementation, the Greek Pontian *diaspora* in south Russia and Georgia created a parliament in Batum so that, when the Allies gave the signal, they could return to form a state in which Muslims and Christians would co-exist by European standards. My father was a member of this parliament.

The Black Sea Republic was stillborn. The victorious Allies rewarded Greece for her role in World War I by inviting Prime Minister Venizelos to occupy the ancient Greek harbor city of Smyrna (now Izmir), with its rich coastland, predictably drawing fire from Turkish forces in the outlying areas and inflicting violence on Greek towns and villages on the Ionian coast. The Greeks retaliated by marching on Constantinople. The Allies, who were willing to use the Greeks as place-holders, but who did not want a Greek Orthodox Constantinople, withdrew their pledged support, and Europe’s

⁸ This figure does not include the more than 1.5 million Armenians, Syriac Christians, and Orthodox Christians of other parts of the Ottoman Empire and neighboring Syria, who died through violence and forced marches between 1883 and 1923.

policy on Turkey made an abrupt about-face as they became aware of Lenin's advances to the new republic; Turkey was now to be handled with velvet gloves to forestall closer Turkish-Russian relations. The Greek front collapsed after forty months of war, the army retreating in the face of the oncoming Turks.

September 1922 signaled the end of the war and the complete extinction of the largely Greek/Armenian presence in the coastal city of Smyrna. On September 9, the Turkish army entered the city, massacring thousands, and burnt the Greek and Armenian neighborhoods to the ground. Caught between a wall of fire and the sea, the city's 100,000 Greek Christians (whose numbers had swelled to almost 350,000 with the addition of refugees who had fled their villages in Turkey's interior) were massacred, drowned, or burnt to death. Bishop Chrysostomos of Smyrna, who had refused to leave his flock, died a particularly horrible death at the hands of a mob incited by the Turkish commander, Nureddin Pasha. British, French, and American ships lying in the Smyrna harbor were ordered to remain "neutral," and there are many eyewitness accounts of Allied sailors and officers pushing frantic refugees, who had managed to swim to the ships, back into the sea to drown.⁹

With the resulting Lausanne Treaty of 1923, a population exchange, unprecedented in world history, was agreed upon, whereby the entire 400,000 Moslem population of Greece was expatriated to Turkey, and over 1.5 million Greek Orthodox, many of whom spoke only Turkish¹⁰ and whose forebearers had lived in Asia Minor since before the time of Christ, were moved *en masse* to Greece, swelling the Greek population by twenty percent. Although the Patriarch and the local Orthodox community of 100,000 was allowed to stay in Constantinople and on two small islands at the mouth of the Dardanelles, the Exchange of Populations ended the 3,000-year-old Greek culture of Asia Minor.

But for the Greek Orthodox, this tragedy is not the end, nor do we see ourselves only as victims. In 1941, on the eve of the German invasion of Greece and his own dethronement for refusing to collaborate with the Nazis, Archbishop Chrysanthos (Phillipides) of Athens and All Greece, wrote, "We Greeks, in particular, have the sacred obligation to humbly offer to a spiritu-

ally hungry and thirsty Europe, the living water that wells up to eternal life. As St. Gregory asks of us: '*Let us obey Him who commands us; let us become Christ's beasts of burden, placing upon ourselves the yoke of love.*' " †

⁹ See Dobkin, Marjorie, *Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City*, Newmark Press, NY, 1971

¹⁰ In a number of Greek villages, where Turkish-speaking Cappadocian and western Black Sea refugees settled, one can still hear Turkish spoken today.