

A Brief History of

It would be foolhardy for anyone to think he/she could write even a brief history of the Greeks in Asia Minor that would cover only a few pages. Therefore only the highlights of such an endeavor will be mentioned.

What is known to us has been gathered by two groups of scholars: (1) archeologists and (2) linguists. Their investigations have revealed much within the past one-hundred years. However, guided by caution we can say that what we know is only the tip of the iceberg.

Basically there are three groups mentioned by historians when constructing the history or Pre-History of the Greeks. They are the Minoans, Mycenaean, and the Indo-Europeans. The linguists have yet to make a positive link between the hieroglyphics of the Minoans and the Mycenaean. The best we can say is that perhaps they were Pre-Greeks, the Minoan linear A language being non-Greek, according to script deciphered by Michael Ventris in 1952 and the Mycenaean being dubbed as Linear B which appears to be Greek. Historians place the Minoans in the Bronze age circa 2500-1100 B. C.

The Indo-Europeans settled in the Greek peninsula circa 1500 B.C. As languages were being classified into families at the beginning of the 19th century the Indo-European family was named from where they originated and that being India and Europe. These languages spread from the steppes of southern Russia westward to Europe and also assumed that the Greek speakers moved from Europe into the Hellenic peninsula to the Greek islands and the coasts of Turkey. The Greek speakers belong to the Western segment of the Indo-European Language groups. Which also is historically one of the most important of the I-E dialects.

There were several Greek tribes who invaded the Greek peninsula. First were the Achaeans followed by the Dorians and the Ionians. The Ionians were driven out of the Greek Peninsula by the Dorians and went island-hopping across the Aegean Sea to settle on the coast of Asia

Minor where they founded Miletus. Eventually the Milesians colonized through the Sea of Marmara and the northern coast of the Black Sea. Practically every tributary into the Black Sea, the Volga, the Dnieper, the Danube and others has revealed archeological evidence of Greek colonies being founded there. Recently at Obia in the Ukraine Greek vases have been uncovered. Trapezus was founded in 756 B.C.

The site of Constantinople, that glorious city of the Byzantine Empire was founded by Byzes from Megara, Greece in 650 B.C. The exploits and conquests of Alexander the Great are well documented and need not be repeated here. However, it is necessary to note that he defeated the Persians and conquered most of the known lands from Greece, Asia Minor, on to the Indus River in India. He lived a scant 33 years dying in Babylon in 323 B.C. Although he and Xenophon were not Asia Minor Greeks their exploits had a considerable effect on those Greeks who were in Asia Minor prior to Alexander's conquests and Xenophon's march of the 10,000.

The Asia Minor Greeks experienced insufferably at the hands of the Persians, the Romans, the Barbarians, the Crusaders, the Franks, the Venetians and the Seljuk Turks, who eventually became known as the Ottomans. The Romans were at their height of power when two incidents which need mentioning happened in Asia Minor. First Attalos III, a Greek ruler died in 133 B.C. and he gave over much of his kingdom to Rome. His Greek subjects revolted but failed in their attempts at the overthrow of Roman Rule in western Asia Minor. Then when Mithradates VI Eupator of Pontus defeated the Romans in and around Pontus 89 B.C., he incurred the wrath of the Roman Empire and so they destroyed many cities on the mainland of Greece.

Another event which had a lasting effect on the Asia Minor Greeks was when, because of local political problems in Rome, Constantine I emerged as the leader and established his domain in the Eastern portion of the

Souvenir de Smyrne. Panorama du Quais.



Πανόραμα της Σμύρνης, 1890

AGIA SOPHIA
"Bloodied But Unbowed"

the Asia Minor Greeks

Roman Empire in A.D. 306. Thus, he built his city between A.D. 324 and 330 naming it Constantinople. With the acceptance of Christianity by Constantine I, Constantinople became the center of Christianity. Certain historians even naming it "the Second Rome". This event caused a decline in the influence of Athens.

The Byzantine Empire, which occupied a large part of Asia Minor, took a turn toward Hellenization when Heraklios decreed that the official language would become Greek during his governance AD 610-641. Prior to that however, a series of Ecumenical Councils beginning in A.D. 325 in Nicea and ending up in the same city in A.D. 787 solidified Christianity as the religion of the Greeks in Asia Minor.

Because of jealousy and political intrigues the Western Roman and Eastern Roman Empires (aka known as the Byzantine Empire) came to loggerheads on many occasions. One of these was the sacking of Constantinople by the Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade. Can you imagine Christians killing Christians. This was to be an introduction to much larger and even more heinous acts of humanity when the Seljuk Turks started their trek across Asia Minor.

The Seljuk Turks had been harassing the Byzantine Empire for many years at its furthest reaches in the East just on the Western side of the Euphrates river. The Turks being excellent horsemen used a "hit and run" tactic disabling the Byzantine outposts. Then in A.D. 1071 a major battle was taking place at Manzikert a city near Lake Van. At first the Byzantine army held the advantage but soon the Seljuk Turks defeated their opponents. They then pressed on across Asia Minor until they reached Nicea, which they conquered in A.D. 1081.

Relative calm prevailed for several centuries. Then a Greek by the name of John Cantacuzenus (a Christian) while trying to dislodge the power of the Paleologi family in Constantinople made a deal with Orkhan the Moslem

Sultan. It must be noted here that John Cantacuzenus gave his young daughter in marriage to the 61 year old Orkhan and subsequently made a "deal with the devil" as it were. John VI promised to give Orkhan whatever he wanted if he succeeded in removing the Paleologi from power. Needless to say Orkhan helped John VI and later Orkhan came asking for his promised reward. What was his reward you ask? It was to take over the fortress of Tzympe, a Greek stronghold on the European side of the Dardanelles. Before this event, Asia Minor was considered European and a Christian territory occupied by Greeks. After this it became Turkish Moslem John VI learned that, as one author stated it " ... it was easier to invite the devil into your home than to remove him later." One piece of territory after another fell before the Turks.

Finally after many Byzantine defeats Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror decided he would conduct a "holy war" against the infidels (the Christians) and attacked Constantinople. The Ottomans were overwhelming in both manpower and sea power. With his large cannon Mehmed, with the aid of the Greek traitor who revealed the weak link which was a set of doors on the western side of the walled city destroyed Constantinople after 53 days on May 25, 1453.

Although Greece was totally conquered, they did manage to regain their freedom in 1821-1829 after nearly 400 years of subjugation by the Moslem Turks. But the Asia Minor Greeks lived under Turkish Moslem rule until 1922. For four and a half centuries, the Greeks were: (1) told to speak Turkish or have their tongues cut out and to attend Turkish schools, (2) at one time or another were forced to convert to Islam (3) their sons were forced into the Turkish army, the practice known as yeni seri or Jannissaries and (4) forced to endure other unspeakable and inhuman acts perpetrated upon them by regular as well as rogue soldiers.

In 1908 the "Young Turks" political party managed to

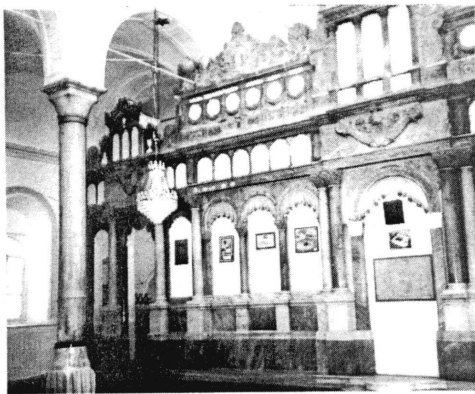


G. Deschamps, Στους δρόμους της Μιχρσσίας, Τροχαλία 1991

A Brief History of the Asia Minor Greeks (continued)

win a huge majority in the election of that year. They promised reforms and radical changes. A democratic society was one of the major planks in their platform. Another was individual rights for all, freedoms of speech, assembly as well as other democratic reforms. By 1912 they reneged on their promises and with Kemal Ataturk at the helm began their ethnic cleansing program of all Christians in Turkey. First they ordered the extermination of the Greek Christians from 1912-1914. In 1915 they followed up with the systematic extermination of the Armenian Christians.

World War I interrupted their program of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Because Greece was on the side of the allies, they felt that they could bargain with the Big Four, (aka the Principal Allies) President Wilson, Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau and Vittorio Orlando and incidentally Japan (which explains why the Japanese warship was willing to take on the Greeks who were caught up in the holocaust and burning of Smyrna in 1922). Therefore Prime Minister Venezelos pressed to acquire Thraki and all of the territory along the Aegean and Black Sea which was heavily populated by Greeks. Besides Constantinople, there were the cities of Smyrna, Brusa, Trebizond and its environs. The Great Powers had other ideas, however.



Iconostasis of the Church of Pahagyia

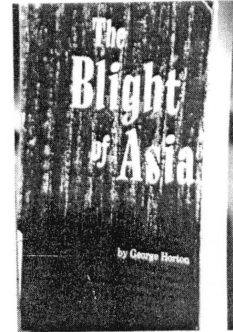
Following that ignominious event where tens of thousands of Greeks and other Christians lost their lives and were forced to leave their homeland under the treaty creating the Exchange of Populations. The grand and glorious history of over 2,500 years for the Greeks in Asia Minor came to an end!

A final note must be added. The harassment of the Greeks by the Turkish government, however has continued in Constantinople - the 1955 and 1964 riots, in Cyprus in 1974 and more than 300,000 Pontian Greeks being displaced to other lands! Also the closing of the Patriarchal school in Halki and the consistent policy by the Turkish government to regain those Greek islands in the Aegean and the Mediterranean positioned near Turkey.

So as Yogi Berra said, "It's not over 'til it's over!"

Pahagyia in Alatsata in 1921.

When Greece invaded Asia Minor at Smyrna there was no Turkish army to fight, until they reached an area outside of Ankara. Then with the help of the Great Powers the Turkish army caused the Greek retreat until they reached Smyrna and boarded ships for Chios, Mytilene and Greece. The Turkish army entered Smyrna and began their mistreatment of Greek citizens. After several days of killing which included the Archbishop of Smyrna, Chrysostomos, a fire was ignited which burned the three quarters occupied by the Greeks, Armenians and French. It has been documented that the incineration of the homes in these quarters was begun by the Turks.



Describes the Holocaust in Smyrna.

