

The End of Greek Asia Minor

by John Steven Moraites, J.D.

I. Prologue

The 70th anniversary of the destruction of the ancient Greek presence in Asia Minor was commemorated by the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece with special services on November 4, 1992.. All the bishops, clergy and laity who perished in that horrible holocaust were proclaimed as saints, as modern ethno-martyrs. It also established that this feast day would be commemorated on the Sunday before the celebration of the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross. This horrible tragedy was almost totally ignored by the Western World and it received no national publicity or public outcry.

It should be known that from ancient times Asia Minor was Greek by language, religion and culture. It produced historians such as Herodotus, Strabo and Xenophon and poets such as Homer and Sappho. It was the birth place of many of the greatest saints of the church such as St. Basil of Caesarea, St. Nicholas of Myra, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. John Chrysostom of Constantinople, St. Christopher the Martyr, St. George the Great, and many others, too numerous to mention. In Revelations 1:4, St. John the Theologian refers to "the seven churches that are in Asia." These seven churches were in the Greek cities of Ephesos, Laodiceia, Pergamos, Philadelpheia, Sardis, Smyrna and Thyateira, which existed in one form or another with sizable Greek populations even during the Turkish occupation until 1922.

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his empire was divided among his generals, e.g., Ptolemy, who became pharaoh of Egypt and established a dynasty that lasted over three hundred years until the death of Cleopatra in 30 AD; Antigonus in Asia Minor; Cassander in Macedonia and the Greek peninsula; and Seleucus in Syria, whose dynasty also lasted three hundred years. Seleucus founded the city of Antioch, named for his son, Antiochos. The city of Thessaloniki in Macedonia was named for Alexander's sister. Several Greek cities named for Alexander were established throughout the civilized world. Rome succeeded in a step-by-step conquest of its remnants and eventually brought them all under one government by the time of the birth of Jesus Christ.

After Constantine the Great became emperor of Rome, he issued his *Edict of Toleration* at Milan in 312 AD, whereby religious freedom was guaranteed to everyone. In 323 AD, he transferred the capital of the Roman Empire to the Greek city of Byzantium because of its more centralized position. He renamed it "the new Rome;" however, the people soon began calling it Konstantinoupolis (Constantinople), i.e. the city of Constantine; and all roads led to it, the "Polis." The bishop of the new Rome, by virtue of being in the capital city was accorded the distinction of being equal in honor to the bishop of old Rome. To this day, the title of the bishop of Constantinople remains "Archbishop of Constantinople, the New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch." During its glorious Greek Byzantine period, Asia Minor was composed of many provinces such as Bithynia, Phrygia, Lydia, Mysia, Caria, Lycia, Pamphylia, Cilicia, Galatia, Cappadocia and Pontus.

II. The Fall of Constantinople

On Black Tuesday, May 29, 1453, Constantinople fell to the Turks and cast many millions of Greek people in the East living on all sides of the Aegean sea into slavery as second-class citizens within the new Ottoman Empire, which had now supplanted the old Greek Byzantine Empire. The last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI (Paleologos) perished in the fighting defending the city.

The conquering Sultan, Mehmet I, was himself the son of a Greek mother, who had been taken into his father's harem. His plan was to allow the Orthodox Christians to continue to function under the Muslim aegis; however, the Ecumenical Patriarch was held personally responsible not only for the spiritual welfare of the Christian subjects but also for their civil obedience. Ethnic differences were not recognized. Subjects within the empire were only designated as either Christian or Muslim.

Under the Ottomans, or the "Τουρκοκρατία" as the Greeks called it, one fifth of anything owned by a Christian belonged to the Sultan and this included children. Sons were taken from Christian families to be raised as Muslims and trained to serve in the best fighting arms of the Sultan. These were known as the "Janissaries (Γιανίτσαροι)." The Turkish conquests extended north through the Balkans to the Danube River, threatening all of Western Europe, until their progress stopped at the very gates of Vienna primarily due to their losses in subjugating the Serbs.

After the fall of Constantinople, the Russian Grand Duke, Ivan the Great, married in 1468 Sophia Paleologos, niece of the last emperor of Byzantium, and thereafter assumed the title of Czar (Caesar, Κάισαρος) by virtue of that relationship. Moscow was proclaimed to be the "Third Rome," and the Czar protector of all Greek Orthodox Christians living under the Turkish domination in the spirit of Byzantium which believed that God had anointed two heads for the welfare of His people, viz. Caesar (civil) and Patriarch (spiritual).

The Greek patriot and teacher, Eugenios Voulgaris (1715-1806), dedicated his life and career to the liberation of the Orthodox Christians living within the Ottoman Empire. In 1753, he became dean of the Vatopedi Academy in Mount Athos, later he taught at the Phanar School in Constantinople and thereafter resided at the court of Frederick the Great in Prussia. In 1770, Catherine the Great of Russia invited him to St. Petersburg to serve as the librarian of her court. She subsequently caused him to be consecrated Metropolitan of Cherson in the Crimea. Through his influence, Catherine adopted "The Great Idea (η Μεγάλη Ειδέα)," i.e. to free the Orthodox Christians from Muslim slavery and to resurrect the Greek Byzantine Empire. Even though she did not succeed in this dream, a semi-autonomous Greek state did come into existence in 1773 at Kydonion in Asia Minor. Kydonion is more popularly known as Aivali. No Moslem was permitted to reside within its walls and it became a thriving center with forty mills, thirty factories, large shipyards, two hospitals and a Greek Academy. It was the first such free Greek city since the fall of Constantinople. The great scholar, Veniamin of Lesbos, was the dean of the Academy and it became the intellectual center of Greek Orthodoxy during the short period it was permitted to exist.

The Crimean War (1853-1856) was also another attempt by the Russian Czar to replace the Ottoman Empire with a restored Orthodox Byzantine Empire, even though he denied this to his allies, England and France. In fact it was England that helped the Turks stave off defeat in this war.

Adamantios Koraes (1748-1856), a native of Smyrna and one of the great intellects of the period, went to Paris, seeking to enlighten the West on the plight of Eastern Christendom and the struggle of the Greeks for liberty. "The Great Idea" did not die out for it was in Imperial Russia that the *Philiki Etairia* (Society of Friends) was organized at Odessa in 1814, and which resulted in Prince Alexander Ypsilanti (1792-1828) leading an abortive invasion across the Danube into Romania for this purpose on March 6, 1821.

Though Ypsilanti's invasion failed because expected support from the Romanians did not materialize, the Greeks continued the rebellion and declared their independence on March 21, 1821. The Turks retaliated by seizing the Ecumenical Patriarch, Grigorios III,

on April 10th of that year as he was descending from the altar steps following early morning Easter Services and hanged him from the main gate of the patriarchate. They continued their oppression by hanging the rest of the members of the Holy Synod as well as all of the bishops of Cyprus and of Crete. 25,000 helpless and defenseless civilians were massacred on the island of Chios on April 22nd and the bloodshed continued for nine more years. On June 15, 1821, five archbishops, three bishops and a number of laymen were hanged in the streets of Constantinople without trial and 450 Greek merchants were seized and sent to Syria as slaves.

To end this oppression and carnage, the great powers, England, France and Russia, forced the Turks to recognize the existence of a Greek state in 1829; however, only a small part of the Greek world was liberated. Other ethnic Christians living in the Balkans eventually gained their freedom and the states of Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria also came into existence as a result.

By the time of the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, the population of liberated Greece was less than three million, whereas the Greek population still in slavery was many times over this amount. The exact figures will never be known.

III. World War I

The outbreak of World War I began with the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne by a Serbian Orthodox patriot, who was part of a plan to liberate the Balkans from the Roman Catholic Hapsburg dynasty. As a result, Austria declared war on Serbia in 1914. The Russian Czar followed by declaring war on Austria to protect the Orthodox Serbs. Since Germany and Turkey were allied with Austria, they also entered the war, which brought in Russia's Allies, France and Britain. Thus the immediate cause of World War I was the protection of Orthodox Christians in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor.

Liberated Greece was neutral with a small population and few resources; however, England planned to invade Turkey through Gallipoli and induced Premier Venizelos to join the Allies in 1915 with the express promise that with victory, Constantinople, Eastern Thrace, and the areas of Asia Minor with large Greek populations, would be liberated and become a part a new Greater Greece to fulfill the dream of "The Great Idea."

The Turks took oppressive action against Greeks living on Turkish-held Greek islands, such as Imbros, Tenedos, Moschonisi, and Kastelorizo, as well as to threaten the recently liberated Aegean Islands of Limnos, Lesvos, Chios, and Samos. The Dodecanese Isles were occupied by Italy, while Britain held Cyprus. When the Allies defeated the Central Powers in 1919, the Turkish Sultan was ultimately forced to sign the *Treaty of Sevres*, which awarded Eastern Thrace, the Mikrasiatic territory of Aeolia and Ionia, including the city of Smyrna, to Greece. Constantinople was to become an "open city" under Allied administration. It was agreed that a Greek army was to occupy Asia Minor and therefore the Greek Army entered Western Anatolia on May 15, 1919. The *Treaty of Sevres* was formalized on August 10, 1920.

Unfortunately, Venizelos was defeated in the post-war elections and the king was returned to power. The Allies refused to honor their commitments to Venizelos and the king decided he would finish off the Turks by himself. His army reached the gates of Ankara before catastrophe struck. Having outrun its source of supplies, the Greek army found itself surrounded by the Turks under the rebel general, Kemal Pasha, and suffered a humiliating defeat at Ayon Karahisar. To avoid complete annihilation, the remnants of the Greek Army retreated to Smyrna and on September 8, 1922, boarded ships for Greece, leaving the Greek civilian population in Asia Minor to the mercy of the Turks.

On September 9, 1922, the Turkish army entered Smyrna, a great cosmopolitan city with a large Greek population of over 750,000. Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Smyrna offered to surrender the city to the Turks; however, he was publicly humiliated and thrown to a Turkish mob, who pulled out his beard by the roots, mutilated him and tore his body to pieces. What was left of it was dragged through the streets of Smyrna before the horrified eyes of European diplomats and French soldiers, who did nothing to stop the massacre of the defenseless civilian Greek and Armenian Orthodox Christian population. The city was set afire and thousands of Greeks died in the sea trying to escape. Many others were taken into slavery and the women into harems.

From Smyrna, the Turks started a campaign of ethnic cleansing and extermination of all Christians that extended north to Aivali and over all of Anatolia. Far inland in Pontus, nearly a half million Greek refugees were able to flee through the Caucasus mountains into Russia, although many thousands of Pontians also perished. In far Eastern Anatolia, the entire Armenian population of over a million and half people was exterminated. The total carnage was never fully documented and the total numbers of Christians who died in the Asia Minor holocaust will never be known.

IV. The Martyred Hierarchs

The following metropolitans suffered martyrdom during the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922:

- On May 29, 1921, Bishop Efthymios (Argitellis) of Zelon, was killed by the Turks at Amasia in Pontus. He was born on the Greek island of Lesbos (Mytilini), then still a part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, and was serving as an auxiliary bishop to the Metropolitan of Amasia.

- On September 10, 1922, Metropolitan Chrysostomos (Kalafatis) of Smyrna, himself a native of Triglia in Asia Minor, whose cruel death, was herein previously described. After this atrocity, the Turks set fire to the city and over 250,000 Greek Christians perished in the sea seeking to be rescued by the Allied fleet anchored in the harbor. Only American and Japanese ships made any effort to save these drowning Christians.

- On September 14, 1922, Metropolitan Ambrosios (Pleianthides) of Moschonision, also born in Smyrna, was buried alive in a ravine on the hilltops outside of Aivali before the horrified eyes of his parishioners. Before the outbreak of World War I, the population of Moschonisi was over 15,000 Greeks. No Turks lived on the island. When news of the coming of the Turks reached the island in the summer of 1922, more than half of the people fled; however, Metropolitan Ambrosios, most of his clergy and 6,000 Greek civilians, chose to remain, hoping the Turks would spare them. They were all taken to Aivali and then marched inland where the metropolitan was thrown into the ravine and buried while still alive before the horrified eyes of his people and then the clergy and finally all of 6,000 islanders were shot and buried in the same ravine.

- On October 3, 1922, Metropolitan Grigorios (Orologas) of Kydonion, also a native of Smyrna, was also cruelly executed by the Turks. Before World War I, the Greek Christian population of Kydonion (Aivali), numbered over 75,000 Greeks. Again no Turks lived there. As previously mentioned, during the eighteenth century, Kydonion and the surrounding area became the first Greek territory since the fall of Constantinople to be liberated due to the threatened invasion by Catherine the Great of Russia; however, with the 1821 Greek uprising, Kydonion was nearly destroyed and again lost its liberty. Among the martyrs of Kydonion was the family of the prominent Dr. Zougris, who fled to ill-fated Moschonisi in the hope of finding a way to free territory at news of the approaching

Turkish army. When the Turks reached Moschonisi, Dr. Zougris and his family were among the 6,000 islanders who were massacred except for his young daughter, who was taken by a Turk as an unwilling wife and today may still be alive somewhere in Anatolia.

• On March 23, 1923, Metropolitan Prokopios (Lazarides) of Ikonion was the fifth Greek Orthodox hierarch to suffer a cruel martyrdom in Asia Minor. Ikonion is called Konya in Turkish. It served as the first capital of the Ottoman Turks when they initially invaded Asia Minor and wrenched the territory of southeast Asia Minor from the control of the Byzantines.

V. Epilogue

Finally on July 24, 1923, Greece was forced to sign a new treaty, that of *Lausanne*, which provided for an exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. All surviving Greeks in the new Turkish state had to leave except those who could prove their birth in Constantinople; however, Turks living in Greece were not required to leave their homes.

The *Treaty of Lausanne* also provided that Turkey would respect the integrity of the ecumenical patriarchate and would not persecute Greeks any further. As a result of the influx of Greek refugees from Asia Minor, liberated Greece more than doubled its population. These refugees founded new towns in modern Greece and named them after their home towns, such as Nea Philadelphia, Nea Ionia, Nea Smyrnis, Nea Brussa, Nea Moudania, Nea Kydonion, etc.

By the *Treaty of Lausanne*, over 100,000 Greeks were permitted to remain in Constantinople. Notwithstanding this treaty, Turkey has continued to harass these Greeks and the ecumenical patriarchate. Today, hardly two thousand Greeks remain in the city and the future of the patriarchate is in serious peril. Before World War I, Constantinople was a cosmopolitan city with a Greek population of nearly a million people. When the modern Republic of Turkey was proclaimed, Kemal Pasha, now known as Kemal Ataturk, became its first president and renamed the city Istanbul. He also abolished use of the Arabic alphabet and forced Turks to use the Latin alphabet. The caliphate (spiritual center of Islam which the sultan had relocated from Baghdad to Constantinople) and the fez were also abolished in an attempt to bring the Turks into the Twentieth Century.

The true story of the Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace disaster was never fully reported in the Western press. The millions who perished were never accurately calculated. Turkish hatred for Greeks continues to this day. Greek Orthodox graves in Constantinople have been desecrated on many occasions, Greek-owned stores have been looted, their owners terrorized, and in 1974, Turkey invaded the island of Cyprus, displaced over 200,000 Greeks, stripped and desecrated their churches and still unlawfully holds one-third of the island in defiance of the United Nations. It remains for modern Greeks to remember these tragedies, to keep the world advised of them and to mourn the millions of fellow Orthodox Christians that died in those nearly forgotten holocausts of 1821 and 1922.

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