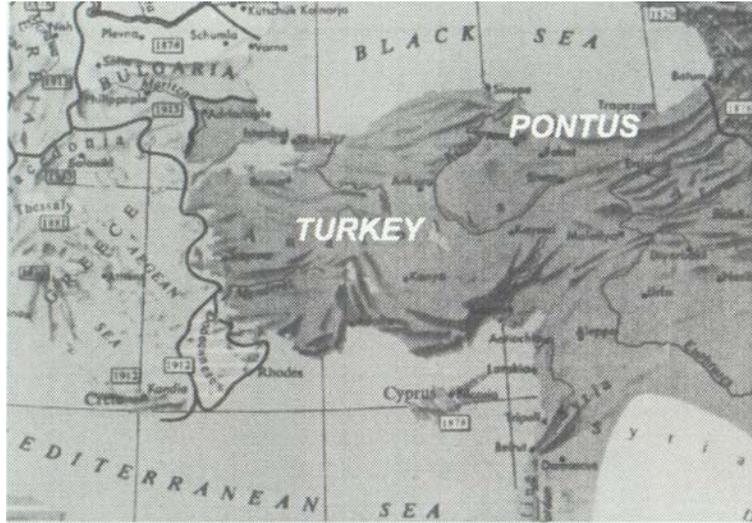


A Brief History of the Pontian Greek Genocide (1914- 1923)



 **The Pontian Greek Society of Chicago**
"Xeniteas"
P.O. Box 6127
Bloomington, IL. 60108-6127
www.xeniteas.net

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PONTIAN GREEK GENOCIDE is published by the Pontian Greek Society of Chicago "Xeniteas."

© 2006 Pontian Society of Chicago "Xeniteas." All rights reserved. This work is protected by federal copyright laws. No part of this work may be copied, adapted, distributed, or displayed without the express written consent of the Publisher. You may share this document freely in its entirety, including contact and copyright information.

With the exception of the two figures and the five quotes, this pamphlet is based on the lecture, "Pontic Hellenism and the Asia Minor Disaster, 1908-1923"

presented by Dr. H.J. Psomiades on May 19th 2006, sponsored by the PontianGreek Society of Chicago "Xeniteas"

A Brief History of the Pontian Greek Genocide (1914 - 1923)

Who are the Pontian Greeks?

Pontus (Greek Pontos), an ancient Greek word for "sea", refers to the Black Sea and the surrounding coastal areas. The presence of Greeks in the area dates back to ancient times some 2000 years before the migration of Turkic people to this area in the 10th century A.D. Research suggests that in the period around 1000 B.C., the first trading journeys in this area took place, mainly in search of gold and other minerals. During the 8th Century B.C. Greeks from Miletus (Greek Miletos) colonized this area, establishing cities like Sinope, Samsun (Greek Amisos) and Trebizond or Trapezunt (Greek Trapezus). Pontus contributed great thinkers such as the philosopher Diogenes of Sinope and the geographer Strabo of Amasia.



Figure I. Map of Greece and Turkey, circa 1912

Following the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek city-states of Pontus and the Pontian hinterland formed the Kingdom of Pontus under the Mithridates family. The Kingdom was the most powerful in the eastern Mediterranean until its defeat by the Romans in 63 B.C.

With the advent of Christianity, in late Roman and early Byzantine times the great monasteries of Pontus were founded in the high mountains southeast of Trapezus, most notably the monastery of Panagia Soumela (Virgin Mary of Soumela) in 386 A.D. Pontus produced two of the greatest intellectuals of the Mediterranean world, Cardinal Bessarion, and George the Trapezuntine.

The fragmentation of the Byzantine Empire, as a result of the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204 by the Crusaders, led to the emergence of the Greek Empire of Trebizond under the great Byzantine dynasty, the Comnenus family. The Empire finally fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1461, some eight years after the fall of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, in 1453.

During the first two hundred years of Ottoman rule, the Pontian Greeks successfully resisted the extraordinary pressures to convert to Islam. Geographic, economic, and historical factors all combined to enable the Pontian Greeks to preserve their dynamic social cohesion, deeply rooted ethnic traditions, and distinctive Greek culture and dialect.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, approximately 250,000 Pontian Greeks were forced to convert to Islam. Although most Greeks remained in the Pontus, thousands migrated into areas of the Caucasus and northern shores of the Black Sea controlled by Russia. This movement into Russian territory which began in 1774 was encouraged by Russia, which preferred that this area be populated with fellow Christians. Pontian Greeks also fled there to escape Turkish oppression and persecution, particularly following the numerous Russian-Turkish wars in the nineteenth century, along the Caucasus, in which the Ottomans suffered one defeat after another. They took out their frustrations on the Pontian Greeks and the Armenians who lived in the border areas, in the Trebizond to Erzerum provinces.

Nevertheless, in an attempt to bring the Ottoman Empire into the world economy, new laws were introduced in the 19th century to modernize the empire. The lives of Ottoman subjects, including the Christian minorities were also improved by attempts to assert the control of the central government and to contain the oppressive rule of local Turkish despots. Unfortunately, the resulting social, religious and economic renaissance in the Christian communities ended during the beginning of the 20th Century.

The Pontian Greek Genocide

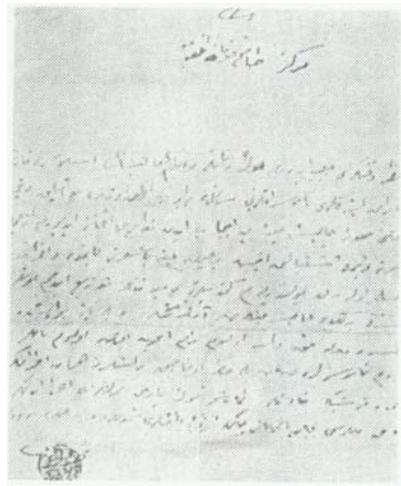
In 1908, the Young Turks (Turkish nationalists) gained control of the government by revolting against Sultan Hamid. After the Ottoman Empire's defeat in the Balkan Wars of 1912—1913, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), an ultra-nationalist group of Young Turks, took control of the government. Its goal was to achieve the Turkification of the Empire by eliminating ethnic Christian minorities such as the Armenians, Assyrians, and Pontian Greeks.

From *The Murder of a Nation* by Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador to Turkey (1913-1916)

... The Armenians are not the only subject people in Turkey which have suffered from this policy of making Turkey exclusively the country of the Turks. The story which I have told about the Armenians I could also tell with certain modifications about the Greeks and Syrians [Assyrians]. Indeed the Greeks were the first victims of this nationalizing idea ...

With the commencement of World War I in 1914, Turkey called for general mobilization. Since the Christian men were not allowed to bare arms, they were sent to labor battalions in the interior of Turkey, which were essentially "battalions of death." Forced labor in the treacherous mountains and ravines, hunger, and exposure to severe weather conditions killed most of those forced to serve in these labor battalions. Some of those who survived were able to escape to join those Greeks in the mountains who took up arms to protect themselves and their families.

After eliminating a significant part of the male population, the Young Turk leaders and later Kemal Ataturk, proceeded to eliminate the rest of the Greek population including the elderly, women, and children. Their plan was to deport the Greek population to the interior and expose them to severe weather conditions, hunger, and illness. Censorship was used quite effectively to avoid headlines in the foreign press. After executing many prominent Greeks in the western Pontus, the Turks proceeded to deport a large part of the Greek population to the interior, Kurdistan, and as far as Syria



Documentary Evidence that Turkish Officials Ordered the Atrocities. Translated, it reads in part: "To the Commandant of the Central Brigade:

"I call your attention to the following:"

"There is nothing but death for the Greeks, who are without honor. As soon as the slightest sign is given you, destroy everything about you immediately. As for the women, stop at nothing. Do not take either honor or friendship into consideration when the moment of vengeance arrives!"

Figure 2. Documentary Evidence of the Genocide (from "The Great Betrayal" by E.H. Bierstadt)

Along the way, the deportees were robbed of money and clothes by mobs of Turkish and Kurdish peasants, and women and girls were raped by the armed escorts who were supposed to protect them. Hundreds of thousands of Greek men, women and children died as a result of these deportations and other atrocities.

From *The Blight of Asia*, by George Horton, U.S. Consul-General in the Near East, 1926:

In January, 1916, the Greek deportations from the Black Sea began. These Greeks came through the city of Marsovan by thousands, walking for the most part the three days' journey through the snow and mud and slush of the winter weather. Thousands fell by the wayside from exhaustion and others came into the city of Marsovan in groups of fifty, one hundred and five hundred, always under escort of Turkish gendarmes. Next morning these poor refugees were started on the road and destruction by this treatment was even more radical than a straight massacre such as the Armenians suffered before. (p. 194)

From a report by Stanley K. Hopkins of the Near East Relief, November 16, 1921: *After leaving Samsoun on my return trip to Harpoot I passed the old men of Samsoun, Greeks, who were being deported. Many of these men were feeble with age, but in spite of that they were being pressed forward at a rate of thirty miles a day and there was no transport available for those who were weak or ill. There was no food allowance for them and any food they could obtain had to be procured by money or sale of small articles that they could carry with them. On this trip I passed many corpses of Greeks lying by the roadside where they had died from exposure. Many of these were the corpses of women and girls with their faces toward the sky, covered with flies. (Genocide, 13, pp. 219-220)*

From Lloyd George, British Prime Minister, House of Commons (Parliament Debates): *... tens of thousands of (Greek) men, women and Children were expelled and dying. It was clearly a deliberate extermination. "Extermination" is not my word. It is the word being used by the American mission.*

From The Memorandum by Mr. G.W. Rendel, of the Foreign Office, on Turkish Massacres and Persecutions of Minorities since the Armistice. March 20, 1922.

"Serious persecutions in the Mardin area, affecting about 30,000 Christians were also reported by Sir P Cox. But the worst atrocities undoubtedly took place in the Pontic region against the Greek population of the coastal towns."

By 1923, out of an approximate 700,000 Pontian Greeks who lived in Turkey at the beginning of World War I, as many as 350,000 were killed, and almost all the rest had been uprooted during the subsequent forced population exchange between Greece and Turkey. This was the end of one of the ancient Greek civilizations in Asia Minor.

As a consequence of the deliberate and systematic policy of Turkification of the Ottoman Empire, it is estimated that more than 2.75 million Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks were slaughtered outright or were victims of the "white death" of disease and starvation — a result of the routine process of deportations, slave labor, and death marches.