British School at Athens

ACROSS THE AEGEAN

A CENTURY OF FORCED MIGRATIONS BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY, 1922–2022

Edited by

Violetta Hionidou and Dimitris Skleparis

Across the Aegean

For a century, the Aegean has stood as both a border and a bridge. The 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey – the forced relocation of over a million Christians to Greece and some 400,000 Muslims to Turkey – transformed both states and societies. Refugee movements from occupied Greece to neutral Turkey during the Second World War, and more recently the crossings from Turkey to Greece of Syrians and others during 'Europe's refugee crisis', highlight the Aegean as a recurring site of forced migration. Today, the region remains defined by militarised borders and the criminalisation of humanitarian actors.

This book investigates the major forced population movements across the Aegean in the last 100 years. It uses the 1922–1923 forced population exchange as an intellectual point of departure to investigate the multiple refugee movements across the Aegean and their interconnections. It addresses the forced displacement of not only Turks and Greeks but also Jewish people and Syrians, while also investigating the remembering of these episodes within and beyond Turkey and Greece. Bringing together leading experts on Greece and Turkey, the volume advances a dialogue between national and international historiographies and offers fresh perspectives on the enduring legacies of displacement.

Across the Aegean is essential reading for scholars and students of modern Greek and Turkish studies, cultural heritage, refugee/forced migration, and memory studies. Its insights also resonate with policy practitioners, journalists, and wider audiences seeking to understand how histories of displacement continue to shape the politics and societies of the Aegean today.

Violetta Hionidou is Professor of Modern European History at Newcastle University, UK. Her research interests span from famines to birth control, from popular medicine to family history, and from migration and refugee studies to the displacement experiences of Pontic Greeks in the former USSR. Currently, she is researching migration in times of famine. She has published three monographs, two of which are prize-winning. Hionidou has held research fellowships at Princeton University's Seeger Centre for Hellenic Studies, at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (George Papaioannou Fellowship), and at the University of Cambridge (Lewis-Gibson Visiting Fellowship).

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The study of modern Greek and Byzantine history, language and culture has formed an integral part of the work of the British School at Athens since its foundation. This series continues that pioneering tradition. It aims to explore a wide range of topics within a rich field of enquiry which continues to attract readers, writers, and researchers, whether their interest is primarily in contemporary Europe or in one or other of the many dimensions of the long Greek post-classical past.

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For our ancestors, whose journeys shaped us – and for everyone who has ever longed for a place they cannot return to.

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Preface

This book originated from the international hybrid conference, *Greece, Turkey, and the Past and Present of Forced Migrations*, held at Newcastle University, UK in September 2022. We are deeply grateful to Newcastle University, the British School at Athens (BSA), and the British Institute at Ankara (BIAA) for generously sponsoring the organisation of this event, which laid the foundations for the volume. The conference also benefited from additional financial support from the International Politics Research Cluster and the *Life Cycles, Bodies, Health and Disease* research group, both at Newcastle University.

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Introduction

Violetta Hionidou and Dimitris Skleparis

The Early 20th Century: 'Successful' States – Unhappy Citizens

The basis of the Lausanne Treaty lay squarely in the Ottoman Empire and its pluralism, an increasingly alien concept for early 20th-century 'modern' societies. The Ottoman Empire, though an Empire of the Muslim peoples (both Turks and Arabs), also included Jewish, Armenian (Christian), and Rum (Christian) people. The languages of its people were even more diverse, including Armenian, Sephardic, as well as varieties of Greek, Arabic, and Turkish. Many of its people could speak two or more languages. While the Ottoman Empire was organised around religion through the millet system, with the non-Muslims paying additional taxes, the Tanzimat reforms of the early and mid-19th century brought significant liberties to the non-Muslim peoples of the Empire: the millet system was abolished, there was increased religious freedom, and Ottoman subjects were guaranteed freedom and security, irrespective of religion. The increasing rights and opportunities offered to Ottoman citizens and non-Muslims within the Empire did not go unnoticed by Greeks outside the Empire. Migration was taking place during the 19th and early 20th centuries from Greece to the Ottoman Empire – mostly to Asia Minor where the Rum populations were most affluent, spoke Greek that was legible to Greeks and the economic opportunities were best (Mihalakake 2010: 29, 51; Lamprides 1895: 37, 40–1, 62–3; Polyzos 1947: 35, 37–8; Augoustinos 1992: 92–3). Thus, the centuries-based Rum populations of Asia Minor and now Ottoman citizens further increased numerically in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At the same time, the Rum populations became increasingly familiar with the culture and nationalistic aspirations of the modern Greek state. Frequently, affluent Rums would be educated or seek employment in Greece, further familiarising themselves with the Greek language and culture. At the very same time, Pontic Greeks, that is Rum people residing in the area of Pontus – in the modern-day eastern Black Sea region of Turkey – were slowly but surely sipping from their Ottoman ancestral homes to neighbouring Russia, where they were welcomed for their Christianity and where they too sought opportunities amongst the blossoming Pontic communities of Russia. Such migratory movements allowed the Pontic migrants to remain close to their Ottoman places of origin and their families that remained there, visiting them, transferring goods, and encouraging the Pontic youth to migrate.

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It was the 1912–13 Balkan wars that signalled a turning point for the Ottoman Empire and both its Muslim and Christian peoples. These wars resulted in the Ottoman Empire losing its Balkan territories, some of which were incorporated into the Greek state, with approximately 400,000 Muslims moving out of the lost territories, seeking refuge in the Empire's Asian body (Bjørnlund 2008: 52; Zürcher 2003). In 1913, the political situation changed in the Empire with a coup that brought all power into the hands of a small group of the ruling party, the Committee of Union and Progress (Findley 2010: 198; Zürcher 2003). In the spring of 1914, large-scale persecutions took place in the coastal areas of the Aegean Sea against the Rums, persecutions that Bjørnlund interprets as 'an aspect of violent Turkification' (Bjørnlund 2008: 42). The clearance of the Aegean region from non-Muslims had been decided and implemented, for security reasons and in order to establish the Muslim refugees there, replacing the prospering Christians (Zürcher 2003). No official order of expulsion was ever decreed, but the violence of irregular troops brought the desired results (Bjørnlund 2008: 43). Around 200,000 Rums fled to the nearby Greek islands, leaving everything behind. This was, what these people called, 'the first refugeedom' (Apostolopoulos: νη–ξα; Bjørnlund 2008: 44; Aktar 2003: 83; Rikaniade 2000: 10, 21; Informant no. 20, male, born 1911, interviewed in 1999 on Chios by Hionidou). It was at this point that a discussion of a voluntary population exchange between Greece and Turkey took place for the first time, only to be interrupted by the entry of the Ottoman Empire into WWI (Bjørnlund 2008: 45–6; Aktar 2003: 83).

Greece eventually sided with Britain and France, whereas the Ottoman government sided with Germany. Throughout the war, internal deportations to the interior of the Empire occurred, involving Rum men obliged to serve in the Ottoman army in labour battalions, but also entire communities (Minasidis 2024: 89–92; Doumanis 2013: 155). The outward justification and an actual reason for such deportations was the security of its border. However, the manner in which they were performed suggests other reasons too (Minasidis 2024: 89–92). Approximately 300,000 Rums were deported, of whom it is estimated a significant percentage perished in the process due to the harsh conditions they encountered and were subjected to (Minasidis 2024: 92). The sustained warfare between the Russians and Ottomans in the Caucasus, leading to the Russian advancement into the Ottoman Empire in 1916, meant that the deportation policy widely affected the Pontic populations. Many among them, having watched the massacres of the Armenians only a few months earlier, escaped to Istanbul and from there to Greece (Clark 2006). Many more escaped to Russia.

The WWI armistice was signed on 30 October 1918. Those Rums who had been internally deported made their way back to their homes. British, French, and Italian troops occupied Istanbul. In May 1919, the Greek Army, with the agreement of the British, French, and US governments, occupied Smyrna/Izmir and the surrounding area. The presence of the Greek Army in Asia Minor allowed those Rums who had sought refuge in 1914 to the nearby Greek islands of Chios, Lesvos, and Samos to return to their abandoned homes in coastal Asia Minor. Few decided that they would not do so. Others were encouraged, even urged, by the Greek authorities to return to Asia Minor. The occupation of Smyrna by the Greek

Army necessitated the presence of the largest possible Greek community in Asia Minor to justify the presence of the Greek Army there. A year later, in 1920, the Peace Treaty of Sèvres put the stamp on the Greek military presence in Asia Minor and on the near-realisation of the Greek nationalistic dream of the 'Megali Idea'. However, the collapse of the Ottoman government at the end of WWI and the subsequent events gave way to the emergence of a nationalist movement and army under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. The new leadership did not recognise the Treaty of Sèvres. The Greek incursion deep into Anatolia, anything but peaceful, was well beyond the capabilities of the Greek Army. Soon enough, it was halted by the advancing army of Kemal. In the summer of 1922, the Greek Army retreated and in early September evacuated Smyrna. The fate of the civilian Rum population was harsher. Many remained unaware of the departure of the Greek Army until quite late (Informant no. 20, male, born 1911, interviewed in 1999 on Chios by Hionidou). Many Rums were slaughtered, men aged 16–45 were taken into labour battalions deep into the country, while the rest, in a situation of utter panic and fearing for their lives, tried in any possible way to gain passage across to the Greek Aegean islands. More than a million destitute civilians arrived there and gradually into various mainland Greek ports (Hirschon 2003b: 6).

Fridtjof Nansen, representing the League of Nations, instigated peace talks at the end of November 1920. These led to the Lausanne Convention, signed on 30 January 1923, which mandated the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. As it was impossible to assess who exactly was Greek in Turkey and who was Turkish in Greece, it was agreed to use the Ottoman measure of difference: religion. Thus, all Rum had to leave Turkey, and all Muslims had to leave Greece, with some well-defined exceptions of those who would remain put: the Christians of Istanbul, the Christians of the small islands of Imbros and Tenedos and the Muslims of Thrace, the remaining Christians and Muslims amounting to approximately 100,000 each (Hirschon 2003b: 8).

The terms of the treaty were to be implemented very quickly. Around a million, mostly destitute, refugees had already left Turkey and were in Greece. The movement of the rest was organised with those departing being able to take with them some of their movable wealth. Thus, Turkish-speaking Christians left Cappadocia for Greece, and Greek-speaking Muslims left Epirus and Crete for Turkey. People who were born in a place, lived their lives there, owned land and houses there were ordered and forced to leave for their new Fatherland, one most of them had never visited, one where they did not necessarily speak its language, one where the culture and customs had no bearing on their own. Those forced to make the move did so involuntarily and with great pain; those who received them were equally unhappy about their arrival. They were seen as outsiders, called names underlying their ties to their previous Fatherland, Turkish-seed (*tourkosporoi*) in Greece – half-infidels (*yari gavur*) in Turkey, their customs and culture were ridiculed as was their inability to speak, or properly speak, the language of their new Fatherland (Hirschon 2003c: 19–20; Tansuğ 2011: 200). In contrast to the local populations of Greece and Turkey who saw the refugees antagonistically, both states de facto provided full citizenship and the concomitant rights to their refugees.

The Lausanne Treaty governed the terms of the exchange of the peoples but also of their wealth. Each person was due to receive compensation for the wealth they had left behind. This happened to a degree but with little accuracy. Even when it happened, the process was protracted, at least in the case of Greece. In Turkey, where the numbers of those arriving were significantly smaller than those who had left, the newly arriving people were allocated housing and lands left behind by the departed (see chapters by F. Nurşen Kul and Ela Çil and Hasan Sercan Sağlam in this volume). The signing of the Treaty of Ankara in 1930 shuttered any hopes the refugees had for repatriation and full compensation for their abandoned properties (Yildirim 2022: 524). In Greece, the Refugee Settlement Commission, under the auspices of the League of Nations and with expensive foreign loans that the Greek state contracted, organised the distribution of lands and the construction of urban homes for the refugees. Those refugees who received land or houses had to fully pay for what they received before they could gain ownership of their lands and houses, adding a further precarity to their lives (Robson 2023a: 288). This arrangement ensured a profit for the investors who funded the loan (Robson 2023b: 289). In late 1944, following a catastrophic – in financial terms – decade, the debts of the refugees were cancelled (Kontogiorgi 2006: 337). In urban Greece, the sheer number of refugees (more than 600,000) meant low wages, thus facilitating Greece's economic growth. In the north of the country, which had been incorporated into the Greek state only a decade before the arrival of the refugees, the Greek state established refugees and provided them with land and housing with the ultimate aim of strengthening the Greek borders (Kontogiorgi 2006).

One needs to address the issue of numbers. As in all refugee situations, it is very difficult – and at times impossible – to have accurate figures. Those who arrived in Greece in a highly irregular manner in 1922 were more than a million; however, as the public health conditions were extremely poor and many died soon after their arrival in Greece, these refugees were probably reduced to around a million. After the Lausanne Treaty, more arrived, leading to an estimated figure of a total of 1.2 or 1.3 million refugees present in Greece in the 1920s (Hirschon 2003c: 14; Oikonomou and Kamouzis 2023: 297; the 1928 census figure for the refugees is 1,221,849). The number of the Muslim exchangees who arrived in an orderly fashion in Turkey after the Treaty was around 356,000 (Hirschon 2003c: 14; Kirisci cites 384,000 from Greece by 1939 (2000: 7)). However, I would argue that to these newcomers into Turkey, the refugees of the 1910s should also be added, bringing the figure of refugees in Turkey to around 800,000 (Kirisci cites 840,000 as having migrated to Turkey from the Balkans, including Greece, by 1939 (2000: 7)). The population of Greece in 1920, with the Lausanne treaty boundaries, was 5.0 million while the Turkish population in 1927 was 13.7 million (ESYE 1928: κζ).

The sheer numerical preponderance of the refugees in Greece, essentially one refugee per 3.8 locals, made their presence felt and voice heard, though neither was always an advantage to them. In Turkey, there was one refugee per 17.1 locals, facilitating the invisibility and social and cultural regulation of the refugees. This numerical contrast almost certainly contributed to the national/state narratives that were put forward soon after the exchange. In Greece, very quickly, academics and

intellectuals produced writings that praised the Greek state for its successful incorporation of the refugees, before moving into praising the contributions of the refugees to Greece's economy and culture (Yildirim 2022: 523). At the international scene, the Greek intellectual Stephen Ladas incorporated the Greek writings and produced in 1932 a highly influential study in English that not only tooted Greece's success but also presented the compulsory population exchange as a successful policy that could be employed by other states in the future to resolve minority issues (Yildirim 2022: 523). Greek intellectuals continued to publish on the topic, in newspapers, journals, and books, exposing their position and strengthening it over time. As they portrayed the state in a positive light, they were neither criticised nor censored by any of the Greek governments. This narrative very quickly became the official national narrative in Greece and continues to be so, supported over the years by many more publications (see, for example, Mavrogordatos 1983). Such a narrative neatly masks the pre-1922 blunders of the Greek governments and politicians, the suffering of the refugees and that of the receiving local populations, presenting a positive outcome for the state and ultimately for 'all' peoples too.

While the sheer presence of refugees in Greece forced the state and its intellectuals to take a (positive) stance on the exchange, in Turkey, there was less such pressure. If anything, Turkey's foundational leader Mustafa Kemal, her politicians and intellectuals were busy establishing the new state of Turkey (as opposed to the Ottoman Empire) and laying its foundational myths and histories that every nation-state needs (Yildirim 2006b: 56). From a very early point, in 1924, the Minister of Internal Affairs delivered a speech in the Turkish parliament that cautioned the exchangees not to behave like the departed Christians, creating cleavages amongst the population, because that would not be tolerated (Alpan 2013: 209). Only in 1931 did Prime Minister Mustafa Kemal publicly mention the Balkan refugees, *muhacirler*, referring to them as 'national memories of the lost homelands' (Alpan 2013: 210). Thus, silence ensued in Turkish society on the population exchange and its effects, reflecting the state's disinclination to refer to the Ottoman past and its remnants (Yildirim 2006b: 56; Alpan 2013: 204). It was in the 1990s that the silence was broken with the publication of novels (Tansuğ 2011: 196). However, as Yildirim stresses, the exchange of peoples had profound effects on the physical geography of the country, restructuring the property map with many properties and whole villages remaining abandoned. Equally important was the reshaping of the composition of its population and the long-term changes that this brought (Yildirim 2006b: 63).

However, it was not only Turkey that silenced its refugees. While Greece and her intellectuals discussed the refugees and how they ended up in Greece, the discussions focused overwhelmingly on the traumatic events of 1922 and mostly on Smyrna: the burning of large parts of the city, the massacres the civilian Christians suffered and the disorderly flight of Greek Christians from Smyrna. Thus, the focus of the remembering has been one of the worst, if not the worst, incidents of the events and one that was rather well documented (Stroebel and Gedgaudaitė 2022: xxii–xxiii). The earlier events of the decade, and the reasons why the Greek army landed in Smyrna in 1919, were rarely discussed, especially in the 50 years after

the events (but see Salvanou 2017a). For Turkey too, Smyrna is central to the narrative: Turkey rose from Smyrna's ashes signalling the 'return' of the Turks to the homeland (Işıkcı *2*023: 308).

In both states, the refugees quickly understood what they were allowed to discuss and what not. They had to adapt to the accepted language of the state, not an easy feat for those speaking Turkish or Pontic Greek in Greece or Greek in Turkey. While neither of the constitutions demanded a specific language from their citizens, in practice the language of the state had to be spoken by its citizens or they would be discriminated against (Kirisci 2000: 2, citing Aktar 1996). The exchangees, and many of the refugees, simply had to wait for their children to learn those, while discouraging them from learning their parental language that would be of no use. At times, the grandchildren of the Greek refugees were not aware that their grandparents could speak Turkish.

The acceptance of refugees into the national space of each of the two states did not translate into their welcoming by the local populations who saw the refugees as contaminating their customs, values, and culture (see, for example, Köker and Keskiner 2003). In Greece, one such example was the liberal attitudes of the urban women of Asia Minor that challenged the ethical code of the local Greeks and led the latter to accuse the former that they were stealing their men. Interestingly, intermarriage between first-generation refugees and locals was rare, increasing among the subsequent generations. The resistance of the refugees in Greece against the state and the Greek people's expectations for their assimilation has been excellently drawn by Hirschon in her study of Kokkinia (Hirschon 1998). The refugees, living within their own close-knit community but spatially close to those of local Greeks, developed a narrative of their superior culture, looking down on that of the locals, thus implicitly justifying why they would not assimilate. Subsequent 'refugee' generations are inevitably fully assimilated. One could see elements of that resistance seeping into the subsequent generations that chose to be called 'refugees' despite having been born in Greece and never having been forced to flee. It was in the 1980s that their full assimilation was materialised and celebrated, most spectacularly demonstrated through the music of rebetiko: music originating from Asia Minor, brought to Greece by the refugees, blended with local Greek music, persecuted by the state for its 'vulgarity', only to become in the 1980s the dominant music of the decade, one that was listened to and celebrated by the whole nation.

While the receiving countries named the newcomers with a single all-encompassing term, refugees in Greece – mostly *muhacir* in Turkey, they were anything but a homogeneous group (Köker and Keskiner 2003: 193–4).[1] Their only common attribute was their religion. However, the receiving states treated them as one body of people. In Greece, the term *refugee* was accepted by the newcomers and was, in turn, employed to articulate and strengthen their demands against the state. Interestingly, the refugees in Greece were often self-identified as *Mikrasiates* (people from Asia Minor), Asia Minor being the geographical area from where the largest percentage of the refugees originated. During the 20th century, there were very few public references to the other, numerically significant, groups that made up the refugees, such as the Pontic Greeks (17 per cent of the refugees) and the