

GREEK REFUGEES

by George Kitsios

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The term Greek refugees has a varied meaning. It can be used for refugees from Asia Minor, the Black Sea or Thrace. All the refugees from these areas have stories that we all need to know, not only to see the suffering those people went through but also to understand better the history of our place.

ASIA MINOR



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The Greek refugees in Asia Minor were the result of the Asia Minor Catastrophe. At the end of the Greek-Turkish war in 1922, the Turks expelled and exterminated a very large part of Greeks in Asia minor. In the Autumn of the same year, approximately 900.000 refugees from Asia arrived in Greece. The Greeks of these areas lived very difficult years. Some of the things they experienced were looting of their homes, demolition of many buildings, such as temples, schools. But the most important of all was the disrespect shown by the Turks, in terms of human dignity. Many Greeks were tortured, mutilated, raped, many infants died and many more.

STORIES FROM THE REFUGEES OF ASIA MINOR

Archontakis' parents told him about the difficulties their exile created: "My father fled from Izmir at the age of nine, getting on a fishing boat in the port of Izmir with his mother, while the city was burning. His father and brothers did not make it and were killed," he told. Archontakis' mother, fled from Izmir at just nine months old. "I grew up in the district of Nikaia, built by refugees who had lost everything when they arrived in Athens." "My teacher was a woman who had escaped from Asia Minor: she always worked as a teacher in the neighborhood, even when the school had not yet been built, she used to call the students by ringing the bell" "For as long she worked, she never stopped talking about the land she had been forced to leave to her students," Archontakis said.

"From the village of Karajoen we left together with one hundred and fourteen families. Half of them went to Thessaloniki and from there to Serres. The other half went to Volos. We heard that Farsala had no refugees in their area so we decided to go there. This happened in 1924, at the end of October. Many people suffered from diseases, but we managed to get through this. When we first came, we did not know Greek. The locals were making fun of us, they called us "Turkosporous". One time , I was sitting in the cafe with ten men. All ten of us put our packs of cigarettes on the table. The locals said "Ten packs of cigarettes? Do you sell them? [Abraham Elvanidis]

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“We left Bursa in September ‘22, when the front collapsed. A soldier warned us to pack our things and go down to the beach to escape. The ship came and the beach was full of people. A pregnant woman fell on the platform and the people were passing over her. The child eventually lived but the mother died. The next day, a Greek ship approached. We went in and we found a place to sit. A family next to us, was about to eat. They said to my mom: You have a hermit crab, let us drink. My mom gave it and we were left without water. My mother was dehydrated. My cousins, went to the machines of the ship to collect the liquids that were falling, to bring her to drink. [Katina Emfietzi-Mitsaku]

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BLACK SEA

On May 19, 1929, Mustafa Kemal landed in Samsun to begin the most brutal phase of the Pontian Genocide, under the guidance of his German and Soviet advisers. The number of Greek who had lost their lives exceeded 200.000, while some historians had raised their number to 350.000. Those who escaped fled as refugees to southern Russia while about 400.000 came to Greece.

“We were more than 100 women and we had 8-10 children, aged 2 to 7 years and we decided to drown them so that no one would cry or talk, because the Turks were near us and they could discover our hiding place and arrest us. Then each of us took each other’s child and strangled him.

A little girl , when she saw what was happening, begged us not to take her necklace that she was wearing and told us “when you drown me, do not take the necklace out of my throat” [Barbara Saltsidou]

“They took us all on a death march. The older ones, could not stand it. My mother’s uncle, Papa-Kyriakos, was ordered by the Turkish soldiers to leave. He asked to leave as soon as the church was over. The Turks threatened to lock the doors and burn them alive. Eventually they were burned inside the church. [Athanasia Ignatiadou]

Black Sea



Black Sea

“A woman was sitting in a corner of the house, with her little son on her knees. She was a neighbor who had asked to stay with us for fear of being desolate. A month ago she learned , that her husband had died, during the war. She was wearing old clothes and her head was covered with a double scarf. One day, the Turks found her. They stood in front of her and they pulled the scarf from her head. Her black hair spilled out and her big black eyes and beautiful face sparkled in front of them. They pushed her boy aside and dragged her to the other room. In a few moments we heard her moans and groans.. The horror filled the whole house. After that, they left her near us. Her clothes were torn and her whole body was bloodied and she was crying with incessant sobs. My grandmother went to her and with a little water she rinsed her sore face.”

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