Contemporary Eyewitness Accounts

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 slash 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 Ambassador Henry Morgenthau’s Story, 1918, 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. Indeed the Greeks were the first victims of this nationalizing idea.”

The Journal of Modern Hellenism from Harry J. Psomiades, illustrates several accounts. Two of them from May, 1922 are below (Nos. 19-20, p.139).

NER (Near East Relief) worker Dr. Ward upset the Kemalists by reporting atrocities against the Christians:

“... and the death of hundreds of Greek deportees from starvation, thirst, cold, fatigue and ill-treatment.”

And NER worker, Miss Wood, wrote in her diary what she saw during her two weeks journey to the coast:

“... groups of deportees, mostly women and children, all starving, and a great number of bodies along the road ... and the entire remaining population was being deported without food and clothing ... Conditions at Malatia, where the deportees died at the rate of forty or fifty a day, were far worse than in Harpoot.”

The following excerpt is from an official memorandum by G.W. Rendel of the Foreign Office on Turkish Massacres and Persecutions of Minorities since the Armistice (May 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.”

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

Asia Minor, also called Anatolia (from the Greek for “sunrise”), is a geographic and historical term for the westernmost part of Asia. From the 9th century BC to the 15th century AD, Asia Minor played a major role in the development of western civilization. Since 1923, Asia Minor has comprised the majority of the Republic of Turkey.

Greek settlements in Asia Minor date as far back as the 11th century BC when Greeks emigrated from mainland Greece. They founded cities such as Miletus, Ephesus, Smyrna, Sinope, Trapezus, and Byzantium (later known as Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire). These cities flourished culturally and economically. Miletus was the birthplace of pre-Socratic Western philosophy and of the first great thinkers of antiquity, such as Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. As the intellectual and business capital of the Greek world a century before Athens, Miletus has been called the birthplace of the modern world.

From the 6th century BC, Asia Minor was successively conquered and ruled by the Persians, Alexander the Great, and the Romans. In the 4th century AD, Asia Minor became part of the Eastern Roman Empire, later referred to as the Byzantine Empire, with Greek as the official language. Greek was a strong influence throughout the empire. From the 4th century AD until the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the empire played an important role in the development of Christianity. It also defended Europe from a number of Muslim attempts to invade the continent from the East.

During the following two centuries of Ottoman rule, the 16th and 17th centuries, Greek communities in Asia Minor resisted constant pressures to convert to Islam. Most managed to preserve their religion, ethnic traditions, and culture. During the 17th and 18th centuries, however, thousands of Greeks were forced to convert to Islam, among them 250,000 Pontian Greeks. Thousands of Greeks fled to Christian Russia to escape Turkish persecution, particularly following the numerous Russian-Turkish wars in the 19th century.

New Ottoman laws introduced in the 19th century were an attempt to modernize the empire and bring it into the world economy. The lives of Ottoman subjects, including Christian minorities, were temporarily improved. Unfortunately, the resulting social, religious and economic renaissance in the Christian communities came to an end at the beginning of the 20th century.

New Ottoman laws introduced in the 19th century were an attempt to modernize the empire and bring it into the world economy. The lives of Ottoman subjects, including Christian minorities, were temporarily improved. Unfortunately, the resulting social, religious and economic renaissance in the Christian communities came to an end at the beginning of the 20th century.

**Figure 1.** Armenian and Greek concentrations in Asia Minor, East Thrace and Cyprus before 1910. (Source: Institute of Historical Studies, Athens, Greece)
The Genocide of the Ottoman Greeks

In 1908, the reformist Young Turk movement revolted against the Sultan and restored the Constitution of 1876. In the two successive Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the Ottoman Empire’s defeats resulted in the loss of almost all of its European territory. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), an ultra-nationalist faction of the Young Turks, seized control of the government. The CUP’s goal was to achieve the “Turkification” of the multiethnic empire by eliminating Christian minorities, including Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks.

In the spring of 1914, before the start of World War I, the CUP began a campaign of terror and deportation of hundreds of thousands of Greeks from Eastern Thrace and Western Asia Minor. On the pretext of internal security and national unity, these deportations were part of a premeditated plan to create a homogeneous nation-state of Muslim Turks, which necessitated purging the Christian minorities. In addition, the CUP called for general mobilization. Most Christian men were sent to labor battalions in the Anatolian hinterland to build roads for the war effort. Within two months, backbreaking work in the mountains and ravines, along with hunger, and exposure to severe weather conditions killed most who served in these “battalions of death.” Some survivors escaped to join Greeks in the mountains who had taken up arms to protect themselves and their families.

Atrocities and deportations against the Greeks resumed in 1916. After a significant part of the male population was eliminated during service in the labor battalions, the CUP, and later the nationalists of Mustafa Kemal, continued their genocide against the Greek population. Another wave of deportations and atrocities began in 1919. These atrocities include burning of hundreds of villages and the murder of their inhabitants, particularly in the Pontus region. In September of 1921, this campaign of terror and extermination resulted in the arrest and execution of hundreds of prominent Pontian Greeks on trumped-up charges of treason.

By 1923, out of approximately 2 million Greeks living in Asia Minor at the beginning of World War I, more than 700,000 perished, and over 1.1 million were uprooted prior and during the forced population exchange between Greece and Turkey. As a consequence of the deliberate and systematic policy of “Turkey for the Turks,” approximately 2.5 million Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks were murdered or were victims of the “white death.” This term was used to describe all deaths that resulted from lack of food, disease, and exposure to the elements during the deportations and death marches. Past and current Turkish governments vehemently denied the Greek, Armenian, and Assyrian genocides. They claim that the loss of lives in the Christian communities of Turkey was the result of the turmoil during World War I.

In December 2007, the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), an organization of the world’s foremost genocide experts, officially recognized the Ottoman Greek Genocide.