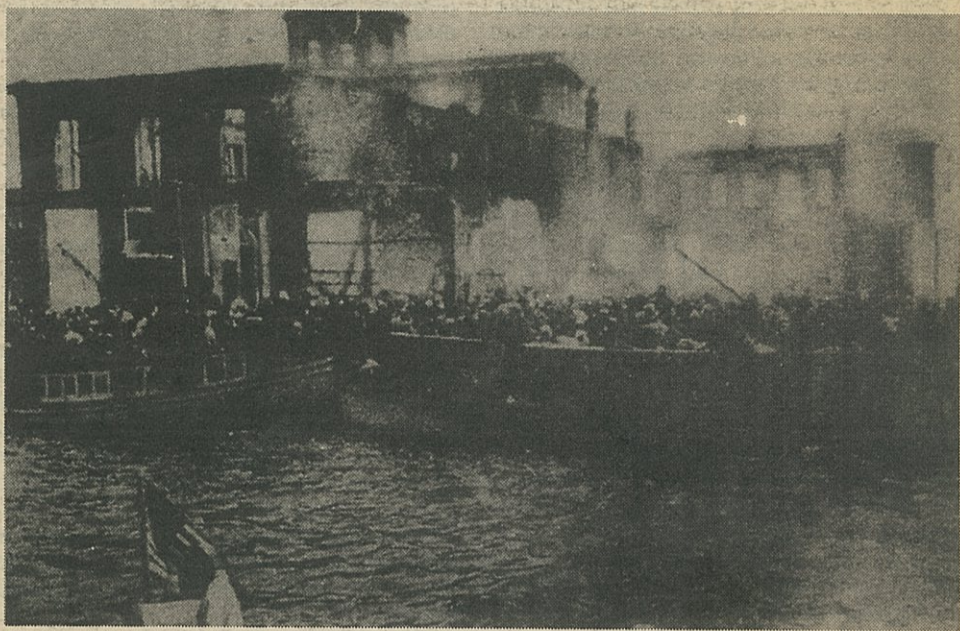


Remembering the Burning of Smyrna



1922 - Asia Minor. The last part of the "Asia Minor Expedition" tragedy is being played out. The collapse of the Greek front was followed consequently by the flee of the panic-stricken Christian population towards Smyrna, from where they departed by all possible means to Greece. This produced a stream of refugees fleeing to the homeland, an uprooting adjudicated through a Greek-Turkish treaty regarding the exchange of populations signed at Lausanne.

This terrible catastrophe was completed with the horrific martyrdom of Metropolitan Chrysostomos Kalafatis and the burning of Smyrna's Greek, Armenian, commercial and European quarters.

The fire that destroyed the city was the worst catastrophe to ever befall Hellenism in Ionia. Smyrna, an international city at the time, was the traditional center of Greek culture and intellect from the first colonization period by the Ionian Greeks during the 10th century BC.

The fire burnt all quarters of Smyrna to ashes, except the Turkish and the Jewish. According to witnesses at the time, some of the city's Jewish residents aided the Turks in the arson by pointing out the homes of the Greeks and the Armenians. Turkish troops would then charge in, rob, rape and slaughter, before setting the houses on fire to cover the obscenities performed.

All the reliable accounts of foreign observers coincide: the arson was a premeditated act on the part of the Turks - premeditated and in accordance with a worked-out plan. The English Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Mr. Mac Neal in the House of Commons on November 27, 1922 told the Royal Navy's Lieutenant Commander Bellairs (and a member of Parliament): "According to the information that the English government holds, the Greek troops completed the evacuation of Smyrna on the evening of September 8 and the Turkish cavalry entered Smyrna on the 11th hour of the following day. In accordance to the proof by the testimonies of eyewitnesses, the arson started in the Armenian quarter and the Turkish soldiers set the fire."

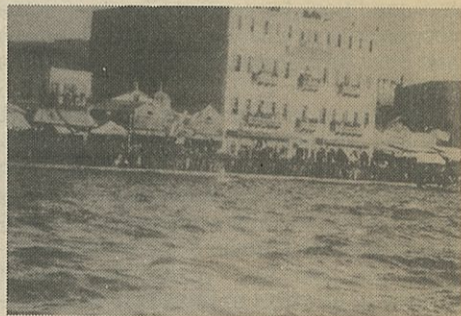
Furthermore, Minie Mills, principal of the American College Institute, testified that she had seen a Turkish soldier entering the building from which the first flames were seen, carrying small containers with paraffin apparently. As soon as he came out of the house, the first flames appeared. After a while,

according to the same witness, other fires began.

The correspondent of the *Chicago Tribune* (September 15, 1922) wired, "There is no doubt left about the origin of the fire. According to a sworn testimony of the higher personnel of the College Institute, Turkish regular soldiers set the fire."

The Turkish military commander propagated and stated to the correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, Ward Price, that the fire was set by the Armenians. This was considered unbelievable by foreign observers because they could not explain why the Armenians would set fire to their quarters whilst the Turkish quarters remained intact. It is also a fact that during the two days after the entrance of the Turkish army, the wind was blowing towards the Turkish quarters.

The arsonists waited, it is believed, until the wind blew towards the Christian and European quarters. American correspondents estimated that the number of Christians slaughtered during the



day of the fire was approximately 1,000, while the number of people slaughtered the previous night was unknown.

According to foreign observers, the material damage was roughly estimated to 40 million English pounds. All consulates, banks and homes along the quay were destroyed.

Besides the Turkish and Jewish quarters, only huddles of ruins remained from the rest of beautiful Smyrna. While Europe and America played the impassive role of the cynical observer, a civilization of more than 2,500 years vanished in the ashes, a victim of the Asian fury and Western reluctance.

Translated from the Greek by Chrysanthos Christoforatos from Evidomadha, a weekly supplement of The Greek American's sister publication Proini.