

The Relocation of Greeks from Pontos

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Introduction

Greeks established colonies around the Black Sea (Figure 1) by the 7th century BC including in modern Georgia, southern Russia, Ukraine and in the north-eastern corner of Anatolia (Pontos). The Greek settlement of Miletos on the western Anatolian coast (Ionia) was the major organiser of this colonising activity (Tsetschladze 2009).

Greeks survived in Pontos during the Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk Turk and the Ottoman Turk period. From the 18th century, the Greeks began migrating from Pontos, especially to modern Georgia and southern Russia (around the Black Sea). Much later, after the August 1922 defeat of the Greek army in Anatolia and the compulsory Population Exchange under the January 1923 Lausanne Convention, Greeks (called Pontic Greeks) were exiled from Pontos with other Christian Greeks in Turkish territory back to their supposed 'homeland', Greece (Note 1). Many Pontic Greeks were murdered in Anatolia during 1916–23 at the hands of the Ottoman Turk authorities and then the Kemalists. After this period and especially in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union (December 1991), many people of Pontic Greek descent moved from the former Soviet Union to settle in Greece.

This paper summarises reputable information written in English on the relocation of Pontic Greeks since the 18th century from their homeland of Pontos and around the Black Sea to Greece and the Pontic Greek diaspora (sometimes via the former Soviet central Asian republics like Kazakhstan). An attempt is also made to describe the Pontic Greek diaspora. The aim is to provide a better summary for interested readers to better understand when and especially how many Pontic Greeks moved from Pontos. As population figures on Pontic Greeks in the literature are often only estimates (of varying quality), an attempt is made here to report 'more reliable' population figures. Detailed population statistics are also analysed. These include the 1928 Greek census, which recorded the number of Greek refugees and their place of origin such as Anatolia and Caucasus and the 1910–12 Greek Population 'survey' conducted in Anatolia and Thrace by the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Constantinople. The population data collected by Ottoman Turks of their citizens from the 19th and the early 20th century have many limitations and were not censuses in the modern sense and are therefore not used here (Note 2).

Sadly, we will never know the exact number of Pontic Greeks who lived in regions at different periods or the exact number who perished in the genocide during 1916–23.

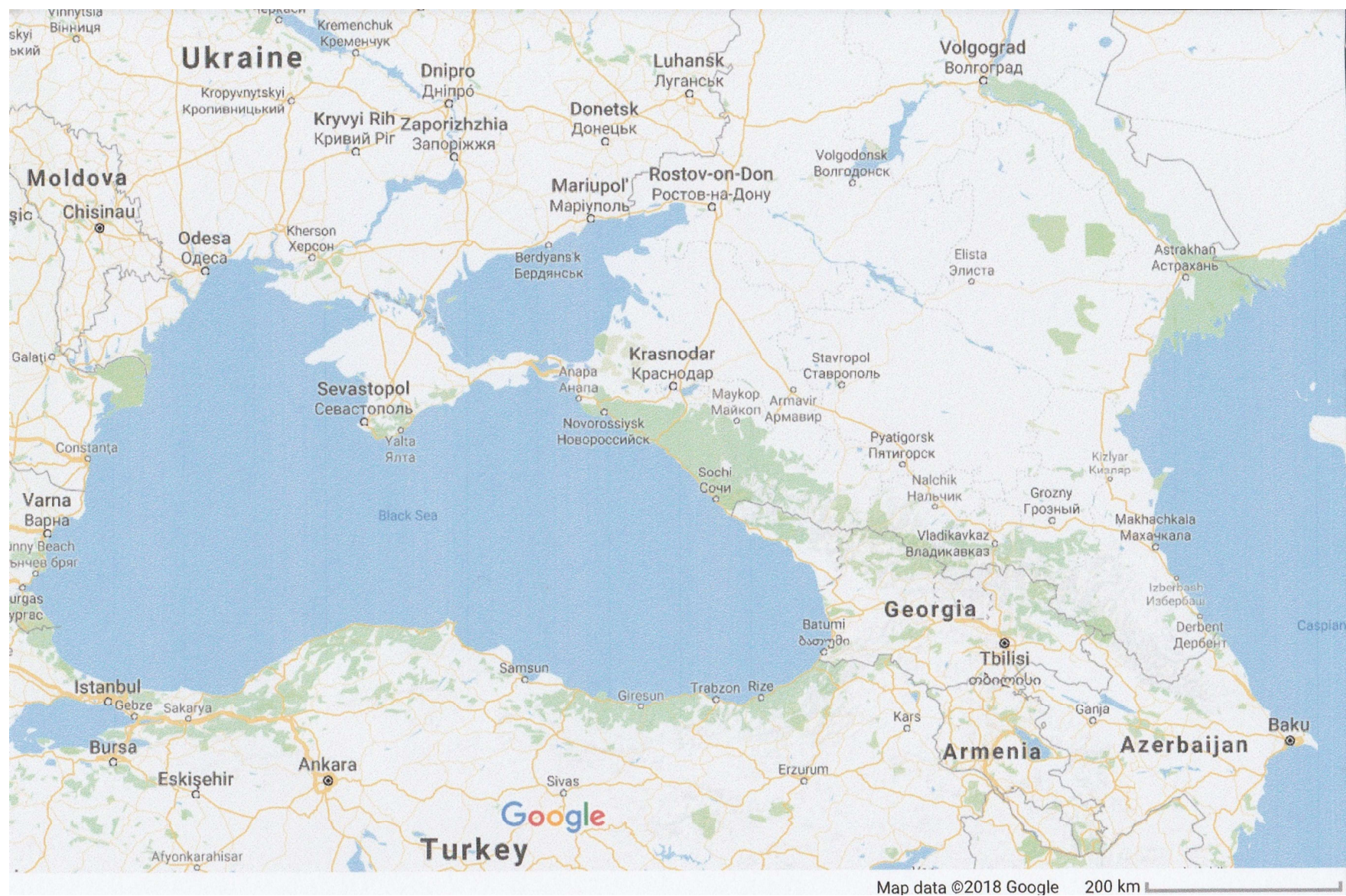


Figure 1: Black Sea region. (Source: Google maps 2018.)

Catherine the Great of Russia

In 1763, during the reign of Catherine the Great (1762–96), Empress of Russia, the first Pontic Greek settlers of around 800 families arrived in the Caucasus from Gümüşane (pronounced Gumushane, south of Trabzon, Figure 1). They worked the ore deposits on the northern border in modern Armenia. Subsequently, the miners founded new settlements in Transcaucasia [Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia] and the North Caucasus region in a migration that continued into the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1775, Catherine permitted Greeks from the Aegean Islands who had served in the Russian army as well as farmers from Greece, Bulgaria and Moldavia, to settle in Crimea. In 1778–79, Catherine assisted a group of Crimean Greeks to settle in Mariupol (Figure 1) and the surrounding area in modern Ukraine. These Crimean Greeks either spoke a dialect of the Turkish (Tatar) language or Greek. The two groups settled in separate areas in the same region (Manuylov 2015).

Russian-Turkish Wars in 19th Century

In 1813, around 120 Pontic/Anatolian Greek households had settled around Tbilisi in Georgia (Figure 1). The wave of migration commenced after the 1828–29 Russo-Turkish war when 42,000 Pontic Greeks from the areas of Gümüşane and Erzurum (south of Trabzon, Figure 1) followed the Russian troops out of Anatolia (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou 1991).

From 1856 to 1866 (after the Crimean War) around 60,000 Pontic Greeks moved from the Trabzon and the Erzurum regions to the Kuban and Stavropol regions in southern Russia. In the last decades of the 19th century and especially during the years of the Russian-Turkish Wars, thousands of Pontic Greek refugees settled in the Caucasus, especially in the newly Russian-occupied territory of Kars (Figure 1) (Karpozilos 1999). (After the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish war, Russia annexed the Kars region from the Ottoman empire.)

Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou (1991) states the rate of migration (including to Transcaucasia) gradually declined until the early 20th centuries. These immigrants tended to be seasonal workers who turned into permanent settlers. At the beginning of the 20th century the Greeks in the Caucasus alone numbered 150,000.

Census figures from the former Soviet Union and (from 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union) in the Caucasus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine are believed to underestimate the number of people of Greek descent. Often people of Greek descent who had been ‘culturally assimilated’ would report in the censuses as being Georgian or Russian etc and not Greek (Note 3).

The first general census of the Russian empire (excluding Finland) was conducted in 1897 and reported 207,500 Greeks. Unfortunately, nationalities were classified according to their mother tongue, not ethnicity, so it probably underestimated the number of ethnic Greeks. This census reported 105,200 Greeks living in the Caucasus which included 32,600 [Pontic] Greeks in Kars (Zapantis 1982).

Population, Exile and Labour Battalions (1910–18)

In 1910–12, based on the ‘survey’ of the Greek Population in Anatolia and Thrace organised by the Ecumenical Patriarch at Constantinople, there is hard evidence there were at least 416,000 Greeks in Pontos (Note 4). It is difficult to produce a good estimate at the same time of how many Pontic Greeks were living in modern Georgia, Russia and Ukraine. Hasiotis (1997) in Voutira (2011) states before the October 1917 Russian Revolution it was believed that 450,000 Greeks were living in the Russian empire of whom 250,000 were thought to be Pontic Greeks.

During World War I, after the spring of 1916 when the Russian army occupied the north-east corner of Anatolia (including the greater Trabzon region), thousands of Ottoman Turks fled westwards from the occupied areas. The Ottoman authorities announced that wherever Orthodox Christians failed to report for military service (i.e. to join the labour battalions, see Note 5) or deserted after joining up, their community would be held responsible. This provided an excuse for the Ottoman Turks to burn Christian villages and that in turn often meant retaliation (Clark 2006).

In December 1916, for allegedly ‘military reasons’, the Ottoman War Minister, Enver, ordered the deportation of the Greek population from the Anatolian Black Sea coast away from the Russian front line. The German diplomats realised that the harsh winter and the failure to organise provisions would lead to high casualties (Hofmann 2011). For example, the then Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Amasia, Karavangelis, stated that around 30,000 Greeks had been deported from the area around Samsun to the province of Ankara. The evacuated villages were looted and burnt with the convoys of the deportees being attacked and women and children killed (Akçam 2012).

While thousands of Pontic Greeks lost their lives in these deportations, others managed to flee across the Russian border or took to the mountains with their guns and formed guerrilla groups. Here the guerrillas endured a precarious existence away from Turkish soldiers while robbing Turkish Muslim villages for provisions. Greeks on either side of the Russian front in Anatolia faced difficult challenges: on the Ottoman side they were deported, while on the Russian side they feared what might happen if the Russians were to withdraw. Aside from Ottoman-orchestrated persecutions, villagers in Anatolia were terrorised throughout World War I and in the post-war years by Muslim bandits (Doumanis 2013).

Exodus from Pontos 1918–24

Movement to Russia and Greece

When the Russian army withdrew from eastern Pontos [north-east Anatolia] and returned to Russia [completed by early 1918 and in the throes of revolutionary fervour], an estimated 80,000 Greeks accompanied them (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou 1991). (Note 6.) Once on Russian soil, these Pontic Greeks encountered widespread famine and disease [as well as social and political upheaval]. A large number of them settled in Novorossiysk, Rostov on Don and the Kuban region (in Russia) (Figure 1), Sukhumi and in the interior of Georgia and cities by the Sea of Azov (Karpozilos 1999).

After World War I, the Greek guerrillas and survivors of the deportations returned to their Pontic villages. In early May 1919, Mustafa Kemal [called Atatürk from 1934] became Inspector General of the Ottoman Ninth army. He was to restore order, to gather the arms laid down by the Ottoman forces and prevent resistance against the government. He was however expected to organise resistance [against the occupying forces in Anatolia] and started raising a popular Muslim guerrilla force (Shaw and Shaw 2002). On 19 May 1919, Kemal arrived in Samsun and over the next two years localised fighting intensified (Stanley 2007). (In the meantime, on 15 May 1919, the Greek army landed at Smyrna on the west coast of Anatolia.)

In 1919, Kars and Ardahan (near Georgia) were occupied by the Ottoman Turks which forced a mass flight of Pontic Greeks to Russia to escape persecution. From May 1920 until the end of February 1921, an estimated 53,000 Pontic Greeks went from Batumi (Figure 1) to Greece. Three quarters of them were refugees from Kars and Ardahan (Pratsinakis 2013; Vergeti 1991).

The 1920 Soviet census recorded 203,000 Greeks living in the country [probably an underestimate due to some cultural assimilation of the Greeks as Georgians, Russians or Ukrainians] which included 23,800 in Crimea [then an Autonomous Republic] (Zapantis 1982).

In June 1921, a Greek warship bombed Inebolu (west of Sinope) on the Black Sea. With the perceived danger of a Greek landing in Samsun, Mustafa Kemal and his Ankara government agreed that all Greek males aged between 15 and 50 years should be deported to the interior (Mango 2002). This provided an excuse for murder and pillage against the Greeks. There are many reports of the authorities murdering many thousands of Greeks in Pontos in this period.

Population Exchange 1923

As far as the Greek side was concerned, the Lausanne Convention relating to the compulsory exchange of people of Greek Orthodox religion from Turkish territory to Greece and a much smaller number of people of the Muslim religion from Greece to Turkish territory, signed at Lausanne Switzerland, on 30 January 1923 legalised the existing situation. That is, after August 1922, with the defeat of the Greek army in Anatolia, the vast majority of Greeks of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace had been forced to leave for Greece from the advancing army of Mustafa Kemal. The Lausanne Convention determined that those Greeks who had not yet left for Greece were subject to the forthcoming compulsory Population Exchange (Klapisis 2014).

By the end of 1924 nearly all the remaining Anatolian Greeks left their homeland although thousands perished in the process before they arrived in Greece. On arrival in their purported 'homeland' Greece, Greeks from Pontos were called Pontic Greeks and received 'a form of acceptance' by other Greeks. Their new life in Greece was another struggle where many more died in the harsh conditions. There were also many Pontic Greeks still living in nearby Russia, Ukraine and the Caucasus. According to the 1926

Soviet Union census (Table1), 213,700 Greeks, [probably an underestimate] were living in the Soviet Republics.

Table 1: Number of Greeks in Soviet censuses

Year	Number of Greeks
1926	213,700
1939	286,600
1959	309,300
1970	336,900
1979	342,800
1989	358,000

Source: Hionidou and Saunders (2010, p. 1480)

Pontic Greeks in Greece 1928

Many Pontic Greeks died during 1916–23 (Note 7). The survivors abandoned Anatolia during this period, leaving mainly for Greece and the Soviet Union, but also travelling to America, Europe and Iran. Table 2 records hard evidence of the number of refugees in Greece [including the children that in the meantime had been born in Greece] according to their place of origin in the 1928 Greek census. [The number of refugees remained more or less stable during 1923–28 since the reduced number of able-bodied men resulted in arresting a natural increase of the population. The population suffered high mortality rates as a result of poor living conditions (Klapisis 2014).] Pontic Greek refugees numbered just over 182,000 (an underestimate) for, as Table 2 shows, around 47,000 refugees declared the Caucasus as their place of origin and nearly all of them were Pontic Greeks. A more realistic total would be more than 230,000—as many Pontic Greeks from the Caucasus probably appeared in the census as refugees from Asia

Table 2: Number of refugees and their place of origin, 1928 Greek census

Place of origin	Number of people		
	Arrived before Aug-Sept 1922	Arrived after Aug-Sept 1922	Total
Asia Minor	37,728	589,226	626,954
Pontos	17,528	164,641	182,169
Caucasus	32,421	14,670	47,091
Russia	5,214	6,221	11,435
Constantinople	4,109	35,349	39,458
Thrace	27,057	229,578	256,635
Bulgaria	20,977	28,050	49,027
Other areas	6,858	3,222	10,080
Total	151,892	1,070,957	1,222,849

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Greece (1930, p. 41)

Minor and Thrace (Vergeti 1991). Of course, there would be some people who were missed and not reported in the census while some refugees probably did not report themselves as refugees.

Pontic refugees who migrated from the Caucasus to Greece from 1919–20, were sent to Eastern Thrace and returned to Greece after August 1922. As a consequence they are probably recorded as refugees from Thrace. Vergeti believes there were as many as 400,000 Pontic Greek refugees [which seems optimistic] from Anatolia and from the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

Greeks in the Former Soviet Union 1930–40

In the early 1930s it was believed that there were around 97,000 Mariupol Greeks in Ukraine. They were probably not Pontic Greeks. It is also estimated there were 100,000 Pontic Greeks at Rostov on Don in Russia where the great mass came from the Gümüşane district (Dawkins 1937; Mackridge 1991). According to the January 1939 Russian census there were 286,600 people of Greek descent in the Soviet Union, (Table 1) (probably an underestimate).

In 1929–39, about 50,000 Greeks went to Greece from the Soviet Union (Voutira 2011). Greeks from the regions of Kuban to Stavropol (Russia) and Kars were Pontic Greeks (Pratsinakis 2013).

1944–49 deportations

In June 1944, a total of 15,000 ethnic Greeks [probably Pontic Greeks] were deported from Crimea [then an Autonomous Republic] (Hionidou and Saunders 2010). Simultaneously, 16,400 Greeks [believed to be Pontic Greeks] were deported from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia and distributed among the former Soviet Republics of central Asia (Bougai 1996).

In 1946, a large number of Pontic Greeks in the Kuban region of southern Russia, were deported to Kazakhstan with many dying on the way. In 1949, about 100,000 Pontic Greeks in the Caucasus were deported to the central Asian republics. At the same time, the last Pontic Greeks around Krasnodar in Kuban were expelled (Agtzidis 1991). (Interestingly, the Mariupol Greeks in the Donetsk region in Ukraine were not deported under Stalin (Kaurinkoski (2010).)

Movement in 1980s–1990s from Russia/Caucasus to Greece

There was a steady increase in the number of Greeks reported from 1926 to 1989 (Table 1) from the former Soviet Union. It is believed that the Greeks reported in these censuses were mostly of Pontic Greek descent. In the 1989 Soviet Union census (Table 3) most/nearly all the Greeks in Georgia, Russia and many in Kazakhstan are believed to have Pontic Greek descent.

In Greece, a survey conducted by the General Secretariat for Repatriated Greeks reported that the number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union who remained in Greece between 1987 and the end of 2000 was around 155,300 people. [Most are of Pontic Greek descent.] From the

turn of this century, the number of immigrants has become a ‘trickle’. This total figure of 155,300 people is an underestimate because the survey was not compulsory (Vergeti 2010–11). Just over 50% of these Greeks came from Georgia, around 20% from Kazakhstan, around 15% from Russia and around 3% from Ukraine (Diamanti-Karanou 2003).

Table 3: Number of Greeks living in the Soviet Union, 1989 census

Soviet republic	Number of Greeks
Ukraine	104,000
Georgia	100,000
Russia	80,500
Kazakhstan	49,900
Other	23,600
Total	358,000

Source: Hasiotis (1997) in Pratsinakis (2013).

Current Distribution of Pontic Greeks Greece

There are nearly 11 million people in Greece (2011 Greek census). The number of Greeks with Pontic Greek descent is unknown. Sjöberg (2017, p. 111) states that according to Lampsidis (1986), people of Pontic Greek descent in Greece amounted to an optimistic around 1 million. The total estimate of Pontic Greeks in Greece and the Pontic Greek diaspora was given at 1.8 million, but Sjöberg states it was not clear how this figure was arrived. This ‘inferred’ there was an optimistic figure of 800,000 people of Pontic Greek descent in the diaspora.

Vergeti (1991) states Pontic Greeks had been migrating to America from the time of their persecutions. In the 1950s, there were migrations from Greece to America, Australia and western Europe.

From a cultural perspective, there are 238 active Pontic Greek associations in Greece with at least 100 active members per association (Vergeti 2010–11).

Pontic Greek diaspora

Active Pontic Greek associations in the diaspora have been established in at least the following countries: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, England, Georgia, Germany, Switzerland and USA.

Armenia

In the 2011 Armenian Population and Housing census, there were 900 ethnic Greek residents in the country. The majority of these ethnic Greeks have Pontic Greek ancestry (Dr Marina Mkhitar, personal communication, July 2018).

Australia

In the 1950s and 1960s there were waves of Greek migrations to Australia. According to the 2016 Australian Population and Housing

census (Australian census), around 420,000 people reported they had Greek ancestry. The largest concentration was in Greater Melbourne where 162,100 people reported with Greek ancestry (<https://profile.id.com.au/australia/ancestry?WebID=260> viewed July 2018). Optimistically up to 42,000 Greeks have Pontic Greek descent in Australia (Note 8).

Belgium

Official Belgian data states there were 17,000 Greeks in the country, but this does not count Greeks who have taken Belgian citizenship (www.mfa.gr/brussels/en/greece/greece-and-belgium/greek-diaspora.html updated December 2013, viewed July 2018). There is an active Pontic Greek association in Brussels.

Canada

In the 2016 Canadian census there were 271,400 Canadians with Greek heritage reported. These Greeks were concentrated in Toronto and Montreal and active Pontic Greek associations exist in both cities.

Cyprus

The migration of Pontic Greeks to the Republic of Cyprus began in the early 1990s and their current number is between 25,000 and 30,000 (Zoumpalidis 2017).

England and Wales

In the 2011 UK census, there were around 35,000 people [an underestimate] of Greek descent resident in England and Wales. This excludes those that identify as Greek Cypriots. This data was produced only for geographic areas where the number of Greeks was 200 or more. (<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/search/result/?q=Greek%20population> viewed July 2018.) There is an active *Pontian Society of England*.

Georgia

Table 4 reports the number of ethnic Greeks in Georgia from 1926 to 2002. With the migration in the 1990s to Greece and Cyprus the number of Greeks in Georgia has dropped significantly from over 100,000 in 1989 to 15,200 in 2002 (which most probably excludes the ‘Autonomous Republic’ of Abkhazia). The 2014 Population census of Georgia reported a low 5,500 Greeks (which excludes the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and south Ossetia region).

Table 4: Ethnic Greek population in Georgia, 1926–2002.

Year	1926	1939	1959	1969	1979	1989	2002
Number of Greeks	54,100	84,600	72,900	89,200	95,100	100,300	15,200

Source: Manuylov (2015, p. 34).

Germany

According to the 2016 German census there were about 443,000 people with a Greek background in the country. It is difficult to

determine how many people with Greek descent live in German cities. There are active Pontic Greek associations in Cologne, Dortmund, Dusseldorf, Munich and Stuttgart, at least.

Kazakhstan

In the 1989 Soviet Population census, there were 49,900 Greeks in Kazakhstan (Table 3). In the 1999 and 2009 Kazakhstan censuses, the Greek population had dropped substantially to 12,700 and 9,000 respectively as many migrated to Greece. Many of the Greeks in Kazakhstan have Pontic Greek roots.

Russia

In the 2010 Russian census, there were 85,600 people who identified as being Greek of whom 42,500 people reported as Greek speakers (*Demotic Greek*, Pontic Greek and Mariupol Greek). It is estimated that there is somewhere between 20,000 and 23,000 Pontic Greek speakers in Russia today (Dr Anton Popov, 2016 personal communication). Many/most of these 85,600 Greeks are of Pontic Greek descent.

Ukraine

The 2001 Ukrainian Population census reported 91,550 Greek nationals of whom 85% lived in the Donetsk region (covering Donetsk and Mariupol). Only a small minority would have Pontic Greek ancestors. It is very difficult to determine how many people from Ukraine have Pontic Greek descent either currently or in the past. The next Population census is planned for 2020.

USA

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2016 there was an estimated 1,278,200 people with Greek descent in the country, which is most probably an underestimate (https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tables/services/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_1YR_S0201&prodType=table viewed July 2018). Active Pontic Greek associations exist in Boston, Canton Ohio, Clearwater Florida, Cleveland Ohio, Chicago, New York, Norwalk Connecticut and Philadelphia.

In 2012, New York-Newark-Bridgeport had an estimated 202,300 people with Greek descent (2010–12 American Community Survey, 3-Year Estimates). This would make it the largest centre outside of Greece with people of Greek descent (Note 9). It is unknown how many have Pontic Greek descent.

Conclusion

Greeks colonised Pontos from at least the 7th century BC and for over 2,500 years, these Greeks maintained a distinct culture up to the early 20th century. During 1916–23 many Pontic Greeks died during the genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Turk authorities and then the Kemalists against its Christian population (Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks) and other minorities. The Christian Pontic Greeks were forced to leave their homeland by 1924 as part of the Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey for their nominal 'homeland' Greece. Many of them had

previously moved to Crimea, Georgia and Russia around the Black Sea, and then many were forcibly relocated from there after 1924 to the Soviet Union's central Asian republics such as Kazakhstan. From around the 1990s many relocated from the former Soviet Union to Greece. Many people of Pontic Greek descent have now also joined the Pontic Greek diaspora outside of Greece where active Pontic Greek associations exist.

A survey is needed on the number of people with Pontic Greek descent in Greece and in the diaspora. New York and then Melbourne appear to be the largest cities outside of Greece with people of Greek descent and thus they may be the largest centres of people with Pontic Greek descent in the diaspora.

Notes

Note 1

Talks began in Lausanne Switzerland in late 1922. The negotiations led to the Lausanne Convention of 30 January 1923, with the exchange of Orthodox Greeks and Muslim Turks between Greece to Turkey. The ongoing negotiations which led to the Lausanne Treaty signed on 24 July 1923, had as their aim to establish peace in the Near East and to draw territorial boundaries and with that the final dismemberment of the Ottoman empire. The Greeks in Constantinople and the Muslims in Western Thrace were exempt from the Population Exchange. The exclusion of the Orthodox inhabitants of the islands of Imbros and Tenedos was also specified in the Treaty of Lausanne (Hirschon 2003). The uprooted Greeks were taken to disease-ridden refugee camps in Istanbul, where many died, on route to Greece (Clark 2006).

Note 2

In Turkey, the first full-fledged Republican census was in 1927. It repeated the tradition of Ottoman population 'counts' and primarily focused on the male populace. As a result, it underestimated the total population. It also suffered from deficiencies in the enumeration of the eastern provinces (Canefe 2001).

Note 3

Whether people identify as being of Greek or indeed of Pontic Greek descent is a personal choice. Active Pontic Greek cultural associations help us to maintain our Pontic cultural heritage.

In the former Soviet Union, peoples' ethnic origin was described in most official documents. At the age of 16 years, children born from mixed marriages were able to choose between the nationalities of their parents. In the second half of the 20th century many chose Georgian, Russian or Ukrainian, according to their republic of residence (Kaurinkoski 2010). So some people with Greek heritage were probably not recorded in censuses.

Not all Greeks had Soviet citizenship. The non-holders of Soviet passports included those who had acquired Greek citizenship and stateless people who had declared themselves Greeks to the Soviet authorities (Pratsinakis 2013).

Note 4

Alexandris (1999) used the 1910–12 Greek Population 'survey' in Anatolia and Thrace by the Ecumenical Patriarch at Constantinople to state there were 397,164 Greeks in northern Anatolia in the vilayets (provinces) of Kastamonu, Sivas and Trabzon. This figure did not include data for the lower level provincial district (sanjak) of Sivas, the Greek communities in Kars [in the Caucasus] or

Artvin (north-eastern corner of Anatolia near the Georgian border). Also, population data collected for the Greek Orthodox dioceses of Neocaesarea and Kolonia were undercounted. I have increased the above figure of 397,164 Greeks by 7,702 Greeks from the sanjak of Sivas from Soteriadis (1918) and a further 11,145 Greeks from the kaza (county) of Ak-Dag Maden (from the Yozgat sanjak within the Ankara vilayet) by Alexandris (1999) producing a total figure of 416,011. (Pontic Greeks had moved to Ak Dag Maden to work the mines.) Thus, a figure of at least 416,000 can be used as a minimum 'working figure' for the number of Pontic Greeks in northern Anatolia before World War I.

This figure of 416,000 Pontic Greeks does not include the many Pontic Greeks who were living in the Caucasus, Russia or Ukraine surrounding the Black Sea before World War I. There are other issues that have not been considered such as how many Greeks deliberately evaded the population count or if any Pontic Greek crypto-Christians were missed.

Note 5

The labour battalions during World War I were overwhelmingly manned by non-Muslim Ottoman enlisted men who were regarded as 'untrustworthy' to bear arms. These battalions carried out manual work like the construction and maintenance of roads, the transportation of material to the fronts and agricultural tasks. They were notorious for their poor living and working conditions. Desertions were frequent. After the defeat in Sarikamiş on the Caucasian front, Enver, the Ottoman War Minister, ordered in February 1915, that Armenians should not be employed in any armed service. Non-Muslims in the battalions included Ottoman Greeks [ethnic Greeks living in the Ottoman empire], Armenians, some Assyrians and Jews. Muslim recruits were also employed in the battalions, e.g. the labour battalions comprising over 25,000 men attached to the First Army (July to August 1915) were 19% Muslim (Beşikçi 2012).

Note 6

The withdrawal of the Russian army in early 1918 from north-eastern Anatolia had serious consequences for the Greeks from the greater Trabzon region with 30,000 Greeks forced to leave with the Russians. According to Kwiatkowski, the Austrian consul in Trabzon at this time, 8,000 of them were inhabitants of the town (Photiadis 1987).

Note 7

The 1928 Greek Population census recorded 1,221,849 refugees who entered Greece. The census figures do not take account of high mortality rates or the emigration of thousands who left Greece before the 1928 census to settle in other countries (Pentzopoulos 1962). Before 1928, 66,000 Greek refugees settled in western Europe, the United States, or Egypt while an estimated around 75,000 people died in Greece between 1922 and 1928 (Kitromilides and Alexandris 1984–85). The real number of refugees who entered Greece is unknown but it was probably between 1.25 and 1.4 million (Hirschon 1998).

Greek civilian losses in Anatolia were exacerbated through the Turks' forced conscription of Christian men into 'labour battalions' after the defeat of the Greek army in August 1922. Losses of adult males were obvious in the demographic imbalance of the incoming refugee population to Greece (Pentzopoulos 1962; Hirschon 1998).

We will never know the real number of Pontic Greeks who fell victim to the genocide during 1916–23. My own estimation is at least 200,000 died. Sjöberg (2017, pp. 46–47) details the lack of accuracy of the figures often quoted.

Note 8

In the 2016 Australian census there were around 420,000 people who reported on census night they had Greek heritage. Of course, Greeks who were overseas on census night may have been missed. (The census allowed people to enter up to two ancestries per person.) If a 'guess' of up to 10% of Greeks in Australia have Pontic Greek ancestry that would equate to roughly up to 42,000 Greeks with Pontic Greek descent.

Note 9

It was estimated in Boston-Worcester-Manchester in 2012 that 96,870 people had Greek descent. Further, it was estimated in Chicago-Naperville-Michigan City in 2012 that 93,600 people had Greek descent (2010–12 American Community Survey, 3-Year Estimates).

The Author

The author is an Australian citizen with Pontic Greek ancestry which he can trace back to his great grandparents. His parent's families left Trabzon in early 1918 with the evacuating Russian army and then in 1939 both families and their many relatives left Georgia for Greece. In 1953, the author's parents migrated to Australia.

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