

PONTIC HELLENISM AND THE ASIA MINOR DISASTER, 1908-1922

by

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Before exploring with you the cruel demise and wanton destruction of Hellenism in the Pontos, your chairman has asked me to present a very brief overview of the Pontians in history. We first hear of the Pontians in the myth of Frixou and Ellis and in the related myth of the Argonauts and Jason in search of the Golden Fleece. Pontic Hellenism first appear in history in the 8th century BC-that great century of colonization that sent Greeks to all of the littoral of the Black Sea, to southern Italy, to Sicily and beyond. Sinope was first Pontic Greek city founded by the Ionians from Miletos. In classical times Pontic Hellenism nurtured among others Diogenes of Sinope-the founder of the cynic school of philosophy; and Strabo of Amasia-the greatest geographer of antiquity. Pontos is also prominent in Xenophone's Anabasis and the retreat of the 10,000.

Following the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek city-states of Pontos and the Pontic hinterland formed the Kingdom of Pontos under the Mithridates

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family, who were Hellenized , semi-Persian kings. Its court was Greek by language and religion, although strongly influenced by Persian culture. The Kingdom was

the most powerful in the eastern Mediterranean until its defeat by the Romans in 63 BC. It is during this period that the Greeks from the coastal areas of Pontos began to move inland and to Hellenize the various tribes of the interior.

With the advent of Christianity, in late Roman and Byzantine times the great monasteries of Pontos were founded in the high mountains southeast of Trebizond , including St. John the Vazelon, in 270 AD; Panagia Soumela, in 386 AD; and St. George, the Peristereota, in 750 AD. All served as important centers of Christian and Hellenic learning; and were to ensure the survival of Pontic Hellenism in the period of Ottoman rule.

The Pontos produced numerous Patriarchs and Bishops of the Orthodox Church. Six of its Bishops participated in the Great Council of Nicea in 325 AD. In the tenth century AD, it was the Pontian St. Athanasius-the Athonite, who founded the Great Lavra and the monastic life at Mount Athos; and the great Pontian missionary St. Nikon, the Metonoete, who restored Christianity in Crete and the Peloponese— after a hundred years of Arab Muslim domination in the former and with the inundation of pagan Slavs in the later, especially, in Sparta, Kalamata and the Mani.

In the field of literature, the Pontians also produced the earliest manuscript of the great Byzantine Epic-Digenes Akritas. And in the twilight of Byzantium, Pontos produced two of the greatest intellectuals of the Mediterranean world-Cardinal Bessarion and George the Trapezuntine.

In the long history of Byzantium, Pontos assumed a commercial, military and strategic status of considerable importance. Commercially, Pontos benefitted not only from the important local Black Sea trade but also from its overland connections with Iran, Central Asia and even China. Strategically and militarily, Pontos served as the main base of operations against the Persians and later against the Arabs in the Caucasus and south eastern Anatolia. It provided a solid core of

locally raised native troops, not mercenaries, for the wars of Byzantium. Indeed, Pontos was the training ground for the Akrites or border guards or warriors of the eastern marches of Hellenism. The other base of operations in the east was the island of Cyprus. It is, therefore not surprising to find that the two earliest manuscripts of the Akritic ballads are in the Pontic and Cypriot dialects.

The fragmentation of Byzantium as a result of the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204 led to the emergence of the Greek Empire of Trebizond under the great Byzantine family—the Grand Komneni. The Empire finally fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1461 some eight years after the fall of the Queen of Cities. The Empire of Trebizond was the last independent Greek state until the emergence of modern Greece in the nineteenth century. That it managed to survive as an independent entity for so long in a very hostile environment was short of a miracle. That in the period of the Turkokratia, Pontian Greek society succeeded in resisting the extraordinary pressures to convert to Islam was also miraculous. The shortage of time does not permit me to explain these miracles, each would require a separate lecture but let me say that it was in part due to the Pontic tradition of resistance to outside pressure, made possible by the ethnological vigor of a society— which could be curbed and subdued only by overpowering external force. Geographic, economic and historical factors all combined to enable the Hellenes of Pontos to preserve their dynamic social cohesion, their deeply rooted ethnic traditions, and their distinctive language and culture. Indeed, the Pontians constituted the single most important segment of native Anatolian Hellenism that had survived from the Middle Ages, maintaining intact the fundamental values of an integral and inimitable cultural identity. After the fall of Trebizond and the massacres and deportations which ensued, Pontic Hellenism managed rather successfully to survive in its mountain strongholds. According to the Ottoman census of 1580, the Greeks were still a majority in the Pontos.

However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries conditions changed drastically. It is a period of forced Islamization-the first step toward Turkification, and the period of the great Pontic neo-martyrs-some 250,000 Pontians were forced into Islam, and of these we find in the nineteenth century over 50,000 Crypto-Christians; it is a period of de-urbanization and the retreat from the coastal regions inland to the monasteries and highlands between Trebizond and the mining town of Gumushane or Argyroupolis, where in time they became the official miners and metallurgists of the Ottoman Empire; it is a period of increased Muslim/Turkish settlements in the Pontos and the departure of thousands of Pontians for Russia, Constantinople, the Danubian principalities and beyond. This movement brought the Ypsilanti and Mouzouri families to Constantinople where they were soon to join the ranks of the well-known Phanariots. The Pontian Alexander Ypsilanti was to become commander-in-chief of Greek forces during the War for Greek Independence.

It is during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Pontos that the Greek population had thinned out considerably and where many of the Pontic Greeks lost their language to Turkish but remained staunch Orthodox Christians. Whereas in Eastern Pontos, particularly east of Trebizond, large numbers of Pontic Greeks retained their language but lost their religion to Islam. Today, there are about 50,000 Pontic Greek speaking Muslims in eastern Pontos, although for a variety of reasons their future as Pontic Greek speakers is problematic.

In concluding this portion of my presentation allow me to suggest to you that it was this common and unique historical experience in the struggle for survival which give special meaning to the Pontic expression 'd'emeteron' or 'are you one of us?' D'emeteron is to take on even greater meaning in the wake of the experience of genocide and the loss of a homeland of 100 generations.

Pontic Hellenism in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century witnessed a remarkable revival of Pontic Hellenism. The oppressive rule of the Muslim *derebeys* or Lords of the Valley, which prevailed in the Pontos since the seventeenth century, came to an end by 1840 as the central government in Constantinople moved to assert its control and authority throughout the Empire. And in 1856 decrees were inaugurated providing for relief for non-Muslims and an improved environment for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The new security along with new economic opportunities, as the Ottoman Empire entered the world economy, contributed significantly to the transformation of Pontic society. The opening up of the Black Sea to international commerce as a result of events following the Russian move into the Black Sea in 1774 and Britain's move to open up Iran to western commerce six decades later had a profound impact on developments in the Pontos. Of major importance was the reopening of the historic Trebizond-Tabriz trade route to Persia, 1829-1869; the extension of international markets for the tobacco of the Pontos, particularly in the Baffra-Samsoun region; and the opening of the new trade route connecting the newly developed port of Samsoun or Amisos in the 1860's with the cities and towns of the interior, extending to Baghdad.

These new developments, including the decline and closing of the famous silver mines of Argyroupolis (Gumushane), led to a large scale Greek migration and re-urbanization of the Pontos. From the Pontic highlands, where in earlier centuries the Pontians had fled seeking relief from oppressive Ottoman rule and where in their isolation they reinforced their sense of community and identity, Pontians moved down to the coast and from eastern to western Pontos. New settlements were established and old ones again reinforced.

In the same period. There was a mass external migration of well over

250,000 Pontians to the nearby and newly acquired Russian-held Caucasus and territories along the northern shores of the Black Sea. This movement was primarily the result of a series of Russian-Turkish wars from 1768 to 1878. These military campaigns, often next door to the Pontos and ending in humiliation for the Ottoman Turks, were invariably followed by reprisals and persecutions-compelling thousands of Pontians to flee to Russia. In addition, the Russians also encouraged the Greeks of Pontos to emigrate in order to populate and develop their newly acquired territories. There was also an internal mass movement of Pontians who sought their fortune and security in other regions of the Empire. Indeed, next to Greece and prior to the Asia Minor disaster, Pontos was the only other part of the Greek world with a numerically significant diaspora of its own- a diaspora which remained to the very end an integral part of the Pontic Greek world and which contributed significantly to its renaissance.

In brief, these favorable circumstances, in less than fifty years, gave new life to Pontic Greek society and fostered its extraordinary cultural, economic, social and political renewal. This renewal included: the constructions of over 1,000 churches and over 1,000 Greek schools, which in 1900 had an enrollment of over 85,000 boys and girls; the appearance of numerous Greek newspapers, journals and books published in the Pontos and in the Pontic diaspora; and the creation of major communication networks within the Pontos, with the Pontic Greeks abroad, and with the Greek world of Athens and beyond. There was also the emergence of numerous cultural and scientific societies. Indeed, the Pontic Greek renaissance and its importance to Orthodoxy was recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate which saw fit to create seven church districts in the Pontos, each headed by a Metropolitan. And finally and perhaps most significantly within a period of fifty years these extraordinary Greeks had achieved economic dominance in their homeland.

By 1900, the future of Pontic Hellenism must have looked most promising to its 800,000 adherents in the Ottoman Empire and Russia. But it was a Hellenism quite different from that of previous centuries. It was a Hellenism politically mobilized and ethnically assertive. Its political entrepreneurs had mobilized an aroused Greek Pontic ethnicity into political leverage for the ultimate purpose of abolishing the Ottoman system of structural inequality between Christians and Muslims. Plainly put, the politicization of ethnicity, which had taken place, translated the traditional personal quest for meaning and belonging into a group demand for respect and power.

This independent process, while never completed, was accelerated and redirected by the export to Pontos of irredentist nationalism from the independent Kingdom of Greece. The medium for the transmission of this new ideology, known as the Megali Idea, was the Greek school, staffed increasingly by teachers who had been socialized in the prevailing Greek nationalist values; and the increasingly nationalist outlook of some of the higher clergy, particularly those with experience in the Balkans and in the struggle for Macedonia. Urbanization in the Pontos and the rise of a Pontian middle class as well as the decline of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, resulting from the emergence of independent Churches in Bulgaria and Greece were contributing factors to this new attraction. It should be said, of course, that the average Pontian, having experienced the heavy hand of oppression and discrimination for so long, was positively receptive to the nationalist message—a message which provided them with a new sense of identity and more important a sense of their own worth and hope for a future with more justice, more freedom and more dignity. As a consequence, the younger educated generation of Pontians tended to redirect their traditional loyalties which heretofore focused on the Ecumenical Patriarchate and on their own exclusive language, history and traditions; and to identify with the remote kingdom of Greece. In conclusion,

Pontos, a child of Byzantium, was bound to be attracted by the overwhelming Byzantine dimension of the Megali Idea or the Greek nationalist ideology that is goal to acquire Constantinople as the capitol and to liberate those formally Byzantine territories of the Ottoman Empire with significant Greek populations.

III

Genocide in the Pontos

May 19 is recognized as the day of remembrance of the genocide inflicted upon the Greeks of Pontos. It is a day of remembrance of the loss of a homeland of 3,000 years and of the 275,000 Pontian souls who were slaughtered outright or were victims of the white death of disease and starvation-a result of the routine process of deportations, slave labor and the killings and death marches. It is also a day of remembrance of the 75,000 Pontians who refused to be exchanged and fled over the border to Russia with the hope that they would one day return to their highland villages, and of the thousands who against overwhelming odds answered the call of resistance. It is also a day of remembrance of the Pontian elite who were condemned to death by the kangaroo courts or Turkish Tribunal of Independence at Amassia; and of the 30,000 Pontians who sought refuge in France and the New World. It is a day of remembrance for the remaining 250,000 destitute Pontians who left for Greece as a result of the compulsory population exchange. For they too were victims of the genocide or as we diplomatically call it today of "Ethnic Cleansing." How dare the Turkish prime minister Recep Erdogan complain last week to the Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis at a meeting in Vienna about the erection of a new monument in Thessaloniki marking the genocide of Pontic Greeks; and how dare Turkish foreign minister Abdullah Gul to warn Greece that the erection of the monument "casts a shadow over friendly relations between the two countries." Unfortunately, to this day, Turkish leaders remain in a state of

denial and refuse to embrace their country's responsibility for the evils perpetuated on Armenians and Greeks almost a century ago. While for decades the Turkish leadership has managed to mislead the Turkish people about the evils of those times, they also seem to wish to deprive us of our right to memory -of our right to know our past. Of our right to pay homage to the victims of genocide.

As we know denial seems to be the final stages of most genocides. Indeed, genocide is such a moral embarrassment that not only the perpetrators but even those who had nothing to do with the genocide seek to suppress it. It seems to me that only the victim struggles with the problem of forgetting- a struggle which cannot and will not end until the genocide is universally recognized.

The focus of my presentation this evening will be on three inter-related themes or issues— the massacres and deportations, the andartes or the Pontic guerrilla movement, and the Pontic quest for political autonomy and independence. They are inter-related because the last two themes—the andartes movement and the quest for independence or autonomy were used as the rational and primary justification for the Pontian genocide by the Turks.

The Young Turks and the Balkan Wars, 1908-1913

Unfortunately, the renaissance of Pontic Hellenism and its demands for equality or pluralism was viewed by the Turkish nationalists as a threat to the social order, particularly at a time when the Empire appeared to be falling apart. Between 1908 and 1913, the Ottoman Empire lost about 500,000 square miles of territory and six million from its population of about 24 million. The honeymoon between Muslims and the Christian minorities following the Young Turk revolution in 1908, abruptly came to an end with the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina, the declaration of Bulgarian independence, the declaration of the Cretan parliament for enosis or union with Greece, and with the intensification

of the struggle for Macedonia and Thrace by Turkey's Balkan neighbors- all in the same year of 1908; followed by the Tripolitanian War of 1911, whereby Italy defeated Turkey and occupied Libya and the Dodecanese islands.

But the major turning point in Ottoman history and the Young Turk movement came with the defeat in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, which heralded the decisive rupture in Muslim-Christian relations throughout the Empire. As a result of the loss of Albania, Macedonia, the Aegean islands and much of Thrace, the ultra nationalist wing of the Young Turks-the Committee of Union and Progress seized direct power in January 1913. It, not surprisingly, introduced revolutionary changes in the economic and social structure of the Empire and in Ottoman attitudes towards minorities. It blatantly stated that its goal was the Turkification of the Empire and the reversal of the economic dominance of the non-Muslim minorities, while creating a national or Turkish Muslim bourgeoisie class. Its response to the loss of territory of its European provinces was ethnic cleansing in Anatolia and the Pontos.

Even before the Balkan Wars, the Young Turks in 1911 had taken measures to undermine the minority communities by banning all their ethnic and cultural organizations and political associations; by instituting an effective boycott on Greek and minority products and services; by taking the Greek schools away from the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and placing them under the control of the Ottoman Ministry of Education. Turkish was to be obligatory in all schools and paid for by the Christian population. In Pontos, there was a large increase in Turkish schools supported exclusively by compulsory taxation on the Christians. Also in Pontos, teachers with Greek passports were prohibited from teaching in the Greek schools, creating a severe shortage of Greek-speaking teachers for the 85,000 Greek students. Finally, a major blow to the economic and social cohesion of the minority communities came with the introduction of compulsory military

service for all religious communities. Because of the oppressive, discriminating and brutal treatment of Christian recruits, military service was to be avoided at all costs. One could escape military service by bribing the authorities, by leaving the country-which often meant bribing the border guards, or by hiding or fleeing to the mountains. The end result would be the further impoverishment of the community. The Greek Consul in Trebizond reported at the time that the number of young men leaving the country for Russia to avoid military service had reached dangerous proportions. Moreover, Christians apprehended for being deserters from the Turkish army or failing to report for military service were summarily tried, sentenced and put to death by hanging. The climate of fear and terror, particularly in the Pontos where the CUP was deeply entrenched, was further heightened by marauding Turkish bands who violated Greek households, abusing and robbing its inhabitants, all on the pretext of looking for deserters. Crimes against Christians, without recourse to justice, became a daily affair. Lawlessness was further sanctioned and compounded by the settlement of thousands of Muslim migrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus in the Greek villages and towns of Pontos, Thrace and Western Anatolia, where they did much to incite the local Muslim population against the Greeks and Armenians.

As we know individual acts of violence may be committed by madmen but collective acts of violence or genocide inevitably involve a myth or theory that provides a moral rationale for killing people who fit in a particular category, that is a legitimating principle or ideology to justify mass human destruction. This was provided by the ultra-nationalist doctrines of the CUP and of the Kemalists; and by the need of a scapegoat, an imagined and dehumanized other, to be held responsible for the accumulated frustrations and failures of governance and to be viewed as an obstacle to the nationalists vision of a new Turkish society.

1914-1918 *the deportations and the massacres*

With the outbreak of the World War in 1914, a reign of terror descended upon the land of Pontos. In the beginning, the persecutions were sporadic but as the war dragged on and particularly after the 1915 Armenian genocide, the persecutions in the Pontos took on a diabolical character. The initiation of mass deportations by foot of the Christians of Pontos to as far south as the desert of Syria under the most appalling conditions and in the midst of winter led to tens of thousands of death. As the German Consul Kuckoff in Samsoun reported on July 16, 1916 to his superiors in Berlin, remember now Turkey is an ally of Germany, "exile and extermination has the same meaning for the Turks because whoever is not murdered dies of hunger and disease." [The excuse given for the deportations was the need for security in the event of a Russian landing on the Pontine coast].

In the dispatches from Constantinople by the other ally of Turkey, the Austrian ambassador Pallavicini tells a similar story of death and destruction as Greek villages throughout the Pontos were plundered and torched. They also report that Greek women and children were detained and carried off into captivity to be Islamized. His dispatches also reported that the Austrian Consul in Samsoun was told by the town's mayor that "we are getting rid of the Greeks as we did the Armenians." On July 31, 1917, before Greece had even entered the war, the Austrian Chancellor Hollweg reported to his cabinet that "all indications are that the Turks plan to eliminate the Greek element as enemies of the state, as they did earlier the Armenians. The strategy implemented by the Turks is of displacing people to the interior without taking measures for their survival by exposing them to death, hunger and illness. The abandoned homes are then looted and burned or destroyed."

Moreover, as part of the general mobilization, all men between the ages of 20-50 were told to report for military service within eleven days. As we know the

Christian recruits were not assigned to regular military units nor were they allowed to bear arms, instead they were assigned to the infamous labor battalions, the *Amele Taroubou*. Purposefully overworked and lacking food, clothing and shelter, the life expectancy in these work battalions was less than 4 months. Small wonder Christians deserted and went into hiding. It was the search for the fugitives or deserters that gave the Turkish gendarmes and vigilante Muslim mobs the excuse to enter the villages and homes of the Giaours or infidels and to initiate the process of intimidation, rape, theft and murder throughout the Pontos. Between December 1916 and February 1917, the German Consul in Samsoun reported that in his region alone, on the pretext of seeking 300 Greek deserters, some 88 Greek villages were torched. In brief, between 1914-1918 over 100,000 Pontic Greek unarmed civilians of all ages and gender perished at the hands of the Turks; and many others fled to Russia and Greece. *the andartes*

The first Greek andartes or guerrilla bands appeared in the Pontos in the winter of 1915/1916, long before Greece entered the war. They were few in number and poorly armed. Contrary to official Turkish sources and propaganda they were not a revolutionary force bent on sedition. They were composed initially of deserters from the Turkish army or fugitives from the draft who fled to the mountains and later were augmented by men, women and children fleeing from marauding gendarmes, hostile Turkish gangs and destroyed villages. During World War I, their numbers under arms never exceeded a few hundred and they only fought to defend themselves and to protect the honor of their families and unarmed compatriots. They certainly did not consider themselves an army of liberation. It is also true, however, that the Russians, who occupied and held the Trebizond district from April 1916 to February 1918, had hopes of arousing the Pontians to come to their aide in the event of a further penetration by their forces west of Trebizond. The matter was not seriously pursued by them nor by the

Pontians.

the idea of an independent or autonomous Pontos

There had always been a separatist notion in the Pontos going back at least to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. At that time, while nominally a part of the Byzantine Empire, the Pontos was ruled by local Greek feudal lords. They were succeeded by the creation of the independent Empire of Trebizond in 1209 which finally succumbed to the Ottoman Turks in 1461. It was not until the Russian occupation of Trebizond in 1916 that a vague notion of an autonomous Pontos began to take shape. During the Russian occupation which lasted for two years, the administration of the region was left to the local Greek notables and Metropolitan Chrysanthos, Archbishop of Trebizond. They governed well and even protected the interests of the local Muslim population. Believing that the Russians were there to stay, many Pontians came to believe that they would enjoy an autonomous status within the Russian Orthodox Empire and that their numbers in the Pontos would be augmented by the thousands of Pontians living in Russia.

But the fates did not smile kindly upon Pontic Hellenism. In March 1917, the Russian Revolution brought Kerensky to power and in the October Revolution the Bolsheviks took control and brought Russia out of the war. In February 1918, they withdrew not only from the Pontos but also from the adjacent territories of Kars and Ardahan, which had been annexed by Russia in 1878. With this withdrawal, thousands of Pontians, some 70,000 from Kars alone, followed the Russian army into the Caucasus, fearful for their lives in the wake of the advancing Turkish troops. Their situation was so desperate that the British control authorities in Batoum, Georgia demanded that the Greek Government repatriate these destitute refugees to Greece and to forget about any notion of repatriating them, in the true sense, to Pontos.

While the war was still in progress, the Pontian diaspora, in France, Russia and Greece, in an instantaneous but haphazard manner began to give serious thought to the problems confronting the future of Pontic Hellenism. From 1917 onward conferences were held in south Russia and the Caucasus in which resolutions were passed asking for the right of return of all Pontians to Pontos and for freedom or autonomy for the Pontic homeland. In February 1918, a Pan-Pontian Congress was held in Marseilles, bringing together Pontians from the United States, western Europe and Greece but there was no representation of the several hundred thousand Pontians of Russia. The Congress passed a resolution for an independent Pontos and naively cabled Trotsky in Moscow asking for Russian support. Inspired by Allied victory and by the Wilsonian notions of self-determination and mindful of the catastrophic conditions in the Pontos, similar resolutions were passed by Pontian associations not only in Russia but also in Constantinople, Thessaloniki and Athens. Finally in 1919, Metropolitan Chrysanthos appeared before the peace-makers in Paris and pleaded for an autonomous Pontos, as a European preferably British protectorate, on the grounds that minority guarantees in the Turkish state, which was being offered the Pontians by the victorious allies, were meaningless. But no one would listen. What the Europeans and even Venizelos did not fully appreciate or understand was that all of these disparate Pontian groups, often at odds with each other and at times exaggerating their claims, were struggling for the very survival of their existence in the Pontic homeland. They, the Great Powers had the facts of genocide, they knew about it but for the sake of their 'National Interests' refused to intervene.

1919-1923, the deportations and the massacres

The landing of Greek troops at the request of the Allies in Smyrna in 1919 and the subsequent breakdown of Allied unity, and their abandonment of Greece

after the defeat of Venizelos in the elections of November 1920, accelerated the pace of persecution and ethnic cleansing in the Pontos. Moreover, the Russian factor was once again used as an excuse to remove or destroy the Greek population of Pontos. Only this time, it was not the threat of an invasion from the north but primarily the need to secure the ports of Trebizond and Samsoun for the importation of war supplies, from Ankara's new ally— the Bolsheviks. Consequently, between 1919 and 1922, close to 150,000 more Pontians perished at the hands of the Kemalists who took over the task of ethnic cleansing from the Young Turks. The coup de grace was the rounding up of several hundred leading Greek notables from the various towns of Pontos in the summer of 1921—doctors, bankers, merchants, journalists, teachers and clergy—the cream of Pontian society. They were summarily tried, in Amassia by the infamous Revolutionary Tribunal and hanged on the trumped up charges of treason. Thus, in one swoop, Pontian society became leaderless, a flock without a head. A similar tactic was used against the Armenians by Young Turks.

A primary instrument of the Pontic genocide was Topal Osman Pasha of Gerasunda and his irregular band of cut-throats who, with the approval and connivance of the Ankara authorities wreaked death and destruction on the unarmed Greeks in the towns and villages of Pontos from Tripolis and Gerasounda to Samsoun and Baffra. Topal Osman met Mustapha Kemal Pasha for the first time in May 1919 at Havza near Samsoun, where he was told by Kemal that "we must carry on the struggle until we have liberated the country so that there will not remain a single external and internal enemy. You shall defend the towns and villages of the Black Sea... and form a battalion of men for this purpose." Topal Osman responded: " You have nothing to worry about, my Pasha. I will see to it that the Greeks of Pontos perish like hornets in their lair." He was true to his word.

Such was the situation that Turkey's ally, the Soviet Union, was prompted to

make a strong demarche to Ankara concerning the wanton massacre of innocent Greek civilians in the Samsoun-Baffra region. Mikhail Frunze, member of the Ukrainian politburo and commander in chief of all Soviet forces in the Ukraine and the Crimea had played a prominent role in reaching an accord with Kemal's nationalist regime in Ankara. In his traveler's diary to and from Ankara in the winter of 1921-1922, Frunze provides us with one more incontrovertible testimony of the tragic fate of the Pontic Greeks who were being subjected to mass genocide at that very moment. The entry in his diary of January 13, 1922 reads as follows:

"Downcast, in heavy silence we pursued our way to Samsoun. There were signs of destruction everywhere... I shall remember this road for the rest of my life. Along its 30-verst length we constantly ran into bodies. I personally counted 58, many of them raped and mutilated. In one place we ran into a body of a beautiful girl, with her head severed and placed in her arms. In another, the body graceful, blue-eyed little girl, no more than 7 or 8 years old, bare legged in just a shift. The girl obviously had been crying, pressing her face against the earth, and she remained in that position, pinned to the earth by an asker's bayonet." [an asker is a Turkish soldier].

I realized that I am running out of time so allow me to say a few words about the commission of genocide before concluding my remarks concerning the guerrilla movement and the quest for Pontian independence. According to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, article 2 states that genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group.
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions calculated to bring about its

physical destruction in whole or in part.

d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.

e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

And article 3 states that the following shall be punishable:

a. Genocide.

b. Conspiracy to commit genocide.

c. Direct and public incitement to commit genocide.

d. Attempt to commit genocide.

e. Complicity in genocide.

With this criteria, it is unquestionable that genocide was committed in the Pontos. And even if you accept the Turkish position that there is no evidence that the government had directly ordered the genocide, which is a very big if, it certainly created the conditions in which the genocide took place and it certainly knew about it and did nothing to stop it. What happened in the Pontos were not random acts of violence but a case pure and simple of mass murder or genocide.

the andartes

As we have seen, no sooner had the andartes and the survivors of the deportations returned to their villages by the end of the World War, they were once again confronted with difficult choices. The Pontians were once again obliged to flee to the mountains, go into exile or face certain death. The Kemalists, for political purposes, having highly overestimated the strength and misread the motives of the Pontic armed bands; and embarrassed by the inability of the local Muslim forces and armed irregulars to eradicate them, finally felt obliged to deal with them with elements of the regular army stationed in Sivas and Ezeroum. Yet, in spite of being out-gunned and out-manned, the andartes against overwhelming odds held their own, although in the process the Turkish forces again turned the Pontic countryside into a burning inferno, bringing death and destructions to its

remaining Greek villages.

Moustapha Kemal Pasha or as he was later called /Uatiirk or Father of the Turks in his famous seven day speech in 1928 maintained that the Greeks bands in the mountains numbered more than 20,000 well armed fighters, led by officers of the Greek army, and that they were guilty of sedition and posed a significant threat to state security. For these reasons they had to be severely dealt with.

In reality, they totaled at their zenith no more than 6,000 poorly armed and locally led combatants, with the largest concentration scattered in the Samsoun-Baffra region, some 4,000 fighters, and 300 miles away toward the east in the Trebizond-Santa region some 2,000. They were hardly the menace pictured by their adversaries, being essentially a defensive force with extremely limited offensive capabilities. They were not united. They lacked an effective communications network and a single command and control structure; they lacked the arms, ammunition and equipment required for sustained combat; they lacked sufficient food and medicine, not only for themselves but also for the large number of women, children and the elderly in their care; hemmed in by Turkish forces in their mountain retreats and obligated to protect large numbers of non-combatants, their movements were severely restricted. For example, the band of Demetrios Charalambides in the Samsoun region consisted of 47 fighters and 2,000 non-combatants.

In summary, the survival of the bands was dependent upon hit and run tactics against opposing Turkish forces either for defense or to capture from them food, arms and ammunition. Their morale was tested by the knowledge that there would be no help from Greece or from any other power. The one military action of Greece in the Pontos came very late and had little to do with the andartes. On June 7, 1922, a few months before the defeat of the Greek army in Anatolia, five Greek warships, led by the battleship Averoff, bombarded Samsoun and destroyed large

quantities of petrol and arms. The operation was initiated in order to relieve pressure on the Greek front in the West and to interdict war supplies from Russia. There was no landing of Greek forces and absolutely no communication with the Pontic bands in the near-by mountains.

Without a doubt, the andartes were the unsung heroes of that sad and painful epoch. Providing cover and security, under the most onerous conditions, for thousands of non-combatants; and with no hope of relief or support, and against overwhelming odds, they best exemplified the unyielding spirit of resistance of Pontic Hellenism. Their story has yet to be written.

the quest for an independent Pontos

The Republic of Pontos was a phantom, a dream with little hope of fulfillment. It was revived briefly with the Russian occupation of a portion of the Pontos in 1916-1918. But its birth was aborted not only by the collapse of Tsarist Russia but also by the mistaken belief that the Allied Powers would entertain such a creation, which was absolutely essential to its fulfillment. Its birth was also aborted by the defeat of Greek arms in Anatolia. Finally, the quest for an independent Pontos was fostered and then terminated by a Turkey determined that there would be no room for Greeks in a Turkish nationalist state. In the end, the only real choice for the Pontians was to leave their homeland of a hundred generations for places unknown or to try to rebuild their shattered lives in the Pontic land they loved so dearly. It was really no choice at all... for the handful that remained could only do so by giving up their faith and ultimately their unique identity. The phantom Republic of Pontos was an imaginary straw in a tumultuous sea. The Pontians grasped it in a sheer act of desperation. And the Turks used it as an excuse to bring to an end 3,000 years of Hellenism in the Pontos.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we remember and mourn the victims of the Pontian genocide of 87 years ago, let us also rejoice that the people and traditions of Pontos live-vibrant and intact. # Ρωμανία κι αν επέρασεν, ανθεί και Φέρει κι άλλο.