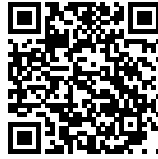




FORGOTTEN TRAGEDIES: THE GREEKS AMONG THE TURKS

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The Greek presence in Turkey and its islands has been continuous since at least the 8th century BC, if not earlier.

The legendary Greek poet, Homer, was from western Turkey, and with the division of the Roman Empire into western (Rome) and eastern (Byzantium) portions, Greek culture flowered in the region, with Constantinople (Istanbul), and the Church of Hagia Sophia, as the high watermarks of Christian Hellenic civilization.

Although Byzantium endured and flourished for many centuries, its death knell struck in 1453, when the Ottoman Turks, led by [Mehmed II](#), invaded the region and toppled the eastern Roman Empire.

They captured Constantinople, and converted the Hagia Sophia into a mosque. Thus was established the modern state of Turkey.

With the fall of Byzantium, the majority of the Greeks fled either to Greece, or westwards into Europe.

They took with them a vast amount of learning and knowledge, which would provide the incentive for the exuberance of the Renaissance.

However, a large number of Greeks also remained behind. Known as the Pontic, Anatolian, or Ottoman Greeks, they faced the [brunt of the ethnic cleansing](#) that the conquering Turks, who were Muslims, subjected non-Muslims.

Many were forcibly converted to Islam, and huge swaths of the country were cleared of Greeks by slaughter. Before long, Byzantium, which was ethnically and linguistically Greek, became Turkish and Muslim.

Persecution of the surviving Greek minority continued through the ages; but in the early twentieth century, it became systematic extermination that came just after the [Armenian Genocide](#), and also organized by the violent, fascist group known as the [Young Turks](#), and the ensuing [Greco-Turkish War](#) of 1922.

This war ended with the [Treaty of Lausanne](#) when the two sides exchanged populations in 1923.

Thereafter, a mere 200,000 Greeks remained in Turkey. Because of continuous civil rights violations, the present Greek population in Turkey is only about 1500 people, who are concentrated around the Bosphorus.

The worst persecution was a [pogrom during September 6-7, 1955](#). This outburst of violence was directed at the Greek community in Istanbul, with a great loss of personal and commercial property, and many instances of rape, beatings, and murder.

Many churches and schools were torched, houses and businesses looted, and Greek cemeteries desecrated, with some bodies of the Patriarchs of the Orthodox Church exhumed and defiled. Also, countless relics were destroyed or thrown to the dogs.

In 1995, the US Senate passed a resolution that recognized this pogrom against the Greek community of Turkey, and called upon the president to declare September 6, 1955 a day of remembrance of the victims of this state-organized massacre.

In 1958-1959, Turkish students (a revival of the Young Turks) actively encouraged the public to boycott Greek businesses. In 1964, all Greek permanent residents of Istanbul (those who were born in the city, but held Greek citizenship) were expelled on a two-day notice.

The tiny Greek community that currently resides in Turkey is still relentlessly persecuted. It faces discrimination, intimidation, threats against its religious leaders, and an ongoing desecration of its holy places.

The persecution is immediately discernible in the treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, which is one of the oldest active institutions in Eastern Europe, having been established around 330 AD.

It is the spiritual center for Orthodox Christians worldwide, as the Vatican is for Roman Catholics. The Patriarchate's printing facilities have been shut down; and the Turkish government will not allow non-Turkish citizens to become bishops, and even the Patriarch must be a Turkish citizen.

This demand is next to impossible to meet, since there are very few Greeks left in Turkey, and the Turks themselves are Muslim.

Turkey also did not allow the Patriarchate to open a representative office in Brussels, Belgium in 1994, claiming that the Patriarchate was not a legal body, and thus there was no need for it to be represented in Brussels.

In 1995, the US Senate passed a resolution condemning the relentless persecution of the Patriarchate by the Turkish government, as it violates international treaties to which Turkey is a signatory.

As well, the Turkish government closed the Patriarchal Theological School of Chalke, which was the primary educational institute for the Patriarchate clergy; many Patriarchs throughout the world graduated from Chalke.

Despite requests from the Patriarchate, the Turkish government refuses to re-open the school. In its 1995 resolution, the US Senate also recognized the arbitrary closing of the School of Chalke.

Turkey also refuses to recognize the ecumenical nature of the Orthodox Church, and thus will not allow

anyone who is not a Turkish citizen to participate in the Patriarchate's affairs in Istanbul. This effectively bars most Patriarchs and clergy who are citizens of other countries.

Further, in 1986 Turkey revoked the right of ethnic Greeks to buy, sell, trade or inherit property. Thus, all property once held by Greeks in Turkey eventually passed into Turkish hands. Greek is not allowed to be taught at Greek schools, and many young people face discrimination because of their ethnicity.

There are Greek communities throughout Turkey, and these people have been completely disenfranchised. They live dual lives of sorts, in that they carry on as Turks in the wider society, but practice their Orthodox faith secretly; nor do they have a right to promulgate their language or culture.

There is also a drive towards "turkification," especially of names. Therefore, the Orthodox Christians that live to the east of Istanbul cannot worship in Greek, nor can they claim to be Greek Orthodox in official documents, and must describe themselves as Turkish; thus even their ethnicity is denied them.

Further, the islands of Imvros and Tenedos have been aggressively made Turkish. School property was seized, the thriving meat export industry was shut down, and a large prison was established on Imvros.

The government also appropriated property that once belonged to Greeks and turned it over to Turkish settlers from the mainland.

Through a systematic policy of persecution, the ethnic Greek population of Turkey has been driven out, its property made over to the state, and its freedom to pursue its own culture, religion and language denied.

Ethnic cleansing of Greeks in Turkey continues - and no one wants to talk about it.

The photo shows, "After the Massacre at Somathrace," by Auguste Vinchon, painted around 1827.

