

**George Mavropoulos (ed.), *Survivor Testimonies of the Greek Genocide, 1913-23*. Asia Minor and Pontos Hellenic Research Center: Chicago, IL, 2024.**

Reviewed by Stavros Stavrides

This new book is the first publication in the English language that makes available for the first time, a collection of eye-witness accounts of Greeks from Asia Minor who survived the Greek Genocide during the period 1913-23. Its introductory material consists of a table of contents which contains a Forward, two maps of Asia Minor and Black Sea, a long historical introduction, followed by testimonies from the different regions of Asia Minor, Pontos and Paphlygonia, and an index. The front cover of the book is very revealing, and captures the sad faces of people who have become refugees, dispossessed of their land and property, and who faced an uncertain future in Greece.

The book is based on a "selection of 203 survivor testimonies" which AMHRC selected from the five-volume publication *Exodus* published in Greek by the Center of Asia Minor Studies in Athens. It was a painstaking process to choose the best cross-section of survivor-testimonies for this book. Having some knowledge of the *Exodus* publication, I believe that that AMHRC choice of survivor accounts is a fair and balanced one.

This book has a number of strong points that make it attractive to the reader. Firstly, as the noted genocide scholar, Paul Bartrop notes the goal is similar to that of the numerous "published testimonies about the Holocaust, that raised, rightfully so much public awareness, and inspired further movies and documentaries" (p. viii). Obviously, the Armenians have done similar work in raising public awareness of their Genocide. However, "the Genocide of Greeks of Asia Minor, Pontus, and Eastern Thrace" is generally unknown by scholars and the general public. (p. viii)

Secondly, this book fills a major gap in what is basically an unknown or least studied Genocide. It has achieved an important contribution in making available many testimonies which would have "remained untranslated and largely unavailable." Taken from the voluminous five-volume *Exodus* publication, the purpose of the book was "to

translate selected testimonies from the collection into English, thereby making available to scholars, and the general public, bringing awareness, through first-hand accounts of what occurred.” (viii)

What stands out about these first-hand accounts that they “are not just Greek stories, they are human stories of suffering and lives lost unjustly and under terrible circumstances-losses that have remained in oblivion for far too long. [This] project therefore is about restoring historical memory.” (p. ix)

Thirdly, the maps provide the reader with an excellent visual of unfamiliar place names where deportations and massacres took place in Asia Minor. The Greeks of Asia Minor suffered persecution, deportation and massacres both under the Ottoman regime and Kemalists between 1913-23. It is also noted that the Armenians suffered the same as their Greek counterparts.

Fourthly, the 24-page introduction by Tessa Hoffman provides an excellent overview of the Greek migration and settlement to the various regions of Asia Minor from ancient times to the present. The introduction is chronologically organized to make it easy for the reader to follow and understand how historical events unfolded in this troubled region. The historical narrative is arranged as follows : the number of Greek Orthodox Population 19<sup>th</sup> century-1922; Specifics of extermination- similarities and differences between the Greek and Armenian Genocides; Chronology of Extermination-During the First World War-Deportations, compulsory labor (July 1914-18); Vilayets of Erzerum, Ankara, Sivas, Constantinople; After World War 1 (June 1920-September 1922); Compulsory Labor (since March 1921); The Holocaust of Smyrna; Estimates of Victims : From Smyrna to Lausanne and beyond “De-Mixing”; and the fate of forced expatriates. The entire introduction also contains copious footnotes based on missionary and consular accounts, books and newspaper articles that allows the reader to conduct their own research on the Greek Genocide.

Fifth, there are a multitude of themes that are common throughout the survivor accounts such as – “Economic boycotts– Confiscation of movable and immovable property without compensation– Mass arrests of notables, followed by their torture, execution or murder– Forced resettlement (deportation) or expulsion under intentionally severe to lethal conditions– Forced labor– Forced assimilation, including forced Islamization and forced settlement in Muslim-majority or Turkish localities– Frequent and numerous killings at the place of residence, during deportation or at the destination of deportation– Forcible child transfer– Targeted destruction of churches, monasteries and places of residence.” (p.22) Furthermore, the survivor accounts contain footnotes that explain Greek and Turkish colloquialisms, Greek and Turkish place names, and famous Greek names like Pavlos Melas and Paraskevopoulos.

Sixth, the index provides the reader with an easy reference to the activities of the Americans, French, English and Russians, the Population exchange, Lausanne Treaty, Islamization, the role of the American Red Cross, and Greek-Turkish relations. The most notable figure in the index is Topal Osman who was a notorious figure who terrorized the Greeks of Pontus. He was responsible for the plunder and destruction of villages, massacre and deportation of the local Greeks, and was seen as a hero by the Turks.

Finally, one of the most important witnesses to the destruction of Hellenic civilization was the former US Consul in Smyrna, George Horton who described it as follows:

The appearance of Smyrna is tragic. Even two years and a half after the tragedy the ruins are untouched. For two kilometers along the quay stretch the skeletons—the ghosts of houses. And behind are more miles of streets, lined by other phantom houses, like an endless morgue. This phantom city is a terrible symbol of all Turkey. That which above all attracts attention is the disappearance of the Greeks, swept out, extirpated from that city, which was their metropolis in the Levant and where they dominated all forms of activity (p. 24)

What Horton describes is echoed in the survivor testimonies where these individuals were uprooted, lost their properties, who had contributed to the local economy where they lived, who witnessed massacres and deportation of family and friends into the Anatolian interior, experienced famine and disease during their deportation and were never allowed to return to their ancestral homelands. For the Kemalist leadership, the expulsion of the Asia Minor Greeks meant Turkey for the Turks and the permanent solution of the existence of minorities that once inhabited the Ottoman Empire.

The book has two omissions which don't detract from its overall contribution to the survivor accounts. Firstly, the book lacks a bibliography detailing the past and latest publications on the Greek Genocide published whether in English or other languages. Whilst there are copious footnotes throughout this book, it would have been useful to include them in a bibliography as a reference for the reader.

Secondly, the survivor stories don't indicate when these testimonies were actually collected and conducted. When survivor accounts are conducted within a space of a few years after an event, the information is still relevantly "fresh" in the minds of the survivors. As time progresses, memories begin to fade as survivors begin to forget, rearrange, delete, and add new "evidence" to their original testimonies. Comparing an original testimony with the same one recorded many years later, one may find that the original evidence may bear no resemblance to the "new" account. It is said that human memory

can play tricks. I would like to have seen a timeline included in the book showing the survivors name and the actual date when the interview was conducted.

I recommend this book to interested scholars and general readers of holocaust and genocide studies. It gives readers an opportunity to learn about a relatively unknown genocide and to read about the Greek survivors' accounts who experienced trauma, uprooting and deportation during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These testimonies add another layer to our understanding of the suffering of minorities in Ottoman and Kemalist Turkey. We hope such testimonies will act as a lesson for humanity to prevent future Genocides. I would also recommend this book be added to Holocaust and Genocide study courses in English speaking countries to compliment the Jewish Holocaust and Armenian and Assyrian Genocides.

In conclusion, this book is an important contribution to the study of the Greek Genocide, especially documenting survivor accounts for the first time in English. The selection of 203 accounts out of about 1000 was not an easy task but the authors selected a good cross-section of them for readers. Hopefully, this book will be the catalyst for us to see additional Greek eyewitness accounts published in English. AMHPR should be complimented in taking such a bold decision to publish such important historical accounts of survivor testimonies.

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