

# THE GREAT FIRE OF SMYRNA

The Final Chapter of the Genocide of Greeks in Asia Minor

CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION 1922-2022

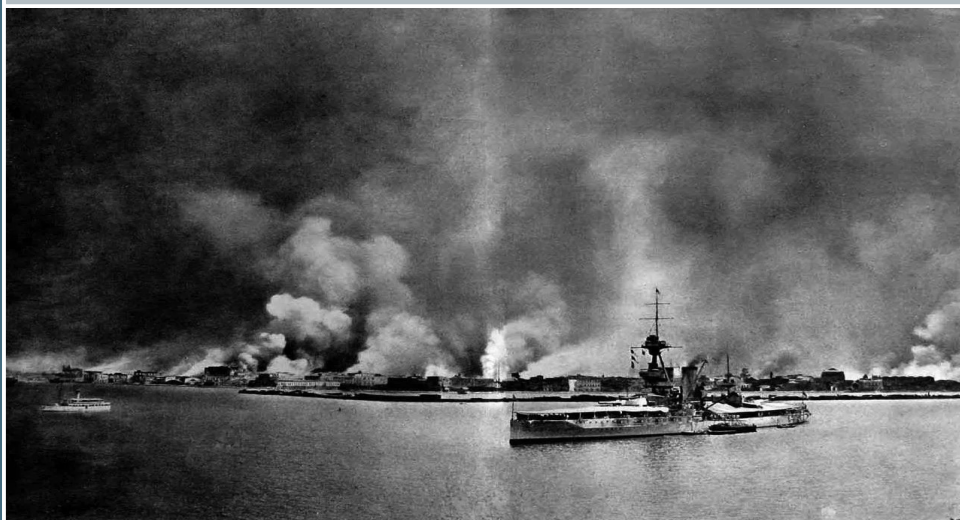
September 18, 2022



ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM  
& EDUCATION CENTER



THE ASIA MINOR AND PONTOS  
HELLENIC RESEARCH CENTER



*A few days after the triumphal entry of the Turks, the arm of quay-squatters saw flames dancing in the old wood-constructed Armenian quarter, a mile and a half away. The dance became a fiery hurdle race, as the wind-fanned flames leaped from balcony to balcony across the narrow streets; then the race became a hungry conflagration whose roaring mouth ate through and gulped down to where the refugee multitude huddled between a waste of fire and a waste of sea.*

**History's Greatest Trek,  
The National Geographic Magazine, November 1925**

# THE GREAT FIRE OF SMYRNA

## THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THE ASIA MINOR GREEK GENOCIDE

PRESENTED BY

ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM  
& EDUCATION CENTER

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HELLENIC RESEARCH CENTER



Photograph by C.D. Morris, National Geographic

### The Great Fire of Smyrna

The burning of Smyrna was a historic turning point and is of enormous importance in both Greek and world history. For thousands of years, Greeks of Asia Minor flourished in the city of Smyrna, establishing a cosmopolitan city, renowned for its tolerance of diversity. For centuries Greeks, Armenians, Turks, and Jews lived and worked together. Then came the "Young Turks Revolution, 1908-1918", during which they gained power and began their reign of terror. This was followed by the Nationalist government in 1919 with a campaign "Turkey for Turks" which provided the lethal platform for the immediate destruction and brutal persecution of the Christians of Asia Minor, Pontos and East Thrace.

The Great Fire of Smyrna started on September 13, 1922 after the Turkish armed forces entered Smyrna, which is now modern-day Izmir, Turkey. The fire lasted approximately nine full days, during which time the entire Greek and Armenian quarters of the city were destroyed, forcing the population to flee and seek shelter in Greece and elsewhere. The Allied Powers witnessed this great catastrophe and did not take any action to prevent it, nor to save lives. Instead, they chose to remain bystanders. The great fire was the deliberate policy of the Turkish government to destroy the Greek and any other Christian population and to expel them from their ancient homeland. Historians believe that the number of victims was in the tens of thousands, while the number of refugees was over a million.

## PROGRAM

**1:00pm-1:20pm:** *Opening remarks by*  
**Kelley Szany,**  
**Metropolitan Nathanael,**  
**Mr. Koumbarakis,** *The Consulate General of Greece in Chicago,*  
**Stavros Basseas**  
**Jessica Hulten,** *moderator*

**1:20pm-1:40pm:** **George Shirinian;** *"The Background of Hellenism in the Ottoman Empire and the Special Nature of Smyrna".*

**1:40pm-2:00pm:** **Dr. Constantine Hatzidimitriou;** *"The Destruction of Smyrna and its Aftermath".*

**2:00pm-2:30pm:** **BREAK**

**2:30pm-2:40pm:** **Historic Footage** *from the Documentary*  
*"Lethal Nationalism: Genocide of the Greeks 1913-1923"*

**2:40pm-2:55pm:** **Testimonials Reading by Descendants of Survivors**

**2:55pm-3:15pm:** **Dr. Paul Bartrop:** *"The Allies and Greece After WWI".*

**3:15pm-3:30pm:** **Kelley Szany:** *"The Significance of the Destruction of Smyrna and its Relevance Today".*

**3:30pm-3:45pm:** **Close**

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH**

**Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago**  
*His Eminence Metropolitan Nathanael*

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**Hellenic American Leadership Council**

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**ENOSIS**  
*The Federation of Hellenic American Organization of Illinois*

**Hellenic American Women's Council**

**Hellenic Link Midwest**

**Pan Pontian Federation of USA and Canada**

**Pontian Greek Society of Chicago**

**Pontian Youth Association of USA and Canada**



## Presenters



### George Shirinian

*“The Background of Hellenism in the Ottoman Empire and the Special Nature of Smyrna”*

George Shirinian was born in Toronto Canada, the son of two orphan survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

He is the former Executive Director (Ret.) of the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (A Division of the Zoryan Institute), which is devoted to research, publication, and education in the fields of Genocide Studies, Diaspora Studies, and Armenian Studies.

George Shirinian is a Genocide scholar and the author of articles on the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Genocides;

- a contributor to *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide*;
- co-editor of *Studies in Comparative Genocide*; and
- editor of *The Asia Minor Catastrophe and the Ottoman Greek Genocide: Essays on Asia Minor, Pontos ad Eastern Thrace, 1913-1923*;
- *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire; Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks 1913-123*; and
- *The Greek Genocide 1913-1923: New Perspectives*.



### Dr. Constantine G. Hatzidimitriou

*“The Destruction of Smyrna and its Aftermath”*

Constantine Hatzidimitriou received his doctorate from Columbia University in Byzantine, Ottoman, and Modern Greek history. He was a Gennadius Fellow at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Educational Counselor at the U.S. Consulate and Fulbright office in Thessaloniki, and an administrator and professor at Anatolia College.

Dr. Constantine G. Hatzidimitriou is a Fellow of the American Hellenic Institute Foundation in Washington D.C., editor of its two academic

journals and has taught at various universities in the NYC area--most recently at Queens College's Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies.

Among his books are:

- *American Accounts Documenting the Destruction of Smyrna*, and
- *Founded on Freedom and Virtue: Documents Illustrating the Impact in the United States of the Greek War of Independence*.

He has also published many studies in scholarly journals and contributed chapters to books such as his supplementary study on Turkish responsibility for the Smyrna fire and the American-cover up which appeared in 2012, and a recent article on George Horton's Blight of Asia published in 2022.

A new book chapter on the persecution and destruction of American Educational Institutions in Asia Minor such as Anatolia College by the Turks is expected to appear early next year.

His mother, Elli Linakis-Hatzidimitriou and her entire family survived the Smyrna catastrophe during 1922. Currently he is beginning a new study on the American Philhellenes during the Greek Revolution of 1821, and is engaged in a long-term study of Byzantine Central Greece.

## Presenters



### Paul Bartrop, Ph.D.

*“The Inaction of the Foreign Powers Before and During the Catastrophe of Smyrna and the Politics Behind It”*

Dr Paul Bartrop is a multi-award-winning scholar of genocide and the Holocaust. He is Professor Emeritus of History at Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers, Florida, and Principal Fellow in History at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Until December 2020 he was Professor of History and Director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Research at Florida Gulf Coast University. He has also held numerous other positions

including the Ida E. King Distinguished Visiting Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Richard Stockton College, New Jersey; the University of South Australia; the Jewish Holocaust Centre, Melbourne; Scholar-in-Residence at the Martin-Springer Institute for Teaching the Holocaust, Tolerance and Humanitarian Values at Northern Arizona University; and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Dr. Paul Bartrop is the author, co-author, and editor of 26 books, the most recent of which are

- *The Routledge History of the Second World War* (2021);
- *Children of the Holocaust* (2020);
- *Heroines of Vichy France: Rescuing French Jews during the Holocaust*;
- *The Holocaust: An Encyclopedia and Document Collection* (4 volumes, 2017, which won the Distinguished Book Award from the Society for Military History); and
- *Resisting the Holocaust: Upstanders, Partisans, and Survivors* (2016).

His current projects include *Genocide and Propaganda: A Primary Source Collection* and editing *The Routledge History of the First World War*.



### Kelley Szany

*“The Significance of the Destruction of Smyrna and its Relevance Today”*

Kelley Szany is Senior Vice President of Education and Exhibition at Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center in Skokie, where she provides strategic leadership and planning for all education, programming, and exhibition initiatives. During her 20-year tenure, Szany has been instrumental in the development of the Museum's broader genocide and human rights mission and vision. Szany currently serves as Co-Chair of the Illinois Holocaust

and Genocide Commission and sits on the Board of Directors for the Association of Holocaust Organization and Educators Institute for Human Rights.

Szany has won multiple awards for her educational and human rights work, including the Samuel Goldsmith Award from the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, Damen Award from the Graduate School at Loyola University of Chicago, and the Carl Wilkens Fellowship where she worked alongside national leaders to build and strengthen community-based action and sustained political will to address the entire spectrum of identity-based violence, from dangerous speech to genocide.

Szany has served as adjunct faculty at Aurora University, Jagellonian University in Krakow, Poland, and National Louis University.

## ASIA MINOR & SMYRNA

Ionian is the land in the central part of the western coast of Asia Minor, where the Ionians -one of the four major Greek tribes that set off from mainland Greece to establish the Greek settlements in ancient times. Its twelve cities, which included Miletus, Ephesus, Colophon, Clazomenae as well as Smyrna, will exhibit such economic, political, and cultural activity that for all Asian peoples the name Ionian will denote the Greeks.



Celsus Library in Ephesus

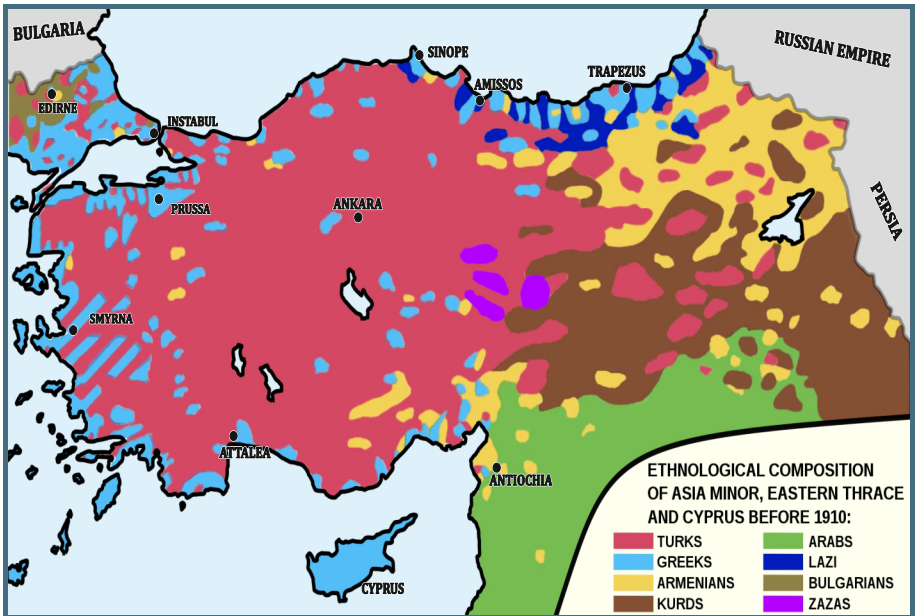
During the Byzantine period, while the ancient cities declined, Smyrna bloomed, became the capital of Ionia, and shortly before the Turkish conquest developed into the capital of the entire western coast of Asia Minor. It will retain this role even after Turkish rule and will be the second largest city of the Ottoman Empire, with the Greek element having an imposing presence, which will be equally prevalent throughout Ionia, as well as other western coast provinces.



Prior to 1922, it boasted 270,000 inhabitants, divided into 140,000 Greeks, 80,000 Turks, 12,000 Armenians, 20,000 Jews and 15,000 Europeans, also including Levantines. The overwhelming presence of Greeks gave the city a Greek character, which was further emphasized by the fact that its financial and cultural life was in their hands.



# ASIA MINOR & SMYRNA



*Asia Minor*, (today is known as *Turkey*) was part of the Greek world from ancient times. The western coast of Asia Minor was known as Ionia which was the homeland of

- Homer (*author of the Iliad and the Odyssey*),
- Herodotus (*the father of history*),
- Thales (*the first Greek philosopher*),
- Diogenes (*the famous Cynic philosopher searching for an "honest man"*)



Smyrna, for thousands of years was an international harbor and a city with religious tolerance, ahead of its time.

It was founded around 1000 BC by Aeolians which were Hellenic settlers.

As an Ottoman City, it was divided into many ethnic quarters such as, Ottoman quarter, Greek, Armenian, French, Jewish, European.

By the 1900s Smyrna established itself as an international commercial port in the Aegean Sea connecting the East with the West ports.

It was considered kin to Constantinople, Alexandria, and Thessaloniki.

## ASIA MINOR & SMYRNA

International commerce, in turn, generated international education and international social life. Its most famous zone was the sea-front section, which was built by the French, a section of the city where mostly activities among all ethnic groups took place. The city had excellent hospitals, schools and social clubs where multi-ethnic groups participated.

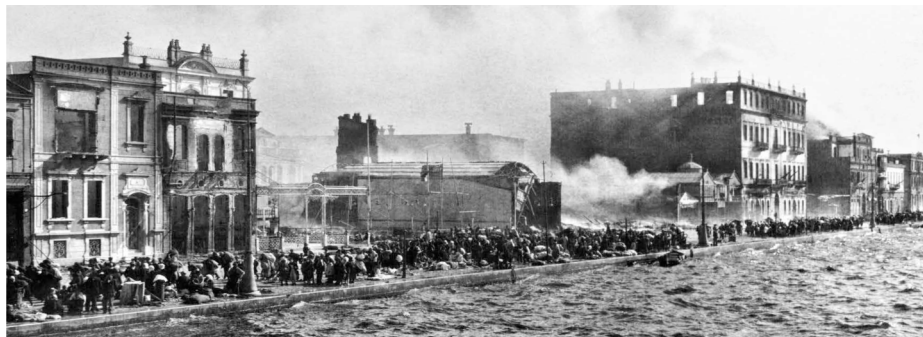


Greeks were the largest group and thrived in this city as they did in Alexandria, Constantinople, and Thessaloniki, because they supported each other and collaborated with foreigners. All that came to an end when the Turkish army set fire to the Greek and Armenia quarters on September 13, 1922. That event wiped out thousand years of Hellenism and Christianity.



Why do we remember Smyrna after 100 years? It is the only city among the other successful major port cities, which shared its success, that was destroyed and because it represents the end of the Greek communities in Asia minor.

As Solomonidis said, *"you cannot leave Smyrna behind, you take it with you."*



## EXCERPTS FROM TESTIMONIALS

**“The cold; the fatigue; the beating; how does one make it alive through that?”**

*Testimony of Georgios Hrysostomidis from Pontus*



All men aged twenty to forty-five were drafted in the Turkish army under the Seferberlik. They let us carry guns, like ordinary soldiers for a while. As soon as the trouble with the Armenians began, they disarmed us and sent us to the “amele taburu”. I was to Paipurt (Turk. Bayburt), together with other guys from our villages and from various places in Pontus.

A hard-knock life it was. They would beat us up a lot back then; I had wounds all over my body. They used us to carry things for the army. There were not many animals; they would keep them

for their own use. We would carry everything on our backs. We would work on road construction, on Zigana, the mountain where they would have us shovel snow. Many didn’t survive it. The cold; the fatigue; the measly rations; the beating; the diseases; how does one make it alive through that? I stayed there for a year and then I came to a decision to escape. I thought to myself: “if I stay, this will be the end of me; if I leave, I will at least have a chance to surviving”.

I left on my own. I would walk by night and hide in the forests by day. I would live on mountain wild greens and at times I would go begging in some Greek villages. When I made it to my village, I looked like death. I was beyond recognition. It was in 1916, before the Russian invasion. I would remain in hiding lest the Turks find out I was a “katsakis” i.e., draft dodger.

Four or five months later, the Russian invaded, and I was able to move freely.

There were women, children, and men above 45 years old in the village. It was hard on them too. As if poverty was not enough in the village, there were no men left to work in the fields and those who were left, couldn’t sustain themselves. There was the war, there was the blockade, and no-one could get neither any money nor any news from Russia. That’s why when the Russians came, people thought they would be our saviors.

The Russians stayed for two years. They came in April 1916 and between November 1917 and January 1918, there weren’t any Russian soldiers left, they had all gone back to Russia. There was the revolution in Russia and there were orders for the entire Army to go back.

Back then, many of our own people, left for Russia on their own will.

I went back to Trapezunda. We were twenty people from different villages, we rented a Turkish motorboat and we left to Batumi in the dead of the night. I don’t know why but they didn’t want us to stay there. Sunrise found us in the open air, under the rain. Next day, we left for Sokhumi. We stayed there for a little while and we left to Novorussiya. We stayed there for three years and in 1921, we decided to come to Greece. We went to the port of Odessa, bought a ticket for a Russian ship that brought us to Thessaloniki.



## EXCERPTS FROM TESTIMONIALS

### "The girl stood there, motionless"

*Testimony of Theodora Kondou from Asia Minor*



We went from the village down to Smyrna. We thought we'd be coming back. We went to rest a bit at the church of St. John. There was a lot of people there. An acquaintance of my father's took us in. We stayed there. He took his family and left without saying a word; he snuck out. The Turks entered; they slaughtered our father, our mother, our uncle, our aunt and my three older siblings. Me and my younger sister - one was two and a half and the other was three and a half - curled up under a little mezzanine and they didn't spot us.

We stayed there for twelve full days, with no food or water. The house had some sort of sink, and water ran through it. What was I supposed to do? All I wanted was to wet my lips. I spread the hem of my skirt over it, held my nose and took a sip; it stank so much, I wanted to throw up.

One of my sisters had a bullet wound in her leg.

As the days went by, the corpses would swell up, get bloated and stank to high heaven. The Turkish women came in the house and were unable to go very far. They'd steal anything they could get their hands on: chickens, spoons, copperware and then they'd leave without seeing us.

At some point it was as though God spoke to me and snuck outside. Then I saw a lot of people leaving, just packing up and leaving. I crossed myself, put my injured little sister on my back and took the other by the hand and got on the street. I was running to catch up the others, the many. Then I saw a girl sitting on a pile of rocks. I gave her a yell; I just wanted someone to help me, to talk to me. That girl, not a thing; she just stood there, motionless. I didn't pay much attention; I just kept talking to her. I could see her eyes bulging out but didn't think anything of it; then I looked more closely. And what do I see? They had stuck a stake up her from behind and it was coming out of her mouth. That's when I started running even faster. What was I do with two babies? I got inside the church, but the reeked so much of rotten blood, the girl's leg, our hair, our clothes, that they kicked us out of the church. What were we to do? We cuddled like puppies in a fireplace. It's been all these years, but I never forget it. It's as though I'm living it all again right now.

They had stuck a stake up her from behind and it was coming out of her mouth. That's when I started running even faster. What was I do with two babies? I got inside the church, but the reeked so much of rotten blood, the girl's leg, our hair, our clothes, that they kicked us out of the church. What were we to do? We cuddled like puppies in a fireplace. It's been all these years, but I never forget it. It's as though I'm living it all again right now.

Finally, wherever the others went, I'd follow. We walked, and we walked, and we walked, until we entered the zone. The Turk wouldn't let us through. If only you could see me then! So, I put my sister in, and then I put the other. Then I got in the zone too and after a while we embarked on a ship and got off in Mytilene.

## ΟΛΑ ΜΑΣ ΤΑ ΚΑΡΑΒΙΑ

Μοιρολόι  
της Μικρασιατικής Καταστροφής.

Όλα μας τα καράβια  
πίσω γυρίσανε,  
σπασμένα τα κατάρτια,  
σκισμένα τα πανιά,  
ήρθαν από τη Σμύρνη  
κι από τα Μουδανιά.

Φέραν των εκκλησιών μας  
τα δισκοπότρηρα,  
παιδιά, γυναίκες, γέροντες,  
γένος Ρωμιών πολύ,  
τις ρίζες της φυλής μας  
απ' την ανατολή.

Μα ένα μικρό καράβι  
πίσω δε γύρισε,  
ποιους κάβους αρμενίζει;  
ποια πέλαγα γυρνά;  
Και πουθενά δε φτάνει,  
δε βγαίνει πουθενά.

Χρόνια το καρτερούμε  
και χρόνια πέρασαν,  
δεν το είδε μήτε ναύτης,  
μήτε θαλασσαετός,  
μήτ' ερημίτης φάρος,  
μήτ' άστρο της νυκτός.

Ωμιέ!

Τάχα να 'χει βουλιάξει;  
τάχα να στοίχειωσε;  
Δε θα ξανάρθει τάχα  
στην πατρική του ακτή;  
Ωμιέ! Κι έχει φορτώσει  
το πιο ακριβό φορτί.

Όλα τα χάσαμε όλα,  
και μόνο φόρτωσε  
το πιο στερνό καράβι  
την ώρα του χαμού,  
φόρτωσε την ελπίδα  
του ξαναγυρισμού.

Έλα μικρό καράβι,  
έλα, ξεφόρτωσε,  
δώσ' μας το θησαυρό σου  
κι άνοιξε τα πανιά  
ολόισια για τη Σμύρνη  
και για τα Μουδανιά!

## ALL OUR SHIPS

*Dirge of the Asia Minor Catastrophe*

All our ships have returned  
their mastheads shattered  
their sails torn from Smyrna  
and from Mudania they came.

With them the chalices from our churches they brought  
Children, women, old men,  
so many of the Greek people  
The roots of our nation from the East.

But one small ship did not return.  
Which fields does it plow,  
which seas does it wander,  
arriving nowhere and going nowhere?

For years we long for it,  
and the years have passed,  
Neither sailor nor sea eagle has seen it,  
and neither has the lonely lighthouse nor evening star.

Oh, Woe is Me!

Might it have sunk,  
might it have become a ghost??  
Might it never return to its homeland's shores?  
Alas... and it is loaded with the most valued of cargo.

We've lost everything.  
And the only thing this little ship  
loaded at the hour of its doom  
was hope of its return.

Come my little ship, come,  
and let's unload.  
Give us your treasures and spread your sails.  
Sail straight ahead for Smyrna and Moudania.

