Eleni Chasioti

CLOTHES AND TEXTILES OF ANATOLIAN GREEK REFUGEES

Embodied Memories on Display

Fashion and Personal Style Studies

Collection Editor

JOSEPH H. HANCOCK II

LIVED PLACES PUBLISHING

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To those who fled and those who stayed behind.

To my refugee family members.

First published in 2026 by Lived Places Publishing

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Abstract

This book explores the legacy of the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey through the lens of clothing, textiles, and material culture. Focusing on belongings of those forced to flee, it explores how personal and collective memories are preserved and communicated within museum exhibitions and cultural initiatives. Drawing mainly on examples from Greece, it looks closely into the role of cultural professionals and institutions in addressing intergenerational trauma and fostering meaningful dialogues for communities. Through historical context and contemporary practices, this book invites readers to reflect on the enduring relevance of displacement.

Key words

Greco-Turkish War, Asia Minor Catastrophe, Anatolian Greeks, population exchange, displacement, forced migration, refugee memory, material culture, refugee clothing, regional dress and textiles

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Note on language

Anatolia and Asia Minor are two terms referring to the peninsula surrounded by water on three sides: the Black Sea to the north, the Aegean Sea to the west, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south. This geographical area is located between the western and eastern worlds and today constitutes part of the Republic of Türkiye. Historically there have been slight differences in defining each area, but the two terms—Anatolia and Asia Minor—are considered synonymous by researchers today and used interchangeably in this book.

Moreover, in the context of this book, the terms Anatolian and Asia Minor Greeks are preferred when referring to Greek communities who lived across the Ottoman Empire for centuries before 1923 as opposed to another popular term used by scholars: Ottoman Greeks.

This decision has been made for purposes of protecting the cultural, social, and religious characteristics of the community. Even though it is acknowledged that diverse communities who lived under the Ottoman Empire for centuries heavily influenced each other, the vast majority of Greek populations that lived across Anatolia maintained their Christian Orthodox religion and Greek language.

With regards to the spelling of the name of the country Turkey, as it is widely known, the name Republic of Türkiye, or for the sake of brevity Türkiye, is being used within this book to reflect a 2022 change to its official name. The change was applied after an official request to the United Nations by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (United Nations). However, the spelling Turkey has been kept for purposes of respecting historical context when a passage refers to events before 2022. Other phrases, including the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman territory, may also refer to the same geographical area.

The same practice has been applied to names of places. For example, in Section 2.2 of Chapter 2, I refer to the Turkish city of Trabzon as Trebizond, its historical name, when discussing events that took place in the area up until the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Throughout the book, I refer to individuals who experienced displacement by their full names, wherever possible. When it comes to married female individuals, I have tried to also include their maiden names where available. While this level of detail may not seem essential to every reader, it reflects a conscious decision to record both married and birth identities in the context of displacement and refugee memory. In situations of forced migration, names become markers of identity, continuity, and belonging. Preserving full names, including premarriage surnames, is a political rather than a stylistic choice to honor the complexity of lives disrupted by war.

Content warning

This book contains explicit references to and descriptions of situations which may cause distress. This includes references to and descriptions of:

- Genocide and massacres
- War violence

Please be aware that references to potentially distressing topics may occur throughout the book.

Introduction

> The construction of refugee identity is sustained and nourished by reminiscences, which provide a chronicle of the ethnohistory of the "Mikrasiates" [Asia Minor natives]. Recollection documents the past and the past is interpreted through the remembered experience. Memory does not exist in a vacuum: the retelling of personal and public experience that augments its meaning surrounds it. Through the interpretation of memory, the past is reified and validated.
>
> James, 2001, p.7

I grew up hearing my maternal grandparents, Eleni and Lazaros, speak a different language (a dialect, really) to each other. What they spoke sounded like Greek but was not quite the same, and while my mother and her two sisters seemed to understand it, I never heard them use it themselves. As a child, I never gave it much thought; it was simply a part of the background of family life.

It wasn't until later that I began to truly understand a family past that stretched far beyond the home I knew. The dialect my grandparents spoke was Pontic Greek or Pontiaka (Ποντιακά), the dialect of the Anatolian Greeks from the Black Sea region.

My maternal great grandparents, Pavlos, Efsaia, Ioannis, and Chrysoula, were between the thousands of Anatolian Greeks who fled the Ottoman territory in the first quarter of the twentieth century. They, like hundreds of thousands of other refugees, fled to make home in their homeland, Greece, with which they were connected by ethnicity, language, and religion but have never lived in or ever even visited.

I have the luck to have met and be very close to my grandparents, and so I was able to interview them both in person about the experiences of their parents, grandparents, and other family members. Even though much of the valuable information about my great-grandparents' refugee experience is already forgotten or was never passed on, I have made every effort to include all relevant information my grandparents could recall about events that shaped our family history over 100 years ago.

According to my grandfather, Lazaros Chouilidis, his father, Pavlos Chouilidis (Figure 1), left from Nicomedia, the ancient metropolis by the Sea of Marmara, around 1917 and 1918 (Chasioti and Chouilidis, 2023). He left with his father, Kosmas, and fellow villagers from his village, Adapazari ("Atapazar" as my grandfather pronounces it) and first went to Iraq. He ended up in a city in the Peloponnese peninsula in southern mainland Greece, either Kalamata or Patra, approximately 3 years later. My grandfather mentions that his paternal family arrived in Greece between 1921 and 1922. In Greece, Pavlos had to become a beggar for a short time to survive and worked as a shoe shiner on the streets.

After the official population exchange was signed in 1923, Muslim refugees previously located in Greece had to relocate to the Turkish territory as did the Greek Orthodox populations located in Anatolia. When movements toward the Turkish territory started and houses became available, Pavlos moved from

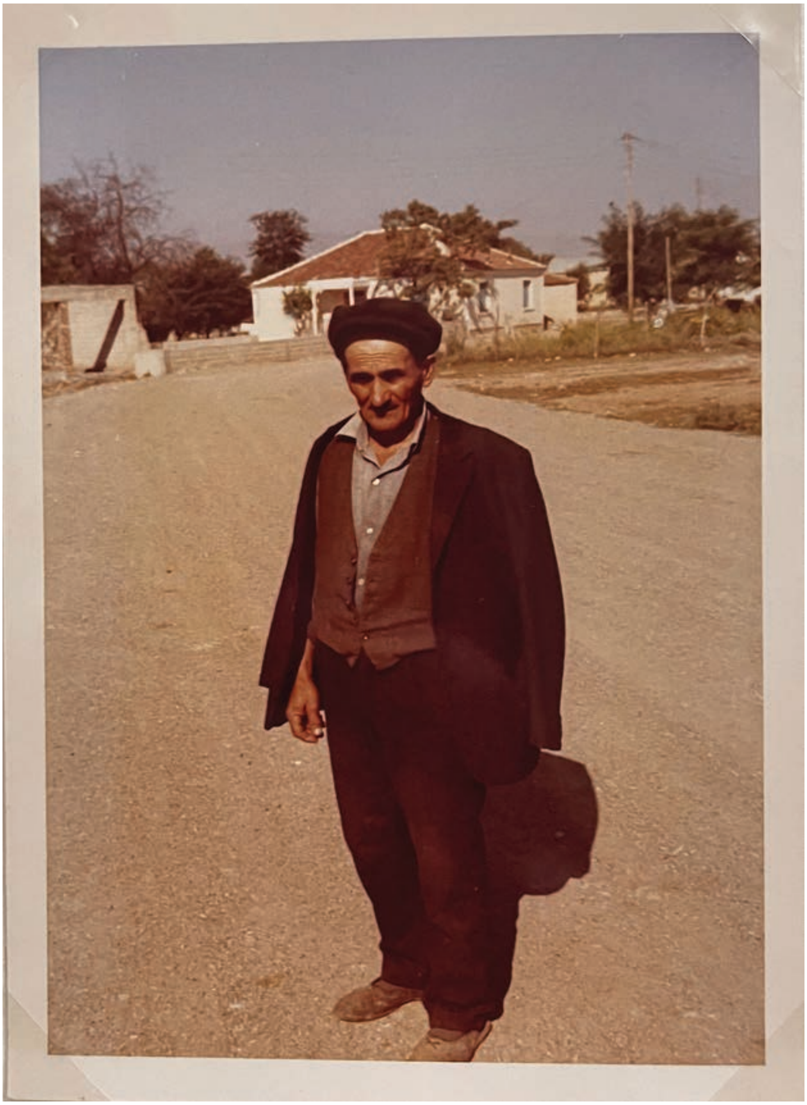

Figure 1: Photograph depicting Pavlos Chouilidis in Kleitos village, Macedonia, Greece. 20 July 1970. From the family archive.

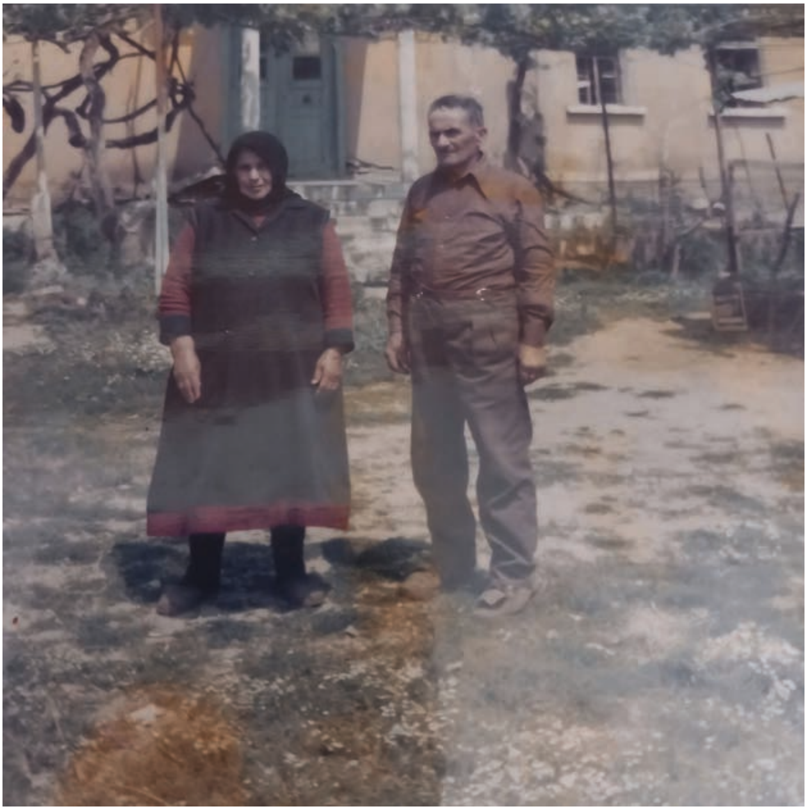

Figure 2: Photograph depicting Pavlos Chouilidis (right) and Efsaia Chouilidou (left) outside their house in Kleitos village, Macedonia, Greece. Date unknown. From the family archive.

southern to northern Greece where he was able to move into one of the empty houses that previously belonged to Muslim local families.

My grandfather's mother, Efsaia Chouilidou (née Heroglidou) (Figure 2), fled to Greece as a refugee with her siblings. As her parents were not able to flee, they were left behind in Anatolia. It is unknown whether they were able to stay in their homes or had to relocate to another region, possibly to one friendlier toward Orthodox populations; however, what is certain is that they never fled to Greece due to age-related physical restrictions. Efsaia most likely spent 2–3 years in quarantine in refugee camps in Kalamaria (Thessaloniki, northern Greece) with family members and other refugees from Anatolia. Efsaia and Pavlos were born and lived in the same region in Anatolia. However, they only met in northern Greece after having fled and got married in Greece.

My grandmother, Eleni Chouilidou, mentions that her father, Ioannis Spiridopoulos (Figure 3), left Anatolia around 1922 together with his father Pavlos, his brother Lazaros, and other family members (Chasioti and Chouilidou, 2023).

Pavlos's wife Parthena, my great-great-grandmother, was unable to travel long distances and was therefore left behind, somewhere on the way to Greece while still in Ottoman territory. As

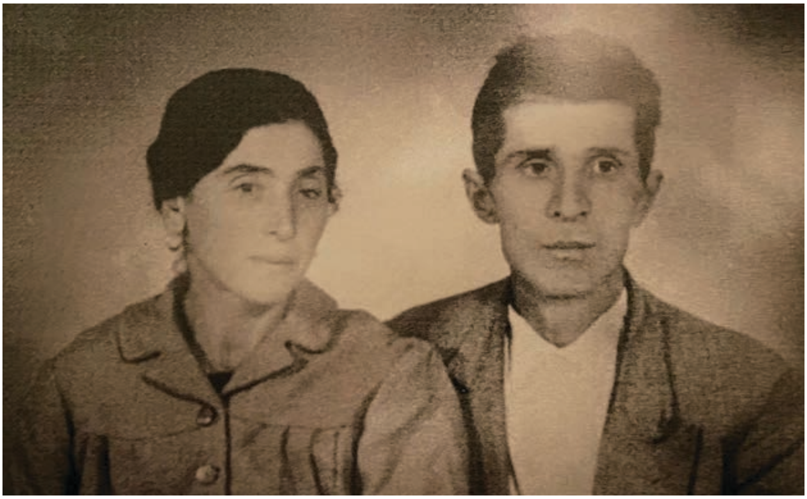

Figure 3: Photograph depicting Ioannis Spiridopoulos (right) and Chrysoula Spiridopoulou (left). Date unknown. From the family archive.

many refugees travelled by foot, it was quite common for the very young, less strong, less able, and elderly refugees to be left behind.

My grandmother narrates this story as she heard it from her father: one of his youngest siblings, Kiriakos, who was around 6 years old at the time, was exhausted from the long-distance walking on rough roads, and was unable to continue walking, let alone walk on the relatively fast pace needed for safety reasons. The faster these refugee groups were able to distant themselves from territories where Turkish army soldiers or armed irregulars were present, the more likely it would be for them to successfully flee and survive. As the family realized that Kiriakos, their youngest member, was struggling to keep up the pace, they had to make the heartbreaking decision of travelling several kilometers back to find Parthena and leave Kiriakos, her grandchild, close to her. It is unknown what happened to Parthena and Kiriakos after the rest of the family last saw them, but it is almost certain that they never made it to Greek territory.

My grandmother's mother, Chrysoula Spiridopoulou (née Iliadou), fled to Greece with her four brothers and her parents, Nafsika and Theodoros. Unfortunately, there are no other details from her flight to safety that either of my grandparents could recall; so, hers and her family's story remain unknown. My grandmother could not recall where her family lived in Anatolia, but my grandfather mentioned that he faintly remembers them mentioning that they lived in an area close to where his family lived (Chasioti and Chouilidis, 2023).

My great-grandmother Chrysoula (Figure 3) was the only family member who lived through the Greco-Turkish War and fled

Anatolia that I have personally met. She died in 2012 aged 94 when I was 18 years old. I still vividly remember the heavy gold hoop earrings hanging from her ear lobes and her long white hair woven in a thick plait touching her neck and back, giving a tiny splash of light to her humble, faded black dress, and a small glass bowl filled with raisins on a table right at the entrance of her tiny house in Kleitos village in northern Greece.

No objects—clothes or other textiles—are known to be brought with any of my family members when they were forced out of their homes in Anatolia. However, I believe that there must have been personal belongings that accompanied them on their difficult journey to Greece, but unfortunately their unique stories were not passed on to their descendants. A reason why textiles and clothing-related objects (as well as their stories) have not survived may be relevant to the common practice of repurposing old clothes and textiles in the twentieth-century Greece as described by B., an 80-year-old woman.

> «Τα ρούχα της μητέρας μου, κεντητά, κάτι φούστες φουντωτές, τα βρήκα εγώ μετά και τα χαλνούσα, στόλιζα κούκλες, δε μ΄έκοβε να τα κρατήσω, κράτησα ορισμένα, τα βάζαμε στα καρναβάλια». [When I found my mother's embroidered clothes and her ruffle skirts, I cut them down, I used them to dress my dolls; I wasn't smart enough to keep them intact, though I did keep some. We even used those old clothes to dress up for Carnival]
>
> Oikonomidou Botsiou, 2009, p. 158

My paternal grandmother, Kassiani Chasioti, confirms this with a similar story she shared with me:

> «Ήταν μάλλινα τότε τα υφάσματα. Είχε ένα ωραίο πράσινο φουστάνι η μάνα μου και δεν το φορούσε κι εμείς δεν είχαμε και το χάλασε για να το φορέσω εγώ. Το έφτιαξε η Αγνούλα γιατί είχε αρχίσει να ράβει τότε· και το έραψε για μένα. […] Ωραία υφάσματα! Δε μας έκοβε τότε παιδί μου. Τότε φτώχεια είχαμε, σάματι κοιτούσαμε να αφήσουμε το ρούχο; Και να το αφήσουμε γιατί, τί θα το κάναμε; […] Τα κόβαμε και τα κάναμε κουρελούδες. Τα ρούχα ήταν μετρημένα. Τα φορούσαμε όσο άντεχαν και μετά τα κόβαμε». [Back in the day, fabrics were woollen. My mother had a beautiful green dress she wasn't wearing, and, as we [her daughters] didn't have any, she cut it down for me to wear it. Agnoula [my sister] had started sewing at the time; and she used it to make a new dress for me. […] Such nice fabrics! We didn't know any better, my child. We were poor, why would we care about keeping a bunch of old clothes? And keep them for what, what would we use them for? […] We cut them down and made them into rags. We only had a few clothes anyway. We wore them for as long as they lasted and then cut them down]
>
> Chasioti and Chasioti, 2020

My family's history has undoubtedly played a significant role in my research interests and the deeply personal and invested way I approach this topic. As a researcher, my interest is in lived experiences of the less privileged, underrepresented, and displaced communities and how museum collections of personal objects and clothes that relate to tragic historical events can help make the memory of conflict and war a little less painful.

This book discusses the historical context around the expulsion of Greek Orthodox refugees from Anatolia to various places across mainland Greece and the islands. Moreover, it takes a close look into contemporary museum collections, found today across Greece, which hold textiles and clothing items related to the lives of refugees before and after the population exchange.

Museum collections that collect and preserve items in relation to forced migration are presented as catalysts for maintaining intercultural memory and showing a path to healing and progression. Items that survived and made their way into museums are approached to help contemporary readers explore how everyday objects may connect people, create a sense of identity for displaced communities, and ultimately help us all understand the lives of their owners better.

In writing the chapters that follow, I aim at maintaining memory and shedding light into unknown lived experiences of refugees who survived tragedy and their valuable stories, as these are narrated through their personal objects within museum collections.

Learning objectives

Readers of this book can expect to:

- comprehend complex historical events and deepen their understanding of people's lives in post-conflict societies;
- observe the practical and symbolic implications of the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, including its impact on individuals who had to relocate;
- look into clothes, textiles, and material culture as vessels for communicating and protecting intercultural memory and examine the significance of various clothing items and textiles, highlighting the personal stories attached to them, including traditional ensembles, wedding dresses, and dowries, among others;
- discuss the contribution of cultural professionals at addressing transgenerational and intercommunal trauma through exhibitions and culture-related activities in museums and cultural centers;
- reflect on the role of cultural institutions and museums as safe places where meaningful, honest, and unbiased conversations about complex history may take place.

1

Historical context, refugees' arrival and their new life in Greece, contemporary matters

1.1 Framing the history

This first chapter is historically dense in order to set the stage for the chapters that follow. It is not meant as a comprehensive historical account, but as an accessible introduction to a lesser-known part of European history, one that is essential for understanding the emotional, cultural, and material notions running through the rest of this book. The approach taken throughout is intentionally human-centered.

The testimony by Anatolian Greek Orthodox refugee Kostis Rizos was deliberately chosen to frame this chapter. His words reflect the emotional devastation ordinary people experienced because of high-level political decisions.

> «Θρήνος, κλαυθμός και οδυρμός απ' άκρη σ' άκρη, μόλις ήλθε στη δημογεροντία η διαταγή της τουρκικής κυβερνήσεως, που μιλούσε για τον ξεριζωμό μας. Χωρίς καν να ερωτηθούμε, σαν να ήμαστε αγέλες προβάτων. Ήταν ανήθικο, ήταν τραγικό να αφήσουμε έτσι να σκορπιστούν αιώνων κόποι, μόχθοι και αγώνες. Να εγκαταλείψουμε τα σχολεία μας, τις εκκλησίες μας, τον πολιτισμό μας, τα κόκαλα των προγόνων μας, τα όσια και ιερά εθνικά μας κειμήλια... κι όμως, δεν μπορούσε να γίνει αλλιώς. Μόνο αν ομαδικά αλλάζαμε τη θρησκεία των πατέρων μας, τότε θα μπορούσαμε να μείνουμε. Αυτό όμως ήταν αδύνατο· ήταν αισχρό. Έτσι υποκύψαμε στην ειμαρμένη.». [Lament, grief, and sorrow, as soon as the order of the Turkish government, which spoke of uprooting us, was received by our local government. They didn't even bother asking us, as if we were animals. It was immoral, it was tragic to let centuries of hard work and struggle go to waste like this. To abandon our schools, our churches, our culture, the bones of our ancestors, our faithful and sacred national relics... and yet, it could not be otherwise. Only if we collectively changed the religion of our fathers, then we could stay. But this was impossible; it was shameful. So we succumbed to fate.]
>
> Mourelos, 2022, p. 21

By placing the testimony at the beginning of the first chapter, I hope to have turned it into a powerful anchor to remind readers that what follows is not only a story of state policies and border changes, but one of disrupted lives and cultural dislocation.

1.2 A short retrospection of the events that led to the Asia Minor Catastrophe

Anatolia has a complex history shaped by centuries of cultural exchange and conflict. In modern times, the Greco-Turkish War that lasted from 1919 to 1922 ended with a brutal massacre of the Christian population by the Turkish army, and later, formally settled by an agreement of an exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey.

For centuries before the 1919–1922 War, the population of the area was quite diverse—Turks, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Albanians, and Kurds were all living together in cosmopolitan places like Izmir. With regards to Greek populations specifically, the vast majority of them lived and worked mostly across the coastal areas.

Even though there had been conflicts across Anatolia in the past, it was during the First World War and after when things started to dramatically change for the local population and minorities (Llewellyn-Smith, 2023, p. 273). During the First World War, Turks forced over 500,000 Anatolian Greeks and thousands of Armenians and Orthodox Assyrians into labor battalions. Labor battalions was unfree labor, very similar to military service, from which only a few men survived due to the inhumane conditions of extreme violence and lack of hygiene that prevailed (Morris and Ze'evi, 2019, p. 387).

Moreover, in the first half of the twentieth century, specifically between 1915 and 1918, thousands of Anatolian Greeks were persecuted by Turks in several areas and killed. Consequently, Greek populations turned to the then Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos seeking for help and protection (Veremis, 2022, p. 16).

At the same time, extremities toward Muslims of the Balkans led to the high volume of Muslim refugees turning to the Ottoman Empire for protection. This disturbed the ways Muslims and other populations had coexisted for decades. So much so that it gradually fired up extreme Turkish nationalism and hostility against Greek and other populations based across the Ottoman Empire.

To add to that, political agendas of allies of Greece like France, Italy, and the United Kingdom also played a role in widening the gap between the two countries. It is worth mentioning one such relevant event that underlines the influence of external forces and their agendas in the conflict as well as, ultimately, the role they played. In 1919, Greek Prime Minister Venizelos met with Lloyd George, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and was informed of the decision made by the Allies of the First World War to authorize Greek army presence in Izmir (Allamani and Panagiotopoulou, 1980, pp. 128–129), a decision that surely sharpened the edges in the relationship of the two countries.

A year later, in 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies but was never ratified (Montgomery, 1972, pp. 775–787). The treaty obliged Turkey to lose power over the islands of the eastern Aegean Sea that were given to Greece; Armenia would become independent; Kurdistan would be declared an autonomous region. According to its terms, Greece would acquire the territories of eastern Thrace and take over the governance of the Izmir region for five years with the prospect of its integration after a referendum.

This became a turning point for Turks who started to lose faith to the Sultan and began trusting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a statesman who seemed to be much more radical and determined to protect Muslim populations of the Ottoman Empire and act on preserving their domination over any minorities. Because of his contribution in safeguarding the Empire and Turkish people, Atatürk was named the founding father of the Republic of Turkey.

In the aftermath of the devastating events mentioned above, over a million Greeks who survived the massacre sought refuge in Greek territory, namely Athens, Macedonia, Thrace and islands of the eastern Aegean Sea. Memories of the Greek populations that lived across the coast of Asia Minor and their rich cultural heritage were threatened with extinction.

As battles were taking place in Turkish territory between the Ottoman and the Greek armies, the Greek army got exhausted and incapable of keeping part in the war. In summer of 1922, Greeks ultimately capitulated. This led to the genocides of Greeks, Armenians and Pontians from the Turkish army and a huge wave of those who survived seeking refuge in Greece.

Historical sources report that several hundred thousand Anatolian Greeks and other Christian minorities died between 1913 and 1923. War victims were either murdered cold-bloodedly, or their death was caused due to conditions that made them extremely vulnerable, such as hunger, disease, and exposure (Meichanetsidis, 2015, pp. 104–173). The total of the events mentioned here is widely known as the Asia Minor Catastrophe.

1.3 Refugees arrive in Greece

At the time, over one million refugees arrive in Greece, and this is the biggest inflow of Christian Orthodox refugees injected into the Greek society in the country's history.

In 1922, the National Geographic Magazine sends correspondents to Anatolia to cover the unravelling of historical events following the Greco-Turkish War. In November 1925, an article by Melville Chater, titled *History's Greatest Trek*, gets printed. The subtitle *Tragedy Stalks Through the Near East as Greece and Turkey Exchange Two Million of Their People* is self-explanatory.

The language and tone of voice used throughout the article make evident the impact of the terrible events he experienced had on the writer as he allows personal thoughts and emotion to express themselves through his writing. Chater vividly describes the havoc the war and conflict created to the surroundings and people around him. Ultimately, the writer and photographers create one of the very few detailed primary sources narrating the tragic events and the refugees' new reality in Greek territory.

> "Ever since the expulsion from Eden, man has been trekking, and folk wanderings are the roots of his history; but with 1922 began what may fairly be called history's greatest, most spectacular trek–the compulsory intermigration of two million Christians and Moslems across the Aegean Sea. Slowly gathering impetus through the centuries, of a sudden these human tidal waves reared and burst on its shores.
>
> This trek, brought about by the startling recuperation of Turkey after her defeat in the World War and her subsequent