

# **GREEKS FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION**



**Sam Topalidis  
2022**



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2022**

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I acknowledge the land of Canberra, Australia is the traditional land of the indigenous Aboriginal Ngunnawal people.



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## Preface

My ancestors were Orthodox Christian Greeks who came from the Trabzon region in Pontos (the north-east corner of Anatolia adjacent to the Black Sea). We are called Pontic Greeks. My father was born in Platana near Trabzon but my parents lived their early years in the Sokhumi area of Abkhazia in the north-west of modern Georgia. In 1939, they moved to Greece and after World War II and the Greek Civil War, they moved to Australia. I am grateful that my parents had the courage to leave Greece for faraway Australia which gave them the opportunity to flourish.

By writing this document I have learned more about my parents and how they were influenced by the Stalin era in the Soviet Union. They had nothing good to say about Stalin!

Unfortunately, my work lacks reference to some respectable works written in Greek which I could not translate, so this work is incomplete. For those who can read Greek, the detailed works of Dr Vlasis Agtzidis are highly recommended.

As Anatolian Greeks we are connected to our lost homeland through experiences, passed down memories and well-researched history. Most Greeks from the former Soviet Union were of Pontic Greek descent. My aim in writing this document is to help Greeks, especially Pontic Greeks know more about their heritage. I have analysed published population data on Greeks and have taken care when quoting this data. All figures and plates in this document have been sourced from Wikimedia Commons which is freely available.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr Dimitris Kataiftsis (from Thessaloniki) for his comments to an earlier draft. I also wish to thank Michael Bennett and Russell McCaskie for their editorial comments to this work. Others who have assisted my work are acknowledged at the end of relevant chapters.

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## **Timeline of Important Events**

c. 7th century BC Greeks from Miletos began colonising the Black Sea

336–323 BC	Reign of Alexander the Great
302–63 BC	Mithradates kingdom of Pontos
330 BC	Constantinople became the capital of the Eastern Roman empire
1071	Seljuk Turks defeat Byzantines [Eastern Roman empire] at Manzikert
1204	Sack of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade
1204	Empire of Trebizond founded
1453	Fall of Constantinople to Ottoman Turks
1461	Fall of Trabzon to Ottoman Turks
1475	Crimea came under control of the Ottoman Turks
1721–1917	Russian empire
18th century	Greeks begin moving to the Russia empire
1783	Russian empire annexes Crimea
1828–1829	Russo-Turkish War
1832	Kingdom of Greece established
1853–1856	Crimean War
1861–1865	American Civil War
1877–1878	Russo-Turkish War in the Balkans
1878	Russia annexes Kars from the Ottoman empire
1912–1913	Balkan Wars
1914–1918	World War I
1915	Armenian genocide by Ottoman Turks
1916 (April)	Russians capture Trabzon
1916–1923	Genocide of Pontic Greeks by Ottoman Turks and then the Kemalists
1917 (June)	Greece enters World War I
1917–1922	Russian Civil War
1918 (Feb)	Russian army leave Anatolia
1918 (April)	Russia return Kars to Ottoman Turks. Greeks in Kars flee
1919–1920	Paris Peace Conference
1919 (May)	Greek army land in Smyrna, western Anatolia
1919 (May)	Mustafa Kemal lands at Samsun and continues the genocide against Pontic Greeks
1919–1922	Greco-Turkish War in western Anatolia
1920	Treaty of Sevres signed
1922 (Aug)	Greek army defeated in the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) in western Anatolia

1922–1924	Christian Greeks expelled from Anatolia
1922–Dec 1991	Period of the Soviet Union
1923 (Jan)	Lausanne Convention signed—population exchange
1923 (July)	Lausanne Treaty signed
1923 (Oct)	Republic of Turkey established
1924	Death of Lenin
1924–1953	Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union
1946 & 1949	Pontic Greeks from Black Sea regions in the Soviet Union deported to Soviet Central Asian republics.
1953–1964	Khrushchev first Secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union
1954	Crimea transferred from the Russian SFSR to Ukrainian SSR
1964–1982	Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
1985–1991	Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
1987–2000	Over 150,000 Greeks from the former Soviet Union move to Greece
1991 (Dec)	Dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russian Federation established
2014 (March)	Russia forcibly annexes Crimea
2022 (Feb)	Russia invades Ukraine.

# 1. Introduction

N' anaspalo ke' eporo. (Pontic Greek)  
[Forget, I cannot.]

## Why is This Document Important?

This document provides an analysis of aspects of Greek history in the Russian empire, the Soviet Union and the Independent Republics which were established after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Most of these Greeks were of Pontic Greek descent (from north-east Anatolia near the Black Sea) who moved to the Soviet Union and then moved to Greece (and the diaspora). My aim is to produce this history, primarily for people of Greek heritage, but also for other interested readers.

Please note that I use the word 'Pontic', the academically accepted term in English to describe people from Pontos. The word Pontos means 'the sea', especially the open sea. In time, however, the word Pontos became associated with the north-east corner of Anatolia that borders the Black Sea. Pontic Greeks are Anatolian Greeks. The physical separation of Pontic Greeks from other Greek communities led to the development of a distinct culture in Pontos, manifested in the idiosyncratic music, dances and dialect. Their culture marks a clear border with other Greeks—something which initially constrained their acceptance by other Greeks.<sup>1</sup>

I refer to the Asian component of the Republic of Turkey as Anatolia not Asia Minor. The Republic of Turkey was declared in October 1923. The term Asia Minor is sometimes used to refer to only the western portion of the current Republic of Turkey.

## Document Structure

The formatting and style in this document follows the latest digital update to the Australian Government *Style Manual*. Please note that when population data are described in the text they will be rounded (for simplicity) when compared with the data displayed in the tables.

The detailed 'Table of Contents' can assist the reader to identify sections of interest and the 'Timeline of Events' will help the reader identify the context of events discussed in this document. Many references are provided in the footnotes—my own comments within sentences within a reference in the text are stressed in square brackets '[ ]'. Complete references are consolidated into the 'References' section at the end of the document. This list is recommended for those who wish to read more detailed information. At the end of some chapters a Notes section provides readers with more details on information discussed in the chapter.

Following this Introduction, Chapter 2, 'Who are the Pontic Greeks', describes that most Greeks in the former Soviet Union (especially in modern Georgia and southern Russia) were of Pontic Greek descent. It briefly discusses the origins of Greeks from Pontos and how they moved to the Russian empire/Soviet Union or were forced to leave Anatolia, primarily for Greece.

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<sup>1</sup> Pratsinakis (2013).

Chapter 3, 'Miletos Colonising the Northern and Eastern Black Sea', describes that the Greeks from Miletos (on the west coast of Anatolia) organised the colonisation of those Black Sea regions with the assistance of other centres. There were many colonies established in these regions.

Chapter 4, 'Greeks Moving to the Soviet Union Then to Greece', provides details of the struggles Greeks (especially Anatolian Greeks) had to endure from the 18th century as they escaped Ottoman Turk repression and fled to the Soviet Union, which had its own set of deportations and repression. The chapter is a simplification of what occurred during this period.

Chapter 5, 'The Greek Language in the Soviet Union', discusses what variation of the Greek language was taught in schools to ethnic Greeks and what variations of the Greek language were used to publish Greek books and Greek newspapers in the Soviet Union. Although Pontic Greek was widely spoken by Pontic Greeks, the Mariupol Greek dialect was widely spoken in and around Mariupol (in modern Ukraine). In addition, in areas in Crimea the Greeks spoke *Demotic* Greek.

Chapter 6, 'Greek Theatre' describes this often unknown aspect of Greek culture around the Black Sea. Much of this theatre used the Pontic Greek dialect, but not exclusively.

The final chapter is the complete list of references. The author's brief biography ends the document.



## 2. Who Are the Pontic Greeks?

### Introduction

Most Greeks in the Soviet Union were of Pontic Greek descent. The study of human ethnicity in Pontos in north-east Anatolia near the Black Sea is complex.<sup>2</sup> From the 7th century BC, the Greeks from Miletos (Figure 2.1, near modern Balat) on the west coast of Anatolia and in partnership with other settlements were predominantly responsible for establishing Greek colonies in the greater Black Sea region. The Black Sea region was already settled by indigenous peoples who were at times hostile to these Greeks.

After colonising the eastern part of the southern Black Sea coast, Pontic Greeks survived for more than two and half millennia until the end of 1924,



Figure 2.1: Map of ancient Ionia in western Anatolia  
(Mytilene to Smyrna = 100 km,  
[commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ionia,\\_birthplace\\_of\\_Greek\\_philosophy.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ionia,_birthplace_of_Greek_philosophy.png)).

<sup>2</sup> Ethnicity can be generally defined as a sense of belonging to a group, based on shared ideas of group history, language, experience and culture (Chatty 2010). Ethnicity is highly subjective—a matter of self-ascription (Zoumpalidis 2013). What we call ‘ethnicity’ is a mental and social construct and is based on what we believe in our hearts. For possible ‘benefits’ of DNA tests for genealogical purposes as a pointer for possible ethnicity, see Topalidis (2021).

when effectively all Christian Greeks were forced to leave Anatolia for Greece under the compulsory population exchange (Note 2.1). However, some Anatolian Greeks escaped to the Soviet Union.

On arrival in Greece, the immigrants had a strong sense of national Greek identity, but this was challenged by their host population—though not by the Greek Government.<sup>3</sup>

Pontic Greeks feel they are different from other Greeks. They developed a distinctive culture (Plates 2.1, 2.2) including maintaining the Pontic Greek dialect, an old form of the Greek language.<sup>4</sup>



Plate 2.1: One example of a Pontic Greek women's folk costume (Edmonton, Canada 2013, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greek\_Dancing\_(9453193683).jpg).

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<sup>3</sup> Hionidou (2012).

<sup>4</sup> In around the 11th century, after the Seljuk Turk invasions of Anatolia, Pontos became isolated from other Greek speaking regions. As a result, the Greek spoken in Pontos had kept many of its medieval characteristics that had subsequently disappeared in other Greek speaking areas (Mackridge 1987).



Plate 2.2: Studio photograph of Pontic Greek men in some traditional costumes (early 20th century, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pontic\_Greek\_men.jpg).

### **Pontic Greeks From the Former Soviet Union**

It can be difficult to accurately identify how many Greeks moved to the Soviet Union. This document will attempt to identify how many were Pontic Greeks or other Anatolian Greeks.

From the 18th century, the Greeks from Pontos began migrating especially to modern Georgia and southern Russia (around the Black Sea).<sup>5</sup> People of Greek descent were brought up as Greeks within the Soviet nationalities model. Ethnic Pontic Greeks in the Soviet Union became aware of ‘their’ Pontic identity when they arrived in Greece.<sup>6</sup>

Greeks from the former Soviet Union faced a language problem which separated them from people in Greece. Most of the repatriates spoke Russian or Urum (a Turkish dialect) and if their families spoke Pontic Greek, it was incomprehensible to the people in Greece who only spoke *Demotic*

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<sup>5</sup> Hionidou (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Pratsinakis (2021).

[modern] Greek. The local Greek population in Greece demarcate the cultural ‘otherness’ of the Greek migrants from the former Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup>

## **Note 2.1**

### Population exchange

At least 416,000 Pontic Greeks lived in northern Anatolia (excluding Kars) before World War I. Many Pontic Greeks were also living in the Russian empire surrounding the Black Sea.

The Greek army was defeated in August 1922 in the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) and retreated in western Anatolia. This exposed the Greeks in Anatolia to retaliation by irregulars and the Turkish army (Hirschon 2003a).

In January 1923, Greece and Turkey signed the Lausanne Convention concerning the population exchange between Greece and Turkey. It stipulated the compulsory exchange of ‘Turkish nationals of the Greek Orthodox religion’ in Turkish territory and the ‘Greek nationals of the Moslem religion’ in Greek territory. The Greeks in Istanbul and the Muslims in western Thrace were exempt from this exchange. The exclusion of the Orthodox inhabitants of the islands of Imbros and Tenedos [in the north-east Aegean Sea which were ceded to Turkey in 1923] was specified in the Treaty of Lausanne signed in July 1923 (Hirschon 2003a). The signing of the treaty formally ended the Ottoman empire (*Encyclopedia of the Ottoman empire* 2009).

By July 1923, most Christian Greeks had already been forced out of Turkish territory. As a consequence, the population exchange dealt with the remaining around 400,000 Muslims from Macedonia and [an estimated] 200,000 Greeks from Pontos and Cappadocia (Shirinian 2017). For Greece, the population exchange legalised the existing situation. That is, after August 1922, with the defeat of the Greek army in the Greco-Turkish War, the Greeks of Anatolia and eastern Thrace had been forced to leave for Greece (Klapsis 2014).

The deported Pontic Greeks were often taken to refugee camps in Istanbul, where many died, on route to Greece (Shirinian 2017). According to Article 7 of the Lausanne Convention, Greek citizenship was granted to refugees from Anatolia (Hirschon (ed) 2003b).

## **Acknowledgement**

I thank Aris Tsilfidis for his comments on an earlier draft.

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<sup>7</sup> Popov (2016:92–93).

### 3. Miletos Colonising the Northern and Eastern Black Sea Coast

#### Introduction

Around 1900 BC, items from Minoan Crete appeared in Miletos (Figure 2.1) on the west coast of Anatolia. Minoans from Crete and then the Mycenaeans from the Greek mainland had a strong presence at Miletos. Following the general cataclysm that affected the eastern Mediterranean in the decades around 1200 BC, which brought about the end of the Mycenaean centres, many mainland Greeks moved eastwards to Anatolia during the 12th and 11th centuries BC.<sup>8</sup>

Miletos in Ionia sought to 'aggregate' some elements of neighbouring cultures into its own.<sup>9</sup> In the wealthy western coast of Anatolia, Miletos became the main centre (Plate 3.1). From the second half of the 7th century BC, Lydia, its eastern neighbour, expanded taking Milesian territory. In response, Miletos began sending out its first colonisers. Then, from the 6th century BC, the Persians began to conquer Ionian territory.<sup>10</sup>

The city of Miletos is known by its many colonies on the Black Sea coast, but other Ionian centres also took part in this colonisation. Residents from Miletos were unable to found and populate so many colonies on their own. Miletos founded its first colonies in the northern and eastern Black Sea region in the last 3rd to the end of the 7th century BC. [There was most probably much earlier voyaging by Greeks into the Black Sea.] The Greek colonies along northern Anatolia (including Pontos, from the 7th century BC) were few, due to the local geography and the hostility of the local indigenous people.<sup>11</sup>



Plate 3.1: Ancient Greek theatre at Miletos  
(commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Ancient\_Greek\_theatre\_in\_Miletus.jpg).

<sup>8</sup> Cartledge (2011).

<sup>9</sup> Greaves (2019).

<sup>10</sup> Tsetskhladze (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Tsetskhladze (2006, 2009).

The reasons for Greek colonisation are complex. Trade was one of the outcomes of colonisation, not one of the reasons for it. When Greeks had to colonise, it was usually in response to some kind of disaster etc. If Archaic Greek colonies have not survived in the Black Sea region, the main reason could be the rise in the sea level.<sup>12</sup>

The Greeks who colonised the northern and eastern Black Sea region are described here to provide an insight into how Greeks first arrived in modern Ukraine, southern Russia and Georgia.

## **Colchis**

### Introduction

Colchis is in the eastern Black Sea region in the west of modern Georgia (Figure 3.1). Local settlements on the Colchis coastline (which later accepted Greek colonists) had been developing at the end of the 2nd millennium BC. Greek colonies were founded [from the 7th century BC] on the estuaries on the coast. Greek culture penetrated into the Colchian hinterland.<sup>13</sup>

A Colchian kingdom had developed by the middle of the 5th century BC. Conditions along the Colchis coast were inhospitable with swamps, marshes and wetlands. Also the tribes of northern Colchis used to attack the Greek settlements.<sup>14</sup>

Strabo, in the 1st century AD wrote that Colchis' wealth was derived from its gold, silver, iron and copper. It also had timber and linen which were important in ship-building. It appears that the Pontic king, Mithradates VI, had control of Colchis by at least 106 BC (details follow).<sup>15</sup>

The well-known tale of Jason and the Argonauts [sailors on the ship *Argo*] who sailed from Greece to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece had been told well before it was recorded by Apollonius Rhodius in the 3rd century BC (but the earlier records have not survived).<sup>16</sup> Before the time of Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, the basic core of stories about the Argonauts already existed.<sup>17</sup> Jason, in Greek mythology, was the son of the king of Iolcos in Thessaly, Greece. His father's half-brother seized Iolcos and Jason was sent away. Returning as a young man, Jason was promised his inheritance if he fetched the Golden Fleece from Colchis, a seemingly impossible task. After many adventures, Jason extracted the fleece.<sup>18</sup>

The myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece may have been an explanation of early 13th century BC Mycenaean expeditions into the Black Sea. Historical evidence suggests that Colchis was rich in gold, often panned from rivers using sheepskins.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Tsetskhladze (2007a, 2007b).

<sup>13</sup> Giorgadze and Inaishvili (2015).

<sup>14</sup> Tsetskhladze (2009:334).

<sup>15</sup> Roller (2020).

<sup>16</sup> Tsetskhladze (2006).

<sup>17</sup> Lordkipanidze (2002).

<sup>18</sup> [www.britannica.com/topic/Jason-Greek-mythology](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Jason-Greek-mythology)

<sup>19</sup> [www.worldhistory.org/article/425/jason--the-argonauts/](http://www.worldhistory.org/article/425/jason--the-argonauts/)

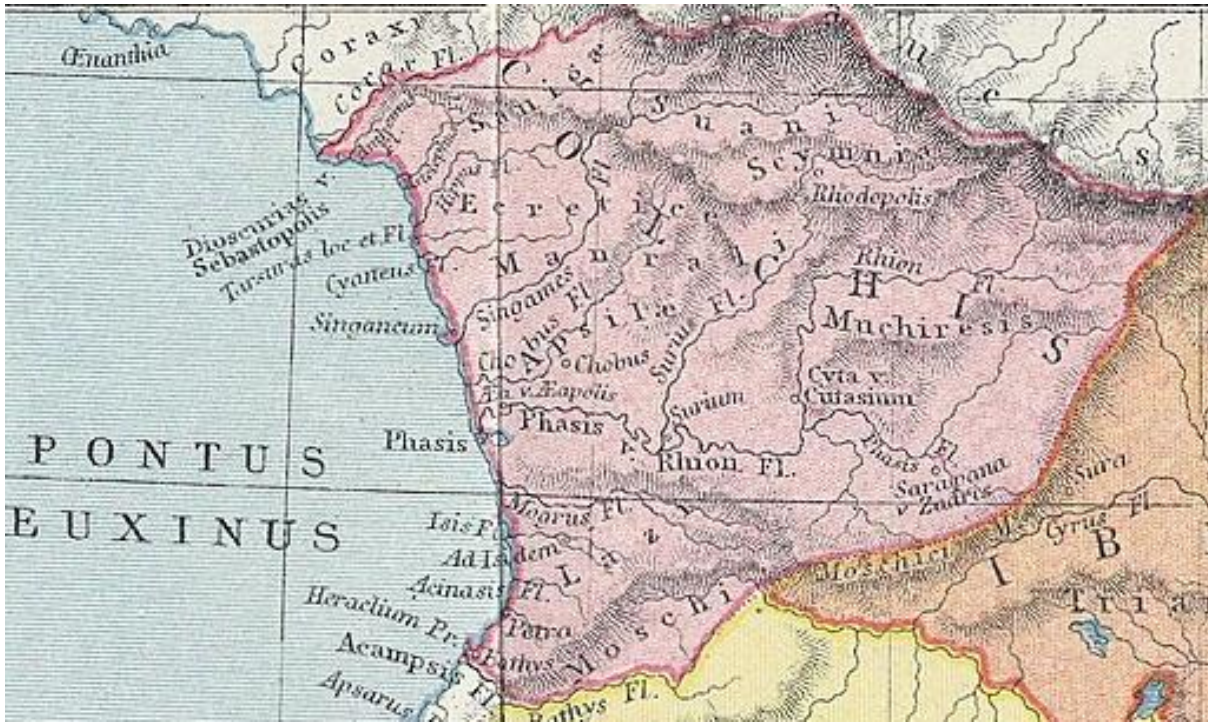


Figure 3.1: Map of Colchis, eastern Black Sea region in western Georgia (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Colchis.jpg).

### Dioskurias

Dioskurias in Colchis was founded by colonisers from Miletos in c. 610–570 BC and seems to have been the first Greek settlement in the eastern Black Sea region (Figure 3.1).<sup>20</sup> Part of the site is now under water and the remainder is covered by the modern town of Sokhumi.<sup>21</sup>

### Gyenos

Gyenos was also founded by settlers from Miletos possibly in c. 600–570 BC. It was situated on man-made hills, surrounded by marshes and wetlands.<sup>22</sup> It was probably a mixed Hellenic-local Colchian settlement. Gyenos is near the modern seaside town of Ochamchire, south-east of Sokhumi.<sup>23</sup>

### Phasis

Phasis was founded in c. 600–570 BC by Miletos at the mouth of the Phasis River. Its exact location has not been found (Figure 3.1).<sup>24</sup> It was probably a mixed Hellenic-local native settlement.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Tsetskhladze (2019).

<sup>21</sup> Avram et al. (2004).

<sup>22</sup> Tsetskhladze (2019).

<sup>23</sup> Avram et al. (2004).

<sup>24</sup> Tsetskhladze (2019).

<sup>25</sup> Avram et al. (2004).

## Batumi

Batumi was founded by Miletos colonisers in 610–570 BC (Bathys in Figure 3.1). Modern Batumi has been built over the Greek settlement.<sup>26</sup> Batumi had one of the deepest and most convenient harbours among the ancient settlements on the east coast of the Black Sea.<sup>27</sup>

## **Northern Black Sea Region**

### Introduction

The northern Black Sea littoral (Figure 3.2) is comprised of three distinct areas:<sup>28</sup>

- The region of Olbia and its environs in the north-west.
- Chersonesos and western Crimea.
- The Cimmerian Bosphoros kingdom, located in eastern Crimea, (i.e. adjacent to the Kerch Peninsula around Panticapaeum) and across the narrow Cimmerian Bosphoros (modern Kerch Straits, 3–15 km wide) to the Taman Peninsula.

In the northern Black Sea region, the Greeks most probably had to receive the approval of the leaders of the local native Scythians<sup>29</sup> by providing occasional gifts, by making agreements and by paying regular tribute.<sup>30</sup>

Greek pottery discovered in Scythian settlements and tumuli was found some 500 km inland from the Black Sea north coast. Collaboration between Greeks and local rulers developed in the classical period, when the Greeks manufactured luxurious metal objects for the local Scythian nobility and Colchians in the east and to design and construct their residences, even their tombs.<sup>31</sup>

When the first Greeks arrived in the northern Black Sea, they had to travel nearly 500 km inland to establish contacts with the local population. It seems that there were practically no local inhabitants on the coast.<sup>32</sup>

The Greek interactions with the Scythians were often not peaceful. In due course, some of these Scythians settled nearby, or even in the Greek settlements, as some of their territories were incorporated into the Cimmerian Bosphoros kingdom.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Tsetskhladze (2019).

<sup>27</sup> Giorgadze and Inaishvili (2015).

<sup>28</sup> Muratov (2015).

<sup>29</sup> Scythian tribes occupied the northern Black Sea coastal regions and hinterland. The term Scythian embraces different ethnically related groups, not all of them nomads. They moved to the steppes of present-day Ukraine in the middle of the 5th century BC and became sedentary or semi-sedentary (Tsetskhladze 2009, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> Solovyov (2019).

<sup>31</sup> Tsetskhladze (2009).

<sup>32</sup> Tsetskhladze (2015).

<sup>33</sup> Muratov (2015).





Figure 3.2: Map of Greek colonies in the northern Black Sea region  
 (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ancient\_Greek\_Colonies\_of\_N\_Black\_Sea.png).

### Cimmerian Bosporos kingdom

By the second quarter of the 6th century BC, a number of Greek colonies around the Cimmerian Bosporos were founded. Around 480 BC these settlements united creating the Cimmerian Bosporos kingdom, with Panticapaeum as its capital. The kingdom had a mixed population of Greeks and non-Greeks, featuring, at least until the early centuries AD, a thoroughly Hellenised, but complex, cultural milieu.<sup>34</sup> The kingdom included some 15 Greek settlements—much of eastern Crimea and the Taman Peninsula and the neighbouring territories in the northern Caucasus (Figure 3.2).<sup>35</sup>

In addition to grain, the Cimmerian Bosporan region was a major wine producer from perhaps the 5th century BC. There was also salted fish and an extensive salt-producing industry.<sup>36</sup>

The Spartokids, a Hellenised Thracian dynasty, ruled the Cimmerian Bosporos kingdom from 438–437 to 109 BC.<sup>37</sup> In the 3rd century BC, the kingdom went into decline, facing military pressure by the Scythians who flocked to Crimea after the Sarmatians [a confederation of nomadic Iranian tribes] expelled them from the Ukrainian steppe. In the 2nd century BC, the Sarmatians also began to settle within the kingdom. In 108 BC, the kingdom became part of the Mithradatic kingdom of Pontus, but it regained its independence after the defeat of Mithradates VI by the Romans in

<sup>34</sup> Muratov (2015:590–591).

<sup>35</sup> Petropoulos (2021).

<sup>36</sup> Roller (2020).

<sup>37</sup> Avram et al. (2004).

64 BC.<sup>38</sup> The Romans generally protected the Greeks of the northern coast.<sup>39</sup> Its prosperity was ruined in the 230s–240s AD by the Goths. The Huns, who arrived in the 370s, delivered the final blow.<sup>40</sup>

### Panticapaeum

Panticapaeum in eastern Crimea (Figure 3.2), was founded by colonisers from Miletos in 575–550 BC. In the 6th century BC, it had a population up to 2,000–3,000 people (Plate 3.2). With its large harbour it controlled the entrance to the Sea of Azov. Along the north-west shore, the mouths of the major rivers were sources of fish and provided easy routes into the hinterland.<sup>41</sup>

A large monumental complex was located on Mt Mithradates, within the acropolis of Panticapaeum. This seems to have functioned as a royal residence from the mid-4th until at least the late 2nd century BC.<sup>42</sup>

The Cimmerian Bosphoros kingdom was created with Panticapaeum as its capital primarily to withstand Scythian pressure on its Greek settlements. The town walls were erected in early 5th century BC. Panticapaeum struck silver coins from early 5th century BC onwards and gold coins in the 4th century BC. In the 4th century BC the town covered around 10 ha.<sup>43</sup>

It was heavily damaged in a revolt and when the town was captured [by Mithradates VI] at the end of the 2nd century BC and subsequently by an earthquake around 70 BC. Panticapaeum was rebuilt under Roman rule and by the 1st century AD it had regained its importance. It began to decline in the 3rd century AD. It was destroyed by the Huns around 370 AD. Later a small town arose at the site, which in the Middle Ages became known as Bosphorus [it was later abandoned].<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The Mithradates Pontic kingdom endured from 302 to 63 BC, reaching its peak under Mithradates VI (119–63 BC). Over the first three decades of Mithradates VI reign, much of the Black Sea and eastern Anatolia were brought under Pontic control (Thonemann 2016). In 64 BC, the Romans defeated Mithradates VI who fled to the Cimmerian Bosphoros where his son, Pharnakes II, conspired against him. Mithradates committed suicide in 63 BC. Rome returned Pontos to the son of Pharnakes II—from 39 to 37 BC after which Polemon of Laodikeia was selected as king of Pontos. Pontos remained allied with Rome until the 60s AD, when it was reprovincialised (Roller 2020).

<sup>39</sup> Deligiannis (2006).

<sup>40</sup> Muratov 92015:590–591).

<sup>41</sup> Tsetskhladze (2009, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Muratov (2015).

<sup>43</sup> Avram et al. (2004:949–950).

<sup>44</sup> [www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CP%5CA%5CPanticapaeum.htm](http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CP%5CA%5CPanticapaeum.htm)



Plate 3.2: Panticapaeum archaeological site  
(commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Julia\_Zirka\_fortez\_Kerch\_Pantikapey55.JPG).

### Nymphaeum

Nymphaeum was founded by colonisers from Miletos in 580–570 BC in eastern Crimea, just south of Panticapaeum<sup>45</sup> (Figure 3.2). Its town walls were probably erected in early 5th century BC and the first colonists lived in dugouts (semi-subterranean dwellings). In the late 5th century BC Nymphaeum struck silver coins. In the early 4th century BC, the settlement was destroyed, but was later rebuilt. The settlement was a craft and agricultural centre. Scythian nobility probably participated in the life of the settlement.<sup>46</sup> Cultural remains have been found below sea level.<sup>47</sup>

### Theodosia

Theodosia in eastern Crimea was founded in 580–570 BC by Miletos colonisers (Figure 3.2). It is now overbuilt [by the town of Feodosia]. It had a large harbour and fertile land. Theodosia struck coins of silver, probably in the 430s BC. Around 370 BC, it became part of the Cimmerian Bosporan kingdom.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Tsetskhladze (2019).

<sup>46</sup> Avram et al. (2004:948).

<sup>47</sup> Porotov (2007).

<sup>48</sup> Avram et al. (2004), Tsetskhladze (2019).

### Hermonassa

Hermonassa was founded in 575–550 BC as a joint colony of Miletos and Mytilene from the Island of Lesbos.<sup>49</sup> (Figure 3.2). It was situated on a small island in the Cimmerian Bosporos and from early 5th century BC it was part of the Cimmerian Bosporos kingdom. The Greek and Roman levels of the town are now several metres underwater.<sup>50</sup>

### Phanagoria

Phanagoria was initially built on a hill on the Taman Peninsula (Figure 3.2).<sup>51</sup> It was founded by Teos [in Ionia] in c. 545–540 BC and the town eventually covered around 75 ha. The old fortification walls were destroyed after a siege in the 4th century BC. This was followed by a large (re)construction during which houses were built of stone. Phanagoria was a very important settlement with workshops for architectural terracottas, bronze and iron objects and bronze statues.<sup>52</sup>

In the 4th century AD, the settlement was razed by the Huns but was rebuilt. It died out in the 11th to 12th century.<sup>53</sup> The ruins of Phanagoria (Plate 3.3) are now situated about 1 km from the current village of Sennoy. The ancient colony has remained practically free from modern construction. Around a third of the colony is submerged beneath the sea.<sup>54</sup>

### Tanais

The site of Tanais (30 km from Rostov-on-Don, Figure 3.2) was possibly founded by Miletos settlers in c. 625–600 BC.<sup>55</sup> In the 2nd–3rd centuries AD, Tanais became an important centre in the steppe region. In the middle of the 3rd century it was ruined, probably by the Goths and was rebuilt in the second half of the 4th century. After the first half of the 5th century, it was uninhabited. The ruins at Tanais have been preserved (Plate 3.4).<sup>56</sup>

### Taganrog

The first Greek settlements in the northern Black Sea region were at Taganrog and Borysthene. Taganrog was located on the coast on the Sea of Azov, near Tanais (Figure 3.2) but is now submerged. Its foundation date is between the last quarter to the end of the 7th century BC and was possibly founded by colonisers from Miletos. It was probably abandoned in the third quarter of the 6th century BC.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Tsetskhladze (2019).

<sup>50</sup> Avram et al. (2004).

<sup>51</sup> Tsetskhladze (2009).

<sup>52</sup> Avram et al. (2004).

<sup>53</sup> [www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CP%5CH%5CPhanagoria.htm](http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CP%5CH%5CPhanagoria.htm).

<sup>54</sup> Petropoulos (2021).

<sup>55</sup> Tsetskhladze (2006).

<sup>56</sup> [whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5422/](http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5422/)

<sup>57</sup> Tsetskhladze (2009, 2019).



Plate 3.3: Phanagoria excavations, 2008  
([commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Phanagoria\\_excavations\\_\(2008\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Phanagoria_excavations_(2008).JPG)).

### North-west Black Sea

#### Borysthenes

Borysthenes was founded in the last quarter of the 7th century BC on a peninsula—now an island (Figure 3.2) in the north-west Black Sea region. Miletos, Samos, Ephesos and possibly Smyrna participated in its establishment.<sup>58</sup> At the end of the first third of the 5th century BC, the northern Black Sea region underwent fundamental changes because of the Scythian expansion. Nomad activity came close to the Greek colonies in the north-western Black Sea area initiating the decline of Borysthenes.<sup>59</sup>

#### Olbia

Olbia was founded by Miletos colonisers in 620–590 BC [near Borysthenes] (Figure 3.2). There were no local people in the immediate vicinity of the settlement of Olbia until the end of the 6th and beginning of the 5th century BC. In the Archaic Period, Olbia's chora comprised 107 settlements.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Tsetskhladze (2009, 2019).

<sup>59</sup> Solovyov (2019).

<sup>60</sup> Tsetskhladze (2009, 2019).



Plate 3.4: Tanais archaeological site  
(commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Excavations\_of\_Tanais\_(2).jpg).

After the last quarter of the 6th century BC, dugout houses, partly cut into the subsoil to a depth up to 1.2 m with mud-brick walls, were replaced by above ground houses. After the middle of the 5th century BC the design of these houses evolved into Greek houses with inner courts surrounded by separate rooms.<sup>61</sup> Olbia evidently had a good harbour (now submerged) and the settlement existed for nearly 1,000 years.<sup>62</sup> It is located at modern Parutino in Ukraine.<sup>63</sup>

### Western Crimea

#### Chersonesos

Chersonesos stood on a headland, some 3 km west of modern Sebastopol in south-western Crimea (Figure 3.2). The earliest structural remains are from the late 5th century to late 4th century BC. Chersonesos struck silver and bronze coins from the early 4th century BC.<sup>64</sup>

In the last quarter of the 4th century BC, the settlement of Chersonesos expanded up to 26 ha. Chersonesos may have been founded by Heraclea [on the northern Anatolia coast] and the island of Delos in the Aegean Sea. Grain was its main export. In 179 BC, it made a treaty with the Pontic king Pharnakes I.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Bujskikh and Bujskikh (2019).

<sup>62</sup> Braund (2019).

<sup>63</sup> Avram et al. (2004).

<sup>64</sup> Avram et al. (2004:943).

<sup>65</sup> Kovalenko (2007).

Later, when it was attacked by Scythians, Chersonesos appealed for assistance from the Pontic king, Mithradates VI. Mithradates' forces defeated the Scythians and Chersonesos became part of his Pontic kingdom.<sup>66</sup> After the death of Mithradates VI in 63 BC (after his defeat by the Romans), Chersonesos became subject to the Cimmerian Bosporan kings. After the withdrawal of Roman troops in the 3rd century AD, it became a town of the Roman empire. It survived during the barbarian migrations in the 4th–5th centuries and continued its existence in the Byzantine [Eastern Roman empire] period.<sup>67</sup>

After the 12th–13th centuries, the sea level rose which flooded the south-east outskirts of the settlement.<sup>68</sup>

### Kerkinitis

Kerkinitis was a Greek colony along the north-west Crimean coast (Figure 3.2), now modern Yevpatoriya. It was founded in the late 6th–early 5th century BC, perhaps by Heraclea [on the north-west Anatolian coast], on the site of a pre-Greek settlement. Kerkinitis came under the control of Chersonesos in the late 4th century BC where stone defensive walls and towers encircled the site. It provided Chersonesos with grain and traded with the Scythians of the interior. It issued its own coins from the mid-4th–2nd century BC. The Scythians captured it in the mid-2nd century BC and occupied it until the early centuries AD.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Roller (2020).

<sup>67</sup> Kovalenko (2007).

<sup>68</sup> Porotov (2007).

<sup>69</sup> [www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0006%3Aentry%3Dkerkinitis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0006%3Aentry%3Dkerkinitis)





## 4. Greeks Moving to the Soviet Union Then to Greece

In foreign lands I am a Greek and in Greece a foreigner.  
[Translated verse from a Pontic Greek song.]

### Introduction

The remnants of the ancient Greek colonies around the Black Sea region were eventually subsumed into the Russian empire and the Ottoman empire. Both these empires in turn failed in the early decades of the 20th century. While the remnant of the Ottoman empire was substantially reduced to the Republic of Turkey, the Russian empire, under a new Communist regime as the Soviet Union (1922–1991) included Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and many other republics.

This chapter summarises the movement of Greeks (especially Pontic Greeks) to the Russian empire from the 18th century and later to the Soviet Union their later movement from the former Soviet Republics to Greece up to the 2000s. It is a brief analysis as there has been a lack of information in the past decade including population census data.<sup>70</sup> The war in Ukraine which commenced in early 2022 has affected the movement of people in the region.

After the defeat of the Greek army (in August 2022) in the Greco-Turkish War in western Anatolia and the compulsory population exchange under the January 1923 Lausanne Convention, Christian Greeks were forced out of Turkish territory back to their ‘supposed homeland’, Greece (Note 2.1). At the same time, some Anatolian Greeks left for the newly formed Soviet Union, joining fellow Anatolian Greeks who had settled there earlier. More recently, especially following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many ethnic Greeks moved to Greece and some to the Republic of Cyprus.

### 18th Century

The main history of Greeks in the Caucasus commenced with around 800 Pontic Greek families arriving in 1763 from Gumushane, south of Trabzon (Figure 4.1). They were invited to work as miners by the king of Kartli-Kakheti [south-east Georgia]. The miners established new settlements in Transcaucasia [modern Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia] and the north Caucasus region in a migration that continued throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1775, Catherine the Great, empress of Russia (reign 1762–1796), permitted Greeks from the Aegean Islands, who were Russian allies during the Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774), together with their relatives as well as farmers from Greece, Bulgaria and Moldova, to settle in Crimea. In 1778–1779, Catherine assisted some Crimean Greeks and others to settle in and around Mariupol on the Black Sea coast

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<sup>70</sup> For those who can read Greek, the works by Dr Vlasit Agtzidis are recommended.



Figure 4.1: Map of the Black Sea region (Samsun to Trabzon = 290 km)  
 (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Black\_Sea\_map.png#/media/File:Black\_Sea\_map\_blank.png).

(Figure 4.1) in modern Ukraine.<sup>71</sup> The migration from Crimea [apparently] involved over 31,000 Greeks.<sup>72</sup>

In 1794, Catherine the Great founded Odessa, in modern Ukraine, in which she favoured the settlement of Greeks.<sup>73</sup>

## 19th Century

### Introduction

In the first decade of the 19th century, almost 6,000 Turkish-speaking [Pontic] Greeks arrived in Tsalka (100 km west of Tbilisi in Georgia) and Akhaltsikhe (south-west of Tbilisi, Figure 4.2).<sup>74</sup> By 1813, some 120 Anatolian Greek households had settled around Tbilisi. After the 1828–1829 Russo-Turkish War, [an estimated] 42,000 [Pontic] Greeks from

<sup>71</sup> Manuylov (2015). In the early 1770s, after the defeat of the Orlov revolt in the Peloponnese, up to 4,000 Greeks from the Peloponnese fled to Crimea (Kisilier 2022).

<sup>72</sup> Kisilier (2022).

<sup>73</sup> Zapantis (1982). In 1814, the revolutionary secret society *Filiki Etaireia*, which in the 1820s was headed by Pontic Greeks Alexander and Demetrios Ypsilantis, was established by Greek merchants in Odessa (encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CG%5CR%5CGreeks.htm). Alexander and Demetrios Ypsilantis became influential in the Greek War of Independence.

<sup>74</sup> Sideri (2017:39).

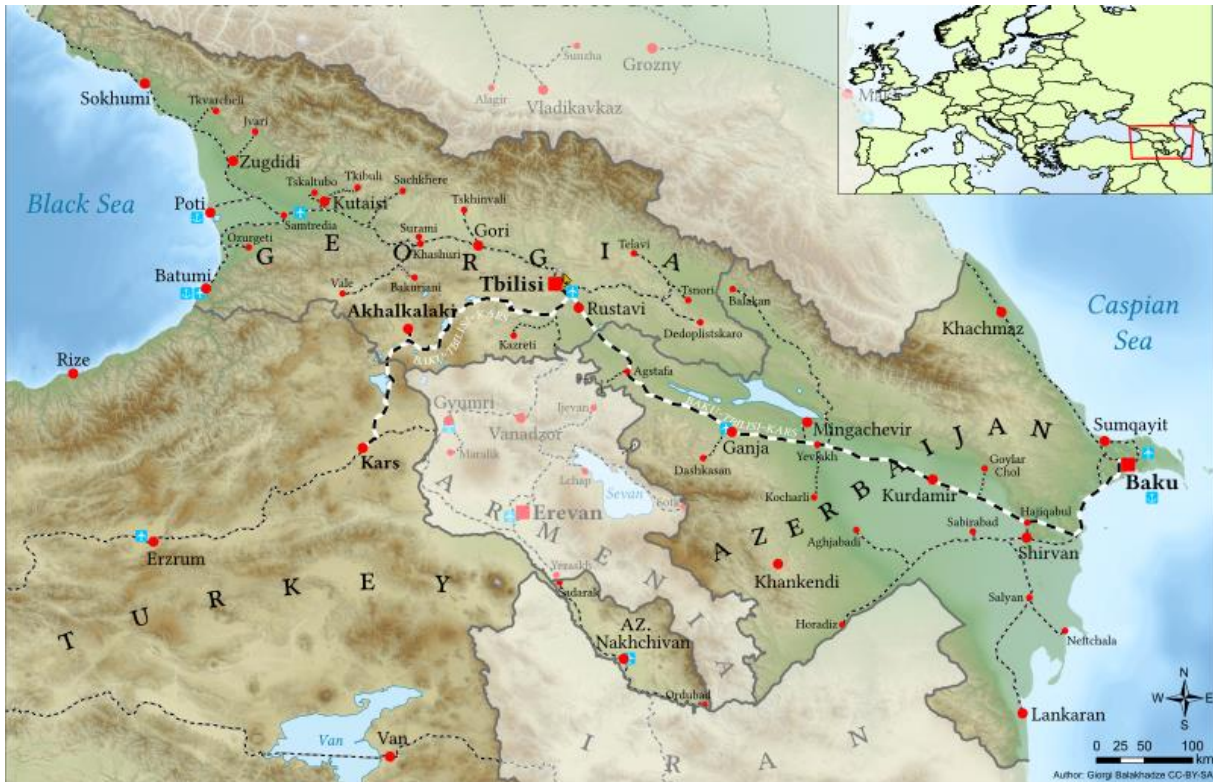


Figure 4.2: Map of north-east Anatolia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baku-Tbilisi-Kars\_Railway\_Map.svg).

Gumushane and [Anatolian] Greeks from Erzurum,<sup>75</sup> (Figure 4.2) followed the Russian troops and settled in the Russian empire in order to escape Ottoman repression.<sup>76</sup>

After the Crimean War (1853–1856) and up to 1866, an ‘estimated’ 60,000 Greeks moved from the Trabzon [Pontic Greeks] and Erzurum [Anatolian Greeks] regions to the Krasnodar and Stavropol kraia (regions) in modern southern Russia (Figures 4.1, 4.3).<sup>77</sup> After 1878, the Kars region became part of the Russian empire (after the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War) (Figure 4.2) which enticed many Anatolian Greeks to settle there.<sup>78</sup> Migration of Pontic Greeks into modern south-west Georgia increased, coming especially from Trabzon and the villages of Santa (south of Trabzon).<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> The Anatolian Greeks of the Erzurum province were on the borders of Pontos. It is unknown if they migrated from Pontos or other areas in Anatolia. Their cultural customs differ from Pontic Greeks (Pratsinakis 2021:510).

<sup>76</sup> Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou (1991).

<sup>77</sup> Karpozilos (1999). Other population estimates include from 1856 to 1878, 36,000 Greeks migrated from Pontos to the Caucasus and from 1878 to 1882, a further 17,000 migrated there (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou (1997) in Berikashvili (2017)).

<sup>78</sup> Koromila (2002).

<sup>79</sup> Giorgadze and Mgeladze (2020).



Figure 4.3: Map of Krasnodar krai (in green), southern Russia  
 (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Krasnodar\_Krai\_map-en.svg).

### 1897 population census

The first general population census of the Russian empire (excluding Finland) in 1897 reported 207,500 Greeks were living in Russia. This was an underestimate, because nationalities were classified according to mother tongue. This census reported 32,600 Greeks in the Kars region and 69,350 Greeks in the Ekaterinoslav province [in modern Ukraine] which included the Mariupol district.<sup>80</sup> Many communities shunned the 1897 census because of its tax purposes.<sup>81</sup> Most Greeks in the Russian empire were Pontic Greeks. The actual ethnic composition of the Russian empire cannot be determined.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Zapantis (1982). Some Greeks, who reported Russian as their mother tongue, were missed in the count of Greeks. Religion of the population was also asked in the census.

<sup>81</sup> Schwartz (1986).

<sup>82</sup> Silver (1986).

## 20th–21st Centuries

### Introduction

The rate of Greek migration from Pontos to the Caucasus and Transcaucasia gradually declined until the late 19th and early 20th century. These immigrants, who had been seasonal workers, became permanent settlers. At the beginning of the 20th century, [Anatolian] Greeks in the Caucasus alone were believed to number 150,000.<sup>83</sup>

In 1910–1912, there were at least 416,000 Greeks in Pontos.<sup>84</sup> It is believed few Pontic Greeks lived in Ukraine [excluding Crimea]. Before the October 1917 Russian Revolution, it was believed that 450,000 Greeks [possibly too high] were living in the Russian empire of whom 250,000 were thought to be Pontic Greeks.<sup>85</sup>

### Pontic Greek exodus

In the first half of the 20th century in the Soviet Union, there were four major periods of dislocation of Pontic Greeks:<sup>86</sup>

1. 1918–1923, flight from Pontos east to the Caucasus, or west to Greece.
2. 1936–1939, exile from within the Soviet Union east to the Urals, Siberia and northern Kazakhstan. [Some also escaped to Greece.]
3. 1942–1946, deportation from Krasnodar and Stavropol kraia [southern Russia] to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.
4. 1947–1949, deportation from Georgia to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4: Map of Kazakhstan (Astana to Almaty = 950 km, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kazakhstan\_Base\_Map.png).

<sup>83</sup> Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou (1991). The 1897 census of the Russian empire [under] reported only 105,000 Greeks in the Caucasus (Zapantis 1982).

<sup>84</sup> This is based on the record of the Greek population in Anatolia and Thrace, conducted by the Greek consular authorities in the Ottoman empire in cooperation with the Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical authorities in Anatolia (Topalidis 2019:8).

<sup>85</sup> Hasiotis (ed) (1997) in Voutira (2011).

<sup>86</sup> Based on Voutira (1991).

By the end of February 1918, the Russian army completed its withdrawal from north-eastern Anatolia, during World War I. An estimated 80,000 Greeks [Pontic and other Anatolian Greeks] accompanied the Russians as refugees.<sup>87</sup> Batumi, on the Black Sea, received an estimated 35,000 refugees [most had left by April<sup>88</sup>], Sokhumi received an estimated 15,000 refugees and Novorossiisk received an estimated 20,000 refugees (Figures 4.2, 4.3). Once on Soviet soil, these Greeks encountered widespread famine and disease [as well as social and political upheaval].<sup>89</sup> Many also moved to the region around Kars.

After World War I, British troops were stationed in the Caucasus to ensure the armistice with both the Ottomans and the Germans was observed.<sup>90</sup>

### Exodus from Kars

In April 1918, the Ottoman army captured Kars which forced 50,000 Anatolian Greeks from the region to flee north-east to Tbilisi. Of these Greeks, 30,000 were sent to Krasnodar krai (southern Russia) and about 10,000 settled in Georgia. The remaining around 10,000 were believed to have perished.<sup>91</sup>

Life was becoming very difficult for Pontic Greek refugees in the (soon to be) Soviet Union. Groups fled Bolshevik persecution [often to the Caucasus] after Greece intervened in the failed 1919 Ukrainian campaign. By early July 1919, 7,000 [Pontic Greek] refugees were shipped from Novorossiisk (modern southern Russia) to the Pontic towns of Trabzon, Giresun and Ordu.<sup>92</sup>

A second wave of people who had remained around Kars left in summer 1919 for Tsalka (west of Tbilisi) and for the northern Caucasus. Finally, a third wave of 15,000 Anatolian Greeks from the end of 1920 to the beginning of 1921 reached Batumi.<sup>93</sup> In October 1920, Kars was recaptured by the Turks.<sup>94</sup>

From April 1920 to February 1921, the Greek Government shipped nearly 53,000 Anatolian Greek refugees [seems too high] from Batumi to Greece.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou (1991).

<sup>88</sup> According to the April 1918 population census in Batumi, conducted after the April Ottoman Turk occupation there, the number of Greeks was up to only 4,900 (Giorgadze and Mgeladze 2020).

<sup>89</sup> Karpozilos (1999).

<sup>90</sup> King (2008). The British army was in Batumi from December 1918 to July 1920 to support the Russian Whites against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War (Everill 2012).

<sup>91</sup> Petsalis-Diomidis (1972:226, 246).

<sup>92</sup> Voutira (2011:105–107). In January 1919, a regiment of 24,000 men from Greece arrived in Crimea against the Bolsheviks. This unsuccessful Greek expedition exacerbated the position of the Greek population in the [soon to be] Soviet Union and forced thousands of Greeks to emigrate to Greece (Dimopoulos 2014).

<sup>93</sup> Perchanidou (2018).

<sup>94</sup> McMeekin (2015).

<sup>95</sup> Perchanidou (2018). The Greco-Turkish War in western Anatolia was still being waged.

### 1926 Soviet Union population census

The 1926 population census (Table 4.1) reported nearly 214,000 Greeks in the Soviet Union, of which 105,000 Greeks were reported in Ukraine—64,000 lived around Mariupol.<sup>96</sup> There were 54,000 [Pontic Greeks] in Georgia (Table 4.2). It is believed that this census underestimated the number of people of Greek descent.

### Greek refugees in Greece (1928)

Many Christian Greeks were forced to abandon Anatolia after the defeat in western Anatolia of the Greek army in August 1922 in the Greco-Turkish War. The remainder were forced to leave mainly for Greece under the January 1923 Lausanne Convention—some went to the Soviet Union.<sup>97</sup>

Table 4.3 lists the number of refugees according to their reported place of origin in the 1928 population census in Greece. Just over 47,000 refugees declared the Caucasus as their place of origin—nearly all of them were Pontic Greeks (Note 4.1). Only around 11,400 Greeks reported to have come from Russia.

Table 4.1: Number of Greeks in Soviet Union censuses (1926–1989)

Year	Number of Greeks
1926	213,700
1939	286,600
1959	309,300
1970	336,900
1979	342,800
1989	366,670*

Hionidou and Saunders (2010:1480) & \*Table 4.4

Table 4.2: Number of Greeks in Georgian censuses (1926–2002)

Year	1926	1939	1959	1969	1979	1989	2002
No. of Greeks	54,050	84,640	72,940	89,250	95,100	100,320	15,170*

Manuylov (2015:34) \* Excludes the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

<sup>96</sup> [www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CG%5CR%5CGreeks.htm](http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CG%5CR%5CGreeks.htm)

<sup>97</sup> During the population exchange, 73,000 Greek Orthodox Christians remained in Istanbul as Turkish subjects and another 30,000 remained as Greek nationals. In addition 8,200 Greeks on Imbros Island and Tenedos Island in the north-east Aegean Sea (which were ceded to Turkey in 1923) were allowed to stay (Canefe 2001). (Note 2.1.) Details on the genocide suffered by Pontic Greeks are reported in Topalidis (in press).

Table 4.3: Number of refugees and their place of origin, 1928 Greek population census

Place of origin	People who arrived		
	Before early Sept 1922	After early Sept 1922	Total
Asia Minor	37,728	589,226	626,954
Pontos	17,528	164,641	182,169
Caucasus	32,421	14,670	47,091
Russia	5,214	6,221	11,435
Thrace	27,057	229,578	256,635
Constantinople, Bulgaria & other areas	31,944	66,621	98,565
<b>Total</b>	<b>151,892</b>	<b>1,070,957</b>	<b>1,222,849</b>

Statistical Yearbook of Greece (1930:41).

Probably between 1.25 and 1.4 million refugees entered Greece, which is more than the reported number in the census<sup>98</sup> (Table 4.3).

#### Greeks in the Soviet Union (1930–1940)

In the 1930s, there were two Greek linguistic centres in the Soviet Union: the Rostov-on-Don region with 100,000 Greeks [seems high] who spoke Pontic Greek and at Mariupol (Figure 4.1). It is believed that the great mass of the Greek Rostov-on-Don population came from the Gumushane region, south of Trabzon.<sup>99</sup>

In Ukraine, the Mariupol Greeks numbered around 97,000.<sup>100</sup> In 1929–1939, about 50,000 ethnic Greeks went to Greece from the Soviet Union.<sup>101</sup> When Stalin became leader of the Soviet Union [1924–1953], both ethnic minorities [and any citizen who espoused political beliefs which were anathema to the regime], were persecuted, exiled or executed.<sup>102</sup>

In 1922, Nestor Lakoba became the leader of Abkhazia [north-west modern Georgia, Figure 4.2]. He was able to halt the collectivisation of peasant farms by Stalin in the late twenties and early thirties. The death of Lakoba in 1936 ushered in the period of Stalin-Beria repression in

<sup>98</sup> Hirschon (1998).

<sup>99</sup> Dawkins (1937).

<sup>100</sup> Sergievsky (1934).

<sup>101</sup> Voutira (2011).

<sup>102</sup> With regard to the Greek population, persecution was initially explained by political and class criteria. Later on, the criteria focussed on ethnic factors, as many faithful Greek Communists were also persecuted (Psarrou 2005:9–10).



Abkhazia.<sup>103</sup> The period 1936–1937 was particularly harsh when many writers, scientists and other intellectuals including priests and teachers were purged.<sup>104</sup>

According to the January 1939 Soviet Union population census, there were nearly 287,000 people reported to be of Greek descent (Table 4.1, an underestimate<sup>105</sup>). This census reported 34,600 [Pontic] Greeks in Abkhazia.<sup>106</sup> Immediately after 1939, leaving the Soviet Union was essentially prohibited.<sup>107</sup>

### 1941–1949 Greek deportations

As the Soviet Union came into being in 1922, those living within its borders without legal status and Greek nationality found themselves in an awkward situation.<sup>108</sup> Holders of Greek passports faced severe discrimination. Thus, especially from the 1940s to the 1960s, many acquired a Soviet passport.<sup>109</sup>

From 1941–1942, during World War II, there was an evacuation of people within the Soviet Union ahead of the advancing German army. Greeks and other nationalities were transplanted from Crimea, north Caucasus and Baku to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Typical evacuees were holders of foreign passports.<sup>110</sup>

In June 1944, the Soviet Secret Police agency deported some 20,000 Greeks from Crimea (estimates vary).<sup>111</sup> In 1946, a large number of Pontic Greeks in Krasnodar krai (southern Russia) were also deported to Kazakhstan (Figure 4.4) with many dying on the way.<sup>112</sup>

In February 1949, Pontic Greeks from Tbilisi (Georgia) were deported to Kazakhstan.<sup>113</sup> From May to June 1949, approximately 50,000 [nearly all

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<sup>103</sup> Shenfield (2010). Beria became Party boss of the Transcaucasian Republics in 1932 and oversaw the political purges in those republics during Stalin's Great Purge (1936–1938). In 1938, Beria became head of the Soviet Secret Police.

<sup>104</sup> Rosen (1991), Psarrou (2005). One of my relatives was a Greek Orthodox priest in a church near Sokhumi. He was last seen in 1937. Also, my father was a Greek teacher at a school near Sokhumi. He never discussed how he escaped Stalin's purges. In the Donetsk and Krasnodar (Russia) regions, about 10,000 'people of Greek nationality' were arrested from December 1937 to January 1938 and nearly all of them were shot (Muraylov 2015).

<sup>105</sup> The 1939, 1959, 1970 and 1979 Soviet population censuses included a question on nationality. At times, early Soviet population statistics fail to clarify the category 'Greek' (Zapantis 1982). In the Soviet Union, from 1932 to 1991, peoples' ethnic origin was marked in their internal passport. At the age of 16 years, children from mixed marriages could choose between the nationalities of their parents (Kaurinkoski 2010). As a result, some people with Greek heritage were not recorded in censuses.

<sup>106</sup> Müller (1999). Many Greeks left Abkhazia in 1939 after the January 1939 census including my father's and my mother's families.

<sup>107</sup> Vergeti (2010–2011).

<sup>108</sup> Sideri (2006:81).

<sup>109</sup> Keramida (2001:263).

<sup>110</sup> Voutira (2011).

<sup>111</sup> Voutira (2014). According to Knight (1993:127) 33,000 Bulgars, Greeks and Armenians were listed for deportation from Crimea.

<sup>112</sup> Agtzidis (1991).

<sup>113</sup> Hionidou and Saunders (2010). Generally, the [Pontic] Greeks in Tsalka, were not deported (Sideri 2017).

Pontic] Greeks (including those ‘stateless Greeks’ with no official papers) were deported from Sochi (southern Russia), Sokhumi and Batumi (Georgia) to Uzbekistan and to Kazakhstan.<sup>114</sup>

Upon arrival in Kazakhstan in 1949, the more fortunate were taken to collective farms, while others lived in tents or dug holes in the desert. At first they had to report to the authorities every week, but after 1953, only once a month and they were able to move freely within their region.<sup>115</sup>

Although there were few Pontic Greeks in Ukraine, they nevertheless made up two thirds of the ethnic Greeks in the Soviet Union.<sup>116</sup> There are no reported cases of deportations among the Ukrainian Greeks [excluding Crimea] during 1942–1949.<sup>117</sup>

### Greeks in the Soviet Union (1950–1979)

In January 1953, 52,000 exiled Greeks were reported in the Russian Central Asian Republics—74% were in Kazakhstan.<sup>118</sup>

In 1957, and in the mid-1960s, some exiles who had retained their Greek citizenship were allowed to migrate to Greece. In 1965–1967, around 13,500 Greeks left the Soviet Union. Also in the mid-1960s, many began to return to southern Russia, although they could not reclaim any of their property in the area.<sup>119</sup>

From 1959 to 1979 (Table 4.1), the number of reported [mostly Pontic] Greeks in the Soviet Union increased from around 309,000 to around 343,000—most probably underestimates.

The number of Greeks in Georgia in Table 4.2 seems at odds with the number of Greeks deported during the Stalin period. For example, the number of Greeks reported in 1959 (nearly 73,000) looks higher than expected. Some of the deported Greeks probably moved back to Georgia before 1959. In 1979, there were 95,000 Greeks in Georgia.

### Greeks in the Soviet Union/Former Soviet Union (1980–2002)

Mikhail Gorbachev, leader of the Soviet Union (1985–1991), removed restrictions on ethnic minorities. Greek newspapers and Greek books were again published. Greek radio stations were established and Greek was taught in schools as a second language. The negative effect of Gorbachev’s reforms was the increase of nationalism, coupled with riots and conflicts which resulted in some Greeks emigrating to Greece (see below).<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Voutira (2011). Across Georgia, nearly 31,400 Greeks were expelled (Kaiser 2019).

<sup>115</sup> Karpozilos (1999:153–154).

<sup>116</sup> Kaurinkoski (2008).

<sup>117</sup> Voutira (1991).

<sup>118</sup> Voutira (2011). This excluded the 12,000 Greeks deported from Greece to Uzbekistan. After the Greek Civil War (1944–1949), the unsuccessful Greek Communists and Democratic Army fighters needed to leave Greece. In December 1949, Stalin provided these 12,000 Greek men, women and children sanctuary in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (Figure 4.4) (Lampropoulos 2014).

<sup>119</sup> Karpozilos (1999:153–154).

<sup>120</sup> Psarrou (2005).

Table 4.4: Number of Greeks, 1989 Soviet Union population census

Soviet republic	Number of Greeks
Ukraine	104,000 <sup>1</sup>
Georgia	100,320 <sup>2</sup>
Russia	92,000 <sup>3</sup>
Kazakhstan	46,750 <sup>4</sup>
Other	23,600 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>366,670</b>

<sup>1</sup> Pratsinakis (2013:66), <sup>2</sup> Manuylov (2015:34), <sup>3</sup> Popov (2016:1)

<sup>4</sup> [web.archive.org/web/20030416222849/http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Mes/pdf/51\\_cap1\\_2.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20030416222849/http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Mes/pdf/51_cap1_2.pdf)

In the 1989 Soviet Union population census (Table 4.4), there were 104,000 Greeks reported in Ukraine, just over 100,000 [nearly all Pontic] Greeks in Georgia and 92,000 Greeks [mostly Pontic Greeks] in Russia.

The 1999 population census in Kazakhstan reported only 12,700 Greeks, a substantial decrease from the 47,000 [predominantly Pontic] Greeks reported 10 years earlier.<sup>121</sup> At least 29,000 Greeks had emigrated to Greece in the 1990s.<sup>122</sup>

In 2002, there were nearly 98,000 Greeks reported in Russia.<sup>123</sup> In Georgia (excluding Abkhazia and South Ossetia), the number of Greeks reported dropped dramatically to only 15,000 (Table 4.2).

### **Movement in 1980s–2011 to Greece**

Between 1945 and 1984, 21,500 ethnic Greeks arrived in Greece from the Soviet Union.<sup>124</sup> In 1989, just before the breakup of the Soviet Union (in 1991), the Soviet Union population census (Table 4.4) reported an estimated 367,000 Greeks.

In the case of the 1992 Civil War in Georgia, when the Abkhazians fought for secession from Georgia, the Hellenic Navy aimed to remove the estimated around 15,000 Greeks in Abkhazia to Greece.<sup>125</sup> In August 1993, 1,015 Pontic Greeks were shipped from Sokhumi (Figure 4.2) to Greece.<sup>126</sup> Later, the Greek Government enabled the departure of those of Greek

<sup>121</sup>

[web.archive.org/web/20030416222849/http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Mes/pdf/51\\_cap1\\_2.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20030416222849/http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Mes/pdf/51_cap1_2.pdf)

<sup>122</sup> Diamanti-Karanou (2003).

<sup>123</sup> Manuylov (2015).

<sup>124</sup> Kaurinkoski (2010).

<sup>125</sup> Diamanti-Karanou (2003).

<sup>126</sup> Voutira (2011).

descent by plane from Tbilisi, Georgia and Sochi in southern Russia.<sup>127</sup> Almost all who were saved were Pontic Greek.<sup>128</sup>

In Greece, an official survey reported that between 1987 and the end of 2000 that around 155,000 immigrants of Greek descent came from the former Soviet Union and had remained in Greece. This total is an underestimate because the survey was not compulsory.<sup>129</sup> Around 52% came from Georgia, 21% from Kazakhstan and 15% from Russia.<sup>130</sup> After 2000, Greece had stopped issuing visas.<sup>131</sup> The Greek Government considered these Greeks as Greek nationals and provided them with full citizenship on arrival in Greece.<sup>132</sup>

These immigrants had a strong sense of national Greek identity, but this was strongly challenged by their host Greek population, though not by the Greek Government. Ethnic affiliation in the post-1930s Soviet Union was attributed at the time of the issuing of an internal passport, held by each Soviet citizen. For any individual, ethnicity was that of their mother or their father.<sup>133</sup>

According to the 2011 Population and Housing Census in Greece, some of the foreign citizens reported included 27,400 from Georgia, 17,000 from Ukraine, 14,500 from Cyprus and 13,800 from Russia.<sup>134</sup> Final data from the 2021 Greek Population and Housing Census of Greece is proposed to be released by 2024.

## **Movement to the Republic of Cyprus**

Greeks from the former Soviet Union began migrating to the Republic of Cyprus after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 2004, the number of Pontic Greeks from the Caucasus in the Republic was estimated to be around 12,000.<sup>135</sup> More recently, the number of Pontic Greeks from the Caucasus in the Republic was ‘estimated’ to be about 20,000.<sup>136</sup>

Preliminary census results from the 2021 Census of Population and Housing in Cyprus state that 21% of the 918,000 recorded residents in the Republic of Cyprus were foreign nationals.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Avdikos (2014).

<sup>128</sup> De Waal (2010).

<sup>129</sup> Vergeti (2010–2011). On a yearly basis, most (i.e. 25,700) came in 1993.

<sup>130</sup> Diamanti-Karanou (2003).

<sup>131</sup> Popov (2016).

<sup>132</sup> People intending to leave Russia had to submit their internal passports and their booklet documenting their work record. They also had to de-register from their household and if the whole family was leaving, the house had to be sold. At the end of the 1990s, the submission of internal passports and the sale of houses were no longer required for emigration from Russia (Popov 2016).

<sup>133</sup> Hionidou (2012:118).

<sup>134</sup> Kaurinkoski (2021).

<sup>135</sup> Teerling and King (2011).

<sup>136</sup> Neocleous et al. (2015).

<sup>137</sup> In the October 2021 Census of Population and Housing in Cyprus, there was a question on ethnic origin. Place of usual residence as at census date and residence one year prior to the census included overseas countries as options ([www.census2021.cystat.gov.cy/Announcements/18%20May%202022%20CENSUS%20OF%20POPULATION%20-%20PRELIMINARY%20RESULTS.pdf](http://www.census2021.cystat.gov.cy/Announcements/18%20May%202022%20CENSUS%20OF%20POPULATION%20-%20PRELIMINARY%20RESULTS.pdf)).

## **More Recent Data on Greeks in the Former Soviet Union**

There is a lack of recent population census data on the number of Greeks in the republics and regions of the former Soviet Union. New censuses are due but there will be a delay of a few years in the release of final census data.

### Russia

According to the Russian 2010 census, there were 85,600 people in the Russian Federation who identified themselves as Greeks. In Stavropol krai the census reported 33,600 Greeks and in Krasnodar krai 22,600 Greeks.<sup>138</sup> Note that these data do not include Crimea which was forcibly annexed by Russia in 2014.

Final data from the Russian census conducted in late 2021 will hopefully be available by the end of 2022.

### Kazakhstan

The 2009 population census in Kazakhstan reported only 8,850 Greeks.<sup>139</sup> Full results of the 2021 population census are planned for release by 2023. It is expected that the number of Greeks will be considerably less.

### Georgia

The 2014 Georgian census (excluding Abkhazia and South Ossetia) reported only 5,500 Greeks.<sup>140</sup> It is believed that they have Pontic Greek ancestors.

### Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, 10,450 Greeks were reported in the last Soviet Union population census in 1989.<sup>141</sup> The next census is not scheduled until November 2023.

### Ukraine

In Ukraine, the last census was conducted in 2001 (including Crimea) when 91,500 Greeks were reported—85% of whom lived in the Donetsk region.<sup>142</sup> Prior to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in early 2022, the next census was planned for 2023. According to Ukraine President Zelensky, after the end of the current war with Russia and the completion of investigations determining the number of dead and/or missing people in Ukraine, a population census will be held.<sup>143</sup>

An editorial in the *Nature* magazine states that after more than six months since Russia invaded Ukraine, some 5,500 civilians had died. It is believed that more than 5.6 million people had left Ukraine for other countries, mainly in Europe. It is also believed that at least another 6.3 million people have been internally displaced in Ukraine.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Email from Dr Anton Popov (November 2016).

<sup>139</sup> Manuylov (2015:35).

<sup>140</sup> [civil.ge/archives/124561](http://civil.ge/archives/124561).

<sup>141</sup> Manuylov (2015:35).

<sup>142</sup> [2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/](http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/)

<sup>143</sup> [www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/population-census-to-be-held-in-ukraine-after-war-zelensky.html](http://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/population-census-to-be-held-in-ukraine-after-war-zelensky.html), *Kyiv Post*, 30 April 2022.

<sup>144</sup> *Nature* (31 August 2022) 609(7).

**Note 4.1**

One report estimated that about 50,000 people left Greece between 1923 and the 1928 population census (Pentzopoulos 1962). Another report suggested that 66,000 Greek refugees finally settled in Western Europe, the United States, or Egypt while another report states that about 75,000 refugees died in Greece between 1922 and 1928 (Kitromilides and Alexandris 1984–1985). It is very important to note that:

- some refugees in Greece in 1928 probably did not report as refugees.
- the Dodecanese Islands (which includes Rhodes) were not returned to Greece until 1947. Thus, any refugees who fled to these islands were not counted in the 1928 Greek population census.

## 5. The Greek Language in the Soviet Union

When Pontic Greeks moved to the Russian empire and later to the Soviet Union, most spoke Pontic Greek and some spoke Urum, a Turkish dialect. Today, it is unknown how many Pontic Greek speakers remain in Georgia or southern Russia.<sup>145</sup>

The Pontic Greek dialect had never been written systematically and it was only after the Russian October 1917 Revolution that writers began to use it in writing to reach the Greek masses as *Demotic* Greek was a foreign language to the great majority of Greeks in the Russian empire/Soviet Union. But the Pontic Greek dialect had a limited vocabulary, so it used loan words from Russian. It was decided that *Demotic* Greek should become the official language of Greeks living in the Soviet Union. In 1926, during a Moscow conference on the regulation of the Greek language, it was agreed that in school, Greek children should be taught *Demotic* Greek, while *Demotic* Greek and Pontic Greek were to be used in Greek newspapers and other Greek publications. *Katharevousa* Greek<sup>146</sup> was removed from the school curriculum and replaced by a simplified spoken Greek with simplified traditional spelling [with 20 letters rather than the normal 24 letters in the Greek alphabet].<sup>147</sup>

The Greek population's illiteracy was very high. The need for new Greek teachers was enormous and with the opening of the first teachers' training college in Krasnodar in southern Russia, a four-year study programme was offered. The first graduates emerged in 1928 and by then it had enrolled nearly 100 students. The founding of other institutions for training teachers followed in the early 1930s in Sokhumi, Mariupol, Batumi (Figure 4.1) and the village of Santa in Tsalka (southern Georgia). By 1927, at least 60 schools teaching up to 5,000 children were operating in the northern Caucasus. In 1932–1933 in Abkhazia (north-west Georgia), about 80 schools were operating with nearly 5,000 pupils.<sup>148</sup>

Unfortunately, there was still some dispute over what form of the Greek language was to be used by Greeks in the Soviet Union. In 1933, a commission of Greeks and Russians, headed by Professor Sergievsky, visited Odessa, Sevastopol, Kerch, Mariupol, Rostov-on-Don, Grecheskii [possibly in

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<sup>145</sup> Today, the Pontic Greek dialect spoken in Greece includes terms from *Demotic* (modern) Greek. In contrast, the Pontic Greek dialect still spoken by between 4,000 and 8,000 Muslim Turks around Trabzon in north-eastern Turkey is not exposed to *Demotic* Greek terms and therefore they speak a cleaner version of the dialect called *Romeyka* (Sitaridou at: [www.romeyka.org/](http://www.romeyka.org/)). Ancestors of these Muslims were [most probably] forced to convert to Islam sometime after the conquest of the Ottoman Turks from 1461. It is amazing that so many words and the grammar of the ancient Greek language that disappeared from *Demotic* Greek are preserved by those who still live in parts of Pontos (Mackridge 1987).

<sup>146</sup> *Katharevousa* originated in the 19th century to 'purify' the Greek language of foreign words and to systematise its morphology by using ancient Greek roots. It was the official written language of Greece. It was also used in most Greek newspapers and technical publications. In 1976, it was replaced by *Demotic* Greek as the official Greek language ([www.britannica.com/topic/Katharevousa-Greek-language](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Katharevousa-Greek-language)).

<sup>147</sup> Karpozilos (1999:148).

<sup>148</sup> Karpozilos (1999:149).

Stavropol region], Novorossiisk, Sokhumi and Batumi to discuss this issue with the leaders of the Greek communities. The final decision on the language issue was made in 1934 at a conference with representatives from the major Greek communities. The commission proposed that the Greek community should strive to create one language based on *Demotic* Greek, to be taught in schools. The two main dialects, Pontic Greek and Mariupol Greek, should be enriched by the vocabulary of the Greek vernacular and should gradually be harmonised with the *Demotic* Greek taught in the schools.<sup>149</sup>

As a consequence, after 1933–1934, the Greek newspapers *Kokinos Kapnas* [*Red Tobacco*] and *Komunistis* changed from being written in Pontic Greek to *Demotic* Greek.<sup>150</sup>

The two major Greek publishing houses formed were *Komunistis* (which also published the Greek newspaper *Komunistis*) in Rostov-on-Don and *Kolektivistis* (1930–1937) in Mariupol (with a Greek newspaper called *Kolektivistis*). Two more Greek publishers were formed in Crimea and Sokhumi. Another large Greek newspaper was *Kokinos Kapnas* published from 1932 to 1938 in Sokhumi.<sup>151</sup>

The Greek newspaper with the largest circulation (to over 300 settlements) was *Komunistis* (Rostov-on-Don), which began as a weekly publication and in 1931, became bi-weekly, reaching its highest circulation with 5,000 copies a day. The Greek press in Rostov-on-Don began publishing in 1926.<sup>152</sup> During 1928–1937, *Komunistis* issued 546 Greek books; 53% written in *Demotic* Greek and 47% written in Pontic Greek.<sup>153</sup>

Most Pontic Greeks in Georgia were bilingual in Pontic Greek and Russian (not Georgian). Today, *Romeika* (the version of *Romeyka*) spoken by the small Pontic-speaking community of Georgia (Figure 4.2), differs from the other Pontic Greek varieties spoken in Turkey (*Romeyka*) and in Greece (Pontic Greek), due largely to local contact-induced changes. As a result, the Georgian variety (*Romeika*) has a lot of embedded elements from Russian and Georgian while preserving many Turkish borrowings and constructions. After ethnic Pontic Greeks from Georgia emigrated to Greece there was also significant impact on their dialect from the local standard Greek and the Pontic multidialectal environment.<sup>154</sup>

## Acknowledgement

I thank Dr Svetlana Berikashvili for her comments to an earlier draft.

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<sup>149</sup> Karpozilos (1999:150–151). The Mariupol Greeks (in modern Ukraine) numbered around 97,000 (Sergievsky 1934). Of these, some 82,000 spoke the Mariupol dialect of Greek (Dawkins 1937).

<sup>150</sup> Karpozilos (1999).

<sup>151</sup> Efkolidis (2020).

<sup>152</sup> Karpozilos (1999:147).

<sup>153</sup> Iliadou-Tachou and Orfanou (2015).

<sup>154</sup> Berikashvili (2017).



## 6. Greek Theatre

### Pontos

This chapter is a brief summary of the history of Greek Theatre performed around the Black Sea region. It is not complete. Additional information can be found in the references in the footnotes.

Greek theatre around the Black Sea region is not well known. The language used in the Pontic Greek theatre is written and performed in part or totally in the Pontic Greek dialect.<sup>155</sup> The Ottoman reform edict *Hatt-i Hümayun* of 1856 allowed the revival of Pontic Greek theatre in Pontos. The first Pontic Greek play [after 1856] was written in 1860 in Giresun on the southern Black Sea coast by Ioannis Valavanis in the Pontic Greek dialect and in *Katharevousa* Greek. The second Pontic play, a comedy, *Oi Erotoliptoi* [*The Lovers*] was written in 1876 in Pontic Greek by Konstantinos Konstantinidis while he was in Athens.<sup>156</sup> Before 1890 came three plays by Foinikopoulos after which plays were written in Pontos and performed by Ph Philippidis (printed in 1904) and by Panayiotis Fotiadis (printed in 1910).<sup>157</sup>

The centre of Greek theatrical activity in Pontos was Trabzon. The Trabzon school club, Φιλεκπαιδευτικός Σύλλογος [Educational Association] organised amateur performances as early as 1876.<sup>158</sup> In Trabzon, a new theatre was built in 1895 (Plate 6.1), by the Pontic Greek banker Theophylaktos. Many Athenian theatre companies performed in this theatre. In 1906, the theatre was managed by Joseph Ktenidis. [Ktenidis arrived in Greece in 1922 where he wrote 17 well-known Pontic Greek plays.] Besides Trabzon, there was a significant amateur theatre presence in Giresun, Samsun, Gumushane, Santa and Imera.<sup>159</sup>

### Russian Empire/Soviet Union

The Greek theatre in the Russian empire was founded in Odessa in 1814 by *Filiki Etaireia* (*Friendly Brotherhood*), the Greek revolutionary secret society founded by merchants.<sup>160</sup> They founded the amateur theatre of the *Etaireia* as a means to transmit their revolutionary ideas and to prepare the uprising of the Greeks and the Philhellenes. In 1817, the theatre group staged Metastasio's play *Themistocles*. In February 1818, they twice staged the play *Philoctitis* [by ancient Greek dramatist Sophocles?]. Many plays were staged in the following years. Due to the participation of the theatre group in the

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<sup>155</sup> Efkolidis (2020).

<sup>156</sup> Konstantinidis from Pontos was to become a wealthy businessman in France and become well-known for promoting an autonomous Pontos after World War I (Topalidis in press).

<sup>157</sup> Fotiadis (2008).

<sup>158</sup> Puchner (2019).

<sup>159</sup> Fotiadis (2008).

<sup>160</sup> *Filiki Etaireia* was founded to overthrow Ottoman rule in south-eastern Europe and to establish an independent Greek state. Alexander Ypsilantis [a Pontic Greek], an officer in the Russian army, accepted the leadership in 1820 ([www.britannica.com/topic/Philiki-Etaireia](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Philiki-Etaireia)).



Plate 6.1: Trabzon theatre (1895–1958)  
([upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bf/Trebizond\\_theatre.jpg/512px-Trebizond\\_theatre.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bf/Trebizond_theatre.jpg/512px-Trebizond_theatre.jpg)).

uprising of the Greek nation, the theatrical movement in Odessa was placed on hold for many years. A decisive role in the renaissance of the Greek theatre in the Russian empire was played by the new theatre built in 1878 in Odessa.<sup>161</sup>

On the north and east coasts of the Black Sea the Greek minority in the Russian empire/Soviet Union differed linguistically and culturally. While the Greeks of northern Caucasus and Georgia were overwhelming of Pontic origin and spoke Pontic Greek, in the area around Mariupol in modern Ukraine, the Greeks spoke the Mariupol dialect of Greek. Also, in Crimea there were some communities where the Greeks spoke modern Greek.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Fotiadis (2008:71–72).

<sup>162</sup> Efkolidis (2020:3).

## 1880–1938

The Black Sea Greek theatre in the Russian empire/Soviet Union, comprised many amateur troupes—but in some, e.g. in Sokhumi (Georgia), the actors, directors, writers and workers in general were professional. Theatrical musicians also performed in the Pontic Greek theatre during the Soviet era. Interestingly, there is no evidence of institutional cooperation between the theatre in Greece and the Greek Black Sea theatre. This was possibly due to the difference in the Greek dialects and the inherent Greek Government distrust of Soviet Communism.<sup>163</sup>

From 1922–1937, Hellenism in the Soviet Union experienced its golden period as the new regime allowed the establishment of theatre clubs and libraries. Frequently, theatre groups even enjoyed financial support from the Soviet authorities. Certain theatre groups functioned as departments within the state theatres.<sup>164</sup> The great centres of Pontic theatre were Sokhumi, Batumi, Tbilisi, Novorossiisk and Baku.<sup>165</sup>

In 1937, the Soviet authorities started persecuting Greek intellectuals and began closing Greek schools, theatres and Greek newspapers.<sup>166</sup>

### Mariupol

The Greek theatre of Dombas in Mariupol staged the theatrical plays by George Kostoprav.<sup>167</sup> Unfortunately, there are few surviving plays by the Greeks of Mariupol.<sup>168</sup>

### Sokhumi

Ioannis Aloizis [around 1880] financed the building of the 650 seat theatre at Sokhumi. Plays in *Demotic* Greek and Pontic Greek were staged there, as well as others by foreign playwrights. At the beginning of the 20th century, a prime mover of the Pontic theatre in the Russian empire was George Fotiadis [from Kromni, south of Trabzon, 1873–1909], whose plays *Proxenia* [*Arranged Marriage*] and the seditious play *O Lazar-agh* were repeatedly staged even in the smaller Greek villages of the Russian empire and then in the Soviet Union. His work was carried on after 1909, by Yiangos Kanonidis and then by the playwright, actor, stage producer and first director of the Greek State Theatre of Sokhumi, Theodore Kanonidis.<sup>169</sup>

From 1928 to 1936 the Greek State Theatre at Sokhumi staged about 40 plays (original, adapted and translated) performed in Sokhumi and in nearby areas. The group consisted of 35 professional actors (one-third were women) and performed both in Pontic and in *Demotic* Greek.<sup>170</sup> More than

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<sup>163</sup> Efkolidis (2020:8–9).

<sup>164</sup> Fotiadis (2008).

<sup>165</sup> Efkolidis (2020). Most Greeks around these centres were Pontic Greek.

<sup>166</sup> Fotiadis (2008).

<sup>167</sup> Fotiadis (2008).

<sup>168</sup> In 1932, Kostoprav was a journalist at the Greek newspaper *Kolektivistis*. In December 1937, Kostoprav was executed for allegedly anti-Soviet actions (Efkolidis 2020:83).

<sup>169</sup> Fotiadis (2008:73–74).

<sup>170</sup> My aunt, Agapi Hatimachinou's Pontic Greek parents were involved in productions at the Greek Theatre in Sokhumi.

36 theatrical works were written and produced by Theodore Kanonidis and are considered classics. One of the last plays it staged was the musical *I Khara* [*The Skull*] in January 1938. It was written by Kanonidis<sup>171</sup> and the musical composer was Odysseas Dimitriadis, [Professor at the Conservatory of Tbilisi, Georgia (1937–1965) who later became the musical director of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow (1965–1973)].

### Batumi

In 1906, the amateur 'Prometheus Greek Dramatic and Philological Association of Batumi' (in south-west Georgia), staged a George Fotiadis play, either *Skotathia* [*Darkness*] or *O Lazar-aghas*. In 1913, they also presented S Melas' play *O Yios tou Iskiou* [*The Son of the Shadow*]. Similar success met the plays *I Katarameni* [*The Cursed*] and *To Kokkino Poukamiso* [*The Red Shirt*]. A performance of the Pontic comedy, *Oi Kodonatoi Vrykolakes* [*The Bell Vampires*] was staged at the Greek village of Tavka.<sup>172</sup>

The British occupation of Batumi between December 1918 and July 1920 (to ensure the armistice after World War I) created some stability in the region. During this period, theatrical events were organised by local societies, some of which had established amateur theatrical groups. In 1919, the amateur theatre group, the Drama Department of the Association of Friends of Progress, *The Hope*, performed the *Dance of Zalongo*, a tragedy by Peresiadis. The Greek cultural society in Batumi, the Reformative Society *The Muses*, staged in July 1920 the comedy, *Number Seven* by Nikolaos Laskaris and Chekov's comedy *The Bear*. In August 1920, the 'Amateur Club of Santa People' performed the comedy in Pontic Greek, *The Bell Vampires*. In October, *The Muses* performed the comedies, *Epidemic of Madness* and *Musical Concert*.<sup>173</sup>

The comic play *Mr Manolis' Kitchen* written by S Charonides was performed in Batumi in 1924, predominantly in Pontic Greek and *Demotic* Greek.<sup>174</sup>

### Tbilisi

In 1911, the 'Greek Amateur Dramatic Group of Tbilisi' in Georgia staged the drama *Athanasios Diakos*. Later in the year, they staged *Aikaterini kai Xanthopoulos* [*Katherine and Xanthopoulos*] a drama about Trabzon. Also in 1911, the amateur Greek 'Educational and Cross-cultural Association of Tbilisi' presented Zanos' drama, *Yenos kai Kardia* [*Family and the Heart*] and the comedy, *I Trella* [*The Madness*]. The performances continued with Peresiadis' play *Sklava* [*Slave*]. The amateur group of Tbilisi also presented Peresiadis' folk drama, *Magemenos Voskos* [*Enchanted Shepherd*] and the comedy *Fiakas* [about Fiakas, a charming young swindler].<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Karpozilos (1999:152). Theodore Kanonidis began his career as an actor around 1920 in a Greek theatrical group in Novorossiisk (Figure 4.1).

<sup>172</sup> Fotiadis (2008:75).

<sup>173</sup> Plemmenos (2020).

<sup>174</sup> Efkolidis (2020).

<sup>175</sup> Fotiadis (2008:74).

## Krasnodar krai

In 1913, the ‘Prometheus Greek Association of Tuapse’ on the Black Sea coast in modern southern Russia (Figure 4.3) performed the play, *O Panayiotis o Kalamatianos* [*Panayiotis from Kalamata*] in 1913, written by Antonis Antoniadis. The ‘Drama Group of Anapa’ also on the Black Sea coast performed for a second time in 1917 the play *To Matsoukakikón Hará* [*The Joy of Machka*—Machka is south of Trabzon] in Pontic Greek as well as D Koromilas’ *O Thanatos tou Perikleous* [*The death of Pericles*].<sup>176</sup>

## Struggle from 1958

In 1958, the Greek State Theatre of Sokhumi resumed operation (it had closed in 1938). The stage producer, D Bourbouridis, played a leading role in reopening Greek schools, theatres and Greek newspapers and reorganising the State Theatre of Sokhumi. The theatre staged plays in *Demotic* Greek and Pontic Greek in Sokhumi and in towns with a large Greek population in the Soviet Union. In 1988, the theatre in Sokhumi closed due to the conflict between the Georgians and the Abkhazians which forced Bourbouridis to emigrate to Greece.<sup>177</sup>

The Greek theatre ‘Eleftheria’ was founded in 1990 and in 1993 it staged 40 performances in the small town of Vityazevo in southern Russia. In 2015, a satellite theatre studio ‘Seagulls’ was created at the theatre with 18 young actors.<sup>178</sup> Eleftheria preserves the cultural traditions including performances in the Pontic Greek dialect.

## **Greece**

Pontic Greek playwrights produced a unique refugee theatre after they arrived in Greece from 1922. They preferred their plays to be performed using the Pontic Greek dialect. Obsessed with their lost homeland, Pontic Greek playwrights evoked nostalgia on stage and their plots show how individuals were reincorporated into Greek society.<sup>179</sup>

In the past, theatrical themes to do with the Communist Soviet Union were treated with suspicion in Greece, while no drama plays were written on the Pontic Greek genocide until 1984.<sup>180</sup> A vibrant Pontic Greek theatre repertoire continues today in Greece and in the diaspora.

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<sup>176</sup> Fotiadis (2008).

<sup>177</sup> Fotiadis (2008:79–80).

<sup>178</sup> [dkvit.anapa-kult.ru/item/285591](http://dkvit.anapa-kult.ru/item/285591) April 2019.

<sup>179</sup> Fann Bouteneff (1996).

<sup>180</sup> Efkolidis (2020).



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Sam Topalidis has written this document, *Greeks From the Former Soviet Union* in order to spread knowledge about Greeks who moved to the Russian empire/Soviet Union and then moved predominantly to Greece. An emphasis is placed on Pontic Greeks who comprised most of these Greeks (originally from the north-east corner of Anatolia adjacent the Black Sea).

The document is divided into chapters covering who are the Pontic Greeks and how Greeks colonised the northern and the eastern regions of the Black Sea. How Greeks moved from the 18th century to the Russian empire/Soviet Union is discussed. Some aspects of Greek culture such as the Greek language and Greek theatre in the northern and eastern Black Sea region are described.

Information written in English on Greeks from the Soviet Union needs to be better known. These Greeks had to endure some very 'tough times' both in the Soviet Union and then discrimination when they arrived in Greece. In the Soviet Union they were called Greeks and when they arrived in Greece they were called foreigners.

This study is an important contribution to an often neglected part of Greek history. This document compliments the previous books which Sam has written which include:

- *A Pontic Greek History* (2007)
- *An Introduction to Pontic Greek History* (2019)
- *History and Culture of Greeks from Pontos Black Sea* (2019)
- *Greek Pontos* (in press).