

# Aftermath of the great catastrophe



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BUSTER**

" The whole city was ablaze and the harbour was light as day. Thousands of homeless refugees were surging back and fourth on the blistering quay - panic stricken to the point of insanity." The events leading up to the great fire of Smyrna all started with the Megali Idea. A concept made to expand Greece from the tiny size it used to be. This was used through almost everything the Greeks did, always making a priority to grow in size. At the end of World War 1, Greece still had certain alliances with Britain, and was promised territorial gains by them.

The Greek forces launched their attack on Turkey and conquered the city, Smyrna on the 15 of May 1919, taking over multiple other cities along the western side of Turkey also. Smyrna had become one of Turkey's most multicultural places over the years, home to Greeks, Armenians, and Jewish people. But the Greeks continued to advance through Turkey, losing the help of the British. From August 24- September 16, 1921, there was the battle of Sakarya, where the Turks took back control of Smyrna again.

Just four days after they had regained their control, fire was set to Smyrna. Almost the entire city went up in flames, and the citizens who lived there were devastated. What was the after-effect of the destruction of Smyrna on those who lived there and the rest of Greece and Turkey? The destruction of Smyrna was a catastrophic event for them, causing physical assault and murder of civilians, the forced population exchange of people between Greece and Turkey, and the burning of a diverse and multicultural city.

The first major effect that the destruction of Smyrna had on the citizens living there was the physical assault and killings by Turkish troops. The

nationalist Turks committed many acts of extreme violence towards the already harmed civilians of Smyrna. Although the slaughtering of Greeks and Armenians had already begun before the burning happened, it still continued after the fire had started. The Turks approached the city from every side, and went on a killing spree. While some were killed, the strongest of the men would then be taken and forced to join labour camps.

Along with this, many women were also raped and there was also a great deal of looting. The soldiers who massacred each town would sack them of all their resources. Within days, there was up to 100,000 citizens of Smyrna who were killed by the fire. The entire city burnt to the ground with bodies everywhere. "The streets and harbour were filled with bloated corpses."

Then there came the population exchange between Greece and Turkey. As a result of many conflicts over history, there was a great deal of Greeks in Turkey and Turks in Greece. Because of this, on January 30 of 1923, Turkey contemplated an exchange of populations of citizens of Greek ethnicity and citizens of Turkish ethnicity between Greece and Turkey. On May 1, 1923, when it was to occur, this exchange was meant as an exodus of Greeks all around Turkey, and as a sort of peace treaty.

Overall there were approximately 1,300,000 Greeks from Turkey and 500,000 Muslims from Greece who were transferred. Of the Greeks who were transferred, many happened to be from the recently demolished Smyrna, which was a haven to many different cultures. Although both governments agreed to this treaty, many citizens were forced to leave their homes. This exchange also conflicted with some people who were Greek, but spoke

Turkish, and people who were Turkish, and spoke Greek. Some of who barely even knew the language of the country they were being moved to.

By the time the exchange happened, nearly 1, 000, 000 of the 2, 700, 000 Greeks had been killed by the genocide at the hands of Turks and 500, 000 had fled due to their defeat in the Greco-Turkish war and burning of Smyrna. In the end, of the 1, 300, 000 Greek citizens involved in the exchange, only 189, 916 were truly exchanged, with the rest of them fleeing in fear and panic, many dying. The majority of the Greek populations were in no way exchanged but left in fear of what the Turks had already done.

The final effect that the burning of Smyrna left on the inhabitants of Turkey and Greece was the fact that it was a multicultural stronghold that was home to so many different people and was gone. The reason that it was such an important place was because it was one of the Seven Churches of Revelation. These churches were each mentioned in letters by Jesus in the bible, and the churches were named after the city they were in. Smyrna was the last of these seven churches to survive. Smyrna was also a very valuable place, having great libraries and schools along with being quite wealthy.

They produced many different items and foods such as silk, carpets, opium, oils, tobacco, and raisins, and because of their prosperity, they flourished. " Smyrna was an emporium and a seaport and a kind of polyglot city-state inside the Ottoman Empire; it was marble mansions, tobacco leaf and opium cake; it was a long table set with grapes, lamb, eggplant..." Not only was Smyrna so prosperous, but also was home to people of Greek, Armenian, and Jewish culture. This also made it one of the few cities that tolerated different

religions in the same place. The fact that such a paradise was destroyed was one of the worst affects that the destruction left on the people of Smyrna.

Because of the physical assault and murder of civilians, the forced population exchange of people between Greece and Turkey, and the burning of a diverse and multicultural city, the destruction of Smyrna was a catastrophic event for the Citizens who lived there and for the rest of Greece and Turkey. When this city was burnt down, the citizens murdered, and people expelled to different places, it left an enormous impact on them. It is unknown how many were murdered after the fire in the Turkish massacre but there was an estimated 2, 000 Greek soldiers whose bodies were thrown into the ocean.

Of the survivors, 60, 000 were left homeless, and many were shipped off back to whatever country their religion was operated at. The after-effect of the Great Catastrophe was fear, panic, and the destruction of a place where different cultures lived in harmony. " Smyrna was an enchantment, an emotion, and an idea that in the end could not close the circle of its own aspiration toward religious tolerance."