

the Asia Minor refugees of Nea Ionia

by

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On the fiftieth anniversary of the events which brought the refugees from Asia Minor to Greek shores, it is fitting that the various academic disciplines offer their contributions to an understanding of these events and of the participants in them.

The present study is primarily concerned with the ways in which the community of Nea Ionia reflects the larger migration and urbanization trends which have been so characteristic of the Athens area in the last decades, rather than with the events of 1922 and the participants in them. Nevertheless, the study provides insights into the experiences of the Asia Minor refugees. It was they who first settled the community of Nea Ionia in the wake of the 1922 population exchange between Greece and Turkey. Today, fifty years later, the refugee inhabitants continue to constitute an important population segment of the community.

The following paragraphs provide descriptive data about the Asia Minor refugees of Nea Ionia, including their background characteristics, the routes by which they came to Athens, and their settlement patterns in Nea Ionia.

research design and work history¹

The study is based on the responses of 909 respondents, of which 522 are household heads and 387 wives. The 522 households constitute a five per cent random sample of households existing in Nea Ionia in 1964.

The research instrument is a semi-structured interview schedule containing eighty questions. Average length of administration was approximately three hours, by trained interviewers who interviewed the respondents in their own homes.

The study was originally undertaken in 1964 by Mrs. Tina Gioka, who served as project director for the ensuing three years. In 1971, the present researcher, on sabbatical leave from Fordham University, became project director of the Nea Ionia study, at the invitation of Director General Dimitras of the National Centre of Social Research, and with the consent of Mrs. Gioka, who was no longer with the Center.

The first draft of the study was completed during the summer of 1972. At the present time, the final draft of the monograph is being prepared by the author, for publication by the Center in the fall of 1973.

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1. For a more extensive discussion of the study's objectives and research design, as well as detailed documentation of findings including tabular presentations, see the author's forthcoming monograph about the community of Nea Ionia.

findings

Background Characteristics of Refugee Respondents

As its name implies, the community of Nea Ionia is one of Athens' refugee communities, that is to say, it was originally settled by refugees from Asia Minor, in the wake of the 1922 population exchange between Greece and Turkey.

A look at the distribution of respondents according to their origins shows that 35 per cent are refugees, that is to say, persons who grew up in Asia Minor and who came to Athens as adolescents or young adults. Another 32 per cent are Athenians, persons who grew up in the Capital area. Finally, 33 per cent are internal migrants, persons who grew up in the Greek provinces and later settled down in Athens.

At first glance, it would seem, therefore, that by the 1960's, the refugee element constituted a minority of the community's inhabitants. The picture changes, however, when origins of parents, and birthplace of respondent, are taken into account. For among those respondents who grew up in Athens, a substantial proportion either had parents who were refugees, or were themselves born in Asia Minor, and brought to Athens as very young children by their parents or relatives. This is true, to a lesser extent, for internal migrants as well. Thirteen per cent of the internal migrants had fathers who came from Asia Minor, and nine per cent themselves were born there.

The vast majority of refugees¹ came to their present neighborhood before the second World War, in contrast to the internal migrants, most of whom arrived in Nea Ionia since that time. Although refugees can be found spread throughout the various neighborhoods of the community, they tend to be concentrated in the core neighborhoods of Saframopolis, Nea Ionia, Eleftheroupolis, and Calogreja. However, a good many refugees can also be found in Paleologou-Beikou, which was settled since the middle 1950's as a result of a Government-sponsored slum clearance program.

Largely due to the presence of refugees, the community of Nea Ionia tends to have an old age structure. Virtually all refugee respondents are over fifty years of age. Female household heads, mostly widows, are not infrequent among them.

Educational level among the refugees tends to be low, a function largely of their age. Sixty-two per cent of the refugee respondents have had either no schooling or only some years of Demotikon, as compared with 45 per cent of the internal migrants and 38 per

1. Throughout this text, the term «refugees», «internal migrants», and «Athenians» refers to the respondents in the study, rather than to the inhabitants of Nea Ionia as a whole, unless otherwise indicated.

cent of the Athenians. Among all three groups, the big jump in extent of schooling occurs between those under fifty years and those over fifty years old.

Also as a consequence of age, only thirty three per cent of the refugees are still in the labor force—a much smaller percentage than among either the internal migrants or the Athenians.

The job level of those refugees who are in the labor force is low, as is true for the respondents as a whole. The majority hold semi-skilled, skilled, or petty proprietor jobs. The latter type of work is particularly characteristic of refugees, 27 per cent of whom hold his kind of job. Petty proprietors are owners of fruit stands, kiosks, yard good shops, cafeneions, etc. Income derived from such work is generally meager, even though petty proprietors are self-employed and engaged in non-manual work.

The Move to Athens

Most refugee respondents were young at the time of their first move. Thirty-nine per cent were less than fifteen years old at the time, as compared with 21 per cent of the internal migrants. These age differences between the two groups at time of first move reflect the differences between politically-motivated as compared with economically-motivated migrants. These differences in motivation for migration are also reflected in the rural-urban origins of the two groups. Whereas most internal migrants are of rural origin, 77 per cent of the refugees grew up in urban areas. Over half came from the cities of Smyrna and Istanbul, Sparta and Vourla, Alaya, Attalya, and Ikonion.

The pattern of urbanism among refugees holds for their parents and grandparents as well. For those refugee respondents whose family origins are known,² the overwhelming majority of their fathers, mothers, and both paternal and maternal grandfathers grew up in cities abroad. The occupations of these forebears lend further support to the urban roots of the refugees. Not only the fathers who came from the cities of Asia Minor, but 68 per cent of those who lived in villages abroad, were engaged in urban, non-farming, types of occupations.

Approximately half of the refugee respondents went to Athens on their first move. Of these, almost four fifths came from cities, as noted earlier. The remainder came from villages and semi-urban areas. Many of these were located in the regions surrounding Smyrna and Istanbul. Others were scattered throughout the interior of Turkey, as far as the northern regions bordering the Black Sea and the southern regions facing Cyprus.

2. Eleven per cent of the refugee respondents did not know the places of origin of their paternal or maternal grandfathers.

Those refugees who grew up in villages of Asia Minor tended to have migrated to cities there in the years before 1922. The majority had moved to Istanbul, from Koutze, Koutali, and the villages of Eastern Thrace, such as Kalamitsi, Sterna, and Ganos. Other rural-urban moves in Asia Minor prior to 1922 were to Smyrna from Koula and Phokies; to Kaisaria from Bagaras; to Sparta from Nazli; and to Magnisia from Galata in Eastern Thrace.

Movement from smaller to larger cities in Asia Minor also was not unusual in the years before the Asia Minor disaster: to Istanbul from Kaisaria, Saframopolis, Inepolis, Nikopolis, and Ikonion; to Trapezounda and Kaisaria from Sparta; to Smyrna from Ikonion and Ayvali.

At the time of their move from Asia Minor to Greece, very few refugee respondents were still residing in villages in Asia Minor. These few were more likely to migrate to a rural area in Greece as an interim point of settlement than the refugees from urban residential points of departure. The «rural» migration for both groups, however, was primarily a move to Greek islands—lands which either were close to the Turkish mainland (such as Samos or Chios), or islands on which they had relatives to give them temporary shelter, such as Zakynthos and Kefalonia in the Ionian; Syros, Mykonos and Naxos of the Cyclades; and Spetses and Hydra in the Saronic Gulf.

Those refugee respondents who resided in urban areas of Asia Minor at the time of the 1922 disaster and who did not come directly to Athens, frequently made their first move to Greece either to northern mainland cities such as Kavalla and Thessaloniki; or to cities on the Peloponnesus, such as Kalamata and Pyrgos; or to towns on the islands, especially Herakleion and Mytilene.

Most of the refugees who did not come directly to Athens on their first move from Asia Minor, did so on their second move.

Refugees differ from the internal migrants in the number of moves that brought them to Athens, the reasons for coming, and their attitude towards the move. A larger proportion of refugees than of internal migrants made more than one move before settling

down in the Capital. Refugees came because they had to leave their homes, not because they chose to. Given a choice of where they could live, refugees are more likely than the internal migrants to choose their places of origin as their preferred residence, for sentimental reasons and because they have their roots there.

Settlement Patterns in Athens

Thirty-six per cent of the refugee respondents came to Nea Ionia directly upon their arrival in Athens and have lived in the same neighborhood since that time. Among those respondents who made moves within Athens, refugees were the most likely to have moved only once or twice. Generally, these moves did not involve residential social mobility, but represented changes from one residential neighborhood of low socio-economic status to another of similar status. Most of the moves, in fact, were confined to changes in neighborhood within Nea Ionia.

Despite their nostalgia for their places of origin, refugees expressed considerable attachment to their neighborhoods in Nea Ionia, largely because most have lived in them for a long time. Refugees also utilize the community more than either the internal migrants or the Athenians, judging from their shopping patterns, the location of their places of work, and the addresses of their relatives.

concluding remarks

The preceding sections contain selected descriptive data about the Asia Minor refugees of Nea Ionia. Hopefully, these data will partially fill the current gap in ethnic data available on the population of Athens, and provide baseline data for studies of population trends in future years.

Selected comparative data on internal migrants have also been included. These suggest the existence of numerous differences with regard to background, migration patterns, and attitudes that characterize politically-motivated as compared with economically-motivated migrants. This is an avenue of research which deserves further study.

In the next Issue we will publish a list of our associated editors and correspondents in Greece and abroad.