



Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus

Renee Hirschon, Renee Hirschon, R. Hirschon

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The war between Greece and Turkey ended in 1922 in what Greeks call the Asia Minor catastrophe, a disaster greater than the fall of Constantinople in 1493, for it marked the end of Hellenism in the ancient heartland of Asia Minor. In 1923 the Treaty of Lausanne ratified the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, involving the movement of some 1.5 million persons. Well over one million Greek refugees entered the Greek state in two years, increasing its population by about a quarter. Given the far-reaching consequences for both Greece and Turkey, surprisingly few studies exist of the numerous people so drastically affected by this uprooting. Over half a century later a large section of the urban refugee population in Greece still claimed a separate Asia Minor identity, despite sharing with other Greeks a common culture, religion, and language. Based on the author's long-term fieldwork, this ethnography of Kokkinia - an urban quarter in Piraeus - reveals how its inhabitants' sense of separate identity was constructed, an aspect of continuity with their well-defined identity as an Orthodox Christian minority in the Ottoman Empire. This rare study of an urban refugee group fifty years after settlement provides new insights into the phenomenon of ethnicity both structural and cultural. In detailed analysis of values, symbolic dimensions, and of social organization the book illustrates the strength and efficacy of cultural values in transcending material deprivation. The reprint of this study in paperback is particularly timely, marking as it does the 75th anniversary of this major event in the Eastern Mediterranean. Renée Hirschon Philippakis is currently Research Associate of the Refugee Studies Programme, University of Oxford, and Honorary Research Fellow of Oxford Brookes University.

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