





# RETURN TO KROMNI

An interview with George Andreadis on the fate of his Greek Pontic family and friends after the revelation of crypto-Christianity and the 1923 Exchange of Populations, and how his own life has been shaped by this enduring legacy.

RTE: George, your narrative of Pontian crypto-Christian life has been remarkable. Can you tell us what happened to your family after the repose of Mullah Molasleyman, your 19th-century ancestor who was both a Muslim mullah and a secret Orthodox priest?\*

GEORGE: It was from my grandmother, Aphrodite, who was born in Varenou in 1867, that I first learned of the crypto-Christians. Christos Andreadis, her husband and my grandfather, was also from a former crypto-Christian family from Zilmera near Trebizond, and made fine woolen bed coverings for a living. When he and my grandmother married around 1885, their families sent the young couple to the Greek Christian community in Batum, Georgia, so that they could live freely under Russian rule without fear of his being conscripted into the Turkish army. Because Turkey and Russia were often at war, and Batum was only six kilometers from the Turkish border, he understood that he might have a problem if the Turkish army found him, so instead of his Turkish name, Basoglu, or his Greek family name, Kephallides, he registered under a pseudonym, Andreadis, which is now our family name. They had twelve children, one of whom was my father, Kyriakos.

## The Legacy of Aphrodite Andreadou

In November of 1955, I was eighteen years old and leaving to study in Germany; my grandmother was sorry to see me go. She was already unable to walk, and if my mother or sister tried to help her, she would complain, “Oh, they broke my bones.” I was the only one who could help her.

\*See *Road to Emmaus*, Fall, 2007 (#31) for Part I of The Crypto-Christians of Pontus.

Of course, this wasn't literally true – it was only that I was her closest grandson, the one who paid attention to her “fairy-tales” about the crypto-Christians, as my family called them.

She called me to her bedside some days before I was to depart. She had already been bedridden for months. “You are going, and I will die,” she said. “I will never see you again.” I argued that I would surely see her when I returned. I didn't believe that she would die because no one in my family

had died since I was born. In my consciousness, Aphrodite was immortal.

“No, my child, my end comes, and it won't be long.” Even then, I did not believe her. She asked me to bring a pillow and sit on her bed. She was breathing with great difficulty. “Open the second drawer of my bureau.” I opened the drawer, and in it were several packages, each bearing the name of one of her grandchildren.

*Aphrodite Andreadou.*

“Give me the packet that says ‘Georgios’.” I took the packet and placed it on her lap. “This is yours. You won't be here when I die, and they may mix it up. I want to be sure it is in your hands now.” I opened the packet. Inside were two towels, hand-embroidered in the Pontian style, and four pairs of small children's socks, all made by her own hands for my future wife and children. One of the pairs of socks had the name “Georgios” on it, a second had the name “Georgios' unknown” and the third and fourth also. The “Georgios' was for my first son, and the Georgios' unknown” were for the children that would follow.

Once I'd opened the packet, Grandmother Aphrodite became calmer, her breathing more peaceful. She repeated a family story, and when she finished said, “In the third drawer, there is another packet for you.” I opened it. It contained an icon which she placed in my hands saying, “Everything was lost except this. I entrust it to you.”

After the revelation of the crypto-Christians, as our family left Turkey, the family icons were divided among the children, who all ended as exiles in Russia and Greece. “I don't know why,” said Aphrodite, “but our family icons are gone. Not one remains among all the relatives, except mine! I have kept this as my own eyes, and now it is yours.” The icon was of the Forerunner and Baptist John as a heavenly man and an earthly angel, and had come down from the time of Mullah Molasleyman or perhaps even earlier, saved through the entire crypto-Christian period. Our children now

receive much more from their parents, often a house or houses, but I'm sorry for their spiritual poverty, because never in their life will they inherit just two small packages. Even now, if I had to make a choice, I would prefer these gifts to any other.

As she had predicted, in days Aphrodite reposed, and I postponed my departure to Germany until after her ninth-day memorial. Before her death, my grandmother had made only one request. My mother had come from a line of openly professed Christians, and because my grandmother and I were very close, she said, “Don't give my dead body to your mother.” My grandmother wanted to be buried in the Greek fashion but she also wanted to be washed in a hot water bath like the Muslims and her crypto-Christian forbearers. “Don't let me go to the grave without this bath.”

Before she died, Aphrodite told me that her first offer of marriage had come from a man named Stylianos. When he came to ask for her hand, she and her sisters had peeped at the young man through the keyhole. Her father sent him away saying, “I will think about it for a week,” but at the end of the week he refused him because rumor said that he was a dissolute musician and a heavy drinker. But when she was 90 years old my grandmother confessed that this was the man whom she had loved her whole life – someone she had only seen through a keyhole. She always told me, “Don't forget, you must only marry the person you love.”

### Escape from Kars and Smyrna

While my own parents were from Batum, the family of my wife, Anastasia, was from Kars and Smyrna. My father-in-law, Constantine Mentekidis, was born in Kagizman and when his parents had migrated from their Turkish village to Kars in 1883, his grandmother had told Constantine's father, then a ten-year-old boy, “My son, if you are ever forced to leave your home, you can be rescued from enemies or from sickness, but not from hunger. If you must leave, make *kavurma*.” *Kavurma* was boiled mutton, sealed in a clay pot under a thick layer of butter that would keep for several months. When Lenin returned Kars to the Turks thirty-five years later, and they were compelled to leave, my wife's grandfather remembered his mother's words. The family fled on foot over the mountains by back roads, arriving in Georgia three and a half months later. Many other refugees died of cold and hunger along the way, but their family survived because they had made *kavurma*.



*Kyria Anastasia Andreadou, in the ruins of the Kars Cathedral.*

My mother-in-law, Demetra, was born in Salonica (Thessalonica), although her parents were from Smyrna (Turkish Izmir) and had escaped the destruction of the city in 1922, only a few years before her birth. They were taken by surprise on September 9 when the Turks fell upon the Greek and Armenian neighborhoods and began to slaughter everyone. After nightfall, her grandfather, Georgios Samios, loaded his family onto his *kurita* (caique), and sailed through the darkness of the blockaded bay, filled with the bodies of the dead, to Greek Mitilene and then Salonica. He not only took his own family of three children, including a 28-day-old daughter, but his close friend, his friend's wife and daughter, and the daughter's fiancé. As he was putting the women and the children aboard, he handed the newborn baby to the youth. After they got underway, he asked for the child, but the young man replied, "I left it on the sand – there's hardly room for us." My wife's grandfather retorted, "If I don't find the child, I will kill you." They sailed back to the beach, found the child unharmed, and took off again. So, my family was saved by *kavurma* and *kurita*.

### The Exchange of Populations: 1923

RTE: Can we return now to the Exchange of Populations, in which the Lausanne Treaty settled that all of the Greek Christians of Asia Minor would be sent to Greece, and all of the Muslims of Greece to Turkey. How difficult was the transfer for the Black Sea Pontians?

GEORGE: Extremely hard. There were many tragedies in that forced emigration and I have hundreds of stories from the evacuation. People often had to leave with just a few hours notice, but this depended on the Turkish ruler of each area. For example, the governor of Gümüşhane (Greek Argyroupolis) allowed our leaving to be postponed three times, and also set a tariff on the Turkish carters who would carry our things to the Black Sea, so that they could not create a black market. But the governor of Trebizond declared that on January 6th, in the middle of winter, all the Christians of Trebizond region had to come down to the harbor, as if the ships would be there to carry them. In fact, the first ships only came at the end of March, and these people

lived in squalor at the open harbor through the winter. They survived the three months only through the charity of the Russian Greeks in Trebizond, who set up kitchens to feed them. When the ships finally came, boats to ferry the refugees and their goods to the ships were at a premium and it was up to each family to save themselves and those close to them. The ships provided by the Turkish government were death traps, and many people contracted typhus and died, but even that risk was better than the certain death they faced if they stayed.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, some were left behind, mostly the very young or very old.

### Thodoron (Temel Garip)

One woman that I knew, Theodora Ikramoglou, from the village of Stama in Matsuka, said that their village priest called the villagers together at the Church of the Prophet Elia on January 6, 1923 and told them that they had six hours to pack their things and take the road to Trebizond. Each family was to carry some of the church icons and utensils. Besides her own eight sons, Theodora had an elderly bed-ridden sister and a seven-year-old nephew named Theodore (familiarly called Thodoron), whose mother had died and whose father was detained in Russia by the civil war. With only a few frantic hours to pack up her family's things and find a solution for her sister, she decided to leave little Theodore to give his aunt whatever food and water she could manage until she died. Theodora hoped that the Turks would leave the child unharmed until his father could return for him. When the bell tolled to leave, she bade them farewell and departed with her husband and sons.



*Thodoron.*

After some time the old aunt died, and Theodore remained alone in the village until the first Muslims came from Greece. They took over the Greek

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Note: Hans Morgenthau, President of the Refugee Settlement Commission established by the League of Nations and Greece in 1923, witnessed a shipload of Greek refugees land at Thessalonica on a ship provided by the Turkish government:

"... seven thousand people crowded in a ship that would have been taxed to normal capacity with two thousand... packed like sardines upon the deck, a squirming, writing mass of human misery. They had been at sea for four days. There had not been space to permit them to lie down to sleep; there had been no food to eat; there was not access to any toilet facilities. For those four days and nights many had stood upon the open deck, drenched by an autumn rain, pierced by the cold night wind, and blistered by the noonday sun. They came ashore in rages, hungry, sick, covered with vermin, hollow eyed, exhaling the horrible odour of human filth – bowed with despair." (From I Was Sent to Athens, NY Doubleday, 1929.)



*The former St. Gregory Church on the Trebizond shore, now destroyed.*



*Trebizond neighborhood, early 20th century.*

Christian homes and Theodore was thrown out of his father's house. Remembering that his grandfather had a remote one-room stone hut high on the mountain-side, this became his home for the rest of his life.

Known as Temel Garip, the boy grew up as a Turk. He was never given a trade, but lived as a child by begging, and afterwards by doing whatever he could find. Nevertheless, Theodore remembered that he was Greek, and when he was in the army in Istanbul, he heard that Greeks were living there, and thought, "Now is the time to find my compatriots." But the Greeks of Istanbul are very closed and suspicious. They were afraid of a trap, and received him coldly. After that one attempt he gave up, returned to the village, and became a devout Muslim.

The local people eventually married him to a very simple village girl by whom he had four children, one of whom died falling over a cliff on the mountainside, while another was carried off by a wild boar. Theodore himself became a fervent Muslim, strictly keeping all of the traditions. I was in touch with him for many years until he died in 1997, when I helped to arrange his Muslim funeral.

As for Theodora Ikramoglou, his aunt, on crossing the Black Sea to Greece, her husband and all eight of her sons died of typhus. She herself had to wrap their bodies and help throw her beloved dead into the sea. Until

the end of her life, she mourned the loss of her family and always said, "This disaster I brought on myself for my sin against the poor orphan, Theodore."

### The Tragedy of Olga Palassof

Another man, G. Orphanidis, saw a picture of his aunt Olga Palassof in my Greek book *Thodoron*, and wrote to tell me his story of the evacuation: "The ships to take us to Constantinople were not able to come to the Trebizond dock. Instead, people and goods were transferred by boat to the vessels anchored far from the coast. We were several families of relatives travelling together. It was getting dark and everyone rushed to pile possessions and people onto the small boat, which came and went many times until everything was loaded. After we set sail, our sad thoughts at leaving our native Trebizond were shattered by the loud cries of my Aunt Olga. In the confusion and disturbance, her three-year-old son had been left on the coast. The ship could not return and she wept until the last day of her life over that child."

There are more stories, of course. Every family has its own, and there are many that will never be told. When I speak publicly about the Exchange of Populations, I always say that, just as Xenophon led his forsaken Greek troops back from the heart of Mesopotamia to the Black Sea, where they

sailed home to Greece, so have the Greek people returned to Greece in the footsteps of this ancient warrior.

### Papa Nicholas Economides (1888-1959)

RTE: In your earlier account, you mentioned Father Nicholas Economides, who told you much about crypto-Christian customs. Was he a spiritual father to you?

GEORGE: Yes, I knew him well during the years he served in the Church of the Transfiguration in Kalamaria, here in Thessalonica. He was also a descendant of crypto-Christians of Kromni, and many of the customs that I have



*Fr. Nicholas Economides, with his wife and son. Trebizond.*

recorded are from him. He saw my interest and never missed a chance to tell me something new. To me, he was a tragic Christian figure of Asia Minor.

He was born Nicholas Economides, the son of Athanasios of Kromni, on November 14, 1888, and belonged to the first free generation of Kromnians after the *Hatti Humayun* allowed the crypto-Christians to publicly declare their faith. By the time he finished high school he was already an accomplished carpenter. He married, had a son, and on May 9, 1913 was ordained a priest by Metropolitan Leontios of Rodopolis (also a Kromnian) and assigned to the Church of St. Theodore in the village of Agioi Saranda in Kromni. His name was changed to Ioannis (John) when he was ordained, but none of us ever knew that. He continued to serve us as Papa Nicholas. In appearance, he was a fine-looking man, with a sweet voice. After some years, Metropolitan Chrysanthos called him to Trebizond, where he served as priest of the Church of St. Marina until the Exchange of Populations in 1923, when he was deported with his wife, his son, and his flock. The Turkish government had made no provision for hygiene, and epidemics spread quickly on the overcrowded boats. Every ship entering the Bosphorus had to disembark on the Asian side of Constantinople (today's Selemie), where a quarantine camp was established, staffed mostly by American volunteers from various Christian organizations under the supervision of the American Red Cross.

In this camp, Fr. Nicholas' wife and child perished. He arrived in Greece thirty-five years old, desperately ill, and with his beloved family dead. For eleven months he served in Oreo Kastro, but at the insistence of the Kromnians was finally assigned to the Church of the Transfiguration, named after the famous Greek cathedral of Kars. Everyone in Kalamaria loved him, and Metropolitan Gennadios of Thessalonica, keenly aware of the tragedy of Papa Nicholas' situation, suggested that he lay down the priesthood, that he might remarry and have another family, but Papa Nicholas refused and stayed with us. And how did he stay? Steadfast and worthy of his office. No one could say a word against him.

He baptized me, and my generation loved Papa Nicholas because his time with us was interwoven with our poor mud-filled streets of Kalamaria, with the German occupation, and with our common hunger. Only a few people, though, were fortunate enough to know him well, and I was one. He told me everything he knew of the religious life of the crypto-Christians of Kromni, and he had known many of them personally because the revelations of the hidden Christians continued until 1911.

Every first day of the month, especially September 1st, the Church New Year, I wouldn't sleep, but laid awake until morning, waiting for Fr. Nicholas to come and bless our house. He had baptized me, and my mother respected and loved him. She always insisted that he stay for a meal, because she knew that he had no one to care for him. From time to time, his sister came from her village to tidy his house, but he was very proud and the Kalamarians were discreet in offering him help, although they did so whenever and however they could. Often my mother would send me to him with cooked food and the message, "This is native Pontian food."

When difficult times came, Papa Nicholas was always with us – through the great move to Greece, through the German occupation, the terrible civil war that followed, poverty and starvation, and he escorted many poor people to the grave, who had no money to pay for a funeral.

At every great feast, I served in the altar with Papa Nicholas. He often gave me parcels, and occasionally money, telling me where to deliver them and always adding, "Don't say they come from me." Through Papa Nicholas I came to know all of the misery of Kalamaria, where the disabled, sick, and helpless were. Each time I gave a package, people naturally asked who had sent it. "No one!" I replied, and I would run away quickly so they couldn't catch me. Knowing Papa Nicholas as I did, I know that even this revelation



*Pontic Christian refugee schoolgirls. Domna Andreadou, top row, second from left.*



*Pontic refugees in their wooden barracks in Kalamaria.*

would distress him. I feel that I am committing a sin, yet for the sake of history this must be told.

After the German occupation there was a habit of taking up a collection at weddings, a certain share of which was understood to be for the priest, but I cannot recall a single time that Papa Nicholas counted the money. Others counted it and decided how much he should receive. Once I became very angry when they were being unjust to Papa Nicholas, and I told him that he should count it again and divide it up. “No, my little chick,” he said, “It doesn’t matter, they have children.” He never kept anything for himself, but gave it all to the poor.

For Papa Nicholas, it sufficed to have enough money to buy a drink of *rakı*, the only earthly medicine he had to ease the great hidden unhappiness of his soul. Yet as soon as he understood that he had drunk enough, he would get up and go home, hiding his pain from the eyes of his flock. But time passed and when he became old, his knees could no longer stand *rakı*. Going home on foot up Komninon Street, he often stumbled and fell in the mud. Men, women, young and old, anyone on the street, would run to help him up and escort him home, and then take his one and only riassa away to clean it. No one ever accused him of being drunk or laughed at seeing him

in the mud. Now, if a priest does something wrong, everyone shouts and criticizes, but then, on the contrary, many cried. All of Kalamaria knew the tragic life of this holy man.

Rarely was a priest so loved as Papa Nicholas, yet he always told me that our grandfathers and grandmothers, the crypto-Christians, were more Christian than any of us today. When he died on April 23, 1959, all of Kalamaria attended his funeral. Trapezountians and Kromnians from everywhere came to escort him to his final resting place, where he gave over the heavy cross he had carried for so many years without complaint.

Over forty years have passed, yet each of us who visits the cemetery feels obliged to light a candle on the grave of Papa Nicholas. The earthen surface of his grave no longer exists – melted wax from the candles that people lit for so many years carpeted the earth long ago.

There is a bust of Papa Nicholas Economides in the church yard of Metamorphosi, placed there by the *Palaia Froura*, the “Old Garrison of Kalamaria.” The inscription reads: *And the righteous will live for evermore; their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High.* (Wis. of Sol. 5:15)

## Asia Minor Refugees in Thessalonica

RTE: What about the other Kromnian Christians who came to Thessalonica?

GEORGE: My father-in-law was one of the first refugees to come before the Greek-Turkish Exchange of Populations in 1923. He was born in Kars and, as I said, for three and a half months his family traveled over the mountains on foot and by ox-cart, first to Batum, and then in 1919 here to the neighborhood of Kalamaria. They lived for decades in tin-roofed, dirt-floored barracks in an abandoned Allied World War I camp. Each was 18 x 20 meters long, with only burlap sacks and old woven Turkish *kilims* separating the families. When people quarreled, they often ended up falling through the wall onto the next family. One barrack served as the Church of the *Metamorphisi* (Transfiguration) after the Greek cathedral at Kars, until we built the first Church in 1928. I was born in one of these barracks in 1936 and lived there for twenty-three years.

RTE: Did you go to school there?

GEORGE: Yes, I went to primary school there, but in high school I was accepted into the *lyceum* in Thessalonica. Every year they would come through all of the neighborhoods and select a few refugee children who showed promise to go to the lyceum on scholarship. This was a great chance for me. In order to keep the scholarship we had to maintain an overall mark of 18 out of 20, with perfect behavior. Because the Exchange of Populations was followed by World War II and the Greek civil war, we still lived in the old barracks into the late 1950's. There was no public transportation into Thessalonica and I walked (or rather ran – I was a great runner) 14 kilometers every morning of my six years at the lyceum, to catch the bus to school, and then 14 kilometers back in the evening. Afterwards, I did my university studies in Germany. Germany was a great awakening in many ways. For instance, it was there in 1955 that I saw my first key, because in Kalamaria no one ever locked anything.

## The Great Bell of Kars

Now, about the refugees from Kars – if you remember my story, in the early 20th century, Tsar Nicholas II donated a 3,200-kilo bell to the Kars cathedral. It could be heard for great distances and had a deep, rich tone. The refugees always said that this was because there was a portion of gold

mixed with the alloy, and indeed, there is an old Russian tradition of wealthy Christians throwing small gold and silver coins into the molten alloy before the casting of a new bell. The refugees from Kars managed to bring this bell with them to Kilkis, about forty kilometers from Thessalonica, but as they were loading the bell onto the ship, the clapper fell off and disappeared beneath the waves. The bell was left in the depot warehouse until 1930, when they paid 8,000 drachmas in storage fees and took it by train to Kilkis. On a hill outside of town stood a small Bulgarian church dedicated to St. George where they wanted to install it, but they didn't have any way to get it up the hill from the station. Horses couldn't pull the weight. At that time there was a herdsman in the area with almost legendary strength, so strong that he could stop a running buffalo.<sup>2</sup> He built a platform on the floor of the station to hold the bell, then harnessed four buffalo to the platform and hauled it up. You could hear the bell ringing forty kilometers away.

Because the bell had fine Russian icons cast into it, in 1953, the anti-communist (and thus anti-Russian) Greek Metropolitan Smyrniotis had the great bell melted down and made into fourteen smaller bells, which now decorate the Metropolis of Kilkis. It was a sad mistake.

Another hierarch, Gennadios of Limnos, was appointed Metropolitan of Thessalonica in 1909 by the Patriarch of Constantinople. When the Germans occupied Greece and began rounding up Thessalonica's Jews, they wanted local people to participate, so they came to him and asked him to write down the names of prominent Jewish people of the city. He took the paper, wrote his own name on it, and handed it back. He died in 1952 and this was the last great Byzantine funeral – the reposed hierarch dressed and sitting upright on a canopied throne, carried in state through the streets. Eighteen bishops processed on foot, nine on each side of the carriage, from the Church of St. Demetrius to the Cathedral of St. Gregory Palamas where he was buried in the courtyard. The procession took two hours, and at each church they passed, a short service was held.

## Dimitrios Fillizis

RTE: When did the last Greeks leave Trebizond?

GEORGE: One Greek whom the Turks obliged to stay after the Christians left

<sup>2</sup> The Greek buffalo, native to Macedonia, is a cousin of the Asiatic water buffalo, and until the late 20th century was used for heavy farming and hauling. There are about 1,000 left in northern Greece.

was Dimitrios Fillizis, whom the Turkish army had forcibly mobilized as an engineer for new defense works on the border. Fanaticism is a terrible thing, and we have his written memories of the first Turkish soldiers entering Trebizond a few days after the Exchange of Populations. Two hundred in number, they were wild and ragged, and they went around to all of the Greek neighborhoods, breaking into the houses, looting and burning. They especially turned their fury on the Christian churches, and the following morning one could see icons, church utensils, iconostases, church books, and priest's vestments lying in the streets. The whole picture was macabre. Because his house was near the Church of St. Gregory, Fillizis wrote as an eyewitness: "At the risk of their own lives, Turkish soldiers mounted to the top of the Church of St. Gregory and bound the Cross with a rope in order to pull it down. But as if it were alive, our Cross resisted for a long time... until finally, it was no more, and the cathedral was razed. They did this to destroy the impression that Trebizond was a Christian city." For many centuries, the Church of St. Gregory on the heights above the port could be seen for miles out to sea, signaling almost 2,000 years of Christian presence. The Turks built a casino in its place.

Later, Fillizis and his wife were ordered to leave, and they took one last drive to see their summer home in Souk-Su. His wife was so afraid of what her husband would suffer at seeing the disastrous ruin that she tried to turn his face away, so that he would not look, but he insisted, "No, let me see everything, that I will never in my life have a nostalgia to return."

### Elena Lazaridou – The Last Greek of Trebizond

This is not widely known, but at the Exchange of Populations, not all of the Greeks left Pontus. A small number had Russian citizenship, and because Turkey did not want to stir up problems with Russia, they allowed them to stay. Most left voluntarily for Greece by 1936, when it became clear that there was no future for them in Trebizond (now Turkish Trabzon). The last old Greek woman, Elena Lazaridou, a Kromnian with Russian citizenship, died in Trabzon in 1965 at age 90, and was buried by the Catholic priest of Santa Maria Church.

Eleni had a daughter, Parthenope, who, at the time of the Russian Revolution, became a fervent communist, believing that even the family property left by her father was profit gained from the "blood and sweat of

simple workers." She disappeared behind the Russian border to live a "truly socialist life," emerging in Greece in 1958, forty years later – still a staunch communist. Discovering that her mother still lived, Parthenope traveled to Trabzon, where she spent three years trying to convince Eleni to move with her back to Greece. The old woman adamantly refused, "I was born here and I'll die here" – and she did die there, cared for in old age by Turkish Muslim neighbors, whose children had grown up hearing Eleni's stories of their distant Christian origins. At her death, the youngest son of the Turkish family even traveled to Thessalonica to try to convince Parthenope to claim her mother's property but, a socialist to the end, she refused the inheritance. Parthenope spent her last years in Thessalonica, earning her daily bread cleaning onions in a meat processing workshop. She tragically ended her own life by throwing herself under the wheels of a truck.

In 1960, however, while still living with her mother in Trabzon, Parthenope wrote a moving letter to Mr. Georgios Papagavriel of Thessalonica about her visit to her Kromni home on horseback. In the sixties, all of the inhabited villages of the region were filled with Pontic-speaking Muslim Turks who warmly remembered their former Greek neighbors, and Parthenope was welcomed with Pontian food, music, and dances. Village elders offered their homes for the night, and once she even slept in the house in Kotsanton that had belonged to her great-grandfather. Although a communist, she had a warm love for her homeland. Here are parts of her letter:

All of the villagers came to see us off. It was a cold morning and in a little while it began snowing. As we were on horseback, we became very wet, but, thank God, the snow stopped as we ascended the mountain and a fine warm sun began to shine that dried us out. Seeing all of the villages covered with a blanket of white snow, and those ruined churches without a priest, without pilgrims, on every hilltop, I could not stop my tears. How deeply they touch your heart and soul...

My deepest impression in Imera was when I walked through the village. The church is still standing, and when I entered I was surprised to see candles burning in the sanctuary. I asked, "Who is lighting candles in a Christian church?" and my hosts replied, "All those who have someone ill at home come to this church, light candles, and ask God to heal the sick one." (!) Another thing that impressed me was that on the hillside by the Monastery of St. John, everything was in



*Houses of Kromni.*



*Karmout, near Argyroupolis.*

ruins, but the church still stands with its marble tablet inscribed with the date of its dedication: 1859.

Oh, my poor monastery! Where are your gardens and your great plane trees? Only the crystal-clear spring still flows near the entrance, giving water for the entire village. I went into a nearby chapel. All of the wall paintings were destroyed, only a Cross remains with the letters: IX NIKA [Jesus Christ Conquers]....

The stone path brought us to the top of Saranton Hill, over which the Church of St. Theodore keeps a lonely watch. Not a single house still stands, only poor caves built by the shepherds... If you stand in front of the church, you command a fine view, a view that became impossible for me because of the tears that continually filled my eyes. From this spot, one can see the churches of Kromni, standing like proud, white castles, just as we left them at our exodus from Pontus. The church of Nanak, of Gluvena, of Loria, of Siamananton, of Manchianton, of Transfiguration, of St. Theodore of Geranton, of St. John of Frangaton! Every church, a community, an entire history, a heartfelt cry. I faced each one in turn, making the sign of the Cross and cried out the pain in my heart, as the tears streamed down my face....

From Alhazanton I went to the Church of Metamorphosis, which was built by my grandfather. Beside the church was the grave of my father's sister, my godmother in baptism. The grave was unfenced and the school without a roof. Ruins everywhere...

Pairamanton. Our two houses there were the best in all of Kromni. Ruins. I went to the spring that was next to the house of my uncle, Kostas Sidiropoulos. With all the crying, my nose began to bleed – perhaps I am to purify my tears with blood.... At that spring there was always a bush, and I found the bush as I had left it half a century before. What memories were mixed with that bush, the most beloved place of our childhood where we played all of our games.

The next day, as if I had completed a pilgrimage, I prayed at the cemetery and left for Imera, following the same way to Gümüşhane (Argyroupolis).

So this is Parthenope's letter. Her mother's death marked the passing of the last Greek soul of Trebizond. I say "the last Greek soul," but it is better if I say instead, "the last known Greek soul," because no one knows who else this ocean of the Orient still hides.

## Going Home

RTE: What a marvelous account. Were you ever able to visit Trebizond and Kromni and see your family home?

GEORGE: Yes, I have been to the Black Sea 52 times, and time-wise my story follows that of Eleni and Parthenope Lazaridou. My first visit to Kromni (now called Kurum Kale by the Turks) was in 1960, when I slept in the house of my ancestor, Mullah Molasleyman, who, as you mentioned, was both a Muslim *mullah* and an Orthodox priest at the same time. I didn't have an address for our house, I only had the instructions of my grandmother: "It has a mulberry tree that is higher than the minaret; one side bearing white fruit and the other side black fruit, and there is a carved stone nameplate." If the house still stood, I knew it would be owned by Muslim Turks, as all the Christians had left in the 1923 Exchange of Populations.

On that first visit I spent three days in a hotel in Ardassa (Turkish Torul), the nearest town to Kromni, where I became friends with the Muslim hotel owner's son. When I told him that I was looking for our house, he said, "Yes, but if you find it, don't let the owners know or they will think that you have



*George Andreadis on his first visit to Pontus, 1960.*

returned to claim your family's hidden gold, and will tear the place down looking for it." When I finally found the house, there was no tree, but I knew it at once from a picture. At the entrance of the house I saw in Osmanic letters the inscription: "M.S.Y. 1818", which stood for "Mullah Suleyman Yazicizade built this house in 1818." This was indeed his name, and the year that my ancestor, Mullah Molasleyman, had built the house. It was an incredible moment, and I was so overcome that I could hardly speak. I made the acquaintance of the Turkish people in the house, and after telling them my family had come from Kromni, they took me in and gave me a clean bed on the floor. That night I couldn't sleep. There were so many unanswered questions, that I laid awake all night, asking my grandmother for answers.

I couldn't ask outright, "Where is the tree?" but the next day, after much discussion, I said, "My grandmother told me that Kromni is famous for its mulberry trees." The woman replied, "Oh, there was a very great one here, it

had both black and white fruit, but the roots came up through the foundation and would have destroyed the house, so we had to cut it down. It was so large that it was very difficult to bring down." In 1970, I returned, but the house was gone. The owner had demolished it and used the stones to build a home for his children in Yomra, a coastal village near Trabzon.

RTE: What is Kromni like now?

GEORGE: The area is empty, but if you go up the old roads into the mountains from Torul (Greek Ardassa), you can see the remains.

RTE: Are there still churches left?

GEORGE: On every hill.

## Pilgrimage to the Black Sea

RTE: You have led many groups of Pontic Christians on visits to their native places. I imagine these were very poignant journeys.

GEORGE: For each of us, every time. The height of one of these visits for my 80-year-old neighbor, Parthena Eleftheriadou, was at a coffee house in Trabzon near her family's home, where she met old Turks of her age, from her neighborhood, who had been her childhood friends. All of these old people spoke with her; they laughed and cried together. When we left Trabzon, Aunt Parthena turned to me and said, "George, thank you very much. I came as an old woman and now I return as if I am twelve years old again."

During these visits we also met and maintained contact with Theodore (Temel Garip) who had been left behind in the village of Stama as a seven-year-old Greek boy at the Exchange of Populations. He had never been able to reconnect with Greek Christians, so had become a devout Muslim and raised a family, and we became close friends until his death in 1997.

Another visit cleared away a fifty-year-old mystery. I will tell it as Nikos Alhazidis of Nea Trapezus and Katerini told me in 1990:

I was born in 1911, in the village of Zurel in the Ofi area. Our houses were rather spread apart, but near our home lived a Turkish woman named Gül, whom we called Guila, who was more of a sister than a friend to my mother. Every year on the Thursday before Pascha, Guila



*Church of St. Theodore, Stavri.*



*Ruins of the Church of St. George, Kromni.*

covered her face and went to the Christian church to attend the service and the psalms. Many Muslim women in our area covered their faces and went to the church. They did not want to be identified.

Near the end of 1922, on the day of the Cross, September 14, shortly before we were ordered to depart with the Exchange of Populations, my mother noticed that our two beloved cows, Tsitseka and Fenguli, were missing from their stable. Both were about to give birth. At first, mother cried loudly, but then she came to herself and decided to follow the tracks left by the cows. Because it rains all year in our native place the muddy tracks were easy to see; they led her to the stable of our neighbor Guila. My mother couldn't believe that her sister-friend would have stolen her cows, but when she called the cows' names, they answered from inside the barn. Many Christians and Muslims gathered there at my mother's cries, and she got her cows back.

When I returned to my village many years later, I was deeply touched by the hospitality of my Muslim compatriots. While I was there, an old Muslim man came to me one day and, making sure that no one could hear, said that he was the person who in 1922 had stolen the cows and put them in Giula's stable. He knew the close relations between Giula and my mother and he didn't think that we would sus-

pect her of being the thief. He told me this to free his soul from that sin, and insisted that I stay in his home as a guest the entire time I spent in the village. And so I did."

There were many stories like this. The Greeks returning to visit their childhood villages were met everywhere with openhearted hospitality.

### The Monastery of Panagia Soumela

RTE: In your account of the Black Sea crypto-Christians, you frequently mention the Monastery of Panagia Soumela, between Trabzon and Kromni. According to the Greek tradition of the founder-monks, Sts. Barnabas and Sophronius, Soumela is even older than St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai.

GEORGE: Yes, we had three of the oldest monasteries in the world near Trebizond. The Pontian tradition describes them as: "Vazelon, the most ancient," dedicated to St. John the Forerunner and built in this remote spot in 270, at the height of Emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians; "Panagia Soumela, the most famous," founded in 383; and "St. George Peristereota, the most beautiful," established in the early sixth century. They were living monasteries throughout the Byzantine and Ottoman periods

until they were evacuated in 1923 during the European-engineered Exchange of Populations, when the monks were forced to leave. The monasteries were left to be ruined by weather and vandals. Archbishop Chrysanthos Filippides of Athens and All-Greece, the Metropolitan of Trebizond who fed the Turkish women and children during the Russian occupation of 1916, later remarked, “Through the guilty complicity of the western Christian powers, a glorious Christian civilization in the East has been destroyed. The Church of Trebizond has been banished, and our inheritance has been transferred to strangers.”

The Turkish government is now restoring Soumela, about 40 kilometers south of Trebizond, not as an Orthodox monastery, but as an historical tourist site, with more Turkish feeling than the original architecture.

In 1950, Filon Ktenidis, a Pontian poet and doctor, who wrote the song that would have been the national anthem if the Independent Republic of Pontus had come into being, began a campaign in Greece: “I have seen a dream. The Mother of God of Soumela appeared and said, ‘You refugees, my children, you have made your homes in this new country. When are you going to make my home?’” With this, he began a campaign to build the new Soumela in Kastania, 80 kilometers from Thessalonica on Mount Vermion, where the original miracle-working icon of Panagia Soumela is enshrined.

### Considering Crypto-Christianity

RTE: After a lifetime of living with stories of these remarkable people, what conclusions have you reached about the whole phenomenon of crypto-Christianity under the Ottomans?

GEORGE: This is a question that inevitably arises when you learn their history. Were they faithful Christians like those of the early catacombs, or were they fortune-hunters and opportunists? More than a century has passed since they publicly declared their Christianity, and how can one now give an historically accurate answer, particularly a descendant like myself? Even those who faced the situation at the time had different opinions. All of the European consuls in Trebizond supported them except the British representative, Stevens, who claimed that they were opportunists trying to escape army service. Was he against the Orthodox? I hardly believe so. The Turks considered them to be Muslim apostates and traitors.

I believe that for whatever reasons the first Kromnian Christians went underground – whether it was a time of near-starvation from oppressive laws and taxes, threatened violence if they did not convert to Islam, or simple self-interest – they did gain some benefit from appearing Muslim and working in the mines. Many of the mining families became fairly well-off, and because they were miners, they were exempt from serving in the Muslim army. Also, being outwardly Muslim, they did not pay the heavy taxes of the professed Christians. But it is only the first generation that we can hold accountable. Until the *Hatti Humayun*, the Christian Reform Edict, later generations could not proclaim themselves Christian even if they had wanted to, as apostasy from Islam was punishable by death. Nevertheless, they dragged their Christianity with them for over 200 years, and as my grandmother said, “We were more strict than the open Christians. We kept every feast and every tradition.”

The problem of crypto-Christianity, of course, was not limited to Kromni. There were crypto-Christians in Cappadocia and Cyprus, and throughout the Balkans in Albania, Serbia, and Bulgaria, where crypto-Christianity emerged even earlier. After the Ottoman Turks under Orhan conquered Nicea in 1331, the Patriarch of Constantinople, John XIV Kalekas (1334-1347), wrote to those believers who had declared themselves Muslim under force that, “those who, in fear of hell for themselves, wish to remain concealed and live the Christian faith, sharing and following the [traditions] in secret ... will be saved. Only keep the will of God.”

On the other hand, when Crete was conquered in the late 17th century, and people again asked for help from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, they received the following answer from the Gospel: *Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*<sup>3</sup> The desperate Cretans then turned to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Nektarios Pelopidas (1664-1682), who was himself from Crete. He allowed them a “superficial abjuration in the face of inescapable need.” By 1730, of the 350,000 inhabitants of Crete, 200,000 were registered as Muslims.

I don’t think that anyone can judge these people in hindsight. What they did, they did, and we can only leave them to God.

<sup>3</sup> Mt. 10:33

## Greek-Speaking Pontic Turks

RTE: You frequently mention Pontus' Greek-speaking Muslim population. Do you think any of these people are still crypto-Christian?

GEORGE: No, it's a mistake to think that the Muslims who still speak the Pontian Greek dialect at home may be crypto-Christian. Some of the worst treatment of Christians was from these same Greek-speaking people. During every Russian-Turkish conflict, the Ottoman administrators used these people to punish the local Christians and the Christian Greeks were sometimes more afraid of them than of the Turkish-speaking Muslims. Even today, Turkey has many cultural groups with great regional differences. Even now, if a young Pontian man goes into the army and while stationed in the south, in Adama for example, finds a girl he wants to marry, his parents will say, "What are you doing? Are you becoming a Turk?"

But what is happening now? The young people who speak Pontian at home have grown up with the idea, "Those Christians were our enemies." For generations, the Turks have been taught in school that the Byzantine Empire invaded Asia Minor around 800 AD and took *their* land. Nothing is said of the fact that the 800's was the first century in which nomadic Turkish tribes were allowed to settle within the empire. But then the children wonder, "If we were here first, why do they have so many monuments, and we have hardly any?" They also ask, "What is this language that my grandparents are speaking at home," and are told, "An ancient Turkish dialect." "But why is it that professors from the university can't speak with my grandfather, but a man coming from Greece talks to him easily?"

These kinds of thoughts and revelations create a protest in the soul of youth. Particularly in the technological university in Trabzon, there is great interest in Hellenism, although not in Christianity. They are trying to find their own identity and this brings them to Hellenism. Some of these students even think that when they come together with Greeks, it is only religion that separates them. Wanting to prove their love of being Greek, they also accept Christianity, but this does not make them crypto-Christians. Crypto-Christianity means that you keep your whole spiritual life intact with services, sacraments, and priests. They do not have this, there are no priests. This is more of a youthful reaction by those who do not feel themselves part of general Turkish society. It is a way for them to show solidari-

ty with people they love. They do it to make their Greek friends happy, and it is a mistake on the part of some of our Christians to baptize them. They have no preparation and no way to maintain a church life.

There are many Turks who know that their ancestors were Greek Christians who converted to save their lives and property, but if asked about it, most of them come up with the simple answer that, "Religion is stupid. Why should my father or my grandfather have lost his property for being Muslim or Christian?" So they are neither Christian nor Muslim.

In thinking over these problems of Turkish and Greek ancestry, another question is, where are the descendants of the Janissaries, the thousands of Christian boys who were taken from their villages in the 15th-16th centuries, forcibly made Muslim, and served in the Sultan's elite military corps? After their service, they retired and had families. What are they, Turks or Greeks? We can't say they were all Christian because we know that Turks sometimes secretly placed their sons in Greek families, hoping to have them selected as Janissaries. For the Turks, it was a sought-after opportunity. History in both Greece and Turkey has been nationalized, but it is also true that many Turks have Greek ancestry.

The only Christian church left now in Trabzon is Catholic. There are no Greek Orthodox churches in Turkey outside of Constantinople, but the Catholic Church was allowed to stay by the terms of the Lausanne Treaty. In Trabzon, the Catholic Church of Santa Maria was built at the time of the Byzantine Comnenian dynasty for Catholic Genoese merchants and their established community in Greek Trebizond. There is another church in Samsun dedicated to Santa Maria Dolores, and I knew the priests in both towns for many years.

When the Greeks left at the Exchange of Populations, the laypeople and monks took as much as they could carry, but often left their libraries, which included many old and rare books from Greece, Venice, and other parts of Europe. The Church of Santa Maria was able to save some of these books and I've spent much time working in their rich archives. There are only four or five Catholic women going to church there, all foreigners married to Turks, but I've seen with my own eyes, Turkish people coming from the villages. The country people still bring their sick from 50 and 100 kilometers away, so that the Catholic priest will pray over them. This is a custom that has been handed down from the old people who remember the Greeks and say, "In many difficulties we also called the Christian priest." It is too



*Pontian men's gathering at Souk Sou.*



*Kromni. Picnic at Kothonanton, early 20th century.*

extreme to say that this practice means they are crypto-Christians; this is a human response. If you have a sick child whom the doctors can't help, and people tell you there is a priest who can pray for him, you will go.

These Turks come to Trabzon because, under state regulations, a Christian priest is not allowed to visit a Turkish village. If he does, this is seen as an attempt to convert someone, which is illegal. However, a Moslem is permitted to come into the church. We had the same rules here in Greece about Jehovah's Witnesses, who were causing much confusion by going from door to door – but now that we are in the European Union, everything is permitted.

Currently, there are a small number of Turkish students studying in Greek universities. At least one of these Turkish nationalist groups claims that the male students are being secretly trained in guerilla warfare, and that I am personally giving each of them \$500 a month (*laughter*). If they read this and come to the door for their \$500, I will have to tell them that I am only an old pensioner.

### Writing and Lectures: Greek-Turkish Relations

RTE: This brings up the subject of your own visits to Turkey. What are your

relations with local people there, and how has the Turkish government responded to your books?

GEORGE: As I said earlier, I visited the Black Sea 52 times between 1960 and 1998, and was also many times on the western coast of Turkey. Everyone belongs to his native homeland, and if I couldn't live in Greece, I would want to live in Turkey on the Black Sea. I have friends there; we have the same music, the same mentality. If you have a real friend in Turkey you can trust him, and I don't always feel that way about the Greeks.

How do the Turks relate to me? In order to tell you, I must mention that I have written forty books, many of them translated into several languages. Of these, *The Crypto-Christians* (now out-of-print) and *Tamama* are in English, while my most recent book, *The Brazier of Memory*, is in Greek, English and German in one edition. *Tamama* has also been published in Greek, the Pontian dialect, German, Swedish, Russian, Armenian, Turkish, and Chinese. Over ten million copies were published in Chinese – enough to reach .05 percent of the population. Shu Kai, a very fine Chinese lady, translated the book and we have given all of the profits to the founding of a Greek cultural center in Shanghai. I gave up my royalties from the Turkish edition to the UNESCO fund that is restoring the ancient monastery of Panagia Soumela. You cannot

imagine how many Turkish Muslim professors have written me letters of appreciation for this book and for our support of the fund.

Some years ago, Archbishop Iakovos, who was then primate of the Greek Archdiocese in America, asked me, "Please translate these books into English. Our American children speak Greek, but with a very limited vocabulary and they can't read in Greek. We can put these books into Greek churches and schools in English."

During the period of 1980-1993, when both the Greek and Turkish Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Athens and Istanbul were against our two peoples even having cultural contact, Greek and Turkish mayors around the Aegean Sea took some private initiatives. Whenever they had a local celebration, I was always invited to speak about what unites us, what brings us together.

My book *Tamama*, about the 20th-century death marches and atrocities against Christians, had already been published and received honors from Turkish academics and historians. In 1992, I was awarded the Abdi İpekçi Prize in Istanbul for this book. Abdi İpekçi was a journalist who was assassinated for writing about Turkish-Greek cooperation, and his journalist friends in Istanbul and Athens created a prize in his name.<sup>4</sup> There are two secretariats – Turkish and Greek. The Greek committee selects writings or paintings of Greek origin that promote this idea, and Turkey does the same. When I was awarded the prize in Istanbul the Turkish presenters said, "Although this book recounts the worst period of Turkish-Greek relations, there is not one instance of hate or blame towards the Turkish people as a whole. The author holds responsible those who perpetrated these crimes." In 2000, I was also awarded a prize by the Academy of Greece.



*George Andreadis receiving award from Greek President Kostas Stephanopoulos and the Greek Academy.*

In the 1990's, when I made a presentation on Turkish-Greek friendship at a public gathering at an International Book Exhibition in Foça (Greek Phokaia), the Turkish archaeologist Ekrem Akurgal stood up to show the

<sup>4</sup> Abdi İpekçi (1929-1979) Turkish journalist, intellectual and human rights activist. While editor-in-chief of the major Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*, he was assassinated by Mehmet Ali Ağca, a member of the ultra-nationalist Grey Wolves. Ağca later escaped from prison and, in 1981, failed in an assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II.

Turkish translation of one of my books, and read aloud from the dedication where I give the profits from the book for the establishment of a folk-culture center and permanent photo exhibit of the history of Greek-Turkish coexistence in Asia Minor, which came about the following year. He said to the audience, "You must take an example from this of what can be done. You must do the same." This was when I was still allowed to enter Turkey.

## Friendship without Borders

RTE: Are you prohibited from entering Turkey now?

GEORGE: Yes. My last lecture in Turkey was organized by the mayor at the University in Adrianople (Edirne) on October 18, 1998. University students on any border are more extreme, and in Turkey, there are problems with the Grey Wolves, a right-wing extremist nationalist group.

At this meeting, the subject was "Friendship Without Borders." I was there with a well-known Muslim author from Ayvalik, Ahmet Yorulmaz, who is of Turkish Cretan origin. His people returned to Turkey at the Exchange of Populations and still speak Greek at home. The university hall was full, as it isn't every day that they have a Greek-speaking author there. Seated between the author and myself was a local professor to moderate the discussion. Yorulmaz spoke first, about the elements that make us close as peoples, and then I spoke. The questions afterward were mostly directed to me, because, being Greek, I was a novelty for them.

In 1998, the United States was bombing Serbia. At the end of the questions, one young girl asked my opinion of the Greek-Turkish standoff in Cyprus. The professor who was moderating, said, "This is a political question. We have had such a fine atmosphere. Why are you asking this?" I said to him, "It's very weak to leave questions without an answer, and I will answer her." I said, "I cannot in any way accept that an organized state like Turkey, on hearing that there are problems against their own nationals, would invade Cyprus without so much as consulting their allies. Seeing what is happening now in Serbia, I cannot accept that the Turkish army has remained on the territory of Cyprus for twenty-three years without the agreement of the United States of America."

After my talk, the rightists wrote it up, of course, with my picture in three newspapers, *The Turkish Daily News* (in English) in Ankara, *Yeni Safak* (The



*Ruined Monastery of St. John near Argypolis.*



*Ruins of the Holy Monastery of Vazelon.*

New Dawn, an extremist right-wing paper in Istanbul), and Trabzon's *Karadeniz* (The Black Sea), claiming that I had propagandized for Christianity and for building monasteries on the Black Sea coast. I had not said this, and afterwards several Turkish journalists, as well as members of the conservative party, called to apologize because they knew the stories were false.

My last trip to Turkey was two months later, in December of 1998, when I was arrested at the airport. I made some calls and a journalist friend of mine finally reached the Greek consulate authorities in Istanbul at 2 a.m.. They sent a young woman, a Greek diplomatic representative, to the airport, who told the militia very strongly that by the statutes of international law, they should have called my embassy. She was Pontian by origin and as she waited with me, we talked through the night and it turned out that we knew many of the same places. In the end, I was deported and have not been allowed to return to Turkey. I later wrote to the president of Turkey, who answered my letter, saying that although he favored my return, my file was marked "high security" and he had to turn my case over to the Ministry of National Security for a decision. I have not heard anything since. This was a result of my remarks in October, 1998.

But, as I said, you can trust real Turkish friends, and a young Turkish Muslim friend in Trabzon, who learned I was to give this talk in Istanbul,

said to himself, "Andreadis is going to speak, but the Grey Wolves know he's coming to Istanbul. Perhaps he won't be safe, they might throw stones or cause trouble." He came himself from Trabzon (the same distance as from Thessalonica to Munich, Germany) and, without asking my permission because he knew I was against carrying guns, he gathered about thirty young Istanbul Pontians, who came armed to the airport to protect me. Their vigil was useless, though, as I wasn't allowed to enter.

My books are still being published in Turkey. They are not censored or prohibited, but after the lecture officials thought, "His books are accepted by university academics, but now he is touching on politics and we must stop his contact with the youth." The same thing would have happened to a Turkish author speaking this way about Greek affairs in Greece.

Every summer I have dozens of visits from people of Turkish descent asking me if my heart is hard against Turkey. What I tell them is that I do not have good relations with any state power in the world, including my own (*laughter*).

If the Turks had not been surrounded by their Christian enemies, Russia, Greece and Europe, perhaps they would not be so quick to identify us as enemies now. Also, without Turkey, perhaps there would have been no modern state of Greece, and our foundations as Greek people would be much

weaker. There are extremists everywhere, but I believe in the possibility of conversion and cooperation for all people.

Although the Turkish government has not yet allowed me to return, they underestimate my forty years of contacts in Trabzon. I've been at Muslim funerals for my friends' fathers and grandfathers, at circumcisions, and at weddings. I did this because these are my friends and it gave them happiness. When the father of a close friend died (an old village man, who, whenever I came with a group of Greeks, would come out of his front door and shoot off his gun in a welcome salute), they held the funeral off for two days until I could arrive from Greece. This was not propaganda; it was from our hearts.

### The Brazier of Memory

To end, I would like to say that among the possessions my family brought from Pontus was an antique hand-made brass brazier from 1850, of Trapezountian design. Every year after Christmas my mother would clean and polish it, and then fill it with clean ashes in preparation for a tradition that our crypto-Christian ancestors and my own family kept on the eve of each Theophany. My father would light a candle and place it in the brazier, mentioning the name of a dead relative or friend to whom that candle was devoted. We all followed him in this, and when we finished, more than fifty candles were burning. My father had lost many friends and countrymen and, as a small boy, when I saw tears on his cheek, I could not understand why. His sorrow only became clear to me when I came to know our history. He himself had been sentenced to death *in absentia* in Amaseia by Emin Bey, the judge who confiscated our family property, and he had survived only because his family had already sent him to Batum. Many of his friends were not as fortunate. It was his greatest sorrow that so many dreams had been quenched, especially that of the free Pontian Republic in which Christians and Muslims could have lived in peace on their common native land. Each year he remembered the many friends who had lost their lives supporting such a hope, and his own crypto-Christian ancestors, who had suffered through so many centuries.

I will be very happy if our Pontian youth would imitate this custom. I will be satisfied if only a few imitate it. I will be pleased if just one of you is inspired to practice it. But even if no one is willing to follow this old custom, I will still be satisfied because I was given the chance to make it known to

you. And even if I have died before you gather over the brazier on Theophany Eve, come to my grave and tell me that you have revived this custom. Be sure that I will hear you. ✚

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His English editions include: *The Crypto-Christians*, *Tamama*, and *The Brazier of Memory*.