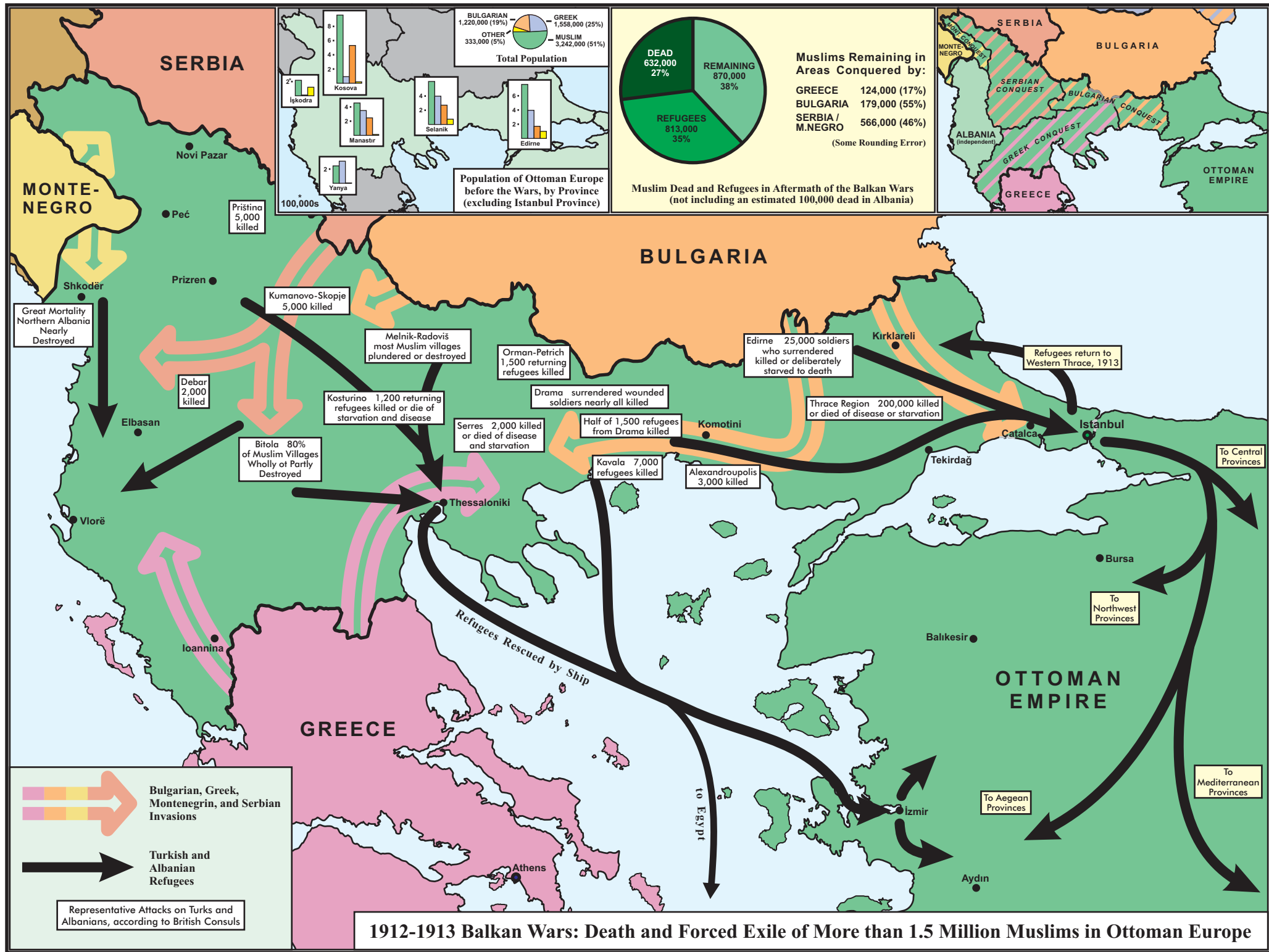


**1912-1913 Balkan Wars
Death and Forced Exile
of Ottoman Muslims**

An Annotated Map

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Death and Forced Exile of Ottoman Muslims in the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars

In Spring of 1912, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro agreed to invade the Ottoman Empire and to drive the Ottomans from Europe. The problem for the conquerors was that their peoples were a distinct minority in Ottoman Europe. 51% of the population was Muslim—mainly Albanians in the West, Turks in the East. Although the census recorded inhabitants only by their religion, the nature of the population was obvious: 25% were Greek Orthodox, a number that included Serbs. 19% were Bulgarian Orthodox, which included Macedonians.

The conquerors knew that Muslim majorities would always be a threat to minority rule. The solution was to be eviction and death of the Muslims.

The Ottoman Defense

Ottoman Europe was nearly impossible to defend. The borders were long and could not be held against four enemies who could strike from anywhere. Militarily, the intelligent plan for Ottoman forces would have been to withdraw from the West, concentrate in the East, defeat one enemy, perhaps the Bulgarians, then turn to fight others. This the Ottoman Army could not do, because it would have meant abandoning the

Muslim population. In 1877-78, 34% of the Turks had been forced from Bulgaria and another 17% had died. Mortality in regions conquered by Serbia and Romania had been even greater. In 1912, European Muslims could expect the same treatment. Therefore, Ottoman forces remained in the West, and were defeated.

Defeat

The First Balkan War began on October 8, 1912. Outnumbered two to one, the Ottomans were quickly defeated. Only three fortified cities held out: Yanya (Ioánnina), Üsküdar (Shkodër), and Edirne. All of these fell by April of 1913. The Ottomans managed to repel the Bulgarians at the Çatalca Line, saving Istanbul. All else in Ottoman Europe was lost.

On June 16, 1913 the Allies fell out over the division of conquered territory. The Ottomans took advantage of the resulting conflict to retake Edirne and Eastern Thrace (today's European Turkey).

Soldiers and Officials

An estimated 125,000 Ottoman soldiers were killed in the wars or died of disease and starvation. Most of these deaths were the direct result of war. Many, however, were murdered by

the victors. Turkish prisoners of war were killed. For example, Bulgarians killed 500 to 600 at Stara Zagora alone.

By holding Edirne against Bulgarian and Serbian troops for more than four months, Ottoman soldiers contributed to the Bulgarian failure to take Istanbul, but they paid a heavy price for their dedication to duty. When Edirne finally surrendered the defenders were imprisoned and starved to death.

As agents of the old order and possible leaders of resistance, Ottoman officials and local leaders were targeted for assassination: British consul Lamb wrote, "Throughout the districts of Kilkish, Doiran, and Ghevgheli nearly all the leading Mussulmans have been put to death in one form or another, their property pillaged or destroyed and their farms and dwelling-houses burned. Their women have been subjected to indignity, and often worse." Other districts were the same.

Muslim Civilians

The speed of the Allied conquest magnified the suffering of Turks and Albanians. Muslims might remain in their villages awaiting the

outcomes of battles. After the Ottoman defeat, the villages would be attacked by guerilla bands, and they would flee. Attacked again on the road, some might reach the relative safety of a port such as Salonica or Kavalla to take ship to a port in Anatolia. Once the conquerors took the ports, however, the peril renewed. Refugees were relatively safe from outright attack in Salonica, which had European consuls, but not safe from starvation and disease as they waited for transportation from their homelands. 30,000 refugees waited there in March, 1913. In Kavalla, less open to foreign influence, thousands were massacred.

Most Muslims could not flee, at least not flee successfully. Armies blocked the way. It was impossible to travel overland to Istanbul and onwards while the Ottomans and Bulgarians fought at Çatalca. They often could not reach ports. Consul Lamb reported, "Of some 1500 Mussulmans who endeavoured to escape to Cavalla [from Drama] barely half are believed to have reached the latter place. For 8 or 10 days afterwards the road is stated to have been quite thickly strewn with unburied corpses." Many set out on the roads, only to be forced to return as they were attacked or as armies and guerilla troops blocked their passage.

Many villagers had never left, fearful of the journey or not willing to abandon their homes. There was no safety in most villages. British Consul Grieg at Manastir wrote, "The war has caused great distress in the Monastir district. It is believed that about 80% of the villages inhabited exclusively by Moslems, and of the Moslem quarters of villages with a mixed population, have been sacked and partially or wholly destroyed, or both, throughout the kazas of Monastir, Kirchevo, Florina, Serfidjé, Hailar, Kozhani, Ellassona, Grevena, Naselitch, and Kastoria. Considerable distress is reported amongst both Christians and Moslems in the Gorcha and Dibra districts. Subsequent enquiry will probably show that the irregular troops attached to the contending armies and parties of marauders from neighbouring Christian villages were mainly responsible for the work of destruction."

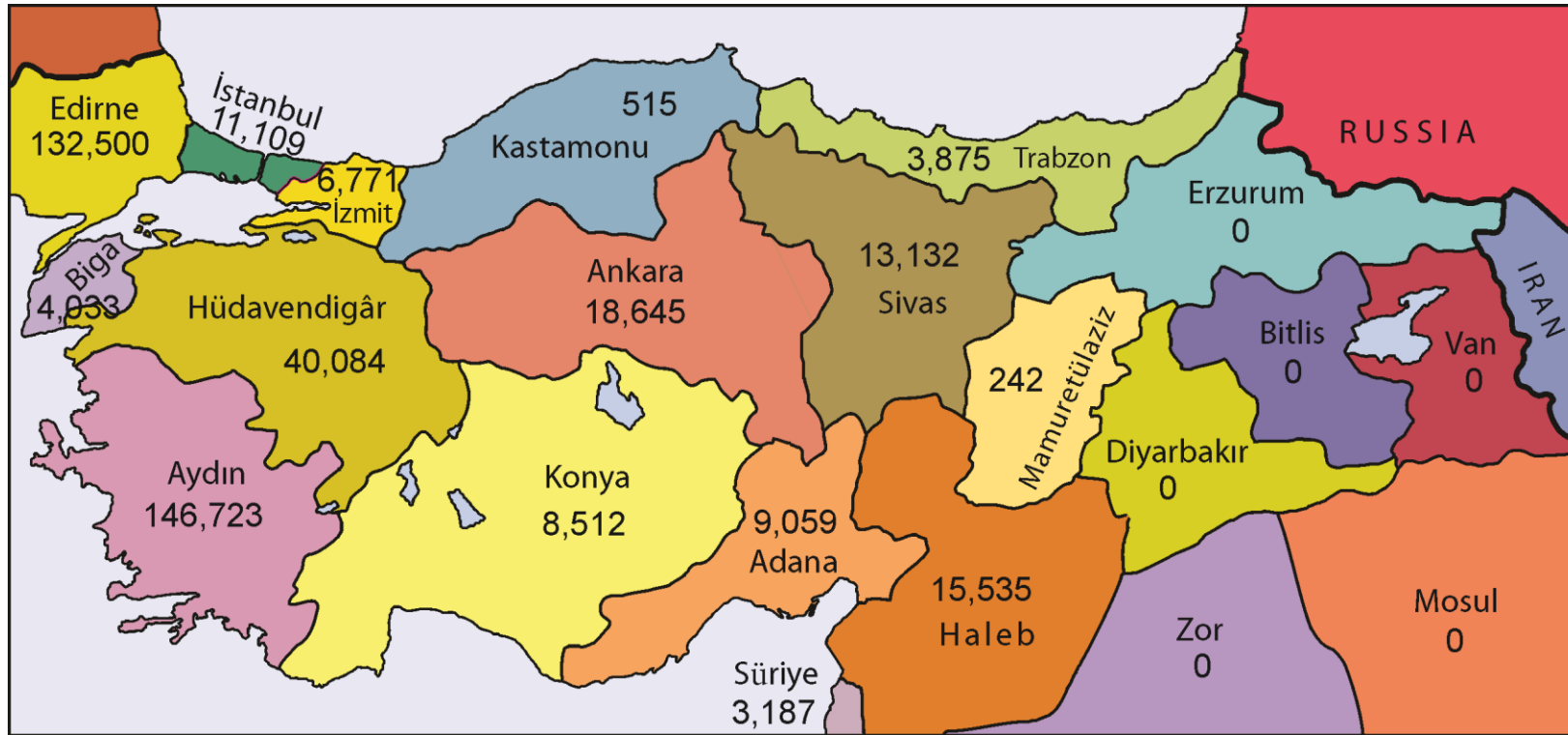
As Grieg reported, Christians also suffered, particularly when the Allies fell out and fought each other, destroying enemies' homes and forcing them to flee and die. Grieg also noted, however, "No place has been heard of where Christian villagers are in any danger of starvation."

The situation was the same in every region. Consuls reported that Bulgarians had destroyed "practically all the Moslem villages" in the areas they occupied in Thrace. Serbs destroyed Muslim

villages in Northern Macedonia and Albania. Montenegrins laid waste to Northern Albania, leaving little standing.

In every region, villagers were robbed of the farm animals and seed upon which their lives depended. They had no food, and none was provided them by the conquerors, so they starved. European observers reported cases of murder, destruction, and starvation from all of Ottoman Europe. The Serres region is an example: Muslim villagers had fled to the city of Serres in the thousands. When fighting ended, the new authorities told them they could safely return to their villages. On arriving, they found that their villages had been destroyed. They gathered in the towns such as Petrich, where 200 were killed by Bulgarians. 1,200 more were massacred at Orman Çiftlik, a further 150 at Gjurgjevo. The 364 who survived in Petrich were ordered to gather in the town barracks; 260 were killed there with bayonets. What happened to the surviving 100 is unknown. They presumably joined the exodus to the remaining Ottoman lands.

At wars' end, survivors who had not been able to escape earlier from Ottoman Europe fled to Eastern Thrace and Anatolia, taking what remained of their belongings. Their land, houses, businesses and most farm animals were lost. No compensation was ever paid



The Human Cost

No one counted what must have been the great number of the deaths in Albania. There was no post-war Albanian census to compare the number of survivors to the pre-war population. Outside of Albania, 2.3 million Muslims had lived in the conquered regions of Ottoman Europe before the Wars. By 1926, only 870,000 remained in their homelands.

Immediately after the Balkan wars, 414,000 settled in what remained to the Ottoman Empire, as shown on the map. 399,000 more came by 1926.* All but a small number settled in Eastern Thrace and Western and Central Anatolia. 632,000, 27% of the Muslims of Ottoman Europe, had died, the worst civilian mortality in any modern European war.

*The calculations of mortality are explained in Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile*, Princeton, New Jersey: Darwin, 1995, pp. 135 – 177. Deaths can only be estimated by subtracting survivors from the original population. Because Balkan countries and Turkey did not take censuses until the 1920s, it is necessary to count the populations at those dates in order to find the number of deaths. This had little effect on the count of the deaths, but it did include Muslim refugees from the Balkans in the period up to the date of the censuses.