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# Greek adolescents on the Asia Minor Catastrophe: perceptions of the past, views on the present, expectations for the future

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## Abstract

The year 2022 marked one hundred years since the defeat of Greece in the Greco–Turkish war (1919–22) and the end of the Greek presence in Asia Minor, two events that are registered in Greek historiography and collective historical memory as the 'Asia Minor Catastrophe'. The Asia Minor Catastrophe gradually evolved into an important pillar for the formation of collective memory and historical consciousness in modern Greece. However, its links with contemporary historical culture and the attitudes of Greek citizens on critical foreign policy issues, especially regarding Türkiye, have not been explored. For example, does the historical perception of the Asia Minor Catastrophe influence citizens' attitudes regarding Greek–Turkish relations? Do Greek citizens' views

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on contemporary Greek–Turkish differences determine their historical perception of the Asia Minor Catastrophe? With these thoughts in mind and in order to address the above question, we attempted to explore 18-year-old adolescents' perceptions of the Asia Minor Catastrophe. The sample for the research involved 20 18-year-olds attending a state school in Athens in spring 2022. A semi-structured interview was chosen as the main research tool for the study, and the views expressed by the participants were recorded, while the data analysis followed the lines of qualitative content analysis. Adolescents' perception of the Asia Minor Catastrophe seems to influence their attitude towards contemporary Greek–Turkish issues.

**Keywords** Asia Minor Catastrophe; adolescents; historical perceptions; historical consciousness; national identity

## Introduction

The year 2022 marked one hundred years since the defeat of Greece in the Asia Minor War (1919–22) and the end of Asia Minor Hellenism (Heraclides, 2010), events that were interpreted in historiography and collective historical memory as the 'Asia Minor Catastrophe' (Llewellyn-Smith, 2023). The term has been adopted by Greek historiography and public history in Greece to refer to an extremely painful period of Greek history that began with the landing of Greek troops on the territory of Asia Minor, and ended with their defeat and the forced exodus of the Greek populations from the Asia Minor territories. A large number of refugees were forced to leave their homes and settle in Greek territory in adverse conditions (Hirschon, 2003; Smith, 1998). It was also the end of the Great Idea, the national vision that aimed at extending Greek borders to Constantinople and the Asia Minor coast, which had dominated Greece's domestic and foreign policy for almost a century.

Greece was forced by the Treaty of Lausanne to consent to the compulsory exchange of the Greek Orthodox populations remaining on Turkish territory, with the exception of the Greeks of Constantinople, and to withdraw from Eastern Thrace. All this is included in the term 'catastrophe' adopted in Greek national historiography, a term which was emphasised by atrocities committed by Turkish troops against the civilian Greek Orthodox population during the Greco–Turkish war of 1919–22. The Treaty of Lausanne and the exchange of populations (Tsitselikis, 2006) finalised the loss of the territories that were considered potentially national, and Greek territory was henceforth to be identified with the borders of the state. It was the irrevocable end of a great illusion about the possibilities of the model kingdom, and of the chances of the Greeks to become, like their ancestors, protagonists of history (Repoussi, 2019).

The Asia Minor Catastrophe (AMC) became a pillar of the collective memory and historical consciousness in modern Greece (Exertzoglou, 2011; Stamatopoulos, 2011). The respective social, political, cultural and educational conditions (Repoussi, 2011) determined the ways in which the AMC was integrated into the dominant national narrative, and it became its second pillar, after that of the Greek Revolution against the Ottoman Empire in 1821 (Liakos, 2011; Salvanou, 2018). In the conditions of globalisation, and of the fears it causes of the loss of national identities – with consequent strengthening of identities in the last decade of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first centuries – and in combination with many factors highlighting different identities (Repoussi, 2009a), the Asia Minor identity has significantly strengthened, and the actors of Asia Minor memory (the descendants of people who came from Asia Minor) claim its overall upgrading. From the negative sign of identity of the first decades after the AMC, Asia Minor origin has acquired a positive aspect, and it is fully and primarily integrated into the national identity. The Asia Minor trauma is considered so national that citizens who do not share it are considered to be in a minority. This is one of the main conclusions of the 'history wars' that erupted with particular intensity in 2008 on the publication of a school history textbook (Nakou and Apostolidou, 2010) that attempted an alternative narrative of the AMC, distancing itself from the victimisation of Asia Minor Hellenism as a result of Turkish barbarism (Athnasiades, 2014; Bilginer, 2012; Broeders, 2008; Hamilakis, 2003; Liakos, 2008; Millas, 2019; Repoussi, 2009b; Zachos and Michailidou, 2014).

The confrontation between the two states of Greece and Türkiye has been fuelled since then by a series of events, such as the persecution of the Greeks of Constantinople (Alexandris, 1983; Klokidou, 2014), and the conflict in Cyprus (Giannouloupoulos, 1992), culminating in the 1974 Turkish invasion and

occupation of the northern part of the island, as well as the demarcation of the maritime border between the two countries, and the exploitation of the seabed in the Aegean Sea.

Due to its importance in the course of Greek national integration, the AMC is not only an important pillar of historical memory and culture, but also an important historiographical subject. However, its connections with contemporary historical culture, and its links with the perceptions and attitudes of Greek citizens on the critical issues caused by Greek–Turkish relations and tensions, have not been explored. For example, does the perception of the AMC influence citizens' attitudes towards Greek–Turkish tensions and citizens' disposition towards the resolution issues? And, vice versa, do Greek citizens' views on contemporary Greek–Turkish conflicts affect Greeks' historical perceptions of the AMC?

With these thoughts, and in order to contribute to the above reflection, we attempted to explore the perceptions of 18-year-old students about the AMC, to relate them to their broader historical perceptions, and to connect them with their views on the present and future of contemporary so-called national issues.

## Theoretical framework: historical consciousness

The present research draws its epistemological basis from theories of historical consciousness, as these theories have been recently developed, mainly in Germany, following an epistemological tradition that goes back not only to the philosophy of history (Seixas, 2004), but also to psychology, ethnology and sociology (Repoussi, 2020, 2023). Historical consciousness is defined as a category that unites the three tenses of history – past, present and future – as an internal relevance of the meaning making of the past, present and future (Jeismann, 1988), and that is linked to practical life (Tyson, 2021). Jeismann (1977) defined it as the relationship between our interpretation of the past, our understanding of the present and our expectations of the future. Further elaborations, towards its understanding, classify historical consciousness in levels – the *unconscious presence* of history, the *diffuse transaction* with history, *explicit negotiation* and, finally, *active perception* (Borries, 1999, as cited in Erdmann, 2007) – or in interrelated categories (Kolbl and Konrad, 2015). The first three categories, *time*, *reality* and *historicity*, are considered central to history, and the remaining four are important for the social function of history: *identity*, *politics*, *economy-society* and *ethics*. In each of these categories, Pandel (2014) included indicators. For *time*, he adopted the distinction: yesterday, today, tomorrow; for *reality*, the distinction: real and fiction; for *historicity*: static and subject to change; for *identity*: us and others; for *politics*: from above and from below, to define the origin of political developments; for *economy-society*: poor and rich; for *ethics*: right and wrong. For Pandel (2014), historical consciousness is broken down into the consciousness of the above categories: *consciousness of time* (distinction between yesterday, today and tomorrow, placing events and phenomena in time, distinction between natural and historical time); *consciousness of historical reality* (distinction between true and false); *consciousness of the historicity of phenomena*, with emphasis on consciousness of change over time; *consciousness of identity* (perception that people belong to particular social groups); *political awareness* (awareness of the way societies are organised, and of the interrelationship of the forces that determine them); *socio-economic awareness* (ability to perceive and analyse social inequalities); *awareness of the moral dimension of people's actions* (and analysis according to criteria derived from the moral codes of each era). Pandel's (2014) treatments have been instrumental in designing empirical studies that track the development of historical consciousness in children and adolescents. In other words, researchers knew exactly what they need to monitor and measure.

Pandel's (2014) scheme was updated by Jorn Rösen (1987, 2005), who made it a benchmark for history education internationally. Rösen's treatments of historical consciousness are known to the Greek academic community of history teaching not only from foreign-language but also Greek-language literature. The first to deal systematically with it was Ioanna Iliopoulou (2002) in her doctoral thesis; see also her publication entitled 'Jörn Rösen's theory of historical consciousness', in Kokkinos and Nakou (2006). The most important research is that of Apostolidou (2006), entitled 'The Historical Consciousness of 15-Year-Old Students in Greece', and the recent work by Papaioannou (2011), entitled 'Qualitative and Quantitative Research Aiming at Mapping the History of the Greek Parliament "Parliament of Teenagers" 1995–2005'. For Rösen, *historical consciousness* is a general category that is not only related to the teaching and learning of history, but also covers all forms of thinking about the past. In other words, historical consciousness mediates our relationship with the past, as it is through historical consciousness, Rösen (1987) argues, that the individual comes into contact with the past and interprets it as history.

But it is not primarily or only about the past. It encompasses all the mental processes through which, on the one hand, the past is used as a means of orienting oneself to the present and the future, and, on the other hand, it is interpreted in order to understand the present and to create expectations for the future (Rüsen, 2005). To understand this concept, Rüsen (2004) proposes a multi-level scheme of dimensions and distinctions: (1) different levels of consciousness and awareness; (2) different dimensions (political, cognitive, rhetorical and aesthetic); (3) different modes of articulation, from the most ordinary to the most complex; (4) different conceptual loci; and (5) four types of historical consciousness that express the respective modes of historical meaning making: (a) *the traditional*; (b) *the paradigmatic*; (c) *the critical*; and (d) *the genetic* type of historical consciousness (Rüsen, 2004). Regarding research on historical consciousness in history education internationally, Seixas (2004, 2017) has made a very important contribution, introducing the German concept of historical consciousness to the international research community of historical education in general. Seixas (2004, 2017) married the German tradition of historical consciousness with second order concepts, and formulated his own model with the 'six major' concepts of historical thinking (Seixas and Morton, 2013). A continuation of this work is Clark and Peck's (2018) study *Contemplating Historical Consciousness*, and, more recently, interesting perspectives on historical consciousness by Grever and Adriaansen (2019) and Grever (2023).

Historical consciousness is linked to historical culture and memory processes (Olofsson et al., 2017). For Pandel (2014), historical culture is identified with how a society views its past, and with what kind of narratives in relation to it are created by different social groups. The narratives, representations and perceptions that are formed and projected in the public sphere are considered by Wertsch (1985, 1991) as cultural tools that play a fundamental role in shaping the historical narrative produced. These narratives relate to memory and identity and, according to Apostolidou (2019), they are selective constructions for understanding the past. People remember through groups such as family, and social and religious groups to which they belong. These groups selectively remember the past in relation to their needs. The family is the first memory community for each of us in which we come into contact with the past (Green, 2018). Liakos (2017: 36), referring to the multiplicity of terms for memory, speaks of 'lived memory' (that which has been experienced) and 'learned' memory (which has emerged from the memories of the family, and family members who have experienced events in the past). Therefore, memory of the AMC is a collective process, 'a learned memory' from the family for those cases where there is an AMC ancestry. It is a memory that has a character that we could say is emotional, and it forms a narrative that contains general attitudes and values of life in space and time that are transmitted from generation to generation (Halbwachs, 1992). But what about those who have no memories from their family? In this case, the memory of the AMC is also understood through cultural memory (Liakos, 2017), a form of collective memory (Assmann, 2017). Cultural memory refers to memory that is constituted through repeated practices that a community performs in its attempt to understand its past in the present, and it is shaped through public uses of memory (Koulouri, 2017). For example, in the formation of refugee memory in the AMC within the context of public history, representations and perceptions are shaped in ceremonies, celebrations, speeches, monuments erected or projected in museum spaces, the internet space, television and other media, and so on. In particular, for historical education, public history, this dynamic informal learning environment plays an essential role in shaping the historical consciousness of students. The school is 'a carrier of the "canon" of collective memory' (Koulouri, 2017: 52), as through the curricula, and the one and only textbook for the Greek educational system, as well as through the way of teaching it promotes, the importance or otherwise of issues concerning collective memory project the choices of the national and dominant narrative.

## Qualitative research

In this research, we are interested in understanding the mental schemas that young people construct on the threshold of adulthood, that is, how they make sense of the world and their experiences in relation to their perception and understanding of the past, in this case, of the AMC. This research orientation leads us to move mainly within the framework of qualitative research (Creswell, 2011). In particular, the case study paradigm was chosen, which explores the context and situation of the topic under investigation (Christodoulou, 2022).

In relation to the possibility that the data of the present research can be considered generalisable, it should be emphasised that in qualitative research, and particularly in the context of a case study, 'the

main concern of the selection of the study is not its representativeness in relation to a population but its theoretical relevance for the development of a new theory' (Christodoulou, 2022: 190). Therefore, claims for generalisation are limited in favour of revealing hidden structures and relationships, and searching for social 'trends'. In an attempt to explore these hidden structures and relationships, the research process aimed to answer the following questions about adolescents' perceptions:

Does the perception of the AMC influence the position of citizens on Greek–Turkish tensions, and the attitude of citizens towards the resolution issues?

Do the views of Greek citizens on contemporary Greek–Turkish conflicts determine the historical perceptions of Greeks about the AMC?

## Sample

The study sample (see Table 1) consisted of 20 students aged 18 years (10 boys and 10 girls), who were enrolled in the third grade of high school during the school year 2021/2. This was a convenience sample that was selected from a general sample, since parental consent had been acquired, and the adolescents had reached 18 years of age. All of them had been born in 2004 in Athens. Seven of them were of Asia Minor origin.

**Table 1. The size of the sample**

Sex		Source	
Boys	Girls	No origin from Asia Minor	Origin from Asia Minor
10	10	13	7

In terms of cultural capital, adolescents seem to belong to different contexts, as defined by the occupational data concerning their parents. The occupations of their parents vary: the majority of fathers are in the liberal professions, several are military, and only two are civil servants; the majority of mothers also work as private employees, and five of them are teachers, while two of them do not work.

## The interview

The semi-structured interview format was chosen for the interview, based on recording the views expressed by the participants, starting from an 'open funnel question' (Creswell, 2011), which gradually 'narrows' to more specific questions. We aimed for our interviews to be in-depth, where the researcher directs the interviewee to the central themes, giving them the opportunity to express their thoughts freely and in depth, fully expressing their views and the way in which the participants themselves perceive reality (Robson, 2007).

The interview protocol (see Table 2) included questions that were divided into three groups:

1. Questions about the demographic data of the participants through which we obtained information about the cultural context of the participants.
2. Questions about their perceptions of history and the past in general.
3. Questions about their perceptions of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, their sources of information, their knowledge and, finally, the relationship between the overall representation and their position on contemporary issues.

## Analysis of the data

Data analysis follows the tradition of qualitative content analysis (Robson, 2007; Saldana, 2009), and involves data reduction, data presentation (summarisation, archiving and so on) and meaning-assignment control (building the interpretive framework). The structuring of the material into categories or themes is done with the aim that the categories are exhaustive of the topic they include and do not overlap with other categories, but that the relationships between them are as clear as possible (Saldana, 2009). For the analysis of the question 'What do you think history is good for?', the

data were analysed based on Rösen's (2004) theoretical framework of historical consciousness and, in particular, based on these categories that he proposed:

- (a) *traditional type of historical consciousness*, in which there is no distinction between past and history, and in which the past is seen as a set of events and interpretations that have automatic significance and function as normative for the present
- (b) *paradigmatic type of historical consciousness*, in which exemplary historical phenomena are sought that formulate supra-temporal rules and universal laws that apply to both the present and the future
- (c) *critical type of historical consciousness*, in which the paradigmatic character of history and dominant values are questioned, and space is created for rival narratives
- (d) *genetic type of historical consciousness*, in which the determining factor is the inevitability of change, which in itself produces historical meaning.

**Table 2. The interview protocol**

1. Personal information
Name
Gender
When were you born?
Where were you born?
Where do your parents, grandparents come from?
What is your father's occupation
What is your mother's occupation?
2. Representations of history and the past in general
What do you think history is good for?
3. Representations of the Asia Minor Catastrophe
Do you know what the AMC is? Why do we call it a catastrophe, what was destroyed?
Where did you hear about the AMC, from whom?
Let's try to remember what in particular you heard or saw or learned: Whose fault was it? Who was responsible?
What are they teaching us or telling us about who was at fault?
Do we have issues with the Turks today? What are the issues?
Do you think they have anything to do with history? With the AMC? With 1821? With what?

For the analysis of the data in the remaining questions, concerning students' perceptions of the AMC, the 'phrase' was used as the unit of analysis, according to which 'the meaning of the group of words' (Robson, 2007: 419) is taken as the unit of analysis.

## Critical analysis – findings

### Perceptions of history

Analysing the data relevant to the question 'What do you think history is useful for?', it was found that the usefulness of history is either attributed to stereotypical perceptions or linked to collective and individual identity, especially national identity. Most adolescents refer stereotypically to the usefulness of knowing history to avoid repeating mistakes made in the past. They claim that by knowing the history and origins of their ancestors, they can also define their own identity (individual and collective). Perceptions emphasising the necessity of knowing the past for national consciousness were also identified with common ideas around the concept of history, for example the common elements that unite groups of people (with reference to language and religion). Students' perceptions of the AMC therefore map a 'traditional' and 'paradigmatic' type of historical consciousness. These are perceptions that identify with ancestral values without critical elaboration, and also with perceptions that see the past as a repository of examples that can lead to more conscious decisions in the present. Only three responses argued that history is also about knowledge of place and people's actions over time at local, national and global levels, and one with implications for the present and future. Typical extracts are given below.



Interviewer (G.K.): And what is the use of history in your opinion?

Student F: History is useful in how one action can affect another action, e.g. if something is done, how events could develop later, and how people and nations could react to some actions.

Interviewer: What do you think history is good for?

Student D: In very many, we learn about our culture, we learn our relationship with other peoples and how the country we live in and Europe was created, how the Balkans were born, that is, we cannot live without it because everything is interconnected. What Ukraine is experiencing now stems from its history with the Soviet Union, which means that everything comes from somewhere and is connected.

Reading these responses, we note that adolescents make some meaningful connections between the past and the present, with the changes observed in space and time, and the necessity of their knowledge to interpret important events in the present.

## Representations of the Asia Minor Catastrophe

### The identity of the event

Speaking about the identity of the event, we will focus on the data that emerged from the questions: 'Do you know what the Asia Minor Catastrophe is? Why do we call it a catastrophe, what was destroyed?'

To make sense of the AMC, the adolescents refer to the uprooting, persecution and massacre of 1922. Their answers also refer to the place, the time and the people who played a leading role (Venizelos, Kemal), and to the places in which Asia Minor Hellenism existed and from which it was uprooted (Smyrna, Pontus, Greater Central Asia). The qualitative analysis of the data highlights the city of Smyrna as the centre of the events, and perhaps the identification of the AMC with the destruction of this city. Some teenagers even refer to the long presence of the Greek element in the region since the eighth century. However, it is noteworthy that many of them have the misconception that the Asia Minor region, and, in particular, the area in question (the Smyrna region) was Greek. This suggests 'misconceptions' about the occupation of the region – 'misconceptions' related to the incomplete historical education they have received at all levels of education that it was Greek territory. It is the imprint of the stereotype of the dominant Greek narrative of the 'Lost Homelands', as the regions of Asia Minor are classically referred to. The following quotation is typical.

Student A: The Asia Minor Catastrophe was an attack by the Turks on various cities in Asia Minor, an attack aimed at taking revenge on the Greeks who, through the Great Idea, had conquered these areas and tried to dominate many parts of Türkiye.

Interviewer: Who went there?

Student A: The army of Greece wanted to keep the lands that used to be theirs.

Interviewer: Ah, yes, very long ago, these lands were theirs?

Student A: Yes, because in many of these areas, there were many communities of Greeks and those who spoke Greek.

Students' responses focus less on the causes of the disaster, and more on its consequences. Reports on the consequences focus on material and cultural destruction, and the destruction of the Great Idea. They talk about the 'Holocaust' and about 'genocide', and they even cite evidence that leads us to conclude that the event is mainly emotionally embedded in collective memory. The feeling of victimisation of the nation is strongly outlined by all adolescents, especially by those of Asia Minor origin, such as the following adolescent:

Interviewer: Do you know what the Asia Minor Catastrophe is?

Student B: The Asia Minor Catastrophe is the uprooting of the Greeks from Asia Minor, the Smyrna region, which happened after the uprooting of the Greeks from the Pontus region, so both of these populations migrated to Greece, that is, they didn't migrate, they were refugees in Greece, um ... , Yes is that, is the uprooting by the Turks ...

Interviewer: Why do we call it a disaster, what was destroyed?

Student B: Basically, the Smyrna area was destroyed, since there was a fire that burned for how many hours and it was destroyed ... property of the Greeks was destroyed, all the population that made up that area was destroyed, and they left and came after years, I think, and the Turks settled.

However, there are also some opposing views that speak of the internal political situation in Greece, the national division, as well as the expansionist policy of the Greeks, the arrogance and overestimation of the forces of the Greeks when they were in the depths of Asia Minor. In the following passage, a student of Asia Minor origin refers to the actions of the Greeks in the area:

Interviewer: Do you know what the Asia Minor Catastrophe is?

Student C: Asia Minor Catastrophe refers mainly to the destruction of Smyrna in 1922, in September, and it all started from the campaign of the Greeks who were in Ankara ...

Interviewer: How did the Greeks get there?

Student C: They had been granted by the Great Powers [Great Britain, Italy, Russia] an area on the outskirts of Smyrna, and then there was a campaign where the Greeks advanced to the line Eski Shehir – Afion Karachisar, but because it was a very costly plan, it was a very costly campaign, both psychologically and financially, and at the same [time] the Turks started to counterattack this Greek incursion into Turkish territory, they were repelled and reached Smyrna and destroyed it in September 1922.

Interviewer: Yes, why do we call it a Catastrophe, what was destroyed?

Student C: All the Greeks who lived in the Turkish cities were expelled and driven out, their houses burned, their possessions burned, many people were killed, and they were suddenly driven out while they were living peacefully many years ago.

A female student acknowledges the actions of the Turks on the issue that arose in Asia Minor. However, she recognises that the AMC is part of a generalised state of unrest in the historical context of the period, bringing out a multifaceted view of the event:

Interviewer: Do you know what the Asia Minor Catastrophe is?

Student D: I'll tell you the way I understand it, it's a result, the result of a continuity, it's the attempt to expel from the coast of Asia Minor the Greek administration which had been in place since the Treaty of Sèvres.

Interviewer: Yes, so tell me more specifically? Why do we call it a Catastrophe, what was destroyed?

Student D: The Greek element that existed in Asia Minor was destroyed. They wanted to drive out the Greek and Christian element that existed. I personally believe that because it was an extremely difficult century for humanity then especially in the relations between Greece and Türkiye it is not logical for a country that has been fighting for almost a century to want to have its own identity, and if there is a valuable culture, I guess it's OK. I don't justify it, but I guess it is logical to want to have their own identity, and to drive out the foreign element.

In summary, the adolescents' responses bring us closer to the 'traditional' type of historical consciousness, as they focus mainly only on the emotional aspect of uprooting and its consequences. This is an image of victimisation that has been strongly cultivated and transferred to the students from the lived memories, and then from the memories of the descendants of the Asia Minor people into the already formed collective memory. The analysis of the data on the identity of the event reveals what has crystallised as a representation of the AMC, whether it was previously held by the family, or by the school and the wider environment. This finding is in conversation with the data from the question about the blame for the event, which we follow up below.



### The sources of knowledge about the AMC

In answering the question 'Where and from whom did you learn about the Asia Minor Catastrophe?', the students referred to various sources of information about the AMC. The sources they referred to are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Sources of information on the AMC**

Sources of knowledge about the event/1st coding	Frequency of references	Sources of knowledge about the event/2nd coding	Frequency of references
School (books, teachers)	14	School history	14
Films/television/shows/theatre/music/internet	9	Public history	20
Family	7		
Friends	4		
Personal interest	1	Personal interest	1

Looking at Table 3, we can see that school is the main source of knowledge about the AMC. More specifically, adolescents refer to school history and teachers who taught about, or did special tributes about, the AMC during their lessons. Seven references, as many as the students in the sample who were of Asia Minor origin, drew knowledge from their family environment, mainly from parents and grandparents. This is metamemory (Landsberg, 2004), passed down from generation to generation to the present. Metamemory (Hirsch, 2008) is not the same as memory, as it describes how the next generation deals with traumatic experiences that preceded them in such a way that their own memories appear through emotion, imagination and creativity. For the AMC, subsequent generations relied on the testimonies of the exodus, photographic material and objects that came from the refugees' places of origin, along with their songs and stories. This memory as a mediated process is often passed down from generation to generation, with fewer and fewer individuals and groups directly related to the issue of the AMC. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a student of Asia Minor origin.

Interviewer: I want you to tell me where you heard about the Asia Minor Catastrophe, from whom?

Student C: I heard about the Asia Minor Catastrophe first from my family from an early age because my parents were interested, especially my father who has roots, in learning about this subject and then at school in history class.

Interviewer: What exactly did you hear from your father?

Student C: I heard the stories his great-grandmother told him about how they were chased out, went back to build their houses and had their lives fixed, then they were chased out again, and went back to Thessaloniki, near the outskirts of Thessaloniki, and started their lives there again for third time.

Interviewer: In fact, have you heard anything from the grandparents? From the grandparents who are from Asia Minor?

Student C: They didn't exactly live these events, but they told us the stories of their parents and grandparents, and through them this was also an oral testimony which was passed on to our ears.

Films, television programmes, theatre and music also play a large part in providing information to adolescents, while personal interest comes last, with one mention. In addition, four students referred to knowledge from their friends' narratives. This extract from a student's interview referring to the sources of historical knowledge is characteristic, mapping not only the scope of information extraction from the public sphere, but also the conditions prevailing in the school setting, with its fragmentation and traditional approach to the teaching of history in general.

Interviewer: Yes. How do we learn about history? How do we learn about history?

Student E: Basically, it all starts from the family, and then it's school, where the immersion should be more substantial and not so much superficial and only graded more, but if someone wants to learn, he can look for himself, especially in this modern age, with the internet and the media and television, social media, everything.

Interviewer: So, the history is also projected through there.

Student E: All of them.

Interviewer: And why did you say about the school that it is not taught properly?

Student E: Because many things are done quickly, just to cover the matter and get it over with, and not pay attention to the more essential things.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that, on the whole, the information sources are sources of public history. Therefore, adolescents draw information mainly from collective memory, and fragmentarily from school and national normative narratives, which do not focus on the causes, but only on the consequences of the event.

### Liability

To the related questions 'Whose fault was it? Who was responsible?', the students gave multiple answers. Analysis of the data on blame led to the identification of four categories, as presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Attribution of blame for AMC**

Attribution	Frequency of references
Both (Turks and Greeks)	7
Only the Turks	5
Only the Greeks	2
I don't know	2
No answer	4

Some of the students do not seem to know the causes of the event, and they draw fragmentary information from collective memory. Some attribute the causes of the AMC to the fault of both sides. Most, however, speak mainly of the responsibility of the Turks and less of the Greeks, for various reasons (religious, ethnic, nationalistic). There are, of course, views that argue that the Greeks were arrogant, as the Asia Minor campaign took them to the depths of Asia Minor to a place that did not belong to Greece.

However, there are more reports of Turkish than of Greek culpability. Adolescents say that the Turks claimed territories that did not belong to them, as many students do not know, as already mentioned, that Asia Minor was under Ottoman occupation. The idea that the territories in Asia Minor were Greek is repeated here as well.

Students of Asia Minor origin in particular acknowledge that their relatives do not discuss the causes, but instead focus on the destruction and consequences of uprooting and refugeeism. In the response below, a student of Asia Minor origin refers to the culpability for the event not through what preceded it, but mainly through the prism of trauma alone:

Interviewer: What finally happened there in Asia Minor, and do you know what preceded it?

Student F: I haven't heard what preceded it because we don't talk that much, basically we're talking over a table, so they say, grandfather did this then, but basically over there people were trying to get out any way they could, because they were basically trying to drive them out of this place, and most of them just took what they could carry of their possessions and went to another place.

There are also reports that the Greeks claimed more areas than they were allowed, and that they had not made proper preparation for such an expedition. Students even do not hesitate to mention the arrogance of the Greek side. The following two relevant examples, although coming from students of Asia Minor origin, see responsibility on the Greek side:

Student G: I think ... I don't think my knowledge is enough to say who is responsible, it's certainly not a simple matter to say that one person can be blamed for this, what I understand is that Greece was in a situation where it had gained territory after the First World War, so it believed that it could conquer all the areas inhabited by Greeks, so they underestimated the Turkish forces and it seems that we ended up there ...

Interviewer: How did we get there?

Student G: I think it has more to do with the arrogance of the political leadership and the people of Greece who believed that they would ... that without the necessary preparation, it would be an easy way to annex this part of Greece again.

Interviewer: What do you know, what have you heard about the Asia Minor Catastrophe?

Student B: I finally understood this year that because Greece was trying and taking actions to conquer states in the Middle East ... basically in the region of Türkiye, so in Asia Minor, and it took these actions, but in the end the Turkish army reacted and as it reacted, all this was happening in Asia Minor, which was a cause for the uprooting of the Greeks, so that the Greeks were finally, completely uprooted from this region.

Interviewer: I want you to tell me, why did the Turks expel the Greeks if they were doing well, why did they expel them?

Student B: I believe that they didn't want, they didn't want the Greek element in their territory, in quotation marks, in their territories and it was because of the power that they had received from their victories in the other conflicts with the Greeks in Asia Minor, so I think that since there were already conflicts, the Turks didn't put an end to it, and just said that they would continue until all the Greek element was gone from their territories.

It is remarkable that the previous girl of Asia Minor origin found that for so many years, her sources of information had not informed her about the causes and actions of the Greek side. It does not, of course, change the stereotypical perception that the Turks did not want the Greeks to be present in Asia Minor, and that they eventually expelled them.

There were also a few answers that the issue was much more complex in its causes, including, for example, the rise of the New Turk nationalist movement. One teenager argues that it is important to listen to both sides, stressing the need for a multiparty perspective on the events:

Student H: I certainly haven't heard both sides, so I can't speak completely.

Interviewer: Where do you think that would help you?

Student H: Listening to both sides certainly gives me a more global view of the problem.

Interviewer: Do you think that's important?

Student H: In everything in life, have a global view ... don't face a problem.

Interviewer: In relation to what you've read, heard and seen, have you seen both sides?

Student H: No, I don't think I've seen both sides, the view that one would form from the information that they were saying is that Türkiye's expansionist tendency led them to go and conquer the coast.

Complementary to the analysis on culpability was the analysis of the data from the question 'What do they teach, or tell us about who was at fault?'

### **What do they think they have learned?**

All the teenagers replied that the textbooks teach them that the Turks were responsible for the war. In their textbooks, there is no mention of the war and the presence of the Greek army in the depths of Anatolia. Only the intervention of some teachers is mentioned, which is differentiated in the national normative narrative by selecting additional sources for the causes of the issue.

Some of the teenagers consciously accept what they are taught. They describe this not as something 'normal', but as something 'ordinary'. They argue that this is usually done to protect the national identity of each people. However, they point out that this is because the national normative narrative focuses mainly on the consequences of the AMC, rather than on its causes.

Interviewer: Who was to blame? Who were responsible for the Asia Minor Catastrophe?

Student C: The Turks were responsible for the Asia Minor Catastrophe, but the Greeks also caused their fate with this campaign, as we said before that they reached Ankara because the army was weakened there, many things were weakened, and also the Turks were to blame who secretly in collaboration with the French broke a treaty that had been signed before.

Interviewer: Yes.

Student C: And they drove the Greeks out of Smyrna, they reached Smyrna, they destroyed all their possessions, they destroyed all their ships when they left, they threw them into the sea.

Interviewer: What are they teaching us or telling us about who was at fault?

Student I: I think it was clearly the fault of the Turks, teaching us at school.

Interviewer: But why are we taught this way?

Student I: Because I think that we are standing on the part of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, and the fact that we were expelled, we are not standing at all on how we got these territories where we may have trespassed on some Turkish property, let's say.

Below are the answers to the relevant question by two teenagers of mixed Asian origin. The first student acknowledges that we are taught that Turks are to blame for the uprooting of refugees, and for reasons of 'national identity'. The second student comments in general that in our country, we tend to blame the 'other', and points out that even in her own family environment, which is characterised by tolerance, they label the 'other' (Turkish) as an enemy.

Interviewer: In fact, in general, what are they teaching us or telling us about who was at fault?

Student F: Generally, we are taught that it was the fault of the Ottomans and not so much of the Greeks.

Interviewer: Why do you think this is happening?

Student F: I know, I know, and to have more sympathy for the people who were uprooted from their land, but also to preserve this national identity that the Greeks had.

Interviewer: In general, what does the school teach us or tell us about who was to blame for this? Who was responsible? Do they tell us anything at school? Are they telling us something at home, in all these media where we get the information?

Student D: Generally, in Greece, we have a tendency to blame the other person all the time and not to look at our own mistakes. Certainly the school, because the books are written in such a way in order to say it more diplomatically and certainly at home, even my own parents, who know what they will do right and what they will do wrong, they blame the other side, and I think the truth is somewhere in the middle, i.e., OK, you have no right to do something like that to a civilian population, to a population that is not to blame for anything, but, on the other hand, when you live oppressed for so many years as a nation, you take it out, and often you take it out wrongly on people who are not to blame.

Reading the previous answer, we understand that even in the case of someone who has a multi-level view on the issue of the AMC (an attitude to life cultivated by their family environment), the collective trauma and stereotypical perceptions still dominate and influence their thinking.

In summary, the analysis of the data shows a reflection on the previous question about the guilt for the AMC, as adolescents recognise that knowledge of guilt is 'taken for granted' by the textbook and public history, and recognise the conventions that often define the historical narrative. It could be argued that these responses highlight an attempt at 'critical-type' historical consciousness, as adolescents appear to have an understanding of the conventions of the 'historical narrative'. However, the question is whether or not adolescents accept such an attitude, and, from their comments, we understand that they consider it reasonable to argue for blaming someone else for national consciousness; therefore, they do not reject the past and do not identify differences from it.

## Representations of the link between the AMC and the issues of the present and the future

Adolescents know that Greek–Turkish relations have problems. They describe these problems as ‘disputes’ over airspace and maritime borders in the Aegean Sea, and as ‘geopolitical’. Some link the problems of Greek–Turkish relations to the AMC and the Treaty of Lausanne, as well as to 1821 (the Greek Revolution from the Ottoman Empire). Those who link the rivalry and enmity between the two peoples in the past and present speak of a rivalry that, as they say, ‘we have always had and will always have’. They argue that this rivalry is linked to the historical education of each people, and the effort by both states to nurture new generations with extreme and stereotypical views of each other.

Today’s problems are, in the view of the majority of the teenagers, due to the Turks, as they believe that they wish to claim territories from Greece, citing the fact that in the past, under the Ottoman Empire, these territories belonged to them. In their view, the Turks have political and economic interests in the wider Aegean region. This means that they will continue to be aggressive towards Greece in the future. This stereotypical perception of Turkish aggression is repeated in most responses.

Interviewer: Do we have issues with the Turks today?

Student E: We always have and always will.

Interviewer: OK, what are these issues?

Student E: They want to expand to some of the Aegean islands, and also to Thrace, to Xanthi.

Interviewer: So what do the Turks want? Or what do we want?

Student E: We want to stay as it is with the Lausanne Treaty that has been signed since then.

Interviewer: When was the Treaty of Lausanne signed, do you remember?

Student E: In 1923, immediately after the Asia Minor Catastrophe, and the Turks now it seems that this treaty is not in their interest, and they want to change it as they are not in agreement, and to satisfy their vanities and ambitions.

Interviewer: So, do you think that all these issues that we have today have to do with history?

Student E: They definitely have direct contact.

Interviewer: So, they are related to both the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the 1821 Revolution?

Student E: I think it has to do with the 1821 Revolution, because it had annoyed the Turks enough that we had defeated them, defeated them then, and also with the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the Treaty of Lausanne, so that they can expand further and in a short while they want to conquer all of Greece.

There are, of course, more critical views on the stereotypes that are politically cultivated about the image of the other and the distortion of history (only three answers in total):

Student I: We have several issues, I think.

Interviewer: Such as?

Student I: Like the violations that they are constantly doing in our national airspace, all these issues with sovereignty in the Aegean, and where our borders will be defined and earlier with Imia we had issues, and quite a few of them.

Interviewer: Do you think that these issues have something to do with history? Do you think these issues are related to the Asia Minor Catastrophe, to the 1821 Revolution?

Student I: I believe that to a certain extent, yes, because let’s say we Greeks today grow up learning about the Asia Minor Catastrophe and they may learn about something that we did to them, and it may fanaticise them, and this hatred remains to this day. That is to say, that this hatred is cultivated because of the history we learn of which to some extent is one-sided, that is.

Also, most students believe that there is probably a connection between current issues and Türkiye, such as the migration issue that has been in the news in recent years in both countries. The first student sees the Turks at present as wanting expansion towards Greece, and as exploiting the migration issue.

The next student, however, sees her family memories conversing with the problems of the present. She takes a critical stance on the AMC, and the refugee crisis that it caused, and the current migrations taking place in the Aegean.

Interviewer: Do we have issues with the Turks today?

Student J: Yes, 100 years later.

Interviewer: What are these issues?

Student J: They want to cross the border in Evros area, and they want to cross the border, and they have gathered with the migrants, and they want to take the islands of Chios and the coast, which are Greek islands, but they are challenging the Greek army in every way.

Student B: I heard all this from my parents and from my grandparents, not my great-grandparents, family in general, and I heard it from others who have this background, and I want to have my own opinion on this ... and from others who have this background and have seen and have these experiences, all this made me form an opinion about the refugees of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, and also today it made me look at the immigration issue and in general all the refugees who have come to Greece and have a different background, somewhat differently, that is, it made me think why we shouldn't call someone Greek who was born here and has gone to a Greek school and has tried very hard.

The analysis of the data shows that students' already-formed preconceived ideas about representations of the AMC influence their attitudes towards Greek–Turkish relations in the present and in the future. The 'aggressive other' as an enemy claims, and will claim in the future, the Aegean islands, as they did the Asia Minor coast in 1922–3. From the comparative study of the data, it is clear that teenagers have a consistent sequence of thought, both on the issue of the AMC and on the present and future of Greek–Turkish relations. The majority of adolescents express stereotypical perceptions influenced by collective memory and informal education. The stereotypical perceptions are linked to the image of the barbaric national 'other' and the victimisation of the 'national self' in the event of the AMC. According to their views, the same stereotypical image characterises relations with the Turks in the present and in the future. But there are also answers that leave open the version of Greek responsibility in the relations between the two peoples, and that refer to the friendship of the peoples as a necessary condition for war not to break out in the future. However, only three adolescents' responses had a more critical view of the past linked to a more critical view of the present and the future.

## Discussion

The adolescents who participated in the survey discussed in a semi-structured interview general issues about the usefulness of history and specific issues related to the topic of the AMC, and whether and how this fact relates to issues that concern us today. Data analysis revealed interesting perspectives on the young subjects' historical consciousness and representations.

The following research questions were investigated regarding the way in which the AMC is inscribed in adolescents' historical consciousness: Does the perception of the AMC influence adolescents' position on Greek–Turkish relations? And, conversely, do adolescents' views on contemporary Greek–Turkish conflicts determine their historical perceptions of the AMC?

A prerequisite for the exploration of these questions was considered to be the relation to their perceptions of history.

First, adolescents see history as a narrative from which they draw information about their ancestors, and as an inexhaustible resource to draw on for examples of either heroism or avoidance of mistakes. They express a historical consciousness of a 'traditional' and 'paradigmatic' type, and, as such, their historical consciousness seems to be identified with the dominant narrative structured around national identity. These results are confirmed by the book *Youth and History* (Angvik and Borries, 1997), which found that Greek students' perceptions are characterised by ethnocentrism, with school textbooks even systematically fostering it. Similar results are presented by research on the historical consciousness of Greek students (Apostolidou, 2006; Fragkoudaki and Dragona, 1997; Iliopoulou, 2002; Papaioannou, 2011). In particular, Greek adolescents choose affectively practical pasts for collective identity, rather

than historical ones, and they do not move to more exploratory ways of thinking, following only the familiar rather than the different (Apostolidou, 2006).

The data analysis revealed that adolescents' representations of the AMC are likely to operate within a 'traditional' or 'paradigmatic' historical consciousness, and to refer or allude to the AMC as an example of analogous events in the present and future. What emerges in their responses is a picture of victimisation of the Greek nation, from the trauma of the destruction of Hellenism in Asia Minor to the present day. Emotion essentially accompanies the orientation in space and time, not only for adolescents who have Asia Minor ancestry, but also for those who do not (collective trauma), and even though they do not know basic details, such as the causes of the event. These representations are linked to the metamemory about the event in question.

In addition, victimisation also presupposes an enemy that still exists today. This view is reproduced both in textbooks and in political news. That is why all participants agreed that they are 'taught' Turkish culpability for the AMC, and argued that this is done for the sake of maintaining historical consciousness. That is, they read the framing and narration of historical events in their textbooks as a result and product of (political) situations/decisions that shape national identity, and we would say that they accept this. This is interesting; that is, while adolescents seem to understand the concept and conventions of 'historical narrative', they see these conventions as inevitable. Therefore, adolescents associate the AMC with issues of the present, as these ideas are projected by the narrative schemas of the Asia Minor communities, which are identified with collective memory, and also by the national normative narrative, which aims to cultivate national identity through the exclusion of the other. The role of official national narratives in the historical consciousness of adolescents is decisive.

The current political situation with the Turks may also influence the adolescents' attitudes about the past as, according to their perceptions, what is happening today with the Turks confirms both the past and what happened in the AMC. The effect in this particular case seems to be influenced by the current political situation, and by the adolescents' cultural capital. For example, adolescents whose parents were in military service and had recently faced Turkish challenges at the border conveyed in their responses views that the aggressive attitude of the Turks confirms their aggressive character in the past, whether referring to the Ottoman period or to the AMC issue, and even to the problems of migration that the two countries face today. They even argue that it is a rivalry that they say 'we have always had and always will have'. Very few responses suggested a multi-pronged approach to the issue by incorporating the narrative of the 'other' into the historical narrative.

Therefore, on the issue of the AMC, adolescents transfer in their answers the most frequently projected representations that they receive from their family environment, the collective memory in school and in the public sphere through the process of metamemory and prosthetic memory (Landsberg, 2004), the manifestations of which would be interesting to study in the future.

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## Data and materials availability statement

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

This study meets the Code of Ethics in Research set by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.



## Consent for publication statement

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

## Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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