

Chrysanthos Philippidis

By [Nikos Sigalas](#)

Philippidis, *Chrysanthos*
(Chrysanthos (born Charilaos) Philippidis)
Orthodox prelate

Summary

Chrysanthos Philippidis was the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Trebizond. He advocated Helleno-Ottoman ideas. During the First World War, he befriended Cemal Azmi Bey, the governor of Trebizond and a perpetrator of the Armenian Genocide. He used this friendship to protect his flock. During the Russian occupation, he sought to prepare for the Pontus region's autonomy. However, he resisted the Ottoman reoccupation, which dragged the civilian population into a spiral of violence.

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Formative Years

Charilaos Philippidis was born and raised in Komotini in the Vilayet of Adrianople and studied theology at the Chalki Seminary. He was ordained as a deacon in 1903 under the name Chrysanthos. He then followed Metropolitan [Constantin Karadjopoulos \(1861-1906\)](#) to Trebizond, where he remained until 1907 before leaving to study philosophy and sociology in Leipzig and Lausanne.

Upon his return to Istanbul in 1911, Chrysanthos was appointed chief director of *The Truth of the Church* (Η Εκκλησιαστική Αλήθεια / Ē Ekklēsiastkē Alētheia), the official organ of the Patriarchate. It was at this time that he met the leaders of the Organisation of

Constantinople: the diplomat and intellectual [Ion Dragoumis \(1878-1920\)](#) and the army officer [Athanasios Souliotis \(1878-1945\)](#). He was greatly influenced by their programme. The organisation advocated Helleno-Ottomanism as a means of Greek-Ottoman collaboration against the Bulgarian *komitadjis* in Macedonia. This idea evolved into the concept of an “understanding of the empire’s nationalities” during the early years of the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1920). However, this idea of “understanding” was set against a [nationalist](#) backdrop. Dragoumis and Souliotis believed that, due to its spiritual and economic potential, “Hellenism” was destined to replace the “Turkish nation” as the leading force of the empire. For this reason, Dragoumis considered the [First Balkan War](#) to have damaged the “unity of Hellenism.” In Chrysanthos’s words:

While Venizelos (editor’s note: [Eleutherios Venizelos \(1864-1936\)](#), Prime Minister of Greece) aimed to expand the state, Dragoumis sought to restore the nation (εθνική αποκατάσταση). The rupture occurred after the First Balkan War, when Venizelos transformed the understanding of nationalities developed by Dragoumis and Souliotis in Constantinople into a military alliance between neighbouring countries, with the aim of dividing Turkey and, by extension, the Greek nationality.¹

In Trebizond

Collaborating with Dragoumis and Souliotis was a formative experience for Chrysanthos. It strongly influenced his policies in Trebizond, where he became metropolitan in 1913. Upon his arrival, he organised a committee to oversee the city’s water supply. This committee was made up of Greek Orthodox, Armenian, and Muslim businessmen and notables and was headed in turn by the metropolitan and the mufti.

The idea of a Helleno-Ottoman understanding was also behind Chrysanthos’ personal relationship with [Cemal Azmi Bey \(1868-1922\)](#), the cruel governor (*vali*) of Trebizond who played a major role in the forced displacement and extermination of the local Armenians in 1915. Chrysanthos admitted to being “the governor’s sincere friend, except when the interests of [his] nation were at stake.”² This friendship was based on shared opinions. Chrysanthos considered Cemal Azmi to be “a conservative Turk [an Old-Turk], who became a Young Turk, because only in this way could he prevail and act.”³

During World War I

Leveraging his good relationship with the governor, Chrysanthos managed to protect his flock from the vicissitudes of the war. Cemal Azmi Bey thus consented to Chrysanthos's demand to employ the soldiers of the Greek Orthodox (*Romei* in Greek, *Rûm* in Turkish) [labour battalion](#) near their places of origin. He also recruited the younger soldiers to work in military tailor workshops in Trebizond. Consequently, Chrysanthos prevented the maltreatment of these soldiers in the labour battalions and their subsequent mass desertion, which occurred in other regions and endangered the entire Romei population. In this regard, Chrysanthos' policy stands in contrast to that of the metropolitan of Amasya, [Germanos \(1866-1935\)](#), who attempted to organise the Romei deserters into a national guerrilla army, thereby causing the forced displacement of part of his flock.

Finally, Chrysanthos claimed that, having once more interceded with the governor, he contributed to stopping the displacement of the Romei of Rize and Gümüşhane in March 1916. This claim is unfounded, however. For Cemal Azmi was then the main advocate of their displacement, which shows that the governor was occasionally less sincere with Chrysanthos than the latter believed.

Chrysanthos' memoirs provide a wealth of information on the [Armenian genocide](#) in the region. The metropolitan provides a detailed account of [Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir's \(1874-1922\)](#) visit and his meetings with Cemal Azmi Bey and other notable figures, which were instrumental in planning the displacement and massacre of the Armenians.

Russian Occupation

Trebizond was conquered by the Russians on 18 April 1916. As he left, Cemal Azmi handed over the city's temporary government to Chrysanthos, entrusting him to protect Muslims and Christians equally. The metropolitan rose to the challenge for his own reasons: he wanted to "gradually prepare an autonomous status for the Greeks, which the forthcoming peace conference would recognise and expand upon by integrating the remaining Muslims."⁴ Chrysanthos sought to establish this de facto autonomy by intervening ad hoc in the city's government. In the early days of the occupation, for example, he obtained authorisation from the Russian Commandant General [Vladimir Liakhov \(1869-1919\)](#) to deal with the "refugee crisis." The refugees were both Muslim and Christian. Chrysanthos founded a Refugee Relief Committee comprising Christian and Muslim members, which distributed aid to refugees regardless of their religion.

For Chrysanthos and his circle of Greek businessmen and intellectuals, dealing with the refugee crisis was crucial. According to [Theophylaktos K. Theophylaktos \(1885-1961\)](#), one of the men in Chrysanthos' circle, "the Greek community needed the Muslim refugees in order to accomplish its national programme." He explained that installing the refugees in the city

“corresponded to an elaborate plan for the future of the nation.” This plan involved assembling “the Greek refugees near the monuments of the Grand Komnenoi,” while the Muslim refugees were confined to the outskirts of the city.⁵

Moreover, Chrysanthos asked the Muslims of Trebizond to organise themselves as a confessional community, equivalent to the non-Muslim ones. He was effectively forcing them to renounce their status as the “dominant community” (*millet-i hakime*).

Chrysanthos wrote that General Liakhov had entrusted him with the region’s civil government in the early days of the occupation. However, this function was actually bestowed upon the civil governor (*natchal´nik*), [Sergei Mintslov \(1870\)](#), who was not mentioned by Chrysanthos, creating the impression that Chrysanthos remained in charge. Nevertheless, due to his administrative skills and his good relationship with Grand Duke [Nicholas Nikolaevich \(1856-1929\)](#), Chrysanthos maintained a dominant position in Trebizond in de facto terms.

Russian Revolution and Ottoman Reoccupation of Trebizond

After the [February Revolution](#) (8-12 March 1917), Chrysanthos and his close collaborators sent a representative to St Petersburg to submit to the Provisory Government a plan for the integration of Trebizond and of its hinterland into the [Russian Empire](#) as an autonomous province, like [Finland](#). Thus, a Pontic territory featured for the first time in a diplomatic proposition. This initiative was thwarted by the October Revolution, leading to the disintegration of the occupying army. Chrysanthos aimed to resist Ottoman reoccupation by raising a voluntary army in the frame of an ill-fated Transcaucasian Federation. He distributed arms to the Romei peasants, enabling a spiral of violence to escalate. Under these circumstances, 30.000 to 40.000 Romei fled to Russia. This interpretation of Chrysanthos’s role during the Ottoman reoccupation, based on both contemporary accounts and recent studies, contradicts the metropolitan’s claim that he distributed arms to protect the peasants from Ottoman paramilitary attacks⁶.

After the Armistice

Following the Armistice, Venizelos invited Chrysanthos to attend the [Paris Peace Conference](#), where he would argue in favour of establishing an independent Pontic state. However, he was disappointed when Venizelos supported the incorporation of Pontus into the [Armenian Republic](#). During this time, he also travelled to [Georgia](#) and London. In 1921, the Independence Tribunals in Amasya sentenced him to death in absentia for high treason. After the Greek army was defeated in Asia Minor in 1922, he settled in Athens. In 1938, Chrysanthos was elected *Archbishop of Athens and All Greece* thanks to the intervention of

the dictator [Ioannis Metaxas \(1871-1941\)](#). However, he was dismissed from this position in 1941 after refusing to swear allegiance to the [Georgios Tsolakoglou \(1886-1948\)](#) government, which collaborated with the German occupiers.

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Notes

1. Chrysanthos (Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αθηνών): Βιογραφικαὶ ἀναμνήσεις [Chrysanthos (Archbishop of Athens): Biographical Memoirs]. Athens 1970, p. 83. ↑
2. Ibid., p. 114. ↑
3. Ibid., p. 92. ↑
4. Ibid., p. 132. ↑
5. Theophylaktos, Theophylaktos K.: Γύρω από την άσβεστη φλόγα. Βιογραφικές αναμνήσεις [The Inextinguishable Flame. Biographical Memoirs]. Thessaloniki 1997, pp. 237, 258. ↑
6. Chrysanthos, Memoires 1970, p. 164. ↑

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[Kyriakidis.](#)

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- [Tsigaras, Georgios \(ed.\): **Ο Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αθηνῶν Chrysanthos Philippidēs o apo Trapezountos. Praktika Epistēmōnikēs Diēmeridas 27-28-Maiou 2016 \(Archbishop Chrysanthos Philippides of Athens, from Trebizond: Acts of the Two-Day Conference, 27-28 May 2016\)**, Komotini, 2018: Holy Metropolis of Maroneia and Komotini.](#)

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- [Tsigaras, Georgios \(ed.\) \(in Greek\): Ο Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αθηνῶν Chrysanthos Philippidēs o apo Trapezountos. Praktika Epistēmōnikēs Diēmeridas 27-28-Maiou 2016 \(Archbishop Chrysanthos Philippides of Athens, from Trebizond: Acts of the Two-Day Conference, 27-28 May 2016\), Holy Metropolis of Maroneia and Komoteini, 2018 \(immaroniaskomotinis\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Unknown author \(in Greek\): Χρύσανθος, Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αθηνῶν \(Chrysanthos, Archbishop of Athens\), in: Σαν Σήμερα \(San Símera\), n. p., n. d. \(sansimera.gr\) \(Article\)](#)

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