

# Muslim Community in Ionnina

*PAST AND PRESENT*

*by Nadjaha Maida*



The story of the city of Ioannina gathers multiple histories in time, such as different religions, different languages and different races.

How is it really?

Ioannina is a city located in the northwest of Greece, it is the most important city of Epirus.

The name of the city of Ioánnina comes from the name of the builder of the fortress, a certain Ioannis. It was founded by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in the 6th century.



Let's talk about the history of Ioannina because it represents a part of the Muslim history.



In 1326 Orhan son of Osman I (the head of this empire) captured all the Byzantine territory with his army. The Ottoman Empire had the conviction to conquer as much territory as possible. In 1354 the Ottomans landed in Europe for the first time. Three centuries later their expansion was at its peak and the empire covered several regions including Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Egypt, Hungary, Romania, Macedonia, Jordan, Palestine and more...



their reign lasted 6 centuries. This empire was known for its military superpower, its strength of ethnic diversity but also for their notable achievements in the arts and architectural constructions. It was at this time that the term 'Greek Muslims'; came into use. Greek Muslims are Muslims of Greek ethnic origin whose adoption of Islam (and often of the Turkish



language and identity) is mainly the result of descendants of the elite Ottoman corps of Turks and converts to Islam from the Ottoman era. Since then, it has been forbidden to use the term 'Turk'; to refer to Muslims. It is therefore replaced by the term 'Muslim minority'.



## SOME PLACES OF WORSHIP BUILT BY THE OTTOMANS: MOSQUES

A mosque is a place of worship where Muslims gather for communal prayers.



The Fetih mosque:

It was built in the inner castle of the city of Ioannina after the Ottoman conquest in 1430, near the ruins of an early 13th century Byzantine church. Ali Pasha made it the main mosque of his palace. Ali Pasha of Jannina Tepelena (1741 or 1744 - 1822) was the governor of the Epirus region for the Ottoman Empire. Now the tombs of Ali's family and of Ali himself are located in front of the mosque.

The Mosque of Aslan Pasha: Is a mosque built in 1618 by the Ottomans in the city of Ioannina, Greece.

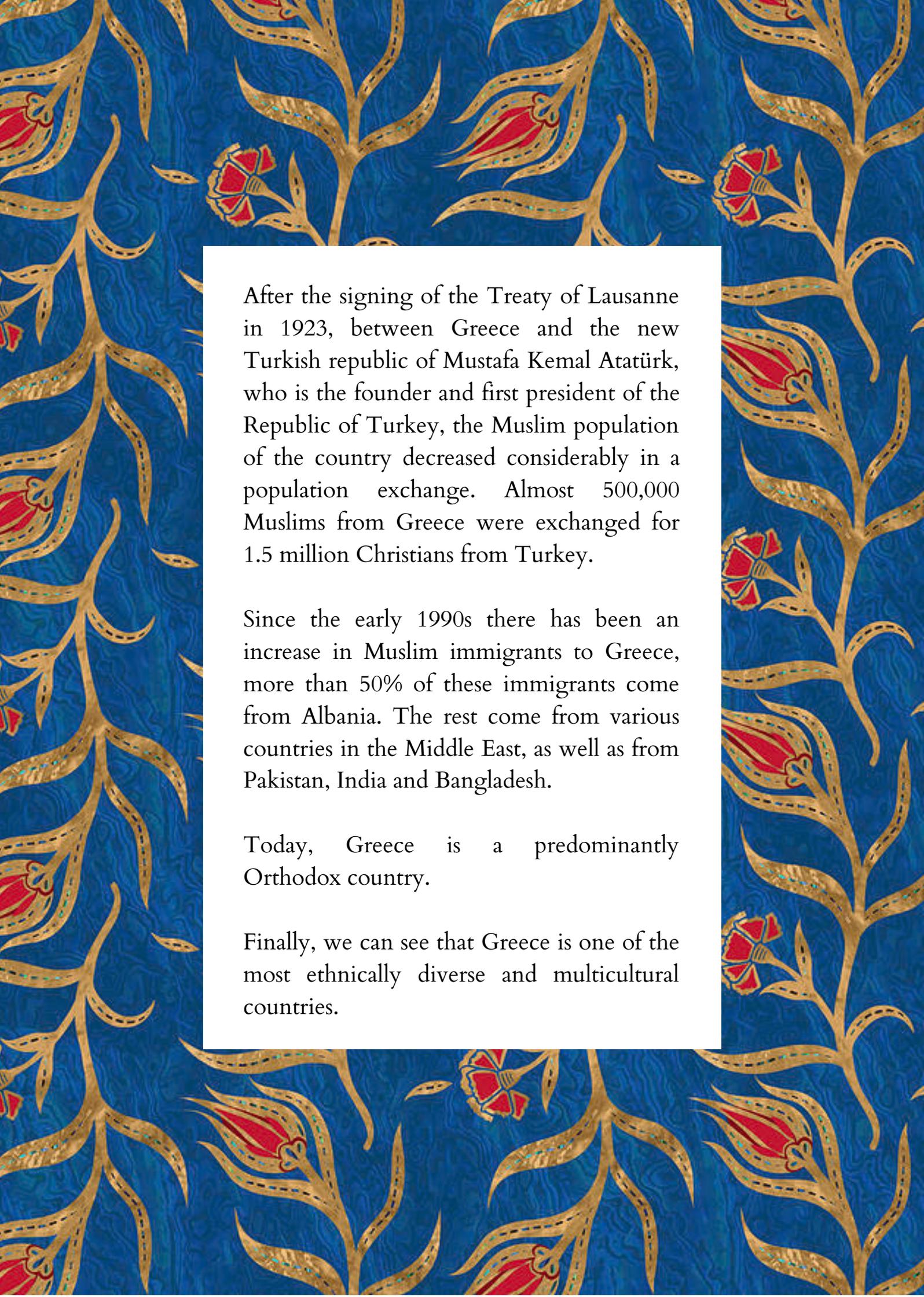
Today it is a tourist attraction that can be visited.



During their conquest of Epirus, the Ottomans did not force the Greeks to become Muslims. However, many of them converted, to escape the economic pressure imposed by the Turks (according to Islamic law, a specific tax, the harac, was levied on non-Muslims) of the number of Muslims and non-Muslims converted. The Ottoman Empire was home to a wide variety of peoples such as Turks, Kurds, Bulgarians, Armenians, Arabs and Greeks. The vast majority of the inhabitants were Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Christians divided into a multitude of religious streams and Jews.

In 1821, Greece, then under the yoke of the Ottoman Empire, began a war of independence that took the form of a struggle between Orthodox Christians and Muslim invaders. Many clergymen distinguished themselves by blessing the combatants and, for some, by taking up arms themselves. Whether fantasised or real, the role of the Orthodox Church in the countrys accession to independence occupies a prominent place in the Greek collective imagination. Article 3 of the Constitution states: The dominant religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ.





After the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, between Greece and the new Turkish republic of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who is the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey, the Muslim population of the country decreased considerably in a population exchange. Almost 500,000 Muslims from Greece were exchanged for 1.5 million Christians from Turkey.

Since the early 1990s there has been an increase in Muslim immigrants to Greece, more than 50% of these immigrants come from Albania. The rest come from various countries in the Middle East, as well as from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Today, Greece is a predominantly Orthodox country.

Finally, we can see that Greece is one of the most ethnically diverse and multicultural countries.

I was able to interview two men of Muslim faith

## Do you live in Greece ?



**Mohamed**

I'm here to visit some friends who live here. Ioannina is a very beautiful place, I don't know the history of the city, but the friends I'm staying with immigrated to Greece in the 90's.

There are not many Muslims here but the main thing is that people respect each other.

We can do our prayers among ourselves and we respect all the religions here. Maybe we could think that there is a conflict between religions but absolutely not, I know a lot of priests and they are friends.



**Ahmed**

I lived in Greece for a long time, there were many Turks and Afghans in the 60s. I lived in Thessaloniki and then I came here to Ioannina. My great-grandparents were Turkish and they knew the mosque Veli Pasha. They prayed inside when they were young.

The history of Ioannina is very conflicting but it has evolved over time. I feel very good here, people are nice and I don't feel like a stranger.

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