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ITALIAN PRISONERS IN OTTOMAN CAMPS DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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ABSTRACT: *The central focus of this study is to examine the lives of Italian prisoners of war in the Ottoman territories during World War I. These Italian prisoners of war were held in prison camps across the Ottoman Empire, mainly in Anatolia. The situation of these Italian military and civilian prisoners of war in the Ottoman Empire is an important but relatively under-examined topic in the history of prisoners of war. It has not even been the subject of an independent study.*
Italian prisoners of war captured by the Ottoman Empire were forced to reside in many Ottoman cities, including Edirne, Ankara, and İzmir. Some Italians captured by Germany on other fronts of World War I were also sent to Ottoman lands to work for Germany. Haydarpaşa Station and the construction of the Baghdad Railway were among the places where Italians captured by Germany were put to work.
The living conditions of the prisoners and the healthcare services provided to them were shaped within the limited resources of the Ottoman Empire. This article, which also examines the prisoner exchange period, evaluates how the Ottoman Empire's prisoner policy was applied to Italian prisoners based on the Ottoman Archives and related literature.

KEYWORDS: *Ottoman Empire, Italian, prisoners of war, World War I, Hague Convention*

I PRIGIONIERI ITALIANI NEI CAMPI OTTOMANI DURANTE LA PRIMA GUERRA MONDIALE

SOMMARIO: *L'obiettivo centrale di questo studio è esaminare la vita dei prigionieri di guerra italiani nei territori ottomani durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale, che furono detenuti in diversi campi di prigionia, soprattutto in Anatolia. La situazione di questi prigionieri di guerra italiani, militari e civili, è un tema importante, ma relativamente poco esaminato nella storia dei prigionieri di guerra e non è stato nemmeno oggetto di uno studio indipendente.*
I prigionieri di guerra italiani furono fatti risiedere in molte città ottomane, tra cui Edirne, Ankara e Smirne. Anche alcuni italiani catturati dalla Germania su altri fronti della Prima Guerra Mondiale furono inviati nelle terre ottomane per lavorare per la Germania. La stazione di Haydarpaşa e la costruzione della ferrovia di Baghdad sono alcuni dei luoghi in cui gli italiani catturati dalla Germania furono impiegati.
Le condizioni di vita dei prigionieri e i servizi sanitari forniti loro furono condizionate delle limitate risorse dell'Impero Ottomano. Questo articolo, che esamina anche il periodo dello scambio di prigionieri, valuta sulla base degli archivi ottomani e della relativa letteratura come la politica dei prigionieri dell'Impero Ottomano si applicasse ai prigionieri italiani.

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Impero Ottomano, italiani, prigionieri di guerra, Prima guerra mondiale, Convenzione dell'Aia*

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Abbreviations: BOA (Presidency State Archives of the Republic of Türkiye); BEO (Record Office of the Sublime Porte); DH.ŞFR (Ministry of Internal Affairs. Code Registry); DH.EUM (Ministry of the Interior General Security Directorate Documents); HR. SYS (Foreign Affairs, Political Section).

1. Introduction

The European order established at the Vienna Congress in 1815 ended when Italy and Germany achieved national unity. Italy began pursuing an expansionist policy to compete with other European states. However, by that time, the lands of Africa on the Mediterranean coast, except for Tripolitania (Libya), had been captured by Britain and France. Therefore, Italy turned its attention to Tripolitania.

Italy's imperialist ambitions for today's Libya date back to the second half of the 19th century. The development that led Italy to demand that Tripolitania be taken into consideration by other European powers was Russia's interest in the Bulgarian crisis, which occupied the Ottoman agenda in 1885-1886. Russian interest in this crisis would lead Germany and Britain to agree with Italy. In November 1886, Italian Foreign Minister Robilant made new demands during negotiations to renegotiate the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany. These negotiations resulted in an agreement on February 20, 1887. Nevertheless, it took many years for Italy to gain the support of all European powers in its attempts to gain control of Tripolitania[1].

Tripolitania was the only North African territory that could be occupied by Italy, both as a crucial point of departure for trade from Africa and as a gateway to other opportunities in the Mediterranean[2]. An operation there could have neutralized opposition to Italy's new government's economic policies, which had been in place for only a few months[3]. Italy's move for Tripolitania did not only have imperial goals. It was openly stated that the blood spilled in an external war would make Italians proud of their homeland, distract them from their troubles, and unite the people, transforming separate elements into a united and proud nation[4]. For these reasons, when Italy occupied Tripolitania on September 28, 1911, the first military conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Italy began. The occupation was prolonged due to the resistance of local forces organized by Ottoman officers. For this reason, Italy took action to force the Ottoman Empire into peace and first sailed its navy to the mouth of the Dardanelles. Then it occupied Rhodes and the Dodecanese islands. Against

[1] L. Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, I. M. (Massey Trans.), 1., Oxford University Press, London, 1952, pp. 52-53; 340-342.

[2] H. Göl, *Trablusgarp Savaşı*, Gece Kitaplığı Yayınları, Ankara, 2023, p. 21.

[3] Milan Videnović, *The Outbreak of the First Balkan War and the Italo-Turkish Peace Negotiations in Lausanne in 1912*, «Balcanica», LIV (2023), pp. 106-108.

[4] R. Simon, *Libya Between Ottomanism and Nationalism, The Ottoman Involvement in Libya during the War with Italy (1911-1919)*, Klaus Schwarz Verlag Berlin, 1987, p. 48.

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these Italian attempts, the Ottoman Empire could not mount a counterattack due to its insufficient naval forces. In addition, it could not receive any help from European states. Because of the occupation, the only counteraction it could take was to deport 2,000 Italian citizens from its own territory[5]. It decided to treat the remaining Italians as prisoners of war. However, this decision prompted reactions from Britain and France[6].

While the Ottoman-Italian struggle over Tripolitania continued, the Balkan states' plans to declare war against the Ottoman Empire in alliance further worsened the Ottoman Empire's political dilemma. Finally, it was the Ottoman Empire that demanded the treaty that ended the war. Ten days after Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire, the two countries signed a peace treaty on October 18, 1912[7]. According to the Treaty of Ouchy, Tripolitania would belong to Italy, and in return, Italy would withdraw from the Aegean islands it had occupied. However, due to the outbreak of the Balkan Wars and then World War I, the Ottoman Empire was unable to retake the islands in question.

However, after the Treaty of Ouchy, Turkish-Italian relations followed a generally positive course. In fact, Italy, which remained neutral during the Balkan War, also improved its political and commercial ties with the Ottoman Empire. In fact, during the Balkan War, the Ottoman Empire borrowed 320,000 gold coins from the Istanbul branch of Banco Di Roma. As a result of this development, in 1913-1914, the Ottoman Government granted concessions for the Fethiye-Muğla, Fethiye-Antalya-Kızılkaya, and Antalya-Alanya railway lines to the Italians[8]. However, these good relations did not last long and were disrupted when the two countries joined opposing blocs in World War I.

The developments in Italy and Germany in the 19th century played a significant role in the process leading to this polarization. The interstate balance that had long been established in Europe would be disrupted in the last quarter of the 19th century. Germany and Italy had achieved their political unity and emerged as essential powers. In this

[5] Ş. Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi,* 1, Bilgi Yayınevi, Ankara, 2008, pp. 30-31; H.T. Güzel, *"Hasta Adam" Osmanlı Devleti Karşısında Başarılı Bir İtalyan Diplomasi Örneği: Trablusgarp Savaşı*, «Vakanüvis - International Journal of Historical Researches», 2:1 (2017), p. 107.

[6] H.T. Güzel, *Hasta Adam* cit., p. 108.

[7] E. Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans; The Great War in the Middle East*, Published by Basic Books, New York, 2015, p. 18.

[8] G. Şahin, *Trablusgarb Savaşı'ndan Milli Mücadele'ye Türk-İtalyan İlişkileri*, G. Yıldız, S. Osmanlıoğlu (eds.), *Türk-İtalyan Müşterek Harp Tarihi Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, Milli Savunma Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 2020, pp. 346-347.

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context, both states fought against Austria. Germany also fought and defeated France. Again, these states sought alliances to maintain their superiority and newfound strength. Likewise, France pursued a policy of revenge. Both this political environment and the colonial race resulted in the division of European states into two hostile blocs[9]. After 1882, Europe was divided into blocs with Germany, Italy, and Austria on one side and Britain, France, and Russia on the other. On the other hand, as a result of the Balkan Wars, Serbia had doubled both its military power and territory. This situation made Germany and Austria nervous. War was inevitable, and only a spark was enough to light the fire[10]. By 1914, this polarization into blocs had reached a sharp stage, and the blocs, divided into the Allies and the Central Powers, were engaged in a major war. The war began in Europe, but it did not stop there; it became a global conflict, with countries and colonies from across the world participating[11].

The Ottoman Empire, which was seeking alliances as it formed a bloc, was undergoing a period of crisis both militarily and politically. First, it lost the Tripoli War to Italy and had to withdraw entirely from Africa. Subsequently, with the Balkan Wars, it lost most of its territory in Europe. These developments accelerated the Ottoman involvement in the upcoming Great War[12]. Initially, it had negotiated with the British and wanted to join their bloc. However, the British did not accept this. Because they both did not want a weak ally and feared Russia's reaction. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire entered World War I on Germany's side. This meant the Ottoman Empire would also be at war with Italy, which later joined the Allies.

World War I is a significant historical event that is still intensely debated today. People still care about this war and discuss it passionately. The causes of the war, its nature, and the legacy it left to the world are all topics of debate. In fact, this is inevitable. Because the ideological and national conflicts ignited in 1914-1918 shaped the rest of the 20th century[13]. Indeed, World War I was the first general war between industrialized countries. Communism, fascism, economic

[9] Ş. Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi* cit., p. 23.

[10] G. Kerr, *Avrupa'nın Kısa Tarihi*, Kalkedon Yayınları, İstanbul, 2011, pp. 118-119; M. Howard, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nı Yeniden Değerlendirmek*, in *I. Dünya Savaşı ve 20. Yüzyıl*, Eds. J. Winter, G. Parker, M.R. Habeck, T. Demirel (Trans.), Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, İstanbul, 2012, pp. 22-23.

[11] U. Erdem, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Türkiye'deki İngiliz Esirler: İki Esir Kampı (Afyon ve Gediz), ve İki Esir Gazetesi (Afyonkarahisar ve Gediz Gazeteleri)*, «Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences Research», 4-14 (2017), p. 1703.

[12] E. Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans* cit., pp. 26-28.

[13] J. Winter, G. Parker, M.R. Habeck, *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, Eds. J. Winter, G. Parker, M.R. Habeck, Yale University Press, London, 2000, p. 3.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

depressions, and a second general war were direct consequences of World War I that have shaped history up to the present day. The global impact of World War I was the deadlock between the great powers from 1914 to 1917. While military power was the most crucial element of this standoff, the extraordinary determination and resilience of the people at the front and behind the front lines were another[14]. Contrary to expectations, the war did not end and became more intense. Therefore, World War I was no longer just a test of military power. It had also become a test of moral strength and civilization[15].

This great war, which affected the whole world, resulted in the loss of millions of lives. However, another consequence of the war, in addition to the loss of human and military power, was the issue of prisoners of war captured by the enemy for various reasons. In other words, the war also brought with it the problem of prisoners[16]. Consequently, this war, which has shaped the present day, should also be discussed in terms of issues such as death and captivity in society's memory, because captivity is one of the most important topics not only in military and political history but also in social history.

2. Wartime Captivity and Its Legal Dimensions

The main issues in the study of prisoners captured in wars constitute the basic framework of the concept of captivity. These issues include determining the number of military and civilian prisoners, their ethnic and religious identities, age and gender, legal status, daily life, health conditions in prison camps, and extradition processes. Taken as a whole, these fall within the scope of a vast academic field. Therefore, it is possible to study prisoners of war in military studies, demography, politics, economics, health, sociology, psychology, and other branches.

The word *captive* is used to mean a person captured by the enemy in war, a slave, a person under the rule and command of someone, or a situation[17]. However, the word "captive" was used in Ottoman sources and documents not only in the sense of prisoner of war, but

[14] D. Stevenson, *The Politics of the Two Alliances,* in *The Great War and the Twentieth Century,* Eds. J. Winter, G. Parker, M.R. Habeck, Yale University Press, London, 2000, pp. 69-70.

[15] M. Eksteins, *The Cultural Legacy of the Great War*, in *The Great War and the Twentieth Century,* Eds. J. Winter, G. Parker, M.R. Habeck, Yale University Press, London, 2000, p. 333.

[16] U. Erdem, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 1703.

[17] U. Erdem, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 1697.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

also in the sense of "slave"[18]. For this reason, the meaning given to the word "captive" by political texts may differ from the meaning attributed to this word by the people. On the other hand, different societies have different approaches to captives. This is because these approaches stem from a mentality shaped by thousands of years of accumulated knowledge about each society's geography and culture[19].

Relations between different groups of people began with the existence of multiple societies on Earth. Since time immemorial, one of the most important of these relations has been war. Indeed, human history has witnessed countless wars between societies caused by exploitation and the struggle for existence. One of the most critical problems arising from these wars is the issue of captives taken from each other[20]. However, this issue has not been one of the most emphasized topics in historiography. Indeed, historians generally categorize wars between societies/countries into two different categories: winners and defeated. In the historiography of societies, a view of political history crowned with victories is dominant. This view often overlooks the fact that the winning side also lost a lot. The most notable of these losses is prisoners of war[21]. One in eight veterans who joined civilian society in post-World War I Europe was a prisoner of war. Despite the publication of numerous prisoners of war memoirs, the story of captivity has never become part of the memory of the Great War[22].

The concept of captivity is not limited to warriors. In wars, civilians were also captured from time to time along with soldiers. This is even more evident in large-scale battles. In World War I, defenseless areas outside the battlefield were also bombed from time to time. These attacks were not in accordance with the rules and laws of war. The Ottoman Empire also had its share of these inappropriate actions during World War I. The Ottoman Empire repeatedly protested against the Allied Powers to stop these attacks. Since these warnings were not heeded, some measures were taken. These measures are characterized as *retaliation* or *mutual harm*. One of these countermeasures was to

[18] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Türkiye'deki Yabancı Esirler*, unpublished PhD thesis, Gazi University Ankara, 2010, p. 1.

[19] M. Karakulak, *93 Harbi'nde Esir Olmak: Rusya'daki Osmanlı Savaş Esirleri ve Gündelik Hayatları, 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı (93 Harbi)*, in *-Vatan Neresi?- Uluslararası Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, Ed.: F.M. Sancaktar, A. Askeroğlu Arslan, Türk Ocakları İstanbul Şubesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2019, p. 240.

[20] A. Özel, *İslam'da ve Günümüz Devletler Hukukunda Savaş Esirleri*, «İslam Hukuku Araştırmaları Dergisi», 1:1 (2003), p. 105.

[21] N. Aygün, *Savaşların Diğer Yüzü: Esirler, Osmanlı ve Rusya*, «Genç Kalemler Tarih, Düşünce ve Kültür Dergisi», 6:7 (2020), p. 58.

[22] A. Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War Captivity on the Eastern Front*, New York, 2002, pp. 4-5.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

arrest senior officials of British, Russian, or French nationality and send them to the interior of the country. Another method of retaliation was the confiscation of the property of the Allied Powers in the Ottoman territories. Another retaliatory policy pursued by the Ottoman Empire was the expulsion of as many citizens of the Allied states as the number of people killed, wounded, or captured by the Allied states[23].

In addition to the soldiers who directly served in the army during the war, some civilians may also become prisoners of war according to the rules of international law. These include various groups of civil servants who helped the army, those who provided supplies to the military, those who worked on telephone, telegraph, and road construction, and newspaper reporters. There are records of these examples in Ottoman documents. For instance, among those captured and sent to different parts of the country were captives such as an Italian who worked as a goldsmith in Istanbul and a British agent in Ankara who spied against the Ottomans. In addition to these people, among the civilian citizens of the Allied Powers who were taken prisoners were ship crews, those arrested for ordinary crimes, disturbers of the public order, machinists, various company officials, architects, engineers, supervisors, bankers, shopkeepers, and laborers[24].

One of the most critical issues regarding prisoners of war is, of course, the rules of international law. In ancient times, when there were no rules of law governing international relations, the winning side in a war could justify taking prisoners or killing anyone, regardless of whether they were soldiers or civilians. Prisoners could also be subjected to very harsh treatment[25]. On the other hand, another option other than death was to be sold into slavery[26]. This method, used by

[23] A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler Meselesi Üzerine Bazı Değerlendirmeler*, «Journal of History and Future», 4:1 (2018), pp. 75-76.

[24] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., pp. 36-37.

[25] Human history is full of examples of this. For example, the Assyrians considered what they did to their captives a religious duty. They killed everyone they found in the city they occupied. In addition, they would skin some of the captives and hang them on the gate of the city. Iranian/Persian communities also practiced cruel practices against their enemies. The Persians denied their captives the right to life and sometimes had them trampled on by elephants. The Ancient Greeks and Romans also denied prisoners the right to life, but unlike the others, these civilizations also enslaved them and benefited from them. Compared to previous practices, even enslavement could be considered an improvement in the situation of captives. A. Özel, *İslam'da ve Günümüz Devletler* cit., p. 106.

[26] This is a very important finding for slave trade studies. Because the sale of prisoners of war as a method of slave acquisition is one of the oldest commercial activities in the world. This kind of trade was most intense in Africa, where prisoners of war captured in local wars were sent to slave markets. The Ottoman

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almost all nations, was not without its problems. For example, when the number of enslaved people was too large, it led to other issues, such as rebellion, and posed a danger to the state's sovereignty and to the army[27].

Throughout human history, practices towards captives have varied from society to society, from state to state, and across time. It took centuries for an ordinary course of action, or at least a broadly acceptable set of rules, to be established for the application of captivity policies across religious, cultural, and ethnic differences. It was only in the 19th century that universal ideas on how captives should be treated emerged[28].

The Ottoman Empire's treatment of prisoners is an important issue. To understand this, it is necessary to know both international law and the Islamic approach to the problem. This approach is actually not very complicated. The earliest practices in Muslim societies were usually ransom-based. However, if a captive had killed a Muslim, this person would certainly be killed[29].

Modern rules on the law of war had emerged long before World War I. The 1856 Paris Declaration on the Law of the Sea is an essential beginning in this regard. Afterwards, eleven regulations were issued on different dates. Although the issue had been regularly discussed at international congresses since the 1870s, it was only in 1899 that the international community agreed on a set of legally binding rules[30] . Among these regulations, the Geneva Convention and the Hague Convention are more comprehensive than the others. Of these, the Geneva Convention of July 6, 1906, was aimed at "improving the condition of the wounded and sick on the battlefield". The Hague Convention of October 18, 1907, was more comprehensive in terms of its provisions on prisoners of war. These international conventions were taken into consideration in the regulations prepared by the Ottoman Empire for prisoners of war[31]. After the signing of the Hague Convention, the

and European markets were supplied with both slaves from Africa and prisoners of war from their own regions. E.R. Toledano, *Osmanlı Köle Ticareti 1840-1890*, Y.H. Erdem (Trans.), Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul, 1994, p. 13.

[27] N. Oran Arslan, *Birinci Dünya Savaşında Türkiye'deki Rus Savaş Esirleri*, IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2008, p. 34; A. Özel, *İslam'da ve Günümüz Devletler* cit., p. 106; E.R.Toledano, *Osmanlı Köle Ticareti* cit., p. 13.

[28] U. Erdem, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 1703.

[29] U. Erdem, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., pp. 1697-1698.

[30] N. Wylie, L. Cameron, *The Impact of World War I on the Law Governing the Treatment of Prisoners of War and the Making of a Humanitarian Subject*, «The European Journal of International Law -EJIL», 29:4 (2018), p. 1329.

[31] According to these agreements, the status of prisoners consisted of the following: *Prisoners are under the responsibility of the enemy government and not*

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Ottoman Empire also conducted studies on how to treat prisoners of war on its territory in the event of war. The Ottoman government, after consulting with the relevant institutions, issued an official document named "*Üserâ Hakkında Talîmâtnâme*" (Regulation on Prisoners of War) on the treatment of prisoners[32]. Published in 1914, this directive consists of five main sections. This directive was sent to all army commands and governorships[33].

3. Italian Prisoners of War in Ottoman Camps

Diplomatic historiography tends to view Turkish-Italian relations as a continuum from the Tripolitan War in 1911 to World War II[34]. The Ottoman Empire and the republics of Venice and Genoa on the Italian Peninsula were in constant conflict or cooperation over various issues, especially in the Mediterranean[35]. Especially for the Venetians, who had a large share in the Mediterranean trade, a conflict with the Ottoman Empire was inevitable. The Ottomans had emerged as a powerful force in the Mediterranean in the 16th century and had become highly threatening to the Venetians. The Venetians, on the other hand, sought to secure their interests through diplomatic means. As a result of these efforts, unilateral concession documents emerged, guaranteeing the security of Venetian merchants and citizens in Ottoman territory.

These documents were called "*ahidnâme*". What makes these documents valuable for our subject is that they contain sections on resolving captivity issues, as the Ottomans captured a large number of Venetian citizens during the war and through pirate attacks. For this

of the military units. Prisoners of war will be treated in accordance with human rights. Prisoners can work for themselves or for public services and can be used as laborers. Officers receive the same salary as their counterpart officers in the country of captivity. They are free to practice their faith. They should be returned as soon as possible after the signing of the peace agreement. U. Erdem, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 1698.

[32] For details of the *talîmâtnâme*, see A. Uca, *1915 Yılında Yayımlanan Bir Üsera Talimatnamesi ve Düşündürdükleri*, «Atatürk Dergisi», 3:3 (2003), pp. 170-175.

[33] A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., p. 75; M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 27.

[34] M.C. Oğultürk, *İki Dünya Savaşı Arası Türk-İtalyan İlişkileri*, G. Yıldız, S. Osmanlıoğlu (eds.), *Türk-İtalyan Müşterek Harp Tarihi Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, Milli Savunma University Yayınları, İstanbul, 2020, p. 358.

[35] S. Bornovalı, Arşivler ve Sanat Eserlerinden Yola Çıkarak Türk-İtalyan Askerî İlişkileri Üzerine Notlar, G. Yıldız, S. Osmanlıoğlu (eds.), *Türk-İtalyan Müşterek Harp Tarihi Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, Milli Savunma University Yayınları, İstanbul, 2020, p. 327.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

reason, the treaty texts initially concerned only trade. However, the Ottomans' expansionist policy in the Mediterranean made it necessary for both sides to include articles on war and captivity[36].

As mentioned above, the first military conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the United Italy was the Tripolitan War of 1911. During World War I, Italy and the Ottoman Empire were on opposing sides. However, when we look at the fronts fought by the Ottoman Empire in this war, there was no direct war with Italy. The Ottoman Empire, which had an estimated population of 22-23 million when the war started, fought on seven fronts. These can be listed as: the Caucasus, the Canal (Egypt), Palestine-Syria, Iraq, Europe/Balkan (Galicia, Romania, Macedonia), Gallipoli, and the Hejaz-Yemen fronts[37]. The Ottoman Empire was successful only in Gallipoli and was defeated in the others. Regardless of the outcome, on all fronts, both its own soldiers were captured, and captives were taken from enemy forces. The vast majority of these consisted of thousands of British soldiers captured on the Iraq Front. Of course, the Ottoman Empire and Italy did not fight directly on these fronts, but both sides sent troops to support their allies. Moreover, the vast majority of Italians in Ottoman prison camps were already captured by the Austrian and German armies. They had sent Italian prisoners to prison camps in Anatolia.

The number of prisoners of war captured by the Ottoman Empire during World War I is estimated at 25-30 thousand. The majority of these (approximately 15 thousand) were British. The remaining prisoners were Russians, Austrians, French, Romanians, Italians, and Indians. These captured prisoners were sent to various camps in Ottoman territory[38]. However, during World War I, the Ottoman Empire mobilized the populace of Tripolitania and engaged in armed conflict with Italy. In this location, prisoners of war were also captured from the Italian army[39]. Niall Ferguson, in his table based on information in the Statistics of the Military Effort prepared by the British War Office, reports the number of Italian prisoners as 530,000 to 600,000 between 1914 and 1918[40]. It is possible to state that a minimal number of these Italian prisoners of war were in the Ottoman Empire.

[36] N.N. Nalçacı, *Osmanlılar ve Beylikler Tarafından Venediklilere Verilmiş Ahidnâmelerde Esaret Meselesinin Gelişimi*, G. Yıldız, S. Osmanlıoğlu (eds.), Türk-İtalyan Müşterek Harp Tarihi Sempozyumu Bildirileri, Milli Savunma Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 2020, pp. 1,6.

[37] Ş. Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi* cit., p. 53.

[38] U. Erdem, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 1703; M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 32.

[39] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 33.

[40] N. Ferguson, *Hazin Savaş 1914-1918,* N. Elhüseyni (Trans.), Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul 2015, p. 438.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

3.1. Prisoner of War Camps

During World War I, the Ottoman Empire opened many prison camps. The purpose of these camps was to keep the captives as healthy as possible until they were exchanged[41]. However, throughout the war, the number of prison camps fluctuated due to increases in prisoner numbers or other factors. Except for those who were employed in different lines of work, most of the captives were kept in camps such as Samatya (Istanbul), İzmit, Bursa, Eskişehir, Ankara, Kastamonu, Yozgat, Kayseri, Kırşehir, Konya, İzmir, Tavşanlı (Kütahya), Gedos=Gediz (Kütahya), Denizli, Bor (Niğde), Belemedik (Adana), Sivas, Afyonkarahisar, and Büyükada General Townshend Camp (Büyükada, Istanbul)[42]. In addition to these large camps, small prisoner-of-war camps were established for British and Russian prisoners of war in Kozan (Adana), Manisa, Şereflikoçhisar (Ankara), Aksaray, Boğazlıyan (Yozgat), Çankırı, and Çorum[43]. However, not only were Russian and British prisoners of war sent to these small camps, but also other prisoners of war.

The prisoners of war held in camps on Ottoman territory consisted of soldiers and civilians. They were citizens of Britain, France, Russia, Belgium, Montenegro, Serbia, Italy, and Romania[44]. Below is an essential table of the camps where these civilian prisoners were held. Documents dated March 11, 1917, were sent from the General Directorate of Security to the Commander-in-Chief, including the names of the major cities where the camps for prisoners of war were located. The document also details the transportation of prisoners of war between various camps. We also learn that 271 Romanian and 33 Italian prisoners in Jaffa and Gaza were sent to Aleppo. The major cities in which the camps for civilian prisoners of war were transferred to the country since the beginning of World War I were located, and the settlements connected to these cities are as follows[45]:

[41] D. Taşkın, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Bursa Esir Kampı*, unpublished master's thesis, Afyon Kocatepe University, Afyonkarahisar 2021, p. 16.

[42] A. Altıntaş, Ç. Öngel, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Pozantı-Belemedik (Bilemedik) Esir Kampı*, in *Tarihte Adana ve Çukurova*- III vol., Y. Kurt, M. F. Sansar (eds.), Akademisyen Kitabevi Ankara, 2023, pp. 462-463; M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 117; Altıntaş, Öngel, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 459; D. Taşkın, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 16.

[43] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 53.

[44] A. Altıntaş, Ç. Öngel, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 462.

[45] «Submission to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of a list of the names of cities and towns where camps for civilian prisoners of war are located». Ottoman Archives of the Turkish Republic Presidency of State Archives (Hereafter BOA), Ministry of Internal Affairs General Directorate of Security Affairs, (Hereafter

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

Tab. I - Prisoner of war camps in Ottoman territory during World War I

Edirne (Kırcasalih, Kırkkilise)	Kastamonu (Kastamonu central district, Safranbolu, Daday, Boyabat, İnebolu, Sinop)	Afyonkarahisar
Ankara (Ankara central district, Çorum, Kırşehir, Ayaş, Yozgat, Osmancık, Sungurlu, İskilip, Boğazlıyan, Mecidiye, Beypazarı, Yabanabad, Kalecik, Bala, Akdağmadeni)	Konya (Bozkır, Koçhisar, Seydişehir, Sultaniye, Beyşehir)	Kayseri (Kayseri central district, Talas, Efkere)
İzmir (Nif)	Niğde (Nevşehir, Aksaray, Bor)	Muğla
Elazığ	Ordu	Kütahya*
Syria (Aleppo, Damascus)	Bolu	Mersin (Ermenek)
Bursa	Balıkesir (Bigadiç)	

The Ottoman government closely monitored the situation of prisoners of war who were sent to camps during the war. Detailed information, such as names, duties, titles/ranks, date and place of birth, the country of citizenship, and the addresses of their families, was recorded in the registers kept by the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior for civilians arrested during the war. In addition, records of how long the prisoners stayed in the camps, the number and names of those who died, and those who were still present were kept regularly. The administrators of the region where the camps were located were ordered to keep this information and report it to Istanbul regularly[46]. In addition, prisoner cards were created to obtain prisoners' identities more easily and quickly when needed. This card application, shown below as an example, was designed to rapidly get the identification information of the prisoner whose information was requested in international correspondence.

In addition, a prisoner commission was established in each prison camp. This commission was responsible for keeping records of the prisoners' accommodation in the camp, their feeding, the treatment of the sick, and all other procedures related to them[47].

DH.EUM), DH.EUM.5.şb 35/34, April 14, 1917.

* There are two camps affiliated with Kütahya that are not shown in the table but are mentioned in other archival documents. These are the Tavşanlı and Gediz camps.

[46] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 39.

[47] H. Key, *I. Dünya Savaşı Yıllarında Osmanlı Devleti Topraklarındaki Esir Kampları*, unpublished master's thesis, Dumlupınar University, Kütahya, 2010, p. 60.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

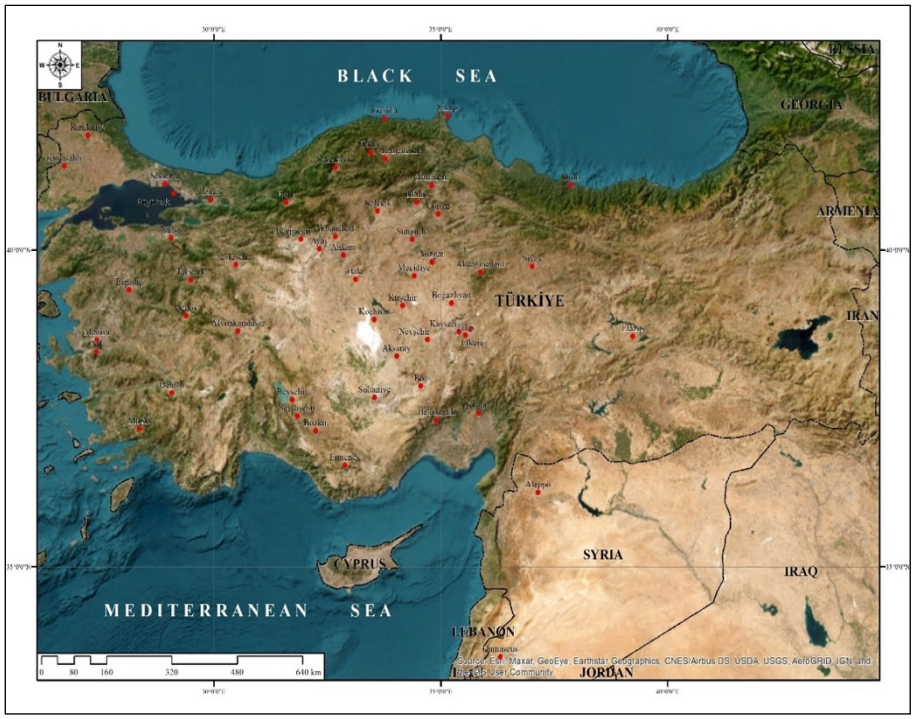


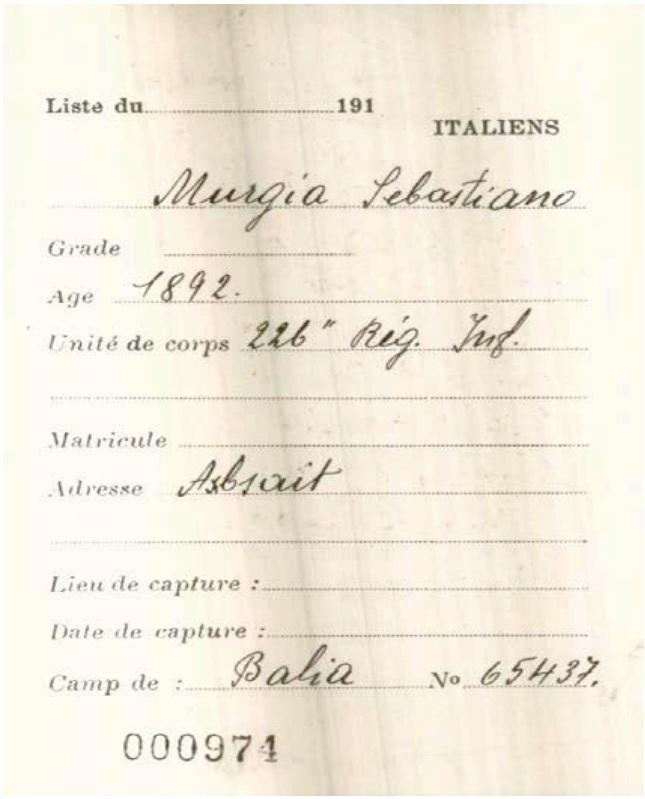
Fig. 1 - Map showing the location of prisoner of war camps in Ottoman territory

The transfer of prisoners to another camp is also one of the critical issues recorded. *Transportation between the prisoner camps was by rail*. In particular, Istanbul Haydarpaşa Station was of great importance for transporting prisoners to Anatolia[48].

One of the camps used extensively for the transportation of military or civilian prisoners was the prison camp in Kastamonu. In addition to prisoners of war, citizens of enemy states who had been arrested were also occasionally deported here. As mentioned above, the Ottoman Empire took specific measures in response to enemy attacks on civilian settlements. One of these measures was the arrest and deportation of citizens of the Allied States to prison camps as part of *retaliation* or *mutual harm*. In this way, we see that deportations were made to Kastamonu during World War I. In 1917, 41 Italian and British citizens were arrested and sent to Kastamonu. According to government correspondence, on September 3, 1916, soldiers and

[48] N. Kalkan Okur, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Sivas Esir Kampı*, unpublished master's thesis, Kırklareli University, 2022, p. 123.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)


Liste du 191

ITALIENS

Murgia Sebastiano

Grade .....

Age 1892.

Unité de corps 226e Rég. Inf.

.....

Matricule .....

Adresse Asbrait

.....

Lieu de capture : .....

Date de capture : .....

Camp de : Balia No 65437.

000974

Fig. 2 - The prisoner card that belongs to Murgia Sebastiano, an Italian prisoner in (Balıkesir)[49]

armed civilians landed in the village of Fetak in Marmaris (Muğla) on boats under the protection of British and Italian warships. In their attacks here, they killed 18 people and wounded 7 others. In return for the 25 Ottoman citizens killed, the British and Italian citizens were arrested and sent to the prison camp in Kastamonu. The deportees were 14 male and 2 female British and 14 male and 7 female Italian citizens living in İzmir. In addition, 4 British nationals working in Istanbul were also added to the deportation list. In an official letter dated February 12, 1917, sent to the Governorship of Aydın, the Ottoman Ministry of Interior submitted the list of prisoners to be transferred to the interior of the country. The lists of prisoners submitted to the government from the General Directorate of Security

[49] R. Karacakaya (ed.), *Kızılay Arşivi Belgelerinde Savaş Esirleri*, Türk Kızılayı Yayınları, İstanbul, 2018, p. 274.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

are also included in the same document. One of the lists submitted was the list of Italian male and female prisoners in İzmir, consisting of the following names.

Tab. II - List of Italian prisoners deported to Kastamonu in 1917

Men				Women	
1	Giuseppe Colombo	8	Giulio Morinaro	1	Dandolo Cili's wife
2	Nicola Croce	9	Kosta Cagiola	2	Maryos Antola's wife
3	Dandolo Cili	10	Maryos Antola	3	Anastas Albareti's wife
4	Enrico Tedeschi	11	Antonio Magnifico	4	Gian de Sena's wife
5	Michele Marinelli	12	Simon Sebastiani	5	Saverio Fabiano's wife
6	Tommaso Tabiano	13	Victor Boreti	6	Giuseppe Ventura's wife
7	Mitrogula (?) Rimo	14	Antonio İndiveri	7	İspirobas's wife

In addition to these lists, the Governorate of İzmir sent a separate official letter to the Governorate of Kastamonu. This document reported that 14 British men, 1 British woman, 14 Italian men, 7 Italian women, and 5 British men from Istanbul had been sent to Kastamonu[50]. In addition to these deportations, 31 French citizens, including 1 woman, were added to the list for the same incident and sent to Kastamonu prison camp[51].

3.2. Living Conditions in the Camps

It can be said that living conditions in the Anatolian prison camps were better for high-ranking officials[52]. However, it can be said that the conditions in the camps were good for other prisoners as well. The fact that the camps were located in city centers provided the prisoners with outstanding opportunities for communication, health care, food, and worship. Again, being involved in social life helped them to relax

[50] «Regarding the martyrdom or captivity of many Turks during the bandit attack on the villages of Kanal, Fetak, Fenaket, Sukut and the regions of Ayvacık, Kaş and Endefli in Marmaris under the protection of Italian and British warships, and the exile to Kastamonu of the British, French and Italians in Aydın and İzmir and some British employees of the British Cooperative Company, as a retaliation in equal number for these Turks». BOA, DH.EUM. 5.şb 47/2, October 24, 1917.

[51] «A telegram from the General Directorate of Security to the governorship of Aydın regarding the deportation of the French, British and Italians in the province in return for the Ottoman citizens martyred or captured by the enemy in the villages of Marmaris». BOA, Ministry of Internal Affairs. Code Registry, (hereafter DH. ŞFR.) 71/209, January 9, 1917.

[52] N. Kalkan Okur, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Sivas* cit., p. 123.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

psychologically. Being able to leave the camp, in other words, being able to walk around the city they were in, was an essential activity in alleviating the troubles caused by captivity[53].

One of the critical indicators of the state's approach to prisoners of war held in Ottoman camps and the lives of prisoners was the opportunity for prisoners to communicate with their families. In addition, issues such as the daily lives of the prisoners, their food, the wages paid, the behavior of the officials, the conditions of those who escaped, and how and where they were captured also provide important clues about the conditions of the prisoners of war and the conditions in the camps of the Ottoman Empire[54]. Prisoners' freedom of worship is also one of these crucial clues. According to the Ottoman Regulation on Prisoners of War, prisoners were free to go to places of worship of their own religion and sect, as long as they did not cause any disturbance to public order. The Ottoman government provided every convenience in this regard and assigned a priest to each prisoner-of-war camp so that prisoners of war could fulfill their religious duties[55].

3.2.1. Negativities Occurring in the Camps

Hundreds of thousands of soldiers from all the countries involved in World War I lived as prisoners of war for part of the war. Their lives were no safer in prison camps than at the front. From the moment of surrender, prisoners were at the mercy of their captors and possible diseases[56]. In fact, epidemics were among the most serious problems of World War I. These diseases were experienced not only on the fronts but also in the camps where prisoners were held. The prisoners who died in Ottoman prison camps generally died of malaria and typhus. Due to diseases, prisoners sometimes requested to be transferred from the camps they were in. Such requests were usually granted in exchange for a doctor's certificate, and the prisoners' camps were changed. Moreover, not only the prisoners but also the Ottoman soldiers serving in the camps died from these diseases[57].

According to the first two articles of the Geneva Convention of 1906, the captors of sick or wounded soldiers were obliged to treat them without discrimination against nationality. Again, according to the Ottoman Regulation on Prisoners of War, the state was responsible

[53] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., pp. 98-99.
[54] A. Altıntaş, Ç. Öngel, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 459.
[55] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 74.
[56] E. Rogan*, Büyük Savaş'ın Osmanlı Cephesindeki Esirleri,* H. Aksakal (trans.), Orient-Institut İstanbul Yayınları, İstanbul, 2017, p. 1.
[57] A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., p. 80; A. Altıntaş, Ç. Öngel, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 473.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

for the feeding, housing, clothing, and treatment of captured soldiers. The necessary official records of the expenses to be incurred for these were required. Documents related to these records were organized by military unit and sent to the Ottoman Ministry of War[58]. Again, records of prisoners who died in the camps due to epidemics or other reasons were prepared and sent to Istanbul. Thanks to these reports prepared in Turkish and French, detailed information about the dead prisoners was transmitted to foreign embassies[59].

The Ottoman Archive in Istanbul has many examples of illnesses in Ottoman prison camps during World War I. The first archival record that can be identified regarding the diseases suffered by Italian civilian prisoners during this war dates back to 1917. The prison camp where this record was kept was located in Yozgat. The prisoners here had first applied to the authorities to go to İzmit or Bursa due to illness. However, according to a report prepared by the camp doctor, the prisoners requested to be transferred to Tokat, which they learned had good weather and climate. The prisoners in question were 8: Rudolf, Bernaggio, their wives, Margaret and Yolanda, and their siblings. It is also understood from the correspondence that these Italian prisoners had previously lived in Samsun. Moreover, again, they were sent to Yozgat due to an illness. As a result of correspondence between the Governorship of Ankara and the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior, it was deemed appropriate to send the Italian prisoners to Tokat, and their requests were met[60].

Vincenzo Buffa Foska, an Italian citizen who was ill in the prison camp in Konya, submitted a petition dated August 14, 1918, to the governor's office requesting treatment. The petition is summarized as follows:

> As a prisoner of Italian nationality, I was sent to Seydişehir and then to Konya while I was working on the Suez Canal. I have been working as a carpenter master at the School of Crafts here for more than a year. However, I fell ill about 2 months ago, and now I am unable to work or walk. I think that my treatment is not possible unless I undergo an operation because I was hospitalized here for 15 days, but I could not recover. For this reason, I request that I be allowed to go to Istanbul to have surgery.

Upon this petition, the government requested information from the Governorate of Konya regarding the prisoner's health status and current

[58] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., pp. 64-65.

[59] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 72.

[60] «Regarding the requests of eight Italian citizens, who were among the civilian prisoners in Yozgat, to change their places of deportation». BOA, DH.EUM. 5.şb. 50/12, December 3, 1917.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

location. In the reply sent by the Governorate on October 2, 1918, the accuracy of what the Italian prisoner wrote was confirmed. After the relevant correspondence, the Ottoman Ministry of Interior granted permission for the Italian prisoner to travel to Istanbul for treatment[61].

Qvanovitch, one of the Italian civilian prisoners in Osmancık (Çorum), had requested that he and his son be sent to Istanbul or Ankara due to their health condition. The Spanish Embassy had already raised this. According to the Embassy records, the civilian prisoners in Osmancık were transferred to Ankara, and Qvanovitch and his son were left alone in this town.

Additionally, due to poor healthcare conditions in the places where they were held, they would not be able to find a doctor to treat them if they fell ill. For these reasons, the Spanish Embassy sent a letter requesting that the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs accept the Italian prisoner's request. On September 4, 1918, the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered that the prisoner's request be granted[62].

Apart from the records regarding illness and treatment in the camps, another negative development was the death of prisoners. For example, an official letter sent by the Burdur Police Directorate reported the death of Carlo Delmento, an Italian civilian prisoner aged 74. According to this police report, he died of a heart attack in the morning hours of September 2, 1917. In addition to the document, the deceased prisoner's belongings and money were also submitted in the form of a report. The dead prisoner's belongings and money were delivered to his brother-in-law in Burdur[63].

Tab. III - List of the deceased prisoner's belongings and money recorded in the report

1 underwear bottom	1 military uniform	3 shirts
2 white shirts	1 coat	1 undershirt
6 pairs of socks	2 basins	1 woolen shawl
9 handkerchiefs	1 towel	1 silver pocket watch
3 trousers	1 pair of gloves	1 gold ring
3 undershirts	4 various underwear	2 Ottoman liras

[61] «About Vincenzo Buffa Foska an Italian citizen who was one of the prisoners of war working on the Suez Canal, being deported first to Seydişehir and then to Konya, working as a carpenter at the Konya School of Crafts, and that there was no harm in his going to Istanbul for treatment». BOA, DH.EUM. 5.şb. 73/31, October 24, 1918.

[62] «About allowing Ivanovic and his son, one of the Italian citizens who stayed in Osmancık during the transportation of prisoners, to come to İstanbul or Ankara». BOA, DH.EUM. 5.şb. 69/21, September 12, 1918.

[63] «Death of Italian citizen Carlo Delmento, a civilian prisoner of war in Burdur». BOA, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Records of Political Department (Hereafter HR.SYS.) 2134/6, October 11, 1917.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

Another camp where documents on the health problems and deaths of prisoners can be found is the Sivas prison camp. The Spanish Embassy wrote an official letter to the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the fate of Alexandre Sartori, an Italian citizen reportedly held in this camp. According to the official letter, Angele Sartori claimed that her husband, Alexandre, had been arrested and sent to Sivas about three years earlier, and that she had not heard from him since then. Therefore, she requested the authorities to find her husband, if he was alive, and send him to Istanbul to join his family. The Ottoman Government made the necessary investigation in response to the Spanish Embassy's request dated November 30, 1918. The Spanish Embassy's official letter was sent to the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior on December 19, 1918, requesting an investigation. The Ottoman Ministry of Interior ordered the Sivas Governorate to investigate the situation of the Italian prisoner. However, the governor's office's response was disappointing to the prisoner's family. According to the records obtained by the governor's office, Alexandre Sartori fell ill in the camp and was hospitalized. On March 4, 1917, Sartori's treatment was started, but it was not successful, and he died[64].

After the end of World War I, the Ottoman government conducted research to determine the number of prisoners who died during captivity and their graves. A copy of the reports prepared as a result of the study was presented to the British on February 25, 1919. According to this report, British prisoners who stayed in Samatya prison camp and died in hospitals were buried in various cemeteries in Istanbul. The report also included records of prisoners who died in camps outside Istanbul[65]. Although not about the dead Italian prisoners, these and similar records that the Ottoman government conducted studies on the dead prisoners and reported them to the relevant states provide essential information about the Ottoman Empire's prisoner policies.

One of the unfortunate events in Ottoman prison camps was fire. However, this is not a very common occurrence. The only record of a fire in the camps where Italian prisoners of war were held dates back to 1916. The prisoners were also affected by the great fire that broke out in Ankara in 1916. Since the houses they were being housed in were damaged, the prisoners had to be transferred to various locations. Due to the fire, French, Italian, and Russian civilian prisoners

[64] «Regarding his wife Angele's request for information about Alexandre Sartori, an Italian citizen sent to Sivas as a prisoner of war». BOA, HR.SYS. 2156/11, November 30, 1918.

[65] S. Ural, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sonrası İtilaf Esirlerinin Teslimi*, «Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi», 3:5 (2007), p. 44.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

were sent to multiple places. Armenian prisoners of Russian citizenship were sent to the districts of Mucur, Osmancık, Haymana, and Avanos in Ankara. Some prisoners were also transferred to Konya. From the correspondence between the Ankara Governorship and the Ottoman Ministry of Interior, it is understood that a total of 149 prisoners of war were held in the camp: 79 Russian, 6 British, 1 Romanian, 3 Serbian, 22 Italian, and 38 French, excluding civilian Armenians. Of these, 4 French and 2 Italians were left in Ankara due to their health conditions. Some of the remaining prisoners were sent to Konya, and some were sent to Aleppo and Dayr al-Zawr sanjaks in Syria[66].

3.2.2. Communication Facilities, Sending Parcels and Money

Article 16 of the International Hague Convention, signed in 1907, dealt with the communication and postal affairs of prisoners. Accordingly, letters, remittances, and parcels sent to prisoners of war, or sent by prisoners of war, were exempt from postal tax in all countries. In this way, both the communication of prisoners and their freedom of communication were facilitated[67]. Similar to other Italian prisoners of war in the Ottoman Empire, the United States (until April 1917) and Spain – maintaining their neutral status – played an active role as 'official intermediary states' in matters concerning Italian military or civilian prisoners. Italy refused to send collective aid to its prisoners throughout the war and even attempted to prevent it. Hence, packages sent via Spain were vital to the Italian prisoners in the Ottoman Empire[68].

The prisoners held by the Ottoman Empire did not have any problems in these matters. This was because the Ottoman Regulations on Prisoners of War were formulated in accordance with international

[66] «About the civilian prisoners of French, Italian and Russian citizens who were transferred to Ankara during the war, some of whom were sent to various places due to the fire and some of whom were waiting in Aleppo to be transferred to Dayr al-Zawr». BOA, DH.EUM.5.şb. 32/3, December 27, 1916.

[67] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 80.

[68] For further information on Italy's policy towards soldiers and civilians who became prisoners of war in the countries it fought against, see: G. Procacci, *Soldati e prigionieri italiani nella Grande Guerra*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1993, L. Spitzer, *Lettere di prigionieri di guerra Italiani, 1915-1918*, Milano 2016, M. Isnenghi, G. Rochat, *La Grande Guerra*, Milano 2004, G. Isola, *Gli strumenti della memoria: monumenti, radio, cinema per la celebrazione della Grande Guerra (1919-39)*, *La Memoria della grande guerra nelle dolomiti*, 2005, A. Gibelli, *La Guerra Grande, Storie di gente comune*, Roma 2014, M. Mondini, *La Guerra Italiana Partire, Raccontare, Tornare 1914-18*, il Mulino, Bologna 2018.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

law. Thus, it was easy to access canteen services, books, letters, clothing, and other items in Ottoman prison camps. For example, Belemedik Prison Camp was not surrounded by fences. Therefore, it was noteworthy as one of the camps with favorable living conditions for the prisoners. In addition to having a canteen in the camp, the prisoners communicated through letters. It was also very easy for them to receive money and packages. Books were also sent to them through the American Embassy[69].

According to the relevant provisions of the regulation on prisoners, cash and valuables were taken from prisoners against receipt. These were kept in a safe deposit box of the Prisoners' Commission. Whenever they needed money, the required amount would be returned from the cash in the safe. However, captured officers were free to decide whether to deposit their money and valuables in the safe deposit box. In addition to these, the embassies of neutral states, such as those of the Netherlands and the United States, handled the various goods and funds sent to the prisoners in the Ottoman camps. The International Red Cross Society also played an essential role in these aids[70].

For example, the 1915 correspondence between the Ottoman Government and the Army Command is a critical document on the content of these aids. According to the document, funds for prisoners of war in Ottoman camps were deposited in the Red Crescent account at the Federal Bank in Geneva. Minutes on how and for whom these funds would be used were sent to the Red Crescent through the Red Cross. This issue was clearly stated in the letter dated October 11, 1915, sent by Army Commander Enver Paşa to the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

According to the letter, the money was to be sent to the commander of the prison camp and to the hospital's chief physician if any prisoners were being treated. The receipts of the expenditures to be made in these places were to be forwarded to international organizations through the Red Crescent[71].

It was the Spanish Embassy that dealt with the situation of the Italian prisoners of war in the camp in Kastamonu. The Embassy played an essential role in several matters, including correspondence with their countries and families, various complaints, and their

[69] A. Altıntaş, Ç. Öngel, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 466.

[70] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 89; A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., p. 84.

[71] «About sending the money transferred to the Red Crescent through the Federal Bank in Geneva and the Red Cross to prisoners in the Ottoman Empire». BOA, HR. SYS, 2213/3, September 21, 1915.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

economic situation. For example, Italian prisoners previously sent here from Istanbul submitted a petition to the governor's office. In a petition signed by Antosyo Livadari on behalf of 12 Italian civilian prisoners, they stated that the 9 Ottoman lira they received monthly was not enough. Therefore, they demanded a wage increase. They also asked for 372 *lira* for their debts accumulated in the camp. The Governor of Kastamonu forwarded this petition to the government on February 17, 1918[72].

The Governor of Kastamonu sent another official letter to the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior in May. This letter concerns a petition signed by 15 Italian civilian prisoners who were sent from İzmir to Kastamonu. In this petition, the prisoners state they wish to meet with the Spanish Embassy regarding their personal situation. They had chosen a representative, Luigi Vesi, for the meeting. The government sent an official letter to the Governorate of Kastamonu on May 21, 1918, stating that it had approved the Italian civilian prisoners' request for a meeting[73].

Again, an Italian in the prison camp in Kırşehir faced food shortages. A petition signed by A. Jon Allette, one of the civilian prisoners in the camp, was sent to the authorities. According to the petition, Allette was a civilian prisoner who was transferred from Jaffa to Kırşehir 3 years ago. From that point forward, he received no assistance from the local government or anyone else. For a while, he was helped by some Syrians here, but they had also left. Therefore, he asked to be allowed to settle in İzmir for sustenance or to be set free[74]. The outcome of this prisoner's petition cannot be traced from other correspondence. However, the existence of the prisoner's petition, written in his own handwriting and preserved in the archive to this day, provides us with essential and specific information about the affair.

The opportunity for prisoners to be together with their families was one of the essential facilities provided by the Ottoman Government. A petition submitted in 1917 to the Directorate of Security is a critical example of familial togetherness among prisoners. This is a petition from the wife of Victor, an Italian citizen in the Belemedik Prison

[72] «Regarding the requests of 12 Italian prisoners in Kastamonu for an increase in their salaries and payment of their accumulated debts through the Spanish Embassy». BOA, HR.SYS. 2153/6, February 14, 1918.

[73] «A document stating that the Italian civilian prisoners in Kastamonu can communicate with the Spanish Embassy through a representative of their choice». BOA, DH.EUM. 5.şb 60/27, June 3, 1918.

[74] «Regarding the request of an Italian citizen, one of the civilian prisoners in Kırşehir, to be allowed to settle in İzmir in order to provide for his sustenance or to be released». DH.EUM. 5.şb. 71/40, October 14, 1918.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

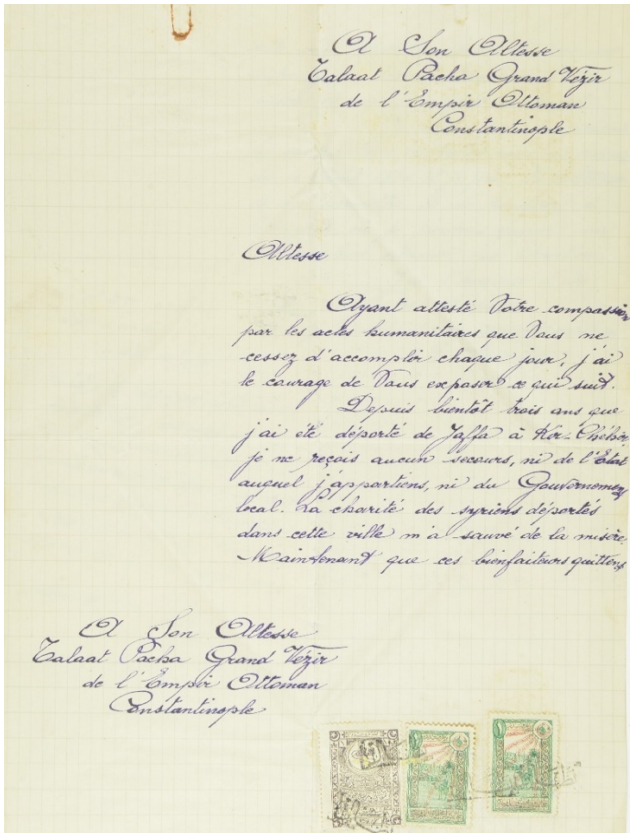


Fig. 3 - Petition of A. Jon Allette, an Italian civilian prisoner in the Kırşehir prison camp

Camp. Mrs. Luisa, who lived in Istanbul, asked for permission for her and her children to join her husband in the prison camp due to financial difficulties. This petition was forwarded to the government, and the family was allowed to go to Victor in the prison camp[75].

If prisoners had to be kept in areas without camps, houses and hotels were rented. In addition, the Ottoman Empire paid for the accommodation of captured officers[76]. The Ottoman Empire's payment of salaries to captured officers is also an important issue. In accor-

[75] «Regarding permission for Laze and her children in İstanbul to join her husband, Victor, an Italian citizen, in Belemedik Prisoner Headquarters in Konya, due to financial difficulties». BOA, DH.EUM.5.Şb 49/24, November 25, 1917.

[76] A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., p. 80.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

dance with the Hague Convention, captive commanders were paid the same wage as Turkish officers. There was an explicit provision in the Ottoman State's regulations on prisoners stating that "they would be paid the same salary as the salary paid to officers of equal rank in the Ottoman army" [77].

3.2.3. Putting Prisoners of War to Work

The state financed the feeding costs of civilian prisoners held in the camps. They were also provided with additional support when necessary. In addition, civilian prisoners were sometimes employed in various occupations[78]. International conventions have already established the legal framework for this situation. According to Article 6 of the Hague Convention, a state could use its prisoners of war as laborers. However, the employment of officers was forbidden. According to the rank and abilities of the prisoners, the lines of work they would work in would be determined. However, the prisoners' work could not be related to war operations. They also could not be excessively tiring. Captives could work both for the state and on their own account. The wages paid for work done for the state must be the same as for the state's own military personnel. Any money they have accumulated would be handed over to them upon their release[79].

Almost all states have used prisoners of war captured in wars for their own war aims. During World War I, the Ottoman Empire also formed labor groups consisting of prisoners of war for infrastructure projects such as railway and road construction[80]. The need for the labor force inevitably increased under war conditions. In addition, the number of prisoners captured by the Ottoman Empire was relatively high. For these reasons, the Ottoman Empire employed prisoners in accordance with both international conventions and its own regulations governing prisoners. In this context, some of the prisoners of war were placed at the disposal of the company that built the Taurus Tunnels. In addition, prisoners of war were employed at various farms, municipalities, mobile hospitals, mines, the construction of Haydarpaşa Railway Station, ports, the Ankara-Sivas and Kütahya-Tavşanlı highways, and forestry enterprises across the country[81]. One of the

[77] H. Key, *I. Dünya Savaşı Yıllarında* cit., p. 76; M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 52.

[78] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 38.

[79] A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., p. 84; M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 107.

[80] E. Rogan, *Büyük Savaş'ın Osmanlı* cit., p. 2.

[81] A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., pp. 85-86.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

locations where Italian prisoners were employed was the Labour Battalions (Amele Taburları). A comprehensive study on the labour battalions within the IV Army's purview area showed that 30% of the 20,992 individuals employed in the Syria and Palestine-Sinai regions were prisoners. This group included 70 Italian prisoners[82].

Seven hundred thirty-six prisoners were sent to work on the construction of the railroad in the Taurus Mountains. Again, 500 prisoners were sent to work on the railroad in Amanus. The salaries of Italian, Montenegrin, Russian, and British prisoners employed in the Taurus and Amanus Tunnels were paid by the companies. These payments were made weekly. In addition, the railroad in Baghdad was also one of the places where prisoners of war taken from the Allied Powers were employed. Of the thousands of prisoners of war employed here, 186 were Italian. The rest were British (610), Indian (3,381), Russian (1,102), French (66), and Serbian (587) prisoners[83]. However, Romanian, Serbian, and Italian prisoners were captured by Germany and Austria. During the war, the Germans and Austrians brought a large number of prisoners of war to Ottoman lands to work in their service. In this way, Romanian, Italian, and Serbian prisoners of war captured on many fronts in Europe, especially in Galicia and Isonzo, were sent to Anatolia.

The majority of the prisoners sent to Anatolia by the Germans were Italians. Italian soldiers captured in the battles of Isonzo were shipped to Istanbul. Some of them were sent to places like Maltepe (Istanbul), Eskişehir, and Rayak (Lebanon)[84]. The rest were put to work in the Balya-Karaaydın lead mine near Balıkesir and in the construction of Haydarpaşa Station. On November 9, 1917, the number of these Italian prisoners who arrived in Istanbul was 500. The Spanish Embassy informed the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 19, 1918, that 9 of these prisoners of war were being treated at Maltepe Hospital. The Embassy requested that the government determine the names of the prisoners, their residences in Italy, and the military units to which they belonged. It was also asked that those who wanted to send letters to their families be allowed to do so. The Ottoman government ordered the necessary research to be carried out and the related requests to be met[85]. Upon this order, the

[82] M. Karagöz, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'da IV. Ordu Menzilinde Amele Taburları*, *«Güvenlik Stratejileri»*, 15:30 (20190), pp.388-389.

[83] N. Kalkan Okur, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 97; A. Altıntaş, Ç. Öngel, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 467.

[84] S. Ural, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı* cit., p. 46.

[85] «Regarding a request for information on the identities of five hundred Italian prisoners brought from the Isonzo front and employed in the construction of the Balya-Karaaydın lead mines and Haydarpaşa Station, some of whom were treated

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

Ottoman Ministry of Defense had carried out the essential work. Still, in its letter dated May 4, 1918, it also stated that there were no Italian prisoners employed in Haydarpaşa. Nevertheless, lists showing the names of those working in the mines around Balıkesir, their nationalities, and the residences of Italian prisoners in their home countries were prepared and sent to the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs[86].

It is also possible to trace the death of an Italian named Giovanni Lunati among these prisoners of war in Istanbul. The prisoner of war in question had died on June 21, 1918, while being employed in Maltepe. A document was requested to be prepared to notify his family of his death[87]. Furthermore, in the official letter sent to the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs on August 11, it was explicitly stated that the employment of the Italian prisoners brought to Istanbul, the official procedures to be carried out against them, and other responsibilities were the responsibility of the Germans. It was also stated that there was no document of the assets of the deceased Italian prisoner of war[88].

Another construction site where prisoners of war were employed during World War I was the Baghdad railway. According to the data of the Ottoman General Staff dated December 1917, the number of prisoners currently employed along the Baghdad railway line is as follows:

Tab. IV - Table of World War 1 prisoners working on the Baghdad railway line

Work Area	Number of British Doctors	Number of British Soldiers	Number of Indian Soldiers
Northern Taurus	3	116	181
Southern Taurus	1	18	708
Amanus	4	54	1551
Ras al-Ayn	9	-	957
Tigris	3	279	1143
Total	20	467	4540

at Maltepe Hospital». BOA, HR.SYS. 2228/60, January 19, 1918.

[86] «About the absence of Italian prisoners in Haydarpaşa and the sending of the list of Italian prisoners employed in the mines of Balya and Karaaydın». BOA, HR.SYS. 2230/16, May 4, 1918.

[87] «Request to notify the family of Giovanni Lunati, an Italian prisoner who died while being employed by German forces in Maltepe». BOA, HR.SYS. 2230/90, July 8, 1918.

[88] «About the fact that all the affairs of the Italian prisoners of war detained in Maltepe belonged to the Germans, and that the deceased Giovanni Lunati had no proof of assets». BOA, HR.SYS. 2231/11, August 11, 1918.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

On the other hand, according to the information given to the British authorities by the Swiss M. Huguenin, director of the Baghdad railway line, after the armistice agreement, the average number of prisoners was as follows:

Section 1 1800-2000 in Taurus

Section 2 1500-2000 in Taurus and Amanus

Section 3 200-500 in Ras al-Ayn and Tell Halaf

Section 4, east of Tell Halaf, employed 2500 prisoners. The number of prisoners engaged in this section at the time of the signing of the Mudros Armistice Agreement was as follows: 610 British, 3381 Indian, 273 Nepalese, 66 French, 587 Serbian, 186 Italian, and 1105 Russian, totaling 6208 prisoners[89].

3.2.4. Escape Attempts and Security Measures

The quickest and easiest way for a soldier captured by the enemy in war is to desert. This is a common attempt. In such cases, the Hague Convention and the Ottoman Regulation on Prisoners of War provide legal guidance on how to respond to desertion attempts. Article 8 of the Hague Convention considers desertion as an act of disobedience and requires harsh measures to be taken against it. On the other hand, escape attempts by prisoners in Ottoman prison camps were widespread. This is because the prison camps established in Türkiye lacked protective fences or walls. However, some of the places of residence for prisoners were not camps. They consisted of hotels, schools, and similar buildings. Prisoners held in this way led socially engaged lives. However, this was a security problem and facilitated prisoners' escape attempts[90]. In addition to this, escape attempts by prisoners who were put to work were also very common. Most of those who attempted to escape were prisoners employed on construction projects such as the Ankara-Sivas railway, the Baghdad railway, the Taurus Tunnels, and the Kütahya-Tavşanlı road[91].

As demonstrated by the extant documentation, an escape attempt by Italian prisoners of war held by the Ottomans during the First World War ultimately resulted in a tragic conclusion for a number of the prisoners. On July 1, 1917, the Army Command submitted a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, informing them that several Italian prisoners of war had escaped. According to the information received, the Italian prisoners attempted to escape in a boat

[89] A. Ersaydı, *İngiliz Kaynaklarına Göre Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Türkiye'de Esirler*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Gazi University, Ankara 2017, p. 15.

[90] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., pp. 57-58.

[91] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 62.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

that they had procured from the coast. However, three land officers and one naval officer perished, and their bodies were subsequently washed up on the shore.

The report also included a list of Italians who had escaped. This list is as follows:

Private Delmonte from the Artillery Branch
Corporal Benevelli from the Signal-Telegraph Branch
Private Fazio from the Communication Company
Private Papa Salvatore from the Naval Artillery Branch
Private Passala Lotiri from the 2nd Engineer Company
Scaraffia Armando, from the crew of the ferry Latimbro
Corporal Sedda Salvatore from the 82nd Infantry Regiment
Senior Corporal Bifaşci (?) Menotti from the 82nd Infantry Regiment[92].

4. Exchange and Repatriation of Prisoners of War

The first prisoner exchange offer to the Ottoman Empire during World War I was made by the Papacy in 1914. In this offer, the Pope proposed exchanging prisoners who were unable to perform their military service. The Ottoman Government responded positively to this proposal. On February 6, 1915, the proposal was accepted. However, it was decided to wait for the results of the Papal initiatives before other states[93]. In 1915, the Papacy made another exchange offer. However, this new offer was only related to civilian prisoners. Declaring that the civilian prisoners held by the belligerents were in poor condition, the Papacy made attempts before the belligerents. In response, the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Army Command began preparing lists of civilian prisoners and determining the conditions of exchange[94].

During the war, civilian prisoners were occasionally exchanged between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire. Of course, these exchanges did not only take place in the form of civilian prisoners for civilian prisoners. It could also take the form of a civilian for a military prisoner or a soldier for a civilian prisoner. For example, Italian civilian

[92] «About the notification to the Italian Government of the information that the Italian prisoners whose names are written in the list escaped with boats and that some of them drowned». BOA, HR.SYS. 2225/43, July 1, 1917.

[93] A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., p. 88; M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 165.

[94] A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., p. 88; M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 176.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

prisoners were exchanged during World War I for three Ottoman soldiers captured by Italy during the Tripoli War[95].

Towards the end of 1915, Britain offered Germany a prisoner exchange treaty. The American Embassy forwarded a copy of this 13-article proposal to the Ottoman Empire. According to this exchange treaty prepared by the British, prisoner soldiers who could no longer fight would be returned to each other. The Ottoman Empire responded positively to this British proposal and began compiling a list of the soldiers it planned to return. However, these attempts could not be concluded positively due to the difficult conditions of war. Nevertheless, the issue of prisoner exchange remained on the agenda. From time to time, neutral states such as Spain, the United States, and the Papacy acted as intermediaries for prisoners held by the Ottoman Empire. However, after America entered the war in 1917, Spain took the lead on initiatives regarding prisoners held by the Ottoman Empire[96].

On March 5, 1917, the Ottoman Government made an offer to the Italian Government to return 6 Turkish prisoners in exchange for the release of 12 Italian prisoners. The official letter was forwarded to the Vatican through the German Embassy on March 29. In the reply signed by Cardinal Gasparri, it was reported that the Vatican had taken the necessary diplomatic steps with the Italian Government. The Cardinal informed the Ottoman Government on April 13, 1917, that the Italian Ministry of the Interior had responded positively to this offer[97]. These and similar exchange attempts continued throughout the war. According to the document dated June 6, 1918, a prisoner exchange agreement had been concluded with the British and French governments. The possibility of a similar agreement with Italy was discussed with the Spanish Ambassador. Following this meeting, the government set out to investigate the number of all Italians, both military and civil servants, currently in the Ottoman country. Accordingly, the Ottoman Ministry of Interior prepared a detailed list of the number of registered and unregistered Italian citizens living in Ottoman cities and towns[98].

[95] A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., p. 88; M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 41.

[96] The conditions stated in the text regarding soldier prisoners of war who were deemed unfit for combat were as follows: Loss of one or more limbs, damage to the spine to the extent of loss of mobility, permanent paralysis, permanent damage to the spinal cord, blindness, severe injuries, epidemic diseases such as tuberculosis, etc. A. Kaşıyuğun, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Esirler* cit., p. 89.

[97] «Request to negotiate with the Vatican Government for the release of 12 Italian prisoners in exchange for 6 Ottoman prisoners». BOA, HR.SYS. 2201/35, April 23, 1917.

[98] «Concerning the signing of a prisoner agreement with the Government of Italy». BOA, HR.SYS. 2246/25, June 6, 1918; «The agreement with the Government of Italy for the exchange of prisoners, and a document showing the number of

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

Tab. V - List of Italians in the Ottoman Empire according to the report dated June 30, 1918

Number of Italian Prisoners of War and Non-Prisoners		Number of Unregistered Italian Citizens	
Istanbul	3736	Istanbul	2029
Edirne	47	Edirne	214
Ankara	23	Ankara	3
Aydın	4039	Aydın	3676
Beirut	201	Beirut	102
Bursa	35	Bursa	33
Aleppo	113	Aleppo	10
İzmit	23	İzmit	12
Syria	164	Syria	122
Kastamonu	17	Kastamonu	45
Konya	59	Konya	81
Eskişehir	29	Eskişehir	32
Antalya	6	Antalya	3
Mersin	7	Mersin	8
Balıkesir	43	Balıkesir	76
Çanakkale	7	Çanakkale	33
Kütahya	26	Kütahya	22
Muğla	14	Muğla	12
Mosul (Iraq)	8	Çatalca	4
Trabzon	15	Bolu	224
Maraş	1	Maraş	1
Sivas	25	Sivas	15
Samsun	7	Adana	113
Urfa	3		
Jerusalem	234		
Lebanon	4		
Total	8893	Total	6870

As shown in the list, the number of Italian citizens living as prisoners of war and as free persons in various parts of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 was 15, 763.

As a result of the studies carried out, the identification of Italians in Ottoman territory was the outcome of the government's positive approach to the exchange. From the correspondence that followed, it is evident that the Italian government was also working to identify the prisoners held by the Ottoman Empire. According to a June 10, 1918, letter from the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the government, the Papacy requested the release of French, Italian, and British civilian prisoners held by the Ottoman Empire[99]. In line with this request, the

Italian citizens in the Ottoman Empire». BOA, HR.SYS. 2246/28, June 30, 1918.

[99] «Pope's request for the return of the French, Italian and British civilian prisoners named in the report». BOA, HR.SYS. 2246/30, July 7, 1918.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

Ottoman Government deemed it appropriate to return some prisoners[100]. For this reason, on July 14, 1918, the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs submitted to the government the list forwarded to them by the Papacy. The names, ages, and whereabouts of the Italian prisoners of war on this list are as follows:

Tab. VI - List of prisoners of war sent by the Papacy to the Ottoman government and demanded to be released

Italian prisoners of war		
Name	Age	Location
1. Madam Maria Moletti (Barzelotti)		Beirut
2. Gian Castelli	70	Istanbul
Eric Castelli	80	Istanbul
Eric Castelli's wife	70	Istanbul
Eric Castelli's daughters, Arnstein, Gabriel, and Lidia		Istanbul
3. Madam Nuilmilidos (?) and her daughter Andredos		Istanbul

The Ottoman Government instructed the Ottoman Ministry of Interior on September 12, 1918, to release the Italian prisoners of war listed in the Papacy's submitted list. From correspondence among the Ottoman Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Defense, it is evident that the necessary actions to return the Italian prisoners of war in Ottoman territories were initiated[101]. The Ottoman Ministry of Defense informed the government that some prisoners had been sent to İzmir for release and that it had been decided to hand some of them over to the embassies in Istanbul[102].

Apart from inter-state correspondence, it is observed that prisoners also applied to the authorities for their release from time to time, either individually or as a group. For example, Italian prisoners of war and Montenegrin civilian prisoners in Konya petitioned the Ottoman government for their release. They also cited the release of British and French prisoners as a reason for their request[103], but the archival records provide no information on how or when the

[100] «Regarding the authorization of the repatriation of French, Italian and British civilian prisoners». BOA, Record Office of the Sublime Porte, BEO 4533/339913, September 9, 1918.

[101] «Regarding the repatriation of British, French and Italian civilian prisoners». BOA, HR.SYS. 2246/39, August 20, 1918; «About allowing the French, Italian and British civilian prisoners held in Ottoman territory, whose names were listed, to go to their homeland through exchange». BOA, DH.EUM. 5.şb 68/38, September 12, 1918.

[102] «Release of Italian prisoners». BOA, HR.SYS. 2232/41, November 11, 1918.

[103] «Italian prisoners of war and Montenegrin civilian prisoners of war in Konya apply for release». BOA, DH.EUM. 5.şb. 74/13, October 30, 1918.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

prisoners made these demands. The probable cause is that they were sent with the prisoners who were later released. Because the application for the release of the prisoners coincided with the days when the Ottoman Empire withdrew from the war. In addition, the Italian authorities in Istanbul had declared that approximately 250 Italian prisoners of war in the Eskişehir prison camp were in poor conditions. Therefore, the prisoners were requested to be sent to Istanbul. Upon this request, the Ottoman Government made the necessary correspondence and ordered the Ottoman Ministry of Defense to bring the Italian prisoners to Istanbul[104].

In World War I, the Ottoman Empire, which failed to achieve success on all fronts except the Gallipoli Front, signed the Armistice Treaty of Mudros with the Allied Powers. Before the treaty negotiations, the British Government had instructed Admiral Calthorp not to make any concessions on prisoners of war[105]. Signed on October 30, 1918, two articles of this agreement were directly related to prisoners. Of these, Article 4 stated that "*All prisoners of the Allied Powers and Armenian prisoners will be unconditionally surrendered in Istanbul*". Article 22 states that "*Turkish prisoners of war shall remain in the hands of the Allied Powers. However, the release of Turkish civilian prisoners above military age will be considered*"[106]. Under this armistice agreement, the Ottoman Empire was obliged to release all its prisoners unconditionally.

On the other hand, the text of the agreement did not specify when the Ottoman prisoners would be handed over. Immediately after the treaty, the Allied Powers demanded that the prisoners in the camps be handed over to their nearest units. For this purpose, correspondence was exchanged between the Ottoman government and the local authorities regarding the number of prisoners, the departure time, and the departure location. The Allied prisoners were generally sent to Istanbul, from where they were repatriated[107].

After the armistice treaty, the Allied Powers appointed representatives to Istanbul to carry out the peace and treaty process. Among these states, Italy had sent Count Carlo Sforza to Istanbul as High Commissioner. The Italian representative attempted to rescue the Italian prisoners held by the Ottoman Empire, and as a result, the

[104] «About the order to send the Italian prisoners in Eskişehir to İstanbul». BOA, HR.SYS. 2232/46, November 23, 1918.

[105] S.F. Maurice, *The Armistices of 1918*. Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1943, pp. 22-23.

[106] S.F. Maurice, *The Armistices of 1918* cit., pp. 85-87.

[107] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 198.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

prisoners were brought to Istanbul[108]. In addition, civilian prisoners were allowed to move freely within the country. For this reason, many Italian civilian prisoners left the camps for Istanbul and İzmir[109].

As a result of the intensive efforts of the Ottoman Ministry of Defense, 515 of the 1,386 Italian prisoners held by the Germans in Tavşanlı and Maltepe were brought to Istanbul. These soldiers were handed over to the Allied Powers in January 1919. 740 Italian soldiers were handed over to the British in Foça (İzmir). The remaining 131 Italian prisoners were handed over to the Allied authorities in Mersin. However, in his note dated February 5, 1919, to the Ottoman Government, the Italian representative in Istanbul stated that, despite all his attempts, he could not determine where the Italian prisoners were sent or how many of them were returned to their country. Therefore, he requested detailed information to be provided to them. However, the Italian authorities were told that it was impossible to obtain accurate information about the number of prisoners. Because the Germans had taken away some Italian prisoners under German command and their files. However, a report on the whereabouts and areas of employment of the 1879 Serbian and 309 Italian prisoners held by the Turkish army, who had not yet been handed over, was presented to the Italian authorities.

Tab. VII – The number of Italian prisoners in the report and their areas of employment

Number	Location	Employment
20	Adana	Military units
87	Adana	Railway Construction
202	Maltepe	Railway Construction

However, the Italian authorities were not satisfied with this information and asked whether the prisoners who were employed elsewhere were sent to their countries. The reply to the Italians dated March 3, 1919, is significant for this study. Because in the relevant letter, it was stated that there were no Allied prisoners left in Türkiye[110].

5. Conclusion and Evaluation

In this study, the concept of *captivity as a prisoner of war* refers to the deprivation of the freedom of civilians living in enemy territory, along with soldiers captured or surrendered during World War I. After the end of World War I, the memoirs and testimonies of prisoners who

[108] M.C. Oğultürk, *İki Dünya Savaşı* cit., pp. 360-361.
[109] M. Özçelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda* cit., p. 199.
[110] S. Ural, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı* cit., pp. 46-47.

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

returned to their countries led to the creation of a body of literature on captivity during the war. However, the captivity dimension of the war remained out of historians' focus for a long time.

It was only in the early 20th century that an ordinary course of action for the treatment of prisoners under international law was established. The Hague Convention, concluded a few years before World War I, also addressed the treatment of prisoners. The Ottoman Empire, which participated in the Hague Conference, issued a regulation in 1914 on the treatment of prisoners within its borders. This regulation complied with the issues set out in the Hague Convention.

One of the questions this study aims to answer is to investigate the situation of both military and civilian prisoners in the prison camps established by the Ottoman Empire, which fought on many fronts during the war.

The prisoners of war in the Ottoman Empire during World War I differed in how they were acquired. Some of the prisoners consisted of soldiers captured at the front before and during the war in question. Another group consists of prisoners who were sent to prison camps in retaliation. The last group of prisoners were prisoners sent from states that were allies of the Ottoman Empire. Since the Ottoman Empire and Italy did not fight on an independent front, the Italian prisoners in the Ottoman Empire were those sent by other allied countries.

During World War I, the Ottoman Empire held approximately 25-30 thousand prisoners, the majority of whom were British. Among these prisoners were those captured in Tripolitania and Italian soldiers who were sent to Anatolia by Germany and Austria. According to the records of the Ottoman Ministry of Interior in 1917, there were many prison camps in Anatolia and Syria where these prisoners were held. The Ottoman State, which carried out meticulous work on the functioning of these camps, had established prisoner commissions in each camp. The commissions were tasked with keeping records of various practices, such as prisoner placement, feeding, and treatment.

The camps were generally located in city centers, which made it easier to address the prisoners' communication and health problems, and their integration into social life was also psychologically beneficial. In cities without camps, the documents show that houses and hotel rooms were allocated to accommodate the prisoners. The fact that the prison camps in other countries lacked fences or walls posed a security problem. Given the location's characteristics, it is possible to say there was a favorable environment for prisoner escape attempts. There is only one incident recorded in the Ottoman archival documents regarding the escape of Italian prisoners. In this case, all Italian

ISSN 1824-3010 (stampa) ISSN 1828-230X (online)

prisoners who attempted to escape were soldiers. It was not possible to find any record of an escape attempt by civilian prisoners.

Another data point for evaluating prisoners' living conditions is the respect shown to their beliefs. The Ottoman government did not neglect to ensure that a clergyman was on duty in each prison camp to meet the prisoners' religious needs.

Of course, some factors made life difficult for prisoners. The first factor that comes to mind is epidemics. The most common cause of death in Ottoman prison camps was malaria or typhus. Prisoners with diseases documented by a doctor's report were transferred to other camps with a request for air exchange. Another practice that gives an idea about the Ottoman State's approach to protecting the lives of prisoners is that many Italian prisoners who petitioned for better weather conditions were accepted and allowed to change camps more than once. Prisoners who could not recover their health in the camps they were in were also transferred to Istanbul for surgery. It should also be noted that the Geneva International Red Cross Society took responsibility for the prisoners' health needs and worked in cooperation with the Red Crescent, the Ottoman Empire's equivalent of the Red Cross. The Red Cross Society sent money from time to time to cover the treatment expenses of prisoners. These funds were directed to the health institutions in the prison camps, and the documents regarding the expenditures were sent to the international organizations through the Red Crescent.

Apart from illness, another unfortunate event that Italian prisoners experienced during their stay in Ottoman territory was fire. During the studies conducted in the Ottoman archives, it is understood that Italian prisoners were also damaged in the great fire in Ankara in 1916. It is understood from the Ottoman archive documents that the Italian prisoners were transferred to different places together with other prisoners when the houses where they spent their captivity were damaged by fire.

Considering the conditions of the period, Italian prisoners had sufficient clothing with them. When the prisoners lost their lives, their valuable jewelry, such as silver watches and gold rings, was handed over to their relatives along with their personal belongings.

There was no ban on communication between Italian prisoners and their families. In accordance with the Hague Convention, the Ottoman Empire did not prevent the prisoners from meeting their needs, such as receiving letters, various goods, and money. The prisoners met these needs through the Spanish, American, and Dutch embassies. During and after the war, when families of prisoners could not obtain information about their loved ones, they approached the Spanish Embassy, which provided updates on their loved ones' situation.

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As stated in the Hague Convention, prisoners in the Ottoman Empire worked in the public sphere for both state and personal needs. According to archival data, Italian prisoners sometimes worked as carpenters in the craft school and sometimes as laborers in the Suez Canal, Taurus, and Amanus tunnels. Some of the prisoners captured by Germany and Austria on many fronts in Europe, including the Galician and Isonzo wars, were sent to the Ottoman Empire to serve in the armies of these countries. Among these states, the majority of the prisoners sent to Anatolia, especially by Germany, were Italian prisoners. 500 Italian prisoners were employed in lead mines, Maltepe, and Baghdad Railroad construction, which were under the responsibility of Germany.

The Ottoman Empire, which left the war defeated, accepted the obligation to release all prisoners of war in the country in accordance with the Armistice Treaty of Mudros. However, before this, negotiations were held with the Italian Government regarding prisoner exchanges. In 1918, although there is no archival document providing a precise figure for the number of Italian prisoners in the Ottoman Empire, it is possible to say with certainty that 15,763 Italians were living there, both captive and free. Following the Armistice of Mudros, many free and captive Italians left the Ottoman Empire to return to their homeland via Istanbul or İzmir. In March 1919, the Ottoman Empire declared that there were no Allied prisoners of war in the country.

When a general evaluation is made, it is revealed that the practices of the Ottoman Empire, which failed to achieve the desired success on many fronts considering the conditions of World War I, towards prisoners were in accordance with the Hague Convention. While evaluating the living conditions of prisoners, it should be kept in mind that the general situation of the Ottoman Empire during the war was not very bright. Therefore, it is not difficult to infer that the prisoners' material needs to sustain their lives were not met to a great extent. Within the context of public health measures, it is understood that the Ottoman Empire could not achieve the desired results despite its outstanding efforts in combating epidemics.

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