

Piotr Nykiel

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6079-7849>

Jagiellonian University in Kraków

piotr.nykiel@uj.edu.pl

DOI: 10.35765/pk.2025.5003.13

Social Life of Ottoman Soldiers in the Rear of the Galician Front in 1916–1917

ABSTRACT


The Galician social life of the soldiers of the Ottoman XV Corps, which fought on the Eastern Front of the Great War in 1916–1917, developed on two levels: service and private. The former encompassed contacts during ceremonies, inspections, and visits, while the latter consisted mainly of informal meetings in their free time. For officers, these meetings typically took place in messes or during winter training in rear areas. Non-commissioned officers and rank soldiers, by contrast, were more likely to interact with the local population in whose homes they were quartered than with their comrades from allied armies. Despite differences in rank and language barriers, Ottoman officers and privates alike had equal access to cultural events in the major urban centers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where they were sent for treatment and convalescence. The encounters between members of the XV Corps, their allies, and the Galician population contributed to the dismantling of centuries-old stereotypes unfavorable to the Turks. This article is based on Turkish, Austrian, and Polish archival sources, memoirs and press reports, as well as selected secondary literature.

KEYWORDS: WWI, Galicia, Ottoman XV Corps, soldiers' social life

STRESZCZENIE

Życie towarzyskie żołnierzy osmańskich na zapleczu i tyłach frontu galicyjskiego w latach 1916–1917

Galicyjskie życie towarzyskie żołnierzy osmańskiego XV Korpusu, który w latach 1916–1917 walczył na froncie wschodnim wielkiej wojny, rozwijało się na dwóch płaszczyznach: służbowej i prywatnej. Ta pierwsza sprowadzała się przede wszystkim do kontaktów podczas różnego rodzaju oficjalnych uroczystości, inspekcji czy wizyt. Drugą stanowiły głównie nieformalne spotkania

Suggested citation: Nykiel, P. (2025). Social Life of Ottoman Soldiers in the Rear of the Galician Front in 1916–1917. ©  *Perspectives and Culture*, 3(50), pp. 173–193. DOI: 10.35765/pk.2025.5003.13

Submitted: 12.07.2024

Accepted: 06.08.2025

w wolnym czasie. W przypadku oficerów dochodziło do nich zazwyczaj w kasy-nach oraz podczas szkoleń przeprowadzanych w okresie zimowym na tyłach frontu. Podoficerowie i szeregowi żołnierze znacznie częściej integrowali się z miejscową ludnością, u której kwaterowali, niż z towarzyszami broni z sojusznicznych armii. Niezależnie od szarży i ograniczeń językowych równy dostęp do wydarzeń kulturalnych zapewniały osmańskim oficerom i szeregowym duże ośrodki miejskie w głębi monarchii austro-węgierskiej, do których trafiali na leczenie i rekonwalescencję. Kontakty społeczne przedstawicieli XV Korpusu z sojusznikami i galicyjską ludnością zaowocowały obaleniem licznych wielko-wiekowych i krzywdzących dla Turków stereotypów.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: I wojna światowa, Galicja, Osmański XV Korpus,
życie towarzyskie żołnierzy

During its approximately one-year deployment on the Eastern Galician Front in 1916–1917, the Ottoman XV Corps, fighting as part of the German Southern Army, participated in the final phase of the Brusilov Offensive (from August 1916), in repelling the Kerensky Offensive at the turn of June and July 1917, and in the Central Powers' counteroffensive in July 1917. The corps played a significant role in all these engagements and suffered total losses exceeding half of its initial strength (Nykiel, 2024).

However, this episode remains largely marginalized in world historiography. In Turkey, it has been the subject of only two monographs, by Cihat Akçakayalıoğlu (1967) and Hülya Toker (2016), both of which rely almost exclusively on sources from a single, now non-existent ATASE (Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Arşivi) Archive in Ankara. Moreover, the latter work contains significant fragments of the content of the former. In addition to these monographs, a small number of articles in Turkey discuss the participation of the Ottoman XV Corps on the Galician Front; however, they contribute little new information, as they are largely based on Akçakayalıoğlu's monograph. Notable exceptions include articles by Eminalp Malkoç (2015) and Oya Macar Dağlar (2009), who, in addition to ATASE, also referred to documents from the Archives of the Department of Deontology and History of Medicine of the Medical Faculty of Istanbul University and the Ottoman Archive in Istanbul. All of the aforementioned publications focus exclusively on the military aspects of the Turkish presence in Galicia, and either do not mention the social life of Turks in the rear areas of the front at all or only do so marginally.

Western historiography, on the other hand, at most mentions the military participation of Turkish troops in the Galician campaigns in one or two sentences. More often, this issue is completely ignored. Only the American historian Edward J. Erickson devotes a short subchapter to it (Erickson, 2001, pp. 137–142), but the information he provides is significantly incomplete and,

in some aspects, even inaccurate. An exception is the research conducted since 1998 by the Polish historian and specialist in Turkish studies Piotr Nykiel. His work culminated in a monograph first published in 2020, with a second, corrected and supplemented edition released in 2024. This book is currently, even compared to Turkish historiography, the most extensive and comprehensive study on the subject, based on archival sources, memoirs, contemporary press, and literature consulted in Turkey, Austria, and Poland.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the social life of Ottoman soldiers in the rear of the Galician front. This topic has not yet been studied separately, which is unsurprising given that the state of both Turkish and European research on the far more extensively studied military presence of Turks in Galicia in 1916–1917, as mentioned earlier, remains limited. The primary challenge faced by the author was the scarcity of source material. In the archives – practically only in Austria (Kriegsarchiv and Bildarchiv Austria) – surviving sources and iconography relate almost exclusively to official events, such as birthdays of the rulers of the Central Powers or anniversaries of their enthronement. Such celebrations, however, provided occasions for contacts, including less formal interactions, among the commanding staff of the allied armies. The main sources regarding the private relations of Turkish officers with their Austro-Hungarian and German comrades-in-arms, as well as of Ottoman soldiers with the Galician civilian population, are primarily the memoirs of two Turks: Mehmet Şevki Yazman (2011) and İbrahim Arıkan (2007). It is clear that these texts, like any memoirs, must be approached with caution, and the author did so by confronting them – where possible – with official documents preserved in ATASE and the Kriegsarchiv. This analysis demonstrates that, with very few exceptions, the aforementioned authors not only provide a truthful account of events on the front but also significantly supplement our knowledge and help to better understand certain situations. Indeed, Yazman sometimes engages in self-censorship, omitting events that were infamous for the Turks.¹ On the other hand, Arıkan openly condemns the reprehensible behavior of his colleagues and provides information about events carefully omitted from official reports.² It should be emphasized that both authors report on social contacts with allies and civilians in a remarkably similar manner, highlighting the same aspects, despite never having met each other and despite their memoirs being published nearly eighty years apart (Yazman, first edition 1928; Arıkan, 2007). Undoubtedly, it would be highly valuable to compare Turkish memoirs with

1 An example of this is the arrest by this officer of an Ottoman soldier who committed a robbery against a farmer, Oleksa Iskra, in the village of Nadorożniów (KA, sig. AT-OeStA/KA FA AOK Bevollmachtigte Ottomanisches XV. Korps Akten 4056, Op. 2519).

2 For example, the sadistic finishing off of wounded Russian soldiers by Sgt. Karacabeyli Ahmed of the 19th Company, 20th Infantry Division (Arıkan, 2007, pp. 157–158).

those of Austro-Hungarian or German soldiers. The problem, however, is that no known accounts by allied authors currently mention the Turks in Galicia.

For most Ottoman officers – and likely for all their subordinates – the Galician expedition was their first experience abroad, during which they had to live in a religiously and culturally unfamiliar environment. Everyday life at the front posed a difficult challenge: to follow the orders of the Austro-Hungarian and German commands³ and to cooperate in battle with allied units. In the rear of the front, whether in barracks, hospitals, or convalescence centers, they spent their free time alongside representatives of nearly all the nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germans.

Quartered in villages in the Berezhany area, they had to navigate the customs of Polish and Ruthenian (Ukrainian) peasants, which were entirely unfamiliar to them. The absence of a division between *haremlik* (the section for women and children) and *selamlık* (the section for men and guests) – and thus the necessity of staying under a Galician thatched roof in the same rooms as unfamiliar women – initially posed a significant psychological challenge for the Ottoman soldiers. However, they quickly adapted to the new conditions, recognizing that this was precisely what their hosts – or rather, the housewives, since husbands and sons were away at war – expected of them. As 2nd Lt. Mehmet Şevki Yazman wrote in early October 1916, just over a month and a half after his arrival in Galicia:

We would enter houses saying “dobro wieczor” [“good evening” – PN]. The poor Poles had already got used to it and, having no other choice, greeted their guests with a smile. I’ve already mentioned that Polish customs and the Galician climate brought together people as diverse as half a dozen Mehments⁴ and as many women and girls under one roof. That night, within half an hour, everyone found a new home, a new bed, and even a resolute girl (Yazman, 2011, p. 123).

Elsewhere, the same officer recalls a conversation with a woman in whose house his orderly was lodged. The topic concerned the orderly’s indifference to the advances of the landlady’s daughter. Interestingly, the soldier’s entirely incomprehensible – and, in the opinion of the Polish women, tactless – behavior stemmed solely from the order to “behave decently” that he had received from 2nd Lt. Yazman:

3 The German Southern Army (commanded by Gen. Felix Count von Bothmer) was part of the Austro-Hungarian Army Group of Gen. Eduard von Böhm-Ermolli, which in turn functioned as part of a front headed by the heir to the throne and, from November 21, 1916, the last emperor of the Danube monarchy, Charles I of Austria.

4 Mehmet was one of the most popular male names at the time. It was also commonly used to refer to an anonymous community of Ottoman soldiers.

There is only one thing that makes me very uncomfortable, and, to tell you the truth, I did not expect such a thing from such a good man. Listen, Lieutenant: I've been working tirelessly for sixteen years to raise this pretty girl. For God's sake, tell me the truth – is Josephine ugly?

... Now imagine that this very good boy, our guest and your orderly, Mehmet, never once looked at the girl's face, never once caressed her, and did not kiss her. For a week, my daughter has been worrying herself – and me – that there must be something wrong with her if this man treats her this way. Isn't that an insult to us? (Yazman, 2011, pp. 44–46).

After breaking the ice and with the tacit approval of their commanders, the Ottoman soldiers, despite the language barrier, integrated quickly with the local population. On long winter evenings, they often organized gatherings during which, sometimes partaking in alcohol, they taught local girls Turkish dances, accompanying them on folk instruments brought from their homeland. On occasion, Polish women even composed a song about the Turks.⁵

Occasions when Ottoman soldiers had to share quarters with their allies were rare. Sometimes, however, such situations caused difficulties, particularly for the more conservative soldiers. Soon after his arrival in Galicia, a company imam complained to 2nd Lt. Yazman that the Austrians with whom he lived “when getting out of bed in the morning, walked around the room without undergarments, completely naked,” despite the fact that “Allah demands to cover oneself, even in complete darkness” (Yazman, 2011, p. 57). He was also disturbed that his roommates would bring girls from the neighborhood and “engage with them” in the other room, exposing him to obscene noises (Yazman, 2011, pp. 57–58). Long-term exposure to the questionable behavior of his Austro-Hungarian comrades eventually led the cleric himself to sow scandal among the Ottoman soldiers, as he later entered into a closer intimacy with his landlady, a widow with two children (Yazman, 2011, pp. 127–129).

The lack of knowledge of German did not prevent the braver Ottoman soldiers from befriending members of the allied armies, although such friendships did not always end well. The acquaintance of Cpl. Mehmed of Uşak, from the Ottoman 20th Infantry Division, with a German soldier named Hartmann – whom he met during gas training in Berlin and who had learned imperfect Turkish while living in Istanbul for ten years before the war – was relatively harmonious. The two even explored the nightlife of Charlottenburg together (Yazman, 2011, pp. 175–199). By contrast, the friendship between Sgt. Durmuş, from the village of Akçabayır in the Nazilli district, and an Austro-Hungarian soldier named Joseph⁶ nearly ended in tragedy. After their service, they spent almost all

5 For its lyrics see: Yazman (2011, pp. 127).

6 As can be deduced from the spelling (he consistently appears as Jozef), he was a Pole.

their time together, enjoying all the attractions and pleasures that the town of Stryi had to offer. One day, they decided to visit a brothel together. Although there were no signs of trouble at first, the visit eventually revealed cultural differences that shattered their friendship. Despite repeated and forceful verbal warnings, Joseph continued to court the prostitute chosen by Durmuş. Viewing this behavior as a blatant insult and unable to express his indignation verbally, the Turk drew his knife. Although no one was ultimately harmed, panic erupted in the brothel, and the entire town police force was mobilized. Naturally, Durmuş's acquaintance with Joseph did not continue after this incident (Yazman, 2011, pp. 291–299).

With regard to the relations between Ottoman officers and their Austro-Hungarian or German comrades-in-arms, it should be noted that they took place on two levels: official and private. Official interactions included contacts on the front line, where the Turks often had to cooperate with allied units – particularly artillery, engineering, and other rear services the intendant and medical services – as well as participation in various official ceremonies. These ceremonies primarily consisted of courtesy visits by Ottoman princes, inspections by commanders of the Army Group or the Southern Army, and celebrations such as birthdays and anniversaries of the accession to the throne of the monarchs of the Quadruple Alliance.

On 4 January 1917, for example, Princes Abdürrahim Hayri and Osman Fuat visited their soldiers in Galicia. The program of their stay included a visit to the headquarters of the XV Corps and an inspection of the 19th Infantry Division. Three days later, they traveled to the headquarters of the Eastern Front in Brest on the Bug River (Akçakayalıoğlu, 1967, p. 63; Toker, 2016, p. 159).

On 9 January, the commander of the XV Corps hosted the commander of the Austro-Hungarian–German XXV Corps, Gen. Peter von Hofmann, whose forces occupied positions on the left flank of the Ottoman corps. This meeting was likely of a working nature and probably brief, as it was not until 22 January that the Austrian general, accompanied by the commander of the 54th Infantry Division, was invited by the commander of the XV Corps, Cevad (Çobanlı) Pasha, for lunch. The main guest, however, was the commander of the Southern Army, Gen. Felix Count von Bothmer, who in the morning had inspected the reserves of the Ottoman 19th and 20th Infantry Divisions at the training grounds in Horodyshchi and Demnia, delivering occasional speeches and awarding Turkish officers and soldiers with Iron Crosses.⁷

On 24 January, the commander of the Army Group, Gen. Eduard von Böhm-Ermolli, arrived at Podwysokie for an official inspection. After reviewing

7 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Kriegsarchiv (KA), sig. AT-OeStA/KA FA AOK Bevollmächtigte Ottomanisches XV. Korps Akten 4054 Nr. 913-1.300, 1917, Op. 1024.

the sub-units of the Ottoman 20th Infantry Division in Hucisko and the 19th Infantry Division in Kurzany, he returned to Podwysokie, where, at the headquarters of the German 36th Reserve Infantry Division – then under the tactical command of the Ottoman XV Corps – he met with its commander and officers. At noon, Gen. von Böhm-Ermolli arrived in Cześniaki, where, at the XV Corps' headquarters, he was introduced to Turkish officers and entertained to a gala lunch (Toker, 2016, p. 162). The inspection of the Army Group commander in the sector of the 19th Infantry Division was photographed by Kazimierz Kuzyk, a Pole who served in the Austro-Hungarian balloon unit (Ballonabteilung No. 22), which was then under the command of the Ottoman XV Corps.⁸

Photo 1. Inspection by Army Group Commander Gen. Eduard von Böhm-Ermolli (x) in Kurzany on January 24, 1917. The commander of the 19th Infantry Division, Lt. Col. Ahmed Sedad (Doğruer), standing to his left and facing the photographer, introduces officers of his unit. Photograph by Kazimierz Kuzyk.



Source: MCh, sig. MCh-H/74/36-08.

Three days later, on 27 January, Ottoman officers participated in a service held to celebrate the birthday of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The service took place at 09:00 in the church in Cześniaki and was conducted by the chaplain, 2nd Lt. Babinger.⁹ In addition to the commander of the XV Corps, Gen. Cevad (Çobanlı), the participants included the Chief of Staff of the Corps, Col. Şefik, accompanied by his adjutant and orderlies; several officers representing individual departments of the corps headquarters; the commander of the corps artillery,

8 Muzeum w Chrzanowie im. Ireny i Mieczysława Mazarakich (MCh): *Karty z fotografiami z okresu I wojny światowej wraz z rękopisem* [Cards with photographs from the First World War with a manuscript]; ten photographs with a common signature MCh-H/74/36 and the title "Kurzany 1916. Bem Ermoli – Turcy. Koło Brzeżan" [Kurzany 1916. Bem Ermoli – Turks. Near Berezhan]. For more on Kazimierz Kuzyk, see: Nykiel (2023).

9 KA, sig. AT-OeStA/KA FA AOK Bevollmächtigte Ottomanisches XV. Korps Akten 4054 Nr. 913-1.300, 1917, Op. 1043, document dated 25 January.

Lt. Col. Halid, with his adjutant; the chairman of the military tribunal with a delegation; and an officer commanding one of the infantry platoons (Toker, 2016, pp. 162–163). It should be emphasized that the initiative to participate in this event came from Cevad Pasha himself, who expressed this wish in a congratulatory letter on the occasion of the German Emperor's birthday, addressed to the commander of the Southern Army, Gen. von Bothmer. The organizer of the service, the commander of the XXVII Reserve Corps, Gen. Oskar von Ehrenthal, appreciating this gesture, did not fail to officially thank the command of the XV Corps for demonstrating "sincere brotherhood."¹⁰ A similar letter of thanks to Cevad Pasha was also sent on behalf of the commander of the 36th Reserve Infantry Division by Col. Schaumann.¹¹ However, the most significant expression of gratitude came from Wilhelm II himself. His thanks were conveyed on the Emperor's behalf by his personal aide-de-camp, Gen. Hans von Plessen, to the commander of the XV Corps.¹² Furthermore, Wilhelm II invited Cevad Pasha to Berlin, where the Ottoman commander arrived on 4 February 1917 and met the German monarch the following day at the Imperial Headquarters.¹³

On 18 April, Prince Ömer Faruk began an official visit to the front sector of the XV Corps. The following day, from morning until 3:00 p.m., he inspected the units of the 19th Infantry Division together with Gen. Cevad, an event documented in photographs taken by the aforementioned Kazimierz Kuzyk.¹⁴ On 24 April, the visitor, accompanied by the Chief of Staff of the XV Corps, inspected the training camp of the 20th Infantry Division. After dinner, he went to Berlin (Toker, 2016, pp. 183–184; Akçakayalıoğlu, 1967, p. 65).

10 Ibidem, Op. 1043, telegraph sent on January 27 at 18:25; Toker, 2016, pp. 162–163.

11 KA, sig. AT-OeStA/KA FA AOK Bevollmächtigte Ottomanisches XV. Korps Akten 4054 Nr. 913-1.300, 1917, Op. 1043, telegraph sent on January 27 at 17:20.

12 Ibidem, telegraph sent on January 31 at 12:30.

13 ATASE Arşivi (ATASE), sig. BDH-237A-727-985-059.

14 Cf. MCh, photos on cards with signatures: MCh-H/74/24, MCh-H/74/35, MCh-H/74/37, MCh-H/74/38 and MCh-H/74/39 as well as AKPZKB: sig. ZOS 1A/1/13, ZOS 1A/4/12 i ZOS 1A/7 no pagination. Photograph with sig. MCh-H/74/24 (one original print of which is also in the author's collection) has been reprinted (unfortunately without mentioning the name of the photographer) by an Ottoman biweekly "Harb Mecmuası." Mayıs 1333 [May 1917], 2(19), 295 and published as a postcard.

Photo 2. A commemorative photo taken by Kazimierz Kuzyk in front of the Greek-Catholic Church of St. Paraskeva in Kurzany: 1 – Prince Ömer Faruk, 2 – commander of the XV Corps Gen. Cevad (Çobanlı), 3 – commander of the 19th Infantry Division Lt. Col. Ahmed Sedad (Doğruer), 4 – Austro-Hungarian liaison officer at the XV Corps Headquarters Lt. Col. Egon Lauppert, 5 – German liaison officer at the XV Corps Headquarters Maj. Eberhard Count Wolffskeel von Reichenberg. This photograph was reprinted in “Harb Mecmuası” and published in Istanbul as a postcard



Source: Author's collection.

On April 27, at 10:00 a.m., chaplain Pryliński celebrated a mass in the church in Cześniaki on the occasion of Empress Zita's name day. The service was attended by officers and soldiers of all the allied armies, including at least fifteen Turks. It should be emphasized that the Ottoman officers were not merely courteously invited but had *themselves expressed a wish to be invited* – a gesture which, given that they were Muslims, represented a remarkable expression of respect toward their Christian comrades-in-arms.¹⁵ The same day also marked the eighth anniversary of Sultan Mehmed V's accession to the throne. Around noon – probably immediately after the mass – a reception was held at the headquarters of the XV Corps.¹⁶ In the evening, during a gala dinner at the officers' mess, Cevad Pasha delivered a speech in which he acquainted the allies with the history and combat record of the XV Corps. The following day, the Turkish general visited the headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian-German XXV Corps (which, as already mentioned, occupied positions on the left flank of the Ottoman corps), where he attended a dinner in the evening with its commander, Gen. Hofmann (Toker, 2016, p. 184).

15 KA, sig. AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA GAK Ottomanische XX. Division/Technischer Referent Patzak 699, Feldpost 205 dated 24 April 1917; BA, photos with sig. WK1/ALB108/33371 and WK1/ALB108/33372.

16 This event was recorded in photographs kept in the collections of the BA, sig. WK1/ALB108/33373 and WK1/ALB108/33374.

Photo 3. Turkish and Bosnian patients of Military Hospital No. 410 in Göding (now Hodonín, Czech Republic) celebrating the anniversary of Sultan Mehmed V's accession to the throne on April 27, 1917



Source: Author's collection.

On 9 May, Cevad Pasha held a reception at the headquarters of the XV Corps in Cześniki on the occasion of Empress Zita's birthday. Among the invited guests were the commanders of all units of the Southern Army and Maj. Prince Abdürrahim Hayri, who had arrived from Istanbul the previous day to assume command of the 1st Battalion of the 19th Artillery Regiment (Toker, 2016, p. 184).¹⁷

Photo 4. Prince Abdürrahim Hayri (1) visits the officers' mess of the German field howitzer battery No. 6/17. Next to the guest stands the host of the place, Capt. Lechner (2). The prince is also accompanied by the Austrian liaison officer, Lt. Col. Lauppert (3). Photo by Kazimierz Kuzyk



Source: AKPZKB, sig. ZOS 1A/7/without pagination.

17 A photograph taken by Kuzyk depicting the prince in the headquarters shelter of his squadron is in the collection of Archiwum Krakowskiej Prowincji Zakonu Karmelitów Bosych (AKPZKB) (sig. ZOS 1A/3/20). The same photograph (again without attribution) was reprinted by an Ottoman biweekly "Harb Mecmuası" (issue of Temmuz 1333 [July 1917], 2(20), 307).

The intensity of informal relations between Ottoman officers and their European counterparts depended largely on their knowledge of foreign languages. The lively social life that flourished each evening in the officers' messes behind the front lines was necessarily attended only by those Turks who spoke some German – and it must be admitted that, outside the headquarters of the XV Corps, their number was quite small. This is evidenced, among other things, by the fact that 2nd Lt. Yazman was the first Ottoman officer ever to cross the threshold of the officers' mess of the Austro-Hungarian 54th Infantry Artillery Brigade, and that did not occur until two weeks after the unit had been placed under the command of the Turkish 20th Infantry Division. On the one hand, the Austrians extended their guest the utmost courtesy; on the other, disregarding his religious principles, they rather insistently urged him to consume alcohol – in quantities and strengths that, while normal to them, could have proved nearly lethal to a Turk accustomed at most to an occasional glass of wine (Yazman, 2011, pp. 61–64). Time showed, however, that with such attitudes among their allies, the Turks had little choice but to grow accustomed to alcohol. As early as the late autumn of 1916, Yazman wrote that:

Twenty-four hours a day, we drank only beer, because according to the Germans, something like water should first of all fill the riverbeds, at most be used to boil potatoes, but as a drink it is unacceptable (Yazman, 2011, p. 138).

Photo 5. Two unidentified Turkish lieutenants (left) on a “boozy” visit to their allies. On the right: Warrant Officer S. Hein of the Austro-Hungarian 15 cm Howitzer Battery No. 3/8, and next to him, Lt. A. Lampel of the German Battery II/R.17. The Austrian and the Turk seated on the left exchanged their headgear. Photograph taken on 9 January 1917



Source: Author's collection.

Photo 6. A genre scene from *Kurzany*: an Ottoman officer on the left tastes a meal brought by a soldier (probably his orderly), the commander of the cavalry battalion of the 19th Infantry Division sits on a chair, and an Austro-Hungarian officer stands behind him holding a bottle of wine



Source: Author's collection.

However, the head of the I (Operational) Department of the XV Corps Headquarters, Maj. Vecihi, emphasizes in his memoirs that, although the Turks were not forbidden to drink alcohol, they never became intoxicated during the “beer evenings” organized with their allies (Malkoç, 2015, p. 661). It is difficult to assess unequivocally how accurate this observation is. The fact remains, however, that in the surviving reports of the Austro-Hungarian military police concerning offenses and crimes committed by Ottoman soldiers on or behind the front line, there is no mention of alcohol abuse. Only in Olomouc, more than 500 kilometers from the front, did the gendarmes occasionally have to return drunken Turkish patients to the hospital (Dağlar Macar, 2009, p. 50).

Photo 7. Kaiser's soldiers celebrating Christmas 1917 (the last one in Galicia) in their quarters in Jagliniec. The music is provided by a German accordionist and a Turkish violinist playing the traditional Black Sea instrument called the kemençe



Source: Author's collection.

Alcoholism was not the only threat confronting Ottoman officers and non-commissioned officers as they strengthened ties with their counterparts in the allied armies. Another such danger was gambling. In the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, within the files of the Embassy of the Ottoman Empire in Vienna, there is correspondence between the consular department and retired Col. Halil Bey, father of Warrant Officer Ali Asım, platoon commander in the 8th Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 10th Reserve Infantry Regiment. The documents show that, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he sent 200 kronen to settle his son's debts and intended to send another 200 kronen, as the first sum was reportedly insufficient to cover the liabilities. Colonel Halil Bey wished to ensure that the first remittance reached Ali Asım. However, the consular section in Vienna refused to issue a receipt, as the addressee claimed that he had not received any money.¹⁸ It appears that the father, who may have used his former connections in the army to place his son in the rear of the front rather than in a combat unit, was cynically exploited and deceived by him.

An excellent opportunity for getting acquainted and strengthening contacts were the numerous trainings organized in autumn and winter in the rear of the front by the command of the Southern Army. In these instances, essential integration had already taken place – not only during the evenings spent in the officers' messes, but also through joint theoretical and practical activities. It was during field exercises as part of the engineering training in Drohobych that 2nd Lt. Yazman befriended several German officers. Interestingly, he valued contacts with the Germans far more than those with the Austrians:

18 Cumhurbaşkanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), sig. HR.SYS, 2434/3, 1-8.

Germans, and especially German officers, can be gentlemen and good friends. Compared with these loyal and courteous men, with whom I had fond memories and friendship at the time of my departure from the Austrian lands, the Austrian officers, whose kindness I cannot deny, did not, however, show the same liking for us as the Germans (Yazman, 2011, p. 135).

Photo 8. Participants of the engineering training held in October 1916 at Drohobych. Second Lt. Mehmet Şevki Yazman is indicated with an “X”



Source: Author's collection.

The polite but distant attitude of the Austrians toward the Turks was certainly rooted in historical experience. It must have been humiliating for them to rely on the military aid of a former adversary. The Germans, by contrast, were free from such encumbrances. Moreover, those whom 2nd Lt. Yazman encountered in Galicia were, in many respects, very different from the officers he and his colleagues had previously known in the Ottoman Empire. Often, less capable or even inept officers were sent to such postings. Even those who were not assigned to Turkey as a form of punishment considered service under the Sultan's orders as a kind of exile. Consequently, one could hardly expect them to display particular warmth toward their hosts. The Germans fighting in Galicia had no such prejudices; moreover, they appreciated their Ottoman comrades-in-arms for their achievements a few months earlier in the Dardanelles and for their conduct during the early days of deployment on this Eastern European front.

The decline in combat activity during the winter of 1916/1917 fostered a notable intensification of social and cultural life. It was not only the Turks who visited the allied officers' messes; increasingly, Austrians and Germans also came, teaching the Turks to dance, playing chess with them, and sharing meals. In the officers' mess of the 20th Infantry Division, where both Turkish and "German" cuisine were served, the Turks – surprisingly – showed greater preference for the latter, while the Germans and Austro-Hungarian officers were

fascinated by the flavors of the Orient. Entertainment was provided by a divisional band, “organized and trained by a German bandmaster,” which played European melodies suitable for dancing (Yazman, 2011, pp. 145–146). On long winter evenings, the Ottoman soldiers also staged theatrical performances, to which comrades-in-arms from allied units adjacent to the Turkish positions were invited (Yazman, 2011, pp. 200–209).

Photo 9. An unnamed Austrian sergeant, serving as cook for the Ottoman 20th Infantry Division, was responsible for preparing “German” dishes in the officers’ mess of this unit



Source: Author's collection.

Photo 10. Concert of the combined bands of the Ottoman 20th Infantry Division and the German 1st Reserve Infantry Division, organized in the autumn of 1916 in front of the headquarters of the above-mentioned Turkish unit in Lipica Górna. The event was likely held on the occasion of the visit of the Sultan's personal representative to the German General Staff, Marshal Halepli Zeki Pasha (standing first on the right, wearing the lanyard of the Sultan's adjutant on his right chest)



Source: Author's collection.

Photo 11. The band of one of the Ottoman divisions, returning to their homeland with European instruments gifted to them by their allies



Source: Author's collection.

Ottoman officers and soldiers were occasionally afforded a taste of high culture even in the rear of the front. On 8 June 1917, at 5:00 p.m., a charity concert took place in the officers' mess of the XV Corps headquarters in Cześniaki. The performance featured Paldo, an artist of the Vienna Opera, accompanied by professors Sulzer, Eisner, and the renowned Czech composer and violinist František Alois Drdla (1868–1944). Seated tickets for officers were priced at 10, 5, and 3 crones depending on the location, while standing tickets for soldiers

cost 1 crone. The proceeds were donated to charity – likely to support the care of the wounded – and were distributed as follows: 50 percent for Ottoman soldiers, and 25 percent each for Austro-Hungarian and German soldiers.¹⁹

A far richer cultural program than that available in the frontline villages and towns awaited Ottoman soldiers in the major cities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where the wounded were sent for treatment and convalescence. Beginning in January 1917, officers and soldiers of the XV Corps receiving care in Vienna were allotted 30 tickets per week to the Volksoper and 50 tickets to Wednesday circus performances at the Varieté Schumann. They were also offered opportunities to visit museums – such as the Military Museum, the Museum of Agriculture, and the Museum of Fine Arts – and to ride trams through the city. Each organized outing, arranged by a professional tourist office, included a meal and a cinema screening. Similar recreational and cultural amenities were made available to Ottoman patients at the convalescence center in Pest (Dağlar, 2006, pp. 62–63).

A prolonged convalescence far from the front in the cities of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and Germany also facilitated the development of intimate relations with local women. 2nd Lt. Yazman recounts in detail the story of Sgt. Osman's infatuation with Miss Lili Grünbergsheim, who attended to him in the hospital at Göding (now Hodonín). Although the nurse was prepared to commit herself to him for life – even, as it appears, with her mother's blessing – the Turkish non-commissioned officer chose to return to the front as soon as possible. He feared that the language barrier and cultural differences might prove insurmountable obstacles to the stability of their relationship (Yazman, 2011, pp. 167–174).

In the same town, Warrant Officer İbrahim (Arikan) also experienced a passionate romance. He attracted the attention of Maria, whom he mentioned only by her first name, the owner of a restaurant and a hotel requisitioned by the Austrian military authorities as a reserve hospital. Through joint German and Turkish lessons, the two quickly grew close. When the ensign's health improved, they took walks around the city, went to the cinema together, and even visited Maria's three-story house regularly. Occasionally, her brother, who worked in the administration of the local sugar factory, accompanied them. When it became clear that Arikan would soon be discharged from the hospital and return to the front, Maria arranged with the hospital commander to transfer him to a convalescence center in Vienna, where she maintained a second home. There he would have remained under the care of her mother until the end of the war and their planned wedding. He would not even have

19 KA, sig. AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA GAK Ottomanische XX. Division/Technischer Referent Patzak 699, letter No. 3465 from the liaison officer of the General Staff to the commander of the XV Corps dated June 6, 1917.

had to worry about his livelihood, as Maria's financial resources would have ensured a comfortable life for both. After a few weeks in the Austrian capital, however, Warrant Officer Arıkan chose to reject the proposal and return to the front. Perhaps he was motivated by the same fears as Sgt. Osman, or perhaps by his pride, which would not allow him to become dependent (Arıkan, 2007, pp. 114–127).

Much greater courage was shown by Lt. Mehmet (?), who, while convalescing from his wounds in Wiesbaden, married a German woman. The ceremony was performed by an imam and attended by the bride's parents, the lieutenant's father, Ottoman and German officers, and several civilians, whom he had met at the "Allegiance to the Allies" table in the "Berliner Hof" café on what was then Wilhelmstraße. A reception for the male portion of the wedding guests was also held.²⁰

Photo 12. A wedding photograph of Lt. Mehmet (?), presumably taken in front of the bride's house in Wiesbaden. On the right sit the parents of the bride, with the father of the groom positioned between them. On the left, wearing a white turban, is the imam who officiated the marriage. Photo by court photographer C.H. Schiffer, Wiesbaden



Source: Author's collection.

In the final phase of the 20th Infantry Division's presence in Galicia, during preparations for its return to the homeland, another couple took their place on the wedding carpet in Stryi. The groom, Sgt. Mustafa Bekiroğlu, born in 1893 or 1894, hailed from the Kocatopal clan of Akçahisar in the Salihli district of İzmir province. Unfortunately, the personal details of his bride remain unknown. What is known is that she converted to Islam before the wedding – voluntarily – and took the name Mediha. The young couple insisted on marrying, despite efforts by Mustafa's company and platoon commanders to dissuade

20 Three photographs with a handwritten description and a stamp of the café in the author's private collection.

them. The ceremony was conducted by the company imam – the same one who had previously scandalized the soldiers with his liaison with a widow – while Mustafa's comrades, in spite of the challenges, endeavored to make the wedding as lavish as possible, and as close as could be to the custom he might have experienced in Turkey. When the 20th Infantry Division returned to Istanbul, Mediha accompanied her husband and was never heard from again. According to Mustafa's plan, she awaited his return to Akçahisar under the watchful eye of her father-in-law until the end of the war. Whether she lived to see it, however, remains unknown (Yazman, 2011, pp. 277–278, 283–290).

To sum up, it may be stated that the official and private contacts of Ottoman officers and non-commissioned officers with representatives of the allied armies developed on several levels: joint participation in official ceremonies, winter trainings in the rear of the front, and the spending of free time together. Meanwhile, the privates – despite language barriers – maintained close relations above all with the Galician population. These interactions, often quite intimate, contributed significantly to changing the image of the Turk in this part of Europe. Numerous attestations of this transformation are found not only in the memoirs of the Ottoman officers and non-commissioned officers cited here, but also in contemporary press, both Galician and Ottoman. The long-standing image of the “bawdy Turk”²¹ – the invader, preserved especially from the 17th century – gradually gave way to a more favorable vision: the Turk as the Muslim foretold by the Ruthenian seer Wernyhora, who, having watered his horse not in the Horyn (as the original prophecy stated) but in the Dniester – the very basin where the Ottoman XV Corps fought – symbolically contributed to the restoration of Polish independence.

REFERENCES

Archival sources

Archiwum Krakowskiej Prowincji Zakonu Karmelitów Bosych [Archives of the Krakow Province of the Order of Discalced Carmelites – AKPZKB]: Kazimierz Kuzyk's collection of photographs, sig. ZOS 1A.

ATASE Arşivi [ATASE, Ankara: Files: Birinci Dünya Harbi (BDH)]

Cumhurbaşkanlık Osmanlı Arşivi [BOA], Istanbul: Files: Hariciye Siyasi (HR. SYS)

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Bildarchiv [BA], Vienna

21 On one of the side scenes of the 17th-century painting “The Dance of Death” from the Chapel of St. Anne in the Church of St. Bernardine in Krakow, a Turk and a Jew are depicted, with a quatrain under them beginning with the words “Bowdy Turks ugly Jews / How Death is not disgusted by you.”

- Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Kriegsarchiv [KA], Vienna: Files: KA, sig. AT-OeStA/KA FA AOK Bevollmächtigte Ottomanisches XV. Korps Akten 4054 Nr. 913-1.300, 1917; Files: KA, sig. AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA GAK Ottomanische XX. Division/Technischer Referent Patzak 699.
- Muzeum w Chrzanowie im. Ireny i Mieczysława Mazarakich [Irena and Mieczysław Mazaraki Museum in Chrzanów – MCh]: A card with photographs from the WWI period, sig.: MCh-H/74/36.

Other sources

- Akçakayalıoğlu, C. (1967). *Birinci Dünya Harbi*. Vol. VII. *Avrupa Cepheleri, I nci Kısım, (Galiçya Cephesi)*. Ankara: T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı Harp Tarihi Dairesi Resmi Yayınları.
- Arıkan, İ. (2007). *Harp Hatıralarım. Bir Mehmetçiğin Çanakkale-Galiçya-Filistin Cephesi Anıları*, eds. S. Soydemir & A. Satun. İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları.
- Dağlar, O. (2006). Birinci Dünya Savaşında Osmanlı Ordularının Galiçya Cephesi'ne Gönderilmesi ve Cephe Gerisinde Yaşananlar. *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları*, X(V), 45–71.
- Dağlar Macar, O. (2009). Galiçya Cephesi'nde Osmanlı Birlikleri ve Sağlık Hizmetleri (1916–1917). In: F. Günergun (ed.), *Osmanlı Bilimi Araştırmaları / Studies in Ottoman Science*, X(2), 35–58.
- Erickson, E.J. (2001). *Ordered to Die. A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*. Westport, Connecticut–London: Greenwood Press.
- Harb Mecmuası*. Mayıs 1333 [May 1917], 2(19), 295; Temmuz 1333 [July 1917], 2(20), 307.
- Malkoç, E. (2015). Vecihi Beyin Gölgede Kalmış Birinci Dünya Savaşı Anıları: 15. Kolordumuz Galiçya'da – Złota Lipa Kenarında Bir Sene. In: *100. Yılında Birinci Dünya Savaşı Uluslararası Sempozyumu / International Symposium on the World War I on its Centenary, 03-05 Kasım / November 2014, Budapeşte / Budapest*. Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, 647–682.
- Nykiel, P. (2023). Kazimierz Kuzyk (1892–1963). Forgotten Photographer of the Ottoman Army and Dynasty. In: F. Korkmaz (ed.), *9. Milletlerarası Türkoloji Kongresi Bildiriler Kitabı / 9th International Congress of Turcology Proceedings Book*. İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınevi / Istanbul University Press, 747–764.
- Nykiel, P. (2024). *Mahometanie Wernybory. Turcy na froncie Galiçyjskim w latach 1916–1917*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Libron.
- Toker, H. (2016). *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Galiçya Cephesi 15'nci Kolordunun Harekâtı*. Ankara: Genelkurmay Personel Başkanlığı Askerî Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt (ATASE) Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları.
- Yazman, M.Ş. (2011). *Kumandanım Galiçya ne Yana Düşer. Mehmetçik Avrupa'da*, ed. K. Şarman. İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.

Piotr Nykiel – Habilitated Doctor, specialist in Turkish studies, historian, and former diplomat. He serves as Deputy Chairman of the Commission on War and Military History of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, is a corresponding member of the Turkish Historical Society, and a member of The Gallipoli Association (UK), the Society for Military History (USA), and Gallipoli & Dardanelles International (UK). Author of (2008). *Wyprawa do Złotego Rogu. Działania wojenne w Dardanelach i na Morzu Egejskim (sierpień 1914 – marzec 1915)* [*The Expedition to the Golden Horn: Military Operations in the Dardanelles and the Aegean Sea (August 1914 – March 1915)*], and *Mahometanie Wernyhora. Turcy na froncie galicyjskim w latach 1916–1917* [*The Muslims of Wernyhora: The Turks on the Galician Front, 1916–1917*].

