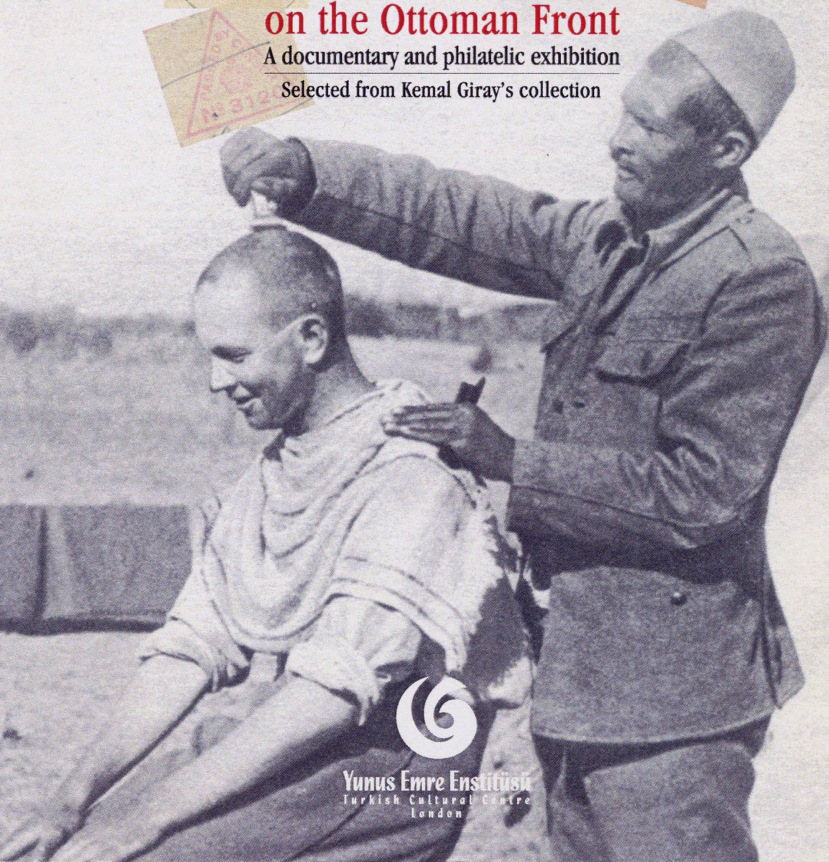


# PASSED BY CENSOR

POWs in the Great War  
on the Ottoman Front

A documentary and philatelic exhibition

Selected from Kemal Giray's collection



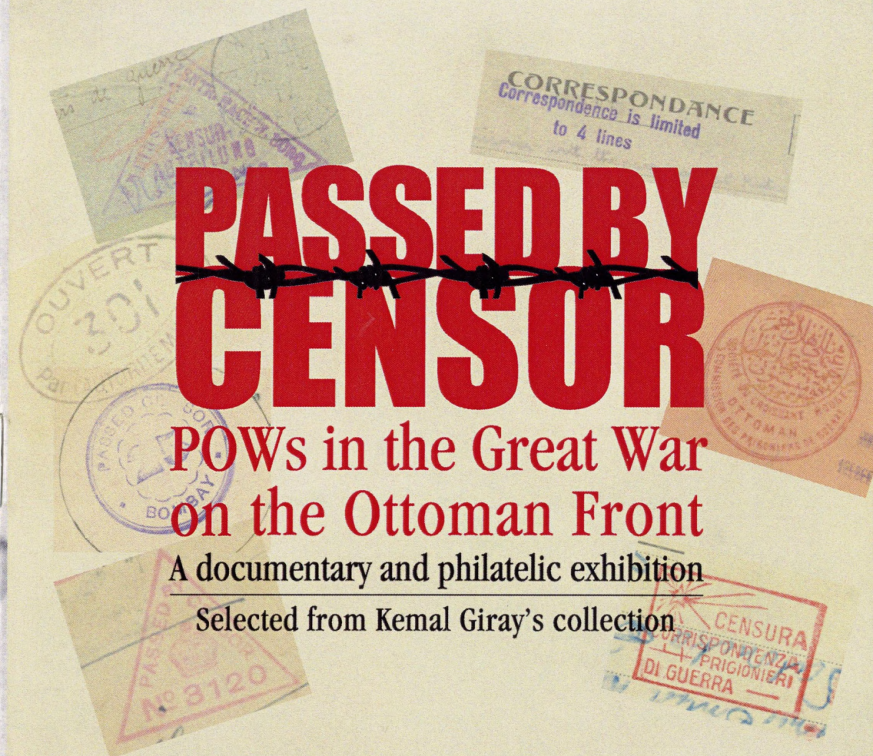
Yunus Emre Enstitüsü  
Turkish Cultural Centre  
London

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13-17 July 2015, The Houses of Parliament, Upper Waiting Hall

21-31 July 2015, Yunus Emre Institute London



Yunus Emre Enstitüsü  
Turkish Cultural Centre  
London

100  
YEARS OF  
PEACE





Photograph of a communal area of the "First Camp",  
Sidi Bishr, Egypt

"The first casualty of war is truth"  
Aeschylus

During the Great War, the Ottomans fought against Britain, France, Russia, Italy and Romania along many fronts such as Gallipoli, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Russia. Thousands of Ottoman troops were captured during these battles and, for months afterwards, lived in camps located in several different countries.

Also a significant number of English, Australian, New Zealander and Indian soldiers who fought for the British Army were captured on the various fronts and held in camps located in several cities in Anatolia.

This exhibition seeks to cast light on the lives, both physical and emotional, of prisoners of war from both sides of the Ottoman Front. It is based on philatelic material, letters, postcards, original photographs and other documents which were collected over the years by the Turkish philatelist Kemal Giray. The collection offers all of us the chance to see how people who experienced the horror and pain of the war which erupted at the beginning of the 20th century, lived and kept themselves in touch with life in the PoW camps.

Excerpts from prisoners' correspondence, all of which "passed by Censor", give a real picture of life inside PoW camps from World War I, one of the most devastating in world history, from a human perspective. Prisoners were trying to keep themselves attached to life, to express their yearning for their family, children and homeland. They were playing hockey, staging plays, forming football teams and music bands. All of them were trying to recover their own realities lost during the war. Nevertheless, humanity was soon to lose reality again and experience a new terror, World War II.

For a world without war...



'We are now allowed to write two letters like this, and four postcards a month. I have told you nearly all I am allowed to write. As of the first Kut-al-Amara (Es Sinn) fight I was commanding the Maxim Battery at Ctesiphon and throughout the siege. I was also forward observation officer in the fort throughout the siege. I was through all the heaviest fighting, and although my horse was hit three times and I got a bullet through my helmet at Ctesiphon I was unhurt...'

1916 (1 October) Cover with its contents from Captain Stockley of 66th Punjabis of the Indian Army prisoner no.30.

## The Great War on the Ottoman Front

1914

28 June 1914

Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was killed in Sarajevo by a young Serbian named Gavrilo Princip.

27 July 1914

Austria declared war on Serbia.

3 August 1914

Germany entered Belgium after declaring war on France.

10 August 1914

Two German ships named *Goeben* and *Breslau* entered the Marmara Sea through the Dardanelles Strait.

29-30 October 1914

The ships, with names now changed to *Yavuz* and *Midilli* and flying the Ottoman Flag, sailed to the Black Sea and bombarded Odesa and other Russian harbours.

1 November 1914

Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire.

5 November 1914

Britain and France declared war on the Ottoman Empire.

14 November 1914

The Ottoman Empire went to war with the Central Powers, including Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Bulgaria.

1915

21 November 1914

Britain invaded the Persian Gulf.

14 December 1914

The Sankamış Operation began after the Russians began to move to Erzurum through Sankamış.

23 December 1914 –

15 January 1915

The Ottoman army attempted to retake Kars and Ardahan, but lost 50 thousand men due to the cold. In January 1915, they were defeated.

19 January 1915

A British fleet attacked the Dardanelles Strait, without success.

18 March 1915

A further attempt was made to pass through the Dardanelles Strait, this time by ships from both Britain and France, but again without success.

25 April 1915

The landing in Gallipoli by British forces sent from Egypt encountered strong Ottoman resistance.

6-7 August 1915

The result of a ground offensive by the Allied states against Arburnu and Anafartalar in Gallipoli remained inconclusive.



8 December 1914 –

8 January 1916

After the failure of the Allied forces, all military units withdrew from Gallipoli.

28 January – 3 February 1915

Ottoman forces took action to occupy the Suez Canal. This operation, named The First Canal Campaign, was unsuccessful. Following resistance from the British army, they retreated.

16 February 1916

Erzurum was occupied by Russian forces.

23 April – 5 August 1916

Again, Ottoman forces tried to occupy the Suez Canal. But again they failed.

22 April 1916

British forces renewed their attack, trying to rescue military units under the command of General Townsend, besieged in Kut al-Amara. Their attack was a failure.

19 April 1916

The British forces besieged in Kut al-Amara surrendered.

1917

15 December 1916

After the battle, which took place at the beginning of the year and became more violent with the uprising of Sheriff Hüseyin, the prince of Mecca.

22 December 1916

British forces occupied the whole of Sinai, forcing the Ottoman troops to retreat to Gaza-Bank.

11 March 1917

British forces occupied Baghdad.

8 December 1917

British forces entered Jerusalem.

18 December 1917

After the 1917 ceasefire was signed between Russia and Germany, a truce was also signed in Erzincan between Russia and the Ottomans.

January 1918

The Ottoman Empire joined the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations.

30 October 1918

The Armistice of Montrose was signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied states.

1918

*'I wish I could write to my daughter separately, but we are only allowed to write once a week. That is why I could not write to her. I am sure, you never leave them without pocket-money. Above all, these are the most dangerous times of their lives. For that reason, they should always be able to get their hands on some money. They should never have their eyes on someone else's earnings. Don't cry for me, only pray. Kiss Turhan on the cheeks for me and buy a chocolate for him.'*

1919 (10 November) Letter from Rıza (Yusuf Ziya) Malta prisoner no.2684 to his wife. German Letter Sheet and envelope with oval Malta P.C.5 censor cachet. Yusuf Ziya Bey was a retired Major and a member of İttihat and Terakki Cemiyeti (The Committee of Union and Progress).



## Ottoman PoWs in The Great War

On June 28, 1914, a Bosnian student of Serbian origin murdered Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria and precipitated a series of events that resulted in World War I, "The Great War."

The Ottoman Empire, allied with the Germans & Austrians, entered the war on November 4, 1914.

The Ottoman army, which was composed chiefly of Turks but also included Arabs, Caucasians, Jews, Kurds and other ethnic groups, was soon fighting on many fronts : Gallipoli, Sinai, Palestine Hejaz, Mesopotamia, Caucasus, Libya, Romania and even Poland.

Out of nearly 500,000 serving in the Ottoman Army, over 200,000 became PoW's to Britain, Russia, France, Romania and Italy.

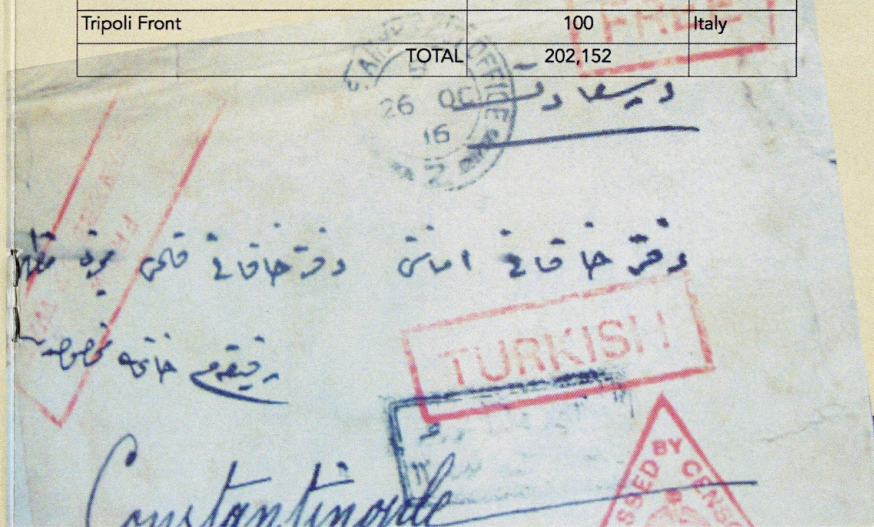
More than half of the Ottoman PoWs were in the hands of the British and were scattered around various camps in the Empire.

The rest were mostly captured by Russians. However, following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, these were all released.

France had a few thousand Ottoman prisoners and those held in other countries can be counted in the hundreds.

Lack of classification of archival documents gives us only approximate numbers.

BATTLEFRONT	Approx. number of PoWs	COUNTRY
Gallipoli	8,000	Britain
Gallipoli	2,000	France
Sankamış (Eastern Anatolia, Russian border)	15,000	Russia
Eastern Front (around Erzincan and Erzurum)	40,000	Russia
Galicia	10,000	Russia
Romania	605	Romania
1 <sup>st</sup> Suez Canal Battle	717	Britain
2 <sup>nd</sup> Suez Canal Battle	3,000	Britain
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Gaza Battles	3,000	Britain
Ramadi, Iraq Front	1,600	Britain
Gazza – Beersheba Palestine Battles	85,000	Britain
Qurna Battle, Iraq Front	1,000	Britain
Kut al-Amara Battle	8,000	Britain
Baghdad – Mosul Battles	10,000	Britain
Macedonian Front	30	Britain
Asir Front (Saudi Arabia)	10,000	Britain
Yemen Front	4,100	Britain
Tripoli Front	100	Italy
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>202,152</b>	





1918 (28 March) Cover with a long letter from Private Grayer of Royal Marine Light Infantry prisoner no. 60, arrived London on 14th of May. He writes 'We play Hockey here regularly on a small field of ground outside our quarter.... Trouble is Hockey Balls as we have very few...' They have ordered some from Constantinople.

Lieut. J. H. Grayer.  
Prisoner of War - No 60.  
at "Hedges"  
Turkey - in - Prison.

28-3-18.

My dear Friend.  
I received a letter from you about a fortnight ago, telling me that you were just going to your new hospital down in the back of France. I suppose you must be settled down by now & back at work, but I am sure you are.  
I just heard from another fellow who is about my own age, but he is not a soldier, which I was very sorry to hear about. I am sorry, but I am sure you are.

No 60.

LONDON E.S.  
PAID

MAY 14 18



To

Miss E. Corwell.

Highlands.

Debden Park

Southampton

England.

## PoWs in Turkey during the Great War

At the time of the 1918 Parliamentary Report on the Treatment of British prisoners of war in Turkey, compiled before the end of the war, there were 9,565 British and Indian PoWs held in Turkey. It was believed that the total number captured had been 16,583, and of these 13,309 had fallen into Turkish hands on the capitulation of Kut al-Amara, on 29th of April 1916. This leaves 3,274 captured at Gallipoli, or in Egypt and Palestine, inclusive of Australians and New Zealanders.

On the Caucasian Front, the Ottoman Army fought against the Russians and struggled for control of Azerbaijan, Georgia – in the region of Armenia. At first the Russian Army gradually advanced south into Turkish territory, but the Bolshevik Revolution resulted in the collapse of the Russian forces. The Ottomans took the offensive and in the Autumn of 1918, drove deep into Russian Caucasia. The Turks acquired a considerable number of Russian prisoners of war throughout this campaign. Also small number of French were captured, mostly in Gallipoli. However, there were more French civilian internees than military.

Unlike the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians, the Turks did not establish many large concentration-style prison camps. Instead they chose to house their prisoners of war in houses and buildings in Turkish towns. The Turks did take advantage of Allied PoW labour during the war. The Ottomans established working camps and detailed Entente prisoners to railway construction projects, especially through the Cilician Mountains and in eastern Syria. These railway routes were strategic lines of communication which supported Turkish military operations on the Mesopotamian and Palestinian Fronts.



Turkey No 3. — English Detention Camp, Kiangiri (Asia Minor).  
Group of Prisoners.



Photocard published by the 'Comité International De La Croix-Rouge,  
Genève' showing English Detention Camp in Çankırı



'...on advice from Ladies Emergency League London. I am told to write you for requirements. This I have done several times without reply. I have here 117 British and 103 ... all in need of clothes and money. If something is not done soon Lay of these will die through cold.'

1917 (18 December) Red Crescent stationery card from Simo of 1st Division prisoner no.170 to Netherlands Legation, Istanbul with red 19.2.1918 arrival cds.

Kemal Giray is a professional philatelist and editor/author of Ottoman Post in Palestine trilogy. Also he is a member of the Royal Philatelic Society and International Association of the Philatelic Journalists.

"Being a professional philatelist I have formed several philatelic collections over the years. Over a decade ago I have acquired my first PoW material which was a British soldier held in Kastamonu, Turkey. Reading the message on reverse I have imagined their feelings of the war and life as a prisoner. Although philately in mind it is a dull subject but in reality it was something. Each document has a history behind can easily be a subject to a film. Then I have decided to collect both sides of the war related to Turkey. Thanks to my philatelic contacts around the world I have managed to get most items I wanted to have but this is a never end story and still hunting for exquisite materials. I believe exhibiting and telling the story of these soldiers is the least I can do for their soul."

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The exhibition is organised by  
Yunus Emre Institute

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