

Turkish Perception of the Anzacs in the Dardanelles Campaign

Çanakkale Savaşında Türklerin Anzak Algısı

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Abstract

The great offensive of the Allied forces against Gallipoli during World War I has been studied extensively in Turkey because of its impact on the outcome of the Great War and its high record of human losses. The internationalization of the anniversary of the Gallipoli Campaigns with the participation of people and academics from participating countries, New Zealand and Australia in particular, may also have played a part in this rising public awareness. New journals and special issues dedicated to Dardanelles studies have helped to unearth important details and previously untold stories of the participants. Nevertheless, in Turkey, the participation, contribution, and impact of the Anzacs on the Dardanelles Campaign have not received the interest they deserve. Even a cursory look at the articles and books dedicated to the Dardanelles Campaign reveals a lack of interest in the Anzacs' participation during the battles—a participation which even led to the naming of the cove in the Gallipoli peninsula after the Anzacs for the high losses they sustained. Worse perhaps is that the immense literature in English about the Anzacs and the Dardanelles Campaign has been overlooked in Turkish literature. In this presentation, I will therefore present what we know in Turkey about the Anzacs and suggest some ways to increase public awareness about them.

Keywords: Anzacs, Dardanelles Campaign, World War I

Öz

Müttefik kuvvetlerin 1. Dünya Savaşı sırasında Gelibolu'ya yönelik büyük taarruzu, savaşın sonucu üzerindeki etkisi ve yüksek insan kaybı nedeniyle Türkiye'de kapsamlı bir şekilde incelenmiştir. Gelibolu Harekatı yıl dönümü anma törenlerinin Yeni Zelanda ve Avustralya başta olmak üzere savaşa dahil olan ülkelere insan ve akademisyenlerin katılımıyla uluslararası hale getirilmesi de bu artan kamuoyu farkındalığında rol oynamış olabilir. Çanakkale araştırmalarına ayrılmış yeni dergiler ve özel yayınlar, önemli detayların ve daha önce anlatılmamış hikayelerinin gün yüzüne çıkarılmasına yardımcı oldu. Ancak Türkiye'de Anzakların Çanakkale Savaşı'na katılımı, katkısı ve etkisi hak ettiği ilgiyi görmemiştir. Çanakkale Savaşı'na adanmış makalelere ve kitaplara üstünkörü bir bakış bile, Anzakların savaşa dahil olmasına dair ilginin olmadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Kaldı ki, Anzakların katılımı ve savaşta verdikleri yüksek kayıplar, Gelibolu yarımadasındaki bir koya Anzakların adlarının verilmesine yol açmıştır. Belki de daha kötüsü, Anzaklar ve Çanakkale Savaşları ile ilgili çok geniş İngilizce literatürün Türk edebiyatında gözden kaçırılmış olmasıdır. Bu makalede, Türkiye'de Anzaklar hakkında bildiklerimiz ve onlar hakkında halkı bilinçlendirmenin yolları önerilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anzaklar, Çanakkale Savaşı, 1. Dünya Savaşı

Introduction

Turkish literature on the Gallipoli campaign can truly be defined as immense. Indeed, in the past two decades, the number of scholarly and amateur works on the Gallipoli campaign has increased enormously. The focus has however been on the cadres of the military, their memories, and the minute details of the heroic battles that took place in and around the Gallipoli peninsula. Military historians in particular have so far unearthed almost every stage of military campaigns, build-ups, and strategies that brought about the victory. Biographies of the heroes and veterans are being published on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary and special issues of journals and editions dedicated to the Gallipoli campaigns appear in increasing numbers. Last month, YTSAM [Yeni Türkiye Stratejik Araştırma Merkezi/Research Center for Strategic Research on Modern Turkey] dedicated its bimonthly

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journal to the Gallipoli Victory and published a volume of nearly 1600 pages with the contribution of over 120 scholars.¹

Infamous Anzacs in the Turkish Literature

Nevertheless, the presence of the Anzacs on the Dardanelles Campaign is overlooked in Turkey. Even a cursory glance at recent publications reveals that information on the Anzac soldiers and their role and relations with the Turkish soldiers during the campaign is very scant and drawn from the literature produced by the Anzacs themselves. In other words, translated works dominated the field of research on the presence of the Anzac at Gallipoli. These works, on the other hand, were used in order to refer to the heroism of the Turkish soldiers through the eyes of the Anzacs. A series of books named “Mehmetcik ve Anzaklar/Turkish soldiers and the Anzacs”, despite the title, quoted Anzac diaries to reflect how bravely the Turkish soldiers had fought against the Allies.² Examples can be multiplied. Suffice it to say that in the YTSAM special issue of Dardanelles, there is no article on the Anzacs. This observation has driven me to conduct a survey on the Anzacs in Turkey-based literature.

Lack of Memories to Construct the Anzacs Image

Before exploring the subject, I must point out that unlike those of the Anzacs, Turkish soldiers, including military cadres, left very few diaries and letters behind them. Unfortunately, even fewer of them mention the Anzacs. Interestingly, Turkish soldiers and even official war diaries did not mention the adversaries by race or nationality, but usually referred to them as “the enemy”. A study on the Turkish press during WWI also revealed that the enemy side was officially mentioned as the Allies, and therefore the Anzacs were named in very few exceptions.³ This ambiguity can however be clarified, since we know where each nation had fought in the Gallipoli peninsula. Therefore, despite such shortcomings, I have been able to gather enough basic information to highlight the presence of the Anzacs in the front and their relations with the Turks, and try to explain the reasons behind the lack of academic interest.

First of all, a common perception exists that the Anzacs had fought against the Turks in the Gallipoli yet were also victims of the war. Even more interestingly, Turkish literature on the Anzacs is almost unanimous in declaring Australian and New Zealanders as innocent soldiers. This notion is drawn from the assumption that these people were brought into the front by the British Empire by force. Furthermore, they were not told where and against whom they would fight. Thus, according to many Turks, Anzacs were also victims of a bloody war fought for the interest of Imperial England. Strange as it may sound, I believe that this concept of the Anzac adventure developed as a result of the pioneering studies of Turkish Professor Mete Tunçoku on the Anzac and the Gallipoli, who introduced the Anzac literature into Turkey. In the interviews he conducted with the Anzac veterans who fought at Gallipoli, most of the soldiers stated that they were not told that the enemy were the Turks. Indeed, Anzac soldiers in general had desired to fight against the Germans in France or somewhere else in Europe. For instance, Russell John James Weir said that “I had no knowledge of the Turks and Turkey at all. We had no idea where the first battle would be after training in Egypt for 4 months”.⁴ Another veteran, J. J. Ryan, also reiterated that “we did not know where we were going. Did not know anything about Turkey or Turkish people.”⁵ William Daniel Bewis stated that when they left Australia, they had no idea where they were heading; “We were not in a war with the Turks”, he said.⁶ C. J. Hazlit added that he thought he was being taken to France.⁷ Ordinary soldiers, at least, had no idea of the intentions of the British Command. As some Anzac veterans like Claude Fankbouser stated during the interview, Turkish soldiers, if not the commanders, thought that they were fighting with the English people in the front.

¹ Yeni Türkiye 65, 2015.

² Karatay, 1987

³ Esenkaya, 2003

⁴ Tunçoku 2008, 152.

⁵ Tunçoku 2008, 157

⁶ Tunçoku 2008, 160

⁷ Tunçoku 2008, 164

Turkish Concept of the Enemy and the Anzacs

This notion, I believe, also fits with the stereotypical images of the enemy within Turkey, which is a hierarchy with the English always on top. In his article, “The Concept of Enemy”, Gladstone argues that “each side believes the other to be bent on aggression and conquest, to be capable of great brutality and evil-doing, to be something less than human.”⁸ He adds that “ these images exist on the individual as well as on the group level.”⁹

Within this concept, Anzacs as an ‘enemy’ remains very ambiguous in the minds of ordinary Turkish people. Whether this concept is illusory or real can be debated according to the theory of Arthur Gladstone. To strengthen my point, I can refer the reader to the famous poem of Mehmet Akif Ersoy, which is called ‘Gallipoli Martyrs’. In his poem, Ersoy makes a list of enemies at Gallipoli and puts the Europeans on top of the list. . . . Since this poem is known almost by all Turkish people, it might have very much impact on the formation of the image of the enemy. Therefore we cannot overlook its effects on the Turkish consciousness of Dardanelles and typology of the enemy . . . in the Turkish stereotypical images of the enemy, the real enemy was the English.

With regard to the Anzacs, there is clearly a divergence from the stereotypical image of the enemy.

Why in Turkey the Anzacs in general and Australians in particular are not seen as enemies but rather welcomed every April 25th for the Anzac Commemorative Event can also be evaluated within the framework of psycho-cultural interpretation theory in conflict resolution, as described by Marc Howard Ross.¹⁰ In Turkey, people read the participation of the Anzacs in the Gallipoli campaign together with the nationalization process of New Zealand and Australia, and sympathize with them. It is also believed that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s struggle against the British-led coalition during the war of independence invoked such people as New Zealanders and Australians for their success in gaining a sense of nationality and independence from British Empire.

Thus, for many Turks, what had happened at Gallipoli between the Anzacs and Turks should remain there, and should not sow the seeds of enmity between these two nations. Immigration of many Turks to Australia for the sake of a better living in the 1960s and hospitality shown towards them as citizens of this country may also have played some role in building a positive image of the Australian in Turkey. Be that as it may, the Turks are in a mood to close old pages of history and establish conflict-free relations with Australia. Therefore Australians are also victimised and even regarded as victims of British imperialism--same as the Turks. Well-known war time stories, including how the Anzacs had established friendly relations with Turkish soldiers at the battle field, exchanged food, photos, and cigarettes, and during the 24-hour ceasefire allowed each other to bury the dead, seems to have helped build a friendly Anzac image in Turkey.

Sagas about the Gallipoli wars in Turkey also helped to alter the stereotypical concept of the enemy with regard to the Anzacs. The saga of Omer the Anzac is particularly important since it is widely known in Turkey: According to the story, Joseph Miller received a fatal injury at Gallipoli and was cured by the Turkish medics. When he woke up, he was surprised at his treatment by the Turks, as he had been told that the barbaric Turks treated prisoners of war badly. While he was in hospital for treatment in America, he met with another Turkish doctor, and his life was saved a second time by a Turk. He then decided to convert to Islam, taking the name Ömer.¹¹ The novel of famous Turkish writer Buket Uzuner, published also in English with the title “The Long White Cloud,” also had a great impact in building a positive image towards the Anzacs in Turkey. The novel tells the story of a young New Zealand woman coming to Gallipoli in the year 2000 to find the lost grave of her great-grandfather, who died in the Battle of Gallipoli. There she meets an eighty-five year-old Turkish granny, who turns out to be her paternal aunt and also the daughter of an Anzac soldier, Alistair Jon Taylor, who had disguised himself as a Turkish war veteran in a quiet Anatolian town.¹²

⁸ Gladstone 1959, 132

⁹ Gladstone 1959, 133)

¹⁰ Ross 1995, 525-44.

¹¹ For the impact of sagas in Turkish society, see Gençcan 1994)

¹² Buket Uzuner, 2001

Burying the Hatchet

Thus, it can safely be stated that the Turks “buried the hatchet” when it comes to the Anzacs. As described by Ross in his psycho-cultural interpretation theory, “without necessarily rejecting older concerns”, conflicting parties can create a peaceful world that they can survive in thanks to cultural exchanges, mutual, and sharing similar feelings about original losses. Blaming the external parties may even escalate the development of friendly relations, as is the case between Turkey and Australia.¹³ As Ross states, “central to conflict management proposals which arise from psycho-cultural interpretation theory is the importance of taking seriously participants’ cognitive and effective interpretation of the conflict, no matter how incomplete, biased, or just plain a wrong third party believes it to be”.¹⁴ Thus, in light of this theory, we can approach and understand why very little opposition exists towards the Anzac Commemorative Event in Turkey every April 25. As Vamık D. Volkan highlights, “mutual acknowledgement of loss and hurt” enables each community to complete a grieving process and establish a new relationship.¹⁵

Having said that, however, I do not mean to imply that all groups in Turkey approve this image of the enemy with regard to the Anzacs. There are al-Kaida led radical groups in Turkey who disapprove the Commemoration Event and declare all those who welcome the Anzacs as infidels or collaborators with the crusaders. Last year, a columnist at a website (www.islam-tr.com) condemned President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister R. T. Erdoğan for allowing the Anzac Commemorative Event to take place. The columnist asserted that “yesterday they landed at the Gallipoli peninsula to occupy Dardanelles and killed all Anatolian Muslims irrespective of age, today they are hand in hand with the servants of imperialism and crusaders . . . their collaborators want us forget our ‘Dardanelles Epic’ which is the symbol of our salvation.” The article ended with the statement that “those elements who are friends of the barbaric Anzacs are surely our enemies.” Despite such statements, I want to reiterate that apart from a very isolated minority who disrespect this historical memory, the vast majority of Turkey realises that this is a historical memory with due respect and not a cause of present day ill feeling between the respective nations.

In compliance with the Turkish perception of the Anzacs as victims, in Turkish literature, published memoirs of Turkish veterans recall the Anzac soldiers for their heroism and gentlemanly behaviour. In his book “Atatürk and the Anzacs”, Uluğ İğdemir, former director of the Turkish Historical Society, described the Anzacs as those who appreciated sincerely “heroism and nobility of the Turkish soldier”.¹⁶ A Turkish veteran who spoke at Anzac Day, organized by the Turkish Embassy at Canberra, made the following speech: “We Turks came to know and love the Anzacs as manly soldiers who sacrificed themselves at Gallipoli front in order to fulfil their duty as best they could. And I believe that you, Anzacs, also returned to your homes with feelings of admiration and respect towards the Turkish soldiers for fighting so bravely in order to defend their homeland at Gallipoli.” He emphasized that “although so much blood had been shed at Gallipoli and both sides lost their most dear sons, I believe we can find some degree of consolation with the fact that this war has helped to build such friendly relations between the two nations.”¹⁷

It might be concluded that the cultural and national perspectives in relation to Gallipoli prevent Turks and Anzacs from making fundamental attribution errors (i.e. blaming the other side without thinking about external causes) although it might be likely in such a case.¹⁸ If we classify Turks and Anzacs as non-western nations, the issue might be less surprising.¹⁹ An interesting memoir with regard to the manly behaviour of the Anzac is that of General Fahrettin Altay. In his memoir, he mentions that the Anzacs were cheerful soldiers and conveys to us a dialogue between himself and Anzac soldiers during a death burial agreement:

-Are you English?

¹³ Ross 1995, 534

¹⁴ Ross, 1995, 535

¹⁵ Volkan 1998, 1990

¹⁶ İğdemir 1978

¹⁷ Karatay 1987, 145

¹⁸ Jones & Harris, 1967

¹⁹ See Miller, 1984 for a discussion about culture and attributions.

-“No we are not English we are Australian and the New Zealanders”, they said.

-Why are you at this front?

-English people are our brothers. We share the same religion and culture.

According to Altay, these dialogues developed a kind of friendship, and the Anzacs began to show that they also enjoyed the behaviours and characters of our soldiers. Soon, they began to pull off the bottoms of their uniforms as a war time souvenir for the Turks, who in exchange could only offer a few coins, as the bottom part of our uniform was not so easily detachable. Later on, the two sides began to talk to each other through gestures as they exchanged chocolate and candies. The ceasefire commission had never approved such communication and tried to forbid them. But no one took notice of these prohibitions, and as soon as the observers had left, the soldiers resumed chatting. Once General Altay had witnessed an Australian soldier taking the measurement of a Turkish soldier during a cheerful conversation. As time passed in the changed ambiance, the soldiers even began hugging each other.

We learn from General Altay that when English soldiers had thrown chocolates, Turkish soldiers returned them.²⁰ Esat Pasha adds an important detail about this exchange. Having agreed on dead burial ceasefire, he says, Turkish soldiers went to the trenches of Australian soldiers to collect the dead. Then, all of a sudden, Australian soldiers got out of their trenches and started up friendly conversations with the Turkish soldiers. Strikingly, Australian soldiers allowed us to collect rifles that belonged to the soldiers killed in combat. As the Turkish army needed weapons and ammunition, the collection of 2688 rifles and 1493 broken rifles made a substantial difference to their equipment levels.

Such scenes described by the Turkish General were apparently not rare in the Gallipoli front, particularly between the Turks and the Anzacs. As described by Ashley Ekins, the trenches at Gallipoli were so close that soldiers from both sides could talk with each other, exchange presents, and even communicate in sign language.²¹ These communications must have helped to mitigate their prejudices against one another; in the end, the relationship with enemy soldiers became personalized.²² Let us not forget that soldiers in the trenches were also able to see each other and could not help communicating at least to make ceasefire agreements. According to the Turkish historian, Ali Ulvi Özdemir, this atmosphere helped in the emergence of what he calls “the motive of getting closer with the enemy in between fighting”.²³ What helped to shape this motive was firstly the closeness of trenches with fighting parties in Gallipoli. Secondly, the battles lasted longer than expected or planned. Thirdly, both sides needed to ameliorate living conditions in the trenches. So many soldiers died in the trenches that both sides needed time to remove their dead, forcing the ceasefires.

From a different perspective, within the framework of realistic conflict theory, the combat periods might exemplify conflict as the ceasefire hours exemplify cases of cooperation. In such metaphorical thinking, winning the war becomes the limited and deferred goal, while mutually acknowledged, humanitarian needs like death burial breaks are the ever-present and prevailing goals.²⁴

Conclusion

As can be seen, there is very little information in Turkish literature about the Anzacs, but on the other hand, there is no enmity either. Turks welcome Anzacs and respect their commemorations held every year at Gallipoli. They express their sympathy with the Anzacs and are very happy to hear that the heroic defence of the Turkish soldiers helped the Anzacs gain a sense of nationality. Therefore, opposition to the yearly Anzacs’ gathering in Gallipoli remains minimal. Clearly, the Gallipoli story of the Anzacs did not end with the evacuations of 1915-16, but continues post-Gallipoli to the present day. The battles in the Gallipoli peninsula may have been fatal for both the Turks and the Anzacs, but they did not kill the friendship between the two nations.

²⁰ Martı 2002, 30-31.

²¹ Ashley Ekins, 2013.

²² Özdemir 2015, 1020.

²³ Özdemir 2015, 1016.

²⁴ See Sherif, 1958 for a discussion.

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