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Chapter 1

The Inventory of the Galician Martyrdoms of the Ottoman XV Corps for the Years 1916-1917 made by the Polish State in 1921

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Abstract

In November 1920, the Representation of the Polish Government at the Sublime Porte informed the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw that action needed to be taken to determine the burial sites and identity of soldiers of Polish nationality who had been killed or had died in the Ottoman Empire. As a gesture of good will, the Poles had already handed over to the Turkish authorities death certificates and inheritance documents of Ottoman soldiers who had died on Polish soil, a gesture which – as noted by the then Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Raşid Bey – "deeply moved both the Ottoman government and the families of the deceased". The conduct of the Polish authorities was interpreted as a testimony to the "delicacy of feeling of the Polish Government". Probably following the above arrangements, and parallel to similar activities carried out in Türkiye (the details of which, unfortunately, we do not know), an inventory of the graves of Turkish soldiers who were killed or died on Polish soil in the years 1914-1918 was made in 1921, on the order of the Section of Non-Catholic Religions and Care for War Graves of the Ministry of Military Affairs of the Republic of Poland. The lists drawn up by local branches of the Office for the Maintenance of War Graves covered, with only a few exceptions, soldiers of the Ottoman XV Corps, which in the years 1916-1917 fought on the East-Galician front. In today's Polish territory, these were the graves of 24 officers and privates with established identities, buried in seven cemeteries. In the case of the current territories of western Ukraine (which belonged to Poland during the interwar years), a total of 876 identified burials and 122 nameless burials located in 13 cemeteries were added to the lists.

Keywords WW1 · Ottoman XV Corps · Galicia · Martyrdoms · Poland

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The fate of the Ottoman WWI war graves which ended up on Polish soil after the conflict has received very little attention from scholars. It is an issue that is directly linked to the participation of the Turkish XV Corps in the fighting on the Galician front in the years 1916-1917. In August 1916, this formation took up positions in the Berezhany area, so as to support the allied Austro-Hungarian and German troops in repelling the Russian Brusilov Offensive. Although the XV Corps (19th and 20th Infantry Divisions consisting of 32,000 men), commanded by Lt. Col. Yakub Şevki (Subaşı), and from November 1916 by General Cevad (Çobanlı) only reached the front in the final phase of this operation, it managed to play a significant role, preventing the Russians from entering Halych again, an outcome that would have threatened the entire front. The Turks made even greater contributions in late July and early August of 1917, providing significant help in stopping another major Russian military operation – the Kerensky Offensive. After halting it, they also took part in the counteroffensive of the Central Powers, which ended with the enemy being driven out of Galicia, in terms of its pre-war borders. The XV Corps paid for these struggles with huge losses that are nevertheless impossible to determine precisely. It should be assumed that they amounted to about 15 thousand killed and at least 6 thousand wounded.[1]

General and partly erroneous or incomplete information about Ottoman WW1 graves on current Polish territory can be found in an article by Cengiz Dönmez.[2] The issue of their post-war fate was examined by Nuri Köstüklü[3], but unfortunately, he only focused on the activities of the Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye in Warsaw, undertaken in the years 1935-1937 (omitting the issue of the activity of the Polish authorities in 1920 and 1921, which is the subject of this chapter) and made numerous mistakes concerning the locations of Turkish cemeteries and the number of soldiers buried in them.

The author of this chapter has made use of the oldest collection of archival documents related to this topic. They concern the inventory of Turkish war graves, drawn up in 1921 by the Military Section of Non-Catholic Religions and the Care of War Graves of the Polish Ministry of Military Affairs, and the papers are stored in the Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe Wojskowego Biura Historycznego im. gen. broni Kazimierza Sosnkowskiego w Warszawie [Central Military Archives of the General Kazimierz Sosnkowski Military Historical Office in Warsaw (hereinafter: CMA)]. The collection of files titled *Biuro Wyznań Niekatolickich Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych 1919-1939* [Bureau of Non-Catholic Religions of the Ministry of Military Affairs 1919-1939], which bears the catalogue number I.300.20.40, contains a total of 223 pages of documents. Some of these papers are official correspondence relating to the task. However, the largest and at the same time the most valuable part of this archival collection consists of detailed lists of names of Ottoman soldiers buried in specific cemeteries that are currently located on the territory of Poland and western Ukraine. It should be mentioned here that similar information has not yet been disclosed in the Turkish archives. The list published on the website of the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Türkiye[4] admittedly contains the personal data of 1609 soldiers of the Ottoman XV Corps who were killed on the Galician front, but without any information about their burials.

Thus, while celebrating (in 2023) both the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Türkiye and the one-day earlier conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship, along with the Trade and

[1] More information on the participation of the XV Corps in the fighting in Galicia can be found in two of the most valuable Turkish monographs, the authors of which are: Cihat Akçakayalıoğlu, *Birinci Dünya Harbi*, VII nci Cilt, *Avrupa Cepheleri, I nci Kısım, [Galiçya Cephesi].* (Ankara: T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı Harp Tarihi Dairesi Resmî Yayınları, Gnkur. Basımevi, 1967) and Hülya Toker (*Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Galiçya Cephesi 15'nci Kolordunun Harekâtı.* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Personel Başkanlığı Askerî Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt (ATASE) Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2016). However, the most extensive and comprehensive study was published by Piotr Nykiel, *Mahometanie Wernyhory. Turcy na froncie galicyjskim w latach 1916-1917*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Libron, 2024).

[2] Cengiz Dönmez, "I. Dünya Savaşıyla İlgili Yurt Dışındaki Türk Şehitlikleri", *Akademik Bakış* VI/XIV, (2014): 137–161.

[3] Nuri Köstüklü, "Tarihte Türk-Leh İlişkileri Çerçevesinde Galiçya'da Şehit Olan Türkler ve Şehitlikler Üzerine Bazı Tespitler", *Journal of the Academic Studies of Turkish-Islamic Civilization* 1/22 (2016): 27-38.

[4] https://www.msb.gov.tr/SehitBilgiKapisi/SehitListesi (accessed: 10.09.2024).

Settlement Conventions signed by the Polish and Turkish delegations in Lausanne (July 23, 1923), we should not forget the mutual gestures to sustain the friendly relations between our peoples (which had flourished since the last years of the eighteenth century) that were made as early as the period between the end of the First World War and the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye. An example of this is the cooperation in determining the identity and burial places of Ottoman soldiers who were killed or died on Polish soil in the years 1914-1918, and of Poles buried at that time on the territory of the Ottoman Empire.

Although these searches formally covered burials related to the entire period of the First World War, in practice, in the case of graves that remained on Polish territory after 1918, the time frame should have been narrowed down to the period 1916-1918 and linked almost exclusively to the presence of the Ottoman XV Corps on the Galician front in 1916-1917.[5] However, it should be noted here that after the recall of the XV Corps from Galicia in the autumn of 1917, several dozen soldiers were abandoned by the Ottoman army in hospitals in Krakow, so some of them died as late as 1918 or 1919. In addition, there were several burials of Ottoman soldiers from units that were never part of the XV Corps. Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to explain the circumstances in which these people ended up in these places.[6]

However, in the case of Polish burials on the territory of the Ottoman Empire, the matter was more complicated. In a document from 23 November 1920, the Representation of the Polish Government at the Sublime Porte informed the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw that action needed to be taken to determine the burial sites and identity of soldiers of Polish nationality who had been killed or had died in the Ottoman Empire. Although no dates were mentioned in this document, the fact that the Polish officials referred to the Treaty of Versailles in talks with the Turkish authorities leaves no doubt that this concerned burials from the First World War.[7] However, the problem was very complex, because soldiers with Polish roots buried on the territory of the Ottoman Empire fought in various foreign armies during the above-mentioned period. Suffice it to say that on the Gallipoli front alone they wore Ottoman, French, various British Commonwealth or even Russian Navy uniforms.[8] In addition, they also served on the German cruisers *Goeben* and *Breslau* that sailed from August 1914 under the Ottoman flag as *Yavuz Sultan Selim* and *Midilli*.[9] A significant number of Poles were also held in prisoner-of-war camps that were established in the Ottoman Empire for Russian soldiers.[10] Therefore, as an exception, the Turkish officials offered Poland assistance in searching for graves and determining the identities of the buried. It was suggested that Warsaw should send an officer to Istanbul, for the purpose of cooperating with a Turkish officer. This friendly attitude of the Sublime Porte certainly resulted not only from historical contacts, but from the fact that a little earlier, likewise in 1920, the Poles had handed over to the Turkish authorities death certificates and inheritance documents of Ottoman soldiers who had died on Polish soil, a gesture which – as noted by the then Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Raşid Bey – "deeply moved both the Ottoman

[5] CMA, cat. no. I.300.20.40.

[6] Nykiel, *Mahometanie Wernyhory. Turcy na froncie galicyjskim w latach 1916-1917*, 593-624.

[7] CMA, cat. no. I.300.20.40 (copy of the letter of the Polish Government Representation at the Sublime Porte to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, dated November 23, 1920).

[8] Piotr Nykiel, "Birinci Dünya Harbi Döneminde Polonyalılar ile Türkler Arasındaki Askeri İlişkiler / Military Relations Between Poland and Turkey During World War I", *600. Yılında Türkiye-Polonya İlişkiler Sempozyumu Bildirileri / Proceedings of the Symposium on the 600th Year of Polish-Turkish Relations*, ed. Hacer Topaktaş (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Basın-Yayın ve Enformasyon Genel Müdürlüğü, 2015), 74-89.

[9] Hafize Kasar, "Birinci Dünya Savaşında Ölen Alman Askerlerin Kayıp Listesi", Gelibolu'yu Anlamak, accessed 10 September 2024, https://www.geliboluyuanlamak.com/200_birinci-dunya-savasinda-olen-alman-askerlerin-kayip-listesi-hafize-kasar.html

[10] Ahmet Altıntaş, "Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Osmanlı – Polonya İlişkileri'nde Esirler (1916-1923)", *Türkiye-Polonya İlişkilerinde "Temas Alanları" (1414-2014) Uluslararası Konferansı Bildiriler Kitabı*, ed. Hacer Topaktaş and Natalia Królikowska (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2017), 357-372.

government and the families of the deceased". The conduct of the Polish authorities was interpreted as a testimony to the "delicacy of feeling of the Polish Government".[11]

Probably following the above arrangements, and parallel to similar activities carried out in Türkiye (the details of which, unfortunately, we do not know), an inventory of the graves of Turkish soldiers who were killed or died on Polish soil in the years 1914-1918 was made in 1921, on the order of the Section of Non-Catholic Religions and Care for War Graves of the Ministry of Military Affairs of the Republic of Poland. As already mentioned, the lists drawn up by the local branches of the Office for the Maintenance of War Graves covered – with only a few exceptions – soldiers of the Ottoman XV Corps, which in the years 1916-1917 fought on the East-Galician front. As far as Polish territory today is concerned, these were the graves of 24 officers and privates with established identities, buried in seven cemeteries. In the case of the current territories of western Ukraine (which were part of Poland in the interwar years), a total of 876 identified burials and 122 nameless burials located in 13 cemeteries were added to the lists.[12]

For reasons difficult to determine, the lists drawn up in 1921 did not include as many as 12 cemeteries, the establishment of which in 1916-1917 is confirmed by Turkish sources. Interestingly, five of those not included were on the list prepared in 1926 by the Lviv Voivodeship Office. However, the cemeteries in Demnia, Mieczyszczów, Podwysokie, Białokiernica, Dublany, Horodyszcze and Potok were still missing.[13]

Figure 1

Photograph that appears to be the cemetery of the Ottoman 62nd Infantry Regiment in Demnia in 1917



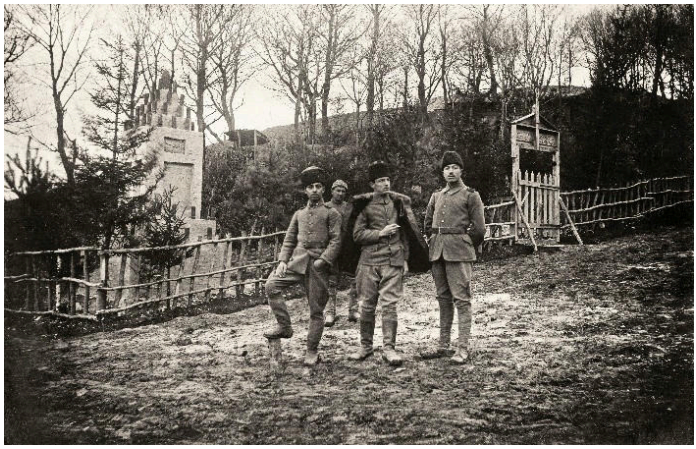
Source: Piotr Nykiel's Archive

[11] CMA, cat. no. I.300.20.40 (copy of the letter of the Polish Government Representation at the Sublime Porte to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, dated November 23, 1920).

[12] CMA, cat. no. I.300.20.40.

[13] NAK (National Archives in Krakow), zbiór: Roboty Publiczne, cat. no. 29/309/505.

Figure 2
Cemetery in Mieczyszczów in 1916 or 1917



Source: Piotr Nykiel's Archive

The incompleteness of both lists is surprising because the cemeteries of the XV Corps in Hucisko, Podwysokie and Łopuszna must have still existed in 1921. What's more, the cemeteries in Demnia, Podwysokie and Hucisko were mentioned in the mid-1930s by Stanisław Wiszniewski, who even wrote that the last of the three was still "very well maintained, with a beautiful gate and fence in the Turkish style".[14] Indeed, there are many indications that the lists prepared in 1921 were created without conducting any field research, and only on the basis of incomplete documentation, probably compiled by wartime Austrian authorities, and held on the spot by individual branches of the Office for the Care for War Graves. It seems unlikely that only 3 or 4 years after their foundation, some cemeteries, especially those made of durable materials, would have completely ceased to exist, although it should be noted that as early as the first half of the 1920s, the process of devastation of all war graves, regardless of the nationality of the soldiers buried in them, had begun.

Figure 3
Cemetery in Podwysokie in 1917



Source: phot. Kazimierz Kuzyk, AKPDCO, cat. no. ZOS 1A

[14] Stanisław Wiszniewski, *Brzeżany i Kresy Południowo-Wschodnie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w wojnie ukraińsko-polskiej 1918–1919* (Lwów: Bibljoteka Kresowa, 1935), 9.

Figure 4
Cemetery in Łopuszna in 1917



Source: Piotr Nykiel's Archive

A circular of the Ministry of Public Works addressed to all voivodes (provincial governors) on April 5, 1923 referred to frequent cases of "devastation of war cemeteries, involving stealing crosses from graves, taking fences, ploughing graves, cutting down trees and shrubs planted in cemeteries etc."[15] In 1927, the same ministry began to receive "complaints about the devastation and desecration of war graves and cemeteries by the local population" and about the still occurring cases of "ploughing graves located in fields, appropriating crosses placed on graves, damaging existing war monuments and destroying fences, breaking stone plaques, grazing cattle on the cemeteries and so on."[16] According to the cited documents, these incidents were often the reason for diplomatic interventions of foreign states. It is true that no documents have survived confirming that Turkish cemeteries were also devastated, but unfortunately it should be assumed that they shared the fate of the Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian graveyards. An indirect confirmation of these assumptions may be the application of the Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye dating back to 1928 for permission to build a central cemetery of Ottoman soldiers in Lviv. The remains of all Turkish soldiers buried throughout the then territory of Poland were to be transferred to this cemetery.[17] However, we will not elaborate further on this issue here.

It should be noted that the inventory made in 1921 sometimes contained obvious inaccuracies, proving the ignorance of the officials who prepared it. For example, 11 burials of Russian Muslim soldiers in Strzałkowo in the Kalisz district were wrongly identified as Turkish. A similar situation occurred in the case of Muslims from the Russian army, who were buried in Leonówka in the Stanislaviv district. In turn, those from the Ottoman 20th Infantry Division buried in Borschiv were considered to be Austro-Hungarian soldiers of Bosnian origin.[18]

Below we will briefly discuss the documentation of the above-mentioned inventory from 1921, which has been preserved in the Central Military Archive of the General Kazimierz Sosnkowski Military Historical Office in Warsaw.[19] In addition to the cover letters, prepared by individual branches of the

[15] CMA, cat. No. I.300.20.40
[16] Ibid
[17] NAK, zbiór: Roboty Publiczne, cat. no. 29/309/505-739
[18] CMA, cat. no. I.300.20.40
[19] Ibid

Office for the Maintenance of War Graves (and not preserved in all cases), the main and most valuable part consists of tabular lists, mostly prepared on the basis of commonly used official forms. In addition to information about the location of the cemetery in a given county and town or village, the lists included the following data:

- **Rank:** for privates, the Ottoman word 'nefer' or the Polish abbreviation of 'private' (szereg.) was entered or left blank, and for non-commissioned officers and officers, the abbreviation or full name of the Polish rank was entered
- **Surname and first name:** in the case of fallen Turks, the father's name or soldier's nickname as well as his own name were entered; the spelling was phonetic (and therefore often distorted) in the Latin alphabet with mixed German and Polish orthography
- **Army affiliation:** marked with a dash in the 'Turkish' column
- In the **'Regiment (comp., formation, unit)'** column the division, battalion and company numbers were usually entered, although in individual cases, even in the case of soldiers who had been identified, this field was left blank
- **The date of birth** was given sporadically and it was always only the year, and usually according to the Gregorian calendar, with some exceptions when it was given according to the Ottoman 'Rumi' calendar; sometimes the soldier's age was given instead of his date of birth; entries concerning the place of birth were very rare and limited to the name of the town (and perhaps only the county town), the sanjak and the country, with the latter consistently given as 'Turcja' (Türkiye); topographical names were written phonetically in the Latin alphabet, usually in a heavily distorted form, sometimes making it impossible to identify them
- **Dates of death and causes of death** were not entered
- In the rubric concerning the **burial**, the full date of the funeral and the name of the commune in which it took place were given; it was also indicated whether the grave was located in a military or parish cemetery
- In the section concerning the **type of grave**, it was marked whether it was single, double, row or mass (friendly)
- In relation to each fallen person, the **number of the grave** was given, sometimes also of the row and quarters (as in the case of soldiers buried at Rakowicki Cemetery in Krakow)

The lists described above were certainly prepared on the basis of – perhaps already then incomplete – Austrian documentation from the years 1916-1917. It is regrettable that – certainly for organizational and financial reasons (the inventory was made shortly after the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921) – it was not considered necessary (or possible) to verify them in the field at individual cemeteries and with the participation of a Polish orientalist who knew the Ottoman-Turkish language, or an officer of the Turkish army, whom the Sublime Porte could have delegated to Poland, following the principle of reciprocity. If such a verification had been done, it would have been possible to have included more information in the above-mentioned lists, information which at that time was apparently only available on the grave plaques themselves. For example, in the cemetery in Stryi, these plaques were made in bilingual form. The German version contained the numbers of the regiment and company, the name of the father and proper name of the buried soldier and the date of his death, while the Ottoman-Turkish version also contained information about the place of birth of the soldier, which was not included in the 1921 list. Moreover, the form concerning the Ottoman burials in Stryi gave only the dates of funerals of individual soldiers, omitting the dates of death, which – as already mentioned –

were given on the grave plaques.[20]

Figure 5

An example of a grave plaque at the cemetery in Stryi, in a picture taken in 1917 (Piotr Nykiel's Archive)



Table 1

Cemeteries and individual Ottoman graves from the years 1914-1918, which in 1921 were located on the territory of Poland and were included in the discussed inventory

Town or village	Number of burials		Country (within its current borders)
	Identified	Unidentified	
Borszczów	9	-	Ukraine
Chodorów	6	1	
Cześniki	3	-	
Drohobycz	106	-	
Dublany	4	-	
Dziedzice	1	-	Poland
Kraków	13	-	
Kurzany	20	-	Ukraine
Lipica Dolna	-	27	
Lipica Górna	18	25	
Olchowiec	-	50	
Poznań	2	-	Poland
Przemyśl	7	-	

[20] Unfortunately, none of the Turkish graves in Stryi has survived to our times. However, in the private collection of Piotr Nykiel, there are several photographs taken in the years 1916-1917, in which the grave plaques are clearly visible. Some of them can even be easily read.

Town or village	Number of burials		Country (within its current borders)
	Identified	Unidentified	
Puków	175	6	Ukraine
Rohatyn	25	3	
Rzeszów	1	-	Poland
Sambor	2	-	Ukraine
Stryi	508	10	Ukraine
Wadowice	1	-	Poland
TOTAL	**901**	**122**	
	1023		

Source: compiled by the author according to CMA, cat. no. I.300.20.40

In conclusion, despite significant shortcomings, the documentation prepared in 1921 by the Section of Non-Catholic Religions and Care for War Graves of the Ministry of Military Affairs of the Republic of Poland is, on the one hand, a unique source for historical research, and on the other hand, a confirmation of mutual respect for fallen soldiers, which Poland and Türkiye showed towards each other, and this in an extremely difficult period, in which both countries were still militarily and politically fighting for their existence as independent states. Certainly, it would be advantageous to merge the two lists in the future – the Polish one discussed in this chapter and the Turkish one available on the website of the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Türkiye. Thanks to the fact that they complement each other, it would be possible to obtain a single list in which, in relation to many fallen soldiers, we would have a complete or almost complete set of information, which would consist of: name, father's name, nickname, date and place of birth, unit number, date, place and cause of death, and date and place of burial. It goes without saying that this would be of immense value to the descendants of the fallen soldiers. After all, many of them still do not know where the grave of their grandfather or great-grandfather is.

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