


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ottoman subjects and prisoners of war in the Semirechye Oblast during the First World War

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Abstract

Amidst the upheavals of the First World War, a considerable number of prisoners of war from the Ottoman Empire found themselves in Russia, resettled primarily in the central regions of the Russian Empire. The regions of Volga, Siberia, Ural, and Western Siberia played host to Ottoman prisoners, who were accommodated in camps and barracks across cities and rural areas. Over time, a noteworthy migration led some prisoners to the territory of modern Kazakhstan, with cities like Samara, Orenburg, and Omsk serving as pivotal points before further dispersion into the central regions of Kazakhstan. As a result, Ottoman citizens found themselves under suspicion and were dispersed akin to prisoners. The Semirechye Oblast (Zhetisu region) emerged as a focal point where both Ottoman subjects and prisoners of war were dispersed during this tumultuous period. This article investigates the political and social dynamics, as well as the fate, of Turkish prisoners of war and citizens within the Semirechye Oblast during the war. The analysis delves into the status of Ottoman Empire subjects who acquiesced to the authority of the Russian Empire, offering insights into the lives of prisoners of war in this specific region.

Keywords: : Ottoman subjects; prisoners of war; Semirechye Oblast; the First World War; Turkey

Introduction

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the Semirechye Oblast (Semirechensk Oblast) within the Turkistan General-Governorate stood out as Central Asia's region with the most diverse concentration of ethnic groups. From the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Russian imperial authorities implemented a policy of relocating various ethnicities from central regions to Semirechye Oblast, ushering in a substantial influx of Russian, Ukrainian, and Tatar peasants to Zhetisu. This policy persisted into the early twentieth century and even extended during the tumultuous times of the First World War, marked by the settlement of diverse populations and the transfer of prisoners to Semirechye Oblast. Notably, citizens from the Ottoman Empire, including Ottoman prisoners of war who had escaped from camps and barracks, were directed to Semirechye Oblast, being identified as suspects within the territory of Russia. In response to this influx, special sections were established in the cities and uyezds (districts) of Semirechye Oblast to monitor and control Ottoman prisoners and subjects. Unlike other regions, Semirechye Oblast lacked designated POW camps and barracks at the state level, with Turkish prisoners and subjects being supervised in special uyezd security posts.

Consequently, the population of Ottoman Empire citizens in Semirechye Oblast increased, and despite their initial status as captive citizens and prisoners of war, they gradually assimilated into the local society. While military and civilian prisoners arriving in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, including Semirechye Oblast, displayed unique characteristics, their commonality lay in being citizens of a

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state in conflict with Russia, often resulting in the treatment of all citizens as prisoners. The intricate social status, mutual characteristics, and connections of Ottoman captive citizens and prisoners of war remain insufficiently explored in scientific literature.

The history of Ottoman citizens and prisoners of war in Semirechye Oblast is a critical aspect that merits comprehensive examination, especially given their presence in the region before and during the war. Ottoman citizens, permitted entry by Russia and acknowledging the authority of the Russian Empire, were documented and engaged in various occupations without significant political pressure until the outbreak of the war. The transformation in attitudes toward Ottoman citizens was a consequence of the wartime rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, reflecting the historically intertwined fate of the two nations, particularly concerning the issue of prisoners.¹

Currently, the study of the history of foreign citizens and prisoners of war in Kazakhstan and Central Asia during the First World War has become a pivotal scientific focus. The motivation stems from the substantial presence of foreign citizens and prisoners in the Steppes General-Governorate and Turkestan General-Governorate during the war, including Semirechye Oblast under the Turkistan General-Governorate.² This region witnessed an influx of captive citizens and prisoners of war, originating from the countries of the Quadruple Alliance.

The exploration of the “social history and fate” of prisoners gained momentum toward the end of the twentieth century, transitioning from the mere enumeration of prisoners and their confinement arrangements to a nuanced understanding of their integration into local society and the trajectory of their lives. Consequently, it is paramount to delve into the “social history and fate” of Ottoman prisoners of war in Semirechye Oblast, contributing to the broader narrative of this crucial period in history.

Arrival of prisoners

During the First World War, a conflict erupted in the Caucasus between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, resulting in the capture of thousands of prisoners of war. The Ottoman army faced defeat on the Caucasus front in 1914–1915, notably in the renowned “Sarykamysh operation,” leading to the captivity of a significant portion of the Ottoman forces.³ However, discrepancies exist regarding the exact number of Ottoman citizens and soldiers captured during this period, as civilians were also taken as prisoners in the occupied lands of the Caucasus.

The primary focus of our attention is the Caucasian front, from which the majority of Ottoman prisoners of war were captured. Historians offer varying figures on the initial wave of prisoners arriving in Russia, but both Turkish and Russian sources agree on a number surpassing 60,000. For instance, Turkish historian C. Kutlu cites 65,000 Ottoman Empire prisoners in the Russian Empire,⁴ while Russian historians suggest over 60,000 prisoners of war and Ottoman citizens came to Russia during the conflict.⁵ Notably, around 15,000 Ottoman prisoners were captured directly from the Caucasus in the period around 1914–1915. A dedicated commission, dispatched to different regions of Russia, facilitated the resettlement of Ottoman captives in the Northern and Central provinces of the Russian Empire. This complex process forms a crucial aspect of our exploration into the fate and experiences of Ottoman prisoners during this transformative period.

Yanıkdağ Yücel provides insight into the fate of Ottoman prisoners in Russia during the Great War, highlighting that Russia captured over two million soldiers from the Central Powers. Among these captives were more than 50,000 Ottoman officers and enlisted men. While the group of captured

¹Poznahirev 2011, pp. 3–7.

²Apendiyev and Abdukadyrov 2020, pp. 218–25.

³Erickson 2001, pp. 10–17.

⁴Kutlu 2010, pp. 320–25.

⁵Poznahirev 2014, pp. 115–17.

Ottomans comprised individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the predominant majority were of Turkish origin.⁶

The first groups of Ottoman prisoners arrived in the cities of Syzran and Samara in November–December 1914. The phenomenon then spread to other cities and regions, representing the arrival of the initial echelon of Ottoman prisoners in Russia. A significant number of prisoners from the Ottoman Empire were placed in various cities, including Omsk, Tomsk, Irkutsk, Samara, Kazan, Nizhny Novgorod, Kharkiv, and Baku. Materials related to the prisoners indicate that Samara and its nearby settlements faced challenges during the transportation of Ottoman prisoners of war from the Caucasus and the European part of Russia to the Urals and Siberia. The province of Samara was ill-prepared to receive, accommodate, and treat such a large number of fighters.⁷ The railways, city authorities, and the local community put considerable effort into organizing the transport, treatment, and upkeep of the Turks.

The exigencies of war precipitated the rupture in the longstanding relationship between the Russian authorities and Turks who, retaining their Ottoman citizenship, had resided in the region for many years, instigating suspicions among the Turks.⁸ As hostilities intensified, scrutiny extended to Turks who, despite long-term residency, had not acquired Russian citizenship. This initial situation presented challenges for both Ottoman citizens and newly arrived prisoners. However, the transient nature of these difficulties became apparent, particularly as Ottoman prisoners swiftly forged connections with the local population compared to their counterparts from Germany and Austria-Hungary. Local Tatars, Bashkirs, and other Turkic-Muslim communities played a pivotal role in facilitating these relationships, with Ottoman prisoners successfully cultivating positive associations with local Povolzhye or Kazan Tatars.⁹

The enduring historical ties between Turkic-Muslim peoples of Central Asia and Russia since the nineteenth century further facilitated these contacts. The local Turkic-Muslim communities actively assisted Ottoman prisoners, prompting the Russian authorities to reconsider the placement of these prisoners in the Volga region. The overconcentration of prisoners in the central regions of Russia was recognized as problematic, leading to recommendations in October–November 1914 to swiftly address the “suspicious Turkish element” in regions predominantly inhabited by Muslim populations. This strategic move aimed to forestall the potential development of perilous Pan-Islamic propaganda among the Islamically loyal Muslim masses.¹⁰ Consequently, the authorities sought to prevent the Ottoman prisoners from establishing religious and cultural connections with the Turkic-Muslim populations in the central regions of the Russian Empire, recognizing the potential birth of a significant threat.

Over time, a growing sense of doubt and suspicion emerged toward Ottoman prisoners and citizens, prompting internal affairs authorities to launch investigations. Organizations clandestinely aiding prisoners’ escape from camps in various cities, including Omsk, Tomsk, Irkutsk, Samara, Kazan, Nizhny Novgorod, and Krasnoyarsk, were identified.¹¹ This covert activity involved local Tatars collaborating with representatives of local authorities. These groups facilitated the escape of prisoners, provided passports to Turkish and German officers seeking refuge outside Russia, and arranged their return to their respective countries. Provincial gendarmerie departments reported that special committees were established in Irkutsk, Samara, and Orenburg in 1915–1916 to send officers abroad, particularly to Turkey via Persia, owing to the Turkic-Muslim solidarity.¹²

Amidst these developments, significant changes occurred among Ottoman prisoners in Russia during the war, with prison escapes becoming a commonplace occurrence. While many Ottoman

⁶Yanıkdağ 1999, p. 69.

⁷Guseva 2016, pp. 97–99.

⁸Guseva 2016, pp. 100–2.

⁹Landau 1981, p. 119.

¹⁰Guseva 2010, pp. 68–74.

¹¹Davis 1987, pp. 157–16.

¹²Usmanova 2016, pp. 73–80.

prisoners managed to escape from camps, the ongoing war in the Ottoman Empire hindered their return. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia did not oppose the departure of Ottoman prisoners to other regions, as Russian camps were gradually reaching their capacity. These circumstances facilitated the dispersal of Ottoman captive citizens and prisoners of war to the southern regions of the Russian Empire, specifically those belonging to the Steppes General-Governorate and the Turkistan General-Governorate, including Semirechye Oblast.

In the exploration of prisoner history, a common point of contention lies in the nomenclature associated with them. Historiographical gaps complicate a clear differentiation between institutions of prisoners of war and civilian prisoners. Some historians label citizens of the Ottoman Empire who migrated to the Russian Empire as “prisoners,” emphasizing their distinct statuses based on position, function, and age.¹³ To elucidate their circumstances, they should be examined individually.

Among the prisoners who arrived in Semirechye Oblast from the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, several distinct groups can be identified based on their status. Firstly, Ottoman citizens migrated from other regions of the Turkestan General Governorate and Russian provinces. While initially settling in the Russian Empire and serving in various capacities for several years, they faced increased pressure at the onset of the war, compelling their relocation to Semirechye Oblast as “captive citizens,” where they remained under strict supervision.

Additionally, there is a group of Ottoman citizens who have long resided in Semirechye Oblast and sought permission to remain at the onset of the war. Their application was approved, granting them the designation of “Subjects of the Ottoman Empire in Russia.” Throughout the war, they fell under the supervision of the Department of Internal Affairs in Semirechye Oblast.

Furthermore, a distinct category comprises Ottoman captive citizens and prisoners of war who were relocated to Semirechye Oblast during the conflict. This differentiation arises from the fact that Ottoman citizens were transferred to Semirechye Oblast from various regions and provinces of Russia alongside prisoners of war. The term “POWs” encompasses individuals who served in the army and were subsequently captured. On the other hand, those designated as under “Ottoman captivity” arrived in Russian territory with different livelihoods or work conditions. Despite being subjects of the Ottoman Empire, they were perceived as provocateurs, fugitives, agents, or suspects. Internal affairs structures deemed such citizens as prisoners and transported them to Semirechye Oblast.

Ottoman citizens (subjects) in Semirechye Oblast

During the First World War, the influx of Ottoman Empire citizens and prisoners of war into Semirechye Oblast became notable. From the onset of the conflict, Ottoman citizens within the uyezds of Semirechye Oblast came under scrutiny. Prior to the war, individuals from the Ottoman Empire resided in Semirechye Oblast, engaging in diverse occupations. However, the outbreak of the First World War aligned the Ottoman Empire with the Triple Alliance against the Russian Empire, complicating the situation for Ottoman citizens in Semirechye Oblast. Local government structures in Semirechye Oblast, during this period, exercised control over citizens from Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Verification processes were implemented concerning their work and places of residence.

The Semirechye Oblast saw the arrival of detainees from Syrdarya and Ferghana Oblasts of Turkistan General-Governorate, as well as internal gubernias of Russia, under various circumstances. Ottoman citizens, for instance, detained in Syrdarya and Ferghana, were progressively transferred to Semirechye Oblast from the early months of the war (Table 1).

In 1914, the Turkestan General-governorate office in Tashkent issued a decision directing specific Ottoman citizens to reside in the Turkestan region, designating them as captives. These individuals hailed from diverse regions of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴ Shortly thereafter, in June 1914, the chancellery

¹³Nachtigal and Radauer 2014, pp. 3–5.

¹⁴QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4589-num. 43 p.

Table 1. Citizens of the Ottoman Empire, first brought to Semirechye Oblast during the War

№	Name and surname of citizens	Nationality	State
1	İgaad Cividlioğlu	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
2	Atanas Demircioğlu	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
3	Savva Sakrioğlu	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
4	Kiriyak Kalmukoğlu	Greek	Ottoman Empire
5	Konstandi Kiryak	Greek	Ottoman Empire
6	Mihayl Yori Bozoğlu	Greek	Ottoman Empire
7	Yorik Mihayl Pozidi	Greek	Ottoman Empire
8	Dimitri Pavlioglu	Greek	Ottoman Empire

of the general-governorship in Tashkent granted permission for Ottoman citizens to settle in Semirechye Oblast.

In official documents such as passports, individuals from Christian families who migrated from the Ottoman Empire to Russia and embraced Russian citizenship had the Turkish suffix “-oğlu” appended to the end of their surnames. This naming convention was consistently used in their documentation.

Among the citizens of the Ottoman Empire in Semirechye Oblast, there were individuals of Greek, Georgian, and other Christian backgrounds who were also categorized as prisoners. These individuals resided in various villages within the Semirechye Oblast and remained consistently under the scrutiny of internal affairs authorities. Notably, they did not face religious pressure within the society due to the coexistence of Christian communities, including Russians and Ukrainians, in Semirechye Oblast.

Information surfaced regarding the arrival of Turkish citizens,¹⁵ including Cuma Mehmedoğlu and Mehmed Öşeroğlu, who were informed of their temporary residence in the Turkestan region for one year.¹⁶ Similarly, in October 1914, the governor-general’s office in Tashkent conveyed details about Turk citizens Mehmet Gauşu and Dursun Çelekoğlu relocating to live in the Turkistan General-Governorate for a one-year period.¹⁷

Examining the period preceding the war and the initial months of the conflict reveals a considerable influx of Ottoman citizens from the Turkistan General-Governorate and other provinces to Semirechye Oblast. Their diverse nationalities included Turks, Greeks, Georgians, and various Caucasian ethnic groups. Local authorities in Semirechye Oblast did not subject citizens of the Ottoman Empire, arriving from other regions of the Turkistan General-Governorate, to significantly stricter treatment than that given to prisoners of war. Nevertheless, a certain level of control was exercised over them. This caution stemmed from their extensive tenure in the Turkestan region, where they had been employed for several years, affording them a profound understanding of the local intricacies.

Continuing, as highlighted earlier, there were Ottoman subjects with permanent residency in Semirechye Oblast before the outbreak of the war. Predominantly Russian citizens of the Ottoman Empire, who had embraced Russian nationality, had long inhabited the uyezds of Semirechye Oblast. One such individual, Turkish subject Suleyman Arif Manaşoğlu, residing in Przhewalsk, submitted an application in June 1914 to extend his stay.¹⁸ Having arrived from the Ottoman Empire to Fergana Oblast in 1909 and subsequently settling in Semirechye Oblast, Manaşoğlu found himself constrained by the expiration of his passport and visa, compelling him to remain in Semirechye Oblast.

¹⁵QROMA. 44-f, 1-inv., 4589-num. 67 p.

¹⁶QROMA. 44-f, 1-inv., 4589-num. 91 p.

¹⁷QROMA. 44-f, 1-inv., 4589-num. 97 p.

¹⁸QROMA. 44-f, 1-inv., 19146-num. 8 p.

Born in 1866 in the Ottoman Empire, he continued his residence in Przhewalsk,¹⁹ facing constant surveillance like other citizens.

Similarly, another Turkish subject, Hızır Osman Arikerimoğlu, a native of Izmir residing in the city of Verniy,²⁰ applied to the military governor of Semirechye Oblast to extend his stay amid the wartime pressures on Turkish subjects in the region.²¹ His request was granted in April 1914, allowing him to remain for an additional five years. Engaged in bakery work in the city of Verniy, Arikerimoğlu found refuge in Semirechye Oblast.²² During this period, Internal Affairs authorities initiated efforts to ascertain the duration of residence of Ottoman Empire subjects in Semirechye Oblast. Requests from Ottoman Empire subjects to the Russian authorities for the granting of city status within the territory of Semirechye Oblast were accepted.

Anticipating the Ottoman Empire's alliance with Germany in the First World War, Ottoman citizens residing on Russian soil sought Russian subject status even before the conflict. Those who arrived in Semirechye Oblast for various purposes fell under the jurisdiction of the Russian Empire. Among them were individuals of different nationalities, such as Ottoman citizen and Greek national Pyotr Dmitriy Yakimoğlu, who, having long lived in Pishpek, applied in September 1914 to continue his local work.²³ An investigation revealed his Greek nationality, Orthodox religion, and birth in Trabzon, Turkey, in 1878.²⁴ His request was accepted, allowing him to pursue continued employment in the region.²⁵

Similarly, another Ottoman citizen, Yorik Panayoti Yakishdidi, a Greek national residing in Pishpek, submitted an application to prolong his stay in the local area, continuing his involvement in bakery and confectionery production. Enjoying a prosperous income and livelihood, he expressed his intention to reside in Russia for an extended period, formalizing a special application on September 2, 1914.²⁶ Subsequent scrutiny revealed his Ottoman citizenship, Greek nationality, adherence to Orthodox Christianity, and birth in Trabzon, Turkey, in 1877. Additionally, Perekliy Anastas Yordan, a Greek national and subject of the Ottoman Empire, resided in the city of Pishpek.²⁷ Well-acquainted with the local situation, he sought permission to stay in September 1914, an application that was subsequently approved, leading to the formulation of relevant documents.²⁸ However, suspicions regarding his activities as a possible spy were raised by observers.

Conversely, certain subjects of the Ottoman Empire in Semirechye Oblast were found to have engaged in illegal activities, leading to specific charges against them. Among the citizens of the Ottoman Empire in Semirechye Oblast, Alexander Assatiyani, of Georgian nationality, exhibited rude behavior in Sarkan village of Kapal uyezd, prompting criticism and an investigation by the local police department.²⁹

Similarly, Turkish subjects residing in the Sarkan village of Kapal uyezd were compelled to flee overnight during the war³⁰ due to exacerbated conditions arising from all-encompassing wartime pressures. Inspections and searches of Turkish subjects posed numerous challenges for them, leading to difficult circumstances and frequent instances of forced solitary living. On August 14, 1916, Turkish subjects Ibraim Mamatov, Ali Aliyev, Emrullah Saminov, and Seifutdin Osmanov left their

¹⁹QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19146-num. 11 p.

²⁰QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4514-num. 1 p.

²¹QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4514-num. 2-3 p.

²²QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4589-num. 41 p.

²³QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4447-num. 4 p.

²⁴QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4447-num. 5 p.

²⁵QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4447-num. 9 p.

²⁶QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4449-num. 2 p.

²⁷QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4451-num. 1 p.

²⁸QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 4451-num. 2 p.

²⁹QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19139-num. 10 p.

³⁰QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19146-num. 1 p.

homes and went into hiding, subsequently becoming the subject of a search by the Sarkan village ataman.³¹

Captive citizens and prisoners of war, in Semirechye Oblast

Captive citizens and prisoners of war in Semirechye Oblast faced heightened scrutiny and strict control by internal affairs structures since 1916. During this period, the number of prisoners increased significantly. Despite a shift in the development vector of the Russian state, it exhibited reluctance in accepting citizens of the Ottoman Empire. Stringent orders were reinforced due to the Ottoman Empire's intensified pan-Islamic activities in Central Asia during the war. Russian authorities viewed leaders of Turkic-Islamic culture and citizens and prisoners from the Ottoman Empire with suspicion,³² perceiving them as potential carriers of Pan-Islamist ideas. The traditional suspicion toward the Turkish military elite contributed to the authorities' concerns about potential allegiance shifts among Muslims in Russia.

Semirechye Oblast emerged as a primary area receiving prisoners from Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Since the early days of the war, prisoners were transported to various parts of the region, with Kapal uyezd hosting the largest number. Turkish citizens arrived for diverse reasons, categorized as prisoners³³ due to their status as citizens of opposing states during the war. According to the laws of the Russian Empire, citizens aged 19–45 arriving in Kapal uyezd under any circumstances were considered prisoners. Ottoman citizens in Kapal arrived either as prisoners, war fugitives, or individuals who resided in their local areas before and after the war. In total, approximately 100 prisoners arrived in Semirechye Oblast during the war.

To assess the situation, a special list of prisoners was created in January 1916, outlining the general social status of captive citizens and prisoners of war.³⁴ Citizens aged 28–30 were considered warlike prisoners, and Russian surnames were assigned to those who had become subjects of Russia. Over time, the number of prisoners increased, with additional Turkish citizens arriving in Semirechye Oblast in July 1916 (Table 2).³⁵

The compilation of the citizen list presented in the table adhered to the indicators outlined in the corresponding document. It is noteworthy that the information in the table is derived from the details provided in the document itself. Notably, individuals aged between 28 and 30 were categorized as warlike prisoners.³⁶ Furthermore, the table reveals instances where Russian surnames were assigned to citizens who had long resided in Semirechye Oblast and had become subjects of Russia. This practice indicates that certain citizens opted to modify their names, incorporating suffixes such as *-ov* or *-ev*.

As time progressed, the count of prisoners witnessed an increase, including individuals from other countries. On July 28, 1916, a subsequent group of Turkish citizens arrived in Semirechye Oblast. The designated plan involved placing them in the village of Sarkan, where they were strategically stationed at the Sarkan station under rigorous control (Table 3).

Table 3 revealed that Turkish citizens included not only prisoners but also individuals who had previously lived in different regions of the Russian Empire and were detained for suspicious reasons. Some prisoners attempted to cross the border to return to their country, and some were recaptured while attempting to escape from Russian camps.

As the Russian administration intensified its persecution of citizens of Turkish origin, the majority of Turkish nationals in all regions were considered suspicious, leading to continued surveillance. On September 1, 1916, another batch of Turkish citizens and prisoners arrived in Sarkan town (Table 4).³⁷

³¹QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19146-num. 3 p.

³²Abdukadyrov and Muldahmetova 2022, pp. 161–65.

³³QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19742-num. 11 p.

³⁴QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19742-num. 4 p.

³⁵QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19742-num. 5 p.

³⁶QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19742-num. 80 p.

³⁷QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19742-num. 87 p.

Table 2. List of citizens who considered prisoners in Semirechye Oblast at the beginning of 1916

№	Captive citizens and prisoners	Age	Specialty	Nationality	State
1	Alexander Assatiani	58	Entrepreneur	Georgian	Ottoman Empire
2	Ibrahim Mamatov	29	Merchant	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
3	Husein Osmanov	31	Merchant	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
4	Abdilbay Aliyev	29	Merchant	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
5	Abdullah Husein	41	Merchant	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
6	Alim Selibey	30	Merchant	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
7	Sheikh Latfulla	39	Merchant	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
8	Ahmed Khoja Abdulkarim	30	Merchant	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
9	Abdullah Lilogly	25	Merchant	Turkish	Ottoman Empire
10	Saifullah Osmanogly	23	Baker	Turkish	Ottoman Empire

Table 3. Complete list of Turkish citizens and prisoners who arrived in July 1916¹

№	Captive citizens and prisoners	Age	Specialty	Nationality	Caught place	State
1	Mamed Tursunoğlu	34	Baker	Turkish	Torgai region	Ottoman Empire
2	Emin Kumışlı	35	Baker	Turkish	Hojent uyezd	Ottoman Empire
3	Ahmed Arif Temaşoğlu	50	Baker	Turkish	Hojent uyezd	Ottoman Empire
4	Sali Hajislam Alemdaroğlu	27	Baker	Turkish	Hojent uyezd	Ottoman Empire
5	Lemanes Buyukoğlu	35	Baker	Turkish	Hojent uyezd	Ottoman Empire
6	Said Abdullah	50	Baker	Turkish	Hojent uyezd	Ottoman Empire
7	Mamed Osman Saljioğlu	18	Baker	Turkish	Hojent uyezd	Ottoman Empire

¹QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 19742-num. 81–82 p.

Tables 3 and 4 illustrated the locations where Turkish prisoners were held and their places of origin. Many Turkish prisoners of war were recaptured while attempting to escape, necessitating the concealment of their documents. Therefore, they hid their documents locally, presented themselves as just workers and did not provide accurate information about their age. All prisoners listed were sent to Kapal uyezd.

Captive citizens and prisoners of war from Semirechye Oblast were relocated to Kapal uyezd and placed under the jurisdiction of local internal affairs structures. A challenging new life awaited them, marked by strict control, particularly for those living in Verniy, Przhevalsk, and Pishpek uyezds. Some attempted to escape or cross the border, prompting vigilant monitoring due to the previous escape of Turkish prisoners from internal provinces of Russia through China and Afghanistan.³⁸

³⁸Poznahirev 2011, pp. 6–9.

Table 4. List of Turkish citizens and prisoners sent to Kapal uyezd in 1916

№	The prisoners	Age	Specialty	Nationality	Caught place	State
1	Hüseyin Mahmud Tarakaşoğlu	22	Baker	Turkish	Samarkand Oblast	Ottoman Empire
2	Ismail İşmanoğlu	28	Baker	Turkish	Bukhara	Ottoman Empire
3	Mustafa Osmanoğlu	25	Baker	Turkish	Samarkand Oblast	Ottoman Empire
4	Shukru Ahmetoğlu	56	Baker	Turkish	Samarkand Oblast	Ottoman Empire
5	Ali Osmanoğlu	35	Baker	Turkish	Samarkand Oblast	Ottoman Empire
6	Mahmud Mustafaoğlu	30	Baker	Turkish	Samarkand Oblast	Ottoman Empire
7	Ahmed Mustafaoğlu	42	Baker	Turkish	Hojent uyezd	Ottoman Empire

Among the Turkish prisoners arriving in Semirechye Oblast, high-ranking military citizens were also present.³⁹ One such individual was Army Captain (Tuğgeneral) Ziya Ergök, who, along with military comrades, arrived from the interior regions of Russia through the steppes of present-day Kazakhstan after the October Revolution in Russia in 1917. The release of prisoners following the October Revolution led to decreased control over them. Ziya Ergök and his military companions, Nuri Bey, Sivashlı Rifat Bey, and Lieutenant Malatyalı Kazım, settled in Pishpek for a while.⁴⁰

Social status and fate of prisoners

The social situation of Turkish prisoners in Semirechye Oblast exhibited variability depending on their individual circumstances, with a pivotal factor being the attitude of local authorities toward Turkish citizens and prisoners. Russian authorities, in general, adopted a harsh stance toward Turkish citizens and prisoners from the early days of the war, resulting in the arrest of even ordinary citizens in cities and uyezds of Semirechye Oblast without just cause.⁴¹ Turkish citizens faced arrests and interrogations indiscriminately.

Most prisoners were concentrated in the cities of Verniy and Pishpek, as well as in the Kapal and Lepsi uyezds. The plight of Turkish prisoners in Kapal uyezd, as reported by the ataman of Sarkan village on October 27, 1916, highlighted a dire social status for 12 Turkish prisoners, characterized by a lack of clothing, food, residence, and housing.⁴²

Furthermore, throughout the war, the health and social conditions of Turkish prisoners in Semirechye Oblast were precarious. An illustrative case is that of Ahmet Abdülkerim, a Turkish citizen who arrived in Kapal in early February 1916 and died shortly thereafter.⁴³ His belongings and property were liquidated, with the proceeds transferred to the county administration.⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that among the Turkish captives, there were individuals of wealth.

Subsequently, these matters were deliberated, and an appeal for social support was extended to foreign nations, encompassing Turkish prisoners as well as individuals from Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Embassy of Sweden was approached to facilitate the regulation of the social

³⁹Poznahirev 2019, p. 128.

⁴⁰Şimşir 2009, pp. 58–60.

⁴¹Yanıkdağ 1999, pp. 74–80.

⁴²QROMA. 44-f, 1-inv., 17713-num. 78 p.

⁴³QROMA. 44-f, 1-inv., 19742-num. 29 p.

⁴⁴QROMA. 44-f, 1-inv., 19742-num. 43 p.

conditions of Turkish prisoners and citizens in the Sarkan village. According to the arrangement, elderly prisoners and Turkish citizens were allocated 20 rubles, while younger individuals received 10 rubles. This initiative transpired within a specific timeframe, realized during the summer months of 1917.⁴⁵ Additionally, support emanated from various international organizations during this period. Notably, the Red Cross Society extended assistance to all prisoners within the Russian territory, further contributing to the welfare of Turkish prisoners and their counterparts.⁴⁶

Prisoners were strictly prohibited from crossing borders, and their mobility was tightly restricted. Within the local area, limited opportunities for state or self-employment were available to them, subject to approval. The Ministry of Internal Affairs held jurisdiction over them, and their conduct fell under the vigilant oversight of militia representatives. Violent actions or activities against state interests prompted the Ministry to impose specific punitive measures. In addition, a set of additional prohibitions was enforced, including:

Separating from the designated public group.

Leaving the city.

Visiting cultural venues without explicit permission (such as parties, concerts, etc.).

Possession of a camera.

Possession of weapons.

Prisoners were obligated to stay within their designated precincts after dark, with any departure or specific actions requiring explicit permission.

However, with the passage of time, the situation underwent significant transformations, primarily influenced by the evolving political landscape in Russia. The October Revolution of 1917 marked a pivotal moment that reverberated throughout the Turkestan region. As the Russian Empire declared its withdrawal from the ongoing conflict, the complex matter of dealing with prisoners emerged on the national agenda. Russia initiated the repatriation of its own prisoners, a move reciprocated by the Allied Powers, resulting in an extensive discussion on this matter during the negotiations of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in 1918.⁴⁷ The aftermath of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk saw a substantial shift in the dynamics between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. With the formal establishment of peace, a considerable number of prisoners of war were slated to return to their respective homelands, a scenario that included Ottoman prisoners. The negotiations also explored potential concessions for Ottoman prisoners, acknowledging the unique circumstances surrounding their captivity.

Significantly, following Russia's withdrawal from the First World War, a noteworthy shift occurred for Ottoman citizens held as prisoners – they were granted the opportunity to earn income through local employment. This marked a departure from the stringent regulations imposed in the early stages of the war, as the post-withdrawal period witnessed a relaxation of such requirements.⁴⁸ The local population's attitude toward the Turks during this phase was generally positive, prompting the need to delve into the nuanced relationships between the prisoners and the local inhabitants. A crucial aspect requiring examination is the intricate interplay between the Turkish prisoners and subjects and the diverse peoples of the region. This interconnectedness was intricately tied to the "social status" of the prisoners, a factor that played a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of their interactions.

Before the war, the Ottoman Empire held a prestigious position as the focal point of the Muslim world, serving as the guardian of the holy places of Islam and Christianity. However, during the war and ensuing civil upheavals, the empire confronted unprecedented challenges. In the Semirechye Oblast, local Kazakhs and other Turkic-Muslim communities exhibited a favorable attitude toward Turkish prisoners and subjects. Notably, they demonstrated a practical commitment to a shared

⁴⁵QROMA. 44-f., 1-inv., 17713-num. 96 p.

⁴⁶Davis 1993, pp. 37–42.

⁴⁷Chernev 2019, pp. 12–18.

⁴⁸Ölçen and Leiser 1995, pp. 128–33.

Islamic identity. This shared Islamic identity proved instrumental in alleviating and ultimately ceasing the societal pressure on Turkish citizens. A convergence of religious, cultural, and ethnic understandings between the local Muslim populations and the prisoners emerged, fostering a harmonious relationship during this tumultuous period.⁴⁹ The formation of a common bond facilitated social support from local Muslim communities to Turkish prisoners, providing them with valuable assistance during a challenging time.

As mentioned earlier, following the conclusion of the war, Army Captain (Tuğgeneral) Ziya Ergök and his troops opted to return to their homeland. Ziya Ergök, along with his fellow soldiers, successfully emerged from captivity, taking varied routes back to their country, ultimately arriving from Pishpek. During their stay in Pishpek, Ziya Ergök and his comrades documented their experiences, contributing valuable memoirs that enrich our understanding of the history of prisoners. Their accounts not only provide insights into Semirechye Oblast but also depict positive interactions with the local peoples, including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Dungans.⁵⁰

In the aftermath of the First World War, the majority of Turkish prisoners chose to remain in the localities where they had been held. Enjoying newfound freedom, they could move freely within society. Interestingly, many Turkish prisoners displayed a reluctance to promptly return to their homeland. This hesitation stemmed from the perilous conditions in the Ottoman Empire, where the loss of the war had ignited a struggle for freedom. As a result, Turkish prisoners were dispersed to various regions within the Turkistan General-Governorate. Those who had acclimated to life in Semirechye Oblast chose to stay, seamlessly assimilating into the local society.

Conclusion

In summary, while Semirechye Oblast was not initially designated as an official receiving region for Ottoman prisoners during the First World War, it eventually emerged as a significant destination for both Ottoman and European captives. Through a comprehensive exploration of prisoner history, it is evident that Semirechye Oblast played a crucial role in the destinies of numerous Ottoman captive citizens and prisoners of war. The legacy of Turkish prisoners endured in the fabric of Zhetisu, where they chose to remain.

Remarkably resilient and adaptable, the Turks, employed in various capacities, assimilated into the landscape of Zhetisu. Throughout the war, Turkish prisoners weathered the most challenging period of their lives in this region, leaving an indelible mark on the country's history and the land itself. Although the number of Ottoman prisoners in Semirechye Oblast was comparatively smaller than that of European counterparts from Austria-Hungary and Germany, Turkish captives faced diverse challenges, encompassing moral, physical, and psychological hardships.

Significantly, the climate of Semirechye Oblast, conducive to living, alleviated many difficulties for the prisoners, distinguishing their experience from those in the Urals, Siberia, and other regions of the Russian Empire. Turkish prisoners, in contrast to their counterparts from different nations, perceived this area as a home away from home. The enduring presence of Turkish prisoners in the local community post-war, as they integrated with the Bolsheviks and engaged in local life, attests to the profound connection they felt with the region. Confidently, we assert that the survival and resilience of Ottoman prisoners during these challenging times owe much to the kindness and support of the local Kazakh people, exemplifying the enduring impact of human compassion in the face of adversity.

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⁴⁹Senyutkina and Guseva 2012, pp. 230–37.

⁵⁰Önal 2007, 88 s.

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