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The banner, shown courtesy of the Schwind Collection to Pēteris Cedrinš, is the personal banner of prince Avalov, commander of the West Volunteer Army (Западная добровольческая армия), a White Russian anti-Bolshevik and pro-German force created by Germany Gen. von der Goltz in August 1919 merging the rest of German Freikorps in the Baltic States and some Russian POWs with the Special Russian Corps raised in November 1918 by Gen. Graf Fëdor Arturovič Keller and by Cossack Gen. Pavel Bermond, later Prince Avalov, both Knights of the Russian Branch of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (SOSJJ). The Corps lent allegiance to Kolchak's white government and later to a Latvian puppet government supported by Berlin, and fought against both the Bolshevik and the Latvian democratic government supported by the Entente, being disbanded in December 1919. The Banner front shows the imperial coat of arms. On the reverse, the Black Maltese Cross with Crown of Thorns memorializes General Graf Keller, murdered by the Bolsheviks

<http://www.theknightsofsaintjohn.com/History-After-Malta.htm>;

<http://www.vexilloграфия.ru/russia/beloe.htm>;

<http://lettonica.blogspot.com/2007/11/bear-slayers-day.html> (Pēteris Cedrinš, *Bear Slayer's Day*, 11 November 2007). Cedrinš posted the image of the Flag's recto on wikipedia commons.

The repatriation of Greek prisoners of war from the Turkish military camps of Asia Minor (April 1923 – April 1924)

by NIKOS TOMPROS* and NIKOS KANELLOPOULOS**

ABSTRACT: The aspirations of the *Megali Idea*, nurtured by generations of Greeks, were permanently put to rest in Lausanne with the signing, by Greece and Turkey, of the homonymous Peace Treaty (24 July 1923). Almost six months earlier (17/30 January 1923), in the same Swiss city, the two states had co-signed diplomatic acts (Agreements and Protocols) for the mutual exchange of populations and prisoners of war. In contravention to what was stipulated in the relevant agreements, the repatriation of Greek prisoners of war took place in stages, over a period of thirteen months. The bulk of the POWs, however, arrived in Greece in April and August 1923. Scholarly interest in the repatriation of these prisoners is manifold. First and foremost, it addresses a gap in Greek historiography relating both to their numbers and the conditions under which they arrived in Greece. Knowing the total number of returning soldiers, coupled with the number of those captured by Kemal's forces in the period 1919–1922, allows one to calculate the extent of human losses suffered by the Greek soldiers during their captivity. Further, the image of the repatriates may act as irrefutable evidence of the billeting conditions in Asia Minor, leading to certain safe remarks regarding their detention in Turkish concentration camps. Focusing on the quantification of Greek prisoners, thus, what follows is an attempt at documenting their “journey” from Turkey to Greece, the public discourse that developed around them, as well as any effort at instrumentalizing them undertaken both by the Turkish and Greek sides respectively.

KEYWORDS: GRECO-TURKISH WAR (1919–1922), PRISONERS OF WAR, PRISONERS OF WAR REPATRIATION, TREATY OF LAUSANNE, PRISONERS OF WAR INSTRUMENTALIZATION.

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The sources

The evidence available to researchers on the detention conditions of Greek soldiers in the Turkish camps of Asia Minor in the years 1919–1924, is abundant.¹ It includes prisoners’ personal testimonies (diaries, memoirs, autobiographies) and, to a lesser extent, the testimonies of repatriated officers given to the Investigative Committee for Asia Minor Operations (1923), which are kept at the Department of Army History (Διεύθυνση Ιστορίας Στρατού – Δ.Ι.Σ.). More evidence is accessible in the report on the prisoners published in 1923 by the International Committee set up by the Greek Red Cross,² in documentary material held at the General State Archives in Athens,³ at the Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ιστορικό Αρχείο του Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών – Ι.Α.Υ.Ε.),⁴ the Department of Army History,⁵ the Centre for Asia Minor Studies,⁶ the National Research Foundation “Eleftherios K.

1 For a wealth of information on the soldiers’ experience in Asia Minor and the prisoners of war, see the recently published collective volume by Dimitris KAMOUZIS, Alexandros MAKRIS and Charalambos MINASIDIS (Eds.), *Έλληνες Στρατιώτες και Μικρασιατική Εκστρατεία. Πτυχές μιας οδυνηρής εμπειρίας* [Greek Soldiers and the Asia Minor Expedition. Facets of a Painful Experience], Athens, Vivliopoleion tis Estias, 2022.

2 *Le traitement des prisonniers Grecs en Turquie. Rapport de la Commission Internationale d’Enquête institutée sous les auspices de la Croix Rouge Hellénique*, Athens, 1923.

3 Γενικά Αρχεία του Κράτους (ΓΑΚ) [General State Archives (GSA)], Αρχείο Πολιτικού Γραφείου Πρωθυπουργού [Archive of the Political Bureau of the Prime Minister], F. 697–698, 723, 1002.

4 Διπλωματικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών (ΥΔΙΑ) [Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DHA)], Αρχείο Κεντρικής Υπηρεσίας (1922–1924) [Archive of the Central Service (1922–1924)], Αρχείο Κοινωνίας των Εθνών (1922–1923) [Archive of the League of Nations (1922–1923)].

5 Διεύθυνση Ιστορίας Στρατού (ΔΙΣ) [Department of Military History (DMH)], Μικρασιατική Εκστρατεία [Asia Minor Expedition], F. 204, 233, 246, 250, 255–256, 260, 270–271, 273, 283, 300–301, 337, 354, 360–362, 382, 384, 395, 401, 419, Department of Military History.

6 Κέντρο Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών (ΚΜΣ) [Centre for Asia Minor Studies (CAMS)], Αρχείο χειρογράφων [Manuscripts Archive]. In addition, the Centre has published two volumes, which contain a plethora of relevant testimonies: CENTRE FOR ASIA MINOR STUDIES, *Η Έξοδος*, τόμ. Α’: *Μαρτυρίες από τις επαρχίες των δυτικών παραλιών της Μικράς Ασίας* [The Exodus, Vol. I: Testimonies from the Provinces of the Western Coast of Asia Minor], Athens, Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1980; CENTRE FOR ASIA MINOR STUDIES, *Η Έξοδος*, τόμ. Β’: *Μαρτυρίες από τις επαρχίες της κεντρικής και νότιας Μικρασίας* [The Exodus, Vol. II: Testimonies from the Provinces of Central and Southern Asia Minor], Athens: Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1982.

Venizelos”,⁷ the Historical Archives of the Benaki Museum,⁸ and the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive.⁹ Further material can be traced in the relevant bibliography. On the contrary, the evidence available to scholars on the repatriation of Greek prisoners of war in the period April 1923 – April 1924 is limited. This material usually includes selected paragraphs from personal testimonies and, predominantly, the contemporary daily press.¹⁰ It is safe to assume that the limited volume of documentary evidence is linked to the fact that the repatriation of Greek soldiers stirred less interest in the public compared to their time in captivity, since it brought to a conclusion a situation that was quite painful for those who experienced it. In addition, Greek society was keen to forego the memory of the magnitude of the defeat suffered by the hitherto invincible Greek army in the territories of Asia Minor. Regrettably, however, the multitude of returning soldiers reminded the Greeks of the devastation that had taken place in Asia Minor. In the mind of the public – and even more so in that of military circles – captivity was a humiliating act.¹¹ Therefore, the whole affair had to be committed to oblivion.

Diplomatic activity relating to prisoners and repatriation

Almost two months after the collapse of the Asia Minor front (August 1922) and the withdrawal of the Greek military forces from Asia Minor, the revolutionary government, based on circulating rumors and other indications of atrocities perpetrated against prisoners of war and citizens of Asia Minor by the Kemalist troops, issued a legislative decree and set up a committee on 22 October 1922, in order to investigate the conditions on the ground in Turkish military camps. As

7 Εθνικό Ίδρυμα Ερευνών και Μελετών «Ελευθέριος Κ. Βενιζέλος» [National Research Foundation “Eleftherios K. Venizelos”], Ψηφιακό Αρχείο [Digital Archive], venizelosarchives.gr, online.

8 *Ιστορικά Αρχεία Μουσείου Μπενάκη (ΙΑ)* [Historical Archives of the Benaki Museum (HABM)], *Αρχείο Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος* [Eleftherios Venizelos Archive].

9 Ελληνικό Λογοτεχνικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο [Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive], *Αρχείο Γεώργιος Στρέιτ* [Georgios Streit Archive].

10 See Pavlos ΗΑΔΗΜΟΙΣ, Βιβλιογραφία 1919–1978. Μικρασιατική εκστρατεία – ήττα, προσφυγιά [Bibliography 1919–1978. Asia Minor Expedition – Defeat, Displacement], Athens, Hermes, 1981.

11 Ourania ΦΟΤΟΡΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, 1912–1930. Νομικό καθεστώς, διαπραγματεύσεις και προεκτάσεις του προβλήματος [Greek Military Prisoners of War, 1912–1930. Legal Status, Negotiations and Extensions of the Problem], PhD thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2010, p. 9, with relevant bibliography.

part of its effort to collect information and sufficient evidence relating to Turkish practices, that it would then present to the participants of the Lausanne Peace Conference, the Investigative Committee on Turkish Atrocities visited hospitals, quarantine stations and refugee camps in search of prisoners from the Turkish concentration camps.¹²

At the same time, in November 1922 (7/20 November 1922), negotiations were launched in Lausanne between Greece and Turkey in order to resolve any disputes between the two states.¹³ After almost two months of talks, The Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations (17/30 January 1923) was signed in the Swiss city.¹⁴ Aside from the aforementioned compulsory exchange of inhabitants, the Convention also provided for the exchange of military and political prisoners of war from the two countries.¹⁵ It is usually argued that these diplomatic agreements preceded the rest of the negotiations for purely humanitarian reasons. In this case, however, they were signed «as a matter of priority because they could be resolved bilaterally».¹⁶ The exchange of prisoners,

12 ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit. pp. 29–30.

13 For the text of the Treaty of Lausanne, see Lawrence Martin (Ed.), *The Treaties of Peace 1919–1923*, vol. II, New York, NY, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924. At the negotiating table, the Greek side was represented by Eleftherios Venizelos, Dimitrios Kaklamanos, Alexandros Mazarakis, Nikolaos Politis, Andreas Michalakopoulos and Secretary Konstantinos Kollas, and the Turkish by Ismet Pasha, Riza Nour Bey, Hassan Bey and Secretary Resit Sefet Bey. Athanasios PROTONATARIOS, *Το προσφυγικόν πρόβλημα από ιστορικής, νομικής και κρατικής απόψεως* [The Refugee Problem from a Historical, Legal and State Perspective], Athens, Pyrsos, 1929, p. 14; Ioannis GIANNOULOPOULOS, «Η Διεθνής Συνδιάσκεψη και η Συνθήκη της Λωζάννης» [The International Conference and the Treaty of Lausanne], in *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* [History of the Hellenic Nation], Vol. 15, Athens, Ekdotiki, 1977, p. 262.

14 The Greek delegation was forced to accept The Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations following the peremptory refusal of the Turks (16 January 1923) to accept the repatriation of those Greeks who had already left Turkey. Gregory DAFNIS, *Η Ελλάδα μεταξύ δύο πολέμων (1923–1940)* [Greece between Two Wars (1923–1940)], Athens, Kaktos, 1997, p. 57; GIANNOULOPOULOS, «Η Διεθνής Συνδιάσκεψη», cit. p. 266.

15 Agreement «On the surrender of political prisoners and the exchange of prisoners of war». See Renée HIRSCHON, *Κληρονόμοι της Μικρασιατικής Καταστροφής. Η κοινωνική ζωή των Μικρασιατών προσφύγων στον Πειραιά* [Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe. The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus], Athens, National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation, 2006, pp. 49, 93.

16 Angelos SYRIGOS, *Ελληνοτουρκικές σχέσεις* [Greek-Turkish Relations], Athens, Patakis, 2015, p. 50.

at least those named in the list submitted by the two countries to the Directorate of the International Red Cross in Geneva, was set to commence two weeks after the signing of the Convention (31 January / 13 February 1923). It was foreseen that it would be concluded within a fortnight (15/28 February 1923). In theory, therefore, all hostages would have been repatriated by the end of February. In actual fact, however, the first ships with Turkish prisoners left Greece bound for Turkey on 17 March. The deadline of the Turkish side was extended in order for the authorities to track additional prisoners not included in the list submitted by Greece to the powers that be in Geneva. At the same time, the Convention itself stipulated that the transfer of Turkish prisoners held in Greek territories would precede that of Greeks in Asia Minor. The Turks originating from Asia Minor would be transferred to Smyrna and those from Thrace would be taken to Istanbul.¹⁷ Once the Turks in the first group had been repatriated, the Greek soldiers and civilians detained in Turkey would follow. These would be assembled in Smyrna and Istanbul, and exchanged with an equal number of Turkish repatriates, «officer for officer, soldier for soldier».¹⁸

According to the list submitted by Greece to an international committee of the Red Cross, there were 7,340 Turks on Greek lands.¹⁹ The available figures, however, are contradictory, with estimates for the number of Turkish prisoners ranging from 7,340 to 16,872 men.²⁰ The same applied to the case of Greek prisoners

17 Ioannis GLAVINAS, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες αιχμάλωτοι και αγνοούμενοι της Μικρασιατικής Εκστρατείας: Αιχμαλωσία, αναζήτηση, απελευθέρωση (1922–1924)» [The Captured and Missing Greek Soldiers of the Asia Minor Expedition: Captivity, Search, Liberation (1922–1924)], in KAMOZIS, MAKRI and MINASIDIS, Έλληνες Στρατιώτες και Μικρασιατική Εκστρατεία, cit., p. 332.

18 Treaty of Lausanne, Greco-Turkish Agreement regarding the Exchange of Prisoners, Article 4, el.wikisource.org/wiki/Συνθήκη_της_Λωζάνης/Ελληνοτουρκική_συμφωνία_περί_των_αιχμαλώτων, online.

19 «Επίσημος ανακοίνωσις διά την ανταλλαγὴν των αιχμαλώτων» [Official Announcement regarding the Exchange of Prisoners], *Embros*, 13 February 1923; Stavros YOLTZOGLU, *Οι ελληνοτουρκικές σχέσεις (1922–1930)* [Greek-Turkish Relations (1922–1930)], PhD thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2006, p. 244.

20 *Paris* (Athens), 28 March 1923; Telegram of Konstantinos Rentis, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, on the number of Greek prisoners of war, *Ιστορικά Αρχεία Μουσείου Μπενάκη (ΙΑ)* [Historical Archives of the Benaki Museum (*HABM*)], *Αρχείο Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος* [Eleftherios Venizelos Archive], file 32 (see also venizelosarchives.gr/rec.asp?id=10279, online); YOLTZOGLU, *Οι ελληνοτουρκικές σχέσεις*, cit., pp. 244–245, with relevant bibliography; GLAVINAS, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες», cit., p. 322.

in Turkey, for whose numbers the Greek side did not have an accurate picture.²¹ As for the costs of their transportation, these would be borne by the country of detainment. The remaining soldiers, who were not included in the original lists, would be exchanged within three weeks of the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne (24 July 1923).²² As for any Christian Orthodox males, who were Turkish subjects but who were being held prisoners in Asia Minor, Article 4 of The Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations provided that they would be the first among the Greeks to be exchanged immediately after the ratification of the Peace Treaty.

A joint committee consisting of five parties, including three representatives of the International Red Cross from countries that had remained neutral in the First World War (1914–1918) and one representative from the Greek and Turkish sides respectively, was responsible for the implementation of the Greek-Turkish Agreement «On the surrender of political prisoners and the exchange of prisoners of war». The members of the committee were Colonel Eduard Wildbolz (chairman) and Dr Raymond Page of the Swiss Red Cross, Dr David Lindsjõe of the Swedish Red Cross, the Greek major of the Corps of Engineers Ioannis Kottakis and Muzaffer Bey, representing Turkey.²³ The deliberations of the committee regarding the implementation of the Agreement on the first groups of hostages and prisoners began in mid February (15 February 1923). The committee, however, soon encountered difficulties due to the rivalry and suspicion rife between the opposing parties, which resulted in the suspension of the exchange process for a month after the end of February (29 March 1923). The main reason for stalling the repatriation of the prisoners was Greece's overtures against the ongoing dis-

21 Telegram of Konstantinos Rentis, *venizelosarchives.gr/rec.asp?id=10279*, online; YOLTZOGLU, *Οι ελληνοτουρκικές σχέσεις*, cit., p. 259; GLAVINAS, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες», cit., p. 320; Ioannis GLAVINAS, «Μέχρι σήμερα δεν επανέκαμψεν εκ Μ. Ασίας αγνοούμενης της τύχης του: οι αγνοούμενοι Έλληνες στρατιώτες και πολίτες της Μικρασιατικής Καταστροφής μέσα από τις αιτήσεις των συγγενών τους στο Πολιτικό Γραφείο του Πρωθυπουργού (1922–1924)» [To the Day, he has not Returned from Asia Minor, Fate Unknown: The Missing Greek Soldiers and Civilians of the Asia Minor Catastrophe through the Applications of their Relatives to the Political Bureau of the Prime Minister (1922–1924)], *Μικρασιατικά Χρονικά* [Asia Minor Chronicles], 24 (2011), p. 216.

22 GLAVINAS, «Μέχρι σήμερα», cit., p. 203; GLAVINAS, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες», cit., pp. 332–333.

23 Muzaffer Bey was quickly replaced by the president of the Red Crescent, Ömer Lüfti Bey. ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου*, cit., pp. 32–33.



Two Greek prisoners of war after repatriation, 1923. Source: International Committee of the Red Cross Audiovisual Archives (<https://avarchives.icrc.org/Picture/5040>).

placement of the Greek populations of Pontus.²⁴ The first part of the joint committee's operations was completed on 19 April, three months after its foundation,

²⁴ On the committee and its operations, see ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, 'Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., pp. 32–38.

with the submission of a report to the International Committee of the Red Cross and all parties concerned by its chairman, Eduard Wildbolz. According to the report, by that date (19 April), 10,098 soldiers had returned to Greece, while six to eight thousand men remained in Turkey, including some four hundred officers.²⁵ As far as the exchange of military personnel was concerned, the committee had decided that those who were «sick and those who did not receive adequate sustenance would be exchanged first».²⁶ In addition to the collection and transfer of the prisoners included in the lists, within the period April–May 1923, the members of the committee investigated the fate of those Greek and Turkish military and civilian captives who were declared missing.²⁷

The first Turkish officers and soldiers, among them the commander of the First Corps of the Ottoman army, Cafer Tayyar, boarded steamships at Piraeus (*Aghios Markos*, *Kefallinia*, *Polikos* and others) bound for Smyrna. The ships made stops at Milos and Crete along the way, where they collected additional prisoners. Another steamship (*Hesperia*), also bound for Smyrna, travelled to Corfu, Lefkada, Ithaca, Zakynthos and Patras, from where she collected a further 1,100 Turkish prisoners.²⁸

At the end of March, the steamship *Ithaki* sailed to the sanatorium of Saint George carrying the first 140 Greek captives (27 March 1923).²⁹ These consisted of ninety sailors, who had been captured by the steamships *Enosis* and *Oourania* in the Black Sea, ten females, wives of Greek officers, and thirty minors. The first Greek prisoners of war, however, arrived at the same sanatorium on 1 April, with almost daily arrivals thereafter until 20 April. Originally, it was conceived that

25 Archive of the Central Service, F. 6, 17–18 (1923), Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., p. 38.

26 *Patris* (Athens), 28 March 1923.

27 ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., pp. 33, 39; GLAVINAS, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες», cit., p. 333.

28 *Patris* (Athens), 28 March 1923; «*Η ανταλλαγή των στρατιωτικών αιχμαλώτων. Η επιβίβασις των Τούρκων ήρχισε χθες*» [*The Exchange of Military Prisoners. The Boarding of Turks Began Yesterday*], *Embros*, 29 March 1923; «*Η μεταφορά των Τούρκων αιχμαλώτων*» [*The Transfer of Turkish Prisoners*], *Embros*, 30 March 1923; *To Fos* (Patras), 2 April 1923.

29 *Patris* (Athens), 28 March 1923.

the stay of the repatriates in Saint George would extend for ten to fourteen days.³⁰ The sheer volume of arrivals, however, soon forced officials to reduce the length of stay to three days and later to just one.³¹

Table 1
Repatriated prisoners of war and political hostages
(April 1923 – April 1924)

DATE OF ARRIVAL	VESSEL	TOTAL NUMBER OF PRISONERS	OFFICERS	INFANTRY – LIEUTENANTS	AILINGS	POLITICAL HOSTAGES
27 March 1923	<i>Ithaca</i>	140				140
1 April 1923	<i>Kefallinia</i>	569			69	
3 April 1923	<i>Polikos</i>	1,306				
	<i>Alex-andros</i>	980	0	980		
4 April 1923	<i>Kaloutas</i>					
5 April 1923	<i>Eustratios</i>	850				
6 April 1923	<i>Poppy</i>	321				
7 August 1923	<i>Aghios Ioannis</i>	1,600				
	<i>Aghios</i>	640				
9 April 1923	<i>Andreas</i>					
10 April 1923	<i>Hesperia</i>	340				
11 April 1923	<i>Aghios Markos</i>	2,778			200	
14 April 1923	<i>Eustratios</i>	1,435				
	<i>Amphitrite</i>	275				
19 April 1923						
20 April 1923	<i>Hesperia</i>	410				

³⁰ Αρχείο Κλεάνθη Αναγνωστόπουλου [Archive of Kleomenes Anagnostopoulos], Γενικά Αρχεία του Κράτους (ΓΑΚ) [General State Archives (GSA)], K413.

³¹ *Patris* (Athens), 28 March 1923; *Eleftheros Typos*, 28 March 1923.

25 May 1923	<i>Her- moupolis</i>	359	32	118		209
19 June 1923	<i>Hermes</i>	653	5			648
6 August 1923	<i>Kefallinia</i>	1,213	13	700		500
15 August 1923	<i>Pantelis</i>	883	13	863		7
17 August 1923	<i>Propontis</i>	1,334		1,334		
	<i>Aghios</i>	1,250		1,250		
21 August 1923	<i>Georgios</i>					
22 August 1923	<i>Hesperia</i>	226	226			
23 August 1923	<i>Daphne</i>	312		310		2
20 February 1924	<i>Euxeinos</i>	945		96		849
10 March 1924	<i>Euxeinos</i>	575		254		321
21 April 1924	<i>Euxeinos</i>	489				489
TOTAL		19,883	289	5,905	269	3,165

Sources: see below, note 38.

Upon their arrival in Greece, the captured soldiers were either discharged immediately, if their class had ceased to serve, or they continued their military service, following a month's leave to visit their relatives. Those among the discharged who had a family received one month's pay and any travel expenses to their homes, while those who were destitute and homeless remained in military units until they found work, at which time they were discharged.³² As part of these separate processes, the prisoners were taken to the Piraeus garrison headquarters, where they were provided with either discharge or marching orders.³³ Any repatriates in need of immediate medical assistance were taken to hospitals and medical care units.³⁴ The poor health conditions of the Greek prisoners are revealed by the fact that, of the approximately eleven thousand soldiers who arrived in Greece

³² *Eleftheros Typos*, 5 April 1923.

³³ «Η επιθεώρησις της καταστάσεως των αιχμαλώτων» [Review of the Prisoners' Condition], *Embros*, 6 April 1923.

³⁴ Spyros ANDROUTSOS, Προσωπικό ημερολόγιο από την εκστρατεία της Μικράς Ασίας: το χρονικό μας αιχμαλωσίας [Personal Diary from the Asia Minor Expedition: A Chronicle of Captivity], Thessaloniki, Pournaras, 1980, pp. 117–118.

in April 1923, 1,363 (14.4% of them) were hospitalized for at least one month.³⁵

The first of the returning soldiers disembarked at the port of Piraeus on 4 April.³⁶ Their state was truly horrific. «Living dead», «human rags», «moving skeletons» or «human spectres» are just some of the expressions used to describe them that appeared in the headlines of the daily press at the time. The journalist Kostas Misaelidis, in his article entitled «The litany of suffering», notes regarding the arrival of the first Greek prisoners on the streets of the capital: «The eyes of the Athenians had never encountered a more heartbreaking scene than the one they saw yesterday morning, when the litany of Pain, the remnants of the Ninth Regiment of the Cretans and the Seventeenth Regiment of the Eleventh Division of Magnesia crossed the street. Yes, it was a procession, but not of people. Of skeletons wrapped in the rags that once formed the uniform of the Greek soldier, the Victor».³⁷ By 20 April, 11,504 people had been repatriated (Table 1).³⁸ The

35 ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., p. 46. Glavinias argues for an increased rate of ailing repatriates, citing 20%. More specifically, the author notes that: «9% of the 10,000 prisoners exchanged were crippled, while 40% were sick, with 2,000 being classified as critically ill and hospitalized with scurvy, enteritis, frostbite and gangrene». GLAVINIAS, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες», cit., p. 327.

36 GREEK RED CROSS, Οι Έλληνες αιχμάλωτοι εν Τουρκία: πώς μετεχειρήσθησαν αυτούς οι Τούρκοι [The Greek Prisoners in Turkey: How they Were Treated by the Turks], Report of the Greek Red Cross, Athens, Press of the Royal Court, 1923, pp. 29–30; *Embros*, 5 April 1923, 6 April 1923; *Skrip*, 6 April 1923; Christos ANGELOMATIS, *Χρονικόν μεγάλης τραγωδίας (Το έπος της Μικράς Ασίας)* [The Chronicle of a Great Tragedy (The Saga of Asia Minor)], Athens, Vivliopoleion tis Estias, 2008 [1923], p. 391.

37 *Amaltheia of Smyrna* (Athens), 7 April 1923.

38 The quantitative data of the study were obtained from the authors' own survey of contemporary newspapers and journals in the period January 1923 – December 1924: *Αθηναϊκή* [Athinaiki] (Athens), *Αμάθεια Σμύρνης* [Amaltheia of Smyrna] (Athens), *Αναγέννηση* [Anagennisi] (Trikala), *Αυγή Δωδεκανησιακή* [Avgi Dodekanesiaki] (Athens), *Δημοκρατία* [Demokratia] (Athens), *Έθνος* [Ethnos] (Athens), *Ελεύθερος Τύπος* [Eleftheros Typos] (Athens), *Εμπρός* [Embros] (Athens), *Εσπερινή* [Hesperini] (Athens), *Εσπερινός Ταχυδρόμος* [Hesperinos Tachydromos] (Chania), *Εστία* [Hestia] (Athens), *Θάρος* [Tharros] (Trikala), *Θεσσαλία* [Thessalia] (Volos), *Ίδη* [Ide] (Heraklion), *Κάδμος* [Kadmos] (Thebes), *Κήρυξ* [Kiryx] (Paris), *Κήρυξ* [Kiryx] (Chania), *Μακεδονία* [Makedonia] (Thessaloniki), *Νέα Αλήθεια* [Nea Aletheia] (Thessaloniki), *Νέα Ημέρα Τεργέστης* [Nea Hemera Tergestes] (Athens), *Νέα Χίος* [Nea Chios] (Chios), *Νεολόγος Πάτρας* [Neologos of Patras] (Patras), *Νουμάς* [Noumas] (Athens), *Οικονομολόγος Αθηνών* [Oekonomologos Athinon] (Athens), *Πατρίς* [Patri] (Athens), *Πατρίς* [Patri] (Tripoli), *Πολιτεία* [Politeia] (Athens), *Πρωινή* [Proini] (Athens), *Πρωτεύουσα* [Proteousa] (Athens), *Ριζοσπάστης* [Rizospastis] (Athens), *Σημαία Καλαμών* [Simaiia Kalamon] (Kalamata), *Ταχυδρόμος Βορείου Ελλάδος*

quantitative data amassed by Ioannis Glavinias (ten thousand soldiers and 349 officers)³⁹ and Ourania Fotopoulou (10,098 soldiers) bear small deviations. Both calculated the number of repatriates up until 18 April. As already stated, the joint committee estimated that six to eight thousand Greek military prisoners, of whom four hundred were officers, remained in Turkey by 19 April.⁴⁰

At the end of April (25 April 1923), a new five-member international committee was formed tasked with identifying and repatriating Greeks and Turks, who had not been registered in the prisoner lists until then.⁴¹ It should be noted that upon arrival, the repatriates engaged in the dissemination of not-necessarily-accurate information about their living and dead comrades-in-arms in Asia Minor, fuelled by the intense interest of relatives in their loved ones. In order to put a stop to the speculations, the government – through the Bureau of the Revolution – called upon all those concerned to disregard any circulating rumours and, instead, only contact the relevant offices for information.⁴²

Resulting from the actions of the above-mentioned five-member committee, the second phase of the repatriation of Turkish prisoners was initiated in mid May, with the departure from Piraeus of the steamer *Hermoupolis* bound for Smyrna. On board were seven Turkish officers, four hundred soldiers and three hundred civilians. These were prisoners who had not been included in the first list submitted by the Greek government in Geneva. The same ship sailed a few days later into the bay of Salamis (25 May 1923), carrying thirty-two Greek officers, 118 soldiers and 209 political hostages.⁴³ At the same time, 799 Turkish prisoners remained in Greece. To the contrary, no action was taken for the repatriation of eight thousand or so Greek soldiers (including some four hundred officers) who were still in Asia Minor, until August.⁴⁴ According to Yoltzoglou, by mid June,

[Tachydromos Voreiou Ellados] (Thessaloniki), Τηλέγραφος [Telegraphos] (Thessaloniki), Τηλέγραφος [Telegraphos] (Patras), Το Φως [To Fos] (Patras), Το Φως [To Fos] (Thessaloniki), Φιλελεύθερος [Phileleftheros] (Zakynthos).

39 GLAVINIAS, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες», cit., p. 335.

40 ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., p. 38, with relevant bibliography.

41 GLAVINIAS, «Μέχρι σήμερα», cit., p. 205.

42 *Embros*, 14 April 1923.

43 *Embros*, 26 May 1923.

44 *Embros*, 13 February 1923. The only exception in the period June–July 1923 was the repatriation of 653 political hostages, which included a few soldiers and only five officers. The



Greek prisoners of war repatriation, 1923. Source: International Committee of the Red Cross Audiovisual Archives (<https://avarchives.icrc.org/Picture/5041>).

Greece had handed over to Turkey 14,878 individuals. Similarly, 11,041 prisoners had arrived in Greece from Turkey.⁴⁵ This numerical total is close to the 11,504 persons identified in the newspapers of the time (Table 1). In any case, an inspection of the prisoner camps in Turkish territories by a committee of the International Red Cross in July 1923, estimated the remaining Greek prisoners at roughly 5,920, a number that probably corresponds to actual figures.⁴⁶

It should be noted that the Lausanne Peace Treaty (24 July 1923) also included articles on the release of prisoners of war and political hostages (Articles 119–123), which reaffirmed both the validity of the Greek-Turkish agreement «On the surrender of political prisoners and the exchange of prisoners of war»

prisoners arrived aboard the *Hermes* on 19 June. *Patris* (Athens), 21 June 1923.

45 YOLIZOGLU, *Οι ελληνοτουρκικές σχέσεις*, cit., p. 260.

46 *Ιστορικά Αρχεία Μουσείου Μπενάκη (ΙΑ)* [Historical Archives of the Benaki Museum (*HABM*)], *Αρχείο Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος* [Eleftherios Venizelos Archive], file 38; Table 1; GLAVINAS, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες», cit., p. 335.

(17/30 January 1923), as well as Article 4 of The Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations and the relevant annexed Protocol. On the basis of the above, then, and in the context of the implementation of The Convention, immediately after and within three weeks of the signing of the Peace Treaty, the first male Greeks (Turkish nationals) who were being held prisoners in Turkey had to be repatriated. Since, however, the operations of the five-member committee ceased upon the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, a new committee was formed, funded by Greece, which was able to repatriate more than 4,700 captured soldiers between 6 and 23 August (Table 1). Following the dissolution of this committee, in turn, the remaining prisoners (both soldiers and civilians) were to be released and returned to Greece under the supervision of the Joint Committee for the Exchange of Populations. Disagreements between the representatives of the two opposing states, however, led negotiations into a deadlock, as a result of which the repatriation of the remaining Greek soldiers was brought to a halt. According to conservative estimates of the International Red Cross, in the last months of 1923, the number of Greek soldiers in Asia Minor amounted to approximately 1,220.⁴⁷ At the beginning of 1924, the Greek press claimed that there were still about 890 prisoners of war in Turkish camps, of whom 206 were found in Mafil, 237 in Akköprü, 350 in Köşk, sixty in Ankara and thirty-six in a hospital in Ankara.⁴⁸ This is an even lower figure than the one of the International Red Cross. If the numerical difference in the number of prisoners (between 890 and 1,220) is not the result of an attempt by the newspapers to create impressions or the conflation of political hostages with soldiers by the International Red Cross, but is rather a reflection of reality, it should then be attributed to the mortality rate of the prisoners.

The agreement between Greece and Turkey regarding the prisoners of war was finally reached in December 1923. A new international committee was created on the occasion, tasked with overseeing the release and transportation of those

47 Table 1; James BARTON, *Story of Near East Relief (1915–1930): An Interpretation*, New York, Macmillan Company, 1930, pp. 168–169; Stephen LADAS, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey*, New York, Macmillan Company, 1932, pp. 434–436. See also, ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, 'Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., p. 57; ΓΛΑΒΙΝΑΣ, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες», cit., pp. 335–336.

48 *Demokratia*, 13 January 1924; *Embros*, 13 January 1924. The newspapers refer to a total of 850 prisoners, but if we add up the individual rates of different regions, the number increases to 889.

Greek prisoners still in Turkey.⁴⁹ It was headed by the president of the American Near East Relief and its members were representatives of the Greek Red Cross and the Turkish Red Crescent. The remaining Greeks were mainly soldiers cared for in military hospitals, who could not have been moved until then, soldiers from Asia Minor who had served in the Greek army, and Greek soldiers who had concealed their military identity passing off as civilians. Upon the formation of the committee, efforts for the release of more than two thousand political hostages and prisoners of war resumed, the transfer of which took place between February and April 1924. Almost two months later (June 1924), all those held in Turkish prisons had also returned to Greece.⁵⁰

The instrumentalization of prisoners

The warring factions in Asia Minor have played more than a “numbers game” with their respective prisoners. From time to time, both maximized or minimized the totals according to circumstance, in order to serve propagandistic purposes both at home and abroad or to boost their negotiating potential. That was not the only way prisoners were instrumentalized though.⁵¹ In any case, the Turkish side proved to be far more adept at this game of “instrumentalization” of the prisoners, as will be shown below.

The “interest” of the Kemalist government in “exploiting” the Greek prisoners of war was primarily related to its attempt to consolidate its power in post-Ottoman Turkey. Emphasizing or even exaggerating the magnitude of its victory over the Greek troops meant that it could prove its political and military superiority over its predecessors among both the conservative peasant populations of Anato-

49 BARTON, *Story of Near East Relief*, cit., pp. 168–169; LADAS, *The Exchange of Minorities*, cit., pp. 434–436; GLAVINAS, «Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες», cit., p. 336; GLAVINAS, «Μέχρι σήμερον», cit., p. 208. Relatives of missing persons submitted applications addressed to this committee, which were collected in two files in the archives of the Political Bureau of the Prime Minister and which led to the compilation of missing persons lists, facilitating the search operations. See also *Macedonia*, 23 December 1923.

50 Διπλωματικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών (ΥΔΙΑ) [Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DHA)], *Αρχείο Κεντρικής Υπηρεσίας* [Archive of the Central Service], F. A., 1924; LADAS, *The Exchange of Minorities*, cit., p. 437.

51 GLAVINAS, «Μέχρι σήμερον», cit., p. 198.

lia, traditionally loyal to the Sultan,⁵² and the anti-Kemalist opposition.⁵³ Secondly, vis-à-vis the Western world this time, it had to renounce any responsibility for the conditions of detention of Greek prisoners and their increased mortality rates in Turkish concentration camps.

With the Turkish citizens as the intended audience, theatrical performances were organized and films were made dealing with the military victories of the Turkish army over the Greek military forces. In order to achieve a degree of realism, Greek prisoners of war were used as participants in both. One such theatrical performance is described by Captain Vasileios Asimakis, taking place on the one-year anniversary of the Armistice of Mudanya (11 October 1922). More specifically, two trenches were dug, facing each other, in which Turkish soldiers were placed. In one of the trenches, the Turks pretended to be “Greeks”. At the signal, the Turkish forces attacked and the “Greeks” abandoned their weapons and fled in disorderly fashion. Then, one of the soldiers, pretending to be a prisoner, upon questioning identified himself as Commander-in-Chief Nikolaos Trikoupis.⁵⁴ In another case, Greek prisoners acted as stage designers in a theatrical performance, which took place inside a Christian church, and dealt with the Greek occupation.⁵⁵ One of the films was made on the orders of Mustafa Kemal, and depicted the surrender of the regiment of Dimitrios Zegginis. The movie was shot roughly ten days before the prisoners left Smyrna for Greece (March 1923). Two military companies of Greeks participated during filming and were specifically transferred to the location where Zegginis surrendered to the Cetes. The prisoners carried weapons but no cartridges, while Turkish officers pretended to be their Greek counterparts. The scene of the surrender was overseen by the Military Commander of Smyrna, the Commander of the Army Corps of Smyrna and many Turkish officers.⁵⁶

52 Angelos SYRIGOS and Evanthis CHATZIVASSILIOU, *Μικρασιατική Καταστροφή: 50 ερωτήματα και απαντήσεις* [Asia Minor Catastrophe: 50 Questions and Answers], Athens, Patakis, 2022, p. 57.

53 On the imprisonment of Kemalist opponents, see Lazaros ZIOGAS, *Τα απομνημονεύματα ενός αιχμαλώτου* [The Memoirs of a Prisoner], Thessaloniki, self-published, 1922, p. 17.

54 Vasileios ASIMAKIS, *Απ'τον τάφο: ημερολόγιο ενδεκαμήνου αιχμαλωσίας* [From the Tomb: Diary of an Eleven-Month Captivity], Athens, self-published, 1924, pp. 114–115.

55 Nikolaos LORENDIS, *Η κόλαση της εικοσάμηνης αιχμαλωσίας μου* [My Twenty-Month Captivity Hell], Athens, self-published, 1976, pp. 32–47.

56 *Makedonia*, 6 April 1923.

A few months earlier (January 1923), Greek prisoners in Smyrna had been ordered by the Turkish field command to move to various hills around the city and engage in “pseudo-combat with the Turkish infantry and cavalry.” The captives were given weapons, bayonets, haversacks, and Greek caps, i.e. the complete ordnance of a Greek foot soldier. In addition, the Turkish authorities gave them instructions to this effect, in which they specified that when the Turkish cavalry or infantry appeared they were to flee, dropping their weapons and their gear, and raising their hands as a sign of surrender to the enemy army. This staged battle was filmed in its entirety by a Turkish emissary of the Ankara Staff. In fact, according to a Greek article, this film was intended to be sent abroad as a real depiction of the overwhelming defeat of Greek troops during their final operations in Asia Minor. The film constituted proof, as far as the official government of Ankara was concerned, that Europe had underestimated the military strength of Greece and mistakenly relied on the fighting superiority of the Greek soldier.⁵⁷

Turkish efforts to renounce responsibility for the atrocities committed and the sorry state presented by the prisoners of war included a pamphlet written in Greek, which the Turkish authorities supplied to the Greek soldiers prior to their embarkation on homeward ships. The proclamation stated:

Soldier. After almost six months of captivity, the Turks return you unharmed to your homeland. It is fitting to think that, during the three years of occupation since its landing in the East, the Greek army has committed atrocities and persecutions. It burned villages and towns, brutally murdered thousands of women and children, destroyed property and turned the East into a heap of ruins, things which no civilized nation has ever done before. All these things you saw with your own eyes, and it was our patriotic duty to make you suffer the same on these ruins, but the merciful and generous heart of the Turks did not deign such savage retaliation. Out of the most difficult circumstances it has nourished you as its own men, and ultimately leaves you free to return to your own country. The Turks have spared you out of the magnanimity of the Turks, who do not wish to prevent you from returning to the embrace of your families. They have spared you to go back to your homes, and no longer to throw yourselves into such troubles, do not wrong, oppress and murder innocent and unarmed people, do not set fire to thriving lands and dwellings, for the vengeance of the just is severe

⁵⁷ *Embros*, 14 April 1923.

and heavy, and never ignored. The Turk.⁵⁸

The publication in Turkish newspapers of a forged letter allegedly found on Major General Nikolaos Kladas, who almost took his own life, served the same propagandistic purposes, i.e. it acted as a disclaimer of any moral or psychological responsibility of the Turks vis-à-vis Kladas' suicide attempt. The letter was addressed to his wife: «My dear wife, today I commit suicide. The reasons for my suicide are, as you know, my nervous disposition. I do not die because of my sufferings in Turkey, but because I have grown old. Do not be sorry for my death. I kill myself with poison, though this is cowardly for an officer, but here where I am there is no other means».⁵⁹

The Greek side sent letters of protest to international organizations about the conditions of detention of Greek prisoners of war in Asia Minor. At the same time, however, it also made use of the power of the image.⁶⁰ More specifically, the government set up a Prisoners' Press Committee to film and photograph «the shadows that have escaped from Hades».⁶¹ In addition, the daily press of the time published almost every day photographs of the emaciated repatriates,⁶² while cartoons often appeared reacting on the different treatment of Turkish prisoners by the Greek authorities compared to that of Greek soldiers by the Turks.⁶³

58 *Amaltheia of Smyrna* (Athens), 4 April 1923.

59 *Ethnos*, 6 April 1923; *Eleftheros Typos*, 6 April 1923.

60 Greece had already used images for propagandistic purposes a few years earlier (1921). More specifically, the silent film *The Greek Miracle* (original title *The Greek Patriotic Miracle*) was funded and directed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This was the first attempt at inserting state propaganda in the field of Greek cinema, which went beyond documentary filmmaking, penetrating the world of fiction. The film presented the victorious advance of the Greek army into the hinterland of Asia Minor, while at the same time narrating the personal story of a conscripted middle-class Athenian and his family. Through this cinematic creation, the filmmakers wished to harmonize a tribute to the Greek Revolution with the promotion of contemporary national duties, demanding a “repetition” of past heroic deeds. See Tasos KOSTOPOULOS, «Το φάντασμα της ιστορίας» [The Ghost of History], *Η Εφημερίδα των Συντακτών*, 11 April 2021, [efsyn.gr/arheio/fantasma-tis-istorias/289365_elliniko-thayma-toy-1921](https://www.efsyn.gr/arheio/fantasma-tis-istorias/289365_elliniko-thayma-toy-1921), online; Thomas AΓΡΑΦΙΟΤΙΣ, «Η Μικρασιατική καταστροφή στον Ελληνικό κινηματογράφο» [The Asia Minor Catastrophe in Greek Cinema], *Ephimerios*, 71 (November–December 2022), p. 45.

61 *Eleftheros Typos*, 2 April 1923; GLAVINAS, “Οι Έλληνες στρατιώτες”, cit., pp. 334–335.

62 The newspaper *Rizospastis* condemned the exploitation of the returning soldiers by the daily press of the time. *Rizospastis*, 8 April 1923.

63 A cartoon by Nikos Kastanakis in the newspaper *Patris* is indicative. A Turkish man wel-

The next day...

Upon their arrival in Greece, the repatriates, most of whom were «dressed in tatters, without shoes, exhausted by the hardships of captivity»,⁶⁴ were, as mentioned above, led to sanatoria.⁶⁵ There, they were disinfected and registered in relevant lists. Those in need were offered medical treatment. The lists with the full details of the prisoners were forwarded to the garrisons and the Investigative Committee for Asia Minor Operations. The latter investigated the detention and living conditions of Greek officers and soldiers in Turkish concentration camps, as well as the possibility of collaboration with the enemy, in both fact and intention on the part of the prisoners in Asia Minor.⁶⁶

A typical example of a repatriated prisoner was Nikolaos Lorendis. The soldier in question sailed to the sanatorium of Saint George for a short stay of five to six days. Prior to disembarkation, he remained on board the ship that brought him to Greece in order to be examined by a committee of the Greek Red Cross and by a medical team. He was then taken to the sanatorium along with the rest of the prisoners. Due to the quarantine in effect, he was not able to communicate with anyone outside the ship. In the following days, once the registration lists with the full details of the prisoners were drawn up, Lorendis, like the rest of his fellow soldiers, was cleaned up, washing his hair and body, having a haircut and shaving. He was also issued with new articles of clothing. When the quarantine

comes his rather chubby friends who were prisoners: «Vai, how you have changed, bless you, you guys! [...] What a pity I am not a prisoner too! [...]». *Patris* (Athens), 5 April 1923. For the general well-being of Turkish prisoners, in contrast to that of the Greeks, see also the relevant testimonies of: Vassilis DIAMANDOPOULOS, *Αιχμάλωτος των Τούρκων (1922–1923)* [Captive of the Turks (1922–1923)], Athens, self-published, 1977, p. 116; Petros APOSTOLIDIS, *Όσα θυμάμαι 1900–1969* [All I Can Remember 1900–1969], Vol. I, Athens, Kedros, 1981, pp. 219–220.

64 *Amaltheia of Smyrna*, 2 April 1923; Αρχείο Κλεάνθη Αναγνωστόπουλου [Archive of Kleomenes Anagnostopoulos], Γενικά Αρχεία του Κράτους (ΓΑΚ) [General State Archives (GSA)], K413. Similar scenes can be found in DIAMANDOPOULOS, *Αιχμάλωτος των Τούρκων*, cit., pp. 117–123.

65 Αρχείο Κλεάνθη Αναγνωστόπουλου [Archive of Kleomenes Anagnostopoulos], cit., p. 152.

66 Διπλωματικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών (ΥΔΙΑ) [Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DHA)], *Αρχείο Κεντρικής Υπηρεσίας* [Archive of the Central Service], F. 17, 1923; Διεύθυνση Ιστορίας Στρατού (ΔΙΣ) [Department of Military History (DMH)], *Μικρασιατική Εκστρατεία* [Asia Minor Expedition], F. 382-A-8.

period ended, he was discharged and transferred to the port of Piraeus.⁶⁷ The same happened to doctor Lazaros Ziogas, who was initially taken to Makronisos, where he was offered the necessary medical care. After a few days of medical examinations, he was vaccinated against smallpox, disinfected, discharged and transferred to Piraeus in a dinghy.⁶⁸

Three days after the arrival of the first prisoners in the sanatorium, 546 repatriates were allowed to leave for Piraeus (4 April 1923).⁶⁹ These were then transferred to various barracks in order to be discharged, while those who were sick were taken to the Chatzikyriakeion Hospital to convalesce.⁷⁰ A delegation of former prisoners travelled to Athens to meet Nikolaos Plastiras at the offices of the revolutionary government. In his address, the leader of the Revolution stated: «I have grown accustomed to speaking only to victorious soldiers. For the first time, I am compelled to address words of consolation to soldiers who, after having been always victorious for ten years, are now coming out of captivity after a catastrophe for which they are not responsible. You have known both freedom and slavery. I am certain that your only emotion will be revenge [...]».⁷¹ In his consolatory speech, Plastiras did not hesitate to urge the liberated soldiers to keep «the fire of revenge going» and use it when and if necessary. Given that the negotiations in Lausanne had been suspended by Turkey (early February – 23 April 1923),⁷² the «leader of the Revolution» reminded the prisoners of the existence of the Evros Forces,⁷³ directly threatening the neighbouring country with a new

67 LORENDIS, *Η κόλαση της εικοσάμηνης αιχμαλωσίας μου*, cit., p. 121.

68 ZIOGAS, *Τα απομνημονεύματα ενός αιχμαλώτου*, cit., p. 31.

69 According to an article of the time: «All prisoners who arrived yesterday belong to the infantry, since the Turks keep the rest of the arms divisions and specialists for their own needs and have so far not presented any of them to the international committee», *Eleftheros Typos*, 5 April 1923.

70 *Ethnos*, 4 April 1923.

71 The speech of Nikolaos Plastiras can be found in its entirety in the newspapers *Amaltheia of Smyrna* (Athens), 5 April 1923 and *Avgi Dodekanesiaki*, 15 April 1923.

72 DAFNIS, *Η Ελλάδα μεταξύ δύο πολέμων (1923–1940)*, cit., pp. 58–59.

73 On the Evros Forces, see Stylianos GONATAS, *Απομνημονεύματα Στυλιανού Γονατά (1897–1957)* [Memoirs of Stylianos Gonatas (1897–1957)], Athens, Elliniki Protoporeia, 1958, pp. 251, 262–263; Theodoros PANGALOS, *Αρχαίον Θεόδωρου Πάγκαλου, Τόμος Α, 1918–1925* [Archive of Theodoros Pangalos, Volume I (1918–1925)], Athens, Kedros, 1973, pp. 178–227; Ioannis GIANNOULOPOULOS, «Η στρατιά του Έβρου και η «ανταρσία του Πάγκαλου»» [The Evros Forces and the «Mutiny of Pangalos»], in *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* [History of the Hellenic Nation], Vol. 15, Athens, Ek-

war aimed at the occupation of eastern Thrace and especially Constantinople. This speech, alongside the one delivered by Plastiras a few days later on the occasion of the unveiling of the statue of Palaion Patron Germanos in Patras (10 April 1923),⁷⁴ is probably one of the last official public statements in Greece of an irredentist character. When negotiations resumed in Lausanne (23 April 1923), any notion of the Megali Idea no longer had a place at the negotiating table. It should also be noted, however, that Plastiras' speech to the former prisoners was not devoid from the air of division that prevailed in Greek society at that time. It made reference to «ignoble treason» and singled out those Greeks «who did not understand the cause of the national catastrophe and who wanted, without realizing it, to increase the destruction». As a result of this speech, a wave of public discourse against the opposition was born. More specifically, the day after Plastiras' meeting with the former prisoners, the sympathizer newspaper *Amaltheia of Smyrna* noted in an article: «The whole of Athens, all of the Greeks, watched with pain in their souls and with justified indignation the miserable conditions under which our fellow prisoners of war were returned to us. Skeletons barely able to move, crushed, bent from torture. They raise, wherever they pass, popular gatherings and expressions of sympathy for the victims, mixed with indignation, not only against the Turks, but mainly against the real culprits of this terrible national disaster».⁷⁵

dotiki, 1977, p. 260; ΔΑΦΝΙΣ, Η Ελλάδα μεταξύ δύο πολέμων (1923–1940), cit., pp. 36–39; Georgios SPENIZOS, «Η στρατιά του Έβρου, οι ελληνικές εναλλακτικές και η συνθήκη της Λωζάννης» [The Evros Forces, Greek Alternatives and the Treaty of Lausanne], *Βαλκανικά Σύμμεικτα* [Balkan Anthologies], 16 (2005–2014), pp. 182–184, 189. According to Eleftherios Venizelos, the reorganization of the «Evros Forces» gave him «the means to negotiate an honourable peace treaty for defeated Greece in Lausanne [...]». Eleftherios VENIZELOS and Ioannis METAXAS, *Η ιστορία του Εθνικού Διχασμού κατά την αρθρογραφία του Ελευθέριου Βενιζέλου και του Ιωάννου Μεταξά* [The History of the National Schism according to the Writings of Eleftherios Venizelos and Ioannis Metaxas], Vol. I, Thessaloniki, Ekdotikos Oikos Kyromanos, 2010, p. 33.

74 *To Fos* (Patras), 11 April 1923; *Neologos of Patras*, 11 April 1923. Nikos TOMBROS, «Ο ανδριάντας του Π. Πατρών Γερμανού στην Πάτρα: Εθνική μνήμη και δημόσιος λόγος» [The Statue of Palaion Patron Germanos in Patras: National Memory and Public Discourse] in *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference: «Υμείς γαρ επ' ελευθερία εκλήθητε (Γαλ. 5,13) 1821–2021»* [You Were Called upon for Freedom (Epistle to the Galatians 5:13), 1821–2021], Athens, Theological School of Athens, 2023, pp. 483–485.

75 *Amaltheia of Smyrna* (Athens), 6 April 1923.

With the repatriation of the first prisoners, the conditions which the Greek soldiers had been allowed to suffer during their many months of detention became clear. As such, the Ministry of Military Affairs resolved to record what had happened and was still transpiring in the detention camps of Asia Minor. For that purpose, it set up a committee consisting of the officers Petmezas, Pappas and Lambadarios,⁷⁶ tasked with taking statements from the repatriates, but also from the medical and nursing staff who provided them with medical care upon arrival in Greece. In its findings, the committee had made a record of all facets of the squalid situation experienced by the prisoners in Asia Minor.⁷⁷ The interrogations of the repatriated prisoners by committees and the testimonies given were part of the military leadership's effort to process how brave warriors would surrender to the enemy. Let us not forget that the military leadership also led the revolutionary government. For that reason, soldiers were submitted «to processes of inspection, judging the conditions of captivity and assessing responsibility for capture by the enemy on a case-by-case basis, thus alienating each soldier entirely from the military value of one's regiment as a whole».⁷⁸ From the soldiers' testimonies and the interviews, it was revealed that the entire length of their captivity was a veritable hell. «They were stripped of their clothes and deprived of everything. They were constantly overworked. For five months, they were only given flour and water as their daily source of sustenance». Their situation slightly shifted for the better only upon the arrival of the Red Cross Smyrna mission.⁷⁹ At the same time, the Ministry of Military Affairs, in an effort to appease public opinion in the face of rumors circulating since the arrival of the prisoners, announced that information published in newspapers pertaining to murders and hangings of prisoners was not officially verified and that the Ministry was already in the process of collating evidence as to what had actually transpired in Turkey.⁸⁰

The Greek Red Cross set up a similar committee to the Investigative Committee, which visited the repatriated prisoners in the sanatorium of Saint George and drafted a report to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Nations. Another report on the state of the prisoners was drawn up by the rep-

76 *Politeia*, 12 April 1923.

77 *Amaltheia of Smyrna* (Athens), 6 April 1923.

78 ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., p. 9.

79 *To Fos* (Patras), 2 April 1923.

80 *Neologos of Patras*, 8 April 1923.

representative of the International Red Cross, Baron de Reading-Biberegg, which was sent to his superiors and to the Red Crescent. In this, de Reading-Biberegg expressed his surprise and his embarrassment for the tragic figures he encountered at the sanatorium.⁸¹

In the context of mobilizing international public opinion against Turkey for the horrendous war crimes committed against Greek prisoners of war in the period 1919–1923, the Association of Editors in Athens and Piraeus decided in a meeting of its members (4 April 1923) to send a telegram of protest to all the Associations of Editors worldwide, in order to raise awareness for the inhuman practices of the Turks. At the same time, they proposed to the Greek government the publication of a book consisting of prisoner accounts of the detention conditions in Asia Minor.⁸² In the same vein, wishing to highlight the wretched condition to which the repatriated prisoners had been relegated and at the same time emphasize the extermination practices used against Greek soldiers by the Turks in the concentration camps, the Greek government invited foreign diplomatic missions and *chargés d'affaires* to the sanatorium of Saint George⁸³ so that they could see for themselves the extent of this tragedy.⁸⁴

The general public discourse on the captured soldiers was cultivated exclusively by the contemporary press. The intense interest exhibited by newspapers in the first few weeks following the arrival of the soldiers from the concentration camps in Asia Minor, which printed photographs and articles about them front and centre and devoted entire pages to recording their names, did not last long. It is safe to assume that the great prominence given to the subject by the Athenian newspapers in particular, was related not so much to highlighting the problem of the prisoners and blaming the opposition, as to increasing their circulation.

81 Διπλωματικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών (ΥΔΙΑ) [Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DHA)], *Monsieur Baron de Reading-Biberegg, délégué de Comité International de la Croix Rouge à Athènes*, Αρχείο Κεντρικής Υπηρεσίας [Archive of the Central Service], F. 17, 5 April 1923; ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., pp. 47–48.

82 Διπλωματικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών (ΥΔΙΑ) [Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DHA)], *Αρχείο Κεντρικής Υπηρεσίας* [Archive of the Central Service], F. 17, 1923; ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., pp. 50–51.

83 *Amaltheia of Smyrna* (Athens), 6 April 1923; *Neologos of Patras*, 13 April 1923.

84 Αρχείο Κλεάνθη Αναγνωστόπουλου [Archive of K. Anagnostopoulos], cit.

It was not only a case of human drama “shifting more copies”, but also that the very act of the publication of the names of repatriated prisoners increased sales, since many were those who were keen to find out whether their loved ones had returned. The issue is scarcely covered in provincial newspapers. They may have devoted some columns or a few lines to the repatriates but almost never recorded their full names. The same approach was followed by the leftist newspaper *Rizospastis*, which, with the exception of the arrival of the first prisoners,⁸⁵ never dealt extensively with “the black ships” again, i.e. the ships that ferried the prisoners from Asia Minor.⁸⁶ It did not fail, however, to address those among the prisoners, who were reserves, pointing out to them those whom the newspaper held responsible for the situation they had experienced. As a matter of fact, in the frontispiece of an issue of *Rizospastis* there was the phrase: «Do not forget that there are culprits for your captivity. Do not forget that Venizelism and old-party-Metaxism ARE YOUR MURDERERS».⁸⁷ The newspaper reflected that «today, none of all those who are essentially the main culprits of this terrible tragedy, bear hope of paying with their blood, with their life, this terrible guilt, no one will be man enough to redeem their crime against Greek society with a bullet to the head».⁸⁸

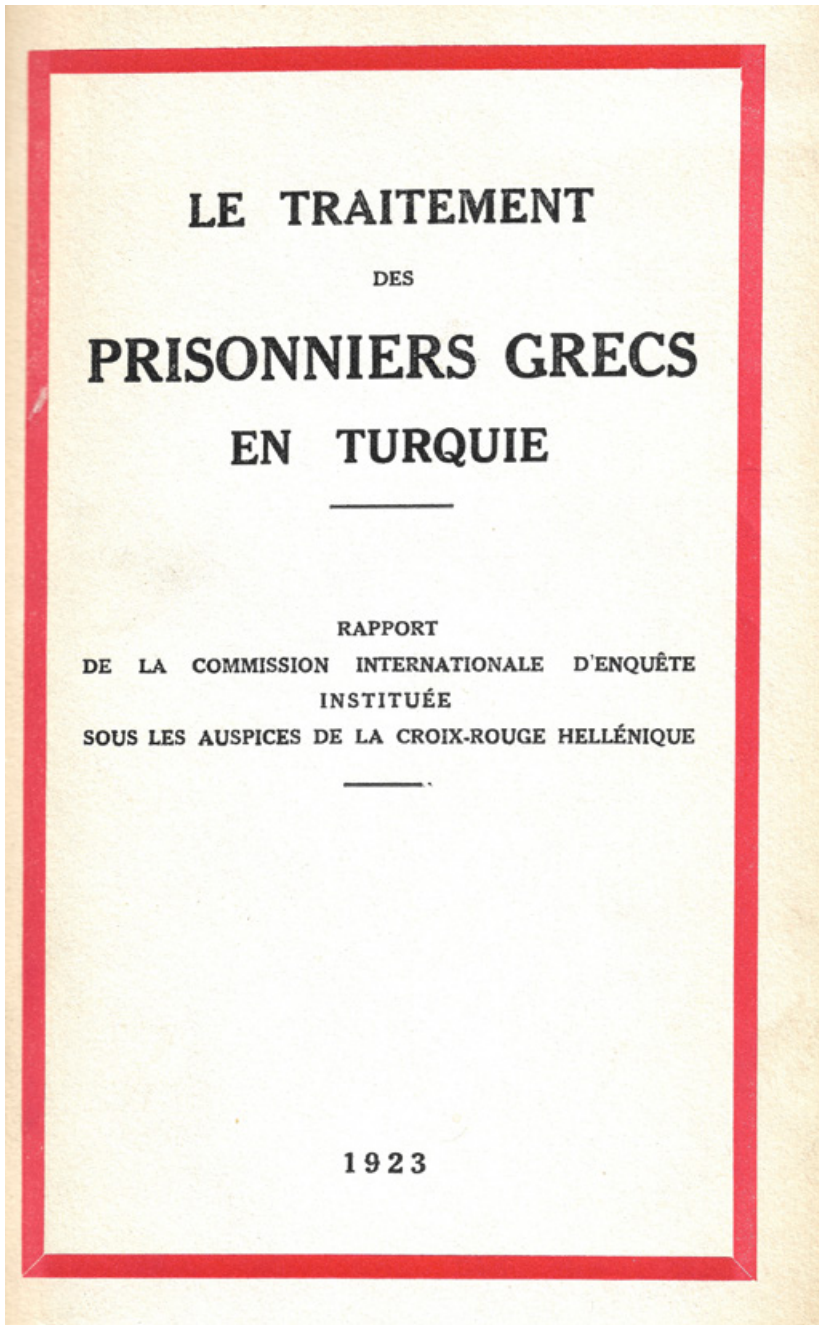
In the following period (May–August 1923), the Athenian press significantly reduced the amount of column space devoted to the prisoners. The issue now only cropped up in the newspapers when new prisoners arrived. In later months, and until April 1924, references to prisoners of war were indeed few and far between. It can be safely argued that Greek society wanted to forget the magnitude of its defeat in Asia Minor, as well as the “high cost” in human lives that Greece paid for the Asia Minor Expedition. The prisoners reminded Greeks of the ugly consequences of the Asia Minor Catastrophe and, for that reason, they should not be talked about. Finally, it should be noted that pro-Venizelist newspapers were more interested in the repatriates than pro-royalist ones, which provided little or no coverage to the issue.

85 *Rizospastis*, 2 April 1923.

86 *Rizospastis*, 13 April 1923.

87 *Rizospastis*, 9 August 1923.

88 *Rizospastis*, 13 April 1923.



Front-page of the Report on the Greek Prisoners of War by the International Committee set up by the Greek Red Cross, 1923. Source: Collection of the authors.

Conclusions

«Through the surrender of the prisoners, the curtain of the Asia Minor tragedy is slowly lifting, revealing horrible, gruesome images, the like of which are missing from the history of even the most barbaric, most brutal peoples». ⁸⁹ With these lines, the columnist of the *Eleftheros Typos* welcomed the first repatriated prisoners of war from Asia Minor. Gradually, and until April 1924, when the number of repatriates had exceeded 19,000, Greek society finally realized one part of the military price that the country had ultimately paid for the Asia Minor Expedition. According to moderate estimates, that price could be measured at some 40,000 dead and missing persons, who either died or disappeared both before and during their captivity. The fate of the missing soldiers and civilians, however, lingered for several years on the public mind even after the bulk of the prisoners was repatriated. This is evidenced by the occasional reports in the contemporary daily press about the existence of Greek prisoners in the depths of Anatolia and the return of some of them to Greece. ⁹⁰ These articles, as well as the rumors that developed, caused indignation in Greek society and especially among the recently formed associations of refugees and reservists, which accused the successive Greek governments, as did newspapers of the opposition, ⁹¹ of incompetence – even indifference – in solving the problems related to the return of Greek prisoners to their hometowns. In order to avoid the political costs of the above-mentioned accusations, the governments of the time not only made overtures to Turkey and appeals to international organizations regarding the prisoners, but also used “unorthodox” methods lying outside the scope of official diplomacy, by recruiting spies and financing informers to retrieve relevant information. ⁹²

Finally, as far as the prisoners themselves are concerned, judging from their testimonies to the various investigative committees, one can easily deduce that very few among them maintained a healthy mental state and a vigorous physique. ⁹³ Articles in the Greek press which mentioned the following are indicative

⁸⁹ *Eleftheros Typos*, 5 April 1923.

⁹⁰ See for example, *Embros*, 27 July 1925, 22 September 1925, 13 July 1926, 19 February 1926, 19 February 1927.

⁹¹ ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., p. 66.

⁹² ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου, cit., p. 71; GLAVINAS, «Μέχρι σήμερα», cit., pp. 217, 218.

⁹³ Captain Vasileios Asimakis, a former captive, called on the government «to be careful

of this: «After all this, it can be explained how many prisoners have fallen into a kind of aphasia. The tortures they have suffered, the horrors they have lived through, have left them without reason and voice».⁹⁴ Nevertheless, quantitative data from the country's psychiatric institutions do not show any particular increase in intake for the period 1922–1924. It is probable that the stigma associated with mental health problems and social racism prevented families from taking their own flesh and blood to mental institutions. Further, the social reintegration of prisoners was also apparently fraught with difficulties, not only due to the limited state resources, but also because most of the repatriates could not immediately be put to work taking into account their compromised good health, physical disabilities and troubled mental state.⁹⁵

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when we return, we must all pass a mental examination and the government will not lose», ASIMAKIS, *Από τον τάφο*, cit., p. 145.

94 *Eleftheros Typos*, 5 April 1923. Similar behaviours were also found among the political hostages. *Eleftheros Typos*, 6 April 1923.

95 ΦΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Έλληνες στρατιωτικοί αιχμάλωτοι πολέμου*, cit., pp. 60, 61.

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