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Turkish Captives in Hungary during Austria's Last Turkish War (1788–91)

During the last Turkish war of the Habsburg Monarchy (1788–91), several hundred Ottoman soldiers were taken prisoner by the Habsburg army and accommodated in Hungarian fortresses. Numerous rules and orders were issued by Joseph II regarding the treatment of these prisoners. These rules represent interesting mixes of the new ideas of the Enlightenment and old habits. According to these regulations, the captured Turks were given the status of prisoner of war and were provided with regular supplies. The study also examines the circumstances of the capture, the lives, and often the deaths of the Turkish prisoners in Hungary, as well as the exchanges of prisoners, which began only slowly but eventually resulted in their release. The fate of the Austrian prisoners in Turkish captivity is also briefly discussed. The paper was completed exclusively on the basis of primary sources.

Keywords: Austro–Turkish War (1788–91), prisoners of war, treatment of captives, exchanges of prisoners, Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor, King of Hungary

Introduction

Until recently, the fate of captives and prisoners of war was one of the most neglected chapters of the military history.¹ Interest in this topic, however, has grown considerably, parallel with the evolution of new approaches, e. g. “the new military history” or John Keegan’s novel perspective of the common soldier. These current trends in military history also have evinced significantly more interest in the fate of noncombatants and other “minor characters” of the conflicts than previous histories of “the warlords.” Inspired by a vague notion, this study examines the question of Turkish prisoners held captive in Hungary during the Turkish War of Joseph II, a topic that in the end proved more interesting than one might first have assumed, and also by and large has been

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Ferenc Lenkefi (War Archive in Budapest) and to Dr. György Domokos (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna) for their indispensable help during my researches.

ignored in the secondary literature.² In the historiography, prisoners are usually presented only as a data, in spite of the fact that there is a wealth of sources on which scholars could draw. I found valuable and essentially untouched archival materials on the Turkish prisoners of war in the Military Archive in Budapest, where the documents of the Hungarian General Commando (the territorial organization of the Habsburg military administration, the “outstretched arm” of the Aulic War Council) is preserved. Not surprisingly, the other rich source, one is tempted to use the word “goldmine,” is the archival material of the Aulic War Council in the *Kriegsarchiv* Vienna. The so-called Lacy-reforms from 1766 established an unparalleled bureaucracy, and the records that were kept provide researchers with a vast array of sources. This raw material of the Habsburg military administration is especially useful if one is interested in going beyond the traditional themes of military history, as in this particular case, which concerns the treatment with prisoners. For example, the thorough Habsburg bureaucracy recorded the names, the ranks, the ages and the origins of thousands of Turkish prisoners in muster rolls, so we have a precise overview of the contemporary Ottoman army in the Balkans.

In addition, one can glean significant data concerning the army and the state of the enlightened absolutisms at work. The fates of the Turkish prisoners suggest a rigid, slow system that was, however, not without humanity. This state was headed by a restless but also very demanding ruler, Joseph II. His short but usually comprehensive and sometimes sarcastic notes on the files may well reveal more about his personality than the hundreds of studies that have been written on him, whether apologetic or condemning. His decisions in concrete cases show the limits of his “enlightened” thinking.

2 The standard literature on the Turkish war: Oskar Criste, *Kriege unter Kaiser Josef II* (Vienna: Seidel, 1904). This book, however, was interrupted by the death of Joseph II on February 20, 1790, despite the fact that the operations lasted for almost another half year. During the nineteenth century, in the Austrian military journal (*Streffleurs Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*) the history of the operations by theatres and corps were worked out in detail in several studies, but the authors, being soldiers, focused mainly on the strategic and tactical consequences of the events. The American historian Matthew Z. Mayer, in his two unpublished works *Joseph II and the campaign of the 1788 against the Ottoman Turks* (Master's Thesis McGill University, 1997) and *Joseph II and the Austro-Ottoman War 1788–1791* (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 2002) covered the whole war based on the documents of the *Kriegsarchiv* in Vienna, but he concentrated mainly on the performance of Joseph II as a military leader. For a short summary, see Michael Hochedlinger, *Austria's War of Emergence, 1683–1797* (London: Pearson Education, 2003), 376–98, and for a more recent account, Derek Beales, *Joseph II. Against the World 1780–1790*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 555–86. With regards to the Ottomans, see Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700–1870. An Empire Besieged* (London: Pearson Education, 2007), 160–79.

This study is concerned first and foremost with the Ottoman prisoners in Austrian captivity and in the area of Hungary.³ Did they enjoy the same treatment as their Western counterparts? Was their status as prisoners of war acknowledged at all? What sort of rules applied to them? How could the Austrian military bureaucracy solve the potential problems of supplying hundreds of people from another religion and culture with shelter and sustenance, however minimal? How did their captivity come to an end?

First, I am going to summarize the contemporary norms and practices regarding prisoners of war in Europe. Then, I will describe the rules issued by Joseph II in the course of this war. I also discuss the circumstances under which the masses of prisoners were taken, the details of their transportation, accommodation and supply in Hungary, and the problems that arose concerning the maintenance of watch over them and numerous events, such as outbreaks of unrest and escapes. I also touch briefly on the conditions under which the Austrian soldiers in Ottoman captivity lived, since their fates were intertwined with those of the captured Turks during the exchange processes. The development of these processes proved to be rather interesting, and many useful sources are available, so the question of prisoner exchange is one of the focal points of my study.

Captivity in the Eighteenth Century

It is difficult to find a comprehensive work regarding the unwritten law of captivity before the age of formal international conventions and the Great War. Although the “ransom-culture” of the Middle Ages⁴ and the Early Modern Period⁵ have met with some interest among historians, the Age of Enlightenment (what one might also refer to as the Napoleonic period) was rather neglected from this point of view, apart from some cursory comments in standard works and some

3 During the war, captured Ottoman soldiers and other subjects of the Sultan (e. g. Ypsilanti, the Prince of the Ottoman vassal state, Moldau, was interned in Brünn) were also accommodated for a shorter or longer period of time in the other provinces of the Kingdom of Hungary: Transylvania, Croatia, Slavonia, and in other parts of the empire, Galicia and occupied Wallachia. They were present in these places in small numbers, so I make only infrequent mention of them.

4 E. g. Rémy Ambühl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War. Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

5 On the practices of the “classic” Turkish age on the Hungarian frontier and in the Balkans with regards to captivity see Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, eds., *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

focused studies.⁶ The rough outlines of the system, however, can be drawn. As a result of the evolution of standing armies after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the limited wars of the eighteenth century, warfare tended to show a “milder” face. The armies were paid, fed and clothed in a more regular way than they had been during the long and brutal Thirty Years War. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when wars were already being fought by professional mercenary armies, it was common practice to press captured mercenaries into the service of their captor. It was almost daily routine during the Thirty Years War, although this custom had gradually disappeared by the end of the seventeenth century, parallel with the evolution of the new standing armies, though as late as 1756, Frederick the Great attempted to press the whole encircled and captured Saxon army into the Prussian army. In the eighteenth century, however, the exchange of prisoners became common practice and even the primary practice when dealing with soldiers who had been taken captive. Before or during a campaign, the opposing commanders (or even rulers) concluded an official agreement, the so called *cartel*, which regulated the quotas and set the terms. Moreover, committees were formed to supervise the process and overcome the difficulties. These committees consisted of officers and commissaries from both parties. The basic rule of the exchange was reciprocity, but sometimes it proved to be impossible: generally one belligerent had more prisoners than the other, or one had captured more officers etc. To address these differences, various kinds of quotas were established. For example, one sergeant “counted” as two privates and a lieutenant as twelve; a colonel was worth as much as 48 men.⁷ The old habits of ransoming were still alive in an altered form: a prisoner in the middle of the eighteenth century could hope that his state would agree to pay the ransom, knowing, however, that this sum might be deducted from his future pay.⁸ For a captured high-ranking general one could ask a huge prize. During the Seven Years War (1756–63), in the conflicts between Prussia and Austria a Field-Marshal could be ransomed for 15,000 Gulden or exchanged for 3,000 privates.⁹

The fates of the prisoners were also determined by the circumstances of their captivity. This period was famous for sophisticated siege warfare. When

6 Christopher Duffy, *The military experience in the Age of Reason* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1987), 257–58; Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 66–72; Lutz Voigtländer, *Die preußischen Kriegsgefangenen der Reichsarmee. 1760–1763* (Duisburg: Gilles & Francke, 1995).

7 Stefan Smid, *Der Spanische Erbfolgekrieg* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2011), 159–61.

8 Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 69.

9 Christopher Duffy, *Sieben Jahre Krieg. 1756–1763. Die Armee Maria Theresias* (Vienna: Heeresgeschichtliches Museum–Militärwissenschaftliches Institut, 2003), 177.

a commander and the garrison of a besieged fortress had fulfilled their duty but nonetheless been compelled to capitulate, their performances were usually acknowledged in the document of the capitulation, which might even grant them free leave with or without arms. Sometimes they had to give their word not to fight for a year or so. If captivity was nevertheless unavoidable, in such documents the circumstances of the arrest—especially for officers who had been captured—were also regulated.

As armies and warfare evolved, international law began to put down modest roots. In 1625, Hugo Grotius had stated, “[i]t has long been a maxim, universally received among the powers of Christendom, that prisoners of war cannot be made slaves, so as to be sold, or compelled to the hardships and labor attached to slavery.”¹⁰ Grotius’ thesis was widely known throughout Europe by the Age of Enlightenment.

This protection, though based on moral, unwritten law and habits, obviously did not apply to the Turkish prisoners during the wars of liberation at the end of the seventeenth century. On the contrary, the captured Turks could be freely bought and sold. The Ottomans and mostly their tributaries, the Crimean Tartars, also made a huge profit from the ransoms that were paid by Christians to free prisoners.¹¹ The Peace of Karlowitz (1699) marked the end of this practice. The 12th point of the treaty declared that all prisoners should be mutually released.¹² The Treaty of Passarowitz, which restored the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (1718), included this stipulation, but when an enemy of the Sultan had been less successful, the Porte showed little interest in returning prisoners who had already been sold. After the Treaty of Belgrade (1739), the difference between the fates of the Russian and the Austrian prisoners was striking. The former were released relatively quickly without ransom, and sometimes the Porte even bought back them from private hands in order to release them. Of the Austrian prisoners, the state-owned galley rowers were released, but others were enslaved until as late as the 1750s, and Austrian diplomats and monks from the Trinitarian Order continued to pay ransom for them. The explanation for this different approach is simple. The Russians had scored considerable successes

10 On the laws of war and peace (accessed January 28, 2015), http://www.constitution.org/gro/djbp_307.htm.

11 Will Smiley, “Let Whose People Go? Subjecthood, Sovereignty, Liberation, and Legalism in Eighteenth-Century Russo–Ottoman Relations,” *Turkish Historical Review* 3 (2012): 201.

12 Acsády Ignác, *A karlowiczj béke története 1699*, *Értekezések a történelmi tudományok köréből* 18 (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1899), 348.

during the war, taking thousands of Turkish prisoners, but the Austrians had mostly suffered setbacks.¹³

After almost half a century of peace, a new war threatened to break out in the Danube Valley. In accordance with the Russo–Austrian treaty of 1781, Joseph II—rather unwillingly—had to declare war on the Ottomans after a Turkish “aggression” against Russia in August 1787, though as historians have persuasively argued, the Sultan was continuously provoked by the Russians. The Czarina, motivated by the Polish precedent, had ambitious plans for the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, and Joseph felt that he had to keep peace with the Russians (who he felt were likely to win), although Vienna had had good relations with Constantinople since the 1740s. But at the beginning of February 1788, war was formally declared. The Austrians had a very cautious operation plan whereby six army or independent corps were to be deployed along the Turkish border. The main army (under Field-Marshal Lacy), concentrated around Zimony (Zemun, in Serbia), tried to capture Belgrade, while the corps of Slavonia and Croatia invaded Bosnia from the valleys of the Una and Sava Rivers. On the other side of the Danube River, a corps covered the Banat. A weak corps protected Transylvania, while the army of Prince Friedrich Josias of Sachsen-Coburg, in cooperation with the Russians, operated from Galicia and Bukovina in the direction of Moldau and later Wallachia.¹⁴

Rules regarding Prisoners

As in almost every walk of life, Joseph II was not satisfied with the traditions, habits and unwritten laws of the past in the case of the captured Turks. The problems with regard to Turkish prisoners first came up in a report from Bukovina. On March 5, 1788, Prince Coburg put a question to the Aulic War Council in Vienna (*Wiener Hofkriegsrat*). Coburg wanted to know what kind of provisions were due to the recently captured Ottomans. How much money should be spent on food and accommodation? Should bread be issued in kind or in cash? Field-Marshal Graf Andreas Hadik, President of the War Council, faced the task of finding solutions to this problem. Hadik wrote a note to Emperor Joseph II on March 20, 1788 in which he declared, “searching in the old files of the previous war

13 Will Smiley, “The Meanings of Conversion: Treaty Law, State Knowledge, and Religious Identity among Russian Captives in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *The International History Review* 34 (2012): 3–4.

14 Hochedlinger, *Austria's War*, 382–84.

in the archive, we could find no specific information about this question [that of providing sustenance and lodging for Turkish prisoners].” Some scattered information was be found, however, according to which the high-ranking Turkish prisoners were simply to be exchanged for captured Christians as soon as possible. One could also claim a significant sum of money (*Ranzionierungs Geld*), as much as 100 Ducats or more. The “temporary” costs of these persons were covered by the Court Chamber (the main financial organ of the empire), and these expenses were to be added to the ransom. The common Ottoman soldiers were nevertheless delivered to imperial officers as servant, handed over to galley, or assigned other compulsory labor.¹⁵

All in all, Hadik had not found satisfactory solutions from the past regarding provisions for and treatment of the Ottoman prisoners. He asked for a resolution to this problem from the sovereign. In the end, it was Joseph who had to make the decision, which he composed immediately on Hadik’s note. Interestingly, this new regulation was a mix of the mentality of the Enlightenment and the habits of the past. According to the imperial resolution, four categories were established, to which the captured Ottoman soldiers were to be assigned. The main principle of this categorization was the religion of the person captured. In the case of a Muslim prisoner, he should receive a supply of 4 *Kreuzers* daily in cash, together with one ordinary portion (one pound) of bread. These conditions were the same in the case of Prussians who had been captured (during the war of 1778–79) and French prisoners taken five years later.¹⁶

At the same time, a Christian who was an Ottoman subject and had taken up arms against the Imperial troops was to be pressed into the army. These people were sent to distant garrisons on the other side of the empire in order to ensure that they would not be able to escape. If a prisoner were found unfit for military service, he was to be assigned some kind of “public work.” The Emperor cautioned captors to be watchful, “because the Ottomans dress the Christians just as they dress the Turks, so one must inspect them closely [i. e. medically to determine whether the prisoner had been circumcised or not].”

15 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (Vienna), Haus- Hof und Staatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv. Wiener Hofkriegsrat, Hauptreihe [hereafter KA HKR] 1788-33-1 (i.e. year of the creation of the document/number of the archival rubric /serial number of the document).

16 Lenkefi Ferenc, *Kakas a kasban. Francia hadifoglyok Magyarországon az első koalíciós háború idején, 1793–1797* (Budapest: Petit Real, 2000), 41.

Christians who were not Ottoman subjects¹⁷ but had fought against the Imperial troops fell into the third category. They were to be interrogated as to their names and the details concerning their families and then sent to lifelong ship-hauling, the same fate as suffered by notorious criminals. Finally, Joseph ordered captured deserters (former Austrian soldiers) who had been captured were to be court-martialled immediately.¹⁸

There were also questions regarding the status of and provisions for captured Turkish officers.¹⁹ After a short hesitation, the Emperor acknowledged their status as if they were European “guests.” The commander of the Main Army, the pedant and hard-working Field Marshall Moritz Lacy, soon compiled a comprehensive breakdown of the ranks in the Ottoman Army and made a proposal concerning provisions for the captured officers. The highest rank on Lacy’s list was the *Bin baschi*, “commander of a detached corps,” who would receive 24 *florins* every month, just like a Janissary Aga or a Sipahi Aga, though no one would receive more than one portion of bread daily. Joseph accepted the proposal on April 30 in the camp at Zimony.²⁰

One additional question remained to be addressed. What if one of the Muslim prisoners wanted to convert to the Christian faith? According to an imperial resolution, which was transmitted by an order from Hadik to the General Commando in Buda, if somebody “of his own will” declared his intention to convert, he had to be furnished with the necessary requisites and then released as a free man. His freedom, however, would not last not long. If the proselyte proved fit for military service, he was to be drafted immediately. Were he deemed unfit for military service, the “new citizen” would be settled far from the border and would be allowed to earn a living.²¹ Thus converting

17 Several European (mainly French) mercenaries served in the Ottoman Army as artillerymen or military engineers.

18 It was transmitted to the troops by an order of the Aulic War Council dated April 11, 1788. KA HKR 1788-33-1.

19 The question came up after the report of the Croatian Corps after the affair of Dresnik, where two Agas had been captured and the Aulic War Council was inquired about their supply (Lacy’s note to the emperor. KA HKR 1788-33-5).

20 Ibid.

21 Hadik’s order to the Hungarian General Commando. Vienna, September 4, 1788. HM Hadtörténelmi Levéltár (Budapest), Magyarországi Főhadparancsnokság – General Commando in Ungarn (hereafter G. C.) 1788-36-68. (i.e. year of the creation of the document/number of the archival rubric /serial number of the document).

the faith meant becoming the subject of the Hungarian king just like centuries earlier.²²

Very few prisoners actually chose to convert during their relatively short period of imprisonment, although the Austrian bureaucracy probably registered every case. It is also not surprising that captives, who were accommodated in the crowded fortress of Munkács (Mukacseve, Ukraine), where health conditions were hardly optimal, were perfectly willing to convert to Roman Catholicism if it meant getting out of the prison in the fortress.²³

Falling into Captivity

The first large group of Turkish prisoners was captured in the siege of Szabács (Šabac, Serbia). This small, desolate fortress next to the river Sava River was in key position for every movement against Belgrade. Joseph himself conducted the siege, which started on April 20. The bombardment began immediately and in the early morning of April 24, the Austrian infantry made an assault against a breach. After having put up fierce resistance, the defenders were compelled to withdraw to the small inner fortress. Finally, on April 26, the garrison of Szabács capitulated.²⁴ The Austrians captured three Turkish senior officers (a Janissary Aga and two other commanders: Achi Akbar and Achi Ibrahim), 33 officers, 32 non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and 617 privates. In the fortress there were 13 Greek-Christians (three merchants and 10 servants, “*Knechte*”) and five Jews.

In the terms of capitulation, the bellicose Joseph acknowledged the gallant and “soldier-like” behaviour of the Turkish defenders. Some officers were allowed to leave temporarily *on parole* to take care of their families. The officers were allowed to wear their swords and keep their horses. The prisoners were transported to the Fortress of Pétervárad (Petrovaradin, Serbia) and later taken to Arad, Szeged and Károlyváros (Karlovac, Croatia) “at the cost of the state,” as Joseph emphasized to Chancellor Kaunitz.²⁵ Ultimately the prisoners from

22 Géza Pálffy, “Ransom slavery along the Ottoman-Hungarian frontier in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,” in *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders*, ed. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 54.

23 On January 4, 1789, the Invalid Commando from Munkács reported to Buda about a newly converted prisoner, who nevertheless soon died. G. C. Department I [hereafter Dep.] 70 Book, number of registration [hereafter no.] 1789-488.

24 Jenő Gyalókey, „Šabac vára 1787–88-ban,” *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 25 (1924): 205–19.

25 Adolf Beer, ed., *Joseph II.: Leopold II. und Kaunitz. Ihr Briefwechsel* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1873), 289.

Szabács were accommodated in Szeged (in the barracks of the so called *Invaliden Commando*) and the fortress of Arad. The former was designated for the officers and the latter for the NCOs and commoners.

In the case of the Christians and Jews who were captured in Szabács, their captors did not deliver the daily portion of bread, but rather gave them on the 4 *Kreuzers* they had been promised. In the case of Muslim prisoners, however, the regulations that had been set by Joseph and Lacy were followed.²⁶

The Imperial generosity after the capitulation of Szabács soon caused problems. On July 4, Field-Marshal Lacy informed the Hungarian General Commando that the prisoners who had been released on parole had failed to return, so their comrades (i. e. their bailsmen), whom “they had left behind perfidiously,” had to put in irons, accommodated in the casemates and assigned to compulsory labor. They were allowed only to write one (and only one) letter regarding what had befallen them. Naturally their swords and knives were taken away and their horses were sold if their masters were unable to cover the costs of their sustenance. Other problems must have arisen, because Lacy reminded the commanders of Szeged and Arad of their responsibility regarding the excesses and misdeeds of the Turkish prisoners. The Field-Marshal finally demanded that not only the names of the deceased prisoners but also the causes of their deaths be reported to the Main Army Headquarters.²⁷ Later in the autumn of 1788 Joseph strictly forbade all form of release on parole, and no requests for parole were allowed either, “because the Turkish prisoners are supplied everything that they need.”²⁸

The second and third batch of prisoners was sent by Field-Marshal Gedeon Loudon, commander of the corps in Croatia and Slavonia. The little fortress of Dubica (Dubica, Bosnia and Herzegovina) at the river Una was encircled and later besieged from the middle of April. Having taken over command, Loudon had immediately started the bombardment on Dubica on August 18, 1788. The defenders soon were compelled to surrender. The Turkish commander tried to convince Loudon to grant the garrison free leave, but he rejected their entreaties

26 Field-Marshal Lacy's order to the Banatian and the Hungarian General Commando. Zimony, on 1 May. G. C. 1788-36-10.

27 Janissary Aga Mehmed and *Kadi* Ibrahim were exempted from punishment because of their services maintaining order and administration; furthermore, they had not been the guarantors of their comrades who had been released on parole. G. C. 1788-33-36. Zimony, on July 4. The General Commando forwarded the orders to Arad and Szeged on July 9.

28 Hadik to the Hungarian General Commando, Vienna, October 13. 1788-33-124.

and the 414 Ottoman soldiers²⁹ were taken prisoner, although like Joseph at Szabács, in the terms of capitulation Loudon acknowledged their courage and endurance: “Dubica is now just a heap of stone and the disgusting smell of dead bodies and horses and cattle carcasses within make it hard to believe that the garrison was able to defend it for so long.”³⁰ The officers were allowed to keep their sabers, and Loudon promised to take care of the wounded and sick Turkish soldiers in hospitals. The women and children who were found in Dubica were sent to inner Bosnia.³¹ The Turkish prisoners from Dubica were escorted to Gradisca (Nova Gradiška, Croatia) in Slavonia, where they remained until at least September 3, and then some time were taken to Hungary. We know only scattered details of their fates after this because of the sources.³² One transport was taken to the small but famous fortress of Szigetvár.³³ The other half of them may have been escorted to Győr.

The next victim of the energetic and aggressive Loudon was the fortress of Novi (Novi Bosanski in Bosnia and Herzegovina), which was also situated near the Una River. The defenders again put up significant resistance and the first storming of the walls, which took place on September 21, was repulsed. The Austrian artillery nevertheless continued the siege and within a week the little fortress had been completely ruined. On October 3, the garrison capitulated.³⁴ In Novi, Loudon took 590 Ottoman soldiers prisoner (566 Turks and 24 Vlachs).³⁵ The question of their accommodation, however, created difficulties because of the deteriorating military situation. Taking advantage of the slowness and hesitation of the Austrian main army, which had been delayed near Belgrade, the Turks won the initiative. They had crossed the Danube River at Vidin and

29 Precisely 2 Beys, 18 Agas, 24 Barjaktars (Standard-bearer), 4 Chehajas (Adjutant), 34 Odobashas (Sergeant), 19 Chauses (Corporals) and 313 Prostis (Commoners). Five Turks were allowed to stay back on Parole to escort the women and children. The Turkish commander was responsible for their return. 45 soldiers were wounded or sick and there were eight Christians in service of the Ottomans: two servants and six soldiers (Loudon’s report to Joseph. Dubica, August 27. KA HKR 1788-33-42).

30 Ibid.

31 Criste, *Kriege* 167–68.

32 The bulk of the archival material of the Aulic War Council was ruthlessly discarded after 1815. Many of the documents of the Hungarian General Commando were also damaged or destroyed during the Second World War.

33 During the siege of this fortress in 1566, the Ottoman ruler, Sultan Suleiman I. the “Great” died. The fortress is also famous for the heroic assault led by the Hungarian national hero, Miklós Zrínyi, during the same campaign.

34 Criste, *Kriege* 168–69.

35 Including the commander of the fortress, Pasha Agi [sic] Mehmed, and 7 Agas. KA HKR 1788-33-65.

pushed back the Austrian army corps. Accompanied by 20,000 soldiers, Joseph rushed to defend the border at the Banat. At the end of September, his army was almost encircled by the enemy and Joseph ordered a withdrawal. At Karánsebes (Caransebeș, Romania) on the night of September 21, this movement changed to panic. The army retreated as far as Lugos (Lugoj, Romania). The imperial high command had good reason to fear the invasion of Banat, Transylvania or even southern Hungary.

In the middle of August, Joseph ordered that the prisoners be transported deeper into Hungary, specifically to Nagyvárad (Oradea, Romania). He also got the casern of Nagyvárad made suitable to provide lodging for the prisoners. Joseph also directed that “prisoners, who must do compulsory labor, should be treated the same way in Nagyvárad as they are in Arad and Szeged.”³⁶ Nevertheless, until mid-autumn this order was only partially executed.

At the beginning of November 1788, the prisoners from Novi were sent to Arad and Szeged, so the initial fear of a Turkish invasion had already faded. The prisoners of Szabács must have been in Arad and Szeged already, because both places were described as “overcrowded,” like Szigetvár. Joseph finally decided that the prisoners from Novi had to be accommodated somewhere in northeastern Hungary, and Huszt (Khust, Ukraine), Szolnok, Ungvár (Uzhhorod, Ukraine), and Munkács were raised as possible destinations.³⁷ In the end, most of them were taken to the fortress (and prison) of Munkács.

The Fate of the Prisoners in Hungary

The first Turkish prisoners of war (at the beginning only eight men) were held captive in the Fortress of Arad (Arad, Romania). In a short time, problems arose concerning provisions for them. On April 8, General Vinzenz Barco, the commanding general in Hungary, reported from Buda to Vienna on the problems faced by the fortress commandant of Arad. Except for bread, the Turkish prisoners were not willing to eat anything that had been touched by Christian hands, so he had had to supply them with firewood so that they would be able to cook themselves. Furthermore, the Turks had wanted to eat warm meals twice a day. Barco and the commandant of Arad sought a “highest resolution” on this question before more prisoners arrived. On April 17, the War Council sent

36 Pancsova, (Pančevo, Serbia) on 16 August 1788. HL G. C. 1788-36-59. The order of the emperor was transmitted by the General Commando to Szeged, Arad and Nagyvárad on August 20. 1788.

37 Lacy to the General Commando. Zimony, on November 6, 1788. KA HKR 1788-33-60.

an order according to which, apart from the daily one pound of bread and 4 *Kreuzers*, nothing should be given to the Turks.³⁸ Interestingly, when there were several hundred prisoners in Arad and other places, Joseph changed his mind. On May 10, the emperor permitted the fortress commandant to supply them with firewood, but the Turks had to be satisfied with the “ordinary” portion and cook together.³⁹

The issue of providing accommodation for the Turkish prisoners also caused headaches for the military and civil officials of the fortresses and municipalities. In Győr, at the end of 1788, the first suggestion regarding accommodation for these 500 men⁴⁰ was to designate the empty college building of the suppressed Jesuit order for this purpose. This project failed because of the poor condition of the building. Finally, the decision was made to use the newly built casern to house the Turkish prisoners, but one company of Austrian soldiers which had guarded the prisoners had to take lodging in private domiciles in the city.⁴¹

At the beginning, the prisoners enjoyed “too much freedom” in Győr, as the War Council put it. Some Turks were allowed to go out into the city and walk the streets with lit pipes hanging from their mouths and wearing their sabers at their sides. Keeping their swords was the orderly privileges of the Turkish officers, granted by the document of capitulation of Dubica, but the private Turks also carried long knives with them, according to the complaints. The emperor forbade these practices and ordered that the Turks not leave the casern and that any and all knives be taken from the privates and only given back temporally when they were needed to “slice the meat.”⁴²

The long winter and the crowded conditions in the casern soon took their toll. On February 10, 1789, the commander of the Lacy regiment reported to the Hungarian General Commando that 34 Turks (of the 610 prisoners) had died of some “extraordinary diseases,” despite the efforts of the regiment’s medical staff. The command therefore requested that no more prisoners be sent to Győr and that a military hospital be established near the city. In answer, the General Commando praised the regiment’s command for its efforts and offered

38 KA HKR 1788-33-2. Vienna, April 17.

39 Hadik’s order to General Commando, Vienna, May 10. G. C. 1788-36-15. I found no other hint in the sources about the religious activity of the Muslim prisoners.

40 This figure is from a report of the Lacy regiment’s command. HL G. C. Dep. I Book 70. No. 1789-16.

41 HL G. C. Dep. I. Book 70. no. 1789-168.

42 Dated in Vienna on January 31, 1789. KA HL 1789-33-7.

the reassurance that no more prisoners would be sent to Győr, but rejected the idea of establishing a hospital.⁴³

The presence of the prisoners in Győr raised other problems. The city was situated on the main communication road of the Danube River valley, so Joseph found it problematic to station numerous captured enemies there. On March 26, 1789 Hadik (according to the emperor's note) instructed the Hungarian General Commando to take the prisoners to the fortress of Lipótvár (Leopoldov, Slovakia) in the northwest of Hungary.⁴⁴ Hadik also ordered the expansion of the available building in order to accommodate possible transports in the future. Arrangements had to be made to provide lodging not only for the prisoners, but also for the soldiers (generally invalids) who would stand guard. In the case of Lipótvár, the nearby city of Nagyszombat (Trnava, Slovakia) was designated to accommodate the guards.

The order of Hadik was executed rather slowly indeed. The General Commando had had one group of prisoners transferred to Székesfehérvár earlier in April. On May 6, the Aulic Council made its resolution clear. The emperor again ordered the immediate transfer of *all* of the prisoners to Lipótvár.⁴⁵ Consequently, several hundred Turks made a long detour to Székesfehérvár on their way to Lipótvár.

In Szigetvár, the responsible guard unit was compelled to report "great unrest" among the 266 Turkish prisoners from Dubica, who had demanded more freedoms.⁴⁶ The cause of this unrest their loss of the right to go into the town from the fortress. It was Joseph who had prohibited this, not only for the Turks in Győr but for every prisoner of war in Hungary. The former commanders of the garrison, including three *agas*, submitted a written complaint to the emperor in which they quoted the promises they had received from Loudon at the capitulation of Dubica. Joseph, however, insisted that every Turkish prisoner was to be given the same treatment. Besides, as the order of the Aulic War

43 HL G. C. Dep. I. Book 70. No. 1789-1214.

44 For this purpose, the name of the former Franciscan cloister in Dejte (Dechtice, Slovakia) next to Nagyszombat was also mentioned, in which 400 prisoners would have been accommodated. The costs of the renovation finally deterred the General Commando from the project. The little fortress of Trencsén (Trenčín, Slovakia) was also a candidate, but the high water in the river Vág (Waag) made transport to it impossible. (Report of the Hungarian General Commando to the War Council, Buda, April 18, 1789. KA HKR 1789-33-50).

45 KA HKR 1789-33-55.

46 Report of the General Commando to the War Council in enclosure the complaint letter of the Turks dated April 30, 1789, Buda. KA HKR 1789-33-54.

Council to Szigetvár stated: “We have to make it clear to these *agas* that prisoners in our hands are treated more humanely than prisoners on the other side, so they had better stay calm.” In the same letter, the War Council ordered the guard in Szigetvár through the General Commando to take strict measures if necessary in order to prevent further unrest.⁴⁷

In Munkács, in addition to the small rooms of the fortress, houses in the small town were also requisitioned for this purpose, so the General Commando had to engage in lengthy correspondence with the County of Bereg and its *vicecomes*. According to a November 4 report to the General Commando (Munkács), the fortress of Munkács and the neighboring Palanka casern could accommodate only 345 prisoners and a guard of 120 men, not the required 645 prisoners and 283 men. The rest had to be billeted in the domiciles of burghers until the necessary renovations of the fortress and the casern were completed.⁴⁸

Within six months, however, it became clear that Munkács was not suitable for the accommodation of hundreds of prisoners. As had been the case in Győr, epidemics broke out, and the “awkwardness of having these people watched over by invalid soldiers and the resulting concerns about desertion” prompted the President of the War Council to propose a move to the casern in Kassa (Kosice, Slovakia) and to keep Munkács in reserve should 150 new prisoners arrive.⁴⁹ Joseph agreed to the transfer, but he ordered that, in addition to Munkács, other places in Hungary be prepared to accommodate future transports. The move to Kassa took place at the end of June.⁵⁰

One of the best indicators concerning the conditions under which these prisoners lived is their mortality rate. Despite the regular supply of provisions, the mortality rate was high according to any kind of modern standard. From September 1, 1788 to December 31, 1789, it was seven percent (of 281 prisoners, 20 died) in Szigetvár. In Lipótvár this figure was 5.5 percent (31 of 560), but in the case of Kassa the losses were enormous: 21 percent (168 of 791).⁵¹ Later, one could include the casualties of the infamous prison of Munkács, where unfortunate prisoners spent several months. The high mortality rate, however, was caused by conditions at the time, not by punishment or negligence.

47 Vienna, May 6, 1789. KA HKR 1789-33-54.

48 HL G. C. 1788-16-1346.

49 Vienna, June 3, 1789. KA HKR 1789-33-78.

50 On June 27, the Invalid Commando in Kassa reported to the General Commando on the arrival and accommodation of the Turkish prisoners. They were being lodged in the casern and the nearby building of a former monastery. HL G. C. I. Dep. Book 71. No. 1789-5137.

51 According to the total account on the Turkish prisoners of war. KA HKR 1790-33-132.

“The Most Important Duty” – Guarding the Prisoners

The old and neglected buildings were not simply uncomfortable and unhealthy, they also raised serious security questions. The other problem was the composition of the guards who were responsible for watching the prisoners. The superannuated soldiers of the different *Invaliden Commandos* and the members of second-rate troop units like the garrison regiments and the staff-regiment were not always up to the task. However they received full pay while serving as guards.

On the night of November 8, 1788, four Turkish prisoners escaped from the Palanka casern. They managed to hide in the forests for several months. The commander of the fortress received a strict rebuke from the General Commando because of “his carelessness in his most important duty, which is guarding these prisoners.”⁵²

There were other prison breaks too, of which the emperor demanded immediate and accurate account. On September 30, 1788, the General Commando reported to the Aulic War Council that two Turks had escaped from Lipótvár. They had not gotten far and were soon caught and brought back by the peasants. The fugitives were held under arrest until the emperor decided their fates. In his note about the case, as regards the punishment Hadik reminded Joseph of two other precedents: captured deserters from Zamość (see below) had had to do compulsory labor in chains, which were also worn in the night. First of all, “without any lengthy inquiry” they received “a certain number of strokes with the stick because that is the habit in this kind of case, which is very common in wars.” Hadik obviously regarded these as cases of desertion. In Munkács, the fugitives, who had already been captured and condemned to compulsory labor (digging entrenchments), had contemplated another plot to escape, so the final sentence in their case was ship-hauling, and they were each assigned to one of four different sites distant from one another. Hadik then asked for a resolution in the case of the fugitives, assuring the emperor that the question of who bore responsibility for the prison break in Lipótvár would be examined by the General Commando. The imperial resolution was short: “they are sentenced to ship-hauling.”⁵³

All in all, guarding the Turkish prisoners was not a rewarding task. On 24, February 1789, all of the 31 Turks in the Galician fortress of Zamość (today

52 HL G. C. I. Dep. Book 70. No. 1788-276.

53 Hadik's note dated October 8, Vienna. KA HKR 1789-33-154.

Poland) managed to escape with the help of a soldier they had bribed, a private from the 1st Garrison Regiment. The latter was court-martialed and executed, but the garrison-commandant, Major Marquis de Torres, was also sentenced to a 14-day arrest according to the order of Joseph because “he did not personally take care of the gate key.” Torres also had to pay the calculated ransom for the 31 fugitives. The commanding general of Galicia also received a slight rebuke, because Zamość was deemed a bad choice as a place to hold prisoners, since it is situated too close to the border.⁵⁴

At the beginning of the war, Joseph and his military advisors might have expected a “flood of prisoners” following the Austrian successes. This did not come to pass. Four years later, however, Munkács, Arad, Szeged and some other places in the Kingdom of Hungary nonetheless had to accommodate thousands of prisoners. These prisoners, however, were not faithful Muslims, but rather enthusiastic French patriots or even Jacobins.⁵⁵

Exchange of Prisoners

On October 27, from Zimony Joseph replied to an enquiry by Loudon:

“The proposal [made by the Turks] concerning the exchange of prisoners can be made, but not as the Turks have envisioned, i.e. not one for one, which would mean one officer for one private and *vice versa*. This exchange must only be made such that officers are exchanged for officers or, according to the circumstances and the rank of the officer, 3, 6, 9 or more privates [should be given] for one officer.”⁵⁶

Joseph then designated the commander of the Austrian troops in Beschania to supervise the exchange of prisoners, and he had Loudon suggest to the Turks that the Pasha of Belgrade be the person responsible for the exchanges on the Turkish side.

However, a larger and centrally organized exchange of prisoners did not actually take place for one year. The cause of this delay must have been the “forgetfulness” of the prisoners of Szabács, Novi and Dubica who had been released on parole. Not one of them returned to the Austrians. The punishments that were inflicted on their comrades and bailsmen were to no avail. The exchange might have been complicated or hindered by the inconsistency of

54 The imperial manuscript dated March 20, 1789, from Vienna, KA HKR 1788-33-32.

55 On the French prisoner in Hungary between 1793–1797 See Lenkefi, *Kakas a kasban*.

56 KA HKR 1788-33-61.

Turkish customs concerning prisoners, which I will discuss later. Briefly, there were simply not enough Austrian prisoners of war at the same time and same places (near the frontline and not in the distant Constantinople) to provide a basis for negotiations.

Along the Croat and Slavonic *Militärgrenze* (Military Border), low-scale exchanges might have been quite common, but these cases effected exclusively *Grenzlers* and generally only involved a small number of men. The Turks and the *Grenzlers* often had prisoners on hand because of the endless raids on both sides of the cordon. Nevertheless, cattle, oxen, and horses always represented a far more valuable target.⁵⁷ Sometimes, this kind of affair was similar to kidnapping and blackmailing. Sources suggest that once it even came to pass that marauding Turks captured the wife of a *Grenzer* in the district of Brod. They demanded not only one Turkish prisoner for the women, but also 45 *florins*. The transaction was concluded, but the poor family of the Grenzer had not been able to pay the ransom, so the money was finally paid from the cash register of the Broder canton. This rather trivial case had come before the Emperor in the form of a note from the President of the War Council. Joseph had been angry: “It is nonsense that we exchanged a soldier for a woman and that, in addition, 10 Ducats was also paid. The man who arranged this ransom without preliminary consent has to pay the 10 Ducats. The War Council will have to see to it.”⁵⁸

In the end, the first step towards a regular prisoner exchange was taken by the Turks. The beg of Ostrožac (Bosnia), Mustafa Besirevich, wrote a proposal on August 21, 1789 to his “Dearest Neighbor,” Vice-Colonel Matthias Rukavina, commander of the Oguliner Border Regiment, about a “general prisoner exchange” and in particular about the possibility of exchanging a captured *Grenzer* officer (Lieutenant Phillipovich) for a certain Mustafa Cserich Beg, who was himself the brother of the Beg of Ostrožac. As the letter revealed, earlier Rukavina had made an offer to ransom Phillipovich for cash, but the Beg realized he had an opportunity to get back his brother. This personal bias was a significant help to the cause of the exchange, but first the Beg had to remedy the problems concerning Turks of Novi and Dubica who had been released on parole but who had not returned.⁵⁹ The Beg suggested in his letter to Rukavina

57 František Vaníček: *Specialgeschichte der Militärgrenze*, vol. 3 (Vienna: Kaiserlich-Königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1875), 402–04.

58 Vienna, on May 4, 1789. KA HKR 1789-33-59.

59 These missing prisoners from Sabać, did not come up in this case. Maybe these people were hopelessly out of the way for a Bosnian Beg.

that if the proposed exchange were to be successful, the “perfidious” Turks, about 30 people, would hardly go back. Rather, they would probably buy and send home Christian prisoners to secure their release once and for all. If the exchange were not to take place, the Beg was willing to turn to the Grand Vizier to ask for his assistance.⁶⁰

Put simply, under the pretext of a “general exchange” the Beg of Ostrožac wanted to get back his brother. His proposal, however, may have met with Vienna’s interest because providing sustenance and accommodation for more than 1,500 prisoners in Hungary alone would have represented a significant burden to the state. So Joseph willingly permitted the “general exchange” as soon as he got some compensation (albeit in the form of faint guarantees) for the missing Turks of Novi and Dubica. The proposal of the Beg of Ostrožac also suggests that earlier some of the border guards (*Grenzzer*) had broken the pledges (“good faith”) that they had made to the Turks promising that they would return shortly with the ransom. Some of them had simply fled. The emperor agreed to release one Turkish prisoner for every Austrian soldier who had been released by the Turks after having pledged to return shortly with his ransom but who had then broken his word and never returned. Joseph also permitted Field Marshall-lieutenant Christoph Wallisch, commander of the Croatian corps who was in charge of taking some of the prisoners from Hungary to Croatia, to ease the approaching exchanges. He ordered, however, that he give specific details concerning accommodation and provisions, since “they [the Turkish prisoners] do not have the same freedoms as are allowed for prisoners on their side.”⁶¹

Almost one month before the final imperial decision on August 5, 1789, Wallisch established an Exchange Committee (*Rancionirung Commission*) under the command of a *Grenz* officer colonel (who later that year became a general), Daniel Peharnik. The Committee stipulated first and foremost that for the 30 Turkish prisoners who had been released on parole but who had not returned a suitable number of Austrian prisoners should be released in compensation. Furthermore, instead of strict rules, Colonel Peharnik enjoyed a wide scope of authority to judge in every case with regards to how many Turkish privates he should exchange for an Austrian officer or NCO (or vice versa). The committee would have no say regarding cases in which the process of ransoming had already

60 Reports of the commander of the corps in Croatia (Field Marshal lieutenant Wallisch) to Emperor Joseph (Sluin, on 25 August 1789). KA HKR 1789-33-145.

61 The imperial decision was made on the basis of the note of the Feldzeugmester Wallis, vice president of the Aulic War Council. Vienna, on September 30, 1789. KA HKR 1789-33-145.

began. For example, for Capitan Siegenfeld from the Licca Grenz Regiment the emperor had already approved a “ransom of 100 pound in gold and 66 gulden in Taller.” A site in Bosnia, Bashina Luca near Dresnik (Drežnik Grad, Croatia), was designated for the exchanges as *Rancionirungs Platz*. Colonel Peharnik would have to arrive at an agreement with the enemy about the conditions of the process; for example how strong should the Austrian and Turkish escort be? The committee would have to be sure that “[o]n the days of the exchange process in the area of Dresnik there will be no hostilities or fights, neither from the Turkish side nor from our side, but all will remain quiet, peaceful and friendly.”

So as of the autumn of 1789, the permanent and organized exchanges had begun. At the end of September, Lieutenant Phillipovich was successfully exchanged for the Bosnian beg mentioned below. Maybe to show their goodwill, on October 8 and 14 ten *Grenziers* (all private solders) were released by the enemy for the 30 frequently mentioned Turks from Novi.⁶²

Nevertheless, Austrian prisoners who had been captured by the Turks somewhere other than the area of Bosnia and the neighboring Military Border seem not to have been considered in the discussions regarding prisoner exchanges. In Constantinople in the infamous slave-house Bagno, 17 Austrian officers and 458 NCOs and privates were lingering in misery in the autumn of 1789.⁶³ The president of the War Council at the time made a logical proposal with regards to trying to exchange them for Turkish prisoners in Austrian hands. Hadik was also encouraged by the recent exchanges at the Croatian border.⁶⁴ However, in his reply Joseph summarized the problem concerning the issue of their possible exchange, removing the question from the agenda at the same time:

“The prisoners in Bagno are the propriety of the Sultan and there is no use in having the French ambassador in Constantinople⁶⁵ to set them free anymore. Every person who was captured from our forces by the Bosnians belongs to his captor and the Sultan has nothing to do with it, thus the Porte does not care about Turks who have been captured by our forces either. Under such circumstances, the prisoners in Bagno may have nothing to hope of from the proposal of the War Council and for the time being there are no further steps

62 Report of General Major Peharnik dated October 16, 1789, Sluin.

63 Report of two prisoners of war, Franz Scholderer and György Feleki, captains (both from the Second Border Regiment of Seckler) from Constantinople on September 5 and 7. KA HKR 1789-33-175.

64 Note of Hadik to the Emperor. Vienna, October 31. KA HKR 1789-33-175.

65 The French emissaries (in this case count Marie-Gabriel Choiseul-Gouffier) in Constantinople were traditionally the protectors of the western Christians, especially the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire.

to be taken with regards to the question of these prisoners.”⁶⁶ It was therefore also clear to the emperor that the Bosnians must have been interested only in their compatriots, so there was only hope for the exchange of prisoners who had belonged to the garrisons of Novi and Dubica.

The fortunes of war following the capture of Belgrade⁶⁷ (on 8 October 1789) by Loudon and the Russo-Austrian successes in Moldau and Wallachia had turned to the favor of Vienna and Saint Petersburg. In 1790, operations were conducted primarily in the valley of Morava and on the Lower Danube River, but on a lower scale. Meanwhile, in Vienna Joseph II died on February 20 of a pulmonary illness, with which he had been infected in the camp during the campaign of 1788. He left his brother Leopold II an exhausted state in the throes of revolt. Leopold’s most vital task was making peace with the Porte before Prussia backstabbed the monarchy. On July 27, 1790, an agreement was signed with Prussia in which Austria promised peace with the Ottomans on the basis of the *status quo ante*.⁶⁸ The war-weary parties concluded an armistice in Giurgevo (Giurgiu, Romania) on September 23, 1790. Then, in Svistov (Svishtov, Bulgaria) a long peace-conference began. During the Austro-Turkish negotiations, Russia continued the war with the Porte, ignoring external pressure from other European powers.

As I have shown, the exchange of prisoners began in the autumn of 1789 and by February 1790 almost all of the prisoners from Novi and Dubica had been released in the abovementioned site in Bosnia.⁶⁹ In return, the Austrians got back men from the Border regiments who had been captured, but for the time being no one from Constantinople, as Joseph had foreseen.

On June 17, 1790, Chancellor Kaunitz made an interesting proposal to the “Apostolic King” Leopold.⁷⁰ Kaunitz had spotted in the muster-role one qadi and three imams among the prisoners of Szabács, who were being held in Kassa, and two imams in the prison of Beszterce (Bistrița, Romania). To make gestures to the Turks and at the same time to attempt to ease the sufferings of the Austrian captivities in Constantinople, the Chancellor suggested releasing these six non-combatants without any compensation. According Kaunitz, this gesture would also facilitate the task of Baron Peter Herbert, the Austrian envoy

66 KA HKR 1789-33-175.

67 Belgrade’s garrison of 8,000 men was granted a free pass.

68 Hochedlinger, *Austria’s War*, 393.

69 KA HKR 1790-33-132.

70 He was elected Holy Roman Emperor in October 1790.

to the Porte, who was working hard to organize the peace conference at the time. The king approved the proposal.⁷¹ The War Council ordered the Hungarian and the Transylvanian General Commando to release the “literates” and escort them to the cordon between the two armies in Serbia and in Wallachia.⁷²

The very few sources available indicate that as of the conclusion of the armistice on September 23, there were efforts to exchange the Austrian prisoners in Constantinople for the Turks held primarily in Hungary and Transylvania. There were hopes that the exchange would include the enslaved peasants taken during the war by the Turks. The new president of the Aulic War Council, Cavalry-General Ferdinand von Tige, ordered the commander of the main army in Belgrade, Field-Marshal Michael von Wallis, who also had been recently appointed, that he had to take the necessary steps to ensure the return of the *Grenzer* families, who had been taken during the Turkish raids on Banat and southern Transylvania in the autumn of 1788.⁷³

After the conclusion of the armistice and even before the opening of the peace conference in Svistov, the parties might have wanted to solve the problem of the prisoners. On September 29, 1790, the War Council demanded from the General Commando the “most accurate” account of the Turkish prisoners of war staying in Hungary because of the forthcoming “official prisoner exchange.”⁷⁴ On October 4, the commander of the Main Army, Field Marshall Wallis, informed the General Commando from Belgrade that according to Baron Herbert, the exchange of prisoners had to take place before the opening of peace conference, so he had to receive the accounts concerning the prisoners as soon as possible. Wallis asked for two separate accounts, one for the Christians and one for the Muslims. He also asked for a list of the Turkish women and children in captivity.⁷⁵

On December 1, Wallis, acting on a suggestion of Field Marshall-lieutenant Enzenberg, reported to the War Council from Belgrade that the focal point of

71 KA HKR 1790-33-132.

72 Vienna, June 20. KA HKR 1790-33-132.

73 Vienna, October 24. KA HKR 1790-33-238. This loss was estimated at 36,000 civilians, including many thousands who were abducted by the marauding Turks (Hochedlinger, *Austria's war*, 384). In this case, at the beginning of January 1791 the Bosnian Turks offered 24 captured women and children for exchange. In response to the note of Tige, Lepold rejected the exchange, stating that a man should not be exchanged for a woman. Only Turkish women or children who had been captured should be exchanged for a woman, or some money as a ransom (Vienna, January 8, 1791. KA HKR 1791-33-5).

74 HL G. C. I. Dep. Book 76. No 1790-7231.

75 Ibid. No.

the prisoner exchange would be moved from the Croatian border to Ruschuk (Ruse, Bulgaria), so Wallis suggested that a certain major, Count Strassoldo, serve as head of the newly appointed exchange commission.⁷⁶

Wallis, however, waited for the Turks to take the initial step. When he received information according to which a batch of released Austrian prisoners (7 officers and 93 privates) had arrived in Ruschuk from Constantinople, he immediately (on January 10, 1790) asked the General Commando to send 300 prisoners from Kassa to Temesvár (Timișoara, Romania), because there were not enough prisoners in Transylvania and Galicia to release in exchange. Buda forwarded the order to the Invalid Commando in Kassa that day.⁷⁷ As Wallis indicated in his report, the Turks transported the Austrian officers by horse and the common prisoners by carts to the exchange site. In the name of reciprocity, the Austrians were also expected to move their prisoners from Kassa to the border by the same means of transportation.⁷⁸

The withdrawal of the Turkish prisoners from Hungary and other parts of the Habsburg Monarchy, however, lasted for months. According to the report of the exchange commission, from January 10, 1791 to March 29 of the same year, 1,238 Turks were handed over to the Turkish commissar, Mohamed Emin, in six stages. In return, the *kaiserlich-königliche* army received only 18 officers and 538 NCOs and privates from the slave house in Constantinople. The exchanges took place in Giurgevo (opposite Ruschuk on the northern part of the Danube River) and around Vidin.⁷⁹

The peace was finally signed in Sistova on August 4, 1791, but the real winner of the war had been Russia, which had gained Crimea once for all, and, with it, dominance over the Black Sea, in the peace of Jassy, which was signed on January 9, 1792. The last Turkish war of Austria, which caused so much death, suffering and destruction, ended with very few results. Belgrade and Wallachia had to be handed back to the Ottomans. Only the town of Orșova and two small strips on the Croatian frontier were ceded to Austria at the price of at least 30,000–40,000 soldiers lost (most of whom had succumbed to disease, like

76 KA HKR 1790-33-252.

77 HL G. C. I. Dep. Book 77. No. 1791-283.

78 Order of the War Council to the General Commando. Vienna, January 15. KA HKR 1791-33-9.

79 The Turks, however, could not hand over the 32 Austrian prisoners, who had been drafted to the Ottoman Fleet. Report of major count Johann von Strassoldo, head of the exchange commission. Bucharest, May 11, 1791. KA HKR 1790-33-252.

emperor Joseph II himself) and thousands more civilians killed, forced to flee, impoverished or even enslaved.⁸⁰

Conclusion

To respond to the questions raised in the introduction, Joseph II, who strove for uniformity in every respect, granted the captured Turks soldiers prisoner-of-war status. Indeed he was rather ahead of his time. In the first convention of Geneva (1864), the rights of the prisoners of war were recognized by the majority of military powers. These rights were roughly similar to those prescribed by Joseph for Turkish prisoners of war some three generations earlier. As I have shown, captives were given regular supplies and enjoyed almost similar portions in kind and in cash as an Austrian common soldier in peacetime. They could also keep their money and personal belongings. The sick and wounded Turks were looked after in military hospitals, although these lazarettos were known by the Austrian soldiers themselves as places to be avoided at all cost. Joseph acknowledged the status of the enemy officers, too. Captives were permitted to write letters home, although translated summaries of these letters made it as far as the writing desk of the emperor in Vienna. In January 1789, Joseph finally prohibited correspondence by prisoners.⁸¹

On the other hand Joseph was not willing to grant Christians who served in the Ottoman army the status of prisoner of war. They were treated as mercenaries, not “legal” combatants, so the logical step was to press them into the Austrian army. This method also suited well the practices of the embryonic mass-armies, which suffered from a constant deficiency of manpower. It was, however, always emphasized that this measure only applied to Christians who had actually taken arms against the Austrian troops, and not to servants or other auxiliaries. By that time, the non-Muslim elements of the Ottoman Army consisted of mainly peasants, who had been forced to dig trenches, transport materials, and other serve auxiliary functions. This meant that most of the captured Christians fell in the non-combatant category and only a few of them were forced into the Austrian army. One other possible reason for this distinction may have lain in

80 The total sum can be estimated as high as 80 000. See Mayer, *Joseph II* 68. The fate of the former, as captured Austrian soldiers, merits further research.

81 On January 31, 1789, the Hungarian General Commando forwarded to the Aulic Council 11 letters from the Turks who being held in Győr at the time. KA HKR 1789-33-17.

the efforts Joseph had previously made to prompt Orthodox Christian Serbs and Romanians to rise up and rebel against the Ottoman yoke.⁸²

Methodically, however, it would be fairer to compare the Austrian conduct with regards to captives to the conduct of the two other belligerents, the Ottomans and the Russians. In this context, the measures taken by the Austrian army were remarkably humane. In some cases, neither the Turks nor the Russians bothered to take prisoners at all. Cossacks on the Russian side and Tartars on the Ottoman side were famous for their cruelty. There were countless examples of brutality. The Russians under Prince Potemkin massacred the Turkish garrison of the Fortress of Ochakov during the final assault on the night of December 16, 1788. During the capture of Ismail, the other Russian commander, Suvorov, had his troops to kill everyone in the fortress on December 10, 1790. 4,000 enemy soldiers were massacred in a few hours.⁸³

Europeans believed that the Turks generally killed and beheaded their Christian prisoners on the spot because their officers would reward them for every decapitated head. Many memoirs and official reports mention this habit, which may not have been simply “barbarism,” brutality or religious fanaticism. A certain Prussian officer, J. E. G. Hayne, explained the Turkish “barbarity” by religious hatred, and, most importantly, lack of discipline. Hayne contended that European troops were also inclined to commit such acts when, after a bloody and chaotic fight, discipline and the control of the officers had been shaken, as happened during and after the final assault on Buda in 1686. The Turkish commanders might also have used this as a means of compensating their men for the lost ransoms, since otherwise the soldiers would have been busying themselves with their prisoners instead of doing their military duty.⁸⁴

If someone nevertheless survived the first minutes of captivity, then came the real ordeals. On September 21, 1788, 822 Austrian soldiers of the Austrian rearguard at Karánsebes were taken prisoner, among them a young Hungarian first-lieutenant, György Görgey.⁸⁵ His vivid account provides a clear picture of their suffering on the long death march to Constantinople. In the end of the 822 men, only 125 prisoners arrived to the capital alive. The rest perished because of inadequate supplies and bad treatment during the 70-day march.

82 See the mission of Bishop Joanovic. Vaníček, *Specialgeschichte*, vol. 3, 365–68.

83 Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 165–67.

84 Hayne, J. E. G. *Abhandlung über die Kriegskunst der Türken* (Vienna: Trattner, 1788), 12–13.

85 Görgey Albert: “Görgey György kapitány jelentése ezredéhez török fogságából,” *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 15 (1914): 642.

Those who were no longer able to walk were killed immediately. Their heads were chopped off and their bodies were left to rot. The heads were shown as trophies, while “our companions severed the ears of the dead to account for the prisoners.”⁸⁶ Nevertheless, Görgey also witness some humane conduct and saw examples of kindness by the captors, but usually they were simply either unable or unwilling to organize the provision of sustenance and accommodation for several hundred men. It was also embarrassing for the Turkish commanders that instead of the promised 4,000 prisoners, they only had 125 to show to the people of Constantinople.

In this context, one can understand the angry words of Joseph in reply to the protest of the Turks held in Szigetvár: “We have to make it clear to these *agas* that prisoners in our hands are treated more humanely than prisoners on the other side, so they had better stay calm.”⁸⁷

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