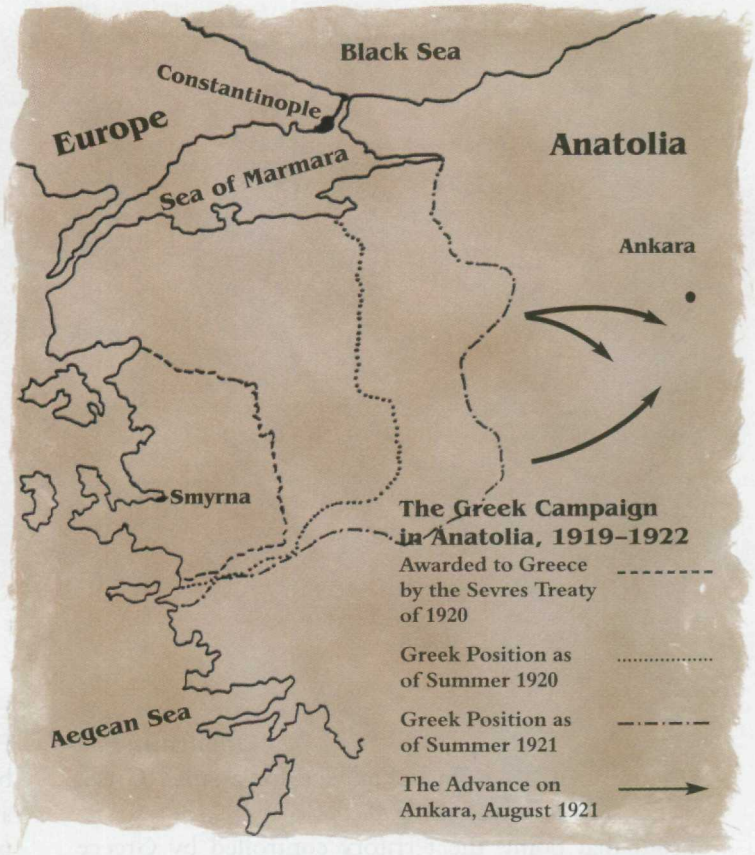
by Alfred F. Kugel

The Greek Campaign in Anatolia 1919–1922

Most of the recent events in the Balkans and Asia Minor have a long trail of antecedents, usually going back over many centuries. So it is with the animosity between Greeks and Turks. Certainly, the region surrounding the Aegean Sea is the scene of deep-seated ethnic, cultural, and religious differences that date back at least to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when two major events created a new geopolitical reality — dominance of the Balkans by the Ottoman Empire. The first of these major events was the battle of Kosovo Polje [Field of the Blackbirds] in 1389, in which the Turks defeated the combined Serbian-Bulgarian-

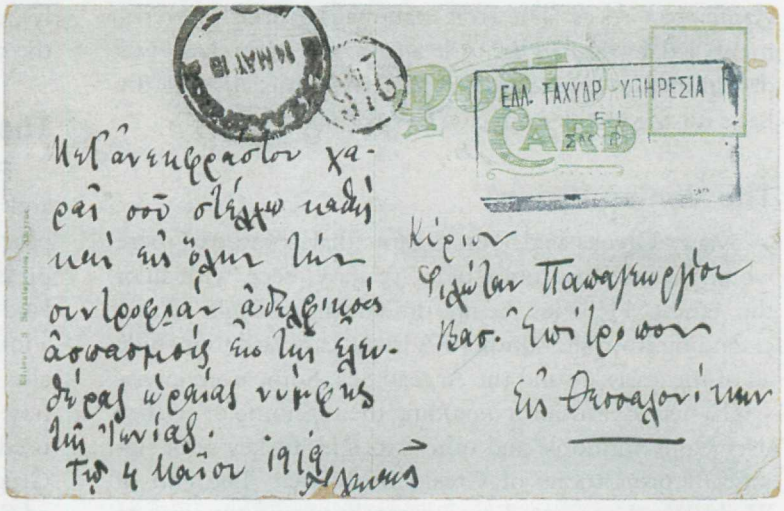


Bosnian forces and brought much of the Peninsula under their rule. The second great event was the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, thus ending the Byzantine Empire, which had been the focal point of the Greek Orthodox religion.

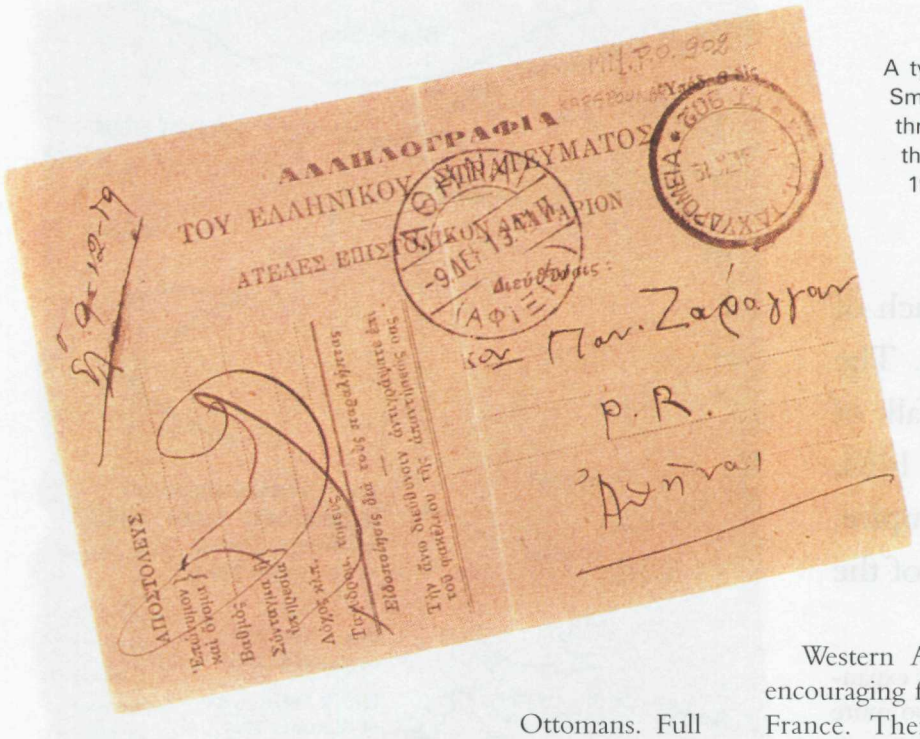
The Ottomans continued their dynamic expansion in Central and Eastern Europe for two more centuries, eventually encompassing Hungary, Southern Russia, and the Crimea, as well as threatening Austria. Their high-water mark was reached in 1683 when the Turkish forces were defeated at the gates of Vienna by an allied army led by King Jan Sobieski of Poland. Subsequently, the Ottoman Empire went into a slow decline as it was forced to withdraw from one after another of the Christian-inhabited territories, culminating in the early 1920s. By that time the only Turkish territory in Europe was Eastern Thrace, a small area extending for just 125 miles west of Constantinople (Istanbul).

The gradual receding of the Moslem tide proceeded from north to south, so the Slavic and Greek peoples of the Balkans did not benefit until quite late in the process. During the post-Napoleonic period, at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the Great Powers of the day — Austria, Great Britain, Prussia, and Russia — tried to deal with disputed boundaries. Ultimately, Ottoman control of essentially all of the Balkan Peninsula (except for a thin strip of Austrian Dalmatia along the Adriatic coast and tiny, landlocked Montenegro) was confirmed. Nevertheless, the indigenous Christian peoples of the Balkans were very discontented with the status quo, and frequent revolts against Ottoman rule followed in the ensuing years.

Greek nationalism was stimulated by several factors, including the French Revolution, the decline of Turkish power and the sympathetic attitude of Czar Alexander I of Russia. Although the Greek War of Independence broke out in 1821, success remained elusive until the Russo-Turkish War of 1827–29. Upon the conclusion of that conflict, the Treaty of Adrianople resulted in the acceptance of Greek autonomy by the



The earliest recorded date for fieldpost mail from Smyrna is found on this Greek military card dated May 4, 1919, only two days after the landing of the Greek expeditionary force authorized by the Allies.



A typical example of soldiers' mail from Smyrna: this fieldpost card was mailed through Greek military post office #902, the base office for Smyrna, in December 1919.

Ottomans. Full independence for a small Greek state followed in 1830.

From that point, the territory controlled by Greece expanded substantially on several occasions with the annexation of: Thessaly following the Russo-Turkish War in 1877–78; Crete, some of the Aegean Islands (Chios, Lemnos, Mytilene, and Samos), Southern Epirus, and Macedonia as a result of the Balkan Wars in 1912–13; and Western Thrace (from Bulgaria) following World War I. In addition, the Treaty of Sevres signed in 1920 by the Ottoman government in Constantinople (which was under occupation by the Allies) granted most of Eastern Thrace and a portion of Western Anatolia around Smyrna (Izmir) to Greece. The rival Nationalist Turkish government, led by Kemal Ataturk and based in Ankara, was determined to resist these harsh terms, thus creating the basis for the Greek campaign in Anatolia.

The "Ionian Vision"

Many Greeks had long dreamt that some day there would be a reconstitution of a Greater Greece, with all of the ethnic Hellenes being united in a single nation extending from the southern Adriatic eastward to include all of the areas around the Aegean Sea. Some even envisaged a new Byzantium, including the regaining of control over Constantinople and other cities in Turkey with significant proportions of Greek inhabitants. The end of World War I presented an extremely propitious time to press the claims to such an empire. Although it came late to the party, Greece was considered a member in good standing of the victorious Allies and felt entitled to rewards when the geopolitical questions of the day were decided. Turkey, on the other hand, was one of the defeated Central Powers, and thus a candidate for severe punishment.

On this basis, Greece submitted claims to the Peace Commissions for a vast enhancement of its territory, to include Northern Epirus (which had been assigned to Albania in 1913), the Dodecanese Islands (occupied by Italy since 1912), and Thrace (then divided between Bulgaria and Turkey), as well as Western Anatolia (a part of Asiatic Turkey). One encouraging factor was strong support from Britain and France. There was an especially close relationship between Prime Ministers Lloyd George of Great Britain and Venizelos of Greece. (However, after the fall from power of Premier Clemenceau in early 1920, this rapport no longer applied to the French.)

As the negotiations proceeded, it became clear that the Allies would not change the Albanian border they had drawn in 1913 and that Italy had no intention of giving up the Dodecanese. Thus, Venizelos concentrated his efforts on Thrace and Anatolia, where the prospects for favorable decisions were much better. In due course, the preliminary decisions of the Commission were that the Greeks should have Thrace (except for a small area around Constantinople that would be administered by the Allies jointly) and a portion of Western Anatolia radiating out from the city of Smyrna.

The Landing at Smyrna

From time to time, negotiations between the Allies and the Ottoman government in Constantinople over a peace treaty tended to bog down. In order to put more pressure on the Turks, the Allies authorized the Greeks to land an expeditionary force at Smyrna and take over the administration of the surrounding area. The landing actually took place on August 2, 1919 (this date and others noted in the article are based on the old Julian calendar used in Greece at the time; based on the more modern Gregorian calendar used in Western Europe and the United States the date would have been August 15). The city was decked out in blue and white flags, and the Greek troops were greeted enthusiastically by the majority of the residents of the city, who were of Greek extraction. During the next few months, the troops gradually expanded

the area under their control to areas outside of Smyrna. Thus began what would turn into a classic "ecstasy and agony" story. This was the ecstasy; the agony would come later.

Although the peace negotiations went slowly, the Ottomans finally were induced to sign the Treaty of Sevres on August 10, 1920. This agreement provided for the transfer of authority in the territory extending for an average of roughly seventy-five miles out from Smyrna. At that point, then, the area was considered to be Greek de jure. One potential problem was that the ethnic make-up of the population living in this territory tended to shift as one went farther inland from Smyrna. Clearly, as the Peace Commissioners drew the boundaries, there was an instinctive bias in favor of Greece since, by some estimates, the Sevres award area contained a population of 800,000 Greeks, a million Turks, and about 100,000 Armenians, Jews, and others.

Nicolas Plastiras, hero of the Asia Minor Campaign. He was known as "The Black Rider" from his habit of always riding a black horse. He later became a politician, and died in 1952. The inscription reads: "Courage and desire brings victory. (signed) N. Plastiras."

Table 1. Normal Greek Civil Postmarks Used in Anatolia

Type 1. Single Circle

Kemer

Kirkgats

Smyrni

Type 2. Double Circle

Aidinon

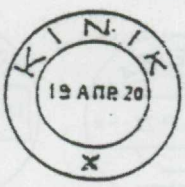
Axarion

Dikeli

Fokea

Kasba

Kidonia



Kinik

Kordelio

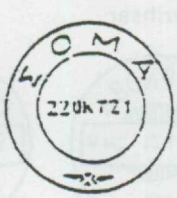
Krini

Magnisia

Odemision

Pergamus

Smyrni



Soma

Vaindirion

Vriulla

Table 1. Normal Greek Civil Postmarks Used in Anatolia (continued)

Type 3. Without Bridge


Aidinon


Axarion


Moschonsion


Nazli


Nimfeon


Sokion

Type 4. Date in Bridge


Ahirli


Ahmetli


Adramition


Alatsata


Ali-Aga


Axarion


Dikeli


Efesos


Gkioul Mpaxi


Kasaba


Kidonie


Kinik


Kirkgats


Kordelio


Krini


Loutra Alatsaton


Magnisia


Mainemeni


Moldovani


N(ea) Efesos


N(ea) Fokea


Odemision


P(alea) Efesos


P(alea) Fokea


Pergamus


Sevdikioi


Sivrihsar


Soma


Theira


Tourbali


Vaindirion


Vournova


Voutza


Vriulla

The Greeks Move Eastward

The Turkish Nationalists neither accepted the Treaty nor favored giving up any of the territory of Turkey proper (as opposed to the outlying parts of the old Ottoman Empire). Therefore, they continued to bide their time and build up their military capability against the day when they would be strong enough to attempt to drive the Greeks into the sea. The high command in Athens recognized the threat posed by the Nationalists and decided to occupy more of Anatolia as a buffer against future attacks.

1921 picture postcard showing Greek military mail truck at Mpal-Mahmout. The bleak Anatolian "Salt Desert" can be seen in the background.

In the summer of 1920 the Greeks advanced more than 100 miles to the east, occupying a line from Moudania on the Sea of Marmara southward through Proussa to Ousak and then westward along the Meandros River to the sea. Unlike the region around Smyrna, this area included relatively few Greek ethnic inhabitants and a lot of residents who were sympathetic to the Turkish Nationalist cause. Thus, this part of the campaign became an occupation of enemy territory, requiring a much larger number of troops to be deployed.

Although unrecognized at the time, the Greek parliamentary elections on November 14, 1920, proved to be a crucial turning point. In a surprising outcome, Prime Minister Venizelos and his party lost badly to the royalists who, once back in power, recalled King Constantine to the throne. This move greatly offended the Allies, who were supportive of the Venizelists but suspicious of the royalists, who had favored a neutralist policy during the Great War. (The king was even suspected of a pro-German bias as he was married to the sister of the Kaiser.) With the recall of the king, Greece forfeited its chance for badly needed military and financial aid from the Allies at a time when the burdens on the country were increasing sharply.

The Advance on Ankara

The situation didn't improve for Greece in 1921. Although the Ottoman government had signed the Sevres Treaty, it was unable to enforce the peace terms anywhere beyond the range of the Allied troops and warships in Constantinople, while the Nationalists continued to attract adherents in the rest of Turkey. Turkish irregulars raided various Greek outposts, although the regular forces were careful to avoid any pitched battles. The Greek generals could not agree on a new plan to deal with the problem, so decided on more of the same — an even deeper penetration of Anatolia with even more troops being required. As a result, the front advanced another seventy-five miles to the east by early summer, embracing Nicomidia (Ismid) at the easternmost point of the Sea of Marmara, as well as the inland towns of Dorileon (Eskishehir), Kioutahia (Kutahya), and Karahissar (Afion).

In frustration at their seeming inability to close out the fighting, the general staff adopted what can be viewed as a "Napoleonic" solution. In 1812 the Emperor of the French believed that if the *Grande Armée* could only capture Moscow, the Russians would surrender; in 1921 the Greek General Staff apparently believed that if they could only take Ankara, Turkish resistance would collapse. Moreover, the evidence is that in both cases geographic and logistical factors that would become crucial to the outcome were given insufficient attention. In the earlier case, Napoleon was defeated as much by the severe climate and overly stretched supply lines as by the Russians, and similar difficulties were about to befall the Greeks.

The Greek Army gathered all of its available resources, reaching a maximum commitment of 200,000 men in Asia Minor, and on August 14, 1921, began its great summer offensive toward Ankara, using two major columns thrusting eastward from Dorileon and Karahissar. However, the geography of interior Anatolia presented severe problems to the advancing troops. The fertile plain near Smyrna become an arid upland plateau further east, offering no possibility of living off the land. In western Anatolia, there was a rail network and relatively good roads on which supplies could be moved. To the east, however, the transportation system was meager at best, in spite of considerable effort by Greek engineering units to construct roads and bridges.

Worse yet, in this new effort the army would have to traverse the Anatolian salty desert in mid-summer. With

Table 2. Special Purpose Postmarks Used at Smyrna

Arrival

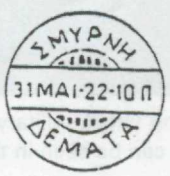
Departure

Central Arrival

Registered

Registered Arrival

General Delivery



Parcels

Branch 1

Official

Telegraph Expediting

Traveling Post Office from Smyrna to:

Ahmetli

Axarion

Odemision

P. Efesos

the utmost effort, the Greeks were able to accomplish this feat, reach the great bend of the Sangrios River, and mount a courageous attack on the Turkish positions on the high ground beyond. Although some units penetrated to only forty miles from Ankara, supplies of water and ammunition ran low. It became a case of thus far and no farther, and ultimately the huge effort simply petered out. On September 11 the high command reluctantly ordered a fall-back to the bases at Dorileon and Karahissar.

Out of Anatolia

Nor was 1922 to prove all that much better for Greece. Although the army was largely intact, the men were exhausted, morale was low, and the supplies that had been consumed the previous year could not be adequately replenished and transported a couple of hundred miles inland from Smyrna. Worse yet, for inexplicable political reasons, the new army commander, General Hatzianestis, shifted three infantry regiments and two battalions from Asia Minor to Thrace in mid-July.

On the other hand, prospects had clearly improved for the Turks. One positive event was that France decided to evacuate its forces from Cilicia, an area it had occupied in southern Anatolia. This move not only freed up the Turkish forces that had been in place facing the French, but the latter left behind considerable ammunition and other war materiel, which could be used against the Greeks. A second event was the signing of a treaty of friendship between the Turkish nationalists and the Russian Communists in March 1921, which resulted in a Soviet Military Mission under General Frunze providing arms and money to Kemal in 1922.

By mid-summer, the Turks were ready to take the offensive. A concerted attack against the Greek positions near Karahissar began on August 26, 1922. By noon on the following day, the main Greek line of defense had been breached, and a retreat was underway. Although some units put up stiff resistance, others merely picked up and headed west in a scene described by one observer as "weary disorder." In some sectors, the retreat turned into a rout.

Even when the retreating troops arrived at the final

Postcard mailed through the civil post office in Kordelio on August 12, 1921. The city was in the so-called Sevres zone, part of the area the Allied Commissioners were prepared to cede to Greece.

defense line only fifteen miles from Smyrna, there was no stopping. The army continued westward onto the Erythrai Peninsula, from which it could be evacuated to the nearby Greek islands of Chios and Mitylene. With the departure of the High Commissioner from Smyrna on a British warship on September 8, the Greek state in Asia Minor ceased to exist. Agony had arrived in full bloom.

Nor was the agony yet complete. The fighting was ended by the Armistice of Moudania, signed on October 11, 1922. The new situation required that Greece give up its claims to Eastern Thrace and Western Anatolia, as well as the islands of Imbros and Tenedos, all of which was ratified in the Lausanne Treaty of July 1923. One of the unusual provisions of the treaty called for the compulsory "exchange" of Greek Orthodox residents of Turkey (except for Constantinople) and Moslem residents of Greece (except for Western Thrace). Thus, for the good of future ethnic stability, a great many people were uprooted from their homes and sent to reconstruct their lives in new countries. With this, the dream of bringing all of the Hellenes together in a Greek nation was in fact achieved, although in a much different manner than envisioned earlier by those with the Ionian vision.

Philatelic Implications of the Campaign

The deployment of the Greek expeditionary force in Western Anatolia had a number of philatelic consequences. Not least, it was necessary to establish a fully functioning fieldpost system to handle the mail for what would become a peak of 200,000 troops in Asia Minor. Second, a mail service would be needed for the civil population of the occupied area, especially the Greek ethnic community, which was heavily involved in commercial activities. The first priority was the fieldpost service, which went into operation essentially simultaneously with the disembarking of the army on May 2, 1919.

Although the existing Turkish post office in Smyrna remained open during the first year of the occupation, there was concern about tampering with the mail. With the Greek businessmen pressing for a more secure civil postal service, the High Commission soon authorized such an operation, which was located in the same building as the FPO but used a civil postmark. The earliest recorded example of this device (a single circle marking inscribed "Smyrni") is dated July 10, 1919.

As the troops fanned out to occupy other cities and towns in the area outside Smyrna, additional post offices were opened and mail service provided. Fieldpost markings are known from offices numbered from 902 to 940, although not all of the numbers in between were used in Asia Minor. Some of the FPOs remained in established locations throughout the campaign, whole others moved around with the particular units to which they were assigned.

Greek civil post offices also were opened in three dozen cities and towns located in the so-called Sevres zone, which was the area that the Allied Peace Commissioners indicated they were prepared to cede to Greece. In addition, a small number of post offices were opened in the occupied territories to the north and east of the area actually annexed to Greece when the Sevres Treaty was signed by the Ottoman government on August 10, 1920. With a half dozen exceptions, these offices were not issued normal Greek postmarks, although some postal officers made up their own provisional markings, generally carved from wood and undated.

For postal historians, an important problem is that in the ensuing Greek retreat and evacuation of Asia Minor, most of the postal records were lost or destroyed, making it impossible to determine the specific dates that either the fieldpost or civil post offices functioned. Fortunately, military records were kept, which show the time periods during which many of the locations were under Greek occupation — at least providing some theoretical sense of the longevity of the postal activity.

Because of the lack of good records, the list of locations in Asiatic Turkey that had Greek civil post offices

An example of official mail: a registered cover sent from the Greek High Commission in Smyrna to Czechoslovakia, mailed on April 25, 1921.

continues to expand each time a study is published, based on new discoveries since the prior article. The same can be said for this study, which illustrates in Table 1 examples of all of the standard civil postmarks currently known. There are four major varieties of these markings, with a number of minor variations, especially in regard to the little designs at the bottom of the circular datestamps. Some cities used two or even three different types.

In addition, as the center of business and postal activity in Western Anatolia, a large number of special-purpose markings were issued for Smyrna (Table 2). Table 3 shows examples of the provisional markings used in a handful of towns outside the annexed area.

Other areas for potential study by postal historians are the censorship markings and unit cachets of various army and administrative groups, some of which, in the absence of anything else, were occasionally used to cancel the postage on civil mail and as postmarks on military or official mail. Such markings are considered to be military rather than postal, thus falling outside the scope of this study.

Endnote

Title page illustration comes from a Greek patriotic postcard celebrating historic victories over the Turks. Constantine's horse is trampling the Turkish flag.

References

Binos, Harilaos M. *The Greek Postal Service in Asia Minor During the Campaign 1919–1922* (in Greek, Athens, 1975; unpublished English translation by Prodromos Üründü).

Hermes 1997 Stamps of Greece & Postal History, Athens.

Nicolaides, Sophocles G. *Les Bureaux de Poste Grecs et Leurs Cachets Pendant La Guerre de 1919–1922 en Asie Mineure* (in French, Athens, 1963; English translation by Walter C. Bauer in *Tughra Times*, Summer/Fall 1997.)

Smith, Michael Llewellyn. *Ionian Vision; Greece in Asia Minor* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1973).

Vlastos 1998 Stamp Catalogue & Postal History, Volume II — New Territories, Halandri.

The Author

Alfred F. Kugel is an investment counselor based in the Chicago area who has been a collector since childhood. He has exhibited nationally and internationally and is a nationally-qualified philatelic judge. He also has written numerous articles, mostly related to twentieth-century military mail, and currently serves as a director of the Military Postal History Society.

Table 3. Provisional Postmarks