

# Sanctuary of A Thousand Adventures: Selimiye in The Besieged, Occupied, And Liberated Edirne

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*“Witness to a thousand adventures, [...] national sentiments howling over the domes of the grand sanctuary which shouted belittle to the Bulgarians [...]”*

*“26 Mart 928 İhtifâli İntiba’larından,” Edirne Milli Gazete, March 1928*

In the last century of the Ottoman Empire, its elites sought to respond to the disintegration of the Empire by resorting to a succession of ideologies. As a shared multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman sculpted in the mid-19th century Tanzimat reforms failed to succeed, the elites -as well as Sultan Abdulhamid II- manifested Muslim nationalism to be the basis of the Ottoman nation. After the First World War, loss of territories with the most of the Arabic-speaking population in the Ottoman Empire strengthened the idea of the nascent Turkish nation.<sup>1</sup> In this complex and long transition towards Turkish nationalism, Balkan Wars (1912-13) were milestones that created memories of trauma as well as intensifying ethnic consciousness and ideological disputes. Former Ottoman capital Edirne and its major monument Selimiye Mosque (c.1574) were highly contested sites in the Balkan Wars which resulted with the loss of almost all the Ottoman territories in Europe except eastwards of Edirne.

Selimiye is unique with its place in the Balkan Wars and also quite familiar among monuments at the midst of ethnic strife in Europe. From the Balkan Wars until the end of the Second World War in Europe, there had been numerous cases of destruction of monuments that found themselves at the violent boundaries of the emerging nation states. These sites of mourning and trauma are fertile ground to investigate the complex relationship of ideological movements, wars, and cultural heritage.<sup>2</sup> As scholar John Hutchinson remarks, modern war-

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<sup>1</sup> Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4-10.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Meriwether Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 135-169.

fare converts populations into “sacred communities of sacrifice” and reinforce the formation of nations.<sup>3</sup> They give rise to the narratives that provide populations with “a sense of meaning and unique destiny.”<sup>4</sup> Contested sites in conflicts became “cultural and political resources” in the present and acquire unique roles as “heritage of war”. Forming war heritage drawing on memories of wars culminates in lasting identities, establishing “legitimacy to political systems” and underlining claims over territories.<sup>5</sup> After the conflicts, sites emerge with “altered roles, connotations, and meanings.”<sup>6</sup> As Rehberg and Neutzner showed, the Baroque church Frauenkirche in Dresden could simultaneously become “a symbol of hope and of suppression” after World War II.<sup>7</sup> Commemorations of the “destruction of Dresden” and the 2005 reconstruction of Frauenkirche embodied communal feelings as well as reflecting divisions and suppressed voices.<sup>8</sup> Monuments and memorials can become an integral part of the national memoryscapes and provide focal points around which “a vision of national identity can be tied up with a sense of a shared past.”<sup>9</sup> Memoryscape not only conceptually melds the ideas of memory and landscape, but it also “renders the ideas of place and remembrance as interdependent.”<sup>10</sup> Historian Pierre Nora conceives the collection and interaction of public memory sites as formation of national identity.<sup>11</sup> As sociologist Maurice Halbwachs remarked, public memory exists within “frameworks” that are used by people to determine and retrieve their recollections.<sup>12</sup> This article aims to reveal the local and national framework of memory through which Selimiye became part of the memoryscape of the nascent Turkish nation in competition with rival nationalisms. By doing so, it locates the transition of Selimiye from an imperial mosque into national war heritage in the formation of the Turkish nation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Hutchinson, *Nationalism and War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Gegner and Bart Ziino, “The heritage of war: agency, contingency, identity,” in *The Heritage of War*, eds. Martin Gegner and Bart Ziino (London: Routledge, 2012), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Marie L. S. Sørensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose, “Introduction: The Impact of Conflict on Cultural Heritage: A Biographical Lens,” in *War and Cultural Heritage*, eds. Marie L. S. Sørensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Karl-Siegbert Rehberg and Matthias Neutzner, “The Dresden Frauenkirche As a Contested Symbol: the Architecture of Remembrance After War,” in *War and Cultural Heritage*, eds. Marie L. S. Sørensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Cooke, “Negotiating memory and identity: The Hyde Park Holocaust memorial, London,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 26, no. 3 (2000): 449.

<sup>10</sup> Sarah De Nardi and Steven High, “Memoryscapes,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Memory and Place*, eds. Sarah De Nardi, Hilary Orange, Steven High, and Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto (New York: Routledge, 2020), 117.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Nora, *The Realms of Memory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. L. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43.

<sup>13</sup> For the investigation of the opposition of memoryscapes in the North American context see Keith T. Carlson with Naxaxalhts’i (Albert McHalsie), “Stó:lō Memoryscapes as Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Stó:lō history from stone and fire,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Memory and Place*, eds. Sarah De Nardi, Hilary Orange, Steven High, and Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto (New York: Routledge, 2020), 138-147.

## Selimiye in the Midst of the Siege

The First Balkan War started in October 1912 and quickly became a catastrophic retreat for the Ottoman forces. Expulsion of ethnic populations including Ottoman Muslims took place during and after territorial changes due to the Balkan Wars.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the Balkan Wars was one of the first total wars, as the peoples of the participating states were mobilized and suffered *en masse*.<sup>15</sup> Thanks to its broad coverage in the Ottoman press, the suffering of Ottoman Muslims was immediately known by the wider Ottoman public.<sup>16</sup> In the publicization of Muslim suffering, mosques emerged both as venues and victims themselves.<sup>17</sup>

On the northern front, one of the sides the Ottoman Empire warred against was Bulgaria. Bulgarian forces systematically approached, encircled and put Edirne under siege in October 1912.<sup>18</sup> The siege would prove a dramatic ordeal that continued for five months, isolating the city of over 100,000 people and 60,000 soldiers almost to starvation.<sup>19</sup> The influx of thousands of refugees necessitated converting public buildings into temporary shelters. Like many other mosques in the path of refugees in the Balkans, Selimiye hosted refugees during the siege. *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab*, one of the significant Ottoman propaganda books about the Balkan Wars, illustrated how Ottoman mosques became crowded spaces full of people taking refuge and living inside (Fig. 1).<sup>20</sup> There were similar scenes in Selimiye, as a Bulgarian officer reported that as many as 4,000 people took refuge inside when Bulgarian forces entered the city.<sup>21</sup> After the Ottomans took back Edirne, Pierre Loti, a famous French author and later an Istanbulite, wrote in *L'Illustration* that women and children, in particular, sought temporary refuge under the

<sup>14</sup> For the analysis of these, see Edvin Pezo, "Violence, Forced Migration, and Population Policies During and After the Balkan Wars (1912–14)," in *The Balkan Wars from Contemporary Perception to Historic Memory*, eds.

Katrin Boeckh and Sabine Rutar (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 68.

<sup>15</sup> Eyal Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat: The Balkan Wars and their Aftermath*, (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2016), 72.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> *Tanin* reported a massacre of women and children in the mosque of Şirva, a village close to Edirne. "Mühim bir Vesika," *Tanin*, July 26, 1329 [August 8, 1913], 3. An Ottoman propaganda book had illustration depicting Muslim women and children being burned in a mosque in Dedeoğaç. Rumeli Muhacirin-i İslamiye Cemiyeti, *Alam-ı İslam Rumeli mezalimi ve Bulgar vahşetleri: İslamiyetin enzar-ı basiretine ve alem-i insan-iyet ve medeniyetin nazar-ı dikkatine* (Istanbul: Mahmud Bey Matbaası, 1329 [1913]), 25.

<sup>18</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912- 1913* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 123-124.

<sup>19</sup> Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 274-275. Erickson notes that the original population of the city was 87,000 people. Including the refugees, this number topped 100,000. For the numbers of civilians and soldiers during the siege see 138, 141-142, 281.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmed Cevad, *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab* (Istanbul: 1328 [1913]), 40-41.

<sup>21</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Washington D.C.: The Endowment, 1914), 352.



### مهاجرت أرواح بجمعه سندن

جامع شريف دوننده مهاجرين اسلاميك حيات آلهيس + وطني مدافه ايدمهين ملك عاقبت عزه نسي .

Figure 1. Illustration of an Ottoman mosque's interior during the Balkan Wars.  
Ahmed Cevad, *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab* (Istanbul: 1328 [1913]), 40-41.

porticoes of Selimiye. He claimed that among them there were orphans of recent battles, who now help each other like brothers and sisters although they didn't know each other yesterday.<sup>22</sup> From the onset of the war, Selimiye was the breeding ground where patriotic sentiments ripened/thrived. Sight of the refugees in Selimiye was an unprecedented and agonizing relationship between the Ottoman Muslims and the mosque. This was a unifying ordeal thanks to Selimiye's literal and symbolic role of a roof under which a diverse population of Muslim refugees from the Balkans gathered.

The unmistakable silhouette of the mosque and the height of its minarets, the highest in the Ottoman territories westward of Istanbul, bestowed it with an unrivaled eminence (Fig. 2). The international press often depicted Selimiye, drawing on its minarets and their dominating visibility in the silhouette of the city. An article in the *New York Times* began with the exclamatory phrase, "The minarets of Sultan Selim!" and depicted them as "needle-like, [...which] rise over the indistinct mass of Adrianople from the distant

<sup>22</sup> Pierre Loti, "La Mosquée de Sélim," *L'Illustration*, October 18, 1913, 285.





Figure 2. Bulgarian soldiers at the trenches and Selimiye at the horizon.  
C. Woitz, "Avant le Suprême Assaut," *L'Illustration*, March 29, 1913.

hills, then as substantial columns from the nearby hills [...]."<sup>23</sup> During the siege, the minarets had strategic value as they provided a vista and acted as a marker for both sides. They proved to be advantageous for Ottoman military observations during the siege, allowing the observation of troop movements and the course of the war.<sup>24</sup> Even the Ottoman Commander Mehmed Şükrü Pasha climbed the minarets to check the movements of Bulgarian troops.<sup>25</sup> The military further benefited from the mosque as Ottoman officers installed an optical telegraph on its minarets.<sup>26</sup> On the besieger's side of the trenches, the soaring minarets were potentially an open target, which would eventually be a contested topic.<sup>27</sup> Minarets had long been seen as a demonstration of Ottoman power and Muslim presence by the non-Muslims in the Balkans. During the Ottoman retreat

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Palmer, "Adrianople Turks Saved the Capital," *New York Times*, December 26, 1912, 3. Similarly, *L'Illustration* depicted the silhouette of Edirne as "dominated by a hundred pointed minarets" which "dart a slender spire in the azure" in "A l'aile gauche bulgare," *L'Illustration*, November 23, 1912, 405.

<sup>24</sup> Şevket Dağdevirenzade, "Dağdeviren M. Şevket Bey'in Edirne Balkan Savaşı Anıları," in *Savaş Yaşayanların Kaleminden Edirne Balkan Savaşı Anıları*, ed. Ratip Kazancıgil (Edirne: Edirne Valiliği Kültür Yayınları, 2013), 152; Hüseyin Cemal, *Yeni Harb Başımıza Tekrar Gelenler Edirne Harbi, Muhasarası, Esaret ve Esbab-ı Felaket*, ed. Aziz Korkmaz (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 94.

<sup>25</sup> "Siege of Adrianople," *Evening Telegraph*, March 14, 1913, 4.

<sup>26</sup> R.P. Paul Christoff, *Journal du siège d'Andrinople* (Paris: H. Charles-Lavauzelle, 1914), 71. This role for Selimiye continued in World War I as machine guns were posted on the minarets. See "Famous Mosque in Peril," *Daily Mail*, July 27, 1920, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Christoff, *Journal du siège*, 71.

from the Balkans in the 19th century, they were among the first victims to destruction.<sup>28</sup> The minarets and the dome of Selimiye during the siege of Edirne recalled this lingering image and defied the expected expulsion of the Muslims from the city following many parts of the Balkans.

The constant shelling of Edirne by modern artillery was a profound experience for the soldiers and civilian population alike.<sup>29</sup> As there was “fire, famine, food, anarchy in Adrianople,” the neighborhood around Selimiye was occasionally on fire too.<sup>30</sup> In these circumstances, the threat from the cannons to the physical integrity of the building put considerable pressure on the Ottoman side and prompted heated arguments during and after the siege. The Bulgarian side constructed their goodwill on the grounds of respecting the monument’s physical integrity. Throughout the war, newspaper reports and a diverse array of individuals from the international scene seemed to confirm the Bulgarian argument claiming that Selimiye was in reach of the besieger’s weaponry but was deliberately avoided.<sup>31</sup> As Bulgarian aviators reported Selimiye and other important buildings to be intact, the besiegers informed the public of their merciful siege.<sup>32</sup> In his memoir, the French General Pierron de Mondésir wrote that the Bulgarians systematically refrained from hitting targets like Selimiye.<sup>33</sup> In a similar manner, war correspondent Phillip Gibbs substantiated this version of the events.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the Ottoman perception of events diverged from the Bulgarian narrative. Selimiye’s exposure to bombing from both land and air caused anxiety among the Ottomans. The lights of the mosque were turned off during the night to avoid it becoming a bullseye.<sup>35</sup> After the initial and largely ineffectual bombardment of the Ottoman defensive positions, the Bulgarians moved their attention to the European quarter of Edirne. The expectation was to persuade the foreign diplomats in the city to pressure Şükrü Pasha to surrender.<sup>36</sup> The *Financial Times* reported an incident of “bad damage”

<sup>28</sup> Aşkın Koyuncu, “Bulgaristan’da Osmanlı Maddi Kültür Mirasının Tasfiyesi (1878-1908),” *OTAM (Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi)*, no. 20 (2006): 197-243.

<sup>29</sup> For the dreadful effects of modern artillery in the Balkan Wars, see Wolfgang Höpken, “‘Modern Wars’ and ‘Backward Societies’: The Balkan Wars in the History of Twentieth-Century European Warfare,” in Boeckh and Rutar, eds., 33.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in “Indications Point Toward War of Big Powers,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, November 27, 1912, 5. The fire around Selimiye was reported by British newspapers too. See, “Adrianople,” *Daily Mail*, November 27, 1912, 7; “Turkish Stubbornness,” *Times of London*, November 29, 1912, 6.

<sup>31</sup> “Siege of Adrianople,” *Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1912, 14; “Siege of Adrianople,” *Daily Telegraph*, March 29, 1913, 13.

<sup>32</sup> “Aviators under Fire,” *Daily Telegraph*, December 2, 1912, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Pierron de Mondésir, *Balkan Savaşı’nda Edirne Muhararası*, 81-82, 112.

<sup>34</sup> Phillip Gibbs, “With the Army of the Cross,” in *The Balkan War: Adventures of War with Cross and Crescent*, ed. Phillip Gibbs and Bernard Grant Small (Boston: Maynard and Company Publishers, 1913), 104-105.

<sup>35</sup> “Edirne Ahvali,” *İkdam*, March 23, 1329 [April 5, 1913], 2.

<sup>36</sup> Ivan Fichev, *Balkanskata voina 1912–1913. Preshivelitsi, belezhki i dokumenti* (Sofia: Dürzhavna pechatnitsa, 1940), 307. Quoted in Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2002), 87.

due to “murderous” and “incessant” fire in February 1913.<sup>37</sup> In his memoir, Ottoman military physician and historian Rifat Osman claimed that as the strikes escalated, Bulgarian cannons hit Selimiye on its eastern facade and cupolas and killed ten people taking refuge in the mosque. He refuted Mondesir’s claim that Bulgarian artillery intentionally avoided damage to Selimiye. Not without substance, he asserted that Selimiye was targeted intentionally to agitate Edirne’s citizens against the war and as an act of insolence.<sup>38</sup> Ottoman war journalists Nazmi and Kenan were also eager to underline that there was deliberate cannon fire on Selimiye. They provided a list of damages inflicted on the mosques of Edirne alongside photos of these buildings at the beginning of their book about the siege of the city (Fig. 3).<sup>39</sup> Reflecting the sentimental effect of these cannon shots on the public, the Ottoman journal *Şehbal* described the incident as a hit to the “qibla of hearts.”<sup>40</sup> Ottomans also demonized the Bulgarians for Selimiye’s “canonball wounds.”<sup>41</sup> The international press also underlined Turkish anxiety about the integrity of Selimiye. When they reported the capitulation of the city, they emphasized the necessity “to avoid [the] destruction of holy places,” such as the Selimiye, by cannon fire.<sup>42</sup> Ottoman eagerness to portray Selimiye as an intended victim was after decades of violent targeting of built heritage of the Ottoman Muslims. The choice of the word “wound” was akin to the humanization of the monument, and representing it as a sentient member of the nation suffering in the fateful war. The commitment to decry and denounce the targeting of Selimiye strengthened its link to this painful episode in the history of the nascent nation. The cannon strikes on Selimiye were an important piece of Ottoman propaganda, as Ottoman Turks believed that Bulgarian acts of violence had to be exposed to make them responsible for their crimes. The word barbaric, previously used for the Turks in a pejorative sense, was borrowed occasionally by the Ottoman Turks to depict Bulgarian atrocities and to challenge the notion that Turks are barbarians to be expelled from Europe. Ottoman Muslims bitterly complained about the major European states’ silence when it came to Bulgarian atrocities during the Balkan Wars.<sup>43</sup> In *Şehbal*, a photo of the interior of Selimiye was accompanied by a caption criticizing the “European world” for ignoring “shots of cannonballs against Selimiye” by the enemy. The author prayed that “God will let the cannonballs have respect for the sacred” by missing, respect that he claimed Bulgaria did not possess.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> “Balkan War,” *Financial Times*, February 11, 1913, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Rifat Osman, “Tosyavizade Doktor Rifat Osman’ın,” 217-218.

<sup>39</sup> Nazmi and Kenan, *Edirne’de Altı Ay, Musavver Edirne Tarih-i Mahsuriyeti* (Istanbul, 1328-1329 [1913-1914]), 46 and 6-11.

<sup>40</sup> “10 Temmuz’un bu sene-i devriyesinde milletin kiblegah-ı kulübü,” *Şehbal*, July 15, 1329 [July 28, 1913], Cover [121]. Qibla means the direction towards the Kaaba in Mecca.

<sup>41</sup> As early as November 1912, Ottoman authors began to refer to canon damage to Selimiye as “wounds”. Rifat Osman, “Tosyavizade Doktor Rifat Osman’ın Edirne Balkan Savaşı Anıları,” in Kazancıgil, ed., 217-218.

<sup>42</sup> “The Turk and Adrianople,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, July 29, 1913, 6.

<sup>43</sup> For an Ottoman propaganda book exposing Bulgarian atrocities, see *Alam-ı İslam*.

<sup>44</sup> “Güllelere muarız bir mücevher-i mukaddes,” *Şehbal*, March 1, 1328 [March 14, 1913], cover [441].

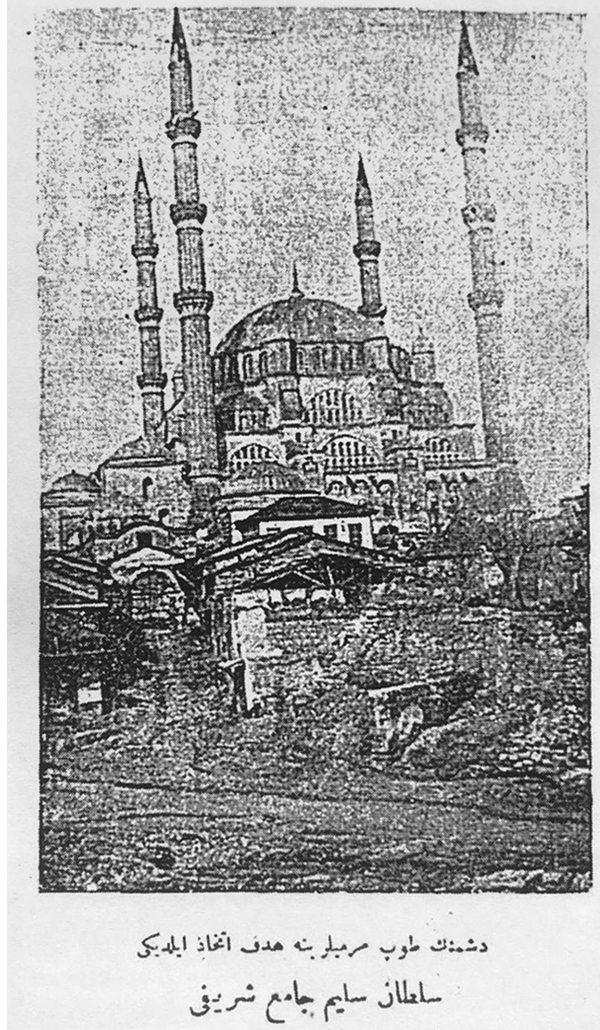


Figure 3. Photo of Selimiye with the caption stating that it was “the target of the cannon shots of the enemy.” Nazmi and Kenan, *Edirne’de Altı Ay, Musavver Edirne Tarih-i Mahsuriyeti* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Hayriyye ve Şürekası, 1328-1329 [1913-1914]), 6.

The “wounds” of Selimiye were a fertile ground for Ottoman Muslims to advocate their position in the context of new types and severities of destruction that became apparent in the Balkan Wars. Eerie landscapes of destruction found their place in the international press. A painting in *L’Illustration* depicted a scene of Ottoman captives left to starve on the banks of the Tundzha. It had Selimiye at the center just behind the mist, a lifeless forest, and men in destitution (Fig. 4).<sup>45</sup> These landscapes of “Dantesque disaster” were testa-

<sup>45</sup> Georges Scott, “L’Ile d’Épouvante,” *L’Illustration*, April 19, 1913, 348-349.



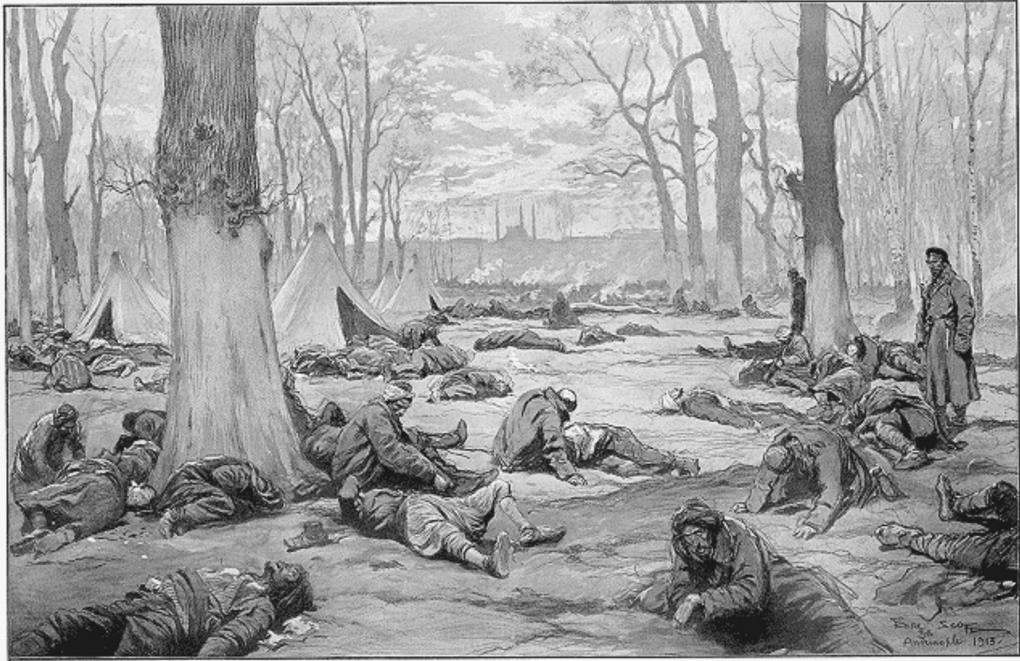


Figure 4. Illustration depicting wounded and exhausted Ottoman soldiers left on an island on Tundzha with the silhouette of Selimiye in the background.

Georges Scott, "L'Ile d'Épouvante," *L'Illustration*, April 19, 1913, 348-349.

ments to the new forms of devastation caused by the wars at the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the lingering dispute over the "wounds" of Selimiye was within the widening scope of the destruction of architectural heritage caused by war. French journalist Gustave Cirilli duly noted the repeated destruction of architectural heritage in modern wars as he compared the fates of Strasbourg Cathedral and Selimiye. Strasbourg Cathedral was heavily damaged by artillery bombardment during the Siege of Strasbourg in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. He celebrated the fact that Selimiye could survive the war, unlike the cathedral.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the destruction of Reims Cathedral during the First World War also echoed the case of Selimiye. The French accused the Germans of willful and evil damage to Reims Cathedral just two years after Ottoman intellectuals blamed the Bulgarians for the same.<sup>48</sup> In this regard, Selimiye was one of the forerunners of debates on the victimization of architectural heritage in total wars. It was preserved with its new and painful layer of history. During the Republican period, following the Turkish president Atatürk's request to

<sup>46</sup> For the destructive character of the war monitored by different perspectives, see Höpken, "'Modern Wars' and 'Backward Societies,'" 34.

<sup>47</sup> Gustave Cirilli, *Journal du siège d'Andrinople: impressions d'un assiégé* (Paris: Chapelot, 1913), 120.

<sup>48</sup> For post-World War I discussions regarding the bombing of the Reims Cathedral, see Maurice Landrieux, *The Cathedral of Reims: the Story of a German Crime*, trans. Ernest E. Williams Kegen Paul (London: Trench, Trubner, 1920).

leave the damage from cannonballs untreated,<sup>49</sup> Selimiye, marked by cannon shot, acquired a role akin to a memorial within its modern image. Recalling Süleymaniye Complex in Istanbul that was planned to be converted into a Sinan complex with secular roles in the 1930s, Selimiye was part of the national heritage of the secular republic as well as being a religious building. The damage sustained by Selimiye during the siege in the First Balkan War was in fact negligible. Nevertheless, in the context of the relentless destruction of the Ottoman architectural heritage in territories they left and the emerging disruptive power of total wars, “wounds” of Selimiye became part of the struggle for the nation’s rights in the international arena. Ottoman Muslims were anxious due to the denial of their rights for having presence in the Balkans. Increasing ethnic consciousness led to advocating rights of the nascent Turkish nation including quest for a national homeland and a dignified place among the nations. As a humanized victim of the Balkan Wars, Selimiye was a fertile ground to propagate the barbarism of the adversaries in contrast with the civilized history of the Ottoman Turks. In the competition of nationalist rhetoric, Selimiye embodied the sufferings of the Ottoman Muslims who became the basis of the Turkish nation.

While Edirne was still under siege, the London Conference began in September 1912 and led to the armistice on December 3, 1912, and the Treaty of London on May 30, 1913. Among the points of dispute mediated at the conference, Edirne was one of the most significant.<sup>50</sup> Although the negotiation drafts prepared by the Balkan states were adamant that the Bulgarians takeover Edirne, Selimiye was dealt with as a particular case. *Le Petit Journal* reported that although there was no possibility to leave Adrianople to the Turks, there was “consent” to cede the famous mosque of Sultan Selim II to the Turks.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Bulgaria was inclined toward such extraterritorial status for Selimiye. Possibly in an attempt to build a sincere image of merciful Bulgaria, Bulgarian officials refuted the idea of a religious war, asserting that they had “no desire to war against the religion of the Turks” and were ready to make “any possible concession to the religious feelings associated with the city.” Recognizing the “sentimental feeling” which the Turks had for the great mosque of the Sultan Selim at Adrianople, they agreed “to vest the mosque in the control of the representatives of the Sultan for all time.”<sup>52</sup> This was to be part of a proposal in which the Ottoman Empire would lose all of its territories in Europe except for the province of Edirne. On January 4, 1913, *The Illustrated London News* reported on the negotiations over the future of Edirne and informed readers that the Sultan objected to the “surrender of the tombs of ancestors.” Its report questioning the future of “be[ing] Turkish in a Bulgarian Adrianople” stated that the Bulgarian state finally consented to accept extraterritorial rights for the mosques and “public memorials.”<sup>53</sup> One member of the Montenegrin delegation spoke to the press to confirm this proposal about Selimiye. He confirmed the veracity of the proposal by underlining the

<sup>49</sup> Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat*, 250.

<sup>50</sup> “Edirne Meselesi ve Devletler,” *Sabah*, Kanunievvel 15, 1329 [December 28, 1912], 1.

<sup>51</sup> “Les Propositions de Paix des Alliés,” *Le Petit Journal*, December 22, 1912, 4.

<sup>52</sup> “Bulgaria and Adrianople,” *Derby Daily Telegraph*, December 27, 1912, 2.

<sup>53</sup> “To be Turkish in a Bulgarian Adrianople? The Mosque of Selim II,” *Illustrated London News*, January 4, 1913, 13.

religious freedoms enjoyed by Muslims in Bulgaria thanks to the “Bulgarians [who] are the most tolerant and liberal” among the Balkan people.<sup>54</sup> While mentioning Edirne as “the obstacle to peace in the Balkans,” the *Manchester Guardian* described the proposed special status of Selimiye as the creation of a “spiritual enclave” “under the authority of the Turkish church” akin to the status of the Vatican.<sup>55</sup> Another version of this proposal suggested “a neutral zone between Turkey and Bulgaria to include Adrianople” and with the “sultan permitted to guard the sacred mosque of Selim.”<sup>56</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* gave its account of why Edirne and Selimiye were key issues in the negotiations. The “sentimental” nature of the issue complicated the possibility of compromise. From the Ottoman perspective, it was a “sentimental” issue because “the magnificent mosque of Selim II” recalls “heroic courage, the irresistible fanaticism” of the Ottomans. The mosque and tombs evoke these memories and raise “the ancient city” to the level of a “sacred place of pilgrimage” such that “Turks” would prefer “to lose everything and die” rather than to “give in.”<sup>57</sup> To explain the Ottomans’ “stubborn” attachment to Edirne, the *Los Angeles Times* likened it to the relation the Chinese have to the tombs of their ancestors.<sup>58</sup> While recognizing the firmness of the Ottoman attachment to Edirne, the Balkan states flatly rejected the Ottoman counter proposals, which did not concede any of the demanded territories.<sup>59</sup> Bulgarian and international recognition of the significance of Selimiye and other Ottoman monuments accentuated the role of them in expressing the Ottoman agony at the international stage. This was a step towards being a viable venue for messages to the international arena as well as to domestic audiences. By offering a special religious status to Selimiye, Bulgarians were eager to position it as a religious monument akin to the prospective status of Muslim minority in Bulgaria in the following decades. On the other hand, Ottoman Turks envisaged Selimiye as the embodiment of the historical memories of victories and recent memories of loss that were becoming increasingly part of the history of the emerging nationalist struggle.

On January 23, 1913, a *coup d'état* was staged in Istanbul by the Young Turks. One of the coup leaders, Staff Lieutenant Colonel Enver (later Pasha), withdrew the Ottoman Empire from the London Conference and therefore nullified the possibility of a concession over Edirne. After seizing power, the Young Turks aimed to continue the war to save Edirne from the siege.<sup>60</sup> As the Ottoman attempts to lift the siege proved futile, the *New York Times* explained the “stubborn defense” of the city by using Selimiye, which is considered the most prominent among the “sacred” buildings, as an example.<sup>61</sup> This narrative was common in the Western press. *L'Illustration* also reiterated this line with a depiction

<sup>54</sup> “Montenegrin View,” *Daily Telegraph*, January 6, 1913, 14.

<sup>55</sup> “The Peace Negotiations,” *Manchester Guardian*, January 13, 1913, 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 6; “Europe and the Peace Deadlock,” *Daily Telegraph*, January 9, 1913, 11; “Attitude of the Powers,” *Daily Telegraph*, January 9, 1913, 12.

<sup>57</sup> “Some Abstract Causes,” *Daily Telegraph*, January 11, 1913, 11.

<sup>58</sup> “Why Turkey Clings to Ancient Capital,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 1913, 4.

<sup>59</sup> “Turkey’s Proposals Declared to Have Ignored Her Defeat,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 15, 1913, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Georges Redmond, *Avec les vaincus. La campagne de Thrace, octobre 1912 - mai 1913* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1913), 181. Quoted in Hall, *The Balkan Wars*, 119.

<sup>61</sup> “Adrianople Won by the Allies,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1913, 7.

of the grandeur of the mosque in order to explain the “stubbornness of the Turkish resistance.”<sup>62</sup> The five-month siege was unprecedented in Edirne’s history, and Selimiye had a prominent place in these traumatic months. As a place of refuge, the target of artillery fire, and an unmistakable marker of the city, the monument was a continual part of the wartime routine of the besieged city. Selimiye’s new image as a symbol of the sufferings of the Ottoman Muslims was formed decisively by its role in the siege. For the Ottomans, permanently losing Edirne was unthinkable despite several temporary occupations of the city since the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Extraterritorial status for Selimiye would not be a relief for the Ottomans as they did not accept such propositions.

## The Ottoman Monument under Bulgarian Occupation

The occupation of Edirne was of great symbolic importance for Bulgaria although the city had a small Bulgarian population and historically there was little Bulgarian interest in the city. After the defeat of the Ottomans at Çatalca, Edirne gained strategic significance due to its position on “the main route to Constantinople.”<sup>63</sup> Edirne was considered “the roots of the Turkish political might,” and according to Bulgarian folklorist Dimitar Marinov, “an omen and a prelude to the domination over the Balkans, Asia Minor, and even Europe.”<sup>64</sup> The praise of the defendants of the city in the Bulgarian press further raised the value of military victory in the eyes of the Bulgarian public.<sup>65</sup> Edirne fell on March 26, 1913 as the Ottoman defenders of the city were exhausted and, by March, without any hope of military reinforcement. When Edirne was seized, Anatoly Neklyudov, the Russian ambassador to Bulgaria, reported that “it is as if we have freed Bulgaria a second time.”<sup>66</sup>

*Le Petit Journal* claimed that Şükrü Pasha considered giving an order to “blow up” the mosques and religious and national monuments just before the fall of the city to not let “vulgars” “defile” them.<sup>67</sup> These drastic and destructive measures were not unprecedented in Edirne. The 15th century Ottoman royal residence, Edirne Palace was almost totally destroyed during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78 after the governor’s order to intentionally explode an ammunition depot.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, such thoughts were never acted upon, and Bulgarian forces captured Selimiye mostly intact.

Edirne was a bitter loss especially because it was to the Balkan nations, which were considered to be “former shepherds and servants” of the Empire. In an article depicting the day

<sup>62</sup> “Un Chef-d’Oeuvre de l’Architecture Ottomane,” *L’Illustration*, April 5, 1913, 300.

<sup>63</sup> See Hall, *The Balkan Wars*, 90.

<sup>64</sup> Yura Konstantinova, “Political Propaganda in Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars,” *Études Balkaniques*, no. 2-3 (2011): 108-109.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>66</sup> Otto Hoetzsch, ed., *Die internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialisms: Dokumente aus den Archiven der zarischen und der provisorischen Regierungen*, 3rd series, vol. 1 (Berlin: 1942), 204, 214. Quoted in Hall, *The Balkan Wars*, 40.

<sup>67</sup> “Nouvelle Turques,” *Le Petit Journal*, March 28, 1913, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Rifat Osman, *Edirne Sarayı*, ed. Süheyl Ünver (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1989), 47-52.



of occupation, *Talebe Defteri*, an Ottoman periodical for children and youth, conveyed the agony of the loss with an anecdote involving Selimiye. Ottoman Muslims, horrified by the news, looked at the Selimiye Mosque one last time and hoped to regain the city.<sup>69</sup> In a poem, Ottoman poet İskeçeli Mehmed Sıdkı directly addressed Edirne and Selimiye in his title. For him, Bulgarian occupation was as bitter as the loss of “the mother.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly, while noting the “communal mourning” among the Turks due to the fall of Edirne, Mondesir’s dramatic depiction of Edirne revolved around Selimiye and its minarets.<sup>71</sup>

The Ottoman newspaper *Sabah* reported a visit by the Bulgarian King Ferdinand I and Queen Eleonore Reuss of Köstritz to Edirne just after the fall of the city.<sup>72</sup> A triumphal arch, military parades, and distribution of medals were among the ceremonial events.<sup>73</sup> During their stay, Ferdinand I and the Queen visited Selimiye.<sup>74</sup> In a scene claimed to be from this visit and which became a postcard in Bulgaria, Ferdinand I was portrayed handing Şükrü Pasha’s sword back to him in front of the Edirne fort’s walls in recognition of his courage (Fig. 5).<sup>75</sup> *Le Petit Journal* reshaped this image by portraying Ferdinand I as refusing to take the sword from Şükrü Pasha. In the background of the image were Selimiye and the vernacular streets of Edirne (Fig. 6).<sup>76</sup> The scene created parallels between the personal surrender of Şükrü Pasha and the capitulation of the city and Selimiye. Having once portrayed himself in Byzantine regalia, Ferdinand I probably sought to position himself as the heir to Istanbul, lying ahead after Edirne. He sent a telegram to the renowned art historian Cornelius Gurlitt about his visit to Selimiye. He praised the architecture of the “spectacular” and “unequaled” mosque, and the “masterful skill” of Sinan, the architect of the Selimiye.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, this would be the beginning of a debate about the historical ownership of Selimiye and the prospects for its identity.<sup>78</sup>

Conversion of the monuments in the post-Ottoman era in the Balkans had the potential to be grounds for ambiguity and contention, as anthropologist Charles Stewart demonstrates through the story of the Roman Rotunda in Thessaloniki after the city became part of Greece

<sup>69</sup> Nafi Atuf, “13 Mart 1329,” *Talebe Defteri*, March 13, 1330 [March 26, 1914], 364-365.

<sup>70</sup> İskeçeli Mehmed Sıdkı notes that he wrote the poem 5 days prior to the recapture of Edirne [22 July 1913] in İskeçeli Mehmed Sıdkı, “Edirne, Selimiye!. Geliyoruz...,” *Trakya Bilgi Demeti*, May 25, 1339 [1923], 35.

<sup>71</sup> Jean Frederic Lucien Piarron de Mondesir, *Balkan Savaşı’nda Edirne Muhasarası*, ed. Haluk Kayıcı (Edirne: Ceren Yayıncılık, 2019), 18.

<sup>72</sup> “Sultan Selim Camii,” *Sabah*, April 12 [March 31], 1913, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat*, 60. This was reminiscent of the king of Bulgaria and king of Greece entering Salonica as depicted in Vera Goseva and Natasha Kotlar-Trajkova, “The Plight of the Muslim Population in Salonica and Surrounding Areas,” in Boeckh and Rutar, eds., 315.

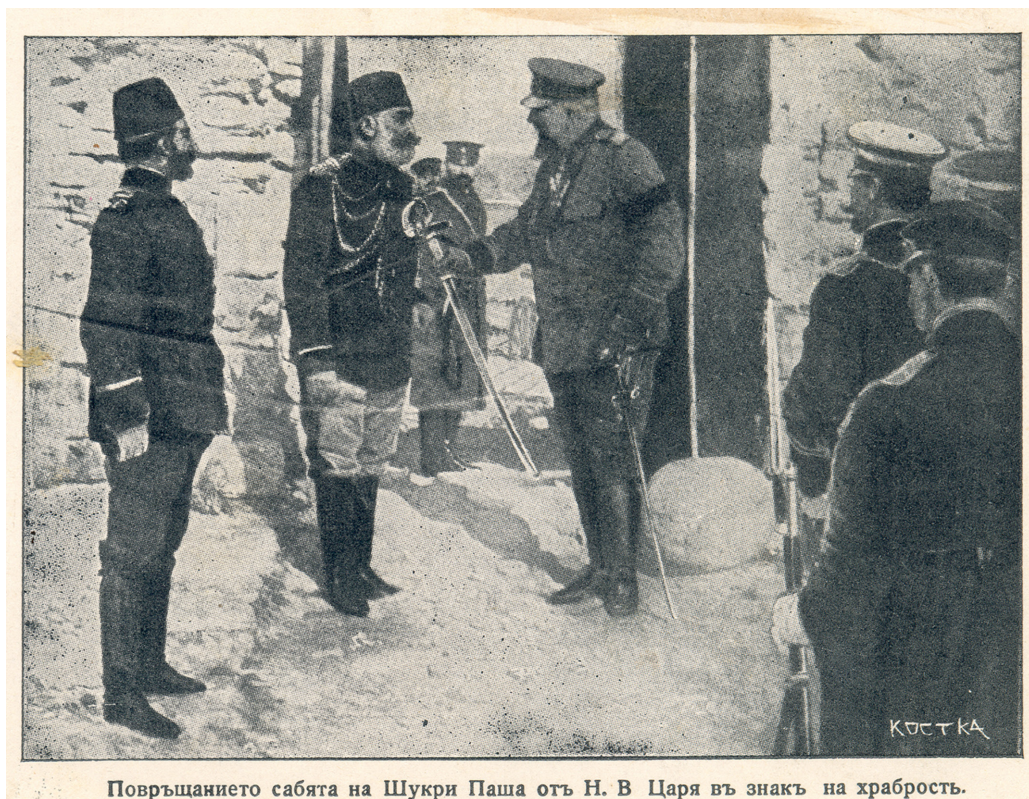
<sup>74</sup> “Tsar Ferdinand in Andrinople,” *Le Petit Journal*, April 4, 1913, 4.

<sup>75</sup> The veracity of the scene is disputed. Atilla Oral convincingly claimed that the photo was doctored. Atilla Oral, “Tarihe Fotoşop,” *Hürriyet*, November 20, 2012, 1.

<sup>76</sup> “Hommage au défenseur d’Andrinople,” *Le Petit Journal*, April 13, 1913, Cover.

<sup>77</sup> “Sultan Selim Camii,” *Sabah*, April 12 [March 31], 1913, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Besides Selimiye, the Ottoman journal *Şehbal* was also anxious about Ferdinand’s ambitions over Hagia Sophia. It was concerned of him entering the monument with “his red boots” and converting it into a church. See “Elimizdeki hazineye hakkıyla sahip olmalıyız: Ayasofya Camii Şerifi,” *Şehbal*, Kanunievvel 15, 1328 [December 28, 1912], Cover [361].



Повръщанието сабята на Шукри Паша отъ Н. В Царя въ знакъ на храбростъ.

Figure 5. Postcard depicting the scene of Ferdinand I returning the sword of Şükrü Pasha. "His Majesty the King of Bulgaria Returns the Sword of Şükrü Pasha," Bulgarian Postcard, Personal Collection of Ahmet Sezgin

in 1912. Rotunda was originally a Roman era polytheist temple, then a Christian basilica, and afterwards a Muslim mosque under Ottoman rule. After the Greek state captured Thessaloniki during Balkan Wars, the monument was in an ambiguous position as it became a church, then a "national monument", finally a museum in which Christian liturgy can take place at certain occasions.<sup>79</sup> Recalling the Rotunda, Selimiye in 1912 faced an uncertain future that would be claimed by multivocal perspectives.

A committee in Sofia demanded Selimiye be converted to a church.<sup>80</sup> The Queen, aware of these demands, asked Bogdan Filov's opinion in private while visiting Edirne. Filov, the manager of the National Archeology Museum of Bulgaria, suggested the expropriation of the monument to make it available both for Turkish worshippers and other

<sup>79</sup> Charles Stewart, "Immanent or eminent domain? The contest over Thessaloniki's Rotonda," in *Destruction and conservation of cultural property*, eds. Robert Layton, Peter G. Stone, and Julian Thomas (London: Routledge, 2001), 168–181, 184–186.

<sup>80</sup> Bogdan Filov, *Bogdan Filov'un Balkan Savaşları Günlüğü*, ed. Hüseyin Mevsim (Istanbul: TİMAŞ, 2014), 83.





Figure 6. Journal cover depicting King Ferdinand returning Şukri Pasha's sword with a street of Edirne and Selimiye at the background.

"Hommage au défenseur d'Andrinople," *Le Petit Journal*, April 13, 1913, Cover.

visitors.<sup>81</sup> Recalling this suggestion by Filov, there was a report in the Scottish newspaper the *Scotsman* about the possibility of converting Selimiye into a national museum like the Hotel des Invalides in Paris.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, these proposals were unrealized and Selimiye

<sup>81</sup> Filov, *Bogdan Filov'un Balkan Savaşları*, 86.

<sup>82</sup> "Balkan Situation," *Scotsman*, April 9, 1913, 9.

was locked down during the Bulgarian occupation of the city. Although the demands of the mufti of Edirne to open the mosque to worshippers was accepted, it was repeatedly postponed and never realized under Bulgarian occupation.<sup>83</sup> If fulfilled, conversion of Selimiye would be the first of an Ottoman Mosque in a former Ottoman capital and a nationalist statement as well as a religious one.

Bulgarian side drew on both religious and nationalist frameworks and symbols while incorporating the monument for their war era rhetoric. As historian Eyal Ginio remarks, from the Ottoman perspective, the Balkan Wars were like “a modern crusade” aimed at “obliterating Muslim presence on European soil.”<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Ferdinand’s manifesto of declaration of war called the war “a struggle of the cross against the crescent.” The term “crusade” was reiterated in Greek, Serbian, and Bulgarian manifestos, correspondence, and speeches. The war was akin to a crusade at the level of public opinion in the allied Balkan states too.<sup>85</sup> One of the illustrations depicting the fall of Edirne portrays worn-out Ottoman soldiers deserting the city, whereas a cross and a historical image of a charging crusader divinely radiate beams of light onto the scene. Selimiye is just to the bottom left of the cross at the vanishing point of the illustration and indicates the location of Edirne with its silhouette (Fig. 7).<sup>86</sup> The radiating cross over Selimiye implied the fall of Edirne, reinforcing Bulgarian hegemony, and thus presenting the mosque as a spoil of war.

However, on the ground, it was nationalist symbols, namely flags, that demonstrated the change in ownership of the mosque. Anthropologist Neil Jarman proposes that the meaning of the flags partially stem from “their role in speaking to the ‘Other’”. Flags’ “meaning and value” increase when there is reinvigoration of “social memories of violence, threat, siege and confrontation.”<sup>87</sup> So much so that, when a conflict dissipates, the value and significance of the flags is also reduced as the meaning emerges from “the process of confrontation, contest and conflict.”<sup>88</sup> The boundaries of ethnic conflicts constitute one of the most prominent crystallisations of such confrontations.<sup>89</sup> During the rapid advance of the Balkan League forces in the Ottoman territories during Balkan Wars, the flag on the main mosque became a decisive sign of the Ottoman town or city being

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<sup>83</sup> Carnegie Endowment, *Report of the International Commission*, 350-351. Although the mosque was not open, Bulgarian forces distributed food to the public in front of one of the mosque’s gates. Hafız Rakım Ertür, “Hafız Rakım Ertür Anılarından Edirne Balkan Savaşı,” in *Savaşı Yaşayanların Kaleminden Edirne Balkan Savaşı Anıları*, ed. Ratip Kazancıgil (Edirne: Edirne Valiliği Kültür Yayınları, 2013), 116; *Kırmızı Siyah*, 37

<sup>84</sup> Eyal Ginio, “Constructing a Symbol of Defeat and National Rejuvenation: Edirne (Adrianople) in Ottoman Propaganda and Writing during the Balkan Wars,” in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, eds. Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (New York: Routledge, 2011), 90.

<sup>85</sup> Konstantinova, “Political Propaganda in Bulgaria,” 93.

<sup>86</sup> Ahmed Cevad, *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab*, 102-103.

<sup>87</sup> Neil Jarman, “Pride and possession, display and destruction,” in *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*, eds. T.H. Eriksen, and R. Jenkins (London: Routledge, 2007), 94.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.





### أوروپانك آثار تعصبتندن بری

انكاز غزتلرندن نقل ایدیان بوتابلو هلاک انحصافی ، مدنیّت ، اسلامیةك فوقه صلیبك برکونش کی طلوعی کوسربرور .  
 آی مسلمانز ، اویانکر ، چایبکنر . هرشیدن اول نفاق ترک ایدورک تمانون وتناصر ایدیکز تاکه بوخیال آجانب مبدل حقیقت اولاسون .

Figure 7. Illustration depicting the defeated Ottoman army retreating while a mirage of crusaders charges from the sky and Selimiye fades into the background.

“Avrupanın asar taassubundan biri,” Ahmed Cevad, *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab*, 102-103.

captured.<sup>90</sup> As *L’Illustration* noted, one of the ubiquitous signs of Bulgarian occupation in Edirne was “the Bulgarian-colored flags, white, green and red, which spread in the evening wind, from the minarets of the triumphant mosque.”<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, a Bulgarian postcard about the conquest of the city eagerly showed an oversized Bulgarian flag on Selimiye. In front of Selimiye, the Bulgarian General Michael Savoff holds a sword while a kneeling Ottoman soldier surrenders his sword to illustrate the Bulgarian victory. The Ottoman flag was also laid on the ground between these figures (Fig. 8).<sup>92</sup> Selimiye’s multi-layered image of a historical monument embroiled in war provided a sound setting

<sup>90</sup> In Salonica, the fight over the possession of the Mosque of St. Sophia ended as the Bulgarians hoisted their national flag over the sanctuary. Drzhaven Arhiv na Republika Makedoniia [State Archive of the Republic of Macedonia], mf. 1966, FO, 371/1507/50526, Consul-General Lamb to Sir Gerard Lowther, Salonica, 15 November 1912. Quoted in Goseva and Kotlar-Trajkova, “The Plight of the Muslim Population,” 315. For a similar act around Lüleburgaz, see M. H. Donohof, “The Catastrophe: Turkey’s Desperate Plight,” *Manchester Guardian*, November 5, 1912, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Gustave Babin, “La Ville Conquise,” *L’Illustration*, April 12, 1913, 324.

<sup>92</sup> “Le Général M. Savoff commandant en chef des armées Bulgares” postcard. Quoted in Güney Dinç, *Mehmed Nail Bey’in Derlediği Kartpostallarla Balkan Savaşı, 1912-1913* (Istanbul: YKY, 2008), 234.



Figure 8. Bulgarian postcard depicting the victorious King Ferdinand with Selimiye in the background. “Le Général M. Savoff commandant en chef des armées Bulgares” postcard quoted in Güney Dinç, *Mehmed Nail Bey’in derlediği kartpostallarla Balkan savaşı, 1912-1913*, (Istanbul: YKY, 2008), 234.

for the Bulgarian flag to disseminate the nationalist message from at the junction of religion, war, and urban heritage.

The symbolism of the Bulgarian flag at Selimiye was painfully recognizable by the Ottomans.<sup>93</sup> A photo of this scene was published in *Edirne’de Altı Ay* as a “warning to the Muslims” (Fig. 9).<sup>94</sup> Unlike the atrocities that were amply illustrated through the Ottoman media, there was a certain reservation towards publishing such a photograph. Possibly it

<sup>93</sup> Nazmi - Kenan, *Edirne’de Altı Ay*, 16.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

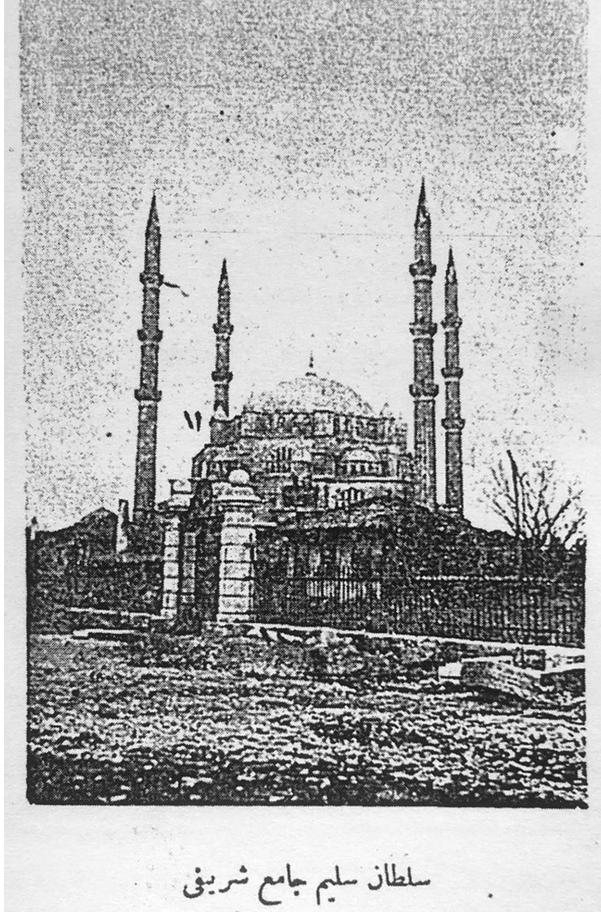


Figure 9. Photo showing the Bulgarian Flag hoisted between the minarets of Selimiye. Nazmi and Kenan, *Edirne'de Altı Ay, Musavver Edirne Tarih-i Mahsuriyeti* (Istanbul, 1328-1329 [1913-1914]), 17.

was seen as a tacit confirmation of the Bulgarian gains without the benefit of sympathy from the international community. In his memoir, Ottoman journalist Dağdevirenzade Şevket wrote that “Muslims were crying and their hearts were broken due to the Bulgarian flag hoisted to the grand minarets of Sultan Selim.”<sup>95</sup> Renowned Ottoman intellectual and poet Mehmed Akif [Ersoy] also referred to the symbols on the Bulgarian postcard featuring Savoff in his poem written between 1913 and 1914. In successive lines, he drew on “hills prostrating before Ferdinand” and a flag hoisted by Savoff while lamenting the fall of Edirne.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Dağdevirenzade, “Dağdeviren M. Şevket Bey’in,” 202.

<sup>96</sup> For the poem titled “Vaiz Kürsüde,” see Mehmed Akif, *Safahat, dördüncü kitab: Fatih kürsüsünde* (Istanbul: Sebilürreşad Kütübhanesi, 1914), 90.



Recalling the Greeks' historical claims over Istanbul through the Hagia Sophia, the Bulgarians' claim over Selimiye would help to justify their occupation of Edirne. The semi-official Bulgarian journal *Mir* claimed Edirne to be Bulgarian and refuted the Turkish claim to the city through Selimiye because "Christians might invoke similar reasons for claiming Constantinople, which contains the temple of Saint Sophia."<sup>97</sup> The parallel drawn between the two indicated inclusion of Selimiye in the discourse of the contested monuments. There were also Bulgarian claims over Sinan's identity, which found a place in the Western press. Based on a folk legend, he was claimed to be a Bulgarian who designed and supervised the construction of Selimiye. While reporting about the contentious position of Edirne, the *Times of London* gave a short account of the legend that portrayed Sinan as a Bulgarian.<sup>98</sup> Several other international newspapers republished the legend claiming Sinan to be Bulgarian.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, Ottoman publications endeavored to portray Selimiye as an Ottoman monument designed by an Ottoman architect. *Talebe Defteri* asked its readers several questions about Selimiye in August 1913 when Edirne's future was still contested. Questions inquired about the building patron, architect, and other works by the architect.<sup>100</sup> As the historic and territorial claims by nationalist movements confronted each other, the chief architect of the multi-lingual and multi-religious Empire was seen from the lenses of ethnic identity.

In the wide range of rival claims over symbols of the appropriation of Selimiye, Bulgarian soldiers and their transgression of the sanctity of Selimiye provided a potent source of resentment and antagonism. The sight of "frightening, bearded, and dirty Bulgarian soldiers" in Edirne and their "dirty boots" was a refrain that conveyed a deep sense of humiliation.<sup>101</sup> *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab* employed multiple photographs and drawings of Selimiye with captions emphasizing the mosque being in peril and "captive in the enemy's hands" (Fig. 10).<sup>102</sup>

Republishing an illustration from *L'Illustration*, *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab* replaced the original caption of "the Bulgarian conquerors" with "barbarians" and "savages."<sup>103</sup> Beyond the symbolic scenes of transgression, there was an actual loss of furnishings and sacred valuables. Just a few weeks after the start of the Balkan Wars, on November 1, 1912, Filov wrote to the

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in "Peace Conference," *Daily Telegraph*, January 2, 1913, 12.

<sup>98</sup> "Adrianople: The Bone of Contention," *Times of London*, December 31, 1912, 3. This story was also published in the *Evening Telegraph*: "The City of the Mosque," *Evening Telegraph*, January 2, 1913, 4.

<sup>99</sup> For instance, see "La Marquise de Fontenoy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 12, 1913, 6; "Famous Mosque at Adrianople," *Courier-Journal*, January 26, 1913, 9. A few years later, in 1920, during the Greco-Turkish War, these ethnicity claims evolved to declare Sinan to be a Greek. See "Adrianople Again Greek," *Reno Evening Gazette*, September 15, 1920, 9.

<sup>100</sup> "Malumat Mütenevvi," *Talebe Defteri*, August 15, 1329 [August 28, 1913], 112. Quoted in Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat*, 179. Again during the uncertain time after World War I, the local Turkish journal *Trakya Paşaeli* directly refuted the Bulgarian claims that appeared to be widespread enough to be addressed directly. See "Vilayetimiz," *Trakya Paşaeli*, January 20, 1335 [1919], 1.

<sup>101</sup> Ertür, "Hafız Rakım Ertür Anılarından," 116.

<sup>102</sup> "Ecdadımızın Eser-i Himmeti, Barbarların Ayakları Altında" in Ahmed Cevad, *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab*, 24-25. For the original version see Georges Scott, "La Recompense d'Un Long Effort," *L'Illustration*, April 19, 1913, 344-345.

<sup>103</sup> Ahmed Cevad, *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab*, 34-35.





اجداد بيزك آثار همتي، باربارك آياقلى آلتنده

ادر نه ده سلطان سليم جامع شريفى اينجده بولغادرل

أى عثمانيلر، ايسته دنياك أك مختتم برأثر صنمق اولان مقدس جامعلر بيزك شوياباقى انسانلرك سردار چايقرى ايله تلوپ ايديلكدهدر. بوا سبر جامعلر سزدن استخلاص بيلگور!

Figure 10. Illustration of Bulgarian soldiers in Selimiye.

“Ecdadımızın Eser-i Himmeti, Barbarların Ayakları Altında,” Ahmed Cevad, *Kırmızı Siyah Kitab*, 24-25.

captain-general of the Bulgarian army to “take all necessary measures to protect the Mosque of Sultan Selim.” He further recommended the lockdown of the mosque and its dependent buildings and placing them under the control of officials to avoid pillaging or vandalism.<sup>104</sup>

Indeed, the Ottomans were also aware of the danger these artifacts faced. They attempted to organize the transport of rare artifacts of Islam at Edirne before the occupation.<sup>105</sup> Despite these considerations, Filov found the library in the Selimiye Complex sacked during his visit just a few days after the capture of the city by the Bulgarian army.<sup>106</sup> Bulgarian Major Mitov also confirmed the pillage of precious manuscripts from the library, which he attributed to “foreign orientalisists.”<sup>107</sup> Searching among the leftover pieces, Filov, with other museum officials, seized

<sup>104</sup> Filov, *Bogdan Filov'un Balkan Savaşları*, 29.

<sup>105</sup> Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri [The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry] (hereafter referred to as BOA), BEO, 4167/312457. Quoted in T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Balkan Savaşları-Balkan Wars in Ottoman Documents*, Vol. II (Istanbul: Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2013), 672-673.

<sup>106</sup> Filov, *Bogdan Filov'un Balkan Savaşları*, 86-87.

<sup>107</sup> Carnegie Endowment, *Report of the International Commission*, 115-116.

many books from the library, along with other valuables like manuscripts or carpets from the city's mosque, to be sent to Sofia.<sup>108</sup> The culprits behind the initial ransack were contested by the Bulgarians and Ottomans.<sup>109</sup> The days before and after the Bulgarian occupation allowed for the ransacking of valuables from the mosque, which became another reason for resentment.

The approximately four months-long occupation of the city was short but created a strong feeling of humiliation and justified anxiety over the permanent loss of Ottoman Muslim existence in Europe. Selimiye proved to be a fertile ground to amplify and express these sentiments. Historian John Horne proposes that defeats suffered by nations can be seen in two dimensions, namely process and event. The process involves grasping, accepting, normalizing or rejecting this new reality of defeat. The defeat as an event is the "moment when the roles of victor and vanquished are fixed". It is the moment "replacing historical continuity with a new and uncertain horizon for the defeated" like decisive battle or an act of surrender, the victory parade, the peace treaty or the flight into exile.<sup>110</sup> The fall of Edirne and the subsequent Bulgarian flag over Selimiye are tantamount to such a momentous event in the defeat.

## Selimiye After the Occupation

The Bulgarian occupation of Edirne was short-lived as the balance of power changed with the Second Balkan War (1913). With Edirne unguarded due to internal fighting among Balkan League states, the Ottomans saw an opportunity to recapture the city from Bulgaria without fighting.<sup>111</sup> On July 22, 1913, Enver's army entered Edirne, making him the "second conqueror" of the city.<sup>112</sup> The Ottoman newspaper *Sabah* reported that among the first acts of the Ottoman forces who liberated the city was to "[open] the doors of Selimiye" and let the call to prayer take place.<sup>113</sup> Mehmed Said welcomed these "echoes of the call to prayer" that made the "face of the minarets" smile in his poem *To the White Minarets of Edirne* (Edirne'nin Ak Minarelerine), written just a couple of days after the liberation of Edirne.<sup>114</sup> A few weeks later, the international press reported that Edirne was getting over the preceding tumultuous months. *Le Matin* wrote that Ramadan feasts were just as joyful as before, and "nothing reminds the besieged of yesterday, except for a few traces of shells on the magnificent mosque of Sultan Selim."<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, the

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<sup>108</sup> Filov, *Bogdan Filov'un Balkan Savaşları*, 86-87. These carpets would be officially reclaimed by the Ottomans later in 1914. BOA, HR. SYS, 1964/4\_38, 39. Quoted in T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Balkan Savaşları*, 697.

<sup>109</sup> Carnegie Endowment, *Report of the International Commission*, 115-116, 119, 331, 332, 334, 338-339, 352, and 354.

<sup>110</sup> John Horne, "Defeat and Memory in Modern History," in *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era*, ed. Jenny Macleod (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 19-20.

<sup>111</sup> Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 321-322.

<sup>112</sup> William M. Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military* (London: Routledge, 1994), 45.

<sup>113</sup> "Sultan Selim Cami," *Sabah*, July 13, 1329 [July 25, 1913], 1.

<sup>114</sup> Mehmed Said, "Edirne'nin Ak Minarelerine," *Sabah*, July 10, 1329 [July 23, 1913], 1.

<sup>115</sup> "Le Prompt Oubli des Mauvais Jours," *Le Matin*, September 20, 1913, 1. The photograph was later published in Youssouf Razı Bey, "Still Under the Crescent: In Adrianople Which Remains Turkish," *Illustrated London News*, September 27, 1913, 473.

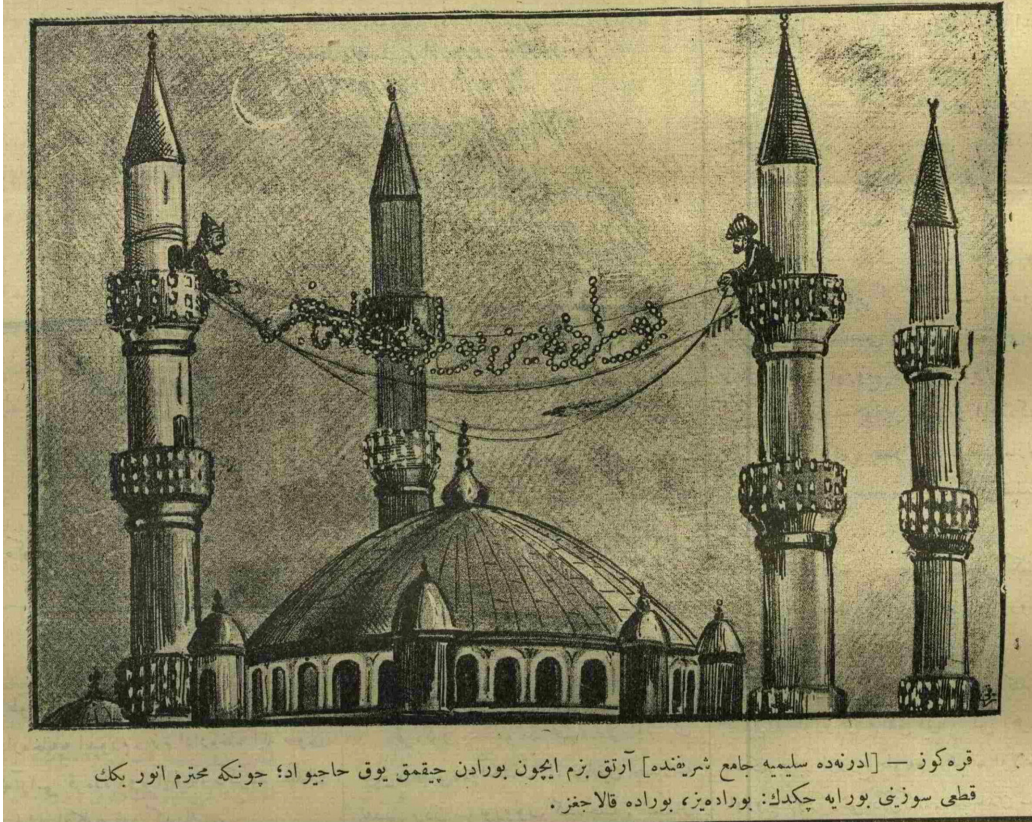


Figure 11. Caricature depicting the hoisting of the illuminated banner reading “We are here, we will stay here.” “Buradayız, Burada Kalacağız,” *Karagöz*, July 22, 1329 [August 4, 1913], 1.

traces of trauma and lingering anxiety, often associated with the image of Selimiye, became explicit immediately after the war. Within weeks of the liberation, Enver’s phrase “We are here, we will stay here” reverberated in Ottoman periodicals.<sup>116</sup> Statements like Enver’s, which referred to the intention to expel Muslims from the Balkans entirely, finally stopped by the liberation of Edirne, were put in frame with Selimiye in press illustrations. In the Ottoman journal *Karagöz*, caricatures of Karagöz and Hacivat, leading characters in a popular Ottoman shadow play, string up the phrase between the two minarets of the mosque. In the illustration’s caption, their dialogue refers to Enver’s “strict” statement which is further affirmed by stating that “there is no way of leaving” (Fig. 11).<sup>117</sup> Enver’s phrase was also found on an Ottoman postcard depicting an Ottoman soldier passionately clinging to one of Selimiye’s flagged minarets of (Fig. 12).<sup>118</sup> The

<sup>116</sup> “Enver Bey’in Beyanatu,” *Sabah*, July 17, 1329 [July 30, 1913], 3. The same news was published in ditto *Le Matin* on the very same day: “Une déclaration d’Enver bey,” *Le Matin*, July 30, 1913, 1.

<sup>117</sup> “Buradayız, Burada Kalacağız,” *Karagöz*, July 22, 1329 [August 4, 1913], 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Edirne’nin Sultan Selim Camii Şerifinden İlan-ı İstihlası, buradayız, burada kalacağız*, Krt\_006739, Postcard, n.d., Postcard Collection, İ.B.B. Atatürk Library Digital Archives and e-Sources, Istanbul.





Figure 12. Postcard depicting the hoisting of the Ottoman flag as Edirne was liberated.

“Edirne’nin Sultan Selim Camii Şerifinden İlan-ı İstihlasi, buradayız, burada kalacağız,” Krt\_006739, Postcard, n.d., Postcard Collection, İ.B.B. Atatürk Library Digital Archives and e-Sources, Istanbul.

moment when the Ottoman flag was raised on the minaret combined with the generous use of flags in the scene seems to respond to the Bulgarian postcard featuring Savoff.

The prevalent use of Enver’s statement reveals lingering Ottoman anxiety about the future of Edirne and Bulgaria’s continuing ambitions for the city. Realizing that Edirne still constituted an unsettled dispute, the Ottomans wanted to reiterate to an international audience their determination to keep the city. “We” in the statement refer to the nascent nation composed mainly of Ottoman Muslims and determined to secure a national homeland. Thanks to its ability to represent Ottoman conquest and trauma of retreat alike, Selimiye became one of the venues that empowered the nation-building messages at the crucial junction of the formation of Turkish nationalism. Hoisting the Ottoman and later Turkish flag between the minarets of Selimiye happened just at the boundary of the confrontation



of Bulgarian and Turkish nationalisms. It emerged as a defiant response to the hoisted Bulgarian flag and the traumatic expulsion of Ottoman Muslims from the Balkans.

In Edirne, the Ottoman commitment to the city was vividly demonstrated by celebrations of the liberation of the city that involved Selimiye as a venue and symbol.<sup>119</sup> The first Friday prayers following the city's liberation were arranged as a major ceremony. Sultan Mehmed V sent a representative committee, along with monetary aid.<sup>120</sup> Just five days later, on July 29, 1913, the crown prince, Yusuf İzzeddin, arrived in Edirne.<sup>121</sup> It was recorded that on the same day, 40,000 inhabitants of Edirne gathered to celebrate.<sup>122</sup> Excursions to Edirne enabled travelers to forge a strong emotional identification with the people of Edirne as well as reiterating that the city was an integral part of the empire.<sup>123</sup> They also had a religious emphasis as some periodicals announced there was "an obligation incumbent on every Muslim" and effectively likened the excursions to the *hajj*.<sup>124</sup> As part of the excursions, there were what Ginio calls "purification ceremonies". Selimiye was the main and sacred locus whose sanctity, violated by Bulgarian atrocities, was being cleansed symbolically.<sup>125</sup> The carpets of Selimiye, which were first tainted by the Bulgarians' "dirty boots" and then pillaged, were replaced with new ones that had been presented by the imperial head after the liberation as a gift to the city.<sup>126</sup> These acts of "purification" enabled regaining confidence, and sought to "herald new directions for the Ottoman nation."<sup>127</sup>

At the national level, victory stamps issued in late 1913 commemorated the recovery of the city.<sup>128</sup> These stamps were pictorial with the view of Selimiye, and were therefore the first of their kind and different from previous stamps, which principally portrayed the *tughra* of the governing sultan.<sup>129</sup> Victory stamps even made it to the Ottoman press when the periodical *Şehbal* printed copies of the stamp so as "not to leave the image on the envelopes."<sup>130</sup> Similarly, statements about Selimiye, such as the aforementioned "qibla of the nation's heart", were meant to identify the

<sup>119</sup> Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat*, 252-253.

<sup>120</sup> Ayşe Zamacı, "Veliâht Yusuf İzzeddin Efendi'nin Edirne ve Kırkkilise (Kırklareli) Seyahatleri (1913)," *Balkan Araştırma Enstitüsü Dergisi* 9, no. 1 (2020): 231-252.

<sup>121</sup> "Son Haberler," *Sabah*, July 17, 1329 [July 30, 1913], 4.

<sup>122</sup> BOA HR. SYS, 1974/1\_182. Quoted in T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Balkan Savaşları*, 110-111. There is no record that these celebrations were organized in or around Selimiye. Zamacı notes that since the visit of the crown prince did not cover the Friday, the imperial tradition to pray at Selimiye could not be performed, yet the crown prince visited the mosque just before he left for Kırkkilise in Zamacı. "Veliâht Yusuf İzzeddin Efendi'nin," 242.

<sup>123</sup> Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat*, 258.

<sup>124</sup> Ginio, "Constructing a Symbol of Defeat," 94.

<sup>125</sup> Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat*, 248, 264; Ginio, "Constructing a Symbol of Defeat," 87, 89, 94-95.

<sup>126</sup> For some other mosques, Bulgaria was asked to compensate the cost of these losses or return the ones kept in museums. See BOA HR. SYS, 1964/4\_38, 39. Quoted in T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Balkan Savaşları*, 696-697.

<sup>127</sup> Ginio, "Constructing a Symbol of Defeat," 95; Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat*, 259.

<sup>128</sup> "Some War Stamps," *Times of London*, February 25, 1918, 11; "New Novels," *Illustrated London News*, November 8, 1913, 764.

<sup>129</sup> Fred J. Melville, "Postage Stamps," *Daily Telegraph*, February 5, 1914, 4.

<sup>130</sup> "Edirne hatırası olan yeni pullardan ikisi," *Şehbal*, Teşrinisani 1, 1329 [November 15, 1913], 248.

monument with national sentiments.<sup>131</sup> The liberation of Edirne was a significant relief for the public and a political opportunity for the ruling Committee of Union and Progress. There was still anxiety about the future of Edirne, although the catastrophic retreat of the Ottoman army from the Balkans seemed to have finally stopped. Enver claimed the prestige of the liberation and endeavored to assure the Ottoman public about the city remaining in Ottoman hands.

## Conclusive Remarks

After the Treaty of Constantinople (1913) that finally concluded the Balkan Wars for the Ottoman Empire, the commemoration of the anniversary of the liberation of Edirne was another step towards the formation of the image of the mosque as a war heritage and eventually a national monument. One year after the liberation, there was a commemoration that involved public ceremonies and a parade in Edirne.<sup>132</sup> In the same vein, on the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bulgarian occupation of Edirne, *Edirne Milli Gazete* published an article of impressions of the commemoration. The patriotic article reported that the people gathered to “commemorate the souls of the deceased” in Selimiye itself. It portrayed Selimiye as “the grand sanctuary,” which was “witness to a thousand adventures” and “shouted to belittle the Bulgarians.”<sup>133</sup> In the 1930s, commemorations included a parade of soldiers, gendarmes, police, students, as well as speeches in the courtyard of the Selimiye. The climax of the commemoration was hoisting a twenty-four-meter flag between the minarets of the Selimiye in the presence of a large crowd that sang the national anthem accompanied by hurrahs and gun salutes.<sup>134</sup>

Such commemorations epitomize how sites that embody memories of defeats can become places of “sacrifice” and defiance for the nation. Selimiye’s significant role in the commemorations of liberation of Edirne drew on its ability to embody trauma, pain, and shame in one of the most apprehensive stages of the Turkish nationalist movement. As well as prose and poems at periodicals, commemorations were grounds for the public to have a performative role in shaping heritage of the wars of the last decades and the image of Selimiye in it. In these commemorations, the national flag over Selimiye referred to a moment and a boundary when and where the traumatic retreat from the Balkans seemed to be overturned. Whereas the Bulgarian flag over Selimiye was one of the climaxes of the defeat, the Ottoman flag replacing it corresponded to the resilience of the nation that eventually culminated in an independence war securing a national homeland. The ongoing commemorations involving Turkish flags hoisted at Selimiye were one testament to the potency of the image of the mosque that was formed during Edirne’s siege, occupation, and liberation. Its image became part of memoryscape of the nation which was transformed from a Muslim people part of the Ottoman Empire into a modern-nation.

<sup>131</sup> “10 Temmuz’un bu sene-i devriyesinde milletin kiblegah-ı kulübü,” *Şehbal*, July 15, 1329 [July 28, 1913], Cover [121].

<sup>132</sup> “9 Temmuz Edirne’nin İstirdadı,” *Tanin*, July 9, 1330 [July 22, 1914], 1; “Edirne’de 9 Temmuz Merasimi,” *Tanin*, July 12, 1330 [July 25, 1914], 1.

<sup>133</sup> “26 Mart 928 İhtifâli İntiba’larından,” *Edirne Milli Gazete*, March 31, 1928, 2.

<sup>134</sup> “Edirnenin bayramı,” *Cumhuriyet*, November 26, 1933, 3; “Güzel Edirnenin Kurtuluşu,” *Cumhuriyet*, November 26, 1936, 1; “Bati sınırı çocuklarının bayramı,” *Cumhuriyet*, November 26, 1937, 1, 7.