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THE BLACK SEA AND THE GREAT WAR, THE NAVAL FORCES AND OPERATIONS OF THE OTTOMAN AND RUSSIAN EMPIRES

Abstract

When the Ottoman Empire entered into the ongoing Great War in Fall 1914, the Euxine Sea became a new theater of naval operations in WWI. The struggle between the Imperial Russian and Ottoman navies (this latter reinforced by the German Mediterranean Naval Division) was heated in the following years of WWI, with Bulgaria joining the Central Powers in 1915 and Romania siding with the Entente in 1916 albeit the former two empires and their naval forces remained as the principal actors of operations. Based on a multi-national documentation, this article aims to analyze, compare and assess the naval assets, capabilities and strategies of the Ottoman and Russian empires in the Black Sea in WWI.

Keywords: naval operations in the Black Sea in WWI; Imperial Russian Navy Black Sea Fleet, 1914-17; Ottoman Navy in the Great War; *Mittelmeerdivision*

Imperial Ottoman Navy at the onset of WWI: An Introduction

During the long reign of 33 years of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II, the Imperial Ottoman Navy, assumingly a formidable fighting force under his uncle, Sultan Abdülaziz, was badly neglected and consequently its ageing and shrinking war fleet was in poor state of combat power and readiness. The absolutist monarch, well-known for his suspicious nature and skepticism about the loyalty of the imperial armed forces, still remembered well the participation of the navy in the dethronement of his uncle in 1876 and kept in mind that his palace of Yıldız on the Bosphorus could be a perfect target for the guns of his very own navy in a next *coup* attempt. As long as Abdülhamid II ruled, that is between the years of 1876-1909, the Ottoman war fleet was almost constantly stationed in the Golden Horn with very low maintenance and battle readiness and ceased to be a significant instrument of power for the Sublime Porte. The short Greco-Ottoman War of 1897 was a manifestation of the poor condition

of the Sultan's navy, although the outcome of the war was decided on land rather than on the seas, and the conflict ended with an Ottoman victory. In the decade following this limited Balkan war, very few and modest warships were to join the navy of the Sultan, the protected cruisers *Hamidiye* and *Mecidiye*¹, the first one built in Britain and the second in the USA and both commissioned in 1903; the small torpedo cruisers *Berk-i Satvet* and *Peyk-i Şevket* both built in Germany and commissioned in 1907 and four tiny destroyers of French *Durandal*-class commissioned in 1908.

Following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the dethronement of Abdülhamid II a year later, the new Young Turk cabinets, vocal supporters of the preservation of the Empire against Balkan nationalisms and Great Power encroachments, saw the need for the reform and the reinforcement of the war fleet.

On one hand, the foundation of the "Association for National Solidarity with the Ottoman Navy (*Donanma-i Osmani Muavenet-i Milliye Cemiyeti*)"² in 1909 and fundraising campaigns were encouraged as a part of the new quest for a modern and powerful navy. This effort was followed up by the publication of a "Navy Review (*Donanma Mecmuası*)" in 1910.³ Even the Sultan himself donated his allocation of a month from the imperial budget to the Navy Association. Considerable donations were rewarded with a medal (with the relief of a dreadnought battleship on one side and that of the seal of the Sultan on the other - "*Donanma İane Madalyası*"). Fundraising activities of the Society went beyond the Ottoman borders, from Sudan to India, from Egypt to the Russian Transcaucasus, Crimea and even to Kazan,⁴ rather successfully. Since the Ottoman Empire did not possess any modern warship-building capability, buying vessels from established naval powers, or, giving orders to major European or American shipyards were the only ways to procure warships. The Sublime Porte opted initially for the first strategy and, in 1910, two old Imperial German Navy sister ships, the *Brandenburg*-class pre-dreadnought battleships SMS *Kurfürst Friedrich Wilhelm* and SMS *Weißenburg*, both deemed obsolete by the *Kaiserliche Marine* and up for sale, were acquired from Germany⁵, accompanied by four modern and large torpedo boats. The old battleships were named respectively *Turgut Reis* and *Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha* (after the two 16th century Ottoman privateers and admirals of almost legendary status in the navy) and the four *Großes Torpedoboot 1906*-class torpedo boats were classified rather ambitiously as destroyers (*muhrib* in Ottoman Turkish) in the Sultan's fleet.

On the other hand, the new constitutional regime invited also a British “naval reform mission (*Islah Heyeti*)” to Istanbul in order to reform and to strengthen the long-neglected Ottoman navy. In early 1909, Admiral Sir Douglas Gamble arrived at the head of a British naval mission. However, his rather short stay at the Ottoman service was hampered by constant frictions with the Ottoman officials. He was against the Ottoman quest for modern capital warships such as dreadnought battleships or battlecruisers and advocated for the acquisition smaller ships, at maximum 10.000 tons of displacement. His training was also that of a basic level and he actually taught to the Ottoman naval officers and crews only “how to cruise properly”, no combat training, no formation maneuvers or gunnery practices were part of the practice and drills. After constant disagreement with the Ottoman naval and political authorities, he left Istanbul in January 1910 and was replaced by Admiral Williams arriving in May 1910.⁶ Yet, this latter Royal Navy officer also had to leave after a short service of less than a year in January 1911, and was succeeded by Admiral Limpus at the head of the British Mission in early May 1912. However, British naval mission’s advices and “strategy” on having a coastal defense force, a fleet composed of smaller warships and not of the ships-of-the-line such as dreadnought battleships or battlecruisers, was to fail soon miserably against the Royal Italian and Hellenic navies in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Aegean Sea between 1911 and 1913.

At the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century, the Ottoman war fleet was still largely obsolete and poorly maintained and it failed to defend the Dodecanese against the Italian Navy during the War of Tripolitania in 1911 and 1912 and the rest of the eastern Aegean islands against the Hellenic Navy during the first Balkan War in 1912. The only tactical success of the Sultan’s navy in these wars was the brilliant commerce raiding (*guerre de course*) of the protected cruiser *Hamidiye* (setting arguably an example to the later campaigns of SMS *Emden* in WWI and to those of *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Bismarck* in WWII) against Greek shipping in the Aegean, in the Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Pre-WWI Naval Armament Program of the Sublime Porte, the Ottoman Quest for Dreadnought Battleships

Just prior to the Italian invasion of Libya and the outbreak of the Tripolitanian War in 1911, the Ottoman government decided to speed up the naval armament program and this time to procure also brand-new capital ships (unlike the old *Brandenburg*-class pre-dreadnoughts bought in 1910) through orders to major foreign shipyards. The most important orders were to be placed (one of them for a battleship already under construction), not surprisingly, to Vickers and Armstrong-Whitworth shipyards of Britain, the leading naval power of the age and an ally of the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean since the Crimean War (1853-1856).

The first dreadnought-type battleship order was placed to Vickers for an improved and enlarged version of the British *King George V*-class and subsequently a large man-of-war (to be named *Reşadiye*) was laid down in August 1911.⁷ In December 1913, another large dreadnought battleship, the *Rio de Janeiro* already under construction by Armstrong-Whitworth in Newcastle upon Tyne, was bought by the Sublime Porte from the Brazilian government (due to be delivered by Armstrong-Whitworth in the summer of 1914).

The huge building and acquisition costs of the two juggernauts were a heavy burden for the already quasi-bankrupt Ottoman treasury during and after the Tripolitanian and Balkan Wars and they were partially paid for by public subscriptions in Istanbul⁸ and in several provinces of Anatolia.⁹ The imposing dreadnoughts were named after two Ottoman monarchs. The first battleship was named *Reşadiye* after the then reigning sultan, Mehmed V Reşad and the former *Rio de Janeiro* became *Sultan Osman-ı Evvel* (Sultan Osman I) after the founder of the Ottoman dynasty and state.¹⁰

The latter of these juggernauts was carrying a record number of 14 big guns of 305 mm on seven turrets accompanied by an impressive secondary armament of 20 pieces of 152 mm naval artillery making her arguably one of the most powerful warships in the pre-WWI world. The *Reşadiye* was an equally powerful and large battleship, similarly at almost 28.000 tons of displacement carrying fewer but even larger guns (ten main guns of 343 mm and 16 pieces of 152 mm) making her indeed one of the very first examples of “super-dreadnoughts”. A hand-picked Ottoman crew was sent to Britain to collect the two dreadnoughts in the summer of 1914 in the midst of the “Sarajevo Crisis” in continental Europe.

After several delays in delivering the ships to their Ottoman crews in July and receiving the vast majority of payment, the British Admiralty ordered in August 1914 the seizure of both dreadnoughts for the Royal Navy, “requisitioning” them in the words of the then First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill.¹¹ The *Sultan Osman-ı Evvel* was renamed HMS *Agincourt* and the *Reşadiye* HMS *Erin* and both were commissioned into service in the Royal Navy. Ottoman naval and diplomatic authorities, present in London, and, the Ottoman government in Istanbul protested, to no avail.¹²

The seizure of the two Ottoman dreadnought battleships by the British government in early August 1914, without any immediate financial compensation, and the subsequent irritation of the Ottoman decision-makers and the public as well as the impending arrival of the two German warships was just one factor among many helping the German efforts to form a functional military alliance (converting eventually the secret alliance treaty of August 2, 1914 into a working partnership¹³) and to make a common cause with the Sublime Porte in the ongoing and expanding European “Great War”, nonetheless a significant one.

Table 1. Ottoman dreadnought battleships built and seized in Britain in 1914

Dreadnought	Commissioned in	Displacement (t.)	Speed (kn)	Main Armament
<i>Sultan Osman I</i> (ex <i>Rio de Janeiro</i>) / HMS <i>Agincourt</i>	1914 [Royal Navy]	28.300	22	14 x 305 mm; 20 x 152 mm
<i>Reşadiye</i> / HMS <i>Erin</i>	1914 [Royal Navy]	27.940	21	10 x 343 mm; 16 x 152 mm

The Imperial Ottoman Navy in World War I

Due to the British seizure of the two Ottoman dreadnoughts in early August 1914, the Imperial Ottoman Navy possessed no modern capital ships at the time of the outbreak of the Great War in Europe. The war fleet had three old pre-dreadnought battleships – one of which was an obsolete former central-battery ironclad; two relatively more modern protected

cruisers; two small torpedo cruisers; eight relatively modern destroyers – all of which were of very modest tonnage; ten torpedo boats and 34 gunboats of different ages and sizes. The arsenal of this modest navy had also six armed yachts.¹⁴ Among the armament of the old battleships, the main artillery of the obsolete British-built (former central-battery ironclad) battleship *Mesudiye* was still in Britain for repairs at the end of the summer of 1914,¹⁵ with almost no prospects of delivery. While waiting for her principal armament to arrive (since the summer of 1913), barrels of the two main gun turrets were replaced in Istanbul, somewhat embarrassingly for the Ottoman sailors, by wooden dummy guns.¹⁶

However, this unimpressive naval force received an unexpected and highly welcome reinforcement less than two weeks after the British seizure. After their impressive escape from the French and British squadrons throughout the Western and Eastern Mediterranean, the mighty *Moltke*-class battlecruiser (*Schlachtkreuzer*) of 23,000 tons (armed with 10 pieces of 280 mm in five gun turrets) SMS *Goeben* and her escort, the *Magdeburg*-class light cruiser SMS *Breslau* of 4.550 tons – forming together the Mediterranean naval division (*Mittelmeerdivision*) of the Imperial German Navy since the Fall of 1912,¹⁷ reached the Dardanelles and were given refuge in the Marmara Sea by the Ottoman authorities.¹⁸ The two German warships officially joined the Ottoman navy with their new names, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* and *Midilli*, on August 16, 1914 after the declaration of purchase (through a bogus sale in order to appease Entente protests) by the Ottoman government.¹⁹

Despite the great joy of the Ottoman public, the addition of the two German cruisers (a battlecruiser and a light cruiser) to the Imperial Ottoman Navy was no substitution for the loss of the two dreadnought battleships seized by Britain (although the two former German vessels were now to be the most modern warships present in the Black Sea in the Fall of 1914). Indeed, the CUP leaders and the ministers of war and navy, Enver and Cemal Pashas asked Austria-Hungary (their yet unannounced ally since the secret Ottomano-German treaty of alliance of August 2, 1914) during the same days to send dreadnought battleships from Pola in the Adriatic to the Bosphorus in order to reinforce the Imperial Ottoman Navy against the Russian Black Sea Fleet.²⁰ The request was not accepted.

Nevertheless, the arrival of the German cruisers helped to strengthen the Black Sea defenses of the imperial capital against the menace posed by the Russian Black Sea Fleet. On August 15, Admiral Limpus and the officers of the British Naval Mission were withdrawn from the

Ottoman war fleet²¹ The commander of the Mediterranean division of the *Kaiserliche Marine*, Vice Admiral Anton Wilhelm Souchon (a Saxon officer of Huguenot ancestry) was appointed on August 16, 1914 the overall commander of the Imperial Ottoman Navy although the German naval officer did not officially enter into the Ottoman service until the end of September.²² Assisted by an ever-increasing number of German naval officers and specialists arriving in Istanbul by rail via still-neutral Romania and Bulgaria, Souchon started immediately to re-organize the Ottoman naval forces and facilities.²³ German specialists at the Ottoman service started by the end of August 1914 to build and erect radio stations and antennas in Istanbul and around the Bosphorus region (Okmeydanı, Tarabya, and Prince Islands in the Marmara Sea) as well as to equip all ships operated by German servicemen with radiotelegraphy (to be sold to the Ottoman government at the end of the war). There were between 50 and 70 German servicemen as “specialists” and/or “advisers” on each Ottoman capital ship and cruiser (the two pre-dreadnoughts plus *Hamidiye* and *Mecidiye*), slightly less German sailors on torpedo cruisers and destroyers.²⁴

Following the re-organization, the Imperial Ottoman War Fleet’s new order of battle was the following.

The 1st Naval Division grouped the capital ships together and thus consisted of the battlecruiser *Yavuz Sultan Selim*²⁵ (SMS *Goeben* of the *Kaiserliche Marine*), pre-dreadnought battleship *Turgut Reis* (formerly SMS *Weißenburg* of the *Kaiserliche Marine*) and her sister *Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha* (formerly SMS *Kurfürst Friedrich Wilhelm* of the *Kaiserliche Marine*) and the obsolete battleship *Mesudiye* (originally built in 1874 and re-constructed in 1899-1903).

The 2nd Naval Division consisted of five cruisers of different ages and sizes, the modern light cruiser *Midilli*²⁶ (SMS *Breslau* of the *Kaiserliche Marine*); the protected cruiser *Hamidiye* whose First Balkan War exploits were very much publicized in the Ottoman Empire and in the world under the command of Hüseyin Rauf (later Orbay) Bey; the protected cruiser *Mecidiye* built in 1903 in the USA, and the two small German-built torpedo cruisers, the *Berk-i Satvet* and the *Peyk-i Şevket*.

The 3rd Naval Division consisted of eight small destroyers which could have been more appropriately called “torpedo boats” in another navy of the era. Four of them were modern vessels of *Großes Torpedoboot 1906*-class, recently acquired from Germany while the remaining smaller four were of French *Durandal*-class.

Table 2. Imperial Ottoman Navy at the onset of the hostilities in the Black Sea

Battlecruiser	Commissioned in	Displacement (t.)	Speed (kn)	Main Armament
<i>SMS Goeben / Yavuz Sultan Selim</i>	1912 ²⁷	23.000	28	10 x 280 mm; 12 x 150 mm
Battleship				
<i>Barbaros Hayreddin (ex-SMS Kurfürst Friedrich Wilhelm)</i>	1893 [+1915]	10.500	17	6 x 280 mm; 6 x 105 mm
<i>Turgut Reis (ex-SMS Weißenburg)</i>	1894 ²⁸	10.500	17	6 x 280 mm ; 6 x 105 mm
<i>Mesudiye</i>	1875 [+1914]	9.250	16	2 x 230 mm ²⁹ ; 12 x 150 mm
Cruisers				
<i>SMS Breslau / Midilli</i>	1912 [+1918]	4.550	25	12x105 mm ³⁰
<i>Hamidiye</i>	1903	3.760	22	2 x 152 mm; 8 x 120 mm
<i>Mecidiye</i>	1903 [+1915] ³¹	3.800	22	2 x 152 mm; 8 x 120 mm
Torpedo-cruiser³²				
<i>Berk-i Satvet</i>	1907	775	21	2 x 105 mm; 3 torpedo tubes
<i>Peyk-i Şevket</i>	1907	775	21	2 x 105 mm ; 3 torpedo tubes
Destroyer³³				
<i>Muavenet-i Milliye</i>	1910	765	26	2 x 75 mm; 3 torpedo tubes
<i>Gayret-i Vataniye</i>	1910[+1916]	765	26	2 x 75 mm; 3 torpedo tubes

<i>Yadigar-i Millet</i>	1910[+1917]	765	26	2 x 75 mm; 3 torpedo tubes
<i>Numune-i Hamiyet</i>	1910	765	26	2 x 75 mm; 3 torpedo tubes
<i>Samsun</i>	1908	290	27	1 x 65 mm; 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Yarhisar</i>	1908[+1915]	290	27	1 x 65 mm; 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Taşoz</i>	1908	290	27	1 x 65 mm; 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Basra</i>	1908	290	27	1 x 65 mm; 2 torpedo tubes

The torpedo boat and gunboat flotillas had some dozens of older, smaller and/or under-armed vessels, with little or no combat value for a modern naval warfare in 1914. As for the shipbuilding and ship repair facilities, the only Ottoman military naval yard was the one in Golden Horn with three dry docks and one small floating dock³⁴, all too small for docking the *Goeben*.

After a period of procrastination of almost three months following the Ottoman-German secret alliance treaty, the most influential members of the Ottoman cabinet gave their consent for a sortie of the Ottoman war fleet into the Black Sea, spearheaded with the two former German vessels and with the aim of attacking the Russian Black Sea Fleet and bases in Sevastopol, Odessa, Feodosia, Novorossiysk.³⁵ The Ottoman-German naval task force bombarded the aforementioned ports on the northern shores of the Black Sea and mined the Kerch Strait sinking in the process the Russian minelayer *Prut* and the old gunboat *Donets* as well as five Russian steamers and capturing another steam merchantman.³⁶ Souchon sent immediately a report to Istanbul and falsely claimed that Russian naval forces had engaged hostile activity and actions against the Ottoman fleet during this latter's exercises in the Black Sea thus resulting in the opening of hostilities.³⁷ Although the raid of October 29, 1914 by Admiral Souchon, did not end in a decisive action such as the destruction of a significant portion or the whole of the Russian war fleet and/or its bases, yet it definitely created the necessary conditions for a Russian declaration of war against the Sublime Porte and for a final Ottoman-Romanov war.

Thus, albeit its rather unimpressive military results, the raid had served, on the diplomatic front, the primary objective of Enver Pasha and the German military-diplomatic colony in Istanbul: bringing the Ottoman Empire into war on the side of the Central Powers against the Entente. Yet, once at war against the Entente Powers' navies, the modest Imperial Ottoman Navy found itself facing several disadvantages, shortcomings and geo-strategic weaknesses. British and French fleets had the "command of the sea" in the Aegean, in the Mediterranean, in the Red Sea and in the Persian Gulf, all around the still-vast lands of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Ottoman naval operations were confined to the inner sea of Marmara and to the Black Sea.

However, the Ottoman navy lacked adequate harbors and bases for operations in the north of the Turkish Straits. The southern part of the peninsula of Sinop³⁸ formed the only natural harbor in the Ottoman Black Sea coast. The only artificial harbor was in Zonguldak and it was built in the second half of the 19th century to ship coal to the Ottoman capital from the mines in the region. Anchorages of Amasra, Rize, Samsun and Trabzon were not protected from the winds, waves and storms. At the beginning of World War I, the Ottoman coastal defenses in Zonguldak (coal mines) and Trabzon (main shipping port for the Ottoman III Army on the Caucasian front) had few and old artillery pieces to protect the port facilities and moored vessels – as well as the town itself – against naval attacks and the situation did not improve much during the war. Under these circumstances, all the vessels of the small Ottoman-German war fleet had to operate from the Bosphorus throughout WWI.

A crucial disparity between the two belligerent littoral empires of the Black Sea, effecting and even to some extent shaping the naval operations in the Black Sea in WWI, was the nature of their respective land communications around the Caucasian borderland. Taking into consideration the complete lack of railroads in the Eastern Anatolian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, unlike the Russian Caucasus³⁹, and, the very poor state of the land communications of the former in the mountainous topography of the region bordering the Russo-Ottoman war zone, establishing a secure maritime connection between Istanbul and Trabzon was crucial for the Ottoman High Command's land operations in the South Caucasus and Northwestern Persia.⁴⁰

Thus, the Black Sea was of major geo-strategic importance for the Ottoman military operations against the Russian Empire and constituted a vital space for the Caucasian front of the Ottoman Empire, first, for

the defense of the left flank of the Ottoman III Army and second, for an alternative route of supplying and reinforcing the Ottoman forces fighting on the Caucasian Front. Again, considering the complete lack of a railroad network and the very primitive nature of land communications in Eastern Anatolia, shipping war material, provisions and troops directly from the Bosphorus to Trabzon was the best way to supply the Ottoman III Army. However, the smaller size of the Ottomano-German naval forces compared with the swiftly expanding Russian Black Sea Fleet made it very difficult for Admiral Souchon's Naval Staff to protect and to secure the Ottoman shipping lanes in the Black Sea in WWI and III Army suffered consequently throughout the period of 1914-17.

Another major importance of the Northern Anatolian shipping lanes for the Ottoman Empire in WWI was that these former were the best available route for supplying the Ottoman capital as well as the Ottoman navy and the merchant fleet with the much needed coal of Zonguldak,⁴¹ since there was no railroad connection between the Zonguldak coal basin and Istanbul. Yet again, because of the superior naval forces of the Russian Empire attempting to blockade the port of Zonguldak with mine barriers and patrolling warships by 1915 (claiming eventually dozens of Ottoman colliers and cargo ships of all size), there was a chronic shortage of coal for civilian, military and naval use in Istanbul and this precious fuel had to imported to the Ottoman Empire from Germany on already overburdened railways.⁴²

The presence of the powerful and fast battlecruiser *Goeben* in the Black Sea was a temporary leverage for the Ottoman forces fighting in Northeastern Anatolia at the beginning of the war, yet except for the primary phases of the Caucasian Campaign, the Russian Black Sea Fleet gave a much more significant support - in the form of transfer of troops and supplies as well as amphibious operations – to the Russian Caucasian Army's operations in the Transcaucasus, Southeastern Black Sea littoral and Eastern Anatolia in 1916 and 1917, prior to the Russian revolutions. Even after a reinforcement in the form of the German *Mittelmeerddivision*, the "command of the Black Sea" was not to be a luxury that the Ottoman navy could enjoy during WWI.

By December 1914, the *Goeben*, the only modern capital ship of the Ottoman navy was damaged in operations against the Russian war fleet in the Black Sea, and as the shipyards of Istanbul were not able to maintain and repair her, her combat effectiveness was gradually reduced and her greatest advantage compared to the Russian capital ships in the Black

Sea, that is her speed, was decreased as well. At the end of 1915, after the commissioning of two newly built Russian *Imperatritsa Mariya*-class dreadnought battleships, the Russian Black Sea had the upper hand in the Black Sea. Although the presence of SMS *Goeben* in the Marmara Sea, consolidated to some extent in 1915 the defenses of the Turkish Straits against the British, French and Russian war fleets, the Unionist oligarchy ruling the Empire and the Ottoman High Command (and also German diplomatic and military colony in Istanbul) paid utmost attention not to lose this capital ship in any major engagement in the Black Sea. The main role that the juggernaut played throughout WWI was “fleet in being”.

On the eve of the First World War, the size of the Ottoman merchant fleet was very modest despite the fact that the Empire’s territories were surrounded by seven seas: the Black Sea, the Sea of Marmara, the Aegean Sea, Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. The total tonnage of the Ottoman merchant fleet was around 110,000 tons,⁴³ of which the majority belonged to the “State Department of Navigation (*Seyr-i Sefain İdaresi*)” and only six ships had displacements of over 3,000 tons. The private shipping sector was also severely underdeveloped and no Ottoman ship owner possessed ships with a higher displacement than 1,000 tons. Due to the attacks of the British, Australian, French submarines in the Sea of Marmara during the Gallipoli Campaign and the raids and minelaying operations of the Russian warships against the Ottoman ports and shipping lanes in the Black Sea⁴⁴, the size of the Ottoman merchant fleet was to decrease to 50,000 tons at the end of the Great War.⁴⁵

With the beginning of the naval blockade of the Ottoman Empire by the British and French navies following the entry into WWI of the Sublime Porte alongside the Central Powers, the Ottoman navigation in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea ceased almost completely. As for the Ottoman navigation in the Black Sea, despite the arrival of the two German warships in August 1914, naval superiority, though incomplete, remained at the hands of the Russian war fleet and consequently the Ottoman merchant fleet suffered substantial losses in the Black Sea between the years of 1914 and 1917.

Russian Naval Forces in the Black Sea at the onset of the Great War

Following the consecutive defeats and destructions of the Imperial Russian Far Eastern and Baltic Fleets by the Imperial Japanese Combined Fleet (*Rengo Kantai*) during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, Saint Petersburg launched a major naval re-armament program. This “post-Tsushima” naval policy envisaged also the expansion and modernization of the Black Sea Fleet.⁴⁶ Between the end of the war in the Pacific and the outbreak of the Great War of 1914 in Europe, this southern fleet of the Romanov Empire commissioned two more battleships into its ageing battle line (although they were both of older design and not that of dreadnoughts) as well as 13 new destroyers.

At the beginning of the First World War, the Russian war fleet in the Black Sea, commanded by Admiral Andrei Agostovich Eberhardt, an Imperial Russian officer of Swedish origins and former naval attaché at the Romanov Embassy in Istanbul (1894-1896), consisted of six pre-dreadnought battleships; three protected cruisers; 26 destroyers of different size and capabilities; six old gunboats armed with 203 and 152 mm naval artillery; four submarines; two mine layers, and some dozens of smaller torpedo and patrol boats and minesweepers of 100 to 200 tons of displacements.

A particular comparative strength of Eberhardt’s fleet over the Ottoman navy was the former’s significant network of facilities around the Russian Black Sea littoral. The Russian Black Sea Fleet had several well-fortified naval bases and ports and besides Sevastopol, the home port of the Fleet, Odessa, Batumi, Feodosia, Novorossiysk, Rostov, Nikolaev, Taganrog, Kerch, Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy offered operational bases to the Russian warships.

Admiral Eberhardt had also three dreadnought battleships (*Imperatritsa Mariya*-class, each more heavily armed than the battlecruiser *Goeben* although slower than this latter) under construction at the time the hostilities started in the Black Sea, thus reinforcing considerably his battle line of six pre-dreadnought battleships. The Russian Black Sea Fleet possessed in 1914 a flourishing naval air arm as well.⁴⁷

The Russian Black Sea Fleet mustered also larger flotillas of destroyers, minelayers and auxiliary ships and a considerable fleet of transports (around 120 steam merchantmen) compared with the modest Ottoman-German naval force stationed in the Bosphorus. Russian destroyers were larger and

more numerous than the Ottoman destroyers (who could probably be more appropriately classified as “large torpedo boats” as the original naming for the German-built *Muavenet*-class vessels had put it clearly: “*Großes Torpedoboot 1906-class*”), thus offering a considerable asset to the Russian fleet for naval raids and interceptions. A particularly striking component of the Russian flotillas were the very recently commissioned and powerful *Derzky*-class destroyers. Unlike most destroyer classes of the navies of the era, these vessels were burning oil rather than coal and were capable of cruising at speeds reaching 34 knots (nautical mile per hour) making them the fastest warship class in the Black Sea in WWI. Nine of these modern destroyers were commissioned in 1913 and 1914 into the Black Sea Fleet and they were to be very instrumental in patrolling, blockading and mining first the Ottoman and later also the Bulgarian shores as well as in escorting other Russian vessels throughout the period of 1914-1917.

The Russian navy in the Black Sea operated from the harbor of Sevastopol (*Akyar* in Turkish), the main base of operations, and from the ports of Odessa, Batum, Novorossiysk, Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy (*Akkerman* in Turkish), Nikolayev, Rostov, Taganrog, Feodosia (*Kefe* in Turkish and Crimean Tatar) and Kerch. Among all these port cities, Sevastopol, Batum, Kerch and Nikolayev had fortifications with heavy coastal artillery as well as protective mine barriers. Sevastopol, situated “almost in the geographical center of the Black Sea”⁴⁸, constituted a formidable harbor and naval base in the natural harbor-poor body of water. Against these Russian naval bases, the Ottomano-German naval forces were to attempt some raids in 1914 and 1915 until the commissioning of the two new Russian dreadnoughts in 1915. These raids, largely inconclusive, ended in the loss of the Ottoman protected cruiser *Mecidiye*, sunk after striking a Russian naval mine in April 1915 near Odessa.

While the Russian Black Sea Fleet had the capability of building warships at the size of dreadnought battleships of more than 20.000 tons displacement at the naval yards in Nikolayev⁴⁹ the Ottoman Navy had no capacity of building any large warships in its smaller naval yard in Bosphorus and did not possess a dry or floating dock large enough to maintain and repair its only capital ship *Goeben/Yavuz Sultan Selim* (reducing gradually the operational capability of this modern naval asset). The smaller Russian shipyard in Kherson had also the capacity of building smaller war vessels such as destroyers.

The Imperial Russian Black Sea Fleet in World War I

The strike force of the Russian Fleet, sizeable but not very modern, was initially composed of its six pre-dreadnought battleships. Among these battleships of older design, the most powerful and relatively more modern vessels were the two sister ships *Evstafii* (“[Saint] Eustace”) and *Ioann Zlatoust* (“[Saint] John Chrysostom”). Both commissioned in 1906 and at 12,840 tons of displacement, they were rather medium size battleships but had four pieces of 305 mm⁵⁰ naval guns in two turrets, large caliber guns that no Ottoman or German vessels were to possess during the naval operations in the Black Sea throughout WWI, in addition to their secondary armament of 203 mm and 152 mm guns. The *Panteleimon* (“[Saint] Pantaleon”) was a third and older battleship of 12,582 tons, commissioned in 1900, and was armed with the same number of 305 mm guns accompanied with 16 pieces of 152 mm. The *Rostislav* (named after Rostislav [Mstislavich] I of Kiev) was the smallest battleship of the fleet at 8,880 tons of displacement. She was commissioned in 1896 and armed with a main artillery of four 254 mm guns and a secondary one of eight pieces of 152 mm. The old battleship *Tri Sviatitelia* (“Three Holy Hierarchs”) commissioned in 1893 was the largest war vessel in the fleet in 1914 at 13.318 tons, armed with four of the same 305 mm guns mounted on the *Evstafii* and the *Ioann Zlatoust*, and with a secondary armament of 14 pieces of 152 mm. The last and oldest battleship of the Russian fleet was the *Sinop*, named after the Russian naval raid to Sinop in 1853. This old man-of-war at 11,230 tons was armed with six pieces of 203 mm and eight of 152 mm naval guns, and, commissioned in 1887 she was completely obsolete by the start of the Great War in 1914. The common and main weakness of all the battleships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet was their speed of 16-17 knots. This was to be the major reason for their inability to completely interdict the Black Sea to the Ottomano-German naval forces in World War I, but in spite of the arrival of the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*, the Russian Navy would still maintain its naval supremacy – albeit not that easily - in the Black Sea during the Great War.

Table 3. The principal vessels of the Imperial Russian Navy in the Black Sea at the beginning of the war⁵¹

Battleship	Commissioned in	Displacement (t.)	Speed (kn)	Main Armament
<i>Evstafii</i>	1906	12.840	17	4 x 305 mm; 4 x 203 mm; 12 x 152 mm
<i>Ioann Zlatooust</i>	1906	12.840	17	4 x 305 mm; 4 x 203 mm; 12 x 152 mm
<i>Panteleimon</i>	1900	12.582	17	4 x 305 mm; 16 x 152 mm
<i>Rostislav</i>	1896	8.880	16	4 x 254 mm; 8 x 152 mm
<i>Tri Sviatitelia</i>	1893	13.318	17	4 x 305 mm; 14 x 152 mm
<i>Sinop</i>	1887	11.230	16	6 x 203 mm; 7 x 152mm
Cruisers				
<i>Pamiat Merkuria</i>	1903	6.675	23	12 x 152 mm
<i>Kagul</i>	1902	6.675	23	12 x 152 mm
<i>Almaz</i>	1903	3.300	19	5 x 120 mm
Destroyers				
<i>Pylki</i>	1914	1.100	34	3 x 100 mm; 10 torpedo tubes; 80 mines
<i>Bystry</i>	1914	1.100	34	3 x 100 mm; 10 torpedo tubes; 80 mines
<i>Pospeshny</i>	1914	1.100	34	3 x 100 mm; 10 torpedo tubes; 80 mines

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<i>Derzky</i>	1914	1.100	34	3 x 100 mm; 10 torpedo tubes; 80 mines
<i>Pronzitelny</i>	1914	1.100	34	3 x 100 mm; 10 torpedo tubes; 80 mines
<i>Schastlivy</i>	1914	1.100	34	3 x 100 mm; 10 torpedo tubes; 80 mines
<i>Gromki</i>	1913	1.100	34	3 x 100 mm; 10 torpedo tubes; 80 mines
<i>Gnevny</i>	1913	1.100	34	3 x 100 mm; 10 torpedo tubes; 80 mines
<i>Bespokoiny</i>	1913	1.100	34	3 x 100 mm; 10 torpedo tubes; 80 mines
<i>Capt Saken</i>	1906	680	26	2 x 120 mm; 3 torpedo tubes
<i>Lt Zatzarenniy</i>	1906[+1917]	680	26	2 x 120 mm; 3 torpedo tubes
<i>Lt Chestakov</i>	1906	680	26	2 x 120 mm; 3 torpedo tubes
<i>Capt-Lt Baranov</i>	1906	680	26	2 x 120 mm; 3 torpedo tubes
<i>Jarky</i>	1905	420	27	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Jivoy</i>	1905	420	27	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Joutky</i>	1905	420	27	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Jivoutchy</i>	1905[+1916]	420	27	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Zavetny</i>	1905	420	27	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes

<i>Zavidny</i>	1905	420	27	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Zvonky</i>	1905	420	27	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Zorky</i>	1905	420	27	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Lt Poustchin</i>	1905[+1916]	420	27	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Strogy</i>	1901	310	26	2 x 75 mm; 1 or 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Svirepy</i>	1901	310	26	2 x 75 mm; 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Smetlivy</i>	1901	310	26	2 x 75 mm; 2 torpedo tubes
<i>Stremitelny</i>	1901	310	26	2 x 75 mm; 2 torpedo tubes

The “battle line” (that is the heavily armed and armored battleships and cruisers forming the core of the combat power of the fleet in an engagement) of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, could combine in 1914 a naval artillery of 127 large caliber guns (of 150 mm and above) and thus overwhelmingly outgunned the Imperial Ottoman Navy which could field only 50 of such guns even after its reinforcement with the German *Mittelmeerdivision*. The Russian navy in the Black Sea had a budget of about 800 million rubles for the year 1914⁵² and the immense disparity in fleet size and firepower was to increase even further during the war by the commissioning of three new *Imperatritsa Mariya*-class dreadnought battleships between 1915 and 1917, the Russian Black Sea Fleet fielding 151 large caliber guns by 1917 versus even a smaller Ottoman-German naval artillery park of 36 Ottoman-German guns mainly due to the Ottoman battleship and cruiser losses in 1915. However, the Russian battle squadron was inferior in speed and in design to the vessels of the former German *Mittelmeerdivision* and risked a “*defeat in detail*” against SMS *Goeben/Yavuz Sultan Selim* and could theoretically fall prey to her ten 280 mm guns and speed of 28 knots in unexpected encounters, especially prior to the commissioning of the three *Imperatritsa Mariya*-class battleships⁵³. These new Russian dreadnoughts, each singularly better armed than the

Goeben with 12 pieces of 305 mm guns, and joining the Russian fleet in the Black Sea between 1915 and 1917 were namely the *Imperatritsa Mariya* (named after the then Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna of Russia), the *Imperatritsa Ekaterina Velikaya* (named after the Empress Catherine [II] the Great of Russia) and the *Imperator Aleksander III* (named after Emperor Alexander III of Russia, father of the then reigning Nicholas II of Russia). The lead ship of her class, the *Imperatritsa Mariya*, was to be lost for the Russian Black Sea Fleet, under mysterious circumstances and suspicions of sabotage, by an internal explosion at anchor in Sevastopol in the fall of 1916.⁵⁴ She was the single battleship and the largest and the most important vessel to be lost in the Black Sea in WWI.

Table 4. Russian dreadnought battleships built in the Black Sea during WWI

Dreadnought	Commissioned in	Displacement (t)	Speed (kn)	Main Armament
<i>Imperatritsa Mariya</i>	1915 [+1916]	23.800	21	12 x 305 mm; 20 x 130 mm
<i>Imperatritsa Ekaterina Velikaya</i>	1915	25.000	21	12 x 305 mm; 20 x 130 mm
<i>Imperator Aleksander III</i>	1917	23.800	21	12 x 305 mm; 20 x 130 mm

Table 5. A Chronological Outline of the Operations in and around the Black Sea in WWI

October 29, 1914	Germano-Ottoman naval raid against the Russian ports and bases in the Black Sea.
Early November 1914	Russian bombardment of Zonguldak port and coal mines and interception and destruction of an Ottoman convoy sailing from Istanbul to Trabzon.
November 18, 1914	Short and inconclusive engagement off Cape Sarych between the battleships <i>Goeben</i> and <i>Evstafii</i> (the latter leading the Russian pre-dreadnought battle line).

Nov. 1914 – June 1917	Russian minelaying operations off the Bosphorus and the Ottoman western Black Sea littoral.
December 23/24, 1914	Failed attempt of the Russian Black Sea Fleet to blockade the Zonguldak harbor with blockships.
December 25, 1914	<i>Goeben</i> damaged seriously after hitting Russian mines in the Black Sea, out of action for three months during which she was imperfectly repaired inside a “cofferdam” (due to the absence of a large dry dock) in Istanbul.
Dec. 1914 - Apr. 1915	Ottoman convoys to Trabzon and naval raids on Batumi, Tuapse, Yalta and Odessa (December 1914 – April 1915). Loss of the Ottoman cruiser <i>Mecidiye</i> off Odessa.
Jan. – May 1915	Russian raids and naval bombardments along the Northern Anatolian coast disrupting the Ottoman communications. The Russian Black Sea Fleet’s diversionary attack and reconnaissance in force against the Ottoman Bosphorus forts in order to support the Entente naval operations in the Dardanelles.
Summer 1915-1917	German submarine warfare against the Russian Black Sea merchant and war fleets.
December 10, 1915	Action off Kefken island near the Anatolian coast between Ottoman gunboats and Russian destroyers ending in the destruction of two Ottoman gunboats.
January 8, 1916	Short and inconclusive engagement between <i>Goeben</i> and <i>Imperatrissa Ekaterina Velikaya</i> in the mid-way between Bosphorus and Zonguldak resulting in the only naval action between dreadnought-type warships in the Black Sea in WWI.
February 1916	<i>Goeben</i> ’s sortie for Trabzon to rush most urgently required war material and personnel to the Ottoman III Army hard-pressed by the Yudenich Offensive.

Feb. – July 1916	The Russian Black Sea Fleet’s successful amphibious operations between Rize and Giresun supporting the Yudenich Offensive of the Russian Caucasian Army.
October 20, 1916	Destruction of <i>Imperatritsa Mariya</i> by a magazine explosion at anchor in Sevastopol.
June 1918	The Russian Black Sea Fleet no more a fighting force due to the revolutions of 1917. Ottoman transfer of troops from Constanta to Batumi (in order to form an expeditionary corps to be sent to Azerbaijan and Dagestan) after the Treaty of Bucharest of May 7, 1918.
Summer 1918	German transfer of troops (three brigades in total) from the Ukrainian client-state (the “Hetmanate”) to the nascent “Georgian Democratic Republic” (over which the German Empire was to establish a similar “protectorate”)

Conclusion

The war in the Black Sea is an understudied page of WW I albeit the three empires involved. Although a secondary theater of operations for both of the Entente and Central Powers, the Black Sea and the adjacent Caucasian front revealed gradually certain opportunities of “power projection” to the belligerent powers of both camps, such as the invasion of a considerable part of Northeastern Anatolia by the Romanov Empire in 1916, or, the control of the revolutionary Transcaucasus for the Ottoman and German empires towards the end of WWI.

With the Ottoman entry into WWI in late October 1914, the Black Sea became a new scene of naval operations in the Great War. The struggle between the Imperial Ottoman and Russian navies to obtain a naval mastery in this sea was heated in the following years of the conflict, with Bulgaria joining the Central Powers in 1915 and Romania siding with the Entente in 1916 albeit the former two empires and their naval forces remained as the principal actors of operations.

Naval operations in the Black Sea during WWI displayed some good examples of early modern warfare. The Black Sea witnessed a constant

struggle of the joint Ottoman and German naval forces to keep the maritime routes open between Istanbul, on one side, and the coal-producing Zonguldak and the main shipping port for the Ottoman III Army, Trabzon, on the other. A flotilla of German U-boats, either transported to the Ottoman capital via railroad in pieces and assembled there or breaking the Entente navies' blockade in the Adriatic Sea and cruising from the Austro-Hungarian naval base of Pola to the Dardanelles, operated from the Golden Horn to deter the actions of the Imperial Russian Navy against the North Anatolian coastline, the allied port city of Varna or even the very capital of the Ottoman Empire. The Russian Black Sea Fleet responded with a strategy of "commerce raiding" and submarine warfare of its own by 1915. There were several minelaying and minesweeping operations of the rival navies with purpose-built minelayer submarines as well as the operations and engagements of dreadnought-type warships from both sides. At the onset of the war, the Ottoman war fleet was reinforced by a state-of-art warship for its age, the German Imperial Navy *Moltke*-class battlecruiser SMS *Goeben*, renamed *Yavuz Sultan Selim* at her Ottoman service, escorted by a *Magdeburg*-class modern light cruiser SMS *Breslau* (later *Midilli* at the Ottoman service). Besides her role of "fleet in being" throughout the war inside the Turkish Straits, *Goeben* engaged in some naval actions against the Russian Black Sea Fleet and escorted several Ottoman convoys in the Black Sea. The Russian Empire built between 1915 and 1917 in Nikolayev three large dreadnought battleships of *Imperatritsa Mariya*-class and tried to obtain a "command of the sea" by 1916, first under the command of Admiral Eberhardt and later by his young and energetic successor Admiral Kolchak. The Russian Black Sea Fleet engaged in several actions against the Ottomano-German naval forces, bombarded Ottoman Black Sea ports and fortresses (outer defenses of the Bosphorus included) and assisted some successful amphibious operations of the Russian Caucasian Army on the Eastern Black Sea littoral of the Ottoman Empire in 1916. However, this newly obtained superiority in material and leadership of the Imperial Russian Black Sea Fleet by 1916 was not to last long. This last Russo-Ottoman War was to pause at the end of 1916 on land and in the first half of 1917 on the seas⁵⁵, never to resume again and just before the respective collapses of the Romanov and Ottoman empires.

NOTES

- 1 The two cruisers were apparently named after the then reigning Ottoman monarch, Sultan Abdülhamid II, and, his father Sultan Abdülmecid I.
- 2 The Association was founded on July 14, 1909 in Istanbul and was led by one of the notable Muslim merchants of the Ottoman capital, Yağcızade Şefik Bey.
- 3 The *Navy Review* was published first monthly later weekly. Between March 1910-February 1914 (monthly, 48 issues in total), in WWI era it became weekly and was published until 1917 (190 issues in total).
- 4 Undated letter from a Unionist Ottoman diplomat working at the Imperial Ottoman Embassy in Saint Petersburg to the Ottoman Finance Minister, Cavid Bey [Letter No. 46, pp. 122-124] cited in Bardakçı, Murat İttihatçı'nın sandığı: *İttihat ve Terakki liderlerinin özel arşivlerindeki yayınlanmamış belgeler ile Atatürk ve İnönü dönemlerinde Ermeni gayrimenkulleri konusunda alınmış bazı kararlar* (The Chestbox of the Unionist: Previously unpublished documents from the personal archives of the CUP leaders and some decisions taken during the terms of Atatürk and İnönü concerning the Armenian property), Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2014, p. 123.
- 5 The former *Kaiserliche Marine* vessels were purchased for a total payment 1.070.000 gold Ottoman pounds lira and they arrived at the Golden Horn, Istanbul on August 21, 1910 (between the North Sea and Dardanelles sailed with a German crew and under the command of a German admiral, at Dardanelles the ships were delivered to Ottoman crews).
- 6 See Miller, Geoffrey, *Superior Force: The Conspiracy Behind the Escape of Goeben and Breslau*, Hull: Hull University Press, 1996, p. 406 note 20.
- 7 Later a second *Reşadiye*-class dreadnought, the *Fâtiḥ Sultan Mehmed*, was ordered to Vickers in April 1914, never to be completed. Although the authoritative 1914 edition German handbook of the war fleets of the era is correct about the time of the Ottoman order for a second *Reshadiye*-class dreadnought, this second order was also placed on Vickers and not on the "united Vickers-Armstrongs shipyards ("*vereinigte Werften von Vickers und Armstrong*")" which, in fact, did not exist until the eventual merger of these two major British shipbuilding companies in 1927 (see *Handbuch der Kriegsflootten von Deutschland, Oesterreich-Ungarn, Italien, Türkei und England, Frankreich, Rußland, Japan* [Handbook of the War Fleets of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Turkey and England, France, Russia and Japan], (Berlin, Verlag L. Gschwing [sic] Pössneck i. Th., 1914), p. 28.
- 8 André Antoine, director of the Odeon Theatre in Paris and founder of the Ottoman State Conservatory and the Municipal Theatre in Istanbul in the summer and autumn of 1914 and present in the spectacles organized by the "[Ottoman] National Committee for the fleet" noted in his memoirs, first published in extracts of the Marseilles daily *Soleil du Midi* in September

1915 and then in Turkey under the title “*Chez les Turcs*” in 1965 that the amount raised through public donations reached the figure of 75-80 million French francs in the summer of 1914 (Antoine, *Chez les Turcs*, pp. 21-22 and pp. 39-41).

⁹ The acquisition and construction of the two large dreadnoughts boosted the national pride of the Ottomans, especially in the aftermath of the recent humiliations of the Tripolitanian and Balkan Wars and the two battleships’ photographs and postcards were circulated all over the Ottoman lands already in 1913. Large individual donations were rewarded with a “Navy Donation Medal”.

¹⁰ See Öke, Mim Kemal and Mütercimler, Erol, *Sultan Osman*, İstanbul: E Yayınları, 1991, p. 20 and p. 56; Çakmak, Fevzi, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Doğu Cephesi* (The [Ottoman] Eastern Front in WWI), Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2005, p. 5; see also Chatterton, E. Keble, *Dardanelles Dilemma, the story of the naval operations*, London: Rich and Cowan, 1935, p. 9.

¹¹ See Tuchman, Barbara W., *The Guns of August*, New York: Presidio Press, 2004, p. 164.

¹² The two Ottoman dreadnought battleships were confiscated on August 2, 1914, before the declaration of the Ottoman mobilization (see the telegram of the captain of the ship, Hüseyin Rauf (later Orbay) Bey, from the Imperial Ottoman Embassy in London to the Imperial Ministry of the Navy in İstanbul, August 2, 1914, cited in Öke and Mutercimler, *Sultan Osman*, p. 13). For the confiscation of the battleships and the subsequent Ottoman irritation and anti-British sentiment see also Chatterton, *Dardanelles Dilemma*, p. 9.

¹³ For the Ottomano-German secret alliance treaty see Trumpener, Ulrich, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914-1918*, New Jersey: Princeton, 1968, p. 16.

¹⁴ *Atakan, Rauf*; Koral, Necmi; Önal, Remzi; Baycan, Nusret and Kızılırmak, Selahattin (eds.), *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, Cilt X, Osmanlı Devri, Birinci Dünya Harbi, İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik* (History of Turkish Armed Forces, Volume X, First World War, Administrative and Logistic Activities), Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1985, p. 96.

¹⁵ See the cable of the British embassy in Athens to the Foreign Office in London providing a French-language copy of a memorandum of information of the Greek naval attaché in İstanbul, 7 November 1914 (The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA / former Public Record Office - PRC), Foreign Office Files, FO 371/2147).

¹⁶ See Kopp, Georges, *A bord du Goeben*, (On board the *Goeben*) (trans. from German-language edition by Renée-Marie Jouan), Paris : Payot, 1931, p. 70.

¹⁷ The other two ships of the German Mediterranean Division, the light cruisers SMS *Dresden* and SMS *Straßburg* were detached from the squadron of Vice Admiral Souchon before the outbreak of hostilities between the Entente and

- the Central Powers in the summer of 1914 (see Souchon, Wilhelm, “Der Durchbruch SM Schiffe ‘Goeben’ und ‘Breslau’ von Messina nach den Dardanellen (The Breakthrough of His [Imperial German] Majesty’s Ships *Goeben* and *Breslau* from Messina to the Dardanelles)” in *Auf See unbesiegt. Erlebnisse im Seekrieg erzählt von Mitkämpfern*, Vol. I (ed. Eberhard von Mantey), Munich: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1922, p. 17).
- 18 After frequent and intensive negotiations with the German ambassador Hans [Baron] von Wangenheim in Istanbul following the signing of the Ottoman-German secret treaty of alliance of August 2nd, 1914, the Ottoman Minister of War had ordered the Command of Dardanelles Fortifications to let the German ships into the Marmara Sea (Cable of Enver Pasha to the Command of Dardanelles Fortifications, August 7, 1914 Turkish General Staff Directorate of Military History and Strategic Studies Archive (*Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Arşivi* – ATASE), First World War Collection (*Birinci Dünya Harbi Koleksiyonu* - B.D.H.), Archive 6/1666, Cabinet 4611, File 10, Index 1-22).
- 19 For the transfer of SMS *Goeben* and SMS *Breslau* to the Imperial Ottoman Navy see also Arslan, Ozan “Lyudi, korabli i oruzhiye dlya sultana personel suda i vooruzheniye, postavlennyye Germaney turetskoy armii i flout (Men, Ships and Arms to the Sultan: German Military Mission and Transfer of Personnel, Vessels, and Weapons to the Ottoman Army and Navy during World War I)” in *Porokh, Zoloto i Stal’, Voyenno-tekhnicheskoye sotrudnichestvo v gody Pervoy mirovoy voyny*, (ed. Andrey Pavlov), Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo RKHGA, 2018, pp. 119-121.
- 20 Belen, Fahri, *Birinci Cihan Harbi’nde Türk Harbi, 1914 Yılı Hareketleri* (Turkey’s War in WWI [Volume I] Operations of 1914), Ankara: Genelkurmay Basimevi, 1963, pp. 41-42.
- 21 Miller, *Superior Force: The Conspiracy Behind the Escape of Goeben and Breslau*, p. 215. A month later, on September 16, 1914, the British Naval Mission left the Ottoman Empire (see Koçer, Özdem (ed.), Şanlı Yavuz (The Glorious Yavuz), Istanbul: Deniz Basimevi, 2008, p. 36).
- 22 The Ottoman government requested officially on September 23, 1914 (and successfully obtained soon after), via its ambassador in Berlin, Mahmud Muhtar (later Katircioğlu) Pasha, the entry of Souchon into the Ottoman naval service (for the Ottoman official request see letter of [the German Undersecretary of State, Arthur] Zimmermann to [the Secretary of State Gottlieb von] Jagow, September 23, 1914 (The Political Archive of the German Foreign Office (*Politisches Archiv / Auswärtiges Amt*) PA/AA, R 22402, No. 533))
- 23 For the arrival of German naval officers and specialists – as well as a limited amount of much-needed German war material – in the Ottoman Empire via Austria-Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria in August and September 1914 see Arslan, “Lyudi, korabli i oruzhiye dlya sultana personel suda i vooruzheniye, postavlennyye Germaney turetskoy armii i flout”, pp. 123-125.

- 24 Cable of the British embassy in Athens to the Foreign Office in London providing a French-language copy of a memorandum of information of the Greek naval attaché in Istanbul, 7 November 1914 (TNA, Foreign Office Files, FO 371/2147).
- 25 The battlecruiser was thus renamed after the Ottoman emperor, Sultan Selim I (1501-1520), the conqueror of Syria, Palestine, Egypt and the Hijaz; the first "caliph" from the Ottoman dynasty whose nickname "Yavuz" meant "the Ferocious". He was the father of Süleyman I "The Magnificent".
- 26 The light cruiser was named after the island of Lesbos/Mytilini in the Northern Aegean (*Midilli* in Turkish), lost to Greece at the end of the Balkan Wars and an Ottoman *terra irredenta* in 1914.
- 27 Commissioned in 1912 in the *Kaiserliche Marine*, SMS *Goeben* was announced "purchased" from the Imperial German government together with SMS *Breslau* upon the two ships' arrival at the Dardanelles on August 11, 1914 (see the cable from the Ottoman Ministry of Interior to the Command of the Dardanelles Fortifications, 11 August 1914, (The Ottoman Archives of the Office of the Prime Minister [of the Republic of Turkey] (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arsivi* - BOA), DH. KMS, 27/2).
- 28 William Edward David Allen and Paul Muratoff wrote that these two pre-dreadnought battleships were built in 1874, in the same year with the *Mesudiye* (Allen, William Edward David and Muratoff, Paul, *Caucasian Battlefields, A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828–1921*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953, p. 227). The latter, an obsolete battleship that was to be sunk by a British submarine in December 1914 at the Dardanelles, was indeed built in 1874, even before the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, but as for the year of commissioning of the other two battleships, the British and Russian authors are mistaken.
- 29 At the start of the hostilities between the Ottoman Empire and the Entente Powers, the *Mesudiye* was still waiting for the delivery of her two pieces of 230 mm, sent earlier to Vickers in Britain for overhauls. She never received her main guns again.
- 30 Uppgunned during WWI with eight pieces of 150 mm, just like the rest of her sister-ships still in the Imperial German Navy service.
- 31 The *Mecidiye* struck a Russian mine and sank on April 3rd, 1915 near Odessa in shallow water. She was later salvaged, repaired and joined the Russian Black Sea Fleet on October 29, 1915 (on the anniversary of the Ottoman-German naval raid of 1914) as Prut after the Russian minelayer Prut sunk by the *Goeben* on October 29, 1914. Following the Russian revolutions of 1917, she was captured in Sevastopol on May 1st, 1918 by the German army which returned her to the Ottoman Navy on May 13, 1918 and she was immediately re-commissioned into this latter under her original name *Mecidiye*.

- 32 For the technical features of these two torpedo cruisers of the Ottoman war fleet see Besbelli, Saim, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*, VII. Cilt, Deniz Harekâtı (Turkey's War in WWI, Volume VIII, Naval Operations), Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1976, Appendix I ; see also the cable of the British embassy in Athens to the Foreign Office in London providing a French-language copy of a memorandum of information of the Greek naval attaché in Istanbul, 7 November 1914 (TNA, Foreign Office Files, FO 371/2147).
- 33 See Çakmak, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Doğu Cephesi*, p. 257.
- 34 See Koçer, Şanlı Yavuz, p. 41.
- 35 For the raid of October 29, 1914 see Firle, Rudolf, "Meine erste Kriegsfahrt nach Odessa. Türkische Philosophie. Die Vernichtung von Donetz und Kubanetz (My first naval expedition to Odessa. Turkish philosophy. The destruction of the *Donetz* and the *Kubanetz*)" in *Auf See unbesiegt. Erlebnisse im Seekrieg erzählt von Mitkämpfern*, Vol. II (ed. Eberhard von Mantey), Munich: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1922, pp. 243-250 and also Danilov, Youri, *La Russie dans la guerre mondiale (1914-1917)* (Russia in the world war, (1914-1917)), Paris: Payot, 1927, p. 338.
- 36 The Ottomano-German naval forces sank some smaller sailing vessels and damaged several other merchantmen as well as the port of Novorossiysk during the raid of October 29, 1914.
- 37 For Souchon's report of October 29, 1914 see Aksakal, Mustafa, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914, The Ottoman Empire and the First World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 179.
- 38 This port was the scene of the naval battle of Sinop on November 30, 1853 which was the *casus belli* for the eventual declarations of war of the French and British empires against Russia, on March 27, 1854.
- 39 At the onset of WWI, the Russian Empire had a significant railroad network on its Transcaucasian dominions. There were three main axes built at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries: the line of Baku-Elizavetpol (today Ganja)-Tbilisi-Alexandropol (today Gyumri)-Kars, the line of Tbilisi-Batumi, and, that of Alexandropol-Erevan-Julfa. The Transcaucasian network was connected to the main Russian railroad system by the line of Baku-Derbent-Petrovsk-Rostov (Allen and Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields*, p. 224). Russians had extended, between 1910 and 1913, their Transcaucasian rail line 60 km (standard Russian gauge of 1,534 mm) further in the direction of the Russo-Ottoman border, from Kars to Sarıkamış (see Badem, Candan, *Çarlık Rusyası yönetiminde Kars vilayeti* (The Province [Oblast] of Kars under the Tsarist Russian Administration), Istanbul: Bîrzamanlar Yayıncılık, 2010, p. 235 and see also Yavuz, Mehmet and Tavukçu, Ali Yalçın, "Doğukapı-Akyaka-Kars-Sarıkamış-Erzurum Eski Demiryolu Hattı ve Mimari Yapılanması (Doğukapı-Akyaka-Kars-Sarıkamış-Erzurum Old Railway Line and Architectural Formation)" in *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 29 (1), 2012, p. 295). They had

already, in 1885, completed the line of Baku-Batumi (see King, Charles, *The Black Sea, A History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 196 and also King, Charles, *The Ghost of Freedom, A History of the Caucasus*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 123). Thus, when WWI broke out, the termini of the Russian Transcaucasian railroads on the Ottoman border were Batumi on the Black Sea coast, and, Sarıkamış, 60 km west of Kars. During WWI following the Russian capture of Erzurum, the Caucasian Viceroyalty built also a narrow gauge (750 mm) line first between Sarıkamış and Erzurum - 170 km - (see Kobro, Georg, *Das Gebiet von Kars und Ardahan Historisch-landeskundliche Studie zu einer Grenzregion in Ostanatolien, Transkaukasien* (The region of Kars and Ardahan: Historical and regional studies on a border region in Eastern Anatolia and Transcaucasus), Munich: Neimanis-Verlag, 1989), p. 153) and later between Erzurum and Karabıyıká - today in Aşkale district of Erzurum province and 46 km west of Erzurum - (Murat Küçüküğürlü and Gürkan Fırat Saylan, Şimendiferin Erzurum Yolculuğu (Journey of Railroads to Erzurum) in *Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 15 (38), 2008, p. 326).

40 An early Ottoman attempt to supply III Army in war materials and troops via the Istanbul-Trabzon maritime route was to meet a disaster on November 6-7, 1914. Three of the largest transport ships available to the Ottoman Navy were intercepted and sunk by the Russian Black Sea Fleet at large of Zonguldak with great loss of life and material for the Ottoman army (see Kır, Naci and Altınbilek, Hakkı (eds), *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi, 3. Ordu Harekâtı, I. Cilt* (Turkey's War in WWI, the Caucasian Front, Operations of III Army, Vol. I), Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993, p. 62 and also the memoirs of the Imperial Russian Navy Lieutenant commander - and later White Russian émigré and naval historian - Nestor Alexandrovich Monasterev (Monasterev, N[estor], *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Karadeniz Cephesi* (The Black Sea Front [Theater] in the First World War), (trans. by Naval Captain Afif Ertuğrul from the 1928 French-language edition entitled « *Dans la mer Noire (1912-1924)* »), Ankara: Deniz Basımevi, 1948, p. 16).

41 "Zonguldak coal basin-Bosporus" lane was actually a short sailing distance of only 120 nautical miles (see Monasterev, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Karadeniz Cephesi*, p. 15)

42 See the report of Hans von Seeckt to the German Imperial High Command (*Oberste Heeresleitung*) on "The Reasons of Turkey's Debacle" dated 4 November 1918 (cited in Kurat, Akdes Nimet, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında Türkiye'de Bulunan Alman Generallerinin Raporları* (Reports of German Generals Who Were in Turkey During WWI), Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1966, pp. 57-58), and also the report of Friedrich Bronsart von Schellendorf to the German Imperial High Command on "Turkish military operations" dated 15 December 1917 (cited in Kurat, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında Türkiye'de Bulunan Alman Generallerinin Raporları*, p. 34)

- 43 *Atakan et al. (eds.), Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, p. 89.
- 44 For the Russian naval raids and minelaying operations against the Ottoman ports and shipping lanes between the late 1914 and mid-1917 see Stébline-Kamensky, Ivan Egorovich, *1914-1918 Karadeniz'de Mayn Harbi* (The [Naval] Mine Warfare in the Black Sea, 1914-1918), (trans. from the French-language edition by Sermet Gökdeniz), Istanbul: Deniz Matbaası, 1938, pp. 5-29; Nekrasov, George, *North of Gallipoli: the Black Sea Fleet at war, 1914-1917*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, pp. 26-126 and Monastarev, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Karadeniz Cephesi*, pp. 16-33.
- 45 See Ahmed Emin (later Yalman), *Turkey in the World War*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1930, p. 90.
- 46 For the "post-Tsushima" reforms, restructuring and expansion of the Imperial Russian Navy see Nekrasov, *North of Gallipoli*, pp. 6-16.
- 47 The Black Sea was to witness during WWI several operations of naval aviation and of the first "aircraft carriers" in the form of "hydro-cruisers", "hydro-avia- transports" and "sea plane tenders" of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.
- 48 See Nekrasov, *North of Gallipoli*, p. 1.
- 49 See Çakmak, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Doğu Cephesi*, p. 256.
- 50 During his conferences given at the Turkish Military Academy in 1935, the Field Marshal Mustafa Fevzi Çakmak gave the number of Russian battleships armed with 305mm guns ("30 and 50 cm" in the text, apparently because of a typing mistake) as six (*Ibid.*, p. 5). This statement of the chief of the Turkish General Staff was not accurate, the naval guns of 305 mm were mounted only on four battleships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet before WWI and until the commissioning of the first *Imperatritsa Mariya*-class dreadnoughts in 1915.
- 51 See Graf, Harald, *La Marine russe dans la guerre et dans la révolution, 1914-1918* (The Russian Navy during the [First World] War and [the Russian] Revolution), (trans. from Russian-language edition by August Thomazi), Paris: Payot, 1928, pp. 413-414. For the composition of the Imperial Russian Navy Black Sea Fleet at the beginning of WWI see also *Handbuch der Kriegsflootten von Deutschland, Oesterreich-Ungarn, Italien, Türkei und England, Frankreich, Rußland, Japan*, pp. 40-41 and Çakmak, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Doğu Cephesi*, p. 5 and pp. 255-256.
- 52 See Stone, Norman, *The Eastern Front*, London: Penguin, 1998, p. 31.
- 53 Stébline-Kamensky, *1914-1918 Karadeniz'de Mayn Harbi*, p. 3.
- 54 The loss of the *Imperatritsa Mariya* was most probably due to negligence rather than sabotage as argues John N. Westwood in his article "The End of the *Imperatritsa Mariia*: Negligence or Sabotage?" (Westwood, John N., "The End of the *Imperatritsa Mariia*: Negligence or Sabotage?" in *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. 21, Issue 1, 1979, pp. 66-75).
- 55 Stébline-Kamensky, *1914-1918 Karadeniz'de Mayn Harbi*, p. 29.

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