

THREE UNRECORDED STRIKES ON MALTA MAIL

By Giovanni Bonello LL.D.

PASSED CENSOR (1921)

It was commonly believed that all censorship cachets used in World War One had been recorded.

A new strike has turned up, which may well tie up with a marginal event in Maltese history: prisoners of war who remained interned in Malta in the Cottonera area long after the end of hostilities. German, Turkish, Austrian, Bulgarian and Greek officers were quartered in Verdala; soldiers in St Clement's Retrenchment and sailors at Fort S. Salvatore. In charge of the prisoners, after January 1919, was the RMA, its regimental headquarters at Polverista Barracks (Fig.1a & b).

Conspicuous among the POWs were the Turks, separated by rank, but mostly by political allegiance. An officer of the old Turkish regime, who had previously killed four young Turks, was murdered at Verdala Barracks by Major Hag Ali Isa. The officer faced trial in the Criminal Court in Valletta, was found guilty and hanged.

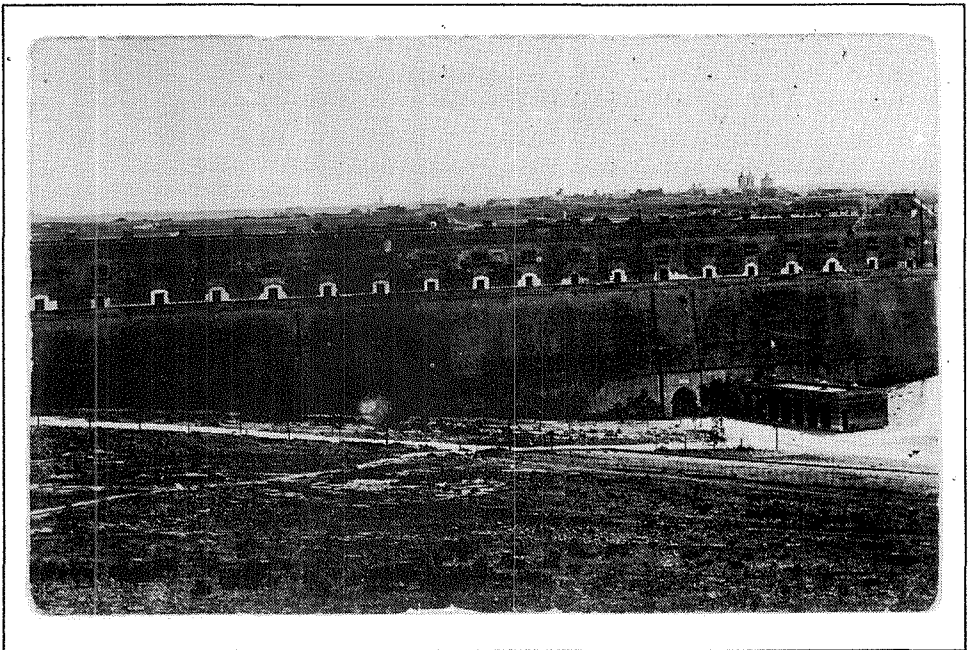


Figure 1a – Polverista Barracks, Cottonera, from a photograph taken early this century. Prisoners of War remained interned here up to 1921; their mail was subjected to censorship.

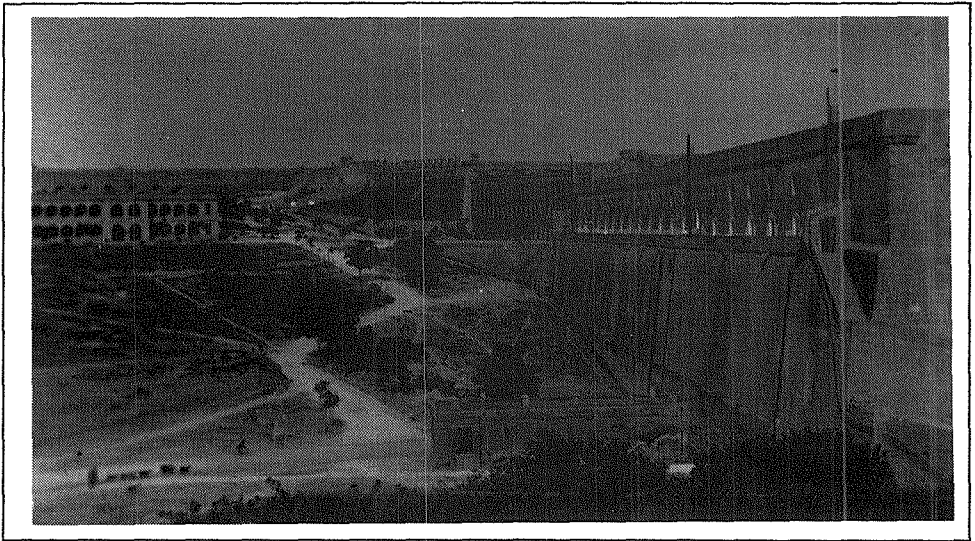
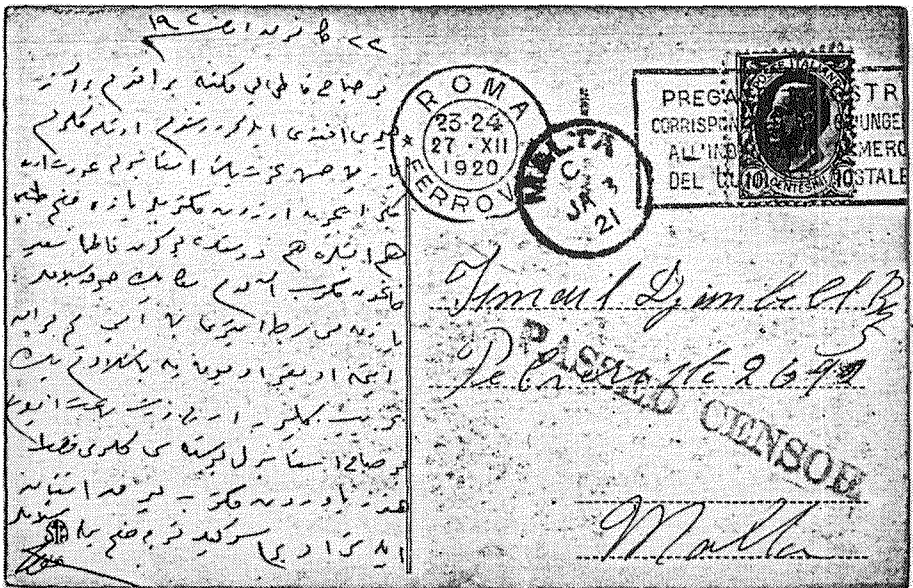


Figure 1b – Polverista Barracks

Among the Turkish prisoners was Zija Gokalp, who remained in Polverista up to April 1921. Zija Gokalp lived to be a leading figure in Turkey after his release. His letters from Polverista and Verdala have become a classic in his native land. A troupe from Turkish TV is, I believe, presently in Malta filming events surrounding Gokalp's internment in this Island.

Fig. 2 (below) shows a postcard mailed in Rome to one of the Turkish Prisoners



of War, Ismail Djimbelli Bey, detained in Polverista with POW number 2696. This straight line handstamp hitherto unrecorded, was applied by the censorship authorities in Malta. It measures 56 x 5 and is struck in violet. The message is in classical Turkish script, before the reform of the alphabet to latin characters.

My thanks go to Fr Tony Galea SJ, Chev. Joseph Sammut and Dr Albert Ganado, who assisted me in researching this strike.

Bibliography

- Laferla, *British Malta*, Vol II p.212, (1947)
Sammut Tagliaferro, *History of the Royal Malta Artillery*, p. 368
Zija Gokalp, *Limni ve Malta Mektuplari*, (1965)

BASTIMENTI/MERCANTILI/ - / ESTERO (1904)

On a type 3 one penny postal card dated 6 AU 04, a rectangular strike 25 x 15 in black (Fig.3).

This curious maritime handstamp has not hitherto been observed on Malta mail, nor is it recorded by *Del Bianco* as having ever been used in Messina either. A very small number are known struck in Livrono and Palermo, but some thirty years earlier!

It would be intriguing to be able to reconstruct the circumstances of this postal

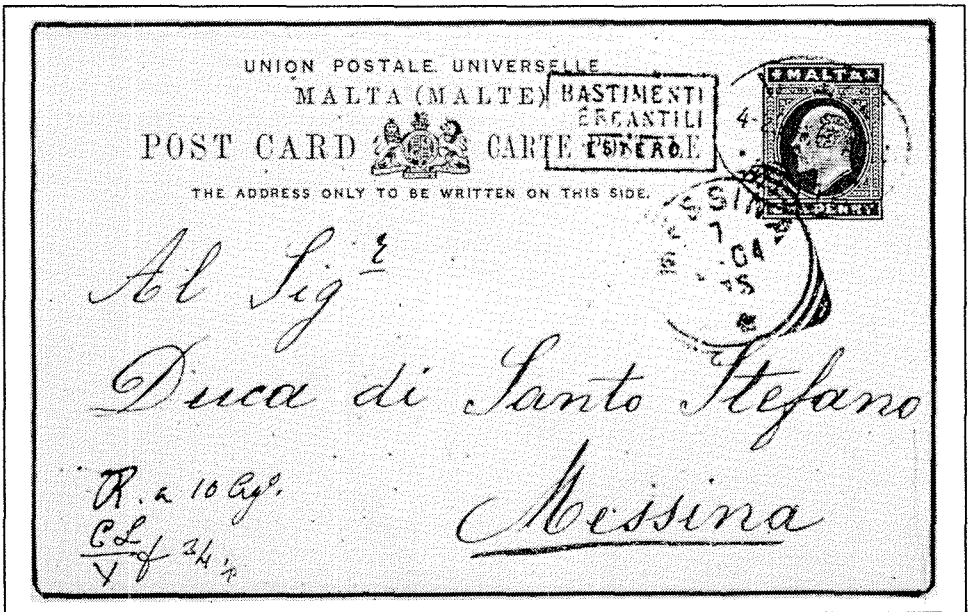


Figure 3

card in its progress from Malta to Messina. One wonders if it was transhipped at some intermediate port onto a merchant vessel where the strike was applied.

By it, Mr Vincenzo Vella, a local trader, informs the Duke of Santo Stefano in Messina, that he has forwarded by mail, as requested, a dozen stockings and another dozen cravats; he apologises that the hose available is of inferior quality.

I thank Mr Cecil Diamantino for the useful information about this strike which he made available to me.

Bibliography

Del Bianco, *Gli Annulli Marittimi Italiani*.

ACCOUNTANCY MARKING FR/2F 20C (1869)

I am reproducing an accountancy marking on mail to Malta remarkable for two reasons: it is unrecorded and is the latest known date of usage for this type of accountancy handstamps.

The six recorded "french" markings on Malta mail are: 1F 45c; 2F 15c; 2F 55c; 2F 96c; 3F 41c and 5F 41c, all used in 1857/1859.

The present accountancy marking is oval in shape, rated FR/2F 20c, size 15x22, and is found on an entire from Montevideo, Uruguay, addressed to Malta. This unfranked letter, dated December 30, 1868, is rated 1/1 in manuscript. Postmarked London Feb 3, 1870, it reached Malta on Feb 9, 1870 (Fig. 4 - below).

