

ÇANAKKALE 1915- THE BODY OF ICEBERG

Author: Mete Tuncoku

Published by: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2002; 180pp. plus photographs.

To most people, Çanakkale is a small provincial capital on the Dardanelles that vividly evokes memories of the Gallipoli battles in the First World War. However, it is no exaggeration to say that Çanakkale –both past and present- is a central theme of the life and work of Mete Tuncoku, who is a Professor in Department of International Relations at Middle East Technical University ; Ankara. Mete Tuncoku brings a surprisingly rich and refreshing background to his interest in Çanakkale. His postgraduate education took him for many years to Japan; he is an accomplished scholar of the Japanese Studies and the Japanese Language education and holds degrees from the University of Kyoto. In 1990, Mete Tuncoku organized an International Symposium for the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Çanakkale Battles, which brought together authorities from many different countries. He is also the author of a very important book on Çanakkale which presents a portrait of the typical Turkish soldier, through the writings of the Anzacs as well as an evaluation by questionnaire of the battles of Gallipoli by the Anzac veterans, who were still alive in 1991. When writing about Çanakkale, Mete Tuncoku is able to draw upon the historical traditions and resources of Turkish, English and Japanese.

Çanakkale 1915 – The Body of Iceberg is Tuncoku's latest book on Çanakkale. Produced in a Turkish edition with an extended summary in English, it is a series of short essays dealing with hitherto less treated aspects of the battles of Çanakkale. Even for someone who may claim familiarity with the history of Çanakkale, there is an impressive amount of new and interesting material hidden in Tuncoku's thought provoking essays.

Çanakkale in the straits of the Dardanelles is the area where the naval and land battles of Gallipoli took place. The aim of the Gallipoli expedition was to bring about the capitulation and fall of Istanbul by using the British and French fleet to choke the sea route to the Ottoman capital. On 18 March 1915, after a month of intensive bombardment, the great fleet consisting of battleships, cruisers, dreadnoughts and destroyers tried to force its passage through the Dardanelles.

However, apart from the damage wrought by the counter fire of Turkish defences, several large warships sank in the straits after being severely damaged by the explosion of 26 mines which the Turkish mine-laying vessel *Nusret* had laid under cover of fog hours before the attack. The second phase comprised a land operation to land troops at the tip of the Gallipoli peninsula in order to secure the high ground and destroy the Turkish defences. The British and French assembled a

large army of several hundred thousand soldiers from Australia and New Zealand, known as the Anzacs. The land operation, under the command of General Sir Ian Hamilton, was confidently expected to be a short and swift affair. In the event, over a period of 8 months till January 1916, the Allied troops could not establish themselves and were repeatedly driven back with thousand of casualties on both sides. A hero of the Gallipoli land battles was Mustafa Kemal, who was later to lead the Turkish armies to even greater victories on the battlefield. It may be stated with confidence that the Allied defeat at Çanakkale in the Dardanelles prolonged the First World War, as a result of which the downfall of the Tsarist regime in Russia was hastened.

The battles at Gallipoli marked the triumph of a European but non-Christian powerlike the Ottomans over the imperialistic might of colonial powers such as England and French. They therefore invite comparisons with the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, when an Asian country after being closed to the world for centuries took enormous strides in a matter of 40 years and annihilated the Russian fleet in the straits of Tsushima. Tuncoku interprets these parallels with knowledge and understanding.

Tuncoku focuses on many different aspects of Gallipoli Battles and their fall-out over the next half century. His essays treat such topics as the Indian troops fighting at Gallipoli, the Jewish soldiers on both sides of the war and the Russian attempt to join thenaval onslaught at Çanakkale with a cruiser of their own so as to obtain an eventual part in the distribution on the spoils of the war. Two essays by Tuncoku bring out the leading role played at Çanakkale by Mustafa Kemal, and present his later assessment of the battles. Other essays deal with little discussed topics as the Çanakkale battles and Greece, or the part played by Turkish women snipers on the battlefield.

This book is a treasure throve of little known aspects of the Çanakkale story. It indicates that much research work still needs to be conducted in the Çanakkale battles and their historical effects. Well indexed and referenced, the book may be read with great plasure even by non-specialist readers.

Syed Tanwir Wasti

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The Turkish Yearbook of Gallipoli Studies is published yearly. The subscription price for 2003 is 10 US \$

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