

OCCUPIED CITY – EDİRNE

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Edirne, capital of Thrace, was one of the most important cities in Türkiye-in-Europe located northwestern part of the country having borders with Bulgaria and Greece with a population of 180,000 nowadays.

In the ancient times, the Thracian settlement known as Uscudama or Odrysa was named Orestias by the Greeks until the town came under the Roman rule in 124 AD. The Roman emperor Hadrian expanded the town into a city, gave it a strong fortification and renamed it to Hadrianopolis. Owing to its strategic importance, the city had been the site of many memorable battles and often changed hands in the last 2500 years and finally came under Ottoman rule in 1360s when Ottoman sultan Murad I invaded Thrace transforming Adrianople into the Ottoman capital of Edirne until the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Edirne had then become a bulwark protecting the approaches to Constantinople. During the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 18th and early 19th century, Edirne experienced sieges and occupations by Russian, Bulgarian and Greek forces until the Ottoman Empire became the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

In the 18th century, foreign countries maintained courier services through their official missions in the Ottoman Empire transporting mail between those countries and Constantinople. The couriers carrying the mail from foreign embassies in Constantinople to the borders of their respective countries, had to cross Thrace and Adrianople was an important relay-station on this route. Some of these services developed into public mail services, used to transmit mail to Europe. The Ottoman Empire itself did not maintain a regular mail service until 1840, when a service was established between Constantinople and other major cities in the country. Adrianople/Edirne holds a significant place in the postal history of Türkiye being the first post office to operate postal service with Constantinople/İstanbul.

1. OTTOMAN POST OFFICE

In the prephilatelic period, Edirne post office used Arabic "An canib-i posta-i Edirne" circular negative seals from 1840 until 1863 when the Ottoman Empire issued its first adhesive postage stamps (Fig.1). As from 1863, the post office first used a rectangle of dots with Arabic "Edirne" in the centre, then several types of circular postmarks with same inscription and later many types of bilingual circular and octogonal postmarks.



Fig.1 1855 prephilatelic entire letter sent to Istanbul showing all Arabic "**AN CANIB-I POSTA-I EDİRNE 1278**" negative seal. Since the distance between Edirne and Istanbul was 44 postal route hours and the weight of the letter was 3 dirhems (9.9 grams), it was shown on the letter by hand writing that the postal fee of 40 paras = 1 piastre had been paid.

2. LEVANT POST OFFICE

Starting from the first half of the 18th century, nine countries had negotiated capitulations or treaties with the Ottomans, which granted various extraterritorial rights in exchange for trade opportunities. Such agreements permitted Austria, France, Russia, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Greece, Poland and Romania to maintain consulate courier services and then post offices in the Ottoman Empire. It is probable that the Austrian Consulate in Edirne began to give mail to these couriers well before the creation of an official Consular post office in 1856. Owing to the absence of any foreign competition, the Austrian post office of Edirne held a practical monopoly of all mail going, not only abroad, but also to the other towns of the Ottoman Empire where the Austrian post offices were in operation (Fig.2).



Fig.2 1868 entire letter sent from Edirne to Lyon, France bearing pair of 15 soldi and 10 soldi Lombardy and Venetia stamps tied by "ADRIANOPEL" postmarks.

Together with four other secondary Lloyd-operated agencies in small ports, the Austrian post office of Edirne was closed on 30 April, 1909, as a gesture of goodwill to the Ottoman Government. World War I forced the closure of all the Levant post offices on 13 October, 1914. After the war, only the Allied Forces post office in Istanbul reopened, operating from August 1921 to July 1923. Although there was not a French post office operating in Edirne, the mail from Edirne to France transported via the French post office of Istanbul (Fig.3).



Fig.3 1861 entire letter sent from Edirne via the French post office of Istanbul to France by traveling onboard of French mail vessel "TAMISE" bearing unperforated 40+10 = total of 50 centimes stamps tied by dotted anchor postmarks.

3. BULGARIAN POST OFFICE

During the First Balkan War, Edirne was briefly occupied by the Bulgarian 2nd Army following the siege of the city for more than five months. The occupation began on 26 March 1913 (Julian calender=13 March 1913) and ended on 21 July 1913 during the Second Balkan War. The occupants took over the Ottoman post office and operated it as Bulgarian post office. This used ordinary stamps of Bulgaria, cancelling them at first with the existing Ottoman bilingual (Arabic/French) "ANDRINOPLE" circular date postmarks, then as from May with bilingual (Bulgarian cyrillic/French) "ODRIN" single-circle date postmarks (Fig.4).



Fig.4 Picture postcard bearing 5 st. stamp tied by bilingual **"ANDRINOPE"** postmark and alongside showing bilingual **"BALIKPAZARI"** postmark with dates March 13th, 1913 - the first day of the Bulgarian occupation. The card then used in mail from Edirne to Sliven showing bilingual **"ODRIN"** postmark dated April 22nd, 1913.

4. INTERALLIED ADMINISTRATION OF THRACE POST OFFICE

After the Second Balkan War, Bulgaria was forced to agree to a truce losing the territories in Macedonia and Dobruja Province, but awarded much of the territory in Western Thrace. At the end of World War 1 in 1918, being defeated by Entente forces, Bulgaria retreated from the area in Western Thrace, while "inter-allied" forces assumed control. General Charpy of France was appointed the Governor of Western Thrace on 22 October, 1919 until Greece annexed the Thrace region on 20 May, 1920 as per San Remo conference which gathered the leaders of the main allies (except the U.S.) of the Entente powers. During this period, the post offices in this area including Edirne post office used "Thrace Interalliee" overprinted ordinary stamps of Bulgaria, cancelling them with bilingual (Bulgarian Cyrillic/French) single-circle date postmark (Fig.5).



Fig.5 1920 registered cover sent from the Interallied Administration of Thrace post office in Edirne to Gumulcine bearing total of 75 st. stamps tied by bilingual **"ODRIN"** postmarks.

5. GREEK POST OFFICE

In the aftermath of World War 1, Edirne was ceded to Greece by the treaty of Sevres and occupied by the Greek army for more than two years from 25 July, 1920 to 25 November 1922. During the Greek occupation, Greek post Office of Edirne used at first overprinted Ottoman stamps, later the "Dioikisis Thrakis" overprints on stamps of Greece, cancelling them with Ottoman bilingual "ANDRINOPLE" circular date postmarks, later with Greek double circle types (Fig.6 & Fig.7).



Fig.6 1920 cover sent from the Greek Ministry of Defence in Athens to a person in Edirne during the Greek occupation. This rare cover had been censored by the French occupation Forces and then taxed by pair of 20 lepta = total 40 lepta "Dioikisis Dutikis Trakis = Administration of Western Thrace" overprinted Greek stamps at the Greek post office in Edirne before being handed over to the receiver. (The postal fee was paid on arrival because the cover had been sent from a government office to a private person).



Fig.7 1920 cover sent from Edirne to Istanbul during the Greek occupation bearing 25 lepta "Ipati Armostia Trakis" overprinted Ottoman stamp tied by bilingual "ANDRINOPLE 4" Ottoman postmark.

6. LIBERATION OF EDİRNE

The Greek occupation of Edirne was ended on 25 November 1922 when the Turkish Nationalist Movement troops entered the city as per the Armistice of Mudanya after the Greek defeat at the end of the Greco-Turkish War, also known as the Western Front of the larger Turkish War of Independence in 1922 (Fig.8).



Fig.8 26 Tesrin-i sani 1338 = November 26th, 1922 picture postcard commemorating the day Edirne was liberated by the Turkish National Movement Forces. The French and Greek stamps were cancelled by their post offices in the last day of operation and the Turkish stamp was cancelled by special **"EDİRNE HATIRA-İ HALAS"** negative seal commemorating the Liberation Day.

On 24 July, 1923, the Edirne suburb of Karaağaç/Orestias which was situated on the right bank of the river Meriç/Evros/Maritza, was released to Turkey as part of the war reparations in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne which was signed on 23 April, 1923 and became the frontier line to Greece and last railway stop to Europe (Fig.9).



Fig.9 1923 cover sent from French Military post office of Karaağaç to Istanbul bearing pairs of 15+10 centimes stamps tied by **"TRESOR ET POSTES 530-A"** postmarks dated 21.4.1922. One of few recorded covers.

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