

Gallipoli before and beyond Anzac

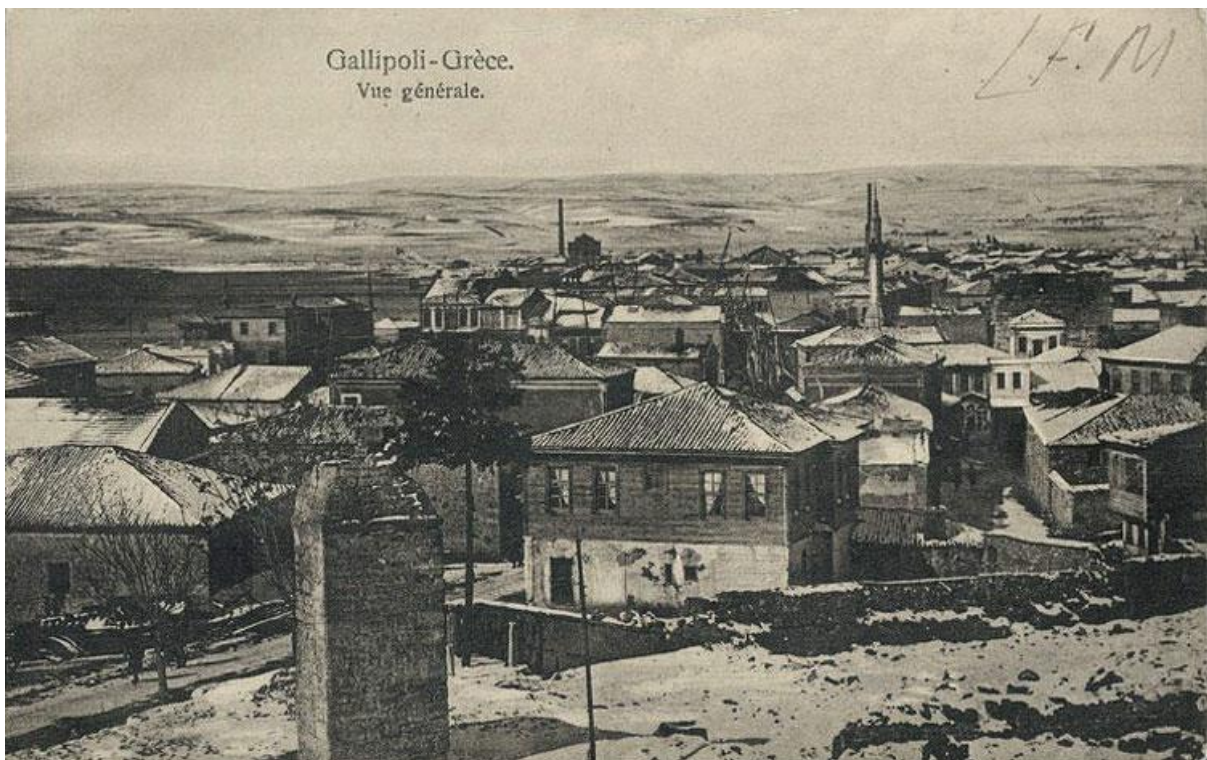
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Part I

There has been a major shift in the Australian-Turkish relationship in the last few months, though few have detected it. Like pebbles dropped into pools, the ripples of the [twin resolutions](#) of the Parliament of New South Wales reaffirming and recognising the genocides of the Hellenes, Armenians and Assyrians are steadily spreading.

The 'misplaced relationship' (as Peter Stanley labelled it in his [recent article for Eureka Street](#)) is being impacted on many levels by the resolutions of 1 and 8 May. The immature response of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has unmasked the feeble base of the supposed 'friendship' built around Anzac Cove.



General view of Gallipoli – Greece (Postcard from the period of French occupation, 1919-22)

As featured on [ABC 7.30](#), Turkish officials have threatened to deny visas to New South Wales MPs who supported recognition of the genocides. In the words of Consul-General, [Ms Gulseren Celik](#):

We expect Australians to show the same kind of respect that we have shown to their history and their ancestry... Those individuals who show no respect to our history will not be welcome in Turkey.

In a statement issued on 7 May, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ankara [declared](#), 'We strongly condemn and reject this motion which is in no way compatible with historic facts'. The statement labels the motions 'unacceptable claims directed towards Turkey and the Turkish identity', calling on Australian parliamentarians 'that they take timely action against initiatives carrying anti-Turkish content and hate-speech'.

NSW Premier, Barry O'Farrell, [denounced](#) the attempted interference in domestic affairs as 'a terrible indictment ... of the freedoms fought for' in 1915. Christian Democratic Party leader, the Rev. Fred Nile, who proposed the parliamentary motion, [described](#) the Consul-General's comments as 'disgraceful'. 'It's very disappointing that they would then try to ban any members of parliament who voted for the motion from attending any celebration at Gallipoli.'

There is more at stake here than bruised egos and the industry built around Anzac Cove. The response of the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry is illustrative of essential paradoxes that faces the Turkish state:

- (i) How does Turkish society face the fact of the genocides of the indigenous Hellenes, Armenians and Assyrians between 1914 and 1924?
- (ii) Why does discussion of the genocides constitute 'hate speech' in Australia but freedom of speech in Turkey?



A large steam-powered flour mill owned by a local Hellene, Gallipoli. The factory building and chimney survived the war and are visible in 1920s photos. Since demolished.

It is the ossified approach of the Turkish diplomatic corps to these questions that has been exposed by recent events. The Australian evidence, highlighted by state and federal parliamentary resolutions and speeches, the 7.30 report, and other media reports, has long been available. It was not until the 1990s, however, that scholars began returning this material to its former place in Australian historiography.

Australian servicemen (both as prisoners of war and as combatants) encountered the genocides of the indigenous Hellenes, Armenians and Assyrians and their aftermath during the Great War. Some witnessed deportations and the aftermath of massacres. Others rescued survivors, offering protection from those who rape and kill.

Australian civilians contributed vast amounts of money and time to the international relief effort mounted from 1915 and for years afterwards. Schoolchildren, local women's groups and organisations great and small became involved to help those stripped of everything because of who they were.

During World War I and for years afterwards the genocides were seen as part of the story of World War I, part of the Australian story. Under the heading, 'Piteous condition of Greeks', Melbourne's *Argus* [reported](#) on 28 June 1915, 'The Greek population from Maidos and Krithia on the Gallipoli Peninsula have been transported to Panderma in a deplorable condition.'

In his diary, Captain Stanley Savige, a member of the Dunsterforce operating in Iran and Mesopotamia, recorded: 'Large bodies of Turkish troops and Kurdish irregulars were raiding the column, murdering the people and carrying off girls to their harems, together with whatever loot they could lay their hands on'. H.S. Gullett's [Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918](#), Volume VII, includes this telling phrase: 'the attempts by some Turkish leaders to exterminate this people'.

When the 'Diggers' were creating the network of trenches along the Gallipoli Peninsula, they brought to light pottery, tombstones, inscriptions and more, evidence of the Hellenic presence there more than seventeen centuries before the first Turkic warrior landed there in 1354.

Doing battle beside the Hellespont these men lost their shining youth. They brought honour to their homeland, so that the enemy groaned as it carried off the harvest of war, and for themselves they set up a deathless memorial of their courage.

These words form part of a monument erected at the Hellespont (Dardanelles, Gallipoli Peninsula) in 440BCE for the Hellenes who fell there during an Athenian expedition to secure control of the vital waterway from a rival *polis*.

Housed in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, the dedication was noticed in 1932 by Australian poet Christopher Brennan. He had studied ancient Hellenic at Sydney's Jesuit schools, St Aloysius, Milson's Point, and St Ignatius, Riverview, and brought the inscription to the attention of his friend, solicitor Robert Innes Kay. He in turn informed Australian official historian, CEW Bean. All three of them were struck by how aptly the inscription related to the Australian experience at Gallipoli in 1915 – 2355 years after the battle for which it was written. John Treloar, Director of the Australian War Memorial, arranged for a plaster cast of the inscription, which today is part of the displays in the Hall of Valour.



'Evacuation of Gallipoli 18.11.1922' by its indigenous Hellenic inhabitants

While diplomats and ministers may argue about these events, the consensus amongst genocide scholars is clear. As evidenced by the recent work of Peter Stanley, John Williams and other scholars, the genocides are as much part of Australian history as the landings at Anzac Cove.

Part II

The first part of this series on Gallipoli before and after Anzac provided a broad overview of the issues as they have developed. The focus of Part II is how educators may develop an understanding amongst their students of the relationship between the Anzacs and the indigenous Christian peoples of Gallipoli and the rest of the Ottoman Empire.

Studies by scholars such as Peter Stanley, John Williams, Vicken Babkenian and others are demonstrating that the genocides of the Hellenes, Armenians and Assyrians are as much

part of Australian history as the landings at Anzac Cove. The challenge now is for educators – of all levels and across subject areas – to integrate this into teaching programs.

From 2014, all Year 9 students across the country will have to undertake study of Australia's involvement in World War I. This study includes an overview of the causes of the wars, why men enlisted and where Australians fought. In '[The ethnic cleansing of the Greeks of Gallipoli](#)', John Williams documents how the Ottoman Turkish state systematically destroyed the indigenous Hellenic population of the Gallipoli Peninsula. Williams summarises the study in the following words.

Once the peninsula ceased to be a war zone, Turks could return. But not Greeks. Some reached Greece but most died; either way, a thriving Greek community of 32,000, dating back 2000 years, had its population obliterated and was expunged from history.

Waiting on Lemnos, a young Colonel John Monash [stated](#) that the liberation of first Gallipoli, then Constantinople, would be a victory 'which will stir the whole world'. The young Anzacs assembled on the Hellenic island of Lemnos believed they were on a mission to liberate the great city of Constantine, in service of freedom and democracy.

Seven years later, at the height of the global campaign to rescue survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides who had managed to reach Hellas, Loyal Lincoln Wirt, International Commissioner for the New York-based Near East Relief organisation, recorded the following:

Four thousand bags of Australian flour passed tragic Gallipoli, where many brave Anzacs from Australia and New Zealand had laid down their young lives, face to the foe. And now the unhappy victims of this same foe were to be fed with bread from their homeland, as if to complete the work for which they died. Anzac bread!¹

The link between Anzacs and Hellenes was clear from the outset. Educators have the duty to promote these links, across curriculum areas and across years. In the history classroom, the syllabus dictates the teaching of Anzac.

In the Modern Greek classroom, the syllabus incorporates aspects of Australian Hellenic heritage including 'the importance of symbols to create a sense of identity', 'changes that occur in language and customs through cross-cultural contact', 'the importance of tradition to a sense of cultural identity', and 'identifying and reflecting on representations of culture'. Australian heritage in the Hellenic world provides opportunities for cross-curricular teaching and learning. It makes learning about Hellenic language and culture relevant to other subjects considered to be 'core', especially English and History.



Recruitment poster by an unknown artist, printed in Brisbane in 1915 for the Queensland Recruiting Committee

Thousands of Anzac servicemen passed through Athens, Lemnos, Thessaloniki and elsewhere, documenting in word and image what they saw and experienced. Women such as [Stella Miles Franklin](#) and [Jessie McHardy-White](#) were nurses in Macedonia during World War I. Others served on Lemnos, nursing back to health the sick and wounded from Anzac Cove.

Primary school students could respond in Hellenic to simple questions derived from photographs Anzacs took during their time in places such as Lemnos, Krete or Macedonia. Year 9 students could develop an Anzac Day tribute in Hellenic. The senior syllabus includes themes on 'the individual' as well as 'the Greek-speaking communities – special traditions (festivals, celebrations and national days)'. Both of these are designed for the exploration of the Australian-Hellenic symbiosis by Australian-born Hellene students.

This rich collection of written documents, photographs and film is being developed for use in Australian classrooms to teach Anzac across the curriculum. The Genocide Education website (www.armeniangenocide.com.au) is where educators may find a range of activities for Australian secondary students on the genocides of the Armenians, Assyrians and Hellenes: download, print and deliver to your students.

Hellenic studies (language, culture, history) must adapt to this reality. Hellenic Studies constitute ONE continuum of teaching and learning across primary, secondary and tertiary education. If we are to maintain Hellenic studies at all levels of education in the Antipodes, we MUST make these studies RELEVANT to our students. We must draw upon their experiences to ensure we are able to pursue our own research interests.



*Macedonia, April 1941. Three Diggers ride donkeys along mountain roads near Florina
(Source: Australian War Memorial AWM 006714; photo: George Silk)*

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¹ Loyal Lincoln Wirt, *The World is My Parish*, Los Angeles: Warren F. Lewis 1951, p. 219.