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The study of the First World War has traditionally focused on the grand strategies of leaders and generals while little attention was given to the simple soldier. In this study, Glenda Abramson uncovers two war diaries by Sephardic Jewish soldiers who served in the Ottoman army during the war, thus providing invaluable insights into the thoughts and experiences of those who paid the price. The two diaries, introduced by the author with skill and sensitivity, provide a unique opportunity for historians and history buffs to learn about the unknown experience of the Sephardic Jewish community in Palestine in those years and the routines and hardships of life in the Ottoman army during the Great War.

Michael Keren, Professor and Canada Research Chair, Department of Political Science and Department of Communication & Culture, The University of Calgary

Two Palestinian Jewish Soldiers in the Ottoman Army during the First World War

Michael Keren

The war diaries of Yehuda Amon and Haim Nahmias throw new light on the history of the Ottoman Empire and of Ottoman and Palestinian Jewry during the First World War. Glenda Abramson’s stirring translation and thorough introductions and annotations make these diaries a perfect teaching tool as well as an absorbing read.

Derek J. Penslar FRSC, Stanley Lewis Professor of Israel Studies, University of Oxford; Fellow, St Anne’s College

The book provides an insight into the Ottoman army in the Middle East as seen through the two diaries, and it also relies to unpublished letters of Yehuda Buell, another Palestinian Jewish conscript who later became a well known Hebrew author.
SOLDIERS’ TALES
Soldiers’ Tales

Two Palestinian Jewish Soldiers in the Ottoman Army during the First World War

GLENDA ABRAMSON

VALLENTINE MITCHELL
LONDON • PORTLAND, OR
To Joel, Theo and Lior
May you never have to tell soldiers’ tales
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1. Turkish troops, led by a military brass band, march through Constantinople. Civilians can be seen on the streets. Image No.Q45359, reproduced here by courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.
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Having been raised in the home of a Second World War hero and diarist, I am naturally inclined to view war diaries as essential documents revealing not only the historical moment of military conflict but also the personality of the writers and their response to that moment. War diarists are not always heroes, but men and women who have lived through something so extraordinary that it has to be set down for memory. Many diarists are not sophisticated writers, and diaries are often disappointing in their lack of accounts of great and terrible events, but rather record the often uneventful daily life in trenches, hospitals, on bases or even on battlefields. Since my war hero was Jewish I am interested in seeking out the experience of other Jewish soldiers, in this case, those who served in the First World War, in one corner of the army of the Ottoman Empire.

Almost a million and a quarter Jewish soldiers took part in the Great War, spread through the armies on both sides of the conflict. Numbers of Jewish soldiers were more or less in proportion to the Jewish populations in the countries involved, and sometimes even greater. Throughout Eastern and Western Europe the patriotism and national loyalty of the Jewish servicemen attracted general notice. In addition to the German Jews’ professed devotion to their German homeland, they also considered their volunteering in the army to be a first step toward the entrenching of civil rights for the Jewish communities. This was the case in Russia as well. In Palestine Zionist leaders saw service in the Ottoman army as a means of securing the approval of the Ottoman hierarchy and a future for the Jewish settlement, the yishuv.

Not much has been written in any form about the overall experience of Jewish combatants in the First World War. Yet there does exist a modest body of life writing, mainly in German, English, Yiddish, and some in
Hebrew, about which not much is known to this day. Service in the Jewish Legions of the British Army and in the Zion Mule Corps has been more widely researched. This book deals with the war diaries of two Jerusalem Jews, Yehuda Amon and Haim Nahmias, who were conscripted into the Ottoman forces and saw their service in Palestine and Western Anatolia in Amon’s case, and in Anatolia alone, in Nahmias’s. Both diaries are translated into English from Hebrew here for the first time.

Diaries fall into the general, and rather amorphous, definition of ‘life writing’ that includes autobiography, memoirs, letters, diaries, journals, oral testimony and eye-witness accounts. The general assumption is that life writing has a greater claim to truth than fiction does; this kind of writing is therefore understood as primarily ‘non-fictional’, but the boundaries between literary or documentary fiction and life writing are too porous for a robust definition. As it happens, all genres of life writing are becoming canonical and gaining status beside other forms of literary expression. It seems that both Amon’s and Nahmias’s war diaries allow some latitude to literary expression and the ordering of language while still being committed to the truth of experience. Also, they show that diaries written by ‘ordinary’ men without literary artifice are no less valuable in the measuring of this experience.

Since both Amon and Nahmias left from, and returned to, Jerusalem I have chosen to take Palestine – their home and base – the yishuv and Jewish society, as my paradigm for the swathe of misery that cut across the Middle East during the war. The entire region was similarly afflicted by the hardship suffered in Palestine. The central military and civilian catastrophes of deprivation, starvation and disease were no respecters of location, origin, religion or race. As Hikmet Özdemir comments, ‘The egregious disasters did not affect narrow and narrowly defined “national” communities. Rather, the devastation of World War I…affected every nation that was involved in the conflict.’ However, it must be stated that the sources for my introductory survey of Palestine during the war years are predominantly, although not exclusively, Jewish and, when they are in Hebrew, notably Zionist. There is, therefore, often a veiled political gloss on the situation, which is manifested even in relation to the locust plague of 1915, a natural phenomenon that ideologues enlisted into the nationalist cause. Of course this applies equally to all sources: for example, the diary discussed by Salim Tamari of a young Turkish soldier in Jerusalem
presents a somewhat different picture, with its own political and social underpinnings, including views on Zionism. Such is the case as well with a more noted diarist of the time and place, Khalil al-Sakakini, a Christian Arab nationalist who had a profound dislike of Zionism. Fortunately or unfortunately neither Amon nor Nahmias expressed ideological opinions but presented their world in microcosm, offering personal and private realities rather than socio-political ideas or judgments. Their writing was, quite simply, their own truth as they experienced it as ordinary men made extraordinary by being forced, without preparation, into the maelstrom of the war.
Many people assisted me in the preparation of this project. First of all I would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust for awarding me an Emeritus Fellowship, which allowed me to spend time searching archives in Israel and New York, and for the courtesy and kindness shown to me by the Trust’s Jean Cater and Anna Grundy. In some kind of serendipitous event, the Yad Ben-Zvi Archive and Library in Jerusalem had obtained the Amon manuscript a few days before I visited it in search of material about Jewish soldiers in the Ottoman army. My immense gratitude to all at Yad Ben-Zvi for their help, suggestions and endless patience, for allowing me first to work from the original manuscript, then making a CD of it, and for the time spent with me and information generously given.

Nissim Amon, Yehuda Amon’s grandson, took time to meet me in Tel Aviv and provided wonderful conversation about his family, and supplied the photographs of Yehuda Amon and the Amon family. Professor Shlomo Nahmias, Haim Nahmias’s son, sent me many enlightening e-mails and marvellous DVDs of the celebration of the discovery of his father’s diary. He also provided his memoir of his father, which is published in this book. These descendents of the two diarists freely gave their time and patience to a very importunate but appreciative researcher. Moshe Amon, too, supplied essential information about the Amon family. Dr Avner Peretz, who translated the Nahmias diary from Ladino into Hebrew, made a number of crucial suggestions relating to the diary, and assisted me with impenetrable phrases in the translation.

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Dr Richard Repp undertook the difficult task of translating a blurred copy of an army registration and service record written in Ottoman Turkish. Yossi Charny obtained a copy of the Burla letters for me, and Dr Aharon Azati, Director of the Yad Tabenkin Archive, allowed me to use them. Dorit Perry undertook to search for documents in libraries and archives when I was away from Israel. To my Oxford colleagues, Dr Eugene Rogan and Dr Alison Salvesen, thanks for their suggestions and help. Heather Marchant, of Vallentine Mitchell, spent weeks nursing me through this project with uncomplaining and enviable patience and forbearance.

To all these, my eternal gratitude. And once again, to my longsuffering husband, David, who has had to endure more than enough soldiers’ tales.

Glenda Abramson

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Map of Turkey.

Courtesy of Jean-Patrick Charrey.
When Herman Melville arrived in Jerusalem in the winter of 1857 he was startled and dismayed by the contrast between his expectations of Jerusalem and the Holy Land and their reality. He wrote in his journal that no country would more quickly dissipate romantic expectations than Palestine, and he singled out Jerusalem in particular. ‘To some’, he concluded, referring, in the main, to himself, ‘the disappointment is heart-sickening.’1 Simon Dubnow wrote similarly about Jerusalem, a city in a desolate, primitive country inhabited largely by Jewish pilgrims who had come to the Holy Land to spend their final years in the study of the Torah, and who constituted the so-called ‘Old Yishuv’:

They subsisted on charity received from all over the world. These unique Pharisees constituted a hindrance to every living social and cultural enterprise; the guardians of holy grave, heroes of the hereafter, they could not comprehend those who had come to Palestine not to die but to live and cultivate a new life; not to weep at the ruins of the Wailing Wall but rather to build a new Jerusalem.3

Similar reports by visitors to Jerusalem in the nineteenth century confirm this view in even more stringent terms. These included Israel Joseph Benjamin (1818–64), the self-styled Benjamin the Second, who corroborated the view of the Jews’ ‘degradation’ and want of self-reliance. The picture provided by two Scottish missionaries in 1839 further reinforces Dubnow’s observations. They write of poverty, communal disunity, the oppression by their rabbis and the ravages of disease. Even Norman
Bentwich, a staunch Zionist, unfavourably compared Jerusalem’s Jewish Quarter with the Muslim and Christian sites.\(^4\) The great majority of the Jews at this time, believed to be as many as 85 per cent, including Ashkenazim, lived off \textit{halukkah}, a form of charity that depended on rabbinical emissaries to collect funds. Despite the amount of money collected from foreign Jews for their brethren in the Holy Land, the sums were not sufficient, particularly as the Ottoman authorities appropriated a portion of them.

Undoubtedly the distinguished visitors and the historians of Protestant and Zionist hues were correct: pious, unpractical Jews in Jerusalem subsisted on charity and spent their time in religious study. Many of them lived in poverty and in conditions of relative squalor. However, as Rochelle Davis observes, British administrators and European Christian travellers to the Holy Land not only brought their own values and standards of upper-middle-class European life to their perceptions of Palestine and its people, including its Jews, but also, like Melville, their religious programmes. Moreover, ‘[e]qually part of this narrative are the works of many Zionist scholars, both past and present, who have often chosen to focus on the “backwardness” of Jerusalem, with a specific agenda to emphasize not the unique nature of the city and its development, but what Zionist enterprise brought to the city.’\(^5\) To an extent their aim was to devalue the ‘Old \textit{Yishuv}’ to demonstrate the salvatory effect of Jewish nationalism.

The arrival of Russian Jews in the 1840s, refugees from pogroms, had led to a major demographic change. The newcomers were Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim, different from the Sephardim in their dress, language and ritual. Predominantly elderly religious people, these immigrants did occupy themselves, as Dubnow and others observed, in study and piety and lived on \textit{halukkah}. There was further demographic change in the 1870s due to large waves of immigration that included Jews from Eastern and Central Europe, and Sephardi groups from Central Asia, Bulgaria, Turkey and North Africa, the latter being Arabic-speaking. Nevertheless, during this decade the Ashkenazim outnumbered the other Jewish communities. Between 1840 and 1881 the number of Jews in Palestine rose from about 17,000 in 1840 to approximately 85,000 in 1914. The great majority were concentrated in Jerusalem; according to one estimate – and there are many – there were some 17,000 Jews in Jerusalem in 1870s, the majority of the city’s population. By the end of the war there were between 20,000 and 29,000 Jews in Jerusalem. Most of the Ashkenazim were foreign nationals under
the protection and jurisdiction of their consuls according to the Ottoman ‘capitulation’ agreements that accorded the consuls judicial authority over their national subjects, releasing them from the demands of Ottoman legislation.6

The majority of the members of the Ladino-speaking Sephardi community, to which Haim Nahmias belonged, originated in the western provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Many generations of Yehuda Amon’s family had been prominent in Turkey itself. Most of these Jerusalem Sephardim were not dependent on halukkah but engaged in various trades; they were artisans or involved in more menial activities that allowed them to earn a meagre living. Arthur Ruppin, a leading sociologist and Zionist leader, comments, after a visit to Palestine in 1907: ‘The condition of these communities may be illustrated by the following incident. In Safed I visited a Jew who told me that his income amounted to eighty francs a month, and that he was therefore considered very well to do, and was much envied. The average monthly income of a Sephardic Jew is somewhere between thirty and forty francs.’7

Indeed, few of them were wealthy although there were ‘aristocratic’ Sephardim who claimed a class status based on descent. Generally the Sephardim enjoyed a clearly defined legal status in Ottoman society, with a chief rabbi, the Hakham Bashi, who was treated as a public dignitary. In fact, the entire Jewish community was ruled by the trustees of the Sephardi community, and the Sephardi leadership alone formally represented the community as a whole, vis-à-vis the authorities, and collected its taxes.8 These non-Ashkenazi communities, including their rabbis, were more open to contact with their non-Jewish surroundings, and there was greater unity between Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities in the pre-war period than is often thought.9 Many memoirs from this period report deep ties between Old City Muslim, Christian and Jewish families and neighbours:

Endless stories – many of them scandalous and satirical – draw a picture of profound triadic co-existence of Christian and Jewish families in the heart of what came to be known as the Muslim Quarter. This was not the tolerant co-habitation of protected dhimmi minorities, but the positive engagement in the affairs of neighbors whose religion was coincidental to their wider urban heritage.10

In her commitment to revising the view of Ottoman Palestine as backward
and riven with intercommunal hatreds, Michelle Campos confirms the ideological commitment among all three religious entities to a shared homeland and the shared Empire. Ottoman Christians, Muslims and Sephardi Jews felt a strong affinity to their coreligionists. Inevitably, of course, there were tensions in this intercommunal complexity, between the Jews and the other two largest religious communities, and between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities themselves. Earlier in the century the Jews of Palestine had been the objects of official oppression and local hostility, yet in the years preceding the war the Sephardim shared neighbourhoods and cultural and daily activities with their Muslim compatriots, unlike the ‘newcomer’ and more conservative Ashkenazi Jews.

In the late nineteenth century, elements of development within Palestine and the Jewish community were beginning to be felt despite the continuing lack of financial stability and the reliance on halukkah. The Zionist-inspired aliyot (immigrations) from 1881, constituting the ‘New Yishuv’ had brought some economic improvement. By the end of the century, economic activity in the country had increased, with expanding commercial prospects. New settlements were founded, concentrated in three main groups: in the central coastal plain near Jaffa; around the Carmel range; and – the most productive – in Galilee. On the eve of the First World War the Jews in the settlements numbered about 12,000 out of the 85,000 Jews living in Palestine. Hospitals were built, farms were thriving and growing food, and a viable infrastructure was beginning to appear. Importing, exporting, industrial activity and manufacture increased. New schools, which taught Christians of all denominations, Jewish schools that taught secular subjects, and Muslim schools for boys were founded. Some wealthier Muslim, Jewish and Christian families chose to send their sons to study in boarding schools in Jerusalem in the years immediately before the war. The Arabic and Ladino-speaking Sephardi families in Jerusalem, rather than the Ashkenazim, spearheaded the move for secular education and supported the Alliance Israélite schools (established in 1882), which introduced Jewish, and sometimes Christian and Muslim, children to secular education. Even cinema, soccer matches, gramophones and automobiles arrived in Palestine in the pre-war years. By the time of the British conquest of Jerusalem in 1917, major technological advancements had changed the country in significant ways, and despite its depredations the war brought modernity to Palestine in the form of transport, telegraph lines and limited postal services.
Most Jerusalem Jews lived in the Old City. In the 1860s, Jews, Christians and Arabs began to settle outside its walls. Diseases, such as cholera, and unhealthy living conditions encouraged the Jews to leave the Old City for more salubrious neighbourhoods where they built hospitals, orphanages, old-age homes and schools. The *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly* reported in 1881 that of 2,500 residents living outside the walls, 1,510 of them were Jews. There was a social stratum among the Jewish communities that could afford to spend money on expensive goods and to borrow from moneylenders on the security of property. For example, Bukharan Jews were fairly rich and built a prosperous neighbourhood close to Mea Shearim. All this contradicts the image of an exclusively poor and dwindling community entirely dependent on the outside world for financial help. There is, therefore, evidence to support the fact that there were different standards of living among Jerusalem’s Jews.

Because one of the diaries examined in this work is that of a coffee merchant, it is appropriate to mention here not only that coffee was imported from South America and the Arab lands, but also that the drinking of coffee, often in coffee-houses, was as popular in Jerusalem as elsewhere in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Coffee, often bought from coffee-houses, was offered to guests at home. Even the poor drank coffee. There was no restriction on the preparation and drinking of coffee or frequenting coffee-houses, except on the Sabbath. Herman Melville writes of an occasion when he was astounded by his guide’s lack of reverence when pointing out the Stations of the Cross: ‘Yonder is the arch where Christ was shown to the people & just by that open window is sold the best coffee in Jerusalem.’

The First World War in the Yishuv

With the outbreak of the war in August 1914 and Turkey’s joining it in October of that year on the side of the Central Powers, the situation in the Ottoman lands, including Palestine and in Jerusalem, in particular, rapidly and disastrously deteriorated. The outbreak of the war was greeted in Istanbul with no less gloom. Çavit Pasha, one of four ministers to resign in disgust at their country’s entry into the conflict, declared prophetically in October 1914: ‘it will be our ruin, even if we win’.

The early twentieth century was the period of the Ottoman Empire’s political and social reform, a growing nationalism that consolidated itself
around a modernizing movement led by the ‘Young Turks’, a formerly secret society that merged with other nationalist reform organizations in 1907 to form the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). As a result of the CUP’s territorial aspirations, the Ottomans lost almost all their European territories in the disastrous Balkan Wars (1912–13) fought against Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece. The Empire still held some territories in Asia and almost all of the Middle East, but these wars had cost its army 250,000 casualties.

Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, the CUP attempted an alliance with Britain and France, and, after being rebuffed, entered an agreement with the Central Powers, which required Turkish participation for their own reasons. The Ottoman Empire was in no condition to fight another serious war, militarily, economically or in terms of internal communications or transportation. Nevertheless, the Sultan officially declared holy war, jihad, and Ottoman forces were dispatched to Galicia, Macedonia and Palestine.

Çavit Pasha’s pessimism was justified, and the Ottomans did not win. Yet there were many misconceptions about Turkish military ability. Allied soldiers in the European trenches were known to assume that the Palestine Front was less formidable than the muddy battlefronts in Europe, and it is true that it was a different theatre from that of France and Belgium. According to historian David Woodward, the war in Palestine was considered a ‘sideshow’ when compared with the Western Front. In fact, Woodward continues, members of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) resented the view that the Turks were lesser opponents than the Germans, and that conditions in the Middle East were ‘cushy’, with regard to terrain and climate, by comparison with the Western Front. Nothing, concludes Woodward, could be further from the truth. The Turks proved to be more challenging enemies than the British had anticipated. ‘I did not know, to tell you the truth,’ commented a British general, ‘that [the Turks] were nearly as good as they turned out to be.’ Nevertheless, the combined German-Turkish forces were fated for disaster almost from the start, from their failed attack on the Suez Canal in 1915. In 1916 the EEF inflicted heavy casualties on the Turkish army led by German General Friedrich Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein, yet the British forces lost the battles for Gaza in 1917 despite outnumbering their enemies by more than two to one. The battle for Beersheba signified the beginning of the end for the Ottoman-
German army. The main British offensive in Palestine, commanded by General Edmund Allenby, took place in Beersheba in October 1917. The newly formed Turkish Seventh Army had already left Jerusalem for the Beersheba Front but was not yet halfway there by the time the battle began. In the aftermath of the capture of Beersheba, Gaza was also taken.

The clearest idea of the experience of this desert war, one that provides a human commentary to the dry historical narrative, is provided by Jerusalem-born Yehuda Burla, who later became renowned as a Hebrew author, in his letters to his wife, Miriam, and in his stories based on his own war experience. He served first as an animal handler in his unit, which he does not identify in his letters, and later became an interpreter for a number of German officers. His fiction is founded on historical fact, confirmed by his letters, and it offers us a detailed picture of the situation in the southern desert from 1915 to 1917. For example, in one story he describes the armies’ departure for the Suez Campaign in 1915 and their return in defeat. The solitary Jew, left behind, is the witness and the reporter, on the fringes of the fighting. Burla underscores the difference between the abysmal Turkish living conditions and that of the British army in a description of an abandoned British camp with its little houses and its well, and he communicates the delight of the Turkish soldiers at the prospect of being captured by the British.22 Burla suffered through the night-time desert marches, the extremes of climate and difficulties of transportation, together with rest of the foot soldiers. During the battle for Beersheba, Turkish troops passed through Bir Asloj where Burla was stationed for a time. He wrote in an undated letter to his wife that when his German superior officer and comrades left Ma’an to go to battle (Burla was ineligible for active service, both as a Jew and also due to his myopia: his commanding officer complained that he could not see to shoot) he was desolate at being left behind by a battalion that went to war without him. He added that he felt like a small boy abandoned by the grown-ups, ‘who go to things that only grownups go to’.23

I saw the thousands of people going to some great and noble action and my Hauptmann holds out his hand and says to me, ‘Goodbye, Yehuda. Perhaps we’ll meet again. If I die, write to the German consul in Damascus . . . Goodbye.’ And in the same way all the NCOs hold out their hands and say goodbye to me. Filled with tears and concern [I see] all of them go by, one camp after another.
In the end, the badly run and impoverished Turkish army was unable to withstand the more sophisticated Allied warfare. By 1917 the Turks in Palestine were defeated.

The war thrust the Jewish settlement in Palestine into a crisis unlike any it had ever endured. Contemporary documents, telegrams and newspaper reports clearly convey the sense of panic and despair:

The terrible danger, together with grief at the events in Europe and the uncertainty of the whole situation, has created great agitation. There is much praying among the followers of all religions, special fast days are ordered and in some very Orthodox quarters of Jerusalem the exaltation of feelings has risen to a point where the people expect the destruction of the whole universe and the coming of the Messiah. The eclipse of the sun which was observed the other day, served still further to rouse the superstitious feelings of Jews and non-Jews who saw it a sign from heaven.24

The crisis grew out of the war situation itself, from the almost complete loss of contact with Europe and America and the growing hostility of the Turks towards the local Jewish population in the belief, not entirely unfounded, that they, the Zionists in particular, supported the enemy. The new rulers of Jaffa, Hassan Bek Basri el-Jabi and Baha al-Din, the latter the civilian adminstrator, the Kamaykam, who was knowledgeable about Zionism, were particularly harsh due to their belief that the Zionist movement contradicted the yishuv’s loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. Baha al-Din confiscated all the boxes of the Keren Kayemet (Jewish National Fund) and forbade the issuing of cheques by the Anglo-Palestine Company, in addition to other severe and some trifling restrictions, such as the banning of portraits of Herzl and of National Fund stamps. A rumour spread throughout the yishuv that those in possession of ‘Zionist’ stamps would be executed.

‘It’s sad to see’, writes Mordechai Ben-Hillel Hacohen in his diary of the war years, ‘how, slowly, the European arteries are being cut off from us: passenger ships have stopped coming, the railway will soon cease and we will not hear the whistle of the locomotive again.’25 He adds that they talk about nothing but the amount of available flour, ‘how much sugar they have, how much other food, what the price of any available food is, how much will it rise in a week’s time, how one can save money, to reduce the
appetite for food, how will it last in the coming days?’ Shimon Rubinstein, who wrote a detailed introduction to Hacohen’s published diaries, is one of few who lays some of the blame for the crisis at the door of the yishuv itself in that it missed a unique opportunity to buy land sold by the Ottoman Empire.

Until 1914 the yishuv had been self-supporting but once Turkey entered the war money became scarce and all credit ceased, leading to a total cessation of trade and a crisis of labour. Not only the Jewish population but also the Ottoman army depended on the agricultural output in the country. The settlement was able to retain some of the benefits of its agriculture, but since its actively productive section depended partly on the export of its produce abroad, the termination of export, together with food imports, was a significant blow. In his diary a Turkish soldier, İhsan Turjman, complains, without irony, about the dearth of tobacco in Jerusalem. He writes: ‘We have been deprived already of sugar, kerosene and rice, but the shortages have not had the same impact as the deprivation of tobacco.’ A further problem was raised by a columnist in the Hapo’el hatsa’ir paper, with a singular lack of empathy for the Jews of Europe:

This war has weakened the majority of Jews in the diaspora to such an extent that for a few years at least we won’t be able to expect new people or means from there. All our efforts must therefore be to preserve all that we already have. The essential condition for this is that we should be able to support ourselves on what the earth produces.

Many labourers, some of them skilled, could not find work; unemployment grew daily. Most of the labour was contracted, and workers did not always enjoy favourable conditions. Shmuel Yehuda’i was a young Polish immigrant who criss-crossed the country, working on the land or serving as a guard. He kept a diary throughout his adult life, first in Yiddish and then in Hebrew. He described his journeys through the country in search of work, moving from moshava to moshava (agricultural settlement) where there was sufficient work only for a small number of labourers between whom the work was divided. He considered the situation to be ‘very serious’, with the deficit growing daily. In 1914 there remained only three possibilities for maintenance: internal measures, for example, aid from the farmers
(despite some of them being known for their lack of sympathy for the Jewish immigrant labourers, the halutsim); aid from the United States; and loans. None of these proved sufficient to ease the situation and many new immigrants hastened to leave the country. By 1915 about 10,000 Jews had left Palestine, most of them being foreign nationals who were not able return to their own countries and therefore went to Egypt. Many of them were from the New Yishuv, the most productive element. According to a public manifesto from the Chief Rabbinate in Jerusalem, this was seen as desertion of the enterprise of settlement and a danger to the efforts already made to sustain the yishuv – in fact, a threat to its survival. Many of the emigrants later joined the Jewish Legions, to serve with the British. There was a rumour that leaders of the yishuv had bribed Turkish officials to make departure difficult for the Jews and enforce Ottomanization, for fear that no Jews would remain in Palestine. Ultimately, whether or not this rumour was true, it was indeed the order of Ottomanization that prevented more from leaving.

With the outbreak of the war, investment in the yishuv all but ceased; deliveries of money were severely curtailed by the cessation of postal services, and people who had depended on halukkah were left destitute. Building activity stopped. Charitable institutions were closed, jobs and livelihoods disappeared and the economy was harshly affected. Commercial ships no longer appeared in Palestinian ports and foreign trade was suspended. Families lost their breadwinners who were conscripted into the army, leaving their families destitute. Some wives of servicemen are reported to have walked into the sea with their children, to die quickly rather than starve to death. In his memoirs, Menashe Meyerowitz reports that the government had confiscated the wheat and barley in Mikveh Yisrael, Ramallah and Latrun. There were no horses for sowing and harvesting. The settlers felt a growing sense of isolation from the rest of the world. Hebrew newspapers and magazines were forbidden and only one, Haherut, which was affiliated with the Sephardi community in Jerusalem, survived until 1917. Yet the Ottoman authorities allowed the Jewish schools to remain open with the substitution of local teachers for those who had left or been exiled. The authorities declared a moratorium and all banks were closed. The Capitulations, the privileges enjoyed by foreign subjects, that allowed them to live and trade in Ottoman lands under the protection of their consuls, were cancelled.
Official proclamations were received with suspicion by a population that on the whole did not understand the reasons for the war or the Ottomans’ participation in it. Basic foodstuffs, water and gasoline and other essential materials were commandeered for the war effort, as were sources of transportation, carts, horses, donkeys and camels, creating difficulties of movement. Hacohen writes about an incident when he and his friends attempted to remove their sons from military barracks from where they were soon to be sent to Beersheba and one of the notorious army Amale (labour) battalions. The parents were obliged to sign certain papers in time to prevent their children from being taken, but ultimately lacked the transportation to deliver them to the offices.37 In his memoir, A. Herzfeld, member of the Central Committee of Agricultural Workers, comments that ‘of course’ he had to go from Petah Tikva to Jerusalem on foot to secure flour for the town. Once he had been given eighty-nine sacks of flour, he had no means of transporting them back to Petah Tikva. He ultimately joined a camel caravan, a ‘Turkish train’.38

Ill equipped and hungry, Turkish soldiers roaming the countryside stealing the farmers’ livestock both for milk and for food, leaving the Jews with very little. In the hotels in Jaffa, police removed all the chairs and the beds, pillows, mattresses and blankets – anything that they considered necessary for the war effort. They did the same in an orphanage in Jerusalem. Soldiers entered churches, ostensibly in search of spies, and looted furniture and artworks. Many shops were emptied of all their merchandise. Shopkeepers pretended to have sold all their goods, after having hidden them. However, there was a Jewish spy, well known in the yishuv, who would lead the Turkish authorities to the hiding places.

In his detailed war memoir, Ephraim Deinard reports that the Turks had heard that the armies in Europe were using railway lines to construct barricades and that they intended to do the same in Palestine. Without having sufficient of this material, they took the fences that had surrounded Tel Aviv, in addition to the fences from a number of orange orchards. Since the government had commandeered most of the animals, and there was insufficient feed for those that were left, the fences appeared to be superfluous. However, Alexander Aaronson reports that ‘all the barbed-wire fences, we heard, had been torn up and then sent north for the construction of barricades. In a wild land like Palestine... where fields and crops are always at the mercy of marauders, the barbed-wire fence has been
a tremendous factor for civilisation.’39 This is an interesting contrast between the use of barbed wire as a factor for civilization in peacetime, and one of the primary metonyms of the First World War. Hacohen confirms the importance of this material:

When I arrived at Merhavia some army men came to take barbed wire from all the farmers and from the entire settlement, everything that they had. Already last year the government had cast its eye on the barbed wire that surrounded the fields and saplings and wanted to take it. The owners of the smallholdings argued with the soldiers that if they take away the barbed wire that surround the saplings they would all be wasted because they would be trampled by the animals and the Arabs would pull up the trees. They valued the price of the wire as Fr. 1000 and [the soldiers] took double that amount from the owners of the barbed wire and now they come to ask for the wire again! The farmers went to complain but it made no difference: the military authorities said that they will take the barbed wire and [the farmers] must put in a claim for the money that they had paid the year before.40

An army officer went to Deinard’s garden in Ramallah and removed about 10,000 amah of fencing, about 180 yards. Modern Turkish military histories report that there was very little barbed wire available on the Palestine front and suggest that the absence of defensive wiring had an effect on the rapidity of the British onslaught.41

Medical services were disrupted: doctors, both Jewish and Turkish, those who had not been taken for military service, were unable to function; hospitals closed due to lack of continued funding from abroad; and there was an acute shortage of medical supplies, leading to increased illness and death. To exacerbate the situation even further, from the end of 1915 epidemics of illness broke out throughout the yishuv, as they had throughout the Middle East, in the case of Palestine, brought by soldiers returning from Suez. These illnesses, primarily dysentery and typhus, which killed hundreds of people, were a direct result not only of the war itself, but also of the dire economic situation and living conditions. In places where work and food were more available, such as outlying farming areas, there were fewer incidences of disease. Patients who could afford to do so travelled abroad for treatment.
By the end of the war the Jewish community in Jerusalem had lost half its population through starvation and illness, emigrations and deportations, leaving 26,000 in 1918.42 The overall population of Palestine declined by over 6 per cent during the war years as a result of famine, disease, casualties and deportations.43 Memoirs and diaries report countless tragedies: death by starvation or disease, parents and grandparents dying of grief, children left orphaned. In his introduction to Haim Nahmias’s diary, Professor Shomo Nahmias, Haim Nahmias’s son, describes in moving detail the death from starvation of two of Haim Nahmias’s children.44 The yishuv’s official institutions attempted to find ways of limiting the widespread shortages of food and other necessities, and to support the families of absent men. Women’s organizations were established to help the needy, especially needy women, and communal leaders, including Zionists, organized systems of aid, particularly in Jerusalem. The hardship of women living without their husbands during the war years catalysed the founding of women’s societies all across the country.45 Aid networks were founded not only in Jerusalem, but also in Jaffa and in some moshavot (agricultural cooperatives).

Despite the financial hardship, the news was not all dire for the economic life of the country: the war made funds available for building, to expand transportation and communication networks. Salim Tamari observes that many features of Palestine’s modernity attributed to the British colonial administration seem to have been initiated by the Ottomans during this period. Wells were drilled, linked by pipes to major urban centres; a network of telephone and telegraph lines connected the country to the outside world. The Ottomans established their postal service and constructed medical institutions.46 Streets were paved and new roads and railways were built, port facilities were improved. The end of international commerce forced the rural areas to increase production of goods and food. This did not apply only to the Zionist farms and settlements, but also to Arab landowners and farmers. In fact, in a few of the outlying areas the war was scarcely felt, while in the cities starvation governed.

Ottoman Rule in Palestine

Ottoman rule in Palestine was chaotic during the war. The corruption of the Turkish administration and their resulting brutality in appropriating goods,
dwellings and human labour is reported by every Jewish memoirist who struggled through the war years. Corruption was endemic, from the highest to the lowest strata, everywhere in the Ottoman army. In Palestine, proclamations were made and then repealed; Jewish notables were summoned to travel distances to meetings that did not take place; promises were made and not kept. In his memoirs, Yitzhak Olshan reports that the local Ottoman authorities received a list of new Ottoman citizens, all of whom were given a document written in Turkish indicating that its holder had been placed under the wing of the Ottoman government. There were no photographs in the documents, which were filled with errors. It was not unusual, writes Olshan, to meet a young man with a certificate in his hand that confirmed that he was 60 or even older. In this way two brothers could reveal that one of them was registered as a father of a family, and the second as his son. The headmen of the Arab villages received a number of these documents, as many as there were inhabitants of the village. Whenever a villager had to go into the town the headman would sign a certificate:

Once I was travelling in the train to Jerusalem and I sat next to an Arab who looked very old. A policeman entered in order to examine the travel documents. These examinations took place from time to time for the purpose of catching deserters. The policeman went up to the Arab and the Arab gave him his document. The policeman looked at it and began to laugh: the document claimed that he was 15 years old. When the policeman asked the Arab to explain this he replied angrily: ‘and how should I know? I had to go to Jerusalem and this is what I received from our headman. Go and ask him.’

Corruption was, however, not limited only to the Turks. There is evidence of a thriving black market among the Jews in the yishuv, despite warning proclamations. For example, a Jerusalem resident reported that ‘in the black market one could not only buy sugar at an exorbitant price but one could buy it in its original English wrappings’. The widespread corruption by the Ottoman authorities sometimes worked in the Jews’ favour, particularly for those who could bribe their way out of conscription and other decrees.

Much of the disorganization in the yishuv rested on the caprice of Ahmed Jemal Pasha, who treated it with methodical ruthlessness. He was one of the leading members of the Young Turks before the war, he was
appointed head of the Fourth Army in Palestine and also held the military governorship of Ottoman Syria. A short and stocky man, he was known for his brutality and was an overbearing presence in Palestine. He set up his headquarters in the Augusta Victoria on the Mount of Olives. According to Menashe Meyerowitz, his autocratic rule was unlimited, to the extent that the life of every citizen depended on him. Yet on a visit to Rehovot, Jemal declared: ‘I am anti-Zionist but I was never anti-Semitic.’ He combined ‘brutish, paranoid cruelty with charm, intelligence and grotesque buffoonery. A bon vivant with a weakness for pomp and circumstance and for beautiful Jewesses.’ His capriciousness is confirmed by all the memoirists, including Meyerowitz and Elisha Belzer whose fate it was, as community leaders and spokesmen, to meet with Jemal on several occasions. Meyerowitz reports that one moment he was demanding that people be hanged, the next he was making jokes.

While he terrorised Jerusalem, he liked to play poker, race horses to the Judean hills, drink champagne and smoke cigars with his friend the Spanish consul, who described him as a ‘filthy type but a good boy.’ One of the German officers judged him an extremely intelligent Oriental despot. His mission was to hold the Arab provinces and suppress any Arab or for that matter Zionist stirrings.

Jemal was as cruel to the Arabs as he was to the Jews, and as antagonistic to Arab nationalism as he was to Zionism. He deported anyone suspected of nationalist agitation. He excelled at executions on invalid pretexts, executing those whom he suspected of being British spies: ‘Soon the Damascus and Jaffa Gates seemed to be permanently festooned with swaying cadavers deliberately left for days on Jamal’s orders.’ He removed foreign diplomats to Egypt in March 1915, deported 500 foreign Jews and exiled the leaders of Po’ale tsiyon, David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Arthur Ruppin and Joseph Luria, among others, in spite of their encouragement of the Jewish populace to assume Ottoman citizenship. He proclaimed that ‘the Jews of Palestine are Zionists and Zionists are the enemies of Turkey’. Meyerowitz reports an experience shared with his colleague Albert Antébi. A man brought Jemal Pasha a package. Inside was a gold medal which he had received from the Sultan (Mehmet V.):
‘after my victory near Gaza.’ He got up and stood in front of a large mirror and tried to pin the medal on his chest and couldn’t. Antébi then got up and said to him ‘If you’d allow me to, I’ll fix it on.’ Jemal Pasha gave him the medal and we both went up to him, and he said to us, laughing: ‘My God, what a strange thing: my Sultan sends an award to Jemal Pasha and two Jews stand beside him in his room and pin it to his chest. What do you say to that?’

Jemal was not the only human trial borne by the yishuv. Added to all its other problems at this time was the brutishness of many other Ottoman officials administering settlement towns and institutions. One of them, the military governor of Jaffa, Hasan Bek Basri el-Jabi, was something of a monster. Meyerowitz writes in despair: ‘Hasan Bek is the only ruler of Jaffa and its environs and does everything he wants to in the cruellest manner. There is no one to turn to, to whom can we complain about this tyrant.’ Hasan Bek was a thief and an extortionist and, according to Meyerowitz, he delegated beatings to his subordinates, who were as cruel as he. ‘Apart from the well-known beatings on the sole of the foot he also has another system: he pushes his victim down onto the ground and then he walks over his body until the victim faints. And while he’s doing this he laughs.’ Meyerowitz relates that he was once summoned to Hassan Bek and he went directly to his office. A crowd of people was waiting for him but he was sitting at his desk and shaving. Many of the summons, which occurred frequently and which brought people long distances, were for entirely trivial matters. Eventually, after representations from yishuv leaders, including Meyerowitz, Hassan received an order from Jemal Pasha to leave Jaffa immediately and to be transferred to Mosul. Yet he was credited with progressive building projects and created a fine boulevard in Jaffa. He widened existing roads and constructed new ones, opened new squares and built a graceful mosque in 1915, but with monies confiscated from the Jews of Tel Aviv and Jaffa.

Even worse than Hassan was a true disciple of Jemal Pasha, Baha al-Din (the Kamaykam, civilian ruler, of Jaffa):

This man had been trained for a position in Armenia, and he came to Jaffa armed with definite instructions, and with the object of instituting there a reign of terror like that in Armenia. Immediately after
his arrival he declared to the Chacham Bashi in the hearing of a number of persons in his office that he was a determined opponent of those Palestine Jews who called themselves Zionists... They came now in order to acquire the land, and founded ‘colonies’ like the Romans, i.e., settlements which were to form a State within a state.62

In contrast to these was Colonel Zaki Bey, military commander of Jerusalem who, according to Zvi Shiloni, was intelligent and decent and who attempted to develop the city of Tel Aviv and establish good relationships with the Jews. Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi, acting as representatives of the ‘Ottomanization Committee’ sought Zaki Bey’s agreement to found a Jewish militia within the Ottoman army. As it happened, Zaki had intended to establish something similar with Jews and Arabs, yet his nerve failed and he substituted the proposed militia with a city defence group. Unfortunately this did not last long; Jemal Pasha vetoed it and transferred Zaki Bey in 1915.63 According to Hemda Ben-Yehuda, Zaki Bey was loved by the Jewish populace who felt themselves ‘secure under his protection’. Yet he is scarcely mentioned in the literature. Hacohen refers to him briefly four times, once in connection with his post-war visit to Jerusalem. It seems, however, that he was less accommodating to the Jews towards the end of his command.

Ottomanization and Conscription

Until 1909 only Muslim men were subject to conscription in the Ottoman army to serve for years in appalling conditions in remote corners of the Empire. Jews and Christians were expected to pay the military exemption tax, bedel, a lump sum based on the reported number of men in the community. In 1909, military service was made compulsory for all Ottoman subjects. For the Ottoman Jewish communities before the First World War this universal conscription became a token of support for the Empire and for the participation of non-Muslims in the new Ottoman body politic.64

In 1914 the Ottoman military was engaged in a massive reconstitution effort to rebuild its army after having endured major losses in the Balkan Wars. Recruits were drawn from every corner of the Empire. Due to the extensive system of exemptions – for example, of heads of families, men with disabilities, students and religious functionaries – the actual strength
of the army on the eve of the First World War was relatively small by comparison with contemporary European armies. Even so, non-Muslim enlisted men were not conscripted into combat battalions but served in support units that had no fundamental combat capabilities.

Unlike other Jewish communities in the Empire, the Jewish settlement found the order of conscription to be one of the most distressing orders imposed on it. It was now compulsory for every Ottoman citizen and therefore also applied to Russian Jews who had chosen to become Ottoman citizens in order to be allowed to remain in the country. Those who refused Ottomanization were sent back to their own countries, which for the Russian Jews was disastrous since it meant immediate service in the Czar’s forces. Once men of the required age had received Ottoman citizenship, they were automatically liable for conscription. New citizens were obliged to join the army a year after the day of their Ottomanization. At first the obligation was imposed on every man from the age of 20 to 45, apart from heads of families. In 1915 the age rose to 50. The system of Ottomanization was generally chaotic, with orders being pronounced and rescinded and inexperienced officials to carry them out. There were areas, however, in which careful records were kept and order maintained.

Conscripts could be ransomed from the army by a payment of 1,000 gold francs in every year of the war. The funds for ransom were not always easy to secure, and even when funds were available men were conscripted anyway. Many people sold all their possessions in order to pay the ransom. Those men forced to serve in the labour battalions had no choice but to leave their families without any sustenance or the ability to support them; the families therefore also suffered from terrible privation and disease. Wives and mothers begged official institutions for money to be able to ransom their men from the army and turned to the city municipalities for assistance. They appealed to the city councils, the yishuv leadership and to the various aid agencies, pleading for aid for their starving families. Schools requested loans to redeem their teachers. While the government did arrange some support for soldiers’ families, this support, by and large, remained in the hands of the Jewish bureaucracy, which did its best to satisfy the multitude of requests. However, progress was slow and formalities had to be maintained to avoid chaos, as we see from the countless letters received by the municipalities and aid agencies. In the last year of the war the Turks cancelled the system of ransom altogether.
The dilemma that confronted the yishuv was crucial: whether or not to apply for Ottoman citizenship. ‘The meetings and councils in the matter of Ottomanization do not cease. Everybody acknowledges that we must be citizens of the country so that when Israel's fate is being discussed we will have a permanent presence in the country. But who will take the responsibility of sending thousands of young people to the Turkish army?’ The two Labour parties encouraged Ottomanization but many remained unconvinced that taking foreign citizenship was a logical step; these included Russian citizens who preferred to leave for Egypt. In addition, contradictory instructions arriving from Constantinople confused the issue even further. For the yishuv leadership the central problem was the attenuation of the settlement by departure and they assumed the responsibility of encouraging settlers to remain and accept the new citizenship. Rabbis, including the Chief Rabbi of Jaffa, were exhorted to persuade their congregants to do so, in view not only of the number of potential emigrants, but also of the severe sanctions on foreign nationals imposed by the Ottoman authorities. Still, many left the country either unwillingly, because they were exiled by the government, or willingly, for the fear of conscription. Those who were unable to exercise any of these options, ransom or flight, had little choice but to submit to the fate of service in the Ottoman army.

Young Jews had already been joining the Ottoman army from 1912 and served in the Balkan wars. Before the Great War a commission in the Ottoman army was regarded as something of an honour. A few Jews attended the military academies in Istanbul, some of them even planning a military career. Until 1914 only eight Jews had ever completed military courses at the three Imperial military academies in Constantinople, in Damascus and in Baghdad, among them three Jews from Palestine. Due to a dearth of educated men to serve as officers in the Ottoman army, at the outbreak of the war the Turks agreed to conscript and commission Jewish high-school graduates, some of whom had already been ransomed. Many of these graduates from Palestine were sent to the Ottoman officers’ training units in Baalbek and then served in the regular Turkish army during the war. Generally the Jewish leadership in all the countries to which the young servicemen were sent attempted to help them as much as they could, interceding with the authorities and providing funds. Most of these men served in the army faithfully until Turkey was defeated in 1918.
Some of them returned to Palestine to become part of the defence of the settlement. Others had already deserted the Ottoman army in order to join the Jewish Legions.

Conditions in the military schools were not always amenable to Jews. This was a controversial issue in the yishuv, where some felt that the Jewish officers’ abilities could best serve the Jews in Palestine; the Zionist leaders, on the other hand, wished to prove to the Ottoman authorities that the Jews could demonstrate their ability as good soldiers. Furthermore, the Zionist leadership believed that army service would build fighters and defenders. Certainly in Europe Jews were proving themselves to be courageous and resourceful fighters, with decorations disproportionate to their numbers. Hacohen’s son, David, particularly hoped to be sent to the military training school in Baalbek, together with some of his fellow students and one of his teachers: ‘We were told today that they are not sending these youngsters to the training school in Baalbek but to Constantinople. It may for the best because in Constantinople there is a large traditional Jewish community and they will take care of the young people coming from Palestine.’ In his comment that ex-high-school students in the officers’ colleges were happy and well treated but denied the Sabbath, David Yellin provides an interesting aside: ‘We know that in the places where our brothers labour, also as ordinary soldiers in the “Amale” units, by government authority they are given this day [the Sabbath] to rest from their toil.’ Neither Amon nor Nahmias, nor, in fact, any of the historical authorities, confirm this statement.

The dilemma of Ottomanization and conscription is reflected in the fiction of the time, which was firmly based on the political and social events observed and endured by the authors. For example, the first section of Aharon Reuveni’s autofictive trilogy of the war years is devoted to the problem of Ottomanization, seen through the eyes of Russian Jewish settlers, and one in particular, a printer called Ziprowitz. Their arguments are likely to be reflective of discussions that took place at the time, in which Reuveni himself participated, although he elected to remain in Palestine and become an Ottoman citizen. In his novel he explores the choices faced by the immigrant Jews in every detail, from the discontent of maladjusted immigrants, to their plans to emigrate to the United States, to the idealism of the Zionist settlers and their leaders, two of whom are based on the characters of Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi.
The reason some Jews, certainly a minority, agreed to enlist into the Ottoman army was their belief that this would affect the political future of Palestine. For example, a spokesman of the Central Committee of Ha-po’el Ha-tsa`ir writes:

There is only one state in the world to whom our attitude must not be false and this is the Turkish state. We can be devoted to this state in heart and soul and our attitude towards it need not be at the cost of our national awareness but on the contrary, to be based upon it. Turkey was the one that welcomed the exiles from Spain with bread and water while the rest of Europe flayed our flesh with bars of iron and it is [Turkey] that keeps the Jews within its borders living in equality…here in Turkey there is a concrete base for our hopes for the future.

This idea was echoed by the yishuv leadership which believed that when it came to determining their political future at the end of the war the Turkish Empire might look kindly upon them. For this reason a small proportion of Jews acquiesced to Ottomanization.

Ben-Gurion himself declared his and Ben-Zvi’s unequivocal loyalty as Turkish subjects. However, this position was not universal since many of the Jews arriving from Eastern Europe remembered the forced conscription, the cantonization, in the Russian Empire. Not all the yishuv leaders were as resolved as Ben-Gurion and his followers but were equally confused and ambivalent about Ottomanization, and accepted it unwillingly when they accepted it at all. Ben-Gurion appealed to Jemal Pasha:

We are facing the order of expulsion. Some of us have already been expelled as enemies from the country some of us cannot face the problem and leave the country willingly and another part that refuses to become Ottomanized are on the point of being uprooted from their home and exiled to places that they do not even know about. We have to admit that the central government has behaved towards us better than towards others: it has given us the right to accept Ottoman citizenship and to remain in the country. In the troubled times at the moment we do not have a choice other than to utilize this right and to become Ottoman citizens and not to leave the country…
However, this rather opportunistic declaration of loyalty by Zionist ideologues differed from that of the Sephardi community. Ottoman Jews, generally among the most loyal supporters of the post-revolutionary Empire, were ‘renewing their covenant of loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and its dynastic head, the sultan’. Syrian-born Albert Antébi proclaimed ‘a sincere loyalty to the Ottoman homeland, collaboration devoted to political and economic regeneration and remaining true to the historical genius of our Judaism – tolerant, egalitarian and compassionate’. This did not always sit well with the Ashkenazi Zionist leadership striving for political independence.

Few options remained for those who attempted to avoid army service. Apart from paying the kofer (ransom; Turkish bedel), they could engage in peripheral labour and receive visikot, certificates of exemption from army service; they could attempt to evade the military police searches for unconscripted men, as Jerusalem-born Haim Nahmias did until he surrendered to the authorities and was sent to Anatolia; or they could join the army and then desert. In Palestine, under the rule of Jemal Pasha, the fate of deserters was dire: a sentence of execution. Jemal decreed that deserters, including those who were not yet enlisted or those who had not paid ransom, would be hanged. At one point he hanged three deserters – a Jew, and Christian and a Muslim – as a lesson to others. Yet despite the threat of hanging, many Jews and Arabs deserted. It seemed that in the chaos of the Turkish administration their chance of being caught and hanged was less than almost certain death in an army labour camp.

In his memoir of life in Rehovot, Elisha Belzer tells the story of the mother of a family who complained that her freshly baked loaves were disappearing. Her daughter, Yehudit, noticed her father stealing the loaves, and followed him: she discovered that he was feeding two deserters whom he had hidden on the roof of the synagogue: ‘He was rescuing two Jewish boys, who had deserted from the Turkish army, from starvation. This was known: no Jewish conscript to the Turkish army ever returned, dying of disease even before he had reached the battlefront.’

Life for the new conscripts was grim. In his memoir, Yitzhak Olshan, later President of the Israeli Supreme Court, describes his early experience of the army, which conforms in detail to those experiences described in their diaries by Amon and Nahmias. Like Amon, who had been called up in February 1915, the young Olshan found himself in a prison cell in
which there were dozens of Arabs and about thirty Jewish high-school graduates. Like him, his comrades had been among the first to join the army. The men were taken to the barracks, the Kishla, which was more prison than barracks, where conditions were appalling. Olshan writes that in the dark corners of a large room, Arab criminals crawled on the floor after having been beaten on the soles of their feet; they were unable to walk. They would eat orange peel and excrete in buckets that stood in the corner of the room. The windows were closed. Olshan recalls the crowding in the prison, with increasing numbers of Arab criminals and deserters who had been caught.80

Daily, new arrivals – conscripts, deserters of all religions and Arab criminals – were thrown into the cell. Olshan and his companions were informed that if the ransom were not paid in full, rather than being sent to the officers’ training school in Istanbul they would be shipped to the Amale (labour) units in the desert. In fact, only half their fees had been secured, twenty-five Napoleons for each man. He and two other Jews were called out to the prison courtyard and each given a slip of paper upon which the words ‘To be sent to the officers’ training college in Istanbul’ were crossed out and above them was written: ‘to the Labour brigade’.81 Olshan and his companions were in the prison where Hassan Bek, the sadistic and anti-Zionist military governor of Jaffa, had his offices, which Olshan later compared to Gestapo headquarters. The young conscripts could hear the screams of prisoners being tortured, sometimes by Hassan Bek himself. Not only did the Jews suffer, but the cruelty was applied equally to Arabs.

The stories of the imprisonment of these young conscripts have a horrifying sameness throughout the memoirs, diaries and the fiction, which is primarily documentary: crowding, filth, cruelty, lack of food or water. Olshan reports that when they left the barracks (thirty-five Jews and over a hundred Arabs) the Arabs were tied together in pairs, but the Jews remained free. Surrounded by mounted policeman they began a long and futile march to Ramallah, on the eve of Passover on a day of hamsin. A number of people from Tel Aviv stood outside and watched. After a four-hour march in the heat, they were forced into a crowded, filthy, roofless stable in which donkeys and myriads of flies joined the men. Many of the Arabs had managed to escape along the way by bribing guards and the mounted policeman. For a small payment Olshan and some others were allowed to stand outside. In the evening they were lined up and forced to
march back to Jaffa, after payment had been secured for their release. Ephraim Deinard gives an example of the conscription process:

On Saturday 16 January it was raining heavily and Jewish boys were summoned to register for the army [in Jerusalem]. About 300 men came at 7.00 a.m. before prayers and they stood outside while army clerks called them into the building one by one. The rest remained in the rain and cold. These unfortunate people were shivering, standing for eight hours without food and without prayer. They hoped that after their names had been written down they would be able to go to their homes. Suddenly one of the officials came out, together with some soldiers, and [the Jews] were marched to the outside of the city and sent on their way, hungry and shivering from cold, to Hebron. Hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of members of their families were standing all this time waiting for them. Our hearts sank at the sight of this cruelty: who could help them? These unfortunate men went on foot and it rained all day. Only in the evening [a doctor called Auerbach] gave some money, about Fr.400, to allow them to hire carts, and [the families] sent clothes and food for these young people, and also some of the aid committees gave money for this purpose and carts went and picked them up and gave them food.82

Hacohen struggled to achieve the release of four young Jewish boys, including his son, who had been unaccountably imprisoned. Even those young men who had recently graduated from high school and were called up to attend the officers’ training school in Istanbul were initially sent to a barracks and then to prison. Olshan, who was one of them, writes in his memoirs that the reason for their imprisonment was never discovered, but it was presumably to allow the Turkish military authorities to extort funds. Hacohen describes his and other parents’ frantic attempts to raise the money to prevent their children being sent to Beersheba and one of the most deadly of the camps. He writes: ‘Our dear children are not equipped, they have no new underwear or clothes and not a single penny in their pocket… I write just one thing: about 40 young people were exiled from Jaffa on the eve of Passover and nobody paid any attention to this not the local city council and not the Hakham Bashi [Chief Rabbi].’83
The Labour Battalions (*amale taburları*)

Once the year’s moratorium had elapsed, in December 1915 Hacohen reported that he had heard that all the new Ottoman citizens were being called to the army and he predicted that the Jews would not be accepted into the forces ‘in this war of *Jihad*’ but sent to what he calls ‘the road labour’. The general fear in the *yishuv* was that the Jewish men would be forced into the labour battalions that were spread across many uninhabited areas of Palestine, or, worse, that they would be sent to camps in Turkey. According to Hacohen, the men were not given supplies, ‘they are not properly housed, clothed or fed and the work is very hard’. He notes that not all the men had the means to pay for their release from these battalions and reports that the inhabitants of the Galilee were striving to sell everything that they could and to borrow from the banks.84

In the official military histories of the First World War the *Amale* battalions are almost completely overlooked. For obvious reasons, it seems, one looks in vain for a mention of their fate in the memoirs of the Turkish and German commanders,85 probably because, apart from the camps in Palestine, in official histories they are associated almost exclusively with the Armenians. The main purpose of the labour battalions (essentially compulsory work gangs86), between 70 and 120 units, was to free the regular Turkish soldiers for action on the fronts. They performed a range of services throughout the Empire, the most important being road repairs and road construction, the laying of railway tracks, building army encampments and military installations. According to Leyla Neyzi, one of the main reasons for the formation of these labour units was to ensure that local non-Muslims would be moved away from their home regions and not join the forces fighting the Turks.87 Labour battalions were part of the Ottoman army’s support organizations that also included transportation units (in one of which Haim Nahmias appears to have served), field hospitals and training battalions, among many other depots.88 Soldiers designated for these battalions were considered to be the most inferior class in an army that had been divided by class and nationality from the start. The Jewish contingents included those whose poverty made it impossible to supply the funds for ransom, in addition to middle-class Jews, like Amon, Nahmias and Burla, who had the means but – for some still unknown reason – had failed to obtain the correct certificates of exemption.
Once the year’s grace was over, all those who could not pay were sent to the *Amale* battalions to suffer from hunger, exhaustion and disease in backbreaking toil in the Sinai desert and in the distant expanses of Anatolia and in the Dardanelles. Others remained in the cities, compelled to do the most menial jobs. Contemporary descriptions are replete with the humiliating impact of these battalions on the local population. In his diary, Ihsan Turjman tells us that the labour battalions were made up primarily of Christians and Jews, with very few Muslims, while the Garbage Battalion contained no Muslims at all.

Transport was a major weakness of the Ottoman army. From the outbreak of war, blockades of Allied warships prevented Ottoman shipping from using the Mediterranean for transport, and owing to the lack of serviceable roads and rails the supply of both civilian and military goods had been effectively cut off: ‘All small arms, every single shell or sack of fodder had to be carried for enormous distances over roads which had been in a bad state of repair when war broke out and which now quickly deteriorated under the heavy traffic.’ In his diary, Haim Nahmias noted that the reason for the labour battalions’ long marches in Western Turkey, carrying building materials and military equipment, was the lack of railway transport. Every history of Ottoman army activities mentions the disastrous lack of transport facilities. Railways were overburdened even though in 1914 there were about 100 small trains in the Empire. Supplies had to be taken on arduous journeys by means of sea, railway, camels and donkeys. Nowhere in his diary does Yehuda Amon mention motorized road transport, but he describes impassable roads in Western Turkey. Even the officers travelled on horseback. Haim Nahmias, on the other hand, records an occasion when he and his comrades were able to hitch rides in German lorries. In addition, there was a shortage of locomotives to pull the trains and a dearth of wood to stoke them. The trains’ carrying capacity was insufficient, with troops being transported sixty to a freight car. Conditions in these cars, and in animal cars that were also used to transport men, feature very strongly in the diaries of Amon and Nahmias.

On the Palestine Front a decisive military campaign, following the losses in the first Suez Campaign, required logistical means which the
Ottoman government did not possess. They lacked a modern transport system there, too, with the result that transporting supplies internally and externally from Anatolia to Palestine became greatly problematical. Von Kressenstein\(^95\) realized that the primitive arteries, inadequate for motorized traffic or even for carts, would be the weakness in future campaigns. The single railway supply line reached only as far as Jenin. The need for serviceable transport, therefore, became crucial.\(^96\)

Even before the outbreak of the battles a rather feverish paving of roads had begun in Palestine, using the forced labour of Christian and Jewish conscripts who served in the Labour units, while the Muslims were either dispatched to the fronts or sent to training centres as reinforcements for casualties. Meyerowitz confirms that all men from 15 to 60 had to work on the roads from Ramallah to Bab-el-Wad, under the control of the feared Hassan Bek. During the first eight months of the war the authorities embarked on a two-year road repair and building effort, using the labour battalions, primarily in Palestine where the war transformed the country into a single major construction site.\(^97\) In addition, Jemal Pasha decided to build a railway link from north to south of the country and then on towards the Sinai Desert, with conscripts in the Amale battalions the designated labourers. Labour Battalions can therefore be credited with creating Palestine’s first modern infrastructure. The building of a continuation of the Hejaz line was achieved at a speed that, according to Ilan Gal-Pe’er, would be enviable today.\(^98\) It seems that road building, tree planting and well digging were for everyone’s mutual benefit.

In addition to their physical labour, Jews acted as supervisors in road building and the creation of other infrastructures. While some of these Jewish contractors, those who oversaw the road and rail construction and the supplies of wood for the locomotives, might have profited from their positions, at the same time they employed hundreds of Jews who were consequently freed from duty in the labour battalions. These labourers, in what was called ‘civilian labour’ for the sake of the army, sukra, received visikot, documents exempting them from conscription. In this way hundreds of Jews were saved from hunger, disease and death in the camps, or transportation to Anatolia. The Jewish workers were given various jobs – felling trees, working on the railway and loading the railcars.\(^99\) A large Jewish crew worked to create a railway bridge over the Beersheba River (Nahal Beer Sheva).
In his memoir Deinard writes about the railways in some detail. He notes that the government’s main concern was the building of a railway track between Afula and Ramallah in order to unite the Jaffa–Jerusalem line with the Haifa–Damascus line, and then also to build another track between the stations of Sajad and Beersheba. It was here that the government intended to concentrate its forces because at the time it was the closest to the Judean desert, a point of departure for the Suez Canal. Deinard reports that since there were insufficient rail tracks the government destroyed a part of the existing track for twenty-three kilometres from Jaffa to Ramallah to use in the building of the new line. The military authorities ordered the felling of eucalyptus trees in some of the most developed moshavot, not only to create sleepers but also to fire the locomotives. The railway lines had been so hurriedly put together that railcars overturned when riding on them: ‘Almost all the Jewish soldiers were sent to work for the railway, and they did backbreaking labour, without bread to eat... without clothes and shoes, only those they had brought with them.’

Yehuda Amon writes in his diary that he and his fellow conscripts were immediately set to work building railways:

We put up thirty tents in two hours, then the labour (angriya, forced labour) began... A large convoy of camels arrived laden with various materials and tools, spades, rakes, barbed wire and on Thursday the work began... this work was paving roads and repairing rails from Tulkarem, Qalqiliya, Wadi Sarar to Beersheba. For the whole week we did backbreaking toil pushing carts filled with dirt and huge stones.

Pack animals, primarily camels, were scarce because the Arab tribes that provided them were reluctant to sell to the army. Hacohen reports that he and other yishuv suppliers could not find camels to bring the wheat they had bought from the Galilee to Jaffa since the government had taken the camels for road building immediately after the animals’ arrival in Jaffa. A large part of the supplies had, therefore, to be carried on the backs of the soldiers in the labour battalions, not only in Palestine but throughout the Ottoman army.

On 14 December 1914, Christian and Jewish soldiers were pulled out of their regular units and sent to the labour units. Alexander Aaronson was
dispatched to one of these camps late in 1914 after being told that this was part of the military effort to conquer the Suez Canal. Aaronson had joined the army, together with other idealistic Jewish settlers, in order to fulfil the political needs of the Jewish homeland by supporting its Ottoman rulers. He observes that the treatment in these labour camps was one of the reasons for the defection of many of the Palestinian Jews to the Jewish Legions of the British Army and the secret underground organization, Nili. Aaronson, who had been trained and well treated in an ordinary regiment stationed in Safed, writes that the final blow came one morning when all the Jewish and Christian soldiers of his regiment were called out and told that henceforth they were to serve in the *amele taburları*:

> I shall never forget the humiliation of that day when we, who after all with the best disciplined troops of the lot, were first herded to our work of pushing wheelbarrows and handling spades by grinning Arabs with rifles on shoulder. We were set to building the road between Safed and Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee – a link in the military highway from Damascus to the coast which would be used for the movement of troops in case the railroad should be cut off.

He adds that this had no immediate strategic bearing on the Suez campaign. From 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. they were forced into hard labour, with one hour’s rest at noon. Those who had money were able to bribe their taskmasters to allow them some slight relief. However, this did not last and the men had to endure their brutality as best they could. Aaronson writes: ‘I shall not dwell on the physical sufferings we underwent while working on this road for the reason that the conditions I have described were prevalent over the whole country.’ Like Neyzi, Aaronson assumed that the reason for their sudden change of status, and from reasonable conditions to those of utter harshness, was to place the Jews and Christians – who, for the most partfavoured the Allied cause – in a position where they would be least dangerous to the Ottomans.

Although fiction and theoretically untrustworthy as an historical account, Aharon Reuveni’s third novel in the trilogy, *Shamot* [Devastation], offers as faithful a portrait of the period as do any of the diaries and histories. The main protagonist, Funk, a Jewish conscript, has been moved to a Turkish unit in the desert. He is suffering from the results of typhus,
from the deadly labour and the catastrophe he sees around him, providing
the kind of details that are confirmed in memoirs rather than in official
documents:

He saw sick deserters meant for death; he saw how they were shot to
death and he saw them afterwards; he saw the ones who were cruelly
beaten as they suffered pain and agony and slowly died; he saw the
Armenian doctor who had poisoned 40 sick soldiers\textsuperscript{104} – he saw him
as he lay dying; he saw Jewish city boys, pale and suffering, who
served the appetites of the army officers and the sergeants; he saw
those who were ill, helplessly rolling around, rotting while still alive,
eaten by lice and filth… he saw a man who could no longer walk
and who lay down. The captain gave orders that he should be buried
and they buried him but he was not dead, he was breathing at the
moment they buried him…\textsuperscript{105}

The conditions in the labour camps caused a large number of fatalities,
soldiers dying of typhus, dysentry, starvation and the trials of the journey.
Those who had the misfortune be detained in the camps in Palestine were
given a minimum of food of atrocious quality. At all times and in all
weathers the men slept without blankets in the open air. Their treatment by
their superior officers and NCOs was worse than the treatment of slaves,
according to Hacohen. Everyone in Palestine knew of the horror of these
camps, the men labouring without food, water, shoes or clothing, in the
filth and extremes of heat and cold. Hacohen recounts the incident, to
which most of the memoirists refer, of a young Jew who begged his father
to pay the ransom for his release from the army, but due to their unhappy
relationship the father refused to do so. The boy then killed his father and
then himself: ‘It is possible that the labour in the \textit{Amale} battalion in the
army in a place where a soldier is not considered to be a human being and
treated worse than the animals shattered the nerves of the young man and
drove him mad so that he did what he did.’\textsuperscript{106} He adds that soldiers are
dying like flies in the camps. This was at the time of a severe typhus
epidemic in the country about which, according to Hacohen, the authorities
did nothing. He also notes that the Turks treat the camp inmates with great
cruelty and fail to distinguish ‘between the intelligent ones and the
fellahin’. Other diary accounts confirm the cruelty with which the Turkish
NCOs treated their men: ‘There is no justice or kindness they do not exhibit any moral responsibility but only know the law of the strap and the fist.’  

In his war diary, Moshe Smilansky, a writer and farmer, observes that anyone who had not witnessed the conditions of the unfortunate men in the battalions had no idea of hard labour, suffering or torture. There were no tents in the ‘camps’ and the ‘soldiers’ lived in the fields, under the burning sun in summer and in the winter, day and night in rain and cold. The food was worse than any of the military rations and the clothing was entirely inadequate: ‘These were camps of the shadows of men, hungry, naked, moving from place to place with a sign of death on their faces and their emaciated naked bodies were given over to terrible diseases.’  

If these men could not be rescued or ransomed their fate was dire. All the reports in Hebrew reinforce the fact of the ‘continuing hell’ of these camps that were akin to gulags: starvation, lack of clothing and shelter, in addition to severe beatings by the Turkish NCOs, and disease: ‘Tens of them died every day and their bodies filled the cemeteries of the Jews, the non-Jews and those simply of the desert.’  

Erik Zürcher confirms these accounts in one of the few comprehensive non-Hebrew reports:

The soldiers were underfed, exhausted, suffering from disease. Their officers beat them mercilessly. One should bear in mind, however, that conditions on the whole in the Ottoman army were almost indescribably bad. Soldiers, even the units at the front which received the best care, were often undernourished. We have a number of reports describing how Arab recruits were being taken to their frontline units under escort – and in chains. The descriptions of how these soldiers were being treated much resembles the descriptions of what went on in the Armenian units. Diseases (primarily cholera and typhus) took many more lives than did the fighting. In all these respects, support units like the labour battalions and also fortress garrisons were even worse off than the front soldiers.

The Locust Plague of 1915

To exacerbate an already desperate situation, from March to October 1915 the Middle East, already catastrophically affected, was visited by a locust plague of biblical proportions. Biblical and talmudic literature describes a
locust plague as one of the worst disasters to blight a country. A severe plague occurred at the time of the prophet Joel, who devoted most of his prophecy to it. The recurrent swarms, lasting for months, devastated the crops and orchards in an area that was already suffering from severe shortages. The effect of the locust infestations throughout the Middle East cannot be exaggerated. They were not confined only to Palestine but afflicted the entire region. Vast swarms of locusts caused enormous damage throughout the Ottoman territories, including North Africa, Syria and Palestine. In Turkey a commission was established to find ways of combating the insects, and in order to implement its decisions, an organization was set up jointly with the Ottoman Ministry of War. Thirteen of the Labour battalions were assigned to carry out the work. Jemal Pasha reports that the infestation was so intense ‘that by the end of May and June it was impossible to see even a single tree the leaves of which had not been eaten up by locusts in Syria’. The locust plague had lasting effects during the war in increased famine and starvation, in areas in which famine was already rife.

In Palestine, Jemal Pasha attempted to prevent further infestations by ordering each person from the age of 16 to 60 to collect twenty kilos of eggs in ten days, and dig deep channels – trenches, in fact – in which to bury them. Every defaulter was obliged by law to pay a fine of one Turkish lira. However, a young boy who was 17 in 1915 remembered that the locusts remained as thick as clouds, mocking Jemal’s attempts, since they simply led to an absurd trade in locust eggs. There were insufficient chemicals to fight the insects and Jemal refused Aaron Aaronson’s request to allow soldiers to help the civilian population in their war against the plague. Yet for the first time the Ottoman authorities joined forces with the Arab and Jewish population in confronting a scourge that was inimical to them all. There were not often opportunities for similar cooperation.

Despite the fact that locusts generally arrive from the south, both in Joel’s time and in 1915 the swarms reached Jerusalem from the north. In 1915, as in biblical times, the means of fighting the invading locusts without chemicals were very limited. The Books of Joel and Job report that attempts were made to drive them away by making a noise (Job 39:20), but the beleaguered people relied chiefly on the mercy of the Lord by praying and proclaiming a fast and a solemn assembly (Joel 2:15). In fact, this had not changed much in 1915 when, in order to disperse the swarm, all the city
shops were closed and all the Jews gathered and recited the entire Book of Psalms, blew the shofar, lit incense and processed around the city. All means of combatting the insects failed: workers tried to drown them in various mixtures, described in detail in the literature; they banged on tin cans, drummed, rang bells and roared.

The horses slipped on the locust eggs which proved a hazard even for the trains. The creatures caused illness and infections, they crawled up women’s skirts, fell into the food, stung, and exuded noxious odours and substances. As in the Book of Joel 2:9: ‘They run towards the city. They run along the wall. They climb into houses. They go through the windows like thieves.’ They even entered the wall cavities and fell from the ceilings like heavy raindrops. In his diary, Yehuda Amon writes of an argument that took place among his military comrades after the Turks’ Gallipoli victory in 1915, concerning the nature of national friends and foes. Amon mocks the widespread rumours that the English had been breeding locusts to use as a weapon against the Turkish armies, that ‘they, the English sent the locusts to punish Turkey’.115

Historical accounts in Hebrew of this period focus on factual details of the situation, but fiction and journalism derived tropes from the locust crisis and drew ideological messages even from this catastrophic phenomenon. The most obvious trope was the internal war’s echo of the global war in terminology and consciousness of apocalypse. The prophet Joel establishes the metaphor of a marching army, subsequently always associated with locust swarms: ‘They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops… like mighty army drawn up for battle… They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course’ (2:3–7). In his memoirs, Moshe Smilansky, writing in 1915 in Palestine, notes that the enemy has surrounded them from all sides, the farmers ride out to combat the enemy’s (the locusts’) camps. He reports that they did exactly as the experts had ordered them to do; they dug defensive channels around the borders of the settlement and around every vineyard. The work was expensive and exhausting and, in the end, useless.

This futile battle led Smilansky to wonder whether the Jewish settlement was potentially competent to withstand the struggle with the desert and to survive in an unfamiliar and hostile environment.116
A locust committee was organized, giving advice that proved to be useless. Smilansky comments on one of a number of conflicting instructions:

You have to seal off all the borders of the settlement with a fence of tin cans . . . A fence of cans! . . . Where will we get the cans and where will we get the manpower? The land is closed and sealed and there is no money left in our pockets...

The entire settlement went into action: the farmers, the labourers, the factory owners the men, women and children. Even the teachers and small children from the nursery school came to help but the enemy came upon us from every side . . . This was war. We called to the labourers in the entire region: Arab men and women, children from the villages, Yemenites, Sephardim. Men and women from the cities. On all the fields on all the vineyards on all the borders and the roads you saw groups and groups of people who stood around the large blots of the locusts and waved black clothes at them and chased them into the channels but the locust blots grew bigger and bigger and they multiplied.117

This was a war, Smilansky concludes, in which the locusts progressed in an orderly military camp that first surrounded their enemy and then attacked it from an unexpected direction. In the early morning he surveys his orchard and sees a sight familiar to us from Great War representations: ‘I leant against on one of the fence-posts and gazed at the terrible destruction. I . . . couldn’t tear my eyes away from the awful sight. Like terrifying skeletons of dead men standing, the trees stood before me.’118

One of the most vivid descriptions of the events occurs in one of Reuveni’s novels, Ha’oniot ha’aharonot (The Last Ships, 1923), in barely fictionalized detail. Reuveni was active in the yishuv during the period described in the novel; for example, with Ben-Gurion and others he served as a member of the Va’ad haganah shel po’ale tsiyon (Defence Committee of the Po’ale tsiyon) established to explore the possibility of building a Jewish militia in Palestine. The novel is derived as much from memory and lived experience on the home front as from contemporary documents, and it involves a few historical figures, such as Jemal Pasha, Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi (the author’s brother), who, together with the war, anchor the story in historical reality.
Smilansky’s factual descriptions of the specific events and Reuveni’s fictional ones are almost identical. Yet it is Reuveni’s use of literary devices, the experience of his characters, his moving the experience away from the collective and into the private sphere, and the glosses he provides for the historical events that actualize them in his novel. Reuveni describes the intense labour by the members of a moshava and its visitors to prevent the recurrence of the infestation, since the second generation of locusts, called gezem, is more deadly than the first.

The early literature of Jewish settlement centralizes the diverse cultures of the Arabs and the Jews, a topic, inter alia, that leads to its frequently pessimistic conclusions about settlement. Reuveni’s characters are surprised to see the Arab fellahin trampling the creatures and sweeping the corpses away. The Arabs refuse to participate in the digging. Throughout the Hebrew fiction, drama and memoirs of the 1920s and 1930s the Arabs are censured for their inactivity and enmity in general, and in the face of the locust disaster, in particular. According to Reuveni, they know that the battle is lost before it is begun and therefore resist the blandishments of the Jews to join the fight, even managing to evade paying the fines. Often they do nothing but watch the diligent Jews fighting an unconquerable enemy. ‘They’re lazy’, says an old farmer in the novel, echoing sentiments in much of the literature of the time, ‘And the nature of a lazy man is to say “What will be will be”, to lie and doze in the shadow of the fig tree.’ In his memoir of the war years, Alexander Aaronson observes that while the people of the progressive Jewish villages struggled on to the end – men, women and children working in the fields until they were exhausted – the Arab farmer sat with folded hands. He reports that this was the case even when the faces of Arab babies, left by their mothers in the shade of some tree, were devoured by the swarms of locusts before the infants could scream. Even then, he writes, the Arabs remained inert. With their customary fatalism, Aaronson concludes, they accepted the locust plague as a necessary evil.

The reasons for this resentment of the Arabs are obvious but it also points to an essential difference between the idealistic pioneers and the native population, a sense that however hard the Jews labour and whatever their historical or textual claims to the land, it is not theirs. In these writings about the locusts, the Arabs knew of the land what the European newcomers could not know (although they quickly learnt). In his plague
memoir, Moshe Smilansky takes an even more pessimistic view: in the early 1920s he wonders how the Jews will overcome the inimical power of the desert on their own, without help. He also notes without comment that the Arabs’ fields had not been overcome by eggs and larvae.\^121

The 1915 plague was a devastating occurrence, coming at a time already fraught with tragedy; it was discussed extensively and in detail by every publication of the period, including journalism, diaries, letters and belles-lettres. Eyewitness accounts of the locusts abound in many languages, and photographs confirm the intensity of the plague.\^122 In Palestine, while also a topic for fiction and memoir, it was, at the same time, employed as part of the Zionist polemic for collectivization, for the ideal of the settlers’ labour, which was elevated to the level of an absolute, almost religious, value, and as a strong critique of internal tensions. In its discussion of the locusts the Labour Party newspaper *Hapo`el hatsa`ir* refers to the ongoing conflict between the established farmer and the pioneering labourers but complains that for once they were united in their disregard of the crisis, only a few of them participating in the battle against the locusts together with members of the general public. The main reason, according to the paper, is the lack of commonality, of collective identity.

In 1915, two years after his arrival in Palestine, Shmuel Yehuda’i gave a dramatic eyewitness account of the advent of the locusts:

An enemy came to the land… from which many more suffered than from the war, a natural enemy against which not much can be done. We are forced to watch this tragedy: this is the locust! I think it was at the end of Adar when I began my guard duty and suddenly the locusts came for the first time and descended on the land and began their labour. At first we couldn’t see that much damage had been done, particularly since they [the farmers] were not used to this and didn’t know its nature. They [the locusts] remained and mated and laid their eggs in the land. A week later they left the place (I’m writing what I saw with my own eyes). A week later a camp [of locusts] returned, a little smaller than the first and then departed. Still there was not yet any real damage. But a month or six weeks later the crawling *gezem* began to emerge, the new generation that began its work of destruction… they managed to destroy everything that had been born here. Many people came to help and the
government also helped as much as they could in these times and in its present situation. Then large swarms began to appear from the surrounding areas. [People] worked as hard as they could but finally their strength weakened and it had to be abandoned. The locusts did what they do and ravaged and ate all the almond orchards and grapes, increasing as time passed and in two weeks’ time they had already been in all the orchards and eaten them until not a leaf remained… the damage from all sides is impossible to imagine. The general appearance was a kind of annihilation [hurban]. [When the plague began to abate and the farmers began to work again] the farmers and landowners were helped with money that had come from America on the last ship, about 1,600,000 francs, together with some private money. Slowly everything went back to normal. But the situation is still very serious. [This was supposed to be] a blessed year but I wouldn’t mind if we didn’t have any more years like this one!123

Ihsan Turjman concludes one of his discussions about the infestation, when it reached Jerusalem, with the exhortation: ‘God protect us from three plagues: war, locusts and disease, for they are spreading throughout the country. Pity the poor.’124

Notes
2. The ‘Old Yishuv’ popularly but inaccurately refers to all the Jews living in Palestine, mainly in Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias and Safed, before the immigration of members of Zionist movements in 1882. The ‘New Yishuv’ is usually dated from the arrival of the Bilu group in 1882, but there were several settlements outside the walls of the Old City prior to 1882.
6. During the early stages of the war, the consulates were neutral territory for protection of their nationals.


12. See ibid., p.18.


19. Founded in 1916 to command the British forces in Egypt.


22. ‘Migilguleihazeman’ [From the passage of time], in Yehuda Burla, *Le-kol ha-tse’ada* (Tel Aviv: Massada 1965).

23. Yehuda Burla, ‘Hitkatvut mi-tekufat milhemen ha-‘olam ha-rishonah [Correspondence from the period of the First World War], Yad Tabenkin Archive, File 15-7 15-1-1/8/9, Letter 9533.

24. ‘The War and Palestine’, interview for the *Jewish Chronicle*, London, with Mr David Levontin [n.d.], Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem [hereafter CZA], A34/112. Levontin was one of the directors of the Anglo-Palestine Company, which functioned as a bank. The solar eclipse took place on 21 August 1914.

25. Mordechai Ben-Hillel Hacohen, *Milhemet ha’amim* [The War of the Nations] (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1980), Vol.1, p.86. Hacohen (1856–1936) was a writer, Zionist, activist and businessman, and one of the founders of Tel Aviv. His diary is a comprehensive and detailed depiction of life in wartime Palestine, in addition to political comment. It is one of the major sources of information about Palestine during the Great War. It was written in Hebrew and unfortunately has not yet been translated into English.
Most of the information in Hebrew later published as memoirs, newspaper articles, journal articles and chapters in books was provided by men who served in some form of official capacity in the *yishuv*; they were, therefore, identified with the Zionist enterprise and with its politics, which were not necessarily shared by the anonymous members of the Jewish populace who lived and suffered in Palestine during the war years. The experience of the educated non-Jews, as depicted in their diaries, was somewhat different from that of the Jews. See Salim Tamari, ‘L’année de la sauterelle. La Grande Guerre et l’effacement du passé ottoman de la Palestine’, in Rocher Hancock (ed.), *Temps en espaces en Palestine* (Beyrouth: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2008), pp.129–78, esp. p.156.

30. Shlomo Yehuda’i, ‘Yoman’ [Diary], Archive Department, National Library, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, PRI 397, 8o5612, entries for 13–15 July 1915.
31. The American involvement in the Anglo-Palestine Company was significant, reflecting ‘the growing American involvement in Palestine in general and with the Jewish community in particular’. See Abigail Jacobson, ‘A City Living Through Crisis: Jerusalem During World War I’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 36, 1 (2009), p.76. During the war, charitable funds were supplied, in the main, by Jews in the United States, with a percentage from Germany and Austria. Farmers in Palestine contributed about 20 per cent to support hospitals and educational institutions, and purchase medicines and foodstuffs for members of the ‘Old Yishuv’.
32. For criticism of these departures, see ‘Beyn ha-metsarim’, editorial, signed ‘Zerubavel’, in *Kovets le’inyane ha-po’el ve-hamone ha’am be’erets yisra’el* [Collection concerning labourers and the nation in Palestine], I-2 (1914), p.7. This was one of the publications that appeared sporadically in Palestine during the war years.
36. Typescript, ‘Yoman mishman ha-milhamah ha’olamit’ [Diary of the time of the World War], January 1917–November 1917, CZA, A32/18. Meyerowitz was an agronomist, who acted as intermediary between the *yishuv* leadership and the Ottoman authorities.
39. Alexander Aaronson, *With the Turks in Palestine* (Dodo Press, 2009), p.17. Aaronson (1888–1948) was an author and Zionist activist and member of a prominent political family, brother of Aaron Aaronson, the founder of the Jewish underground pro-British espionage operation, Nili.
40 Soldiers’ Tales

41. Edward Erickson, Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), p.198. Aerial reconnaissance during the battle for Beersheba revealed that the Turks were not protected by barbed wire (see Gilbert, First World War, p.371).
42. Margalit Shilo, ‘Women as Victims of War: The British Conquest (1917) and the Blight of Prostitution in the Holy City’, Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues, 6 (Fall 2003), p.73.
43. See Jacobson, ‘A City Living through Crisis’, p.78.
44. See below, pp.196, 197.
50. Jemal Pasha appears in many guises in the Hebrew diaries and memoirs of the time, usually as a haughty tyrant. Deinard mocks him, within the safety of hindsight. Natan Efrati makes the important point that the predominant assessment of Jemal in Palestine is from Jewish sources; in view of what he terms the ‘hermetic sealing’ of the Turkish archives to scholars, the perception of Jemal is necessarily one-sided (Efrati, Mi-mashber le-tikvah, p.12). However, Ihsan Turjman detested him as much as did the Jews (see Tamari, Year of the Locust, pp.45–6). A more balanced conclusion can be reached only by comparing Jemal’s treatment of other minorities within the Empire (Efrati, Mi-mashber le-tikvah, p.13).
54. Montefiore, Jerusalem, p.396.
55. Shortly before departing from Palestine after their defeat in 1917, the Ottoman authorities arrested Khalil al-Sakakini for sheltering a Polish-American Jew, Alter Levine, in his home. Both men were exiled to Damascus.
56. Montefiore, Jerusalem, p.397.
58. Meyerowitz, ‘Yoman’, 20 May 1916. Syrian-born Albert Antébi was one of the few Jews who, for a while, enjoyed a certain influence over Jemal Pasha, but he incurred his displeasure over a trivial matter and was exiled with his family to Constantinople, where he remained until his death.
59. Meyerowitz, ‘Yoman’, 3 January 1916. On 4 May 1915 the last supply ship, the American **Vulcan**, docked in Jaffa. ‘It promised us existence for at least a little while but the next day we found out that the government would confiscate everything that had been brought to us and divide it among the populace without exceptions’ (that is, preferences) (ibid.). After applying to Jemal Pasha he, Antébi and Meir Dizengoff (the mayor of Tel Aviv) had no choice but to agree to the following: the Jews would receive 55 per cent, the Muslims 26 per cent and the Christians 19 per cent. Hacohen confirms the story in part. The ship arrived under the auspices of the American government, which sent two envoys, Louis Levy and Samuel Levin-Epstein, to ensure the correct distribution of the foodstuffs. There was general agreement between the Americans and the Turks that the food would be allotted to the population, and that the Turkish army and Ottoman bureaucrats would not share in it. The Consul General in Jerusalem, Otis Glazebrook, and the two envoys would decide. However, Hassan Bek insisted on examining the cargo. He objected to the contents of some letters carried on board, which were, in fact, innocuous. Later, he proscribed the sending of any letters and telegrams. The negotiations about the money brought by the **Vulcan** continued for ten days from 12 May. The commandant demanded his share of the money, and even when his demand was met he would not allow the two envoys to travel to Jerusalem. The ship could not be unloaded. Eventually, the order was given to unload the food from the American ship. ‘The food was, naturally, sent by our American brothers to their Palestinian [Jewish] brothers. But this was not stated specifically, and it was the task of the General Consul, as head of the distribution committee, to distribute the food. He decided to give it to the population as a whole, without difference of nationality or religion’ (Hacohen, *Milhemet ha’amim*, 12 May 1915, Vol.1, p.101). Generally, all private contributions went through the American consulate.

   It was perhaps the exigency of the situation – people were starving and conditions were dire – that led to the indifference of the Jewish officials to the fate of all others in the country. Perhaps it is only with hindsight and with much more delicately honed sensibilities that we see the cold-hearted self-interest of the yishuv’s leaders. However, this was not lost on everyone at the time: Ephraim Deinard and even Hacohen criticize some of these leaders for their self-aggrandizement and, according to Deinard, their dishonesty. Hacohen is moved by the plight of some of the Arabs: ‘I saw something today. I sat beside the train station waiting for the train. I ate an orange and threw the orange peel on the ground. Two Arab children fell upon the orange peel and while it was still in their hands they ate it with a great appetite because the Arabs are very, very hungry and they have no food. They eat roots, they eat grass after mixing it with a little bit of flour, they pick up seeds from the mounds of wheat and put them in their bellies. They are hungry.’ (p.254)


64. See Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p.151.


68. See, for example, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Relief Committee, Tel Aviv, December 1915, Tel Aviv City Archive, File 127. Numerous letters preserved in both the Tel Aviv Municipal Archive and the Central Zionist Archives witness the shortages in the country: money was requested to feed children, to buy a cow, for halukkah, for medicines, for professionals who had not been paid, and so on. In one of Aharon Reuveni’s novels of the war years, his protagonist, a conscript called Meir Funk, has been allowed to leave his barracks – startlingly similar to those both Amon and Nahmias describe in their diaries – in order to seek the money to buy his freedom. In the lengthy description of his and his fiancée’s attempts to raise the ransom, they run from place to place, beginning with one of the aid organizations, but without success. The indifferent officials treat them with contempt, ‘mainly Ashkenazis handing out Ashkenazi money’ to those seeking halukkah, support and ransom. Some of the Jewish religious officials attract Reuveni’s most intemperate criticism for their unconcern about the soldiers’ plight. After their frantic pleas and supplications, some good luck and some sympathy, the young couple are able to secure half the sum but it is not sufficient to free Funk, who later dies by his own hand. See Aharon Reuveni, *Ad Yerushalayim. Roman mi-yme milhemet ha-`olam ha-rishonah* [To Jerusalem] (Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad & Keter, 1987), pp.380–2.

Yehuda Burla was unable to secure the ransom, due to a confusion regarding his papers. He was therefore obliged to serve in more than one of the labour battalions, which he called ‘Amili’, in the south of the country, where conditions ranged from tolerable to atrocious, dependent upon the nature of the officer he was serving. He describes these conditions in a story, ‘Ha-hayalve-ha-pirda’ [The soldier and the she-ass], which expands the narratives in his letters.


70. They were carried to Egypt on three American cruisers and some European ships. Those leaving faced confusion and chaos. Panic reigned at the port (see Efrati, *Mimashber le-tikvah*, p.21). The Italian steamship *Florio*, en route for Egypt, was too small to contain the vast number of potential exiles and many were sent back. A telegram gives an idea of the haste in which immigrants were despatched: ‘A
thorough investigation shows that the Turkish authorities in Jaffa gathered about 1500 Russian Jews in the streets on Thursday last and embarked them on boats for the Italian steamer in port, forbidding them to take any luggage stop. From the shore to the steamer they were robbed by the boatmen if their valuables such as rings, watches, chains, earrings and money. A34:112 T-A Municipality no. 686.


72. Archive of the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, HM2 907.3.

73. Ha-po’el Ha-tsa’ir [The Young Labourer] was a Zionist group active in Palestine from 1905 until 1930. In accordance with the beliefs of one of their founders, A.D. Gordon, Ha-po’el Hatsa’ir was an anti-militarist group and sought to establish the Jewish settlement in Palestine through labour and the development of the land.

74. Y. Aharonowitz, ‘Bifneihame’ora’ot’ [In the face of the events], Ha-po’el hata’sa’ir, 1–2 (1915), p.36. For official Jewish attitudes to conscription in the Empire, see Campos, Ottoman Brothers, pp.150–8. Amon’s and Nahmias’s diaries illuminate the differences in the attitudes of the ordinary conscripts in Palestine in the First World War from those of the yishuv’s political leaders.

75. Letter from Ben-Gurion to Jemal Pasha following Ben Gurion’s and Ben-Zvi’s expulsion from Istanbul, where they had been studying Ottoman Law, in 1914. Jerusalem State Archives, K178007–8.

76. Campos, Ottoman Brothers, p.200.

77. Ibid.


79. For uncertainty of date, see p.59.


81. Ibid., p.41.

82. Ephraim Deinard, Milhemet tugarma be-’erets yisrael [The Turkish War in Palestine] (St Louis, MO: Moinester Press, 1926), p.63.


84. Ibid., p.203. Entry for 19 April 1916.

85. See Erik Jan Zürcher, ‘Ottoman Labour Battalions in World War I’, in H.-L. Kieser and D.J. Schaller, Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah (Basel: Chronos Verlag, 2002), p.190. See also http://www.arts.yorku.ca/hist/tgallant/documents/zurcherottomanlaborbattalions.pdf. There is a brief mention of these battalions in Nicolle. A more comprehensive coverage of these battalions is in Hebrew in Markovyetzki, Ba-kaf ha-kela shel ha-ne’emanut.


87. Leyla Neyzi, ‘Strong as Steel, Fragile as a Rose: A Turkish Jewish Witness to the Twentieth Century’, Jewish Social Studies, 12, 1 (Fall 2005), pp.167–89, and 170.
89. See Tamari, ‘Short Life’, p.9.
90. Ibid., p.29. It is interesting to compare the assessment of these battalions by the Jews and by the Turks. Whereas the Jews viewed them exclusively as a death sentence, there were some advantages to them for the Turkish soldiers. See Tamari, Year of the Locust, pp.9–10.
92. Ibid.
95. A Bavarian-born general who spent the majority of the war in the service of the Ottoman Empire. He was appointed military adviser to Jemal Pasha.
97. Tamari, Year of the Locust, p.10.
99. Ibid., p.34.
100. Deinard, Milhemet tugarma be’erets yisrael, pp.41, 50–1, 100.
101. Amon, ‘Yoman’, Chapter 2, p.28. Amon describes the carts [wheelbarrows] in great detail, obviously never having previously seen one. The Turkish station of Sajad (Wadi Sarar, Nahal Sorek) was on the old Hejaz Railroad that reached from Jaffa to Jerusalem, known in military history books and documents as ‘The Junction Station’.
103. Aaronson, With the Turks, pp.16–17.
104. He had killed forty Turkish soldiers by infecting them with typhus after his son and brothers had been killed and his wife raped by the Turks.
105. Aharon Reuveni, Shamot [Devastation], in Ad Yerushalayim, p.399. See also Yehuda Burla, ‘Ha-hayal ve-ha-pirdah’ [The soldier and the she-ass], in Bli kokhav. Sippurei milhamah (Tel Aviv: Devar-Massada [n.d.]) This story is based on Burla’s own experience as an animal handler in of one of the labour (?) battalions to which he was sent. The only difference between his situation and that of the other soldiers is that he was able to secure food; otherwise he suffered from the same sad catalogue of illness, cold, beatings and lack of appropriate clothing.
106. Hacohen, Milhemet ha’amim, Vol.1, p.273. For conditions in these camps in other war fronts, see also Özdemir, Ottoman Army; Erickson, ‘The Armenians and Ottoman Military Policy, 1915’; Zürcher, ‘Ottoman Labour Battalions’.
107. Ibid., p.275.
108. Diary of Moshe Smilansky, quoted in Markovyetzki, Ba-kaf ha-kela shel ha-ne’emanut, p.55.
109. Rubinstein, Ha-nusakh ha-male shel he’arot she-katav Shim’on Rubinstein le-kerekh bet shel ha-sefer MILHEMET Ha’amim (yoman) shel Mordechai Ben Hillel Hacohen, p.9.
110. Zürcher, ‘Ottoman Labour Battalions’. The report of the Twelfth Zionist congress in Carlsbad states that in the final year of the war, in March 1918, the War Minister in Constantinople, Enver Pasha, removed all Jewish soldiers and officers from the units in which they were serving, in Palestine and elsewhere, and dispatched them into the
interior of Anatolia where they were handed over to the command of the Third Army Corps. Some of these servicemen included officers who had fought in the Balkan wars (Palestine During the War, pp.29–30). This may not be entirely accurate but reflects the anonymous writer’s desire to highlight Turkish animosity toward the Jews. Amon and Nahmias are witnesses to the fact that Jewish recruits in the labour battalions had already been sent to Anatolia earlier in the war.

111. See Özdemir, Ottoman Army, p.155.
112. Ibid., p.156.
113. Montefiore, Jerusalem, p.595.
114. Aaronson was a leading agronomist and botanist who was enlisted by Jemal Pasha to advise on combatting the scourge. He was unsuccessful. For a scathing comment on Aaronson’s efforts, see Hacohen, Milhemet ha’amim, Vol.1, p.98.
117. Ibid.
118. Smilansky, ‘Ha’arbeh. Zikhronot’, p.178. Remedies bordered on the absurd. Arthur Ruppin ordered a group of labourers at Gan Shmuel to ‘dig a canal the entire length with depth and width the same. If there is time, also dig holes in the canals at a distance of 10 to 30 metres . . . Buy ten rotel (about two-and-three-quarter kilograms) of simple soap, heat it in hot water and . . . throw it on the locusts in the orchards’, CZA, KKL3/858 (6).
120. Aaronson, With the Turks, pp.34–5.
121. Countering this one-sided view, according to Shimon Rubinstein the Arab nationalist movement could have served as the start of a process of reconciliation between the two nationalist movements in Palestine, the Arab and the Jewish. Preparations had already begun in the summer of 1914 for the establishment of a Jewish–Arab association, which had to be deferred by the outbreak of the war. Jemal Pasha suppressed the Arab nationalist movement and cut off the head of the Zionist movement by exiling all the leaders. See Rubinstein, Ha-nusakh ha-male shel he’arat she-katav Shimon Rubinstein le-kerekh bet shel ha-sefer MILHEMET HA’AMIM (yoman) shel Mordechai Ben Hillel Hacohen, p.5. The newly-established ‘Ottomanization Committee’ met with certain Muslim Jerusalemites in 1915 in the hope of achieving dialogue and cooperation. With the encouragement of Zaki Bey, the Military Commander of Jerusalem, this project appeared to be successful until the Jews requested permission to establish a defence militia, whereupon Jemal Pasha put an end to the entire enterprise. See Shiloni, ‘Temurot ba-hanhagah ha-yehudit bi-yrushalayim ba-tekuufat milhemet ha-’olam ha-rishonah’, pp.69–72.
122. See, in particular, ‘Jerusalem’s Locust Plague: Being a Description of the Recent Locust Influx into Palestine, and Comparing Same with Ancient Locust Invasions as Narrated in the Old World’s History Book, the Bible’, National Geographic Magazine, 28, no.6 (December 1915). See also http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/americancolony/amcolony-locust.html.
123. Yehuda’i, ‘Yoman’.
Chapter 1

The Diaries

Only when all the sources which have survived from all parties involved in the Ottoman Empire during World War I are fully available to all historians wishing to use them with an open mind, and without preconceptions we really secure as full a picture as is humanly possible of events and conditions that went on in the Ottoman Empire during World War I.¹

War diaries differ considerably from traditional daily journals. Their primary impulse is for testimony and witness; to record the experience for the larger community; to serve as memorial to the diarists’ suffering comrades, and as a mark of the diarist’s striving to retain a life of meaning and personal identity in the direst circumstances. In his diary of service in Turkey in the labour units of the First World War, Haim Nahmias implores the ‘Holy One Blessed Be He to return me soon to my children and my friends, [so that I can] tell them of my experiences.’²

Conventional diary theory does not consistently apply to war diaries unless the writer is already a diarist. Steven Rendall argues that a diary cannot include its own end, that ‘diaries do not end; they simply stop’. Moreover, the modern diary ‘requires no central line of thought, no Leitmotiv, no story’.³ A war diary, however, is finite; when a diary is written for a purpose other than a routine chronicle of the self, particularly when it has a memorial function, it ends at the culmination of the event it is recording. The parameters of war, its beginning and its end, constitute a natural narrative framework, in fact, a story. Both Nahmias’s and Amon’s narratives are given a redemptive shape: from trial to deliverance. Nahmias’s diary is constructed to echo the Zionist structure of the imagination which sees redemption necessarily following oppression. This is,
however, the nature of the larger historical narrative: already in 1918 the Ottoman Empire was beginning to smell defeat and soldiers like Nahmias and Amon could contemplate survival.

By August 1914, the Ottoman Army consisted of four forces, divided into thirteen corps composed of thirty-eight divisions scattered across the Empire. The Turkish Army numbered over half-a-million men, and had to defend a huge empire across Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and the Arabian coastline. The First Army had its headquarters in Constantinople, the Second Army was based in Damascus, the third Army maintained its staff headquarters in Erzingen (Erzinican) and Fourth Army was responsible for defending Mesopotamia. After the war began, the Turkish General Staff reorganized the Fourth Army to take over command of the Sinai-Palestinian Front. The Fourth Army Corps consisted of three infantry divisions and was based in Izmir (Smyrna), with its primary responsibility of defending Asia Minor in the Aegean Sea region. This is most likely the corps to which both Yehuda Amon and Haim Nahmias had been assigned in support units. The Fifth Army Corps had its headquarters in Constantinople and was responsible for the defence of Anatolia.

Both Amon and Nahmias were conscripted into the Ottoman army in Jerusalem. They served in Western Anatolia, travelling through the same territories, and they were both spared the much harsher conditions of the Eastern war theatre. Both kept a detailed record of their experiences in diaries. Amon’s was less conventional than Nahmias’s since it did not consist of daily entries but, rather, notes that were later constituted into an unbroken narrative. Nahmias, too, arranged his diary after the war and his return to Jerusalem, but the careful recording of dates confirms that his notes were made at the time. The central problem of these diaries is that of the exact military status of their authors. Being Jews, they could not have been regular soldiers and they were not stationed in any of the Ottoman training or replacement centres. They might have been sent to one of the army support organizations, some of which included labour battalions. Both suffered intensely from the various hardships prevalent throughout the army but neither was exposed to actual danger from enemy action, although Amon describes the aerial bombardment of Izmir which was close enough to their encampment to terrify the men stationed there. In sections probably added after the war, Amon’s diary displays a strong admiration for the ‘English’, as he called the British forces, and he wished for their
victory, although he was of Turkish-Jewish descent. His negative attitude to the Turks and the Empire no doubt derived from the suffering he endured during the war, and the particularly severe treatment meted out by his military superiors. Even the Turkish victory at the Dardanelles in 1915 (Gallipoli) failed to arouse his enthusiasm or support.

Unlike Nahmias, Amon underwent the kind of training for which the replacement centres had been established: constant exercises, manoeuvres and training classes, weapons drill and rifle marksmanship, but there was no possibility of his being sent to a front to replace a casualty, as would be the case had he not been a Jew. Amon lists his exact unit in the Fourth Army, but the terminology is uncertain: ‘3rd section, 2nd battalion, 1st legion, 6th company, 4th unit’. These terms are doubtful in translation although he does mention a specific Army Corps. According to the diary, ‘[A superior officer] is visiting our Legion [sic לגיון] which is the Fourth Corps.’6 Both he and Nahmias seem to have been part of one of the support divisions (as opposed to field armies) based in Izmir (Smyrna) but there was no battle front or any military action in the areas of Western Anatolia through which both men travelled. Nahmias refers constantly to Heyl mishloah, which translates literally as ‘transport division’ or ‘transport regiment’ and sometimes as ‘expeditionary force’. Transportation units were part of the army support units.7

As Erik Zürcher observes, there is sufficient source material about the First World War in Europe, seen through the eyes of men who served on the battlefield and civilians who worked for the war effort on the home fronts. These sources are letters and postcards, diaries, stories, poems and paintings. However, there are few such writings from soldiers serving in the Ottoman armies, since the majority of the common soldiers were illiterate. A decade after the war, only 10.6 per cent of the entire Turkish population was able to read and write. The Ottoman soldier, therefore, did not leave much in terms of ‘written monuments’.8 On the other hand, Zürcher continues, there are memoirs by high-ranking officers, both Turkish and German, which offer a specific point of view, certainly not that of the ordinary men. Some information was gleaned from British interrogations of Turkish POWs and from medical records and army doctors.9 Between these two extremes there are a number of diaries in Arabic that include information about the Palestine and the Middle East during wartime.10 ‘To find three ordinary soldiers in the imperial army writing
daily diaries is remarkable for this period of mass illiteracy. The narratives...are particularly valuable in that they record the impact of the war on their society, document their personal transformations and describe the trauma the war produced in their officers and comrades."

Literacy amongst the Jews was much higher than that of the common Turkish soldier, but, even so, memoirs and diaries by Jewish conscripts in the Ottoman army are rare, unlike the comparative wealth of memoirs and collected letters by Jewish officers in the training centres of Istanbul and Baalbek. The voice of Ottoman ordinary soldiers, Jews, Muslims and Christians, remains largely unheard. Therefore, the two voices of our diarists, Nahmias and Amon, are of profound importance to the understanding not only of the Jewish experience in Palestine and in the Ottoman forces, but also of the general experience of the lowliest soldiers in the army. The work of these two men clearly indicates that they were not only literate in more than one language, but that they were able to quote long passages from the Hebrew Bible and other sources in Hebrew and Aramaic. They were religiously observant without being overly pious. Despite their erudition in the Jewish sources, from the diaries it appears that both Nahmias and Amon were comparatively unsophisticated and unworldly, ordinary men thrust into a life they could never have imagined themselves living. They did not – as did the great Palestinian diarist Khalil al-Sakakini, for example – leave us comprehensive records of the most important events of their period. Their diaries are comprehensive records of events as Amon and Nahmias experienced them within their own confined context, without comment on the broader political or cultural picture. Even Yehuda Burla, a teacher and intellectual, did not comment on the political realities of his time, but described what he saw around him. Generally the political context of these diaries (as, in fact, of Burla’s letters) is vague; apart from Amon’s references to ‘the English’ and his occasional listing of the combatant countries, references to the politics and personalities of the day, including Zionism, are absent. Doubtless the two diarists’ negative attitude towards Turkey was the result of their maltreatment, rather than the wider conflicts engendered by Jewish nationalism and Zionism. Although Amon rather laconically discusses the Turkish victory at the Dardanelles (Gallipoli), he writes nothing about the Armenian massacre, which took place in the same year. Only within the description of a dream at the end of the war – and the diary – does Amon list the names of the political leaders of the warring sides.
As we have seen, writings in Hebrew of the period constitute a fairly extensive and hitherto untapped source of information about the labour battalions in *Palestine*. However, from the diaries of Nahmias and Amon we are unable to state categorically that they had been consigned to these battalions in Anatolia, despite Amon’s mention of Arabs, Turks, Kurds and Christians in his battalion, and, occasionally, Armenians, either as personnel or refugees encountered along the way. Both men write about ‘forced labour’ and suffer the extreme conditions attributed to the labour battalions. A clue to where the two men served may be in the fact of the units of the Ottoman army being ethnically uniform up to the level of regiments or even divisions. German officers routinely spoke of ‘Arab divisions’ and ‘Turkish divisions’ and the British reports did the same. However, there were exceptions – that is, mixed units¹³ – and the labour battalions were composed of Christians of many ethnicities, and Jews.

We may assume that the experience of the ordinary soldier, in contrast to that of the officers and reservists, was similar throughout every section of the Ottoman army. An interview with a Turkish ex-army officer confirms many elements of Amon’s and Nahmias’s recorded experience. The interviewee, Vasfi Cindoruk, a Turkish reserve officer, verifies our diarists’ complaints about the lack of food and clothing, for example. The men were not given boots and were forced to wear sandals even in the coldest weather, colder in the eastern part of Turkey than in the west. It was not unusual for Turkish troops to fight and march barefoot or with their feet covered in rags. Troops deployed at high altitude in the mountains of Eastern Anatolia often had only summer clothes. Ottoman soldiers in Palestine often robbed the British dead of their boots and clothing. Those on garrison duty (perhaps including Amon) had to make do with shoes made of straw, with wooden soles.¹⁴ Difficulties with boots and shoes recur in Amon’s account. Many of the men served without uniforms, and, according to Zürcher, ‘most dressed in rags’.¹⁵

A Palestinian Jew of Romanian origin was among those recruited during the war and assigned to the fourth army. He comments that most of the uniforms given to the soldiers were old and dirty, having been previously worn by others and probably still carrying the germs of various diseases. In many places the soldiers did not even have access to such previously used, old dirty and infected uniforms.¹⁶
As we shall see from both Nahmias’s and Amon’s diaries, desertion was a constant and enduring problem throughout the Ottoman armies. By 1918 it was reported that 500,000 men had deserted from the army and were roaming loose in Anatolia. Reliable estimates, Edward Erickson writes, place the total number of deserters at the end of the war as nearly a half-a-million men. The number of deserters was four times that of the soldiers on the front. Interestingly, neither of the diarists mentions any desertion by Jewish soldiers. This does not indicate that Jews did not desert, but that it was not reported. According to Zürcher, when deserters were caught they would generally be punished lightly and returned to the units as soon as possible in order not to deplete the strength of the army any further. We see from the diaries that this is the case, despite the threat of immediate execution. There are, however, examples of cruel executions, but these may be to deter others and clearly had no effect. The theme of desertion is a leitmotif in Amon’s memoir and it seems likely that he, together with other men in his unit, were trained and armed for a single task: as guards to prevent escapes.

One of the reasons for the large scale of desertion was the lack of food. In this respect, conditions in Western Anatolia were less dire, although both Amon and Nahmias suffered from constant hunger and thirst. Bread was made of wheat mixed with barley or ground beans. Meals, such as they were, consisted of flour soup or bulgur, with meat from time to time. Those soldiers who could afford to pay supplemented their diets with dates, figs, raisins or olives. On the whole, the diet lacked vegetables or fruit. One of Amon’s most extended anecdotes concerns his and his companions’ theft of fruit from an orchard, and the consequences, both medical and military, of attempting to consume as much fruit as possible in a short time. In Western Anatolia the food situation was badly affected by the deportation of Greeks from the coastal plains in 1915.

One of the unending trials borne by both diarists was the cruelty of their immediate superiors. The officers remained fairly remote from the activities of the NCOs, but the corporals and sergeants seemed to have had free rein in the treatment of the men, including the theft and extortion of their belongings. Severe beatings were commonplace for the most minor offences. Much of the second volume of Amon’s diary is devoted to descriptions of heartless thrashings and the means of avoiding them. What emerges clearly in all these memoirs is the sheer brutality of the Turkish
police and guards. Even a Turkish soldier, Muhammad Fasih, criticized this brutality:

This incident [of an officer beating a sick soldier] and many others of the kind, demonstrates that, from the lowest to the highest, many of those who fail to appreciate the true value of our ordinary soldier. He is the backbone of the army. He is the one who does all the work. No army can do without him. Regardless of what officer you put at his head, be he German or otherwise, regardless of whether his uniform is khaki or grey, one must know how to deal with his soul and his spirit.20

Many of the NCOs were cruel and vicious, subjecting non-Muslims to beatings at every pretext, stealing from them without mercy. Whether or not this is a palatable fact, it is one of the common factors across all the memoirs, diaries, Burla’s letters and the documentary and historical fiction. Civilians were not immune to this treatment. In the Jewish settlement in Palestine, for example, when the military authorities heard a rumour that a ‘slick’ – that is, a secret armoury – had been constructed after the government had decreed that civilians were forbidden to possess weapons, they used severe beatings, torture, imprisonment and threatened rape of the women of the settlement as means of locating the cache. Yet we should be somewhat wary about the sources of these stories because many of their non-military recorders were potential Jewish leaders, therefore Zionists, to whom the Ottoman government was consistently hostile. Nevertheless, the beatings of elderly civilians, the forced marches in heat and cold and the senseless looting had little to do with politics. One of the pervasive themes in the diaries of the two Jewish soldiers, Nahmias and Amon, is the frequency of harsh punishment – the only method, it seems, of instilling discipline in the army.

The ordinary Turkish soldiers everywhere suffered as badly as did the civilian populace. They, too, were hungry, insufficiently clothed and at the mercy of their superior officers’ caprices. In his story of the war in Palestine, ‘The Way Out’ [‘Hamotza’], which is based on his own experience, Yosef Haim Brenner refers with sympathy to a Turkish sergeant whom he describes as poor and tattered. In fact, the critic Menahem Brinker criticizes Brenner’s portrayal of the Turkish soldier as inaccurate.
He should, according to Brinker, be a representative of the ruling power during wartime, but in fact he is a ragged, illiterate, but compassionate, peasant, for Brenner the stereotype of the noble savage.21

The diaries prove the extent to which Amon and Nahmias developed mechanisms for survival, particularly Nahmias, a gentle man, who learnt the lessons of adversity in conditions more severe than those of Amon. Both men, Sephardi members of the ‘Old Yishuv’ were, as I have said, observant Orthodox Jews, devoted to Jerusalem, yet both encountered and adjusted to modernity in its most extreme form: the technology of war, trains, bombs, aircraft and the modern urban environment. However, we do not know to what extent they were fundamentally changed by the war; according to their families, on their return they resumed their previous lives in Jerusalem.

Notes

beyond the scope of this work. However, such comparison would yield interesting evidence of the vast sociocultural differences between the diarists, despite their all emerging from similar social and economic backgrounds.

12. Nahmias has an oblique reference to refugees, mostly Greek. Deinard wrote about the Armenian massacre unusually bluntly for a passionate Zionist. Throughout his book, however, he was unafraid to speak his mind, particularly about Turkey and the Turks. See Ephraim Deinard, *Milhemet tugarma be’erets yisrael* [The Turkish War in Palestine] (St Louis, MO: Moinester Press, 1926), pp.194–5.


14. See ibid., p.247. A long episode in Amon’s diary deals with his misery at being forced to wear sandals in cold weather.

15. Ibid. A recently translated diary by Ilyas Ragib, a Turkish reserve officer candidate assigned to a training regiment, underlines the differences in the experience of even a fairly low-ranking officer and the ordinary men. One entry reads: ‘Getting up in the morning, morning and evening drills and continuous merriment are the major events of the day!’ See Ragip Nurettin Ee and Günes N. Ege-Akter, *By the Light of a Candle*, translated by Edward J. Erickson (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), p.209.

16. Özdemir, *Ottoman Army*, p.36.

17. Ege and Ege-Akter, *By the Light*, p.54.

18. Ibid., p.141.


Yehuda Amon was born in Jerusalem in 1878 to a family with a long and exalted Turkish-Jewish lineage. The distinguished Amon family name was historically rendered as ‘Hamon’. This is confirmed by the present-day Moshe Amon: ‘I am a descendent of the Amon (Hamon) family, having my grandfather’s name who has his grandfather’s name and so on generations back. We are the descendents of Moshe Hamon, a doctor Vizier to the Ottoman Sultan, and my grandfather’s brother was the last doctor in [Sultan Wāhīd ād-Dīn’s] court. His name was Yitzhak Amon, the son of Raphael Amon.’1 Little is known about Yehuda Amon’s early life, but he was conscripted into the Ottoman army, according to his diary, in 1915 or 1916. His exact length of service is a mystery. The reason for his conscription similarly remains a mystery, because he was already a successful merchant at the time, and could have paid the ransom. A photograph shows him to be a rather dapper young man who certainly does not seem to be impoverished. He was transported to Anatolia in what appears to be a support unit of the Fourth Ottoman Army Corps, perhaps an Amale unit, although he was armed, uniformed and trained. However, not all these units were alike; some were more merciful than others, as we see from Yehuda Burla’s letters. Both Amon and Nahmias suffered the privations characteristic of the Amale battalions both in Palestine and in Anatolia.

After the war Amon returned to Jerusalem and became a coffee merchant responsible for importing into Palestine the first coffee machine, which he bought for 150 gold Napoleons. He had the first ‘Aroma’ and ground coffee in the Old City and later owned a coffee factory. He died in Jerusalem in 1954.

In time-honoured fashion his war diary was discovered by a member of
his family in a small leather satchel in May 2010. It was then handed to the Yad Ben-Zvi Library and Archive in Jerusalem. Amon himself entitles his work a diary (yoman) but it is, in fact, a combination of diary, memoir and fiction. It is autofictive in the sense that it lies somewhere between autobiography and fiction, being a combination of autobiography and the imaginative construction of memory. Serge Doubrovsky’s concept of autofiction attempts to crystallize the grey area between autobiography and invention, real memories and creative art: ‘Doubrovsky] wants to play between two charts (autobiography/fiction), creating a hybrid term that depicts the duality of a narrator who wants to put himself in the position of analyzing his life and be a novelist at the same time.’

Autobiographical truth is centrally important to autofiction but the writing constantly involves elements of fantasy; it writes fantasy in the sense that it permits an author to express his or her entirety, or fragmented ego: the truth and the fiction, the author as self, and as the writer of self. Although Amon’s diary contains a certain element of fiction, its proportion of non-fiction is greater than it would be in a documentary or autobiographical novel. Yet whether this work is based on a real diary, or a memoir, every narrative contained in it, however elaborated, is based on lived experience. ‘Memoir’ may be a more apposite definition for it, since the term covers simple chronicles and also more intricate, analytical and structured accounts.

The diary consists of four hard-covered A5 exercise books and a large number of sections written on unbound pages, consisting of an astounding 1,146 pages in all, written in ink in Hebrew Sephardi script. Two of the books (numbered for convenience 1 and 2), which form a continuous narrative, appear to be the final version of material in the third and fourth books and the unbound pages (which I shall call fragments), since 1 and 2 are neatly written out, whereas the third and fourth books and the loose sections consist of untidy, often illegible, handwriting with much erasure, truncated notes and marginalia, some parts almost impossible to read. The archivist at the Ben-Zvi Institute, to whom this work was given, has numbered the volumes and fragments as chronologically as possible; this is a massive task which cannot always succeed, due to the disorganization of the material. For example, Amon discusses the end of the war in Volume 4 and again in fragment 21, but not in either of the completed volumes. The same stories are told in Volume 1 and in numerous fragments. Few of the fragments have a beginning or conclusion and there is no continuity between them. Some
anecdotes appear in them that have not been reproduced in the final version, but most of them consist of variations on – or drafts of – the central themes of the final volumes. Many passages of description, events and anecdotes in the fragments are repeated within the fragments themselves, as well as within the final version. It appears from the marginal corrections in Amon’s handwriting that he might have been preparing a version for publication.

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish the fiction from the fact in Amon’s diary unless the latter is historically verifiable. Perhaps what we have here is the ‘truth’ of the experience together with the ‘facts’ of the war; ultimately the ‘truth’ allows us a more profound insight into one soldier’s war than facts alone would do. It also offers an awareness of the role of the individual narrative within the larger historical narrative. More problematical is the dating in this work. Amon himself writes that he does not remember the date of his departure for war very well. For example, he heads one section ‘Second great journey’ and dates it 11 April 1917. However, at the beginning of the diary he writes that his army service began in 1914 or 1915 but does not remember the exact date. It could not have been 1914 since Turkey entered the war only in October of that year; therefore it would have been in 1915 that his journey commenced. Furthermore, he was present in Turkey at the time of the Dardanelles campaign (Gallipoli), which took place at the end of 1915 and the beginning of 1916. Amon mentions many dates, such as the date of his first visit to Aleppo on Friday 8 Adar (Fragment 14, 6) on his battalion’s way to Anatolia. There was only one Friday 8 Adar during the war years, in 1917 (2 March). The dating, therefore, does not follow. At one point during his service in Anatolia he writes about the Charleston, which was created only in 1923. The diary was written out probably between 1923 and 1927, and it is possible that by that time Amon had forgotten many dates. A number of single pages of notes, written on pages torn out of exercise books (and some bar bills) and dated from the 1920s, appear to be drafts of sections of the diary, in addition to other, unidentifiable, material.

The crucial first few pages of Volumes 1 and 2 are missing, torn out of the books, and therefore the diary does not begin at the beginning; yet much of the beginning can be reconstructed from the fragmented notes, as I have done for the first entry. This section, which describes the beginning of Amon’s travels, is repeated in more than one of the fragments, with only slight variations. Henceforward I characterize the ‘finished’ accounts as the
‘volumes’ and the rest as the ‘fragments’.

The fourth hard-covered volume, the undated 70-page handwritten notebook, numbered 4, seems to have been written some time later: its style and contents differ considerably from the other two. It appears to be a self-contained novelette recounting some of the protagonist’s experiences in the army, and ending with a dream of the war he dreams in his warm and comfortable bed once he has returned home. This dream appears in one of the fragments but not in the finished text. This volume contains an autonomous narrative with fewer dialogues and it lacks the ironic humour which is so strong a feature of the first two volumes, and its dramatis personae are different. It is headed Nissim A and written under a different name, Nissim Ayvin, perhaps a pseudonym, perhaps recounting the experience of someone else. It is undated, as is the material in it, and it begins in the middle of a narrative. The majority of the events described in it take place in 1917 or 1918, and in this fourth volume the diarist writes with unusual precision: ‘In total, my army service from the day I left Jerusalem on the 14th Nissan to my return was a period of two years and fifteen days’ (which he changes in a marginal note to thirty days) (Volume 4, 68). Contradicting this statement, the events that begin this narrative take place shortly before Purim, in the month of Adar (March). This statement does not, therefore, solve the confusion of dating and it may not refer to Amon himself. Furthermore, in the first volume Amon writes about his regiment’s response to the news of the Ottoman victory at Gallipoli, which took place in 1915. Similarly, he refers to the plague of locusts of 1915, as if it were contemporary. His actual period of service must, therefore, remain speculative. The fourth volume is devoted largely to the author’s illness and hospitalization, in a hospital named Romadani, in Aleppo in Syria. It continues with the story of the Jewish soldier’s journeys by train throughout Syria and Anatolia, and his sojourns in the various cities in which the army was billeted, including Beirut, which is not mentioned in the final volumes. I have, therefore, not included this volume with the first two in the translation.

We do not know whether Amon made notes at the time, or whether these exercise books were themselves diaries, or copied from diaries. This is unlikely because of their lack not only of dates but also of diachronic recording. The diary includes descriptions and conversations, and very often over-lengthy and embroidered – and it has to be said, sometimes trite
— anecdotes, without doubt based on actual experiences. I have not translated these anecdotes in full because they are repetitive, and some conversations continue for pages, as do descriptions of army practice, such as means of deferring to officers, marching, saluting, maintaining a rifle and preparing a hand grenade. Because there are a number of ‘beginnings’—that is, anecdotes relating to the beginning of Amon’s war service—it is difficult to determine which one is the correct one and which was inserted later in order to create a unified narrative. I have chosen to translate those that are verifiable from historical accounts and by comparison with Nahmias’s diary of the same time and places, similar circumstances and recounting similar experiences.

The general tone of Amon’s diary is surprisingly light: he frequently refers to his misery but his flippant and ironic tone does not accord with the events that cause it. Only occasionally are we given a glimpse of the real man and the real war: for example, Amon suffers one of many dreadful train journeys in bitterly cold weather. The railcars are so crowded that many of the soldiers, including Amon, are obliged to sit on the roof. The train stops at a station and Amon, too exhausted, cold, wet and hungry to follow the men into the town (Aleppo), goes into the station waiting room, where he leans against the wall and falls asleep. He later sleeps on the ground until morning, wearing some tattered clothing given to him by one of the men. (Fragment 14, 6) Another example is his bitterness at the constant beatings he and his comrades-in-arms were forced to endure, for very little reason, if for any reason at all. Also, he refers constantly to the lack of food and water, and states frequently, as does Nahmias, that the soldier’s worst enemy was hunger. When there are meals, he describes them in the minutest detail.

Throughout the diary Amon speaks of ‘the soldiers’ [ha-hayalim], always a silent, shadowy presence somewhere in the background, filling the trains and the barracks, standing in the lines at parades, singing and applauding at the celebrations, suffering the hard labour of the battalion. They are Muslim and Christian, Syrian Arabs, Turks, Kurds and Jews, only six of whom are mentioned by name: three are his Jewish companions Yitzhak, Raphael and Yosef, the latter a Bukharan Jew who is totally unfit for army service and who arouses Amon’s protective instincts together with his irritation. It could be that these are true companions, or that they are symbolic names for various Jews whom Amon encountered in the army.
The other three are Christian Arabs: Shukri, Yassin and Ibrahim (who appears only in fragments and the third book). Amon does mention that on being discharged from a hospital, Yitzhak left and the two never met again; Yosef disappears in a similar manner, and Rafael is transferred, leaving Amon the only Jew in his battalion. It is impossible to say whether this is likely or not.

There appears to be little anti-Semitism in the army: occasionally officers point to Amon’s Jewishness, but there does not seem to be concerted antagonism or persecution either by his superiors or his peers. On the contrary, in their rousing speeches the Turkish officers consistently refer to the three groups, Christians, Jews and Muslims, as brothers in the defence of their homeland, and suggest that members of all three ‘races’ [geza’im] may attain high ranks. In fact, two of Amon’s worst experiences in the army concerned the same Jewish officer.

Despite the constant overwriting and repetition and the often tiresome imaginary encounters and excursions, this diary is valuable for many reasons, chiefly its detail about life in the Ottoman army. Amon revels in detailed and wearily lengthy descriptions of army protocol, military law as it affects the ordinary soldier, guard duty, guns, uniforms, bullets and hand grenades and, above all, the unnecessary cruelty of the NCOs, the humiliation of unprovoked beatings and of ceaseless heavy labour. No mercy is shown to the ordinary men: they work by day and stand on guard duty at night. They are like small stones in a rushing stream, helpless to divert their fate, carried along by circumstances, surviving as best they can. Amon highlights the problems of chaos in the Ottoman forces, the perpetual attempts to instil discipline in the troops, the seemingly pointless journeys from place to place, the frequent desertion ‘mass disintegration’ by Arab and Turkish soldiers. Other than this, there are some rather garbled and subjective insights into the political thought of the time and a disappointingly short section on the aftermath for the Turks of the Dardanelles campaign. Amon recalls his experience of hospitalization and of general disinfection and preventive medicine, and he excels in description of the cities visited by the troops. One episode allows an insight into the Turkish air force and the difference in attitude and demeanour of military pilots from those of army NCOs. Throughout, Amon’s sense of humour prevails in ironic comments that indicate the preservation of an emotional distance from the events and the people. His attempts at knockabout comedy and the creation of a hapless
Schweik-like soldier are less successful. The diary has literary merit. Amon is able to create and sustain tension, and many of the dialogues are convincing and interesting indications of character. His companion Raphael, in particular, is a complex character, a Jewish NCO who is sometimes friend and sometimes superior, both loved and resented by Amon. Raphael takes his duties seriously and will not make compromises for a fellow Jew.8

Amon’s language is elegant and eloquent at all times. He writes in a high register, with frequent quotations from the biblical text and from other sources in Hebrew and Aramaic. In moments of extreme dejection he calls upon the biblical texts, particularly the Books of Psalms and Job, to speak for him; for example, at a time of almost unbearable exhaustion he quotes Job 5:7: ‘My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken and become loathsome.’ His vocabulary is extensive and difficult, indicating that he was a learned man. His grandson reports that he knew the entire Torah by heart; this is borne out by his recourse to the biblical text. Yet this, in a certain sense, is also one of the diary’s greatest weaknesses: Amon’s use of biblical language and quotation masks the historical reality of the events described. A good example of this is his use of biblical terminology for implements the men used to clear paths in rough terrain; similarly, his use of biblical military ranking, which gives us no idea of the real rank of the Turkish officers and NCOs he encountered in his unit, apart from the occasional mention of shaoush, sergeant, and On Bashi, corporal;9 his use of biblical units of measurement give us little idea of the real dimensions of the barracks and bridges he describes. Amon is, in fact, a mystery: a successful coffee merchant with a profound knowledge of the Jewish sources, and possessing a rich Hebrew and Aramaic idiom – and an ‘ordinary soldier’, subject to the whims of brutal and illiterate men.

The diary’s other limitation is its lack of political and cultural context. Amon does not refer to the political realities of his time, the yishuv (‘Old’ and ‘New’), Zionism, Jewish nationalism, personalities other than those he encountered in the army, or even his own aspirations for the future. He tells us nothing at all about himself and we discover very little about his pre-war life apart from a few comments in the text: we learn that he has a wife and at least one daughter, that he is from Jerusalem, that his ancestors were Turkish and that his grandfather immigrated to Palestine at the age of 5. In the mysterious fourth volume the author has a wife and sister. The events
described in the diary are, therefore, devoid of context other than that of the war itself, and about the war itself we learn very little. Amon’s massive work is simply a chronicle of hardship; he is, in fact, a kind of Ottoman Every soldier and clearly not a sophisticated diarist, as were al-Sakakini and Ihsan Turjman, for example. Even Nahmias retained some diachronic temporality in his diary. A few conversations with Amon’s comrades yield some political gossip and legend, but little that is historically useful. Amon refers, as I have said, to the events of the time such as the locust plague of 1915, the Dardanelles victory (for the Ottomans) and the visit of Enver Pasha to Istanbul in 1917. Like Nahmias, he lists place names with precision so that his journey from Jerusalem to Izmir and Istanbul can be traced on a map. Generally, one of the distinguishing features of this diary is Amon’s attentiveness both to space and place: landscape, including forests, orchards, deserts, mountains, and cities and towns. He delineates the characteristic differences between the various locations in which he has been unwillingly placed, and the physical responses to them: thirst, cold, heat and, occasionally, pleasure: for example, in the Syrian landscape as seen from a train window, or on the Galata Bridge in the city of Istanbul.

Amon offers little insight into the lives of the Jewish communities of the towns visited by his battalion, although he often encounters Jews in these places. Amon, his battalion and the men seem to exist in an isolated, self-sufficient universe, as if the external world had ceased to exist. Perhaps this is the way it appeared to them, thrust into events and places they could not understand, treated abominably, shifted from place to place, worked to exhaustion, ill fed, ill clothed, cold, hungry, filthy and frequently ill.

Despite the lack of context, a strong composite picture emerges about life in the Ottoman army in Western Anatolia in all its daily detail: its routines, its personnel, interrelationships, weaponry and food – most often the lack of it. We see from this diary that the Ottoman army was disintegrating. Food and clothing were scarce, transport was primitive and inefficient, discipline was random and desertion was the most destructive problem in battalions behind the lines. Amon makes it clear that all the races, as he calls them, suffered equally, as did the NCOs and the conscripts. He makes light of his angriya, hard labour: but between his often facetious lines we see men treated no better than beasts of burden. In fact animals were more precious to the army than were the men.

The two final volumes say nothing about the war’s end. Only in the
fragments, repeated more than once, do we learn of the final ceasefire, and Volume 4 offers information about the protagonist’s journey home. We are unable to answer the question of the missing pages, the reason for the exclusion of a large number of the fragments in the final version or for the multiple versions of the same story, notably Amon’s illness and hospitalization, which appear to have been exceptionally traumatic because they recur many times throughout the fragments. Nonetheless, as a military history, a picaresque journey, an adventure story, in addition to a chronicle of the real experiences of Jewish soldier in an army far from home, the diary is continuously fascinating, moving and exciting.

A Note about the Translation

The diary is partially punctuated, without commas, semi-colons and other aids to accurate reading. Amon uses periods (full stops) and question marks. Dialogues do not have inverted commas. I have inserted all these for clarity. Wherever possible I have tried to retain Amon’s rather archaic Hebrew expression, but I have also tried to find equivalents in English for his idioms and sayings. Amon shifts from present to past tense without any apparent logic. I have retained his rather idiosyncratic use of tenses except when its clumsiness impairs the narrative.

I have inserted linking narratives and summaries of conversations and some of the more inconsequential anecdotes, between square brackets. The first number in the square brackets is the volume or fragment number, the second is the page number or numbers.

Yehuda Amon’s Diary:
Diary of a Jewish Soldier in the Ottoman Army

[This introductory material – that is, the description of the beginning of Amon’s journey – is taken from the fragments. It does not appear in the final volumes. It is possible that it appeared on the excised pages. This alternative version of the outset of the journey is a fragment headed ‘From the Beginning of my Journeys in the Ottoman Army, and subheaded ‘The first short journey chapter 1’, in which the departure date is different from that appearing in other fragments.]
‘Dear friend, in an hour’s time you must go with all the people who will be gathered at the Damascus gate and do not be more than an hour late.’ So said the Mukhtar of Jerusalem Mr Ye’uda to me… ‘Without any delay, and now go home quickly.’ On the Tuesday morning I packed up the things I needed and I took six gold coins in my pocket because the world war will end soon. I went to the gate. There was a crowd of many people gathered together in groups: one laughs and the other shouts and I approached them and I asked, ‘What is all this shouting, what kind of confusion is this, and what are you intending to do, and who is coming to take us, and where are we going, and where are the officers and what…?’ All of us hired carts for 3 bishliks[^11] per person. They told me that there are no officers and everyone became angry with me [because of all the questions I was asking] and didn’t let me finish. I again asked about who will pay for us? ‘Everybody pays from his private pocket’, they answered me. ‘How do you know?’ ‘This is what they told us at the Damascus Gate.’ Therefore this is a very strange government. If this were the English government it would not do this. In the end we reached the gate and we went to the main road at six in the evening but where should we go? This is on the 15th of the month of Shevat, the New Year of the trees [Tu Bishvat], the date is 1914 or 1915 I do not remember exactly.^[12] Where are the officers, where are the army headquarters, the soldiers that have come to meet us? Suddenly they all separated, one went to a café with others, and we went our separate ways. We were still shivering from the cold that had taken hold of us and we began a conversation. If only we had been under the government of England for which we have been longing for a long time, it would be wonderful. Oh, how the English love the nation of Israel. We continue to speak in praise of the English for whom the hearts long. Suddenly one of [the men] exclaimed: ‘I will tell you much about this wonderful nation of the English: it is clever and swift and ready and knows everything about the sea and about the land and it is the father of humanity and its government will last
forever and it is an enlightened government, an honest government that pursues righteousness and loves the nation of Israel and will redeem our nation in the near future.\footnote{13}

[Fragment 7, 9–10]

[This important fragment is written in an almost illegible scrawl, with corrections, additions and deletions. These details do not occur anywhere else in the volumes.]

From there we moved onwards and we met many people some of whom were walking and others riding [some on two and others on four]… The journey took four hours and we arrived at one o’clock in the afternoon close to Tulkarm and afterwards a cart [arrived] and the men got down from it and began to give spades to everyone who needed them. Afterwards, army officers came and an order was given to gather together and to put up tents. We put up about 30 tents in two hours and then this [person] brings wood and this one water and this one onions and the cook prepares some lentils for us… We remained free for two days and on the third day a large convoy of camels arrived laden with various materials and tools, spades, rakes, barbed wire and on Thursday the work began… On the Sunday they brought carts filled with large and small stones. Every cart stands on one wheel at the top and at the back there are two thick rods in place of wheels and you push it from place to place. This work was paving roads and repairing rails from Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Wadi Sarar to Beersheba. [He goes on to describe a storm that flattened the tents.]

[Fragment 18, 1]

On the 11th day of Nissan, 1917\footnote{14} (3rd April) I was saying the evening prayer. I had just stopped [in order] to leave the synagogue and a lowly official called Kujuk Kaman Shaoush [Sergeant] grabbed me. A metal sign, shining like a half moon with golden protruding letters and with some green ropes, was
hanging on his chest as a sign that he was able to grab people walking [about] innocently. He gave an order: ‘Halt.’ A brown strap was immediately taken out of a [incomprehensible word] shorter than he was and he bound my arm to an arched railing together with another person who had previously been caught. Seven well-fixed bindings to realize the verse [about] seven maidens appropriate to give to the Princess. My daughter, who was with me, ran away in confusion, weeping, to tell her mother about these things that have happened. I, who knew that [the Shaouush] had the power or the authority, did not resist. ‘Move on!’ he ordered us and so we reached the Shehem [Damascus] Gate and above that De’ira [Daatar] Elradif (a place where the army gathered). Opposite it there was a beautiful building belonging to the French. It was seven o’clock when we reached this place. As I thought that this place would be greatly enjoyable I did not worry at all, also because my relatives would come to visit me immediately, but it was not as I had imagined it. While I was still thinking, a gate opened in the inside of the building while the two of us were still closely bound together; a small door opened opposite us. The functionary turned the key and we were pushed inside. He loosened the straps [binding us], closed the door and left and in a few moments he came back again to take away the man who was with me and he shut the door behind him. It was already dark in this room and I was standing in confusion, not a word escaped from my mouth, for to whom should I speak? I went in.

He locked the door with a bang. Confused and depressed I remained alone, amazed and surprised in this Egyptian darkness. What kind of mysterious connection is there here? They even took away my brother-in-suffering and I seem to be the one going down into the pit: why and for what reason? There is no answer or reason at the moment but I did not lose hope that in a few moments I would leave as free as the Armenian had left; perhaps I can still make a forceful complaint against this MP who was enjoying himself maltreating me. I moved this thought around in my mind for a short while but it was a vain hope that would not afford me
any actual protection. At this moment I hear someone speaking outside the room of my confinement; not a single sound has come out of my mouth, for with whom should I speak? What I have heard speaking outside appeared to me in the end to be the fruit of my imagination – there is no one to hear and no one to speak.

Meanwhile my eyes search the darkness here and there. I turn my face and I see this chink of light beyond the window in this room of which I had no idea, half an amah \(^{19}\) in width and in height surrounded by iron bars and a lattice that was a little defective all around so that the prisoner’s hand could receive something from the outside. I looked through the window angrily; in a few seconds and with forceful steps I went over to the window and leant on the windowsill – suddenly someone let out a terrifying scream, ‘waah’, ‘oyah’. Trembling, I remain in my place, the hair of my head standing up because of this terrifying sound. I know very well that I am confined here on my own and there is no one apart from me in this room. This nerve-racking sound came out of a man who was lying on the filthy floor. Suddenly the voice sounded again and added [in Arabic] ‘pay attention, wise man’; again a shiver crossed my bones when he began to cough with a deep gurgle. Now the fear faded away. I knew that this is a man and not a demon mocking me. In any case, I felt that I was treading upon something which I had come upon while standing at the windowsill. I didn’t know that I was trampling upon a person. I didn’t know whether I was standing on his head or on his feet or his stomach. He was letting out screams of pain and I calmed him with certain words. I became stronger and I straightened myself up, and I begin to speak with him softly in elevated language.

[Through the long dialogue that ensues we learn that he is an Arab farmer who has been imprisoned after having been accused of theft, but he swears that he is not a thief. There follows a lengthy conversation between them. Amon continues: While we were speaking] I feel the stings of mosquitoes and they whine and begin to settle on my face and sting, and there were cruel fleas and the entire floor was covered in clumps of stones and other obstacles. I now stopped arguing with the so-called thief. I had to use both my hands to get rid of the insects that were not allowing
me to have any peace even for a moment. [In the meantime a Jew, Moshe Franco, is thrust into the cell or the cellar.]

[Volume 1, page 12]

While we were still angry about the noise and the insects that were irritating us, there was a loud crash at the lock and the door opened. The official pushed somebody inside and the door was closed with a thumping of the old bolt. The noise stopped and we remained amazed.

The man who came in was terrified, he stopped for a moment in confusion and then he began to rain fluent curses [in Arabic], among them the well-known saying ‘your forefathers are like devils’. Once again the person who had just come in said these words, ‘I scorn them and their seed’ and, snarling, he let out obscenities that have no meaning, and after he had poured his fury upon the officials he became quiet and there was a long silence, together with the sound of muffled scratching, and if I’m not mistaken the insects ran away, amazed by the this endless anger…

[1, 13] At this moment I neglected the Jew Moshe and the old fellah who sat with his mouth open; however, this was not clear to me because of the Egyptian darkness that covered his face and I can’t say truthfully and clearly that he remained with his mouth open. I took upon myself the role of drawing near to the Lord of the Curses and to welcome him in the darkness. I took a few short steps and then I stood in front of him or behind him because of the darkness in which there was absolutely no light, but for the moment I am the Lord of the Manor. I opened my mouth and began to conduct short conversation in Arabic.

‘Who are you?’

[1, 14] He replies briefly. ‘I’m a Muslim’, and added, ‘and you?’

‘I am a Jew.’

And therefore I said to myself, so be it, here we are in this narrow room to realize the verse ‘and four leprous men…’ which means excellent men.20
Once again he asked me, ‘Who else is here, Sir?’
‘An old fellah, an honourable thief from Yalu (a river in a
village close to Ramallah) who did not steal a little salt and
tobacco, and another Jew like me.’
‘Is there space to sit down and rest a little?’
‘There is: there is a sofa which is the floor and there are
springs which are the insects that fly and skip and sting very
badly.’

In spite of this he tries to find a path for himself while he feels
about in the darkness and comes nearer to us. We begin to tell
each other our general troubles and our private woes and in this
way the conversation moved to the events of the day, while we
were standing or moving or rolling about all night. Sometimes we
would bump into each other face-to-face together with light kicks
on the feet of the old man sitting in the corner. As far as I’m
concerned, I was happy for the moment in spite of the frequent
discomfort, and even though my sadness and sighs grew and
multiplied. But I found someone with whom to argue. The three
of us were talking about this and that without knowing what each
other looked like. The old man did not join our conversation. By
the way, if I am not mistaken, the conversation with this Muslim
indicated that he was an honourable man according to the
charming way he spoke at the start and by his adding these words,
‘My life’s happiness has passed and gone away, my friend and
brother, but I heard much positive hope for peace and joy
awaiting us.’ And he added, ‘And we are praying that our efforts
will be realized soon without any kind of loss.’

A ripple of joy moved in my heart because of the charming and
sweet words that he had expressed...

I began a conversation regarding him, and I asked him: ‘Were
you caught for army labour and you hadn’t paid the ransom?’
These words came out of his mouth: ‘No, no, my friend, but these
are evil people who do not distinguish between something small
and something large; it is nonsense and nothing else.’ It seemed
to me that this person was clothed in the garb of selfishness, but
we will wait and see when daylight breaks.
‘So, my brother, how were you caught?’
‘It is not important how I was caught but I tell you that I am a teacher and the deputy headmaster of the government school in Jerusalem and I am a qualified writer in Arabic literature. As such I was relieved of army duty and also of the ransom, my friend. This impertinent and crazy person Kahun Jawish [Shaoush?] who did not know how to distinguish between his right hand and his left caught me and put me in with you in order to make me suffer this hell for a few hours with you. Tomorrow I will show him my strong arm. I am not in a hurry to punish him except with some reflection. [The conversation continues and Amon notes that he would give ‘half of his possessions’ to see this man’s face. He speaks of him as ‘this government teacher, according to his own words’. He again comments, ‘They put my effendi into this dark room without any justification’, seeming not to believe the man’s credentials. When daylight dawns he sees this man and discovers that he is very beautifully dressed and indeed a man of some importance. He is also something of a dandy which Amon’s usual wonderful powers of observation make quite clear. But then the teacher asks him what he does and he answers.]

‘I am a teacher in a government school for the mentally ill. I decided to take up a new profession a short while ago. Beforehand I was a merchant and now that there are so many more mentally ill people due to suffering and sorrow I began to become a teacher because there are very few teachers of this kind in general and at this time in particular.’

[The Muslim] laughed from time to time and meanwhile opened up his plait [coif?] that had become a wavy fringe. He was a man of about 30, a talented and very courteous man.

The sun lit up the room and came in through the window into the room, or, more exactly, the cellar. I look at the walls of the building where the pestilence [of insects] leaps out: [the walls] are concave and reddish, dark brown, and with fleas and insects and cruel mosquitoes, some of them squashed and others living and satisfied. In the latticed roof are spider-webs and lizards climb and leap here and there without stopping. With such harmony how can anyone rest even for a moment? Anyway I sit
on the windowsill with my head on the edge and watch the
passers-by and with a pounding heart I wait for someone to
appear who can release me from the painful predicament in
which I am cast.

At this moment an old Arab acquaintance of mine appeared at
the window. [His job is to write] pleas on behalf of those who
have cases and complaints and require pleas to present to the
local courthouse. He looks at me and becomes very upset to see
me imprisoned in this filthy room. I tell him everything, which he
summarizes by these four words, ‘This is not good’, and he adds,
‘When did they bring you to this place?’ ‘Yesterday evening,
without eating or smoking. I didn’t even have a cigarette with me.
I am having the fast of my soul.’21 ‘This is a great pity’, he said
and went away. To tell the truth I was very hungry.

A few moments later he returned and approached the window,
put his hand through the lattice which had been broken for a long
time, and he gave me two loaves of bread, cheese, oranges and a
packet of tobacco. He said to me, ‘Please eat, my friend, and I am
going to your house to tell them that I have found you. In any
case I’ll try to free you soon, but perhaps not entirely because the
army plague has spread from the great to the small.’

I sat on the ground because we had been standing on our feet
all night. I invited the Effendi and the Jewish Moshe to have a
morning meal, also because of the powerful hunger22 that had
attacked me. During the meal, which was pleasant to our palates,
the door was turned on its axis. An army officer appeared and
stood beside the door, his eyes squinting. He raised his arm and
pointed to the government teacher, who left the cellar, his face
becoming, in turn, pale and red and then blue. [1, 21] He
hesitated and then turned towards me while a light smile spread
on his face because of his contentment with me. He raised his
hand to his brown tarboosh as a sign of parting and he said very
courteously, ‘Thank you very much’, and he disappeared. In his
hurry to link his arm to the arm of the teacher, the officer
appeared to have forgotten to lock the door, which remained
open, which pleased me very much. The remains of the teacher’s
meal had fallen into the old man’s possession...
Moshe and I quickly finished eating and we agreed to pick up our legs and run. But it was an hour before we could escape without interference, but now we could be free. In the meantime I looked about here and there to make sure that there was no one who would disturb us from committing our misdemeanor, and then the time was right.

In a moment I threw an orange at the head of the old fellah as a sign of parting and we went outside and stood under the tall oak and linden trees whose branches covered the sun. Mischievous birds sang in them in complicated chirps. Again I looked about here and there so that none of the guards on duty should see that we were intending to escape.

Suddenly we were caught by a policeman who crept up from the side and who once again imprisoned us and we had no means of escape. He ordered us to enter the reception room and to sweep and clean and polish the floors in all the rooms and all the terraces in the building. In the meantime with both hands he brings in a large tub laden with various utensils: bowls and cups and spoons and samovars, dishes and kettles, forks and various wooden implements. This kind of work will not be finished even in a year’s time because they had to be cleaned and because we had to clean and polish everything. To cut a long story short, the rooms were swept but not yet the terraces. I, who had not been schooled in cleaning and sweeping and polishing, left that to Moshe with his strong arm, and I accepted the tub that was loaded to the brim and, with suppressed anger, I began to do the cleaning… While I was so angry, some china bowls were broken and also a crystal tumbler, all in a second. The guard was not a witness to this small tragedy.

A few moments later I rose from my place and I went to wherever the wind would carry me and Moshe followed me. We left the floor and the tub and the dishes and we prepared to escape no matter what. [1, 23] We go towards the great gate – there is no one there, not even a guard. We are bracing ourselves to get away from here and because of my fear I leaned against a [?] of uneven stones (quarried and standing in piles ready to use for building) and
above this there is a lovely view, especially a large ridge surrounded by grass and winter flowers that give off a perfume, and in the middle of the ridge stands a meagre scarecrow confronting every bird and wing. Here and there are aromatic flowerbeds and shrubs and slim branches, to be brief. During my unintentional surveillance we went out through the great iron gate into the open without deviation and with hurried steps we reached the Damascus Gate and members of my household rushed out to greet me.

Before noon there were public announcements in every part of the city that all the men from the ages of 25 to 45 had to be present in a kishla [barracks], which is an army post, on such and such a date, all of them, and those who do not obey will be punished with the full force of the law. In any case the searchers and the detectives are penetrating into all the houses and the courtyards and every angle and every hidden corner and confusing the people by saying that they should rush to the army post on a particular day, and there very soon they will organize our departure. In the middle of the day of our journey hundreds of people flowed to the army post. We were sitting in rooms at the army post. Every one of them contained about 15 people. Every family brought their men parcels of sustenance for the journey. All the Jews were crowded into three rooms. It was our wish that about 20 people were pushed into one room in which there was a Bukharan Jew whose name was Hakham Yosef. [He describes Yosef as being very splendidly dressed and very pious, and he seemed to be honoured amongst the members of his family. He was wearing a black skullcap and his head and face were covered with curly hair. He begins to preach a sermon but is unable to finish because the men are allowed to go home for one day.]

The sun was about to set and the lieutenant gave us home leave until tomorrow morning early and with many terrible conditions if we do not all appear on the 13th Nissan [April]. The next day at 7 o’clock we gathered without any delay in the military barracks. This was the last time that I packed up my belongings into one parcel and [packed] food in my knapsack and I took leave of my family.
In the army quarters I found crowds and complete commotion. Hundreds of people were gathered, filling up the width of the great square and others were added to them. The din grew every moment. Bewildered and confused I entered this black sea of people standing and running about, coming and going in the enormous noisy square, bundles in their skirts and on their shoulders like those who went out of Egypt and Jerusalem. They had food in their knapsacks.

An hour later without any order we went from there into another courtyard that belonged to the English, opposite the military quarters, in order to disinfect our clothing and our parcels and to be free of all kinds of germs that were gnawing at our souls... The clothes and the parcels were squeezed into a round iron tank with steam being forced out of an engine into a round pipe and propelled into another tank in order to heat up everything that was inside it destined for burning. In this way the germs jump into the air and we see the appliance’s steam. For my part this is not important so I pushed three coins into the hand of the Officer of the Germs and my parcel was released from the disinfection. I was not the first to do this. That is to say, every item of clothing was disinfected without steam and clean [empty of germs] in any case. At noon we returned to the military headquarters purified of the germs and such that is known to the initiated, and we sat down to have our meal.

At four o’clock we were given an order to go quickly and organize ourselves in rows [columns]. The officers rushed around and positioned all the people in straight lines and once again the parade began with greater exactness. They call out the people’s names that were written down on lists and afterwards the officer gives the order to march.

The lines move one after the other and all along the way there was a great noise and turmoil with sighing and shouting and wailing which deafened the ears and which rose to the heart of the sky. It was like the end of the world. In one moment the world would return to chaos, as at the beginning of its creation.
The police and the lower ranks, who were hard-hearted, beat anybody who dared to approach the lines – old people and children – the confusion was terrible: officers pushed away the crowd of old people and children and mostly numerous women and young girls from the lines [of soldiers] who [would be] travelling in the train. The noise stopped for a short while because we had reached the railway. Hundreds of women clung to us again and old people near and far joined in, this sight so distressing to the heart, and in the end we all climbed into railcars and we sat down. Those who approached us at the windows, weeping, were beaten back by the police, in particular naughty children who were attempting to climb up into the railcars.

On 14th Nissan at 4.30 p.m. the locomotive whistle was sounded as the sign for the journey [to begin]. The train moved, handkerchiefs and scarves were waving in the air as a sign of parting, once again a general wailing burst out from the families and the public, crowded and noisy, and after a moment the sounds stopped – we heard only the sound of the wheels turning with feverish speed and the whistles of the locomotives from time to time. We were sad and sighing as if we were leaving this world and going towards certain death.

We were so jam-packed that you could not move a foot or a hand because of lack of space in the railcars. In every car there were two armed Turkish sentries standing beside the door. It was dark inside the car even though it was the 14th and the moon lit up with all its strength. After a while the moon disappeared and the stars gathered together their brightness, and [then] the sky was covered with clouds and we didn’t know whether it had begun to rain because of the noise.

[1, 27] [Because it was Passover] we searched for unleavened food in the darkness by all sorts of means, [also] in order to be separated from certain hooligans who then went to sit on the front benches. We, the Jews, crowded together in one group on the other side. Within the darkness we heard curses and swearing, screams and groans: this one curses that he doesn’t have enough space to sit down and this one shouts and whistles and the other mocks him
that he doesn’t care, another claps his hands and groans and the other at his side hits him with his elbows because he’s stronger, and all of this violence grew. Yet it so happened that in the meantime they even began to sing.

Groups of secular people [sic] burst into song and melody, together with flutes of thin reeds, adding ‘May God keep the Sultan.’ All of them raised their voices. The sadness passed and we participated with envy in their joy and in those songs but afterwards we, the Jews, sang old tunes and among them the song ‘Hatikvah’ which restored us at this time. Still there were sighs and songs, groans and praises, laughing and crying, mocking and wailing. Three hours later there was silence when we were leaning squeezed one upon the other in the terrible crush, but in spite of this we were able to sleep from time to time. Only our heads were free to move by themselves with the movement of the car and sometimes the dozing heads started in anger and they banged into one another through the movement of the car…

In the morning we see cataracts of water on the sides of the mountain, white and pure on the mountain’s heights, flowing in a torrent as we come closer opposite it. It was clearly seen, a flowing current of water, pouring its waters from the high mountains and between the magnificent rocky boulders. Soon a flowing stream burst out, silver and foaming at the same time. The sun’s rays echoed colours like rainbows adorning it. When I asked what this place was I was told that it is the Edrai River.

We pass through stations without number as we take on additional people waiting for the passing train at every station. At every station we receive new faces and the crush is doubled even though they added cars and a second locomotive to push them from behind. In this way we celebrated Passover. Our troubles grew, we were filled with longing and the desire to go home as if we had been away for many days from our land and from our families, and we cannot bear any more. Every one of us is longing for his wife and his children but what can we do – there is no wife and there are no children now and it is only now that we
begin to understand what a wife is and what precious children are. Sadness and sorrow were crouching in the railcar in which two thirds of the men were Jews, even on the first night of Passover which had in any case blurred its form. A great sorrow attacked us when we considered the beauty and shape [of Passover]. Even the Gentiles wore a mask of unhappiness on their faces. All the songs and the celebrations that had been organized yesterday had lost their spirit. In the meantime one of the Ashkenazis, one of the newest ones, takes a bottle of wine out of his knapsack and says the blessing with a glass which he had deliberately prepared at the start and he gives some [wine] to all those leaning and twisted one upon the other, propped up like statues one upon the other, and he hands out some horseradish and lettuce to be maror [bitter herbs eaten on Passover], to remember the departure from Egypt and Jerusalem. Then I take some pieces of matzah out of my knapsack and I say that we should eat it but also that before doing so I must tell the story of the departure from Egypt and because of the terrible noise in the car I decided to say it aloud [or ‘loudly’. He then goes through portions of the Haggadah 30 that he knows by heart].

Once again we received scarecrow guests whom the Jews had not invited: those whose long hair covers their eyes and their faces, wearing keffiyes and agils [circlets] on their heads. This was on the first day of Passover and the 16th, the first day of hol hamo’ed [the week between the first and last days of Passover]. In the early morning we reached Damascus, to our great dejection and our officers’ joy. [1, 32] The army officers there welcomed us with joy. A large cellar or a barn for cattle and sheep had been prepared for us. Fleas and insects in their thousands did not leave us alone. They [the army officers] threw water on the dusty ground in our honour. A screen of wooden planks was raised between those of us who were paying 51 Napoleons up front and between those who had not paid the military tax [or fine] so that they would think that we were honoured and of a high rank, but then we were pushed inside the cellar and that is all the honour we were afforded for the time being. Apart from this we paid another 30 lira in Turkish notes before we went on our journey.
[He then lists the amount of money they had to pay in Damascus and other cities.]

[1, 33] In the morning three Jews appeared amongst the most honourable in Damascus with the Chief Rabbi and they distributed matzot [unleavened bread eaten on Passover] and boiled eggs and some people also received money; they said to us ‘next year in Jerusalem’ in deep sorrow. They parted from us and said, ‘until we meet again’. Throughout the entire hol hamo’ed we continued [to eat?] this treasure in great quantity.

The day before the seventh day of Passover they took us to the bathhouse and after we had washed in cold water barbers arrived to cut our hair with a razor: the hair of our heads and our beards and our chests and our armpits and elsewhere. Yosef refused to be shaved and we had to beg him to obey the order lest he be beaten with sticks or with straps...

[1, 34] On the seventh day of Passover we went to Aleppo and we sat down on the floor of the railcar in orderly lines. We had no carts here, only trucks, and it seems that the difference between those who paid the military tax and those who did not disappeared completely. An officer explained to us that we paid the tax for what had been in the past at a very specific time and not the present or the future. Together with this the officer informed us that all those who paid the military tax are called traitors.

[(1, 35ff.) He goes on at great length to describe an incident where Arabs on the train, one of whom was a civilian, bribed a young Turkish officer and some guards with money and a lavish feast in order to be allowed to escape. Amon and his comrades were astounded and angry. The officer (lower rank than a lieutenant, probably an NCO) accepted the money and the food but did not give his benefactors better accommodation and, moreover, he punished them by tying them up and beating them. This is the first instance in the diary of the easy corruptibility of the Turkish soldiers. Amon mentions that the guards were there to prevent anybody from escaping.]
Then we went into the order of the day and night. The order of the night was thus: when we entered the military quarters everyone had to find a suitable place for himself. Those who were sitting down were certainly resting from the day’s toil. Some of them were lying stretched out their full length because the hall was so big. But not a half hour had passed before the mice began to show their fury, not to mention the insects known to us in every place we had lived in. We were busy the entire night chasing away the mice which gnawed at our knapsacks and drove us crazy because we could not close our eyes and rest.

At sunrise we were taken to the bathhouse and after a kind of washing we received our portion of daily bread called ta’en and raisins, and we were hurried to the train station in German wagons whose sides were tattered, painted and clean and covered with a kind of china [clay?].

[Fragment 14 tells the story of another journey, although its exact location both in the narrative and in the geographical area is uncertain. It is certainly later than their departure from Jerusalem because it is in Adar, early winter.]

There was no space between the railcars. What could we do? In five minutes’ time the locomotive whistled as a sign of our journey’s start and I looked here and there and saw that the soldiers were climbing up onto the roof of the railcar and I was in a different car where seven of us, all soldiers, were sitting on the roof. The train moved and travelled quickly. A strong wind began to blow without stopping because of the speed of the locomotive. Oh, woe is me, what have I done? It was a miracle that the sun was burning but in spite of it the cold was terrible. And who could get off the roof at this time? Therefore I remained sitting on the roof with six people; and all the roofs of the railcars were filled but the sorrow of many is only half a consolation. The sun, which had turned violet, began to set behind the horizon. The stars appeared and the weak light of the moon disappeared quickly. Now it wasn’t hunger that was bothering me but the cold which burnt my bones and choked up my throat. All the soldiers open their mouths wailing and whining and weeping, and I joined with them because I am one of them [lit. ‘one
must not separate oneself from the group’]. Suddenly a miracle happened. We went into a long tunnel that took in the entire train and we were covered with warm steam: for this instant we were in a hot, choking bathhouse, and after this sweet moment we travelled into open space and the cold, especially the wind, gnawed our bones. Master of the Universe, have I not suffered enough? An hour before midnight the train stopped at the station of Marmora. Who could get off the roof? With a great deal of difficulty I got down from the roof on the trembling arms of Ahmed…

[14, 4] We were still complaining, shocked and seeking escape from the cold that was pursuing us to the point of death. [They find an empty railcar and take shelter in it. He is not sure where they are going, but assumes that it is to Halb (Aleppo) in Syria.]

(14, 5) Now it is no longer cold that afflicts them, but hunger. Amon writes more than once ‘the most terrible enemy is hunger’. They had not given us bread during that entire day. At two in the afternoon the train moved and gathered great speed. I found myself a place in the space between the railcars which was closest to me and with great an impressive speed the train continued onwards. The cold increased and in an hour rain and hail fell to the ground, for snow had fallen the previous evening. I was completely wet, and uncontrollable, intense shivering attacked my body. I was fixed to my place.

At eight o’clock, at the beginning of the night, the train stopped and here they hastily gave us bread. I could not get up from my place. I remained without bread because I had lost my appetite. We heard a loud whistle and the train moved on with amazing speed. The rain and hail had not stopped. [14, 6] At dawn the train stopped at Aleppo on Friday the eighth day of the month of Adar [February] closest to Nissan. All the passengers, civilians and soldiers, got off and went away. I didn’t even see Ahmed. I had not moved from my place for two consecutive nights. I had not slept on this last night when I was sitting on a narrow board near the steps: and if not for the shivering that grasped me from the cold at every moment and that woke me up, I would have fallen under the wheels of the railcars.
With great difficulty I got off the railcar because the locomotive was pulling all of them to a different place. Shivering and vexed by the rain that continued all night, I went into the railway station that was open. There was nobody there. I leaned against the wall and water flowed from my clothes and my hat, which had weighed a half a kilo beforehand but must have added another half. I left the place and went to another place and sat on the ground and fell asleep until the day dawned. I began to hear a noise in this place. Then I went outside, wrapped up in some old rags I had inherited from one of the soldiers. The rain had stopped and the sun came out of its sheath. [End of the fragment.]

During this journey we passed through the following towns: Salatiyah (or Salahiya), Marmora, Tarsus, Adana, Karaköy – a pure Turkish city – and other villages and towns surrounded by walls, until we reached Pozanti where we stayed for two days. Then another journey of a day on foot between boulders and a wasteland and we stop in the evening in a desolate desert. There is a small stream whose waters gush, cutting into a long spine and flowing in a narrow incline and from there into a valley and mountains in the wasteland of a desert.

The next day, again a march of seven hours, stopping three times. In the night we were [billeted] in a large bakery. [He does not specify the location of this bakery but his comments indicate that it was part of a farm.] They didn’t allow us to spread out in the fruitful farm in which here and there were neglected furrows of plantings between streams of water that flowed abundantly, and between them were elm trees and cedars and beds and furrows lined with grass. In them grew mallow, aspidistra and clover, tomatoes, eggplant, cucumbers and other things. The sun turned the night red and we didn’t visit [the place as we would have liked to]. Certain prisoners were kept inside the bakery and armed soldiers guarded us for fear of people going outside; they were also guarding the fruitful orchards.

At dawn we again went out on one long march. Exhausted and crushed, in the evening we arrived at a desolate desert. A few isolated buildings stood here and there, among them a huge
warehouse that was called Karakol Musa. When I went in I couldn’t take a step because of the crowd crammed inside it. I refused to remain among them and escaped outside.

[1, 41] For the first time I received cruel blows, slaps and a beating with a leather strap on my face and on my back because of my refusal to go into this treasure house. In the end my punishment was thirty grush [which I paid] through a friend of mine and I lay down to sleep in the officer’s tent until morning. This is how stupidly they treated us. The delicate ones among us who couldn’t bear these crowds and the distress they caused had to pay from 30 to 50 grush to be invited into the tent of the young officer who had come out to meet us [when we had gone halfway] and who was the first to return to Damascus.

The sun came out and shone on the land and we were organized into lines. After the daily muster – at each of which two or three of us were missing – we received the official bread and continued our way on foot.

At the end of Iyar [April–May] the heat intensified. The summer heat began to do what it does, and from the tramping of the lines [of soldiers] striding along their way, sandstorms rose that covered the sun with dust. Our tongues stuck to our palates and thirst dulled our senses. A thick layer of dust hardened with sweat covered our skin. Your face is burnt like pure copper: more exactly, blackened like bricks. Dust comes into your mouth in spite of yourself and you begin to chew in anger. Then a whistle comes out from [between] your teeth; from clods of sand and dust that are stirred up...[1, 42], your tongue tastes sand and your mouth spits it out: tfu, the hell with it, you can’t stand life like this. At this point a sigh bursts out of [his friend, the Bukharan Jew] Hakham Yosef and he chants: ‘My Lord, when will this war come to an end?’

At noon we reached a broad field and more-or-less 1500 men camped on a broad plain. We were very tired and we were given a two-hour rest right there by order of the corporal who suddenly shot out from inside a wood that we had not known about at this time.
At the end of the official two hours we heard the sound of the trumpet and many officers appeared from below [lit. ‘under the earth’] – again the trumpets sounded and we, the conscripts who did not understand the meaning of this, remained seated in our places. Then the officers signalled to us by waving their arms about, adding loudly ‘Get up quickly and get yourselves into a circle.’ The efficient officers organized us into a giant circle in which one could build a splendid palace.

In the meantime we heard the galloping hooves of a magnificent horse and we saw an officer approaching. [1, 43–4] We see here that we have many enemies who rise up against us to defeat us, but Allah will save us from them: these are Russia, France, England, Greece and recently Italy and Romania and others. We must stand up and come to the aid of the Ottoman government to our last drop of blood with our entire will and power, not with the power of the fist [sic]. We are the children of the Ottoman homeland, we are also obliged, without any difference of religion or race, Jews and Muslims and Christians, we are brothers in suffering, to defend our precious homeland, and here we participate, with power and wealth in the aid of our homeland. It is our desire to bring about our efforts and to banish completely the enemies of our land: Egypt and Iraq [Naharayim] are already in our hands and we will overcome enemy nations beneath us: we will weaken them with the power of the sword; and we will give them a blow on the thigh; we shall not rest nor shall we be silent until they bend their knee: because we are the Ottomans and we are not of those who cut reeds and collect trees
in the lake.44 [1, 43] In spite of this there are enlightened governments that join in to help us: noble Germany, magnificent Austria, heroic Bulgaria and others. [As a son of the English is my son45] in case I may have to speak to each one of you. I have spoken clearly with one of the men who was a conscript like you and it shall be that you will follow in his footsteps and you will achieve ranks even more exalted than his within a short time, without any difference of religion and all the privileges. If you desire this tell me, please.

‘Yes, yes’, all of them reply, accompanied by noisy clapping. At this moment silence spread over the place as if there were no one there. The officer took out a whistle from his bowl and he sounded a few single notes that are known [to be a signal] and someone leaves the circle and goes up to the officer and stands at a distance of 2 metres from him with his hand raised to his cap to a movement of the horse’s head, for the horse was restless and had froth coming out of his mouth and he was neighing. This was a lieutenant standing before the superior officer and the latter gave an order to stand at ease. The lieutenant lowered his hand which had been touching his cap. His fingers were straight and held together except that his thumb was bent in a circle.

[The speech continues for a very long time. It is followed by a list of regulations regarding army discipline: respect for superior officers, behaviour before superior officers, the value of weapons, admonitions for courage, obedience, the difference between soldiers and civilians, all in an attempt to encourage discipline by promising rewards.]

[1, 45] After he had instilled bitterness into our hearts, the commandant turned his head at an angle, surveyed the silent circle and added: ‘Soldiers, are you the sons that listen to your motherland?’ ‘Yes, Yes!’ answers the great throng with stormy hand-clapping that accompanied the commandant and [as he?] entered the wood.

The community [of soldiers], which was two-faced,46 declared in celebration: ‘Long live the Ottoman ruler, long live the General, long live Turkey, long live the army’ and ‘Down with all the enemy nations’ and with disgust they added ‘Down with traitors.’
So here we have heard the first lessons to trouble the mind. Indeed his inspiring words made a very strong impression on the officers, who began to sing the national anthem and other tunes as a kind of demonstration. Again trumpets blaring and hands clapping with false heroic entertainments; they knew how to arrange the dancing of two enemies facing each other and what appeared to be false enthusiasm, according to their expressions and prattling lips. After that the trumpets sounded again and the crowd marched with vigorous steps and they sang ‘In this land of drought and sown with thorns…’

Very soon a pleasant desert and shrubs of light grass are to be seen on the horizon. We approach it slowly and in an hour we stopped in Konya, the big city, and we took off our knapsacks and our weapons which were a kind of army issue. Everyone spread out and walked about here and there.

The people of the city welcomed us with a fresh meal. The trumpeter was busy blasting on his trumpet in order to bring everyone together because they had spread out and then the people gathered ten by ten in each group. [He writes that there was great joy because there was a rumour – and this is the first of many throughout the diary – that the war was soon coming to an end, and that if this were the case they would move heaven and earth to go home. Amon demonstrates an ironic sense of humour: in this case, he declares that if the war were to end in two days’ time he did not want to be saved while eating meat, so he ate only milk foods.] But miracle of miracles, the war did not end and I was complaining about people inventing rumours plucked from the air and I, in my naivety, went and wasted my money on vegetarian food. So thirty days passed and I continue to eat this dry food.

After lunch or supper in Konya, because the day was still young – once again a journey. Therefore it didn’t seem as if the countryside had changed. The train went straight to Iski-sher [Eskişehir] Tidar-Pasha, Usmani Jami. We spent all that night in a big ship, tens of people and [incomprehensible phrase]. [1, 47] Meanwhile our clothes and faces were whitened because of dust and sand and our throats closed up from the layers of dust and our
mouths spat mud. The next morning we all stood on the beach, we bought sardines which we cooked on the stoves that were available and ate quickly. A ship appeared on the coast and took us to Constantinople, the capital and the city of miracles: the sea looked and fled from us, the noble soldiers were [as] the offspring of Don Quixote.

From here they took us to a broad area fenced with a sharp layer [this appears to be barbed wire] and inside were some temporary rooms with floors covered with wooden planks and carpeted with crude mouse droppings. We spent three days in these rooms closed up atop a prison so that we weren’t able to see a single street. Above this flags flew here and there to the glory of this great barracks of the armies of Constantinople.

We spent these nights without sleep. Because of the terrible crowding we sat twisted night and day, because of the cramming that was afflicting us from all sides, together with the insects living in our skin and on our faces. Apart from this we didn’t have anything to complain about. Sometimes we went to walk outside in an area that was surrounded by iron fences. We, people of 40 and 50 and 60, had a stiflingly short walk, men wearing caftans, born in Syria and Palestine, the heroes who were prepared to banish the enemy [he uses the Yiddish word] schnorrers from the gates of our country. These are the Allies who bother us, and have no sense; they make a noise in our faces, armed with rifles and bayonets and grenades on the tops of the mountains. These are the Allies: sly England, France that looks with enmity at the unfortunate Germany that seeks peace in a dream; Russia its enemy and the most hateful to Turkey; Greece and Italy in any case are not being overthrown. This is how we complain among ourselves, the three races all together [as one], for too much suffering and misery surrounds us, pangs of anger and fury about the Allies, because our sorrow is their fault.

On the fourth day of our being in the jail cells we were taken to the bathhouse and given razors in order to be rid of all hair on the body, apart from the moustache which was the only survivor. And
after all that came the new uniforms of different styles. A coat and
trousers, purple leather straps to belt the coat to the hips. A grey
hard cap with an abundance of patches [or spots], grey ribbons
tied around them for decoration and especially a shiny gold
button sewn onto the brim like a breastplate. No socks. Strong
new shoes protected by nails inserted under the soles with their
flat tops together with of a kind of ring of iron on the heels. You
manage just a small step and you fall on your face and your blood
is on your head. A small bag for bread and other kinds of food, a
spoon and salt and a brass metal seal for the monthly wage and a
notebook to sign the monthly wage of no more than one *grush* for
the month.54

[1, 50] In short, here I am a proper soldier except that I have no
weapons.55 That day was like a festival for all the three races, well
washed and shaven but... [Amon’s ellipsis] If you were to say, so
what do you have to complain about? Indeed I had something to
complain about in that I am not a proper soldier – I do not have a
rifle or bullets, I do not have a bayonet or housing [this makes no
sense in English but in Hebrew it is a rhyme]. Are there any
soldiers without weapons even when they’re old? What good are
the rules of the wise? Unfortunately, I don’t see anything [that is,
weapons] in all that I have mentioned about uniforms.

At that time I wanted to be armed and to bear arms on my
shoulder like in every army but at this moment there were no
arms and no matter [once again, a rhyme] and without them I will
categorically refuse to fight with all my strength against the
Allies.

The midday meal arrived and because the war had not come to
an end I ate a fatty meal for the first time, ‘kosher’ according to
the law of Istanbul. Even though the meal was not Jewish, what
could I do: the law of the land is the law of the Jews and sadly I
took out my spoon from my knapsack and I ate together with a
group of ten soldiers. [We ate] from a brass bowl in which there
was onion soup, rice and beans and upon that [there was] fresh
fish that was kosher... And what is this noise? There is no meat
so who has been imprisoned? [A rhyme in Hebrew.] There is no
camel’s meat and no labour [a rhyme in Hebrew. He continues with a few more rhetorical rhymes.]

At two in the afternoon there was a blast on the trumpet, indicating another journey – where to we didn’t know. Preparations continued until the evening and at 7.00 p.m. we crossed the great and wonderful bridge into the great Royal city itself – the most beautiful city in all of its noise and crowds. Here we were now in the miraculous land: thousands of electric lights covered with glass spheres hanging on iron poles coloured in grey and pink; some of them were open and spilling out their bright light. From both sides of the magnificent bridge are the golden halos of the lamps. On concrete balustrades like a kind of illuminated stonework with [decorations resembling] a segol ֶ and a tsere ֵ [he draws them]. They protrude in spaces of 20cm by 20cm and the frames around them are braided in single colours.

It was like a birthday. Our souls longed and yearned to stroll in the streets of Istanbul, the capital, the epitome of charm but in vain – we are not free. The noise stopped as we moved away from the beautiful city northwards to the train station where the train was going crazy with the whistling of its locomotive for our sake, to take us away once again. The cars filled up, the train moved and we passed through towns that surrounded various villages throughout the entire night. The next day at three o’clock in the afternoon we stopped in the fruitful city of Manisa. This was the fifth day of Shevat [i.e. sometime in February] and while we were walking in the town the trumpet was heard to indicate that we should stop. Diligent officers appeared and after a few moments all the soldiers scattered in different streams. [1, 52] We remained until their numbers reached 250 people and then we went into a large courtyard that was clean and paved with large, smooth, hard and shining paving stones that pierce the eyes and break the legs, and to tell the truth they dismember the joints, the arms and hands. Stop a moment and you will hear about them and about the shoes.

In short, from all the Jews who had been together we dwindled to two, to our great sadness, amongst that huge crowd inside the courtyard… In the end the soldiers entered a large hall.
[There follows a long section, told mainly through dialogue, when Amon and his companion, Yosef, are encamped in the huge hall. He has an argument with Yosef who is unhappy and asks many questions, such as when they will be returning to Jerusalem. They are the only two Jews in the barracks: they tend to fall down because of their new boots and the polished floor. (1, 54) They visit the mosque which is beside the courtyard in which they are billeted. He notes that it is called the ‘Sultan Jami’ mosque and he describes the main hall.]

We entered the hall leaning one upon the other [he and Yosef, because their new boots caused them to fall down] and looking feebly at the wall above the floor which is paved with reddish concrete. It is round on three sides and there is an arch over it from above and across the front of it. Standing upright and fixed [to the ground] are two wax [sic] columns leaning in layers. They are two and a half amah long and a half an amah wide. Their tops are covered with thick threads like flowerpots and there is a banner [legend] above the tops of the columns. In this corner stands the public crier [pilgrim, worshipper, possibly the muezzin] within the congregation and declares that this is the place of worship for the Turkish public.

We gazed at the walls of the building in which there were almond-shaped flowerpots, truncated trees and flowers of all colours. In addition to all this, carpets and rugs of many colours were hanging from the tiled ceiling like fresh grass, together with arches and other images of one colour…

[(1, 56) The next section is told through dialogue. Amon and Yosef welcome two young armed Jews. These are the companions who accompany Amon almost throughout the rest of his army service. Whether they are real or fabricated is unknown. These two men speak Ladino. They sit together and introduce themselves. They eat the food that the one called Raphael, from Indrani, has brought and they smoke. The other, Yitzhak, is from Izmir. Raphael, a sergeant or corporal who has served in the army for three years and has been decorated, promises to take care of them. Then Amon and Yosef have a terrible quarrel. Amon wants to be armed and Yosef does not because he does not want to kill]
and he does not understand Amon’s desire for weapons. It reaches the point where Amon actually knocks Yosef down (1, 66). Then they have a parade and the officer in charge calls for weapons to be brought.]

Raphael hands me a new polished shiny rifle whose butt is [like] red and purple made out of cedar and pine wood. A belt for bullets and a pouch for arrows [חצים] in dull purple. A shiny blade in its sheath; soft combs between each five bullets of 160 [in all]. A large, thick, grey fabric knapsack, large, with straps stretched across its frame for the bullets. Nightshirts and shirts for day and all sorts of underwear, a vest and socks and a heavy blanket of a single colour of two cubits long and half of that in width. A brown square tent secured with hooks and knots: all of this is made in Germany, the God of the armies of the Central Powers. A vest filled with cotton wool, with kinds of ribbons that emerge from the seams. A spade and shovel hanging from it and then again straps on the shoes and sandals.

[They are given water bottles which he describes in detail. He notes that the guns are not theirs but ‘for work plain and simple’. They are then taken to the bathhouse. They go to be shaved and inoculated, which makes them ill with high fever.]
of each unit there was an On Bashi who explained the military methods for the very first time. The officer stands in front of every unit separately and lectures before it and [he] began to speak in Turkish of which I didn’t understand a single word. We were all from the East but there was an On Bashi who spoke Arabic and he translated the Turkish language and through him he explained the lecture. We should not break the military laws for there was a serious punishment for those who do, and then he also explained the way of providing respect for the officers. [He therefore writes down the entire lecture: at what distance to stand from an officer; how to salute if he passes from the right or from the left; they have to keep their hands to their heads in the salute until he has taken six steps away from them. Then he describes the military hierarchy and how they have to provide respect for each other. How to speak, how to look at the officer when the soldier is unarmed but if he is armed there are different rules. It seems that the army authorities are endeavouring to instil discipline by this concise and precise training of the soldiers. Amon repeats these rules throughout the diary in the same detail and then he also gives the rules of the rifle. They learn in great detail how to use their guns (1, 78–80), how to salute, how to stand.]

[1, 83] The order comes: get ready, forward march. The lines move forward, diverging of their own accord, as before. They continue their journey in a zigzag pattern. We are all holding a sword [bayonet] and we are students of the war of the first and greatest rank. We were sure that after these difficult exercises that I have already mentioned we are quite able to spar right away with the enemy who is, it seems, not well versed in this great and difficult wisdom that we were taught on one leg.63 Wonderful exercises until our strength wanes.

Meanwhile pillars of dust spin around the lines whose numbers, according to the estimates, reach about 1500 men, without exaggeration. The captains and the corporals had to obey the commanding officer’s orders regarding the lines marching towards the city. You could hear the noisy stamping of the heroes’ footsteps on the ground. They raised even more cylinders of dust
that was already profuse. In front of you the officers mouth these two words ‘parp, parp’, that is to say that the soldiers’ footsteps and treading should be heard. The soldiers tramp in one beat [in unison] on the road as we enter the city. At the front of the lines passes a double military band and behind it the head of the battalion is at attention from above, seated on a military or a civilian horse, who knows? – with his sword unsheathed and his arm outstretched. After we had passed fields of bushes and thistles and our faces were covered with thorns we drew near to the city [Manisa]. [1, 87] There were crowds of women and children and old people gathering and adding to the crowd on both sidewalks on the sides of the streets and watching our passing by before them. Also, heads were peeping out from the windows and balconies as we passed through the city, and from them they threw wreaths of flowers, like lilies, and fresh branches, on the heads of the soldier heroes, as it seems, for the purpose of encouragement. There was a tumult on the road and a great noise from the pounding of the tipsy soldiers’ steps.

After a march of 3½ hours in one go we passed over twisted and winding roads and paths. Meanwhile we are the heroes of the homeland, armed and full of pride, boasting and preening in our suit of clothes. We are certain of our strong bodies to the point that the enemy’s hand will not harm us, God forbid. All this is on the one hand, and on the other hand we are terrified by any sound, even that of a falling leaf, because we don’t know what horrors would erupt after the celebration. See below in the tents of terror and horror on the terrible night of Rosh Hashana.64

[(1, 86) Army manoeuvres continued from the middle of Iyar until after the festival of Shavuot – that is, May or June. He is in a squadron of 250 men under a commander. They are still encamped in the city. They have one of their celebrations with songs, dances and patriotic hymns. They once again prepare for a journey. They leave Manisa.]

[1, 87] The day we left the city of Manisa [we were] accompanied by the captain riding on a light brown horse with brown patches. After walking for 3½ hours in one go we walked on twisted roads and
crooked paths... A hot wind blew, stroking our faces that were covered in dust and dirt. Purple columns of dust and dirt combine in a moment and consolidate into separate globules. With the help of the wind pushing behind us we reached the desert with all our belongings; in other words, we were mules laden with many implements suited for our labour. Here we put up our tents, six tents for 60 soldiers and at their head two corporals and an extra tent is a kitchen. [1, 88–9] [He then goes on to describe the food that they were given and also the examination of their nails and for general cleanliness. He was not paying attention to the order to show his fingernails to the officer and is therefore beaten. The story is repeated in Fragment 10, 1, 2.]

[1, 89] Meanwhile [the officer’s] cane splits and can’t do the job. Again they cut a fresh thick twig from a branch of a tree. The corporal plucks [the twig] and strips off the leaves and gives it to the officer who has once again begun to beat with admirable orderliness while he is laughing behind his hand. After I had stretched out my hands before him [in the fingernail examination] with my fingers curved, he examines my nails and counts one, two, three, ten. I salute as a sign of gratitude because this is what the soldiers preceding me did. Some of them laugh at him but in their hearts they hide a strong complaint. Some of the soldiers received up to 20 lashes. [The officer] strides forward, beating without speaking and the one who is beaten salutes until the order of beatings is finished.

[1, 90–1] After the beatings, as a token of joy the Commanding Officer orders us to arrange a party with torches in the night so that the soldiers should be happy. A great circle is made once all the flotsam and jetsam of the men are gathered together. In the meantime torches of fire were lit and the party began with dances and bayonets and spears [lit. ‘fencing foils’]. Before midnight the Commanding Officer, who could be called the Lord of the Lashes, appeared with a gleam of madness [in his eye] and to tell the truth he was half mad. Sparks of fire were scattered in his honour and in the honour of the soldiers who were out of their minds at this time. He was pushed into the circle and he looked
around everywhere. His appearance was amusing and he raised and lowered his head and looked at our welcoming faces. The soldiers tried to carry him on their shoulders but he refused. The officer forgot all the beatings and the tortures and the troubles that we had received from him during the day; it was as if nothing had happened. By the way, we are learning new rules. Generally speaking, if a corporal or a lieutenant hits you, and even more so the Commanding Officer, you must immediately forget what he has made you suffer. You are forbidden to make a complaint even if there is resentment in your heart. This is not customary amongst civilians; when they quarrel amongst themselves they remain [angry] for days or years and sometimes end up in a vendetta or a duel, but here there aren’t wars of years. Even when the soldiers fight amongst themselves they pay according to the law that forbids vulgarity. What is well known is that in a few minutes an important or unimportant officer will appear, one who has been beating you a few minutes ago; he speaks to you with a beaming face if he wishes to, and forgets all the lashes and whips with which he has whipped you on your face or hands. It is as if he speaks no good or evil in your presence and you had a bad dream which has now ended happily. Therefore, brother, this is the law and you must not exceed it with anything. That evening it was like this: the Lord of the Lashes whipped, laughed, had fun, scattered sparks, walked around the circle and then disappeared. [1, 91] The angry soldiers who had received beatings and compliments followed the Lord of the Beatings with their eyes, together with despairing and unhappy hand-clapping and without hope and only haughtiness, and when the officer left the dances became much more bearable. In the meantime my own mischief increased like everyone else’s and I drummed on copper tambourines one against the other and [I blew on the flute while singing] verses in Arabic. Raphael the Jewish Turk was chatting even though he doesn’t understand one word of Arabic except these two words [words in Arabic].

[1, 92] There were soldiers who were like acrobats and comedians who were entertaining the excited company with words and jokes.⁶⁵
And so there was joyfulness and excitement in the middle of this party because of the joyous message that said that a telegram had arrived speedily from Constantinople telling us that all the governments in the war had made an agreement between them, and in two days’ time there will be another telegram proclaiming a ceasefire without evacuation, even though this troubling expression had been heard everywhere a thousand times. Anyway there was a new yearning under the canopy of joy because of this message, and at two in the morning the dancers finished the phoney dances and we were drunk when we lay down to sleep and the soldiers could not find their hands, only their feet.

With sunrise in a crown of red there was a catastrophe: oh dear, all those arrogant heroes, the young men, the wild, boorish men, those who organized the party, the lovers of the homeland, the heroes of our security, had made their way [i.e. fled]. It was established that at the beginning of the evening they had decided between themselves and they disappeared to the four winds... We remained, a number of Turks and Arabs and two Jews, me and Raphael... Raphael said that if he had known that this celebration would shake the foundations of this place it would have been surrounded by soldiers, the passes would have been fenced off. It was his fault as well because that evening he was the person on duty. [1, 93] If everybody had died on that night then the whole thing would have been thought of as a game, but to run away before smiting the enemy on its thigh with a sword red with blood – this is a sin for which there is no pardon forever. But the truth is that this was an organized group. [He is particularly upset because one of the escapees had borrowed some money from him and it had not been returned.] These honourable escapees whose weapons and swords dripped with blood are the enemies of their homeland. They were from these places, Syria and Damascus and Aleppo. I didn’t know anybody from Palestine amongst those who ran away. Some came from the cities of Turkey. In case you say that the Turks were great lovers of the homeland and more faithful, certainly not. Even these were amongst the traitors, their desire to escape was even greater than
that of the Arabs… One of the non-commissioned officers ran away and also the commanding officer of the unit returned to the city.

[(Fragment 10, 5) This story is told in Volume 1 and Fragment 10, where it contains greater detail. Raphael orders:] Go please and stand guard on the great bridge on which the trains pass ten times a day loaded with soldiers from all the cities of Turkey and sent to various places. There are almost no soldiers [available], as you know, therefore you must stand on guard for three hours at a stretch but I will come to see how you are doing each hour until more soldiers arrive. Our purpose in coming here is only and solely for this bridge. [Amon has a short argument with Raphael.] Meanwhile our conversation stopped because we had reached the place. Raphael ordered me not to smoke cigarettes in this dangerous place; in any case it is forbidden to smoke if a soldier is carrying his rifle and doing his job and one must depend on this double order. Briefly the size of the bridge is 60 amah long and 6 metres wide and 20 amah high. On each side of the bridge there are two huge tanks [or silos] made of iron, wide and circular, called reservoirs [sic; transliterated]. They are fixed into the ground from one side to the other. They stick out more than a metre above the bottom of the bridge. The height of the tanks is more than 23 amah and they are 1 metre 25 wide. These reservoirs can be seen from under the bridge. At their openings is a mixture of straw dipped in something like sulphuride and they are uncovered. I asked for an explanation from Raphael, the corporal, about the nature and purpose of these tanks.

1, 97] ‘Pay attention [Raphael replies], because when you see aeroplanes flying in the sky and coming closer to you [but] only making a noise [i.e. when they are heard and not seen], don’t do anything and be very careful. When you see the planes above you must light a fire immediately. Once the fire begins to burn wait for one moment and from both sides, that is, from both ends of the bridge, dreadful heavy pillars of black and green smoke will burst out and rise up directly with propelling power to the sky. The [spout?] of the tank will be upright with steam like the steam
of the Day of Atonement when the Temple still existed. It covers the eye of the sun and all around it. This is what Ahmed Effendi the lieutenant and Usman Shaoush have told me. I have to tell you, and to explain twice, that after the straw on the top of the tank has begun to burn you have to stand firm wherever you are. Lie on your stomach or in the meadow or behind that tree’ – Raphael points – ‘but don’t stand on the bridge lest… [Amon’s ellipsis] Whatever happens I have to tell you again to obey this order so that you should not come to any harm. This is what I order the soldier on the other side of the bridge. Yehuda, be careful. I am now going to give the order to that other stupid soldier.’

[1, 98] These explanations were as long as the Babylonian and Egyptian exile but this is a terrible catastrophe… I understood what I had to do at this moment. He said, ‘I am going to hurry to give the order to the other stupid soldier’, but what do I know more than that stupid soldier? Raphael disappeared hurriedly and I called him, ‘Raphael, listen to me, where are you going?’ [Amon calls after him with his usual exaggerated pleas for protection:] ‘Haven’t you found anyone else to stand in this hellish place for three hours, only me? I am a Jew who refuses to stand [guard] in this place in which winds of death and destruction blow. Raphael, do me the favour of releasing me from this deadly place and I will be your slave forever.’ [His plea is not accepted.] At this moment I abandoned the domes and the river and a stream [and went?] to the fabled smoking tanks that smoke out the sky. I wanted to know the nature of these tanks, for Raphael’s explanation was not sufficient for me. What is in them? Poisoned steam? Gunpowder? Thunder crackers? Only the military demon knows. On the top of my tank, which is covered with straw, three black big black corks stick out, the size of Indian nuts or even larger, set out like a segol [he draws three dots]. Someone seeing them from a distance would think that this is a ghost in the form of a human skeleton that has been destroyed. I go closer to the tank after I have crossed the railway lines and I try to see the other tank on the other side of the bridge but because I knew where it was [I saw]
only the soldier standing in his booth next it. [Ultimately no planes arrive; he leaves his post in order to smoke.]

The story of the bridge is both hilarious and exciting; while waiting for the planes to arrive (they do not), Amon draws out the narrative and maintains the tension. He muses about whether or not he should smoke; when hunger assails him he debates whether to leave his post to seek food, and when his hunger gets the better of him he finds a poorly dressed couple of civilian Turkish peasants sitting down to a meal and demands food from them, which they refuse to give him. However, after he threatens them they give him their pot. He returns to the bridge, waits for his relief and returns to his tent. Despite his fears, Amon is not punished for smoking, threatening the Turkish couple or leaving his post. This tale is typical of Amon’s style: he builds the tension with protracted dialogue and description, and then leaves an anti-climax when, as usual, nothing happens.]

[1, 115] On the Friday night, the night spread its wings and a canopy of joy along the courtyard, celebrations and jubilation: a party. All the soldiers are joyful and happy. What had suddenly happened? There are new and exciting rumours, some of them exaggerated but in the end they came true. In army units telegrams arrive and in them there is an abundance of joyous tidings. Even the newspapers had already published in large letters on their front pages the praise of the armies and governments of the Central Powers. The soldiers are singing and making sounds of exaltation and joy. Stories about the victory were spread in every section of the city and everyone was tipsy with the drunkenness of victory, even though most of the telegrams like this appear very often in the soldiers’ mouths, with the addition of their own colouring, but here are the details of this shining victory for the moment.

[1, 116] On Thursday evening [the following week?] another telegram arrived giving the news that Turkey had a great and splendid victory with the help of Germany. 170,000 Allied soldiers became prisoners beside Geheonom, that is to say, beside the great campaign taking place, heavy with cannon and machine guns and
all the deadly weapons between Dardanelles and Shanak Kale
[Çannakale Savaşlari, Gallipoli, March–April 1915 to January
1916] as it is said in the style of the Syrian Arabs and
Palestine. And so, a great bounty that will be priceless, like the
fine gold of Ophir, and so on and so on and so on. We heard that
the Allies frequently demand peace because of the defeat; they
are covered in shame and disgrace. Truthfully I felt only boredom
and irritation, hearing these important tidings, because I prophesy
a dangerous precedent for the extension of exile in the army’s
activities on the one hand, but on the other hand Turkey will win
and peace will come to everyone. This and other things. Ten days
ago news came of a ceasefire, so how is it that they gained a
victory? There is no excuse. Again here is an instructive example,
in my opinion, that peace is still very far away in reality.

[1, 117] After the party, which was filled with noisy demonstrations that
ended close to midnight, a group of Syrians and other comrades-
in-arms sat together discussing the day’s events. I and Yosef and
Yitzhak joined them and within the drunkenness of victory the
conversation turned to politics. Listening, our ears became like
trumpets and we heard this strange conversation. One of the most
extremist among them told us these facts and said: ‘Our exalted
government will decide [about] the nations beneath us. Germany
will change the borders of nations with hidden stratagems for
battle, with great wisdom and understanding and knowledge’, and
he continues with this nonsense: ‘The Germans have created
some wonderful means of thrusting into the land of the enemy:
fake hollow trees and inside them are hidden people who are
knowledgeable and who have many implements with them, for
example: electric bells, telephones, telegraph, electricians, a
device to bring the enemy’s voices close in conversation. They
[transmit across] the enemy’s barricades with magnetism and
convey it to their rulers, and other prattle like this that I couldn’t
understand…[Another man who, according to Amon is ‘sitting
on the fence’, speaks of equal English brilliance because of
another device: they fill false chickens, made out of white and
grey fabric with combs that resemble those of roosters, with
explosives, and drop them. On impact with the ground they explode into fragments (resisim) and destroy everything around them.[72]

Apart from this, the soldier tells us another dangerous and surprising thing: ‘The English also have the ability to change the hearts of locusts to make them especially clever: they are prepared at any moment to open the doors of their treasuries [storages, store-rooms] and a stream of locusts in all the various stages of growth bursts out and spreads across the land that is not their own. They cover the sky and the land, they eat all the grass of the field and all the twigs of the forest until they leave the land desolate, bald and smooth. This is the wisdom of the English, do you understand?’[73] The soldier had not finished and he ended briefly: ‘The English are able to collect this multitude, which does not enter the areas of their land or [go] across the borders of their allies, and they gather them together so that the storehouses are immediately filled.’ [1, 119]

With this the conversation that troubled our minds ended, and then we went to sleep, as we are again tipsy with forced joy and sadness.[74]

[There follows one of Amon’s strangest stories. He is on guard in the courtyard in the dead of night and the sar hagedud (commander of the regiment), who must have been a high-ranking officer, arrives and demands that Amon hand over his gun. At first Amon refuses but he is afraid, as always, shivering in his boots, his hair standing on end, and so he hands over his gun and his ammunition. The officer then tries to shoot him and he falls to the ground, but he is unhurt (after his often repeated, but unconvincing, dramatics about not minding if he died because his life at the moment is worthless). Eventually he is able to catch up with the officer, who hands him back the gun. Amon is then severely punished for giving the officer his arms, since the rules demand that in no circumstances is a gun to be handed over, no matter what the provocation and even if the Sultan demands it. Amon is beaten.[75] The solution to the strange event follows. (1, 130) The commanding officer demands to know the identity of the soldier on guard, but no one responds. Amon, as usual, is
quivering in his boots. The officer calls all the men together, and begins to make a speech, according to Amon (1, 133): ‘a short oration in his opinion, but to tell the truth, longer than the Exile’.

[1, 133] ‘Soldiers! [orates the officer] It is your duty to be aware of the summary of my words which I have condensed this time: if any officer appears, and let us say even the King himself wanting to pass through the forbidden areas, where the sentry stands on guard, and an officer or a king bothers the soldier while on duty, saying that he has to pass through the area despite the prohibition and without the permission of the soldier who does not make allowances for him, the soldier must stand firm and not allow him to enter without the permission of the duty officer. Similarly you are not allowed to let the officer take anything large or small if it is under your command at the time you are fulfilling your duty. Also it is forbidden to hand over any arms, even a single bullet during the time that you stand on guard. No conversation is allowed except by permission of the duty officer. Or if [the officer] implores you to show him your weapon, like all the other prohibitions, you must refuse and say in clear language and a strong voice, “No, I shall not give it to you.” Certainly you should not offer him military respect [i.e. a salute] while you are on duty. You must firmly ask him to leave and if he refuses you give him three warnings, and if he takes no notice of this you have permission to shoot him, but you must warn him and remind him of the prohibition. If he is aware of these laws you are allowed to shoot him if he refuses to obey your order. The sentry is greater than the king while he is on duty; there is no important or high-ranking officer who may overcome your orders, only the duty officer alone.

‘Take the permission seriously: this is military discipline. Large and small must be careful not break the law and the regulations of the army. This is military law and if you ask, how could I commit such a contravention by grabbing the miserable sentry’s weapons while he was on duty, I shall answer you, because I have done this to test him. Above all, I made an experiment and I entered the area and he did not prevent me from entering. Because he did not bother me I intended to test him through his
weapons which he handed over to me, both because of his good heart and his stupidity.’

He then added briefly: ‘Therefore, soldiers, be prepared to obey my instructions: are you prepared to obey them?’ ‘Yes, yes’, reply the soldiers with hand-clapping and whistling, and with a satisfied smile the officer disappeared.

[It appears, at the end of the story, that the officer in question went mad and the NCO (Shaoush) who administered the beating suddenly disappeared, presumably sent to one of the fronts, according to Amon.

The next story is about the visit of Enver Pasha, Minister of War and the commander of Turkish forces in Istanbul, to the battalion stationed in Manisa. The section is headed ‘Enver Pasha in Manisa’ (1, 136).]

A week later a telegram was hurriedly sent from Istanbul reporting that Enver Pasha, the Vizier of the army, would visit the city of Manisa, accompanied by a coterie of his comrades, and he wishes to inspect the state of the army in Manisa. There was also a second telegram to our commanding officer in which it was explained that Enver would arrive at the train station on Thursday at one o’clock. The MPs and military personnel who had to attend at that hour were in a state of shock. Public announcements were made that spread through the streets of the city in order to organize a wonderful welcome. Similarly the newspapers proclaimed in large print on their front pages that a welcoming ceremony was going to be arranged for Enver Pasha. We didn’t know anything about this until the MPs told us, since we were locked up [no reason is given. He mentions that there were no military drills because of a day of rest, but there was angriya, labour]. During our exercises we had come to know only one street in the city because we walked on it every day.

On Thursday preparations began from the morning until 12.30 p.m. when we reached the train station. Thousands of flags were flying and some of them were on poles like those that that fly at the embassies. Long lines of soldiers were organized beside the many railway tracks. All the units [stationed] in parts of the city were already in place.
Meanwhile our Colonel appeared in a new uniform decorated (like a breastplate) with medals. He began to criticize sharply those soldiers who were lacking something, even to the point of a cork or a water bottle, while we were waiting for the arrival of the great leader.

Suddenly one of the corporals of our unit but not of our squadron came up to me. His name was Sa’id On Bashi and he asked me to hand him all the ammunition in my [ammunition belt], saying: ‘You, Yehuda, please stand in the second line behind the first because the first line will be inspected.’ I hesitated for a moment. Anyway, I decided to hand them over. This arrangement would not allow me to carry ammunition for a few hours. This is reasonable, therefore I didn’t object to his request and I quite willingly handed them to him. Sa’id took 150 bullets, leaving only ten in my belt. And so I went to [stand in] the second line, behind which the large and curious crowd of civilians was gathering. They were well dressed with good taste. The expectation was not high. [It is not clear whether he is saying they did not have high expectations of the event, or that the expectations of their good clothing were not high.] At one o’clock exactly a strong and protracted whistle was heard from the locomotive. In feverish haste we organized ourselves into the lines and stood armed. The Colonel sheathed his sword in his scabbard and the lower ranks did the same. When they motioned us we made a wide space for them.

The military band began to play the national anthem and then comes a parade of the leaders of the army and its police, and then comes Enver Pasha walking through the lines of the soldiers with his hand bent behind his back. He looks [at them] at an angle as a small smile hovers on his face. Behind him are two tall officers, amongst the most select of the army. They are the head of the Central Command in Izmir, and the head of the medical services from Istanbul. After them come various servicemen with the swords on their sides ringing and dragging behind them. Then Enver comes closer and looks sideways in his military uniform which is the colour of a dark grapefruit. He was wearing a kalpak (a foreign word) hat. It has a dark red
point decorated with gold ribbons and on them small shining gold bands. Under his hat, which reaches to the crease on his forehead, is black curly hair. His beard is cut in a circle. He is short of stature. He comes closer and walks slowly along the lines, again with a hint of a smile on his shining face. Then our Commanding Officer similarly had a look of great affection on his face while giving the order: ‘Present arms!’ We all look at the face of the Lord Enver when he comes towards us and there is a shout of joy, ‘Long Live Enver Pasha’, and all the company joined in. He walked on with his companions behind him.

The crowd squeezed behind the columns of soldiers, watched us and gave us lengthy applause. In the same way the army surveyed the Head of the Turkish army. He stood in the middle of an area that was empty of all people and began to offer a speech, before the general public and the army. Among other things he made short comments about the army and he added: ‘The Ottoman government thinks of the beloved army the way a mother thinks about a child who is obliged to come to her aid in times of pressure and to protect her with all of his will and his heart in his love for his mother. This is unconditional love between the son and the mother, in this way he helps her in her time of trouble. This is the basis of the complete and glorious victory in the very near future. I want to say that the son must not betray his mother, who loves him forever, by means of desertion and different kinds of treason, God forbid. I have said that this is the basis of the victory. The soldiers are the faithful sons of the Ottoman homeland.’

When he ended his speech and his comments, the army and the public shouted, ‘Long live Enver, long live the army, long live the homeland’, and with stormy applause they accompanied the officers who turned towards the train that was taking our lord to Izmir.

If you were to ask where do I get this description of his complete speech, because I don’t know one word of this pure language, and in any case I didn’t hear anything from the place where I was standing at some distance. But Raphael was the
adviser, together with the Jewish soldier from Izmir who was in the second battalion.  

I myself did not pay much attention to all of this because I was concerned about retrieving the bullets that I no longer had. I was afraid that there might be some kind of panic, speedily in our time [original phrase in Aramaic] because of the bullets that had been borrowed from me, panic with all its qualities and terrors. Meanwhile the columns of soldiers once again stood in [the correct] order to return to the city two by two. In every column there were 100 soldiers; soldiers from all the battalions from all parts of the city were joined to it.

After a short inspection by the Colonel we were given the order to move forward: the columns move with the band at their head, playing the best of its melodies. The enthusiastic civilian crowd disappears and the field is emptied of people. The tunes and the steps of the departing soldiers are heard from the distance, with [our] sweat pouring while we were marching, its drops forced onto our eyebrows.

Yosef and I were walking with pride and showing off our new khaki uniforms that we had received in the morning in honour of this day, and they were well used. Only I alone did not carry golden bullets made of sparkling yellow metal, shining like the gold of Ophir, and I was sorry for the lack of them. And so we returned to the barracks with joy and songs and melodies, accompanied by an excellent double band. But here the panic begins: I was shaking to the marrow of my bones which was consumed by the cursed corrosion.

At twilight I met that same Sa’id [an NCO] who had borrowed my bullets but I couldn’t get them back from him even for a moment. I am not so eager to have them, apart from my fear of the enemy that took over my body and soul. I begged him to return 250 bullets to me which I had given him at noon before the visit of Enver Pasha at the train station. He replies, ‘I’m busy right now’, and he adds, ‘Tomorrow I will give them to you before we go out to our manoeuvres.’ It seems that this miserable man forgot that tomorrow is a day of obligatory rest like every Friday when there are no manoeuvres because of the day.
for them again the next day but he wouldn’t give [them to me].
Every time he puts me off again and again. I didn’t know what to
do so I told Raphael about everything that had happened to me.
He advised me to complain to the corporal who deals with all
requests.

[The volume ends here but the story continues directly in the next
volume.]

Notes

1. Personal correspondence. See also Lawrence Fine, Physician of the Soul, Healer of
the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship (Stanford, CA: Stanford
University Press, 2003), p.22; Giacomo Saban, ‘Jewish Physicians in 16th Century
Ben-Naeh and Giacomo Saban, ‘Three German Travellers on Instanbul Jews’,
Journal of Modern Jewish Studies 12, no. 1 (March 2013).

2. Alberto Fonseca. Against the World, against Life: The Use and Abuse of the
Autobiographical Genre in the Works of Fernando Vallejo (unpublished Masters
thesis, Faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg,

3. See Simon Harel, ‘A l’autofiction analytique: Emergence d’un paradigme contem-
47.html. See also Glenda Abramson, Hebrew Writing of the First World War (London

4. The first volume has the running head יהודא אמון (Yehuda Amon) and signed
Yehuda Amon. The second volume has the running head יאמון (possibly initials abbreviating ‘The Ottoman Soldier’) and signed
Y.Amon (Y. Amon).

5. The tone changes in the fourth exercise book to one of descriptive sobriety. We can
only assume that it was written at a different time from the rest of the material.

6. Amon’s description of his guard duty in one of the fragments is headed: ‘Ahmed the
officer is like the Lion constellation and Yehuda the fearful is like the Goat.’ ‘On the
night of the 9th of Av [Tisha b’Av, an annual fast day on the ninth day of Av (July-
August), mourning the destruction of both the First and Second Temples] – as it is
known everywhere where “there will be woe” is written, new troubles occur and
come alive all on their own. This night is the night of bitterness: I was given the honour of standing guard at the door in the room in which the deserters are held until their fate is decided...they are strangers to us from another legion. This place is surrounded by walls and it is not easy to escape from here, unless the door is wide open. There are two openings in this wall: one is always closed and at the other stands an armed sentry who watches with eyes at the back of his head lest someone escape. As I said, I stood on guard, armed, with my sharpened bayonet stuck in the barrel of my gun – actually without bullets but only an empty bandolier for the sake of appearance. According to instructions, between [i.e. conveyed to] the soldier standing on guard and his replacement this is what a guard must do: he must explain to his replacement why he is guarding and what he is guarding even though he knows full well, why he has come and what he is guarding, but this is the rule and it won’t change. After a quarter of an hour of standing, my gun heavy on my shoulder, I walk with long and short steps, that is to say, with measured steps, ankle to toe and sometimes like the steps of the English military sentries’ (Fragment 6, 1).

7. See Edward Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), p.214: ‘Desertion was an enduring problem in the army, despite all the precautions taken to prevent it and the severe penalties when it occurred. Desertions occurred primarily during unit movements across the Empire, during lulls in action and from hospitals and rear areas.’ Some reports indicate that only Arabs deserted, but in Amon’s account equal numbers of Turks desert.

8. In conversation with Raphael, Amon learns about promotion: ‘After three years of army service I received a silver medal with a red ribbon as a mark of excellence’ [Raphael says]. ‘So’, I answer, ‘this is the elite glory of heroism, after three years of hard work in the army?’ ‘What does my lord think, it isn’t easy to achieve a rank in Turkey, the rank of Corporal. It needs great patience and sometime they have to lose one of their legs in the war or their hands or even their head before they receive a medal and the rank of On Bashi [corporal], does Sir understand? For example in a year’s time Yitzhak will receive the rank of corporal…’ ‘Raphael [says Amon], I can do without this kind of excellence and want only to be free of army labour, do you understand?…The ordinary soldiers must suffer ten times as much as the corporal who is thought of as a rabbi before his pupils, is this not so Yitzhak Effendi?’ (Fragment 12, 43).

9. The Çavuş (Shaoush) is a sergeant; On Bashi, responsible for ten men, whom Amon terms ‘the leader of ten’ is a corporal; the Yüz Bashi, ‘the leader of a hundred’ or a centurion, is a captain; the Bin Bashi, commanding a thousand men, ‘leader of a thousand’, is a major. The rest of Amon’s designations follow logically from these.

10. Amon’s own title.

11. Equivalent to half a German frank or two-and-a-half Ottoman piastres.

12. 11 February 1914 or, more likely, 30 January 1915.

13. Because Amon’s dating is so vague, we could speculate that this was said or written following the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Similar sentiments are expressed in the diary in after the Dardanelles Campaign (Gallipoli) in 1915.

14. As noted above, throughout the diary Amon’s dates are questionable. In this fragment he begins his story in 1917. In Volume 1 he begins his account in Adar (February–March) ‘1914 or 1915’. If Amon were present in Anatolia at the time of
the Dardanelles Campaign he could not have left his home in 1917. Since this is the only example of text that describes the beginning of his military odyssey, it is useful, even if at times chronologically inaccurate. This alternative version of his entry into military service takes place in April 1917 rather than January 1915.

15. The Book of Esther, 2:9: ‘And the maiden pleased him [The king, Ahasuerus], and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king’s house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women.’

16. This is likely to be the Notre Dame Pontifical Centre, a large and beautiful building that dominates the Jerusalem skyline. During the war it was used as a rest stop for the Turkish troops. It was built on a high spot facing the Damascus Gate. The German Catholic St Paulus Hospice, which was built early in the twentieth century, also opposite the Damascus Gate, was used as a central administration headquarters during the war. See Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, ‘The Growth of Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 65, 2 (June 1975), p.264.

17. The account continues on page 5, the first page of Volume 1 of the diary.

18. Amon frequently characterizes darkness as *hoshekh mitzrayim*, ‘Egyptian darkness’, referring to the plague of darkness in Egypt.

19. The biblical *amah* (cubit) is about fifty-two centimetres long. He presumably means a square *amah* (*amah al amah*).

20. This is Amon’s joke, based on the line ‘And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?’ (2 Kings, 7:3).

21. During the war, tobacco was a main staple and a medium of exchange between soldiers. See Salim Tamari (ed.), *Year of the Locust: A Soldier’s Diary and the Erasure of Palestine’s Ottoman Past* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011), p.52. Amon refers to it frequently throughout the diary.

22. *Bulmus*, a craving for food.

23. Amon’s thoughtlessness is most likely due not to the fact that the man is an Arab, but that he is a simple, uneducated peasant.

24. They were being held in a building, either the Notre Dame Centre or the St Paulus Hospice. Very often, throughout the diary, they are encamped in the courtyard of a mosque.

25. Nowhere does Amon indicate why he was unable to ransom himself out of the army. In the case of his fellow conscript, Haim Nahmias, it was too late in 1917, when he emerged from hiding, to pay the ransom. Due to the aforementioned confusion of dates, this may be the case with Amon as well.

26. This is Amon’s running joke: he gives these humorous titles to the various military personnel.

27. The word Amon uses is *hiloniyim*, lit. ‘secular’. By this he may mean non-observant Jews, or non-Jews.

28. This song, ‘The Hope’, words by Naftali Hertz Imber and music by Samuel Cohen, based on a folk tune, later became Israel’s national anthem.

29. Amon writes the name very clearly, but I have not been able to identify this river (עייף) which is likely to be in Syria since they had not been travelling for very long.
30. The account of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, read aloud on the eve of the festival of Passover.

31. This is an example of Amon’s temporal blurring in his insertion of later events into the narrative. He mentions cities by name – cities that they had not yet reached.

32. קולינובאוצרבלוםזה Lit. ‘a mine of information’.

33. If this is the case, his geography is faulty. He could not have visited Marmara in Western Turkey before going to Aleppo in Syria, unless by this time they were on their way back. However, Amon’s dating in this fragment suggest that this journey took place in 1917.

34. From Amon’s account, as from Nahmias’s diary, we see that they travelled from Jerusalem, passing through Aleppo and Damascus before reaching Anatolia. This list of names includes Salahiyah in Syria; the other towns are in Anatolia.

35. A historic city in south-central Turkey, twenty kilometres inland from the Mediterranean Sea.

36. A city in southern Turkey.

37. Amon must be mistaken, because Karaköy is a district of Istanbul. Amon was indeed there later in his service.

38. A small city in the Adana Province of Turkey.

39. The Ottoman Army trained its men to march long distances while carrying equipment and rifles. A distance of 120 km in four days was commonplace. See Ragip Nurettin Eğe and Günes N. Eğe-Akter, By the Light of a Candle, translated by Edward J. Erickson (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), p.73.

40. For a detailed description of marching in a sandstorm, see the Hebrew author L.A. Arieli Orloff’s novel Yeshimon. Very often the passages in the novels evoke the atmosphere far better than factual accounts are able to do.

41. Amon frequently mentions the organization of the men into circles on formal occasions. This style of meeting is confirmed in Orloff, Yeshimon. In the novel, Orloff, who served in an Ottoman military band during the war, describes the band as having been organized into a circle. See also a photograph in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_military_band, although this refers to an earlier period.

42. ולא במחנה האגרוף

43. Amon uses many terms from the Bible, which cast some doubt on the accuracy of his reporting. He is reconstructing rather than reporting. He uses Hebrew idioms and he is constantly interpreting the words of others.

44. Meaning laymen, those who do not know Torah. Sanhedrin 33. In other words, ‘we are professionals’. This is an example of Amon’s interpretation of events and words.

45. This is incomprehensible in this context.

46. פסחעלשנת사업

47. City in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey.

48. ‘In Jerusalem there was a special shop next to the Jaffa Gate for news from the field of the war in which they put up information about all the victories of Germany and Turkey, and according to this information there was not a single living soul in all the countries that were the enemies of Germany.’ Ephraim Deinard, Millhemet tugarma be’erets yisrael [The Turkish War in Palestine] (St Louis, MO: Moinester Press, 1926), p.38.

49. An important industrial and transport centre in central Western Turkey.

50. We can follow Amon’s progress on the map. His geography is accurate. However, not all the names he mentions are identifiable.
51. Psalm 114: 3: ‘When Israel came out of Egypt, / Jacob from a people of foreign tongue, Judah became God’s sanctuary, / Israel his dominion. / The sea looked and fled.’ This is repeated in the Haggadah for Passover.

52. This is a reference to the first time Don Quixote and Sancho Panza saw the sea and watched a battle at sea.

53. This is an interesting detail. Payment of soldiers in labour units is never mentioned. Soldiers in regular units were paid, but their payment often went into arrears for months at a time. It is possible, but unlikely, that Amon had not been assigned to an Amale unit, but unfortunately he gives no indication of his unit or battalion, except in terms that are unidentifiable. For an illustration of the uniform that comes closest to Amon’s description, see David Nicolle, The Ottoman Army 1914–18 (Wellingborough: Osprey, 1994), p.26 (B). The infantryman in the picture has little pouches on his belt, similar to the one to which Amon was referring. However, it is unlikely that he can be called an infantryman.

54. He had previously mentioned that they were armed.

55. Amon’s description, and even his basic drawing, are so exact that we can identify the bridge as the old Galata Bridge, which spans the Golden Horn from Karaköy to Eminönü.

56. A city south of Istanbul.

57. It appears that a year has passed since he left Jerusalem.

58. There three historic mosques in Manisa: the Sultan mosque (sixteenth century), the Great mosque (1366) and the Muradiye mosque (1586).

59. Endirne in Western Turkey?

60. In his book The Ottoman Army 1914–1918, David Nicolle reproduces photographs and drawings of Ottoman military personnel. Some of the men wear khaki. The infantrymen wear a belt containing a series of pouches like those that Amon has described, in which he could keep his pay. Another illustrates a member of the bicycle infantry, to which Amon does not belong, but the uniform is precisely as he describes it, with groups of five cartridges on a belt and a rifle strap slung across the front of the jacket. There is also an infantryman who has, as Amon describes, a series of ribbons wound around his boots. He is carrying a knapsack covered with a blanket strapped down atop the knapsack, and a water bottle (A to E between pages 24 to 33). The infantryman similar to Amon does not seem to be carrying bullets but he does have a belt with pouches. Nicolle confirms that the dress and equipment were manufactured in Germany but he says the bulk of uniforms seem to have been made in Turkey itself.

61. A cubit is equivalent to 17–22 inches.

62. Al regel ahat: a Gentile told Hillel, the great Jewish sage, that he would convert to Judaism if Hillel could teach him the whole of the Torah in the time he could balance on one leg. Hillel replied: ‘What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah; the rest is just commentary. Go and study it.’

63. Rosh Hashana is mentioned many times in this diary, in numerous contexts and without much relationship to real time. It is not clear to which specific event Amon is referring.

64. ‘Meantime [writes Amon in a fragment, one of many that describe similar celebrations] the party began with dances and spears, and voices [crying] ‘God save the
Sultan’ burst out like a wave into the air and they added: “A red sword is again thirsty for the blood of enemies” and other mouthings like that’ (Fragment 10, 1).

66. This story is impossible to verify without place names. I have not been able to discover the location of this bridge nor of the silos that were there obviously to create smokescreens in the face of enemy aircraft. Smokescreens were used widely in the war, particularly by ships at sea. Various chemicals, including chlorosulphuric acid, were used. The well-recorded chlorine gas was by far the most deadly of these smokescreen gases.

67. Generally Amon does not identify ‘the soldiers’ (ha-hayalim) who are an abiding, ghostly presence throughout the diary. In reality they were a mixture of Christian Arabs, Turks, Kurds and Jews.

68. The only newspaper in Hebrew still functioning in Palestine, Herut, reported the victory in a very small column (date missing) headed ‘In Honour of the Great Victory’: ‘Damascus announces that on the day that the news spread about the great victory that the Turks achieved on the Dardanelles front at the time of the retreat of the British... Damascus was overjoyed and celebrating. The entire city was decorated with Ottoman flags, and a great patriotic celebration was held there in honour of the victory. Local schoolchildren participated in these celebrations with their bands.’

69. The Dardanelles is a narrow strait in north-western Turkey that separates Europe (the Gallipoli Peninsula) from the mainland of Asia and links the Aegean Sea to the Black Sea. It was a strategically important waterway. Following the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war, Winston Churchill believed that an opening could be forced through the Dardanelles, providing an opportunity for a direct assault on Constantinople. Operations began on 19 February 1915. The Allies’ naval campaign was a failure and the Allied leaders realized that a ground force would be needed to eliminate the Turkish artillery on the Gallipoli Peninsula which commanded the straits. This mission was delegated to General Sir Ian Hamilton and the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, which included the newly formed Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC). Opposing the Allies was the Turkish 5th Army, commanded by General Otto Liman von Sanders, the German advisor to the Ottoman army (who was of Jewish descent). Allied security for the operation was lax and the Turks spent six weeks preparing for the anticipated assault. The last Allied forces departed from Gallipoli on 9 January 1916. Despite their heavy losses (195,000 men, against the Allies’ 141,113 killed and wounded), Gallipoli proved to be the Turks’ greatest victory of the war. See http://militaryhistory.about.com/od/worldwari/p/gallipoli.htm. Martin Gilbert writes: ‘Ill luck and error, followed by the unexpected vigour of the Turkish defenders, shattered the Allied dream of a turning point that would bring them both victory in the field and territory on the map.’ See Gilbert, The First World War (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p.153. It is a pity that Amon’s disdain for Turkey, or at least for the Turkish army, colours his report of the Dardanelles victory. He takes it in the same spirit as he takes other rumours and reports of the war’s end.

70. From Isaiah 13:12: ‘I will make man more rare than fine gold, even man [more precious] than the pure gold of Ophir.’ As cynical as ever, Amon is referring to the rhetoric that followed the victory in the Dardanelles.

71. The three words that form the acronym for Ha’ba’d, חכמה, בינה, דעת.

72. This is repeated more than once in the diary and the fragments. In Fragment 11 Amon is a little more explicit: ‘They make chickens out of a kind of white and grey cloth..."
and other colours and combs on their heads that [make them] look like living roosters and their hollow bodies are filled with gunpowder and small poisoned capsules and after precisely indicated spreading [i.e. being flown to an indicated spot] they fall to the ground. The poisoned chickens only have to touch the ground and like lightning they explode into fragments and bring death and destruction to a land that isn’t their own. This is the wisdom of the English’ (Fragment 11, 2). The page preceding these discussions is missing: it would have been the description of the aftermath of the Dardanelles campaign.

I have not been able to discover any reference to bird-shaped bombs deployed by the British forces. They used Mills bombs, fragmentation bombs which broke into fragments when detonated. Amon, who had been trained in the use of grenades, would have been aware that the ‘chickens’ were not ordinary grenades or canisters. However, since most of the elements of this discussion amongst the men are, thus far, based on historical fact, even if massively embroidered and interpreted, there may be some basis for the ‘chickens’ as well. The ensuing speculation about the locusts is, of course, nonsense.

73. In one of the fragments of Amon’s diary, after a long passage of praise for the ‘English’, a soldier speaks: ‘This [English] government has courtyards filled with locusts of all the kinds the the hagav the yelek [growth stages of the locusts], of every species. Did you know that great camps of locusts spread themselves? It is the English that have sent these locusts to punish the Turks, and when it’s necessary to open the storehouses the locusts spread out and cover the eye of the sun’ (misc. fragments). In the fragment, the conversation about locusts takes place shortly after Amon’s conscription and then again after the Dardanelles campaign.

74. As I have previously mentioned, one of the major problems of this diary is dating: Amon is clearly describing the Dardanelles victory, which places his account in 1915 or early 1916. He was already on his way in February 1915 (according to Fragment 7); the Gallipoli campaign began in February 1915 but Amon is writing in early summer (after the festival of Shavuot) or perhaps later in the year, because he says to a soldier: ‘if you were more intelligent you wouldn’t have behaved towards me this way and wouldn’t have terrified a total beginner – I haven’t yet completed three months of army service’. This appears after the story of Gallipoli, so he is writing sometime in 1915. The locust plague took place in 1915. Unfortunately, this is the last we hear about the Dardanelles. It appears that it was difficult for men like Amon, trapped in a dire situation from which there was no escape, to rejoice in the victories of those who were oppressing them.

75. This is perhaps the method of discipline in his unit: stringent rules are made, the breaking of which incurs severe punishments, usually beatings with stick and whips, and at the same time the men are almost encouraged to break the rules to give their superiors reason to thrash them.

76. Ismail Enver Pasha was one of the founders of the CUP and Turkish Minister of War. He considered himself to be a great military leader, while the German military adviser, Liman von Sanders, thought him a military buffoon: see Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p.119. According to Edward Erickson, Enver was a disaster: an extremely aggressive nationalist ‘who
was prone to making hasty and ill-advised decisions with incomplete information. His personality was flamboyant, volatile and charismatic.’ He was, according to Erickson, one of the principle architects of the Armenian genocide: see Ordered to Die, p.214. See also Rafael Nogales, Four Years beneath the Crescent (London: Taderon Press, 2003), p.218 (originally published 1926).

77. Throughout this diary I am apportioning military terminology and ranks according to Amon’s designation, without confirming that they are accurate: I have not come across a table of Hebrew equivalents of Turkish titles and ranks.

78. The words in parentheses are Amon’s. A kalpak is a high-crowned cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and the Caucasus.

79. Pictures show Enver wearing a kalpak with small gold squares on the crown.

80. It is difficult to believe that after spending this time in the army Amon knew no Turkish. His family originated from Turkey and his grandson has told me that Amon was the treasurer of the Istanbul synagogue in the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem. This is one of Amon’s conceits that recurs throughout the diary.
Chapter 3

Yehuda Amon, Volume 2

The second volume of the diary/memoir, a direct continuation of the previous one, is a far more accomplished narrative than the first. It is likely that Amon intended to publish it in some form, possibly even as a novel, based on his own experience. We have seen from the fragments that the memoir as a whole underwent numerous drafts. This volume contains (as does the first volume) elements of fiction but it is, in the main, verifiable as historical fact. It appears to have been written some years after the author’s army service, since it contains a number of anachronisms, the most glaring being reference to the Hebrew newspapers *Do’ar Hayom* and *Ha’aretz*, the latter of which was founded only in 1918. There is also further confusion regarding dates. Amon begins a story by giving the date as Rosh Hashana (September) 1918, and, in a marginal note, corrects it to 1919, yet the anecdote concerns personnel and events directly related to his army service. This is an unrealistically crowded Rosh Hashana, filled with incidents and events. It is possible that Amon is conflating more than one series of High Holy Days into one.

The book, like the first, handwritten in a hard-covered exercise book, includes a few autobiographical details, such as, for example, the brief reference to Amon’s family’s origins in Turkey, which has been verified by his grandson. Generally, the account is filled with anecdotes that extend over pages, with long, repetitive passages of dialogue. These anecdotes are less verifiable as lived experience than those in the first volume, but this account contains some material of historical interest, such the details about disinfection, the structure and use of weapons and an encounter with members of the Ottoman air force. In fact, it is filled with technical facts, some of which may be available in military histories of the period – although not, however, with the personal insights that Amon provides. In
this volume, in this sense different from the first, Amon’s actual experience is largely fictionalized, while based on real events, people and places. As with the first, this volume is missing the pages from the beginning and end, but from pages in the fragments I am able to reconstruct Amon’s description of the end of the war and his homeward journey. The already familiar themes of corruption and cruelty are repeated in this volume at greater narrative length.

However, it is in the fragments rather than the volume that we are given an insight into the sheer misery endured by the servicemen, and by Amon in particular. He writes with intense pathos about his suffering from the elements, from illness, from cold, hunger and thirst, and from the almost unbelievable physical and psychological brutality of his military superiors. Perhaps he considered these sections to be too desolate to be included in the final volumes.

The book is constructed from a series of sketches, the adventures of an ill-fated ‘ordinary soldier’ (hayal ragil), likely to be a conscript in a labour unit, for while he is being trained in the use of rifles and grenades, in addition to going out on endless drills and manoeuvres, he is not being trained for combat. While the narrative, as I have said, is still a form of autofiction, there is no doubt that the real war is at the base of it: for example, in Amon’s exact description of uniforms; military equipment borne by each man; techniques of cleaning a rifle and throwing a hand grenade; target practice; field and hill manoeuvres; marches and military regulations; troop movements throughout Western Anatolia; the nature of the encampments and barracks; the landscape and terrain; the weaponry; and the interrelationship between the men. As we have seen, the men marched long distances while carrying equipment and weapons, as Amon describes in his long and detailed passage about receiving and carrying arms and ammunition up a hill.

The stories in this volume generally extend over pages of narrative and dialogue. Unfortunately, in many sections Amon appears to be more intent on telling a good story (and he does indeed write well, maintaining tension and adding humour) than providing an accurate chronicle of his experiences. When he does do so, for example in the sequence about Rosh Hashana, his writing abandons its efforts to tell a tale, and becomes personal and moving.

Throughout both volumes, both his friends and his fellow soldiers apostrophize him as יְודָעַ (Yuda). In some cases this appears to be an affectionate diminutive and in others, in the mouths of the NCOs and officers, a
less affectionate appellation for a Jew. It is difficult to be sure, since this diary does not supply any consistent form of address of soldiers by their superiors.

The book begins where the first one left off, with accounts of regular beatings at the hands of Amon’s nemesis, a sadistic NCO, Mahmid Bash Shaoush (a sergeant-major).

*Diary of a Jewish Soldier in the Ottoman Army, Volume 2*

[2, 2] [He was] of short stature, sickly and stubborn, bad tempered and angry. On his forehead were stony wrinkles, he had a wrinkled face the colour of dust. Sometimes it glowed with the glow [the colour?] of cinnamon. His bleary eyes tremble in anger all the time. His eyes [water] and his teeth grind. Once a year a strange smile hovers on his crude lips... His body is gaunt. His dress is simple, like that of any of the soldiers. He bears three dusty and tattered stripes on his shoulder. He is not given to doing good, but he is mean, regarding others with malevolence. He eats little. He is responsible for matters of [life?] and death, of shoes, kitbags, guns and ammunition, spades and all kinds of implements. There are more value descriptions [i.e. I could say more that is judgmental]. But contrary to all this, [he is] an experienced military leader without whom no one will lift his hand or foot, not even the commanding officer.¹

Five days later, Mahmid, whom I have just described, grabbed me and ordered me to hand him the full belt of bullets within 24 hours without a single one missing, and if I did not, my end would be bitter. But the ammunition had been stolen from me in the sunshine and so, as a compensation, he demanded the gold ring on my finger that he had been coveting. He would pardon me by hinting at a gift in place of the bullets, because according to the law every bullet was worth a single soldier. When his desire was not fulfilled he warned me with a ploy when the time came to place the bullets in his thin hand. He stopped saying that he would take his revenge on me but my heart had predicted that at the moment I should have handed over the bullets, a great catastrophe would befall me, but I hadn’t been certain. But here came decisive
proof that I had foreseen, that the ring would be constituted as a fine. I was prepared with all my heart to give him the ring until Raphael came alongside and warned me that he would desert me. He [was concerned] that he [Mahmid] would force me to do heavy labour [angriya] and so I suffered bitterly until the time came to see him [Mahmid]. [2, 3] At the end of the specified time Mahmid, filled with anger, slapped me on the cheek many times, almost every day. Every time I had to present myself before him against my will, I receive four times as many slaps every day until I [would give] him the bullets or the ring. I received two blows every day and I was in a state of despair until I complained bitterly to Raphael because it was as if it were his problem [as well]. Had he not advised me to go to the Lieutenant and that Lieutenant to go to the Captain then this matter would have all passed in silence and I would not have suffered so terribly. But this terror and suffering were likely to explode in the very near future and even so there is the possibility that it may be ignored.2

I hid many times from the cruel Mahmid. If I saw him I would quickly stand still so that he shouldn’t see me as he came close. Raphael suffered as much as I did because Mahmid was of a higher rank than Raphael, but the latter placated me with inane talk because he was not able to do anything for my benefit or to save me from Mahmid’s evil hand. A number of days went by in this way.

[2, 4] On Friday when there were no drills, as you know, Mahmid began to sit in the corner near the courtyard outside the place where he lived. I thought that the anger of this viper had passed. I was sure that he had gone to stroll in the city streets as always, not like us who had been stuck [here] for a number of days. For that reason I went close by the courtyard, the length and breadth of it, and here this coil is sitting bent over in a hidden corner. This was the place in which the four of us, Yosef, Yitzhak, Raphael and I, had eaten a cake on the first day of our arrival in Manisa.

Here he is, the Lord of the Feeble and the Prying [lit. ‘detectives’: the two words rhyme: halash and balash]. My eyes
meet his troubled teary eyes, small and purple, like the eyes of a mouse, and his blemished face showed weakness.

He throws a distorted glance at me with his watering eyes and his forehead on which the wrinkles go up and down and he yells: ‘Yuda, come here.’ It was like a sin between me and death. My hair stood on end through agony and strife, my heart pounded, like the blows of hammer. Cold sweat covered my face because of the trembling and terror that were etched on my face. I stood to attention . . . He raised his eyes and looked into mine and asked thus: ‘Yuda where are the bullets? Tell me quickly and if you don’t I will torture you seven times more [fiercely] because of your sins.’ [2, 5] There is no escape from him and my throat was closed up and I couldn’t make a sound. Therefore I kept quiet but I was still standing before him like a golem [man of clay], still with my hand beside my cap, and trembling because I saw that he was going to make me depart the land of the living because of the ring on my right hand. I curse, because this ring is gold and I must remember Raphael’s order but where will I turn for help? [Mahmid] is screaming and ordering me to come near him and I am at his command.

Then he cracked his whip and had it in mind to bring it down on my face. At this moment I forgot about the law of prisoners and I moved more than a metre away from him with some insolence, because I moved away from him with my hand still raised beside my forehead. [This continues for a while: Amon stands trembling, and Mahmid shouts at him in a rage and demands the bullets. Finally Amon runs away. He appeals to his friend Raphael.] Raphael, what have I done wrong? I have been placed in the lowest pit and I cannot bear any more. I will escape from this. There is no escape from this plague and this curse, Mahmid Bash Shaoush. Raphael, I beg you, take me away from this evil man and if you cannot do so I shall escape this night. This Bash Shaoush is terribly cruel to me and embitters and deprives my life because of the bullets and, to be more accurate, because of my ring. [2, 6] [Raphael will not allow him to hand over the ring and suggests that Amon see a superior officer, recently arrived from Istanbul from the Fourth Army Corps, and
who happens to be a Jew. Raphael promises that this officer, Mushun Effendi, will take care of Amon.] It seems that there was no other way but to go to him and to humble myself before him and I harboured the hope that I would be free of Sergeant-Major Mahmid because of the suffering he inflicted upon me. So we came to a decision and Raphael told me to hurry to him [the officer] and I stood at a distance of three metres in front of the room of the Jewish Mushun Effendi from Istanbul. I hesitated about the way in which to approach the door of his room.

Meanwhile Mahmid sent two soldiers to apprehend me but Raphael was the duty officer and he sent them away for a quarter of an hour so as not to disobey Mahmid’s order.

I go slowly to the door of [the Jewish officer’s] room. I am still free and I have not presented myself to him but I look at his sparkling eyes. He sits on a simple armchair. In front of him there is a small writing table polished with red polish and on it is a white map and he has a fountain pen in his hand. [2, 7] Many papers are spread out here and there. He stops and starts writing while smoking a cigarette and letting out the smoke between his lips and his nostrils. He didn’t sense that I was standing at the door. And therefore I examined him once again: the shape of his strong, powerful and glorious body. He has a quiff of reddish hair on his head combed tidily on his forehead which is smooth and free of wrinkles. His eyes are blue and sparkling. He is about 30 years old. His face radiates charm and pleasantness and is a little red, and he has a yellowish French moustache. His shoulders are solid and he is sturdy with great nobility. He is splendid in his blue uniform. His boots are short and polished. A short shining sword is fixed to his thigh. After I had examined him I leaned against the door-frame of his room. He stopped writing, blew a cloud of smoke, looked out of the corner of his sharp eyes and threw a quick glance at me and again his eyes were fixed on the ledger before him while leafing through page after page. Meanwhile I am standing to attention and I sensed that he had looked at me but he did not pay attention to my attitude of respect and I felt offended. Once again I examined his military uniform: on both his shoulders there were shining silver pips together with a
Once again he is smoking but this time he looks at me directly for a long time. He puts down his pen and calls me sharply in Turkish in a strong voice, ‘What do you want, soldier?’ Immediately I stood to attention and answered him in this way.

‘May it please you, sir, may I have a few words?’

‘Wait just a minute’, he answered patiently, and once again picked up his pen and wrote something on the paper in front of him.

I see that he excels in everything he does and with his qualities and intelligence he is seven times better than what Raphael has told me. We surmise that very shortly he will rise and advance to the highest echelons, this chap [barnesh], due to his sharpness, wisdom and intellect.

A few moments later he puts down his pen and turns to me once again with a question.

‘What can I do for you, soldier?’

‘I am a Jew and my name is Yehuda Amon.’

‘Yes?’ A little smile hovers between his lips and he adds, ‘There are other families in Istanbul who bear the same name and quite frequently I have heard “Amon” in my city. Are you a citizen of Istanbul and I have never seen you?’

‘My father’s father came from Istanbul but arrived in Jerusalem at the age of five with his family. They have been living in the holy city of Jerusalem, Effendi.’

‘I’m very happy to hear that. Are there other Jews in this Division apart from Raphael?’

‘There are four Jews in this Division, Effendi.’ [His three friends.]

‘Come in, come inside and stand at ease—’. My hand is still raised in a salute and I may not lower it without permission.

‘What is your question and it shall be answered for you?’

After I had told him about everything that had happened to me and the suffering and the torture that I have been enduring at the hands of Sergeant-Major Mahmid who embitters my life, Mushun, the officer answers: ‘Good, I will come to your aid,
don’t worry about this’, and he adds: ‘I would like to let you sit down but you may not do so because of the well-known military law. It could happen that at some point one of the MPs could come to ask me for advice about something and for this reason it is better for me not to allow you to sit; therefore you must stand before me all the time, according to the law.’

His wonderful qualities impart strength and courage to someone who wishes to complain to him. He bends his ear to hear all the complaints of the complainer and he gives him all his attention…

[Mushun writes something on a piece of paper, and so begins a very long, convoluted and rambling, almost incomprehensible, story about boots, which quickly brings about Amon’s disillusionment with the Jewish officer, whom he now supposes to be crazy. He also reverses his view of him as a handsome man. The officer has ordered Amon’s boots to be replaced by goatskin sandals. As mentioned above, footwear was a serious problem in the Ottoman army. However, the experience comes to a conclusion.]

[2, 18] The next day on the Sabbath I met with Mushun Effendi in a new section of the field that was set aside for individual drills that had stopped for a half an hour as a rest period. Mushun comes up to me, saying to me, ‘Don’t take any notice of Mahmid. I spoke to him in detail [and told him] that he should not treat you badly at all from this day onwards. I’m speaking seriously this time and I have decided that he should not speak to you for good or evil. He is very dangerously ill and there’s a possibility that he will go to hell. The commanding officer has requested that he be transferred to a hospital and he refuses. He will not even go to a rest home. His soul and being are fixed to the military exercises because he is an enthusiastic patriot.’ [Mushun again promises to take care of Amon, who thanks him effusively.]

[(2, 20) In the next excessively long story, told largely through dialogue, Amon is guarding a prison, in a city he calls Mune or Muna. It is a fortress surrounded by walls and gates. An Arab prisoner, Yussuf, begs him to be allowed to fetch water in the heat. Amon asks the prisoner where he has come from and he
replies, ‘From the first Legion and the Sixth Army’, to which he gives the names in Turkish, Branji and Altinji. Amon permits him to fetch water, and naturally the prisoner escapes. After the escape Amon is filled with regret, and is not sure whether his punishment will be imprisonment or permanent army labour. He is slapped in the face and then his old enemy Mahmid appears with a whip, intent on disciplining him, but he is saved by the Jew, Mushun, who is as good as his word. Nevertheless Amon is punished.

[2, 29] And so I am in prison, arrested by this destroying angel; Raphael, who was my dear and faithful friend, ran for his life. The NCO Raphael has become the avenging angel but he has disappeared and he is not here and therefore upon whom must I depend, only our Father in heaven. My Lord whose wisdom is infinite, help me and help me to understand how I should justify myself before these cruel people who punish the innocent. Some days have passed and I don’t know what my sentence will be: either to remain in jail forever or to do permanent army labour. [2, 30] I am certain that my guts are scorched, my heart has turned round in my body [and I am suffering] bitter mourning.

My Lord, the torments of hell are approaching and will soon take control of my oppressed and wounded body inside and out; from where will my help come? I have never in my life known the depths of deceit and corruption such as this. Indeed a conscript has been sent to trace the footsteps of the man who escaped, but who knows whether he can catch him. Meanwhile a great tumult has taken place after Yussuf’s escape. Within my confusion I scolded myself that if they find him I could break his head into pieces because of the fury burning inside me.

Ten minutes later, Ahmid, the Second Lieutenant, appeared. I recognized him by the light of the moon. It seems that he had received some news. He is very cruel and there are very few like him apart from Mahmid the Sergeant-Major, may catastrophe come upon him. When I saw him come towards me in fury, trembling took hold of me and a cold sweat covered my body that was preparing to receive cruel beating and whippings without
number. This Second Lieutenant treated the soldiers as [they did] in the Middle Ages. First of all I received a strong punch on my forehead without his opening his mouth. He begins to ask sarcastically, ‘How could you allow Yussuf to develop wings. Are you permitted to leave him alone?’ I muttered, ‘He was very thirsty’… [2, 31] Once again he raised both his hands and they came down on my face: one came down on my face and the other was raised and then the other was raised and one came down on my face and in this way I received four slaps until he left me for a moment and went to his room.

I was filled with despair and I cried out to Heaven, but to myself, because many soldiers had gathered and were standing around me, apart from the two armed soldiers standing where the event had taken place, and I said, ‘Lord, how my troubles have multiplied. Many men rise against me. You listen to the clamour of the poor. You will listen to the cry of the poor man and save him.’

And here comes Ahmid once again with a cat-o’-nine-tails in his hand and he was about to beat me without opening his mouth. [At that moment Amon was rescued by Mushun, who scolded Ahmid:] ‘[T]housands of soldiers have deserted and further thousands have died and you intend to raise the flag of the army because of the type of deserter like Yussuf? Would he have been imprisoned if he hadn’t been a deserter? Isn’t he a Staff Corporal? This Jewish soldier is innocent against the thousands of deserters like Yussuf, do I make myself clear?’

[Nevertheless Amon is punished by being kept in prison and he becomes ill as a result of this experience. He sees a doctor who prescribes some medication to bring down his fever, in addition to two days of rest which, says Raphael, ‘is the only medicine available in this place’. Amon meets another patient, an Arab, who is a serial malingeringer. Amon sweats away his fever, and is cured.]

[2, 37] At 3 o’clock in the afternoon I heard a great noise from the courtyard. As far as I knew, the army had not yet returned from its exercises because it was still early, but what was this tumult? I
rushed outside to see what was coming. And so, a long caravan of unarmed soldiers, who had been caught, joined the diminished group in the depths of the courtyard; among them were strangers and those known to us. There were 140 soldiers sitting in three rows on the spot, crowded together and looking at us with surprised eyes. Some of them had run away from the hospital and some of them were deserters (fararim) who had been caught during the night and during part of the day, which was my fault and the fault of Yussuf, the leader of the deserters. If he had not run away these unfortunate men would not have been caught. They had run away a short while ago and now been caught. They belonged to all the units [stationed] in the city of Manisa, to the place where all the soldiers were gathered from the rest of the city.

[(2, 38) One of his most hated sergeants was also caught among the escapees.] All the foreign unarmed soldiers are stretched out on the threshold of the courtyard. The Christian duty officer called Basharra from Aydin, to whom the horsemen had brought the deserting soldiers, gives an order and says ‘Yuda, you must stand guard here over these foreign soldiers. Watch them very carefully and make sure that they do not fight amongst themselves. Some of them have been caught because of you. The army has not yet returned from its manoeuvres as you know and therefore…’ [Amon reminds the duty officer that he has some time off because he had been ill, but Bashara responds that they are short of men. There follows an enthralling narrative which exhibits Amon’s skill at comic storytelling.]

Bashara the Corporal stood armed at one end of the rows and I in the middle. It apparently seemed to be a good thing to be in control of 140 minus one – we know who the one is, the one who filled his heart with the aim of leading me astray. There is no need to repeat that this is the Lord of the deserters, Yussuf Effendi, may his body be tormented and shredded forever, just as he shredded my body with his devious guilt.

And so I passed between the columns of these unfortunate soldiers staring at me, afraid of me and Bashara the duty officer, and like Bashar the duty officer I let them see my angry face as
a warning that they should not dare to oppose anything. I shake
my shining bolt [lulav, probably the barrel of his gun] that has no
bullets, in order to make them afraid of me, and the ill-fated men
sit still without any movement but they make at terrible noise
whose echoes deafen the ears.

We were in this situation for about a half an hour but when I
turned to face Bashara to take a few slow steps, because it was
dangerous to take many steps, and woe is me: within the
organized columns two places are empty. They had escaped from
the gate in the internal yard which remained wide open. This was
Bashara’s fault. Because they came through it, this was the gate
of bitterness and this is where they left from and not from the
other gate at which stood an armed soldier so that they did not
dare to run away from there.

I screamed and shouted to Bashara who stood at the end of the
line but he didn’t hear me because of the noise. Again I shouted
and screamed, ‘Bashara listen to what I’m saying: two living
birds have flown between the lines.’ They have disappeared; tell
me what to do now? The poisoned chalice is choking me but has
not yet reached my stomach, it is still in my eyes, as you know.
So therefore tell me what is there to do about this?’ [2, 40]
Bashara shouted and yelled but to no avail: they prefer not to
come back and they will not return here ever. At this moment I
thrust my foot on the back of one of the soldiers next to the empty
spaces and I yelled in fury and also in despair saying to him,
‘Traitor why didn’t you tell me that the escaper is getting ready
to leave? Why didn’t you find an opportunity to run away like
them as well?’ And I hit him furiously with the butt of my gun.
And Bashara joined me and we began to beat left and right, even
those who had not committed any crime. In the meantime two
more from the second row left their place and disappeared
because Bashara had not managed to shut the internal gate as he
had intended to.

Now we stopped punishing the soldiers lest they all escape or
rise up against us and we were three against 70 pairs minus one.
And so we were left with empty hands because the beatings
didn’t help for very long. But what we had feared took place.
They intended to rebel against us and they all got up as one man and they yelled and they banged and they stamped on the spot and they pounded with their legs with the intention of terrifying us. But we could hear, faintly, the army’s footsteps. The army was coming close and at the head of it the joyful sound of the band penetrating into the courtyard in which suddenly there was silence. The army surrounded [the prisoners] and right away they were divided and separated into various units. Those who had escaped were not returned and I didn’t hear anything about them and everything passed by in silence.

[(2, 42) On 15 August they were ordered to leave the place, and to surrender all their faulty weapons to be destroyed. During a much-awaited meal they were ordered to move. To Amon’s chagrin, food was spilled and wasted. He managed to save three pieces of meat which an Arab soldier later tried to steal from his knapsack. He joined a column in which he had friends and they marched to the train station.] We sat in the train’s carriages, the locomotive whistled as a sign of departure and we passed the city of Izmir and many villages. [2, 43] The following day in the evening we visited the fruitful city of Aydin. We camped there for two days in the centre of the city in the military barracks. The late Tabor Russo, the owner of the broom factory, came to visit me while I was armed and standing guard in the prison, but since then I had not seen him. They told me that he had died in the city of Bandirma and had been accorded final honours by the Jewish citizens of the city.

In two days’ time an order came to depart from Aydin and to go up a hill two hours away from the city. It was an arid hill surrounded by skeletons of abandoned houses and nothing else. By the way, if you go to the city for a number of days you do not have the right to tour or promenade in the streets because of the plague of desertions by the mostly Turkish soldiers. The entire army was encamped on the hill. We struck pegs and square tents after we had got rid of all the many obstacles that were in that part of the field; the crooked became straight because we paved roads.

Every 150 small tents were joined to a large tent by attaching hooks and knots. These were the small tents which every soldier
has to carry folded lengthwise on his knapsack. [Each tent] was a metre and a half long and a square metre wide. [2, 44] For example, if two soldiers sit alone doing some kind of job they put up two tents fastened by buttons and hooks so that it becomes one tent with a peg in the middle and this is how it protects against the sun in the middle of the sky . . . the tent is tented only on two sides and its four corners are bound with a thick cord on which short thick poles hang and they are stuck into the ground after the tent’s corners have been properly stretched. The result was that every giant tent was 25 amot long and five amot wide and two and a half amot high. Possibly about 60 soldiers could be stretched out, thirty on each side.¹²

The following day, lorries arrived from Germany laden with new weapons and bricks of Pirolin/Pyrolin¹³ and a great many cartridges. We were sure that the end of the war had come but it was not as we had thought. We had given away all our arms in Manisa¹⁴ and we were free of all weapons, therefore this new misery came to us as a great surprise.

On the orders of the new commanding officer the entire army went down to the train station to unload the heavy consignment from the railcars: here begin the heavy loads and burdens to destroy the bones of every soldier who carries five rifles on his shoulder and they go up to the top of the hill like old men. [2, 45] And the plague of bullets. Every four soldiers carry a box of bullets. Two of them are never parted; they bend under the tribulation of carrying something heavy and two others grab the corners of the box with their hands and they go up the hill.

We worked all day at this hard labour because of the huge numbers of weapons, and a large number of rifles and bullets remain in the armoury for the soldiers who will arrive to suffer after us. It was enough for me to go up once, laden with the burden of rifles on my shoulder only for five minutes but if I try to shift them onto the other shoulder they fall to the ground. I was attacked by faintness. Again three on my shoulder and two clutched in my left hand and dragging behind me like swords dragging behind the lords and the mighty.

The heat was terrible; the sweat streamed, there was no water
and no food even to be seen [nothing but weapons] because where would it come from in the middle of the road? Finally I went up the hill in the afternoon to the place I hated so much. At two o’clock I put down my load and I was free.

All the weapons had been brought to the specific place between the skeletons of the abandoned houses. And if you ask the Turks and the Arabs how the Jews do better compared to us? [For we were only four.] We admit that they did no fewer than 10 journeys to and from laden with flutes and branches that cause a noise and lightning. During the manoeuvres they carry [objects?] on their shoulders and come [and go] but everyone is angry at our laziness. From the railway to the hill was about an hour’s march. But I must mention that on that night a man showed the way and the strongest was the hero: in all, 50 soldiers ran away, of those who were the best able to go, mostly apparently innocent Turks, absolute traitors had managed to escape… They plot injustice and say, ‘We have devised a perfect plan!’ [God] will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake their heads in scorn. The innocent and slightly stupid Arabs stuck to them and also escaped: I have to add that that I’m speaking very generally and not specifically. In short, this was the result of the hard labour of the entire day.

The next day after breakfast we received a new dowry, shining German weapons. Up to now I had been free of carrying bullets but now I was loaded with 160 golden and shiny bullets, like the gold of Ophir. A solid material was wedged into the heart of the new iron bullets. The remainder of the day passed with some rest and labour, and guard duty after guard duty.

The next day after receiving the arms I went to military training in completely different programmes and firing exercises in Manisa. The exercise went on for four hours a day for five or six days and until I was sure that I was a great expert in the wisdom of these exercises. In a few days’ time I should be promoted to Corporal!

After dinner for the first time we had the burdensome obligation of expressing thanks and praise and blessing to the
Sultan, which we did every evening. [2, 47] This task [mitzvah] is the custom. At first we sang the national anthem accompanied by a band. Afterwards we had to say three times: ‘Long live Sultan Rashad’, and these words in Turkish: ‘He is King and Emperor, Long live the Sultan, long live the Empire.’ After the ceremony, ‘Long live desertion.’ That night the army had no sleep: about 25 people deserted. After the blessing and thanks to the Sultan come the escapes. Important and unimportant officers jump about and give vigorous orders to the duty soldiers to double up the guards, and have three or four times as many guards than they had had before. In the morning the new commanding officer, about thirty years old, appeared. The previous commanding officer had disappeared from our sight. He was about forty and his advice was about twenty, and seven in its faultiness. And it came to pass that when the commander heard about the escapes his anger was mighty and his fury burned and he said: let the guard be increased sixfold and sevenfold. On all other nights 20 soldiers stand guard every hour but on this night 120. Twenty soldiers stood on guard duty every night, changing every hour until it was impossible to have any rest for one moment from this terrible labour in the true sense of the word. Throughout a night of toil and suffering we did not have any sleep during those nights.

At eight o’clock in the evening I returned from the guardhouse. Before I had managed to smoke a cigarette the duty officer arrived and ordered: ‘Amshari [soldier], get on guard duty.’ [They continue the exhausting exercises – or manoeuvres – and hard labour day and night, constant guard duty. After an argument with the NCO, Amon complains:] 

[2, 48] To hell with all the Effendis, don’t stuff me with useless titles. Stop all the unnecessary wittering and don’t waste words needlessly. The outcome is that there was not even an hour [spent] under a roof. Perhaps we could sleep for two hours in every twenty-four on duty and filthy ground [where there was] a vapour of ashes all the time that the soldiers get up to go on guard duty. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin
is broken and become loathsome in this disorderly land. And for what? Simple: because the disease came to the hill: the disease of desertion.

The entire circular area was surrounded by loyal soldiers hidden in ambushes in case someone runs away. And if someone decides to escape and the armed sentry sees him, there is an added cruel and serious order: to shoot him after he had been warned three times according to military law. And so it goes on: exhausting military drills every day, wearying body and soul and no sleep at night, filled with [carrying] bullets to the point of madness. Sorrow during the day and at night there is no release from the provocation of toil and exhaustion.

[2, 49] My friend Yitzhak fell ill and went to the hospital. We parted amicably and with good wishes for his recovery. I have never seen him again to this day, and my soul longs to be comforted.

[(2, 50–1) He encounters his old adversary, the psychopathic NCO Mahmid again. He refuses to greet Mahmid, who slaps him on the face, a slap that reverberates in his ears ‘like the whistle of the locomotive as its hurries along its way, and the long whistle as it disappears’. Amon and Yosef are then ordered to guard an airfield.]

[2, 51] Weak at the knees we went directly to the airfield while [in my imagination] I was beating Mahmid’s head with fluent curses, apart from those that will be mentioned in the forthcoming narrative. When we reached the place the sentries left and we sat down, certainly against the regulations, with our guns across our knees and conversing about matters at the height and depth of the world, both [as] a rabbinical disputations and secular matters so that I should forget the occurrences with the sickly Mahmid. From afar we heard a noise coming closer and making a racket in the sky and turning towards the ground.

This was a Turkish plane weaving down and in a moment it landed on a broad area empty of all thorn and thistle. Just as it touched the ground it began to go at a crazy speed like a car going along the road and it hit the trunk of a cypress tree and stopped
while its front wheel was still going round, caught in the fronds and stalks of the tree whose roots and branches were jammed in the wheel’s axle.

Meanwhile the noisy movements from within the aircraft stopped and the mechanic once again [sic] tried to free the wheels from the jumble and moved a little backwards in order to free the plane. [2, 52] Again he went round and stood still, ready for take-off. Meanwhile the chief engineer appeared. He takes off his heavy dark glasses and loosens the straps over his head; he leaves the aircraft, walks down and comes towards us, who were standing a little distance away with our rifles on our shoulders, waiting for him to reach us.

This was a jovial, red-headed Turkish man with light blue eyes and with a smile on his face. He says ‘Salaam aleikum’ [peace be unto you] and we welcomed him with a similar blessing. The chief pilot begins to have a conversation with little Yosef, who is 200 years younger than me. He answers with movements of his hands and feet and with signs. I was certain that a word to the wise is enough because the mechanic didn’t understand a word or half a word while Yosef was talking with his fingers, and he turned towards me so that I could add two or three times the number of words to those coming out of his mouth.

A few moments later his [the chief pilot’s] adjutant arrived and in his hand he had an Egyptian wicker basket filled with all sorts of food, fruit and cereals, and the chief engineer and his adjutant were kind enough to sit with us and they implored us to be seated and despite the regulation [that it is forbidden to sit in the presence of an officer] we sat down with them and they fed us with all the good things and, in a pleasant and kindly manner, again invited us to take fruit and anything we wanted. The engineer and his adjutant were from Izmir. The former wears a red cap with a white visor which was long and thin and reached to his chest. His shirt and trousers were as red as blood. The second one had a slightly wrinkled face, he wore a black cap and visor. His shirt was black and his wide Charleston trousers had white piping with small yellow spots at the seams. With pleasant expressions and with smiles on their lips they spoke peacefully.
with us while we were eating, and after an hour or so our relief arrived came and we left the place completely unwillingly.

About a week later Yosef left Aydin to go to the hospital after he had added pain and knowledge in [to?] the joy of the world. I have never seen him again. I thought, in my storm of suffering, that I would never again be consoled for his absence. [2, 53] [Amon’s great enemy, Mahmid, also disappears from the narrative. It is possible that he died, because throughout the narrative he was seemingly very ill, and this may explain his extreme cruelty. Amon’s hatred of him is so intense that he writes: ‘Anyone who is cruel to me or beats me, his end is to die by the hand of God.’ His friend Moshe Franco also goes to the hospital, but they meet again in Jerusalem. At the time of writing, Franco had passed away.]

The soldiers begin to become ill, one after the other. Because of this we went to the city [Aydin] to the Department of Health, according to the Colonel’s command, and the military doctors gave each of us two injections, on the arm and on the chest around the nipples and in this way the illness disappeared from us.

On one of the mornings it was our turn to cut down some trees for firewood and to bring them from a distance of not less than an hour away to the place in which we were encamped. I went with soldiers armed only with blades and axes. On our way we wandered into a vineyard while our stomachs were actually empty and we ate to the point of vomiting. Then we went on until we reached a forest of oak trees and we cut them down with the axes, we pulled them up and took pieces of wood and logs from them and planks from their roots and their branches without mercy because everything is permitted wartime according to the law, as we know, it will be as it will be, in our opinion, risky but permitted, to steal them from people [our fellow men]. In any case, somehow every one of us took his load and bound what he had cut down or uprooted with fresh vine tendrils and stood it up in front of him.

Before piling the load on our backs we very badly wanted to enter the fruitful orchard once again. At first we didn’t expect the
size of the orchard and fruit [that was replete with] oak trees and branches of giant date palms in the wonderful and beautiful orchard which was huge and beautiful to see. [2, 55] Vines climbed on the fences that looked like nets and on them were intertwined strong dark and pale bunches of grapes and once again we began to pluck and to eat fresh fruit that was ripe or unripe. My knapsack was filled up with white figs and ripe fruit and the best part of the buds and thick drops of honey dripping from beneath them in the hives and the branches of [unidentifiable plants], bunches of grapes and figs and pomegranates that were not even able to fit into our knapsacks and we transgressed, ‘You must not harvest [your neighbour’s grain] with a sickle.’

We are still plucking and eating from the fruit of the land and suddenly the owner appeared from the corners of the orchard that was filled with oak trees. It appeared that his honour the Colonel lived in it [the orchard]. We all stood astounded and felt like sheep going to the slaughter or caught in the net when we saw the Colonel approaching, all dressed up, like a girl. To run away and to escape, this we couldn’t do because of the burdens that we had abandoned outside the orchard.

Two soldiers were fighting amongst themselves because one of them had refused from the beginning to go into the orchard and other one had persuaded him that there was nothing to be afraid of because they had nothing to fear from going into the vineyard, but when he did come in he was compelled to steal ten times as much as the rest of us because of his honesty.

At this moment we were wondering how to reply to the Colonel. In a moment he would crack his whip upon us because it is for this that we have been created. [The Colonel scolds them and whips some of them and then departs. As a result of their gorging of fruit the men suffer from diarrhoea and nausea, which Amon describes at length in sickeningly clinical detail. Eventually they reach their base.]
like this, for example, bringing water from the Nile – meaning from a great distance because in this place there is no reality, trees for kindling for the kitchen, and those who stand on guard at this place, all of these received an added meal because their work is exhausting to the point of death, apart from the sentry who stands on guard in the kitchen where he doesn’t need to get tired but is fortunate because he stands on guard for only one hour and he has another meal, according to the law. 27

The head cook prepares a large frying pan and places it beside the huge cooking pot filled with grits and mainly hunks of meat; he takes the handle of the giant ladle in his hand and pours and stirs inside the boiling pot. We sit in a circle inhaling and eating hot food with great appetite, for our bellies are resting from their sound and fury, the rumbling and the diarrhoea have ceased, and we are cured in a few minutes because of the heat of the food.

While we were still wiping the bottom of the bowl, with the meat between our teeth, the duty officer, who was a corporal, came to invite us to the field of beatings. That is where he took us. We knew from the beginning that we were obliged to receive another important course: from the commanding officer and from his generous hand, for dessert to our noble meal.

[2, 60] In the meantime the Commanding Officer arrived in the field of beatings and in his hand, as we know, was the well-known amulet, ready for thrashing. We stood in front of him, our bodies trembling. The officer cast his eyes upon each one of us. He looked at us with curiosity and surprise at the same time. He demanded a sentence and after a tough investigation [in front of?] the nation, we were beaten on our backs which felt like burning pliers; arrows honed our flesh while waves of dust hovered and rose from our coats and flew away to the four winds of the world. Again, on the knees and on the hips; once more they deformed our bodies under the three-quarter moon and they beat us on our buttocks and on our legs. The quantity of beating was tiring the officer out so he passed his whip to the corporal and he ended as he had begun.

Consider carefully and you will find that each of us received 20 lashes in all, together with two slaps for every soldier as a gift
to fulfil the section of military law. And all of this because of the figs and bunches of grapes that we had eaten and which belonged to the Commanding Officer whose armies and soldiers are encamped in this city of Aydin. The [other] officer disappeared from our sight because we did not see him at that place at the time of the ceremony of beatings.

After the Commanding Officer had [completed his task?] we were obliged to salute him in proper order as a sign of our gratitude, according to the law. We did not lack beatings and slapping like this day and night, like children long ago in the *heder* [Sunday school]. And if you ask what the connection is between the beatings and the little children in the *heder* long ago I will explain briefly.

[2, 60–1] In my childhood when I was at the *heder*28 I remember seeing the scholar Hayim or Hakham Preciado29 my teacher, who was so scrupulous that no fewer than twelve sticks and batons were to be found in the cupboard. He was afraid that one of them would be broken and it was impossible to survive without them for even an hour. Therefore tens of sticks were resting there [in case of] disturbances. But we did not salute the teacher after a thrashing and we were not obliged, as we are obliged [now] to salute the officer after a thrashing during the World War. We were bitter that we had [to suffer] this behaviour in the *heder* long ago – the teacher beat, slapped, hit, without mercy but without the pupils’ having to salute.

And now? At this time, blessed is the One who changes the times and turns them over.30 The matter causes amusement and emotion together. We, the parents, hear and see the voices of the patient teachers who sigh with their pupils, tell them stories and legends, new ideas and jokes, hikes and history, songs and physical training, knowledge and research, with a smile on the teachers’ lips as they describe to their pupils who, in turn, enjoy the wise teacher’s face and don’t pay attention to what is issuing out of his mouth, and every one of these pupils is considered to be the hero of the day and mock their parents who suffered in the *heder* before them. [2, 62] [Amon ends this long philosophical
aside on the value of schooling with the words, ‘but this is not my concern, only an emission of the pen here’. In addition to the beatings they were imprisoned for three days. After their punishment they were given a meal.

To our great enjoyment, while sitting in the fleshpots of the prison we were given an extra meal according to the law. But the sentries are laughing at our incarceration with sly mockery. Because they had no luck in wanting to rest a little from their great labour. Anyway, [we are] inside the pit and we long only to rest a little and not to be beaten because in this regard everyone would give up this kind of rest, beatings and blows like these. [This sentence is incomprehensible, unless one reads it as an ironic definition of ‘rest’, or as ‘they would forego their rest if they were not beaten’.] The soldiers refuse to accept [the beatings] but they have to suffer them. For there is not one single soldier who is free of either a light or serious misdemeanour; in other words, who did not receive blows like the ones I have mentioned: light and heavy beatings in the day and at night and at the end of the watches. [2, 63] Anyway, [in the jail] we sit peacefully, free from all labour [angriya, forced labour] and, the best of all, to sleep throughout the night in peace without going on guard duty four or five times in places that require guarding; rest that has no equivalent in the world of war. Even though we do suffer from the pain of the beatings, everything passes in time and the figs are still in the knapsack [the stolen figs from the orchard]. For the moment we are eating and drinking, sitting and lying down in the prison cell.

[Three days later he is released and once again assigned guard duty to prevent desertions, which are nevertheless continuous.] I went on duty, leaning on the split trunk of an oak tree – whose trunk five soldiers holding hands would be able to surround. Inside it [the trunk] was split and aged and exposed…This was just before dawn and the second time on this night.

Then came the dawn in reddish splendour at the edge of the eastern horizon. The darkness melted away and a part of the west became alight. Within a quarter of an hour I could distinguish between blue and white. [2, 64] My eyes were gazing here and there, and ten steps away from me stones like tombstones were
standing out, each single stone shimmering with grains of salt. Some of them are whitewashed, bent over and sunken towards the plain that was covered with nettles armed with stinging cones. I was keen to know what these stones were and therefore I abandoned my post which I had forgotten for this moment. Eagerly I moved away from my post and I drew closer to the white tombstones upon which the letters of names of the Jewish dead were deeply engraved.

I began to read the names aloud as in a nightmare; I had come some way from the place of my guard duty, with my rifle on my shoulder. Now I became emotional and I was longing for the dead of Jerusalem, and a profound yearning attacked me. It seemed to me that I was visiting the dead in our cemetery in Jerusalem, to the point that I had forgotten the world and everything in it.

While I was still reading the names on the tombstones suddenly I heard some sarcastic words: ‘Yuda, the Lord of the Dead will take you to him, for what are you saying to the dead while you are still alive?’ This was the duty officer. [(2, 66) During a lengthy dialogue in which Amon is reprimanded for deserting his post, he suggests to the duty officer that they should employ the dead to catch the deserters. Because he has been on duty four times, the duty officer forgives him.]

A comment: every duty officer is on duty from morning to the next morning and then he has a day and a night free . . . In this way our bitter lives go by in this monstrous place. We remained on the hill until the 10th Elul [August–September] and on that day there was a rumour that we were about to travel again and in the evening this rumour became reality and the preparations began. The next day after our morning meal we went in the train from Aydin to Izmir and from there further by train. Within an hour and a quarter we arrived in the blessed city called Menemen.³¹

At noon were set up our tents about two hours’ distance from the city, once again on a hill overlooking the city, on ground pitted with gullies but also bearing enormous trees with broad tops. [2, 67] Nearby we could see a few channels and desert rocks between barren trees. Below them virgin land with a few abandoned buildings here and there, forgotten to the passer-by.
At dawn we were already heavily involved in clearing the wide area armed with rocks and aloes, which we straightened out by hoeing and rerouting with spades and hoes, with axes and hatchets with which we cleared trails and paths, as if in a pleasant summer.

After dinner came the guard duty all around the area of our camp in this desert. Every soldier was obliged to stand guard no fewer than four times every night, apart from all the work during the day. In the morning the entire battalion went to the city without weapons. We passed by markets and streets and once again we left the city when we went towards the train station. Beside it, we saw abandoned rooms here and there. Beside the first railway track stood a huge locomotive made in Germany. Behind it were seven cars, one after the other, made out of iron, resting in between the railway lines. The first two cars are used to divert hot water which is forced from the tank of the locomotive itself and runs through pipes around the cars from above. Upon them there are showers and sprinklers from which water beats down on my head. The soldiers wash in hot water and in lukewarm water in order to be free of any contagion because the lice have again begun to settle in our skin.

The two cars behind them are used for disinfection in pipes of four inches which run from the locomotive that pushes hot water into the cars in which there are piles and parcels of clothes taken from all the soldiers, filling up through the entrance hatch from above when the doors move. When the hot steam that had been pushed from the locomotive ceases, the doors are moved and the clothes appear in the form of parcels. These are hot sterilized clothes that have been folded and uncreased, and the seams of the trousers are folded. When you dress everything is hot and a bitter smell extends to some distance. This is proof that the vermin have disappeared for three weeks.

At two in the afternoon we left the place and rushed to the clinic to have injections on the arm and between the soldiers’ breasts and on the nipples of the breast which swell in the meantime almost like real breasts. Two weeks later shivers run
through the entire body and a burning temperature takes control until midnight and from that point onwards sweat covers the entire body until morning.

In the morning we are recruited to go out to unique exercises on the slopes of the mountains where locusts of all kinds range all around and upon the sycamore trees. Exhausted and weary by day, crushed and miserable at night, and just for good measure two of my dearest [friends] were taken away from me. They disappeared without trace [and I have not known where] to this very day. My companion Raphael as well, whom sometimes I trusted and who was sometimes arrogant towards me. [2, 69] He was a joyful and courteous man who disappeared, having departed from our unit suddenly, leaving me filled with sadness and sorrow when I heard from the sergeant that Raphael had moved to a different legion in another city. I was inconsolable. This man, Raphael, was younger than I was and his memory will not be forgotten within his nation.33

Even Mushun Effendi my saviour – I seek him with candles in the darkness at the end of the day but he is nowhere to be found. How my troubles mounted on that day!

In any case I am assimilated among hundreds of Turks and Arabs and therefore I remain, to my sorrow, the only Jew among the three races. I was obliged by various means to become friendly with two of the more moderate amongst the Arabs who were intelligent and honourable. The one was called Yassin from the city of Homs [in Syria], a city dignitary, the only cotton-wool merchant and a wholesale butter merchant, who sold leather skins to Europe, according to what he told me. The second was called Shukri, a Christian from Beirut, and he was involved in furniture and was abundantly rewarded, according to what he said… Yassin said that if we continue to dwell together until peace comes to the world everything will be good and excellent. Shukri was half rich in foolishness and half poor in intelligence but Yassin was a devout and intelligent man. [2, 70] He had a very nice face which was always smiling. He was about 30, slightly ruddy with yellow hair. Read on to see what became of this man, of whom there are very few like him [in] the Arab nation. In short we became friends and closer than flesh.
A week later we all dressed in new grey uniforms of blue weave [sic]. Miracle of miracles, these uniforms were new and there were even more new uniforms – why, we don’t know. The soldiers sell the old uniforms to the civilians standing some distance away and among them are some for the coming winter. I wanted to do the same thing and I rushed to sell them to the lying Ahmed the Shaoush for 30 grushim which I have not received to this day.35

I’m convinced that he will pay for years in the future war according to the promises of the organizers and the scientists and as we are informed by the main newspapers Do’ar hayom and Ha’aretz36 and perhaps for those who fly on the wings of the wind.37

Meanwhile a rumour was fizzing among the soldiers that all of us are about to be involved with new equipment very soon and to go out to the field of battle to meet the enemy. The following day a great load of hand grenades arrived for the armoury; nobody knows when this monstrous load arrived. [2, 71] The rumour that we were about to go the front was confirmed. And all that came at the moment that the cherubs of peace were rising in the air with exalted information about victories. The allies were demanding a ceasefire. These tidings came one after the other and struck our faces with heartening joy even though many among us had serious doubts and refused to confirm such counterfeit tidings.38

In any case there were many preparations: in the evening [a] party was organized in honour of the ceasefire or for the oaths of peace,39 together with organizing a powerful attack and to conquer the enemy this time.

The next morning after a terrifying meal we received our new equipment: a grey German kitbag in which there was everything we needed and 120 bullets, a thick grey-black blanket that had red packets at each corner, a tent made of fabric in brown, surrounded by buttons and knots. All of this is on the soldier’s back. Around his waist there is a belt with sheaths around it with space for forty bullets. Not all of them allow [one] to proceed easily… salt, a loaf of bread, raisins, and seated upon it is a hand grenade as dessert. Above that is a water bottle filled with cold
water to slake our thirst at times of stress, hanging on a strap and corked at the mouth. On his thigh is his bayonet under the bag on his waist, also a sword [epee] and rakes and finally the mashhit [blade] of his rifle on the shoulder and that is the end of the order of destruction. [2, 72] Here we are armed and ready for the enemy, in the field of Gomorrah, as we had thought. We intended to finish them off and to erase their memory and to show them a well-recruited army. Certainly two of us would beat a thousand of the stubborn enemy troops.

In short, the trumpets sounded for us to be prepared. The captain gave the order: Forward! Then we go out to face campaign against campaign but in the end it was a bluff [sic] from beginning to end. [He writes a rhyming verse, which makes as little sense in Hebrew as it does in English.] There is no enemy, no misery / No cease-fire, no homestead / No Yosef, no Raphael / No Yitzhak and no leader / No Mushun and no sleep / No Pishan river, no Kishon. Only what? Only for exercises. To run up the sides of mountains bent over with fear and terror and these are their only tactics. We prostrate ourselves on the high mountains, we wallow in dust and dirt to the point of exhaustion. On the way, vipers come out to meet us and to take part in our exercises and participate in our misery, or, more exactly, to terrify us. Pillars of coarse sand cover our faces, mixed with shards of sweat that sprout on our foreheads and bodies, a veritable dough made out of both, kneaded by itself. Our faces are crusted with clayey mud. Our lips are withered from the continuing heat. [2, 73] Sometimes water drips from our foreheads on which the sand squats, and crude drops fall straight into our eyes, burning our pupils and making them squint. And if, on our way, we were to encounter a well of fresh water and pass it without stopping, [this would be] for the purpose of becoming used to the greatest tribulations in the future, according to the Lord of the Beatings.

And so this is the fact: it is the same as every day, the heat does its damnedest, the sun burns and wrinkles our skin. I was very thirsty but we were not allowed to drink from our water bottles as long as we were continuing on our way.
After two hours of being close to death we heard the sound of the trumpet as a signal to stop and rest for only a half an hour in a dry and barren desert land on sand dunes three hours away from the camp. The sun beats us with a wave of fire but now we are able to overcome it by means of our water bottles hanging from our loins. With a great craving I prepared to drink the cool water but what am I talking about? I could not drink a single drop, not even sip this water, to be exact, palm water, for those who drink [even] for the third time are left as they had been. If I had coffee and sugar and especially tea with me, I would be prepared to drink four hot cups in turn.

The soldiers are complaining and asking for water and there isn’t any. Some of the water bottles spill their water, some of [the soldiers] had washed their faces to take away the crust [of dirt] stuck to them and even I did the same. We were almost unconscious with thirst and [because of] our worn-out bodies and shattered souls. The entire exhausted army is concentrated in that place for exactly half an hour.

After the appointed time we again go on our way. On an order from the captain we enter a beautiful vineyard where the vines are quite a way from us and inside there is a well of cold water. We pushed and shoved at the mouth of the well in order to draw the water but we could not do so because there was no bucket or any other utensil. The water refused to come towards us and to rise up to the mouth of the well. We therefore tied straps one to the other and knotted 20 water bottles to them, tied together by their necks on the patched-together straps and with strong hands the water bottles are thrust into the well and strong arms make them jump up and down, but there’s a problem: the water bottles sail and float upon the surface of the water and mock us. The well is deep and like a rounded chimney. The water spreads around the chimney pipe and if you shout the sound is swallowed within it; this proves that its wall does not branch out and no echo comes out of it. It is constructed with a circumference of one metre by one metre.

The time passes and we still do not have water to drink. At this moment one of the soldiers became very angry and jumped into
the well, like a hero on the sea. First of all, his belly is filled [with water] until it comes out of his nostrils and because of his strength all the water bottles sink like lead into the depths. Again twenty-three water bottles fall and rise once again, one after the other, once again they go up and down, and in the end some people slake their thirst and others remain without water. [2, 75] I myself drank two units of water, with breaks in between. [The soldier who had jumped into the well demanded a portion of bread from all those whose water bottles he had filled from the well, including Amon for whom half a loaf and some raisins had to suffice for the midday meal.]

And if you were to ask why the rest of the soldiers, weeping for their families, remained without water? Because the captain sealed the well with a hammer since the time had come to leave [the place in which] two hours had been set aside to rest from the toil of the road. In these two miserable hours the hero had not managed to fatten and fill the bellies of the many soldiers; also his body was freezing with cold. He had to be pulled up by a rope taken from one of the tents and to jump once again. In the end some of us were equipped with half-filled bottles. I again sold my water [for?] as much as I had lost originally.

In the evening we came to rest and also to the earlier disease – to stand on guard four times every night, in addition to the day’s work of drills and manoeuvres. Meanwhile our strength has diminished by many degrees.

The next day we went out for new and difficult exercises: three hours in the morning and three in the afternoon, and at twilight there was a new exercise. [2, 76] We were given an order to stand in long lines and every soldier had a hand grenade in his hand with a short, thick orange fuse eight centimetres in length, combined with straw saturated with a ball of sulphur and stuck into a yellow shining metal bulb at the top of the grenade in the housing of the device. 41 The top of the fuse is covered with sulphur-like reddish match paper. Between the soldier’s nipples there is a small square cardboard slab of which half is rubberized, and the other in stone like a kind of thin glass-paper ready to be struck with a match to light it.
After all the preparations we wait with racing hearts for the order. Then it comes: ‘Stand at attention.’ Then another disturbing order: ‘Fire.’ While he is still speaking you rub the match at the top of the fuse in your right hand while the grenade is held in your left hand. The match is lit then the fuse is lit and light sparks burst out from the fuse that move towards the device. Immediately your right hand grabs the grenade and you begin to count right away, one, two, three, up to nine. While you’re still saying the word ‘nine’ you rush to throw the grenade from your hand with great force. When you see the place in which the grenade or the bomb has fallen, you have to spread yourself out on the ground like lightning, especially your face, until the top of your nose touches the ground like Balaam in his time, and both your hands are joined together behind your neck. Then you begin to breathe heavily while clods of dust cover your face and your nose while you breathe. After a moment or two you hear a light explosion [2, 77] [indicating] that the device has caught alight, with [in the body of] the device between the top of the hand grenade [having] touched the gunpowder in the full hand grenade filled with this lethal powder.

At this moment you hear magnificent claps of thunder, heard at intervals because 20 soldiers throw at the same time and then another 20, and so on. Like at the battlefront the rods break into fragments that spread everywhere. There is a terrible noise and columns of smoke and dust mixed together rise to the sky. When you gaze at this plain like the plain of Sodom, fragments of iron in their flight fall upon your head and your body and sometimes cause light wounds to appear in your hand or your leg. These grand objects are wasted without any use [because we are] not facing the enemy but only for the purpose of learning. The grenade is the size of a coconut without its skin, and it weighs three kilos. It is made of lead, tin or steel and it is quite heavy.

All of this is reasonable, but not to speed up the high mountains so much so that our bones are broken and our flesh melts. [This is] apart from all the problems that we suffer along the way and apart from the burning heat that torments us. This is very hard labour indeed, like slave labour in Egypt, and if I were
to recount all the details it would take more space than I have. This and more: to this is added the plea for water. We have to bring water from a distance of 20 minutes because there is no water at this citadel – or more correct to say, this tree house – there is no water. About twenty soldiers in turn take their small water bottles to fill them and when the water bearers arrive the soldiers go out to meet them while their hearts are dying inside them. [2, 78] They prepare to slake their thirst. Immediately they begin to grab: this one pushes someone else’s water bottle away even though it isn’t his. Another one grabs a water bottle from someone else. There is terrible confusion. Some curse that they have not even touched any drops, while another tries to put the funnel between his lips to try to taste a few drops but a stronger hand grabs it and the soldier who has grabbed it runs away while he’s mumbling and cursing that his water bottle has been squashed under a soldier’s boots. Among the thirsty soldiers, or more correct to say, those whose thirst has been caused by other people, one pulls a water bottle from somewhere; next to him stands some idiot who clasps both his hands and his fingers under the beard and moustache of the terrified one who is drinking and who gathers a few drops [from him] and licks them. In the end we find water bottles and funnels at that place, their straps and lids squashed and crushed and their chains broken. After all this, the soldiers have not slaked their thirst and they remain thirsty because the water has been spilt to the ground and the soldiers’ thirst has not been slaked.

You might say now that from this point the soldiers should bring water for themselves but this was forbidden because of the fear of desertion. We were enclosed and surrounded by soldiers, most of them Arabs because the only purpose of the Turks was to run for their lives. The Arabs – where would they go?

[2, 79] Four days before Rosh Hashana in the month of Tishri (September–October) many Germans arrived, bringing us this news: the Central Powers conquered many towns and villages and found a great booty of guns and bullets, sub-machine guns and cannons. We were told to organize a party. The entrances to
the tents were decorated with lilies [שושנה המלך] and palm fronds and thyme. The party began with songs and dances and fencing. [Once again there was a rumour of ceasefire.]

Within this heartening joy eight of us sat together talking about the events of the day, and among us was a soldier from Manisa who was wise and stupid at the same time, who told us, among other things, that Hamburg had conquered Petersburg; the capital of Roumania, Bucharest, had fallen to the Allies with great losses; Serbia disappeared from the earth [at this point Amon reveals it all to be a joke]; Italy had lost all its dogs and so on, the cycle of fabrications without limit or purpose and from the start I let them know that whenever I hear these rumours drawn from the air – whether possible or impossible – boredom overwhels me and I become nervous and angry.

[(2, 80) Three days before Rosh Hashana, Amon is called to the tent of Sabri Effendi (‘a perfect oppressor’), a lieutenant, and accused of attempted desertion. Of course Amon denies the accusation.] As a reply he makes a sign to Ahmed [Shaoush] who takes my head under his arm, sprains my body and Sabri, whose entire being is doltish, whips me with a strap in his hand while his eyes water. He hit me and counted aloud: one, two, three, up to ten. Afterwards he said to Ahmed, ‘Stop.’

What are these beatings for? I don’t know to this day. It was only the result of lies. Afterwards he felt in my shirt and my coat and he took out a pocket of grey material in which there was the last Napoleon together with 70 grush in notes of ten and five. He took them and while he was busy with this thieving he said, ‘Get away from here’, and I went into a solitary exile. And then I was obliged to salute him as a sign of my gratitude, as is written in the book of military law.

I left there and told this story of [his] evil-doing to the many soldiers who were waiting for the outcome of this matter. All of them became secretly angry, among them my friends Yassin and Shukri. They got up as one man and cursed, and cursed, ‘May his father become a ghost’ – since this is the kind of curse that exists in the Arab nation. [They persuaded him to complain to a new Shaoush called Mahmid, not the previous one who, Amon
reports, had died. This man bore same name.] This new Mahmid was a patient man who behaved decently and dealt straight with people. He was a cold Turkish man from Izmir.

At this moment I stood to attention before him while he was dressing inside his tent. I told him everything that had happened to me in connection with Sabri Effendi and after hesitating he warned me openly: [2, 82] ‘What can I do to him? He is my superior in army wisdom and in his military excellence he is twice as good as I am. This Sabri is a thief and if he’s not able to steal he will pilfer; he is dishonest from his head to his feet but who will tell him what to do? So now I advise you to stand before the Commander once he has completed the manoeuvres and tell him these facts.’

Meanwhile they invited me to a second breakfast because the first one was for the purpose of torturing me and the second one to make me feel better. At the end of the meal the duty officer ordered me to stand guard until the army returned from its manoeuvres, since my body was partly injured because of the oppressor Sabri. Normally various soldiers stay back every day to stand guard in different places. Since I had been appointed to guard I was a little late.

[In the next long anecdote (2, 82–8), Amon (addressed here as Nissim Oğlu, son of Nissim), as a direct continuation of the previous incident, is suffering from his injuries at the hands of Sabri and therefore not obliged to go out to the drills. He is commanded to go on guard duty and takes up a rifle which, he discovers, is not his own but that of a soldier who has taken his in error. The weapon is faulty and falls to pieces as the commanding officer approaches. Amon is again beaten, but the error is finally discovered. He establishes that the new Mahmid is in league with Sabri, that they are both thieves. Amon writes:] And so all the events of the day came to an end, together with the situation of Sabri the Lieutenant and the Prince of Thieves. It seems that there are among us, apart from Sabri, the ancestor of the corrupt, three other lieutenants who are wicked and corrupt. If I were to go into detail about them I would have to write [many] full pages. This is also because I am not sparing with
The next story concerns target practice, which Amon (in his own name) describes in his usual detail. He illustrates the narrative with a drawing of a target: at its centre is a man in a top hat who represents the enemy. Fifteen metres away from the target there is a security trench. The sergeant is kneeling inside. In his hand is a thick round cardboard card of 2 by 2 metres, which is the target for the bullets. Numbers from 1 to 12 are written on it from the top to halfway across the board in order to learn how to shoot. A picture of the European enemy, one of the Allies, is drawn on the number 12. The devil knows whether he is French, English or Russian, Greek or Italian, this picture has been photographed for the sake of revenge. This target is covered with dark yellow material; the numbers are written in a straight line from 8 to 10 lines. A 3-metre-long pole is nailed in the middle of the targets in the circle under the neck of the picture, which is wearing a top hat like this [he is indicating a drawing that he has made of the target and the photograph]. This is one of the most hated enemies of Turkey and here he is. And so the soldier who shoots at the centre of this picture, on which the number 12 is written, and from so great a distance, is one of the heroes of the Turkish army, able to kill and to shoot his enemies, and to win. The lieutenant would say, I praise the soldiers who are prepared to die on the altar of their precious homeland...
and to run, until all his anger at him has dissipated. But the one
who hits the picture, that is to say, the number twelve, his name
is written in the soldier’s golden book, one who has a glittering
future ahead of him, a future of blood since he is now capable of
joining the soldiers at the front.

When my turn came to hit the target I lay down properly next
to the tents’ opening...my body stretched out and my head
resting on the barrel of my rifle. My right eye is closed, three
fingers and the thumb encircle the barrel beside the bullet
chambers and my finger is on the trigger. The corporal helps me
by telling me to raise the butt of my rifle to be parallel to my
shoulder; he once again warns me to be careful and gives me a
command and other clear signals. The lieutenant looks at me
curiously and orders me to aim at the highest number, that is, the
12, and orders me to fire by commanding: Fire! At this moment I
press lightly and my bullet bursts into space and fortunately I hit
the target – the European hat is flattened. The corporal explains
to me that had my bullet passed through the picture’s eye, that is,
12, I would have been awarded the most exalted mark, but the
lieutenant thought I had hit 12 for he said, ‘You are an excellent
shot.’44 You may garb yourself in the glory of heroism’ and he
writes down my mark of 12 beside my name, as an outstanding
mark, and he smiles at me. [Amon hits eleven on his second shot
and receives even more extravagant praise, although he claims
(2, 92) that he could not see the target from so great a distance.]

The third bullet? It seems that the third bullet had flown to the
four corners of the earth: it didn’t even reach the number one. I
was certain that the last bullet would not be stubborn like the first
one, and would go of its own accord into the eye of the picture
without any hindrance, and not miss the target. Therefore I felt I
did not need to be very exact but I would win without impediment
and without any particular talent. Here comes the lieutenant
whose name I did not know but I remember him as a thief like
Sabri. [For some reason Amon is accused of cheating, and the
lieutenant erases the two good marks Amon had received.] [2, 93]
I get up from my place, ashamed of my transgression and embarras-
sed by my failed shooting. And this is while, in any case, I
didn’t want to pierce the European eye because I loved the English with my whole heart. Perhaps this is why I lost the most important marks – apart from the bitter irony on the part of the lieutenant and the corporals. [The story continues for pages with an encounter with the wicked sergeant Bakir, at whom Amon swears.\footnote{45}]

\footnote{2, 95} According to military law it is forbidden for an ordinary soldier to swear at a sergeant because the soldier is then liable for a beating, up to 20 blows, if it is only a curse. But if he assaults him, he receives 20 blows. Since I had sworn at him I would in any case have to receive a bitter meal before the sweet one. Let us see how the matter comes out. I still hesitate and an ordinary Turkish soldier comes towards me and says Yussuf Gaoush, the Turkish corporal whom they call the source of evil, similar to Sabri [is calling for you]. This Yussuf is a very cruel man without boundaries and we are all in his hands like clay in the hands of a potter. Standing to attention and trembling I stood before him and he demands angrily, ‘Are you not an ordinary soldier? Have you not heard and do you not know the rules and regulations of the army? You have sworn at a corporal, you Jew the son of a Jew… Corporal Bakir I have no time for this, get out of here and hang [this man] on a tree. And if there is any rope left you have to hang yourself as well, do you understand?’ [Bakir takes Amon out to be hanged.]

\footnote{2, 96} I must mention that when he [Bakir] was 20 years old he was taken into the army and before he had finished his period of service the First World War broke out and so he is in the permanent force until the present day, and he is now about 30. Because of this he was awarded a medal [that is awarded only] to a sergeant. In Turkey a soldier does not easily attain a rank like this, only if he loses one of his arms or a leg or sustains a broken hand. Or the minimum of five years in the army through which he had already achieved a reputation with the senior officers\footnote{46}...\footnote{2, 97} Through an extended narrative, Amon describes Bakir’s preparations for the hanging. After a prolonged argument with
him, during which Amon attempts to persuade him to release him from his death sentence, Bakir shows signs of relenting. At one point Amon says: ‘Bakir On Bashi you are thirty years old and I am forty. Since I am older than you by years you must be considerate of me in some things. If you have a spark of humanity in your heart you are forbidden to oppress me and to punish me in this way.’47 (2, 98) Eventually Amon is saved by a trumpet that summons all the NCOs to the camp to process new arrivals.

(2, 100–2) The following story illustrates Amon’s ability to draw out his narrative with some tension and humour.]

At two in the afternoon we go out to strange military exercises. The heat was terrible – the sun beat [down in] a wave of fire stroking our faces and helping the thirst to grow since the morning when I had tasted three drops and that’s all.

To start with we go up the Tiger [מורות] Mountains and in order to rest a little the captain orders us to decorate our hats with the branches of the tall trees. All the soldiers decorate their hats and their bodies with the leaves of the cypress in the Iron Mountain,48 and olive leaves that were plentiful at that spot. Our hats looked like the hats made out of swans’ feathers that used to decorate the Americans and many of the Eskimos, to the point that they came into our eyes and beat on our heads and foreheads.

And if you ask what all this nonsense is for? So that the enemy will not sense that we are not human beings but wild wolves – or better still, quarries wider than a desert, so the captain tells us.

[2, 101] Meanwhile two asses arrived at the place laden with four kegs. The commander orders that the kegs of water be unloaded from the asses and each soldier receives a glass of hot water to slake his thirst, so that the army becomes used to sufficing with hot water, and learns that when time is short there is a need for it. This is called an exercise.

After drinking this stale water this strange exercise begins: ten columns of ten soldiers [stand] each column behind the other. In every column the soldiers stand side by side and not one behind the other. The columns are separated from each other by a space of ten metres. Then there are again tens of columns like this at the
edge of the mountains, and valleys covered with bushes of juniper and golden grasses. When everything was in its place an order came for each column to step about eight metres forward. Our column was the sixth away from the place where the event was taking place, about 50 metres away.

Suddenly a volley of shots poured over the first column. We were confused and we didn’t know what the nature [was] of these shots at the soldiers’ heads. While were still wondering [and trying] to understand what was happening, again an order came to step forward and the shots continued at the columns, one after the other until we reached the place where it was taking place.

Under the elm trees ten soldiers stand in a line, and with our own eyes we see how they aim their rifles at the column that we were behind, and they rained ten shots all at once at the heads of the soldiers trembling with fear of the terrible noise. [2, 102] Smoke covered the burning sun and hung between the branches of the tall trees. We are standing about eight metres away, amazed and afraid. Our eyes stood out of their sockets when we saw this monstrous exercise…

The apparent casualties in front of us inherited the places of those that shot at them, and their rifles were pointed at us. With chattering teeth and angry voices we said, ‘Do you intend to kill us? Are we enemies that have destroyed the houses in your land? Do you intend to bring this terrible tragedy and catastrophe upon us?’ Even though we knew that miraculously not a single one [of these men] had fallen. To tell the truth, the thing was funny and frightening at the same time. These were bullets in the true sense of the word and the shots were accompanied by fire and smoke.

While we were still trembling and our knees were knocking together an order came to step forward and we are in front of our enemies [who are] our friends. Again an order: Fire! And ten shots fly above our heads. As we jumped with the fear of hell the captain calmed us. The place was filled with smoke that blew away a moment later; we were trembling under it; let’s see how it all ends. [This continues for a few pages. The bullets were blanks. Later the captain explains that it is an exercise to teach the soldiers to be courageous under fire and not to show fear to their enemies.]
Aircraft, Grenades, Bombs and Destruction in Izmir

[2, 105] That evening an order came from the Commanding Officer of the unit to cover all the tents in cypress trees and olive branches as if they were trees and [as if] there were no tents there, only trees. We received this order before we had reached the place after strange and frightening information predicted catastrophe: that the enemy is preparing to drop bombs on our tents but that so far it wasn’t clear whether the attack would be during the day or the night because the enemy’s activities are obscured by fog. Wouldn’t it rather be better to be afraid at the moment because we are back [from exercises] tired and broken and still we have to work and uproot trees? When the army heard this monstrous rumour spread at the gate, we were suffused with quaking and horror and like shadows we went around trembling and pathetic to see. We tore up many trees like plants; branches were dispersed and prepared here and there.

The tents seemed to be elm [terebinth], fig and vines. We sat down for the evening meal until it was night and the stars came out on their paths. Again there was an order not to smoke and not to make any noise. It came to such a pass that even talking dropped to a whisper.

[2, 106] The soldiers were quietly angry in this predicament. The destroyer intends to cross over these hellish hills and to defeat our fresh tents. The guards go out on guard duty in fear and trembling. A frightened and tender man falls on his face and grumbles. Another order: to go into the tents. All the soldiers fall on their faces and stretch out according to the instruction of the Lord of the Fears. We are tremblingly ready to receive the many bombs of the enemy rising against us.

[He lies trembling on the ground for some time. Then the duty officer comes and kicks him.] ‘Get up and go on guard duty, soldier’, he whispers to me. [In the dark] how is he to know who I am? In this thick darkness he only calls on the first one in the line in turn, and my turn has come to go out on guard duty which I didn’t want to do, to stand before the enemy is a terrible
thought. The duty officer forces me to get up quickly – I think about what to say to him and at this moment an idea came into my head that may change the situation to my advantage. It is possible that the enemy will drop bombs on the tents thinking that they are trees and I would be in the desert. [2, 107] I felt about in the dark and took rifle on my shoulder and I went out on tiptoe as others had done because we had been going out fully armed ten by ten, up to forty every hour and then spreading out.

I stood on guard in the darkness without even a moon because it was the eve of Rosh Hashana.51 I was convinced that I had to guard the area of the brook so that its water shouldn’t be wasted, but actually I had to guard the nearby orchard so that no thieving soldiers, who had previously damaged it, would go inside. There had been complaints from the elderly civilians. The order was such that even at midnight the orchard was guarded and even the guard was forbidden to steal. But I took courage, I became as strong as an oak, I hung my rifle on a branch on the tree trunk, magnificent elm branches moving in a fairly strong wind. I decided how to climb up, the area was mine, to hell with the enemy, the planes, the grenades and the bombs and the tents all together. I climb up and stand on bumps on the trunk and I pick quinces and ripe pomegranates. It was a pity that I didn’t have my kitbag with me. My rifle was a thief like me: a pomegranate was stuck on the spear [of the bayonet]. I pick them and throw them on the ground.

[(2,108) He eats pears and pomegranates and reflects that if an enemy plane were to come over to bomb them he would rather throw a pomegranate than a grenade52 because he does not want to kill. He prays to God to make him ill, to suffer fever or pain (but not tuberculosis) so that he may go to the hospital, and adds ‘but there is no peace and there is no illness’. The men hear shots in the distance and fall on their bellies, praying.] [2, 109] While I was still praying and supplicating before the Creator, the duty officer, together with his relief, came to stand in front of me. I left the place and I shrank myself in between the rows of soldiers who were sleeping within a nightmare. There were a few pears and pomegranates concealed in my pockets and cuffs which I divided
between Shukri and Yassin, my friends. We were hoping that the enemy’s fury would pass us by but what we most feared came to pass.

Before dawn we heard dull echoes and frightening sounds and especially explosions that came from afar to the place in which we were encamped. A few moments later we heard the whine of grenades as they flew over and we heard the sound of great explosions from nearby. We drew ourselves together and bundled up with each other and those who were sitting down fell upon their faces and cried ‘Bless the righteous Lord’ in Turkish and Arabic. Our stomachs stuck to the ground and terror seized us. Where, where to go, where to escape? And the one who dares shoot will shoot because this was the Sultan’s command. It seemed that we were miserable creatures, terrified of a falling leaf, but we were heroes only at a time when there were no obstacles in our way.

A quarter of an hour later the sounds stopped but our hearts were beating like little clocks in a man’s breast. We were still trembling from this horror; we heard the whine of a cold wind coming between the branches of the high trees, sounding like the whine of grenades in their flight to the place to which they were fired, but then there was a long silence.

When the sun came out in all its glory over the land, rumours followed one after the other, confirming the rumours of the day before: the enemy had not touched us, as I have described above. The rumours said that enemy aircraft had dropped bombs and grenades on the railway lines in Izmir. The train station was destroyed to its very foundations. The rooms and the entire station were completely destroyed, even the passengers’ toilets. Poles were destroyed together with the telegraph and telephone lines. A great clock made out of pine that was two metres high, leaning against the wall, was melted and fell down with the wall, with its hands straight out like a lion jumping upon its prey. The roof covered with tiles and scrolls was torn into little pieces. Some of those that remained were twisted and leaping about and flying like flags, fluttering of their own accord with the help of
the wind that was blowing. The window blinds were shut and glass panes were shattered into pieces. The railway cars and carts were partly broken up. The central charcoal stores, especially the granaries, the safes and storehouses, are shattered and dispersed. Pieces of coal were scattered here and there. There was a new, shining, boot with a man’s leg stuck inside up to the calf, and possibly also to the knee, pushed inside the boot. The railway line was not badly damaged. Certain equipment like notebooks and ledgers and pens and a tuning fork were thrown about chaotically. Hundreds of people come to look at this horror. All of this has been told me but I saw the destruction for myself when I returned to Izmir.53

[2, 111] The time before Tishri [September/October] in the period of the New Year in the year 191854 in the morning 200 new soldiers arrived, who were joined into our huge battalion. Before the meal I intended to have some words with the Lieutenant Sharif Effendi, a decent man. I approached him with another Jew who had come with the new camp, to allow us to celebrate the two days of Rosh Hashana with the Jews in the city of Menemen, to rest and to be relieved of our hellish tasks. For some time I have been imprisoned like a lion in a cage and [I wanted to] spend time in the house of God for the purpose of my soul, to pray among the Jews, the mystery in the heart of the Jew, to eat something among them that would suit my palate. This army food nauseates me even though we long for it, but I want something better than this.

After many requests the officer agreed to my plea and he wrote something on a piece of paper and ordered me to take it to two [other] officers. These two snatched glances at the note and stared at us [Amon and his new Jewish friend]. One of them tore the note into little pieces, opened my hand, and thrust all the pieces into the palm of my hand, closed my fist around them so that not one single one should blow away. He was warning me, his mouth twisted in extended laughter, and he showered us with vigorous curses with a smile on his face and said to us, to hell with you, and some words in Turkish which meant that we are bringing evil into the world. Bitter and angry, I returned with the Jew Hahalbi.
I again go to the Lieutenant and this one is tired of talking. He indicated that I should be quiet; he once again writes a note and orders me to take it to the captain Mussa Effendi, a man of gentle temperament and patient, in his [the Lieutenant’s] opinion, who had been appointed as our superior a short while ago. [2, 112] At first this person was surly and turned aside, indicating that he is not free for requests, but that was before he read the note. When he saw me saluting out of army courtesy, and that I did not move from where I was standing, he thought about it and said something to himself. He signalled with his finger to come closer to him. He took the note from my hand and read it. He reflected in surprise, threw a glance at my entire sturdy body dressed in a German type of trousers which were wide to the knees and said in Turkish ‘Are you a Jew?’

‘Yes, sir.’ Once again he examined me, laughing, and greeted me.

‘Good day to you my friend – you do not have to salute.’

Since I saw that he is a friendly man and wise in the ways of the world, I rejoiced when I saw his merry and smiling face. I felt proud and strong when I realized that Mussa Effendi is a Jew whom I hadn’t known until today. I was sure that before the day had ended he would send me to spend time in the bosom of the Jews in the city of Menemen.

‘Is Sir a Jew?’

‘I am a pure Ashkenazi Jew.’

‘From which city is Sir from?’

‘From the Land of Israel, Jerusalem, the land of the ingathering of the exiles.’

‘How happy I am because I am also from Jerusalem, the Holy City and my name is Yehuda and I am a great merchant, touch wood’ [lit. ‘without the evil eye’]. [2, 113] At that moment I thought that I had encountered my entire family and Jerusalem at the same time. After a warm handshake the conversation continued in pure Hebrew on his side.

‘My name is Moshe Ahanani but I’m called Mussa Effendi at the moment.’

‘Where does Sir live in Jerusalem?’

‘In the Poor Shelter in the Old City.’
‘I was certain that Sir was a pure Gentile because of yesterday’s incident.’

‘What was the incident?’ [With his usual want of tact, Amon goes on to accuse Mussa of having slapped him for the offence of turning his head in the presence of an officer and looking at something which did not concern him, instead of keeping his eyes to the front. Mussa replies that he does not remember the incident, but apologizes all the same. Even after that, Amon continued to hope that the Jewish officer would fulfil his request, but, unsurprisingly, he does not. (2, 114) Mussa Effendi tells him that without the permission of the officer commanding the battalion he could not do so.] Therefore he opened a drawer of his desk, wrote something on a piece of paper to take to the Commanding Officer, together with the blessing of farewell.

On the one hand I wanted to examine him carefully and to find out from this man the nature of what he is, but he answers briefly because he was an officer who had been raised in the Temple of Enlightenment in Istanbul the capital.58

The two of us, Hahalbi and I, immediately went to the tent of the Commander whose dwelling was outside the camp. We waited an hour [to find out that] he was not there. So of course we went back the way we had come. In the meantime we had missed breakfast but we hurried to join the rest and go out on manoeuvres.59

We return to lunch after the exercises that exhaust our bodies and minds. When we reached the city [Menemen] the Commanding Officer ordered us to sing the Turkish folksong of which, to this day, I don’t understand what the words mean. [He quotes two lines in Hebrew transliteration of Turkish.] I feel terrible pain in my bronchi and lungs, especially in the sealed and hollow trachea in the lung – for I am unable to sing due to my great sadness but if I do they will allow me to celebrate the High Holy Days that the Jews always remember, so I shall sing the song of the Lord on alien soil.60

(2, 115) Time is running out and the meal will again be missed. Again two hours are fruitlessly wasted and we manage to go to the
Commanding Officer again to ask for two days’ leave because then I would be granted my leave in the evening and particularly my Jew, Hahalbi.

And in the evening? I missed my meal and went directly to the Commanding Officer but he was not at home. I asked his deputy whether he would say yes or no but he began to speak in brief, strange words and he became angry and in the end there was neither a positive nor a negative answer. I searched for Mussa Effendi but he had disappeared, keeping out of sight, but perhaps to be found in the Jews’ houses in this city celebrating his festival.

Therefore it seems the cycle of requests was cancelled. The sun began to set and in a moment the lovely prayer ‘A Little Sister’ would already have begun, according to my estimation, pealing this song to the God of Jacob. I had not yet lost hope of a temporary pass but the note, written in some code or abbreviation, is still in my hands to this very day. I didn’t see the officers [and] Mussa-Mushun ever again.

The last attempt was to go to the Captain, Sharif again, at seven o’clock. He shouted at me with a reproach, threw me a white-hot look and said, with burning anger, that he could do nothing and added: ‘Go and ask the Commanding Officer, do you understand? Does a non-Jewish soldier dare to complain to us with a request for leave for our festivals? As far as I know, never: but you Jews…’ He throws an angry, sidelong glance and in a rage he disappears into his tent. ‘Sharif Effendi…Sharif giraffe…’ [sic], he shouts loudly.

[2, 116] Who dares say a word? Despondent, sad and sighing we left the place and went into [our] tent. My heart was so twisted because I was not to realize my deepest wish. I neglected Hahalbi who was like a hump on my back and I sat [under the sky?] between the columns of the soldiers. I lay down aimlessly; Shukri and Yassin came up to me to comfort me.

My personal need had not been accepted. Hunger began to throb because I hadn’t eaten that morning or in the evening because of the many fruitless pleas. I ate my breakfast loaf and
[drank my] drink in the evening, saying, ‘on this night’ twice\textsuperscript{63} [when the] Jews of Menemen feed me when I go to the city.

On this night I wept\textsuperscript{64} in misery and within dashed expectations I sit gloomily in agonising hunger and sadness that I have remained without Jews and without Effendis to protect my heart. The Jewish soldier Hahalbi is a simple man, perhaps unbalanced, who doesn’t know his right hand from his left, not even his name at the time you ask him [for it].

Suddenly the duty officer is standing before me, feeling around with his knees and says, ‘Jew, on guard.’ In despair I get up and he takes my arm and places me in the line of soldiers standing under his orders. I stand on guard twenty minutes away from the tents opposite the telegraph and telephone rooms. If someone calls on the telephone I have to Inform the clerk sitting on the middle storey. The Colonel lives on the top floor.

[(2, 117) On his return from guard duty, still unhappy about having missed the Rosh Hashana Eve services, he falls, fully armed, into a hole three feet deep. This is a channel over which the men jump during exercises. He then offers a long digression describing the exercise in detail. He is then rescued by the sergeant, Bakir, who mocks him but helps him out. Amon is immediately placed on guard again, without being permitted any rest. He cries out in his misery.]

[2, 126] Is this possible? Here I am at midnight in this terrifying and monstrous darkness without any light. Who would have thought this? One can see these clouds in a dream, but awake as well? Or when did I arrive in the land of the living to straighten crooked paths\textsuperscript{65} and to perfect my soul? Is that hell that stretches before me and are these the sling stones? In all seriousness I didn’t know what was going to happen to me and it seems anyway that I am not alive. All hope was lost in the land. Everything was completely silent and all the world had died, but all the soldiers around the area, perhaps with me among them, we are still alive for a while, with a few dead from some enemy aircraft establishing [משתיתים] the survivors for we have been severed [or decreed] from the land of the living.\textsuperscript{66} My eyes are raised to the
heavens strewn with stars and with a broken heart I begin the verse: ‘My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint on myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.’ My nerves are stretched too much and I have suffered terribly and bitterly to the point of death twice [he has almost been hanged and has fallen into a deep trench]. I cannot bear it any more and especially on this night. Standing here is not pleasant for me at all and I gaze up to the sky and I say ‘My Lord God my saviour, I cry out all day, and at night I come before you.’ The prisoner’s groan will come before you.

[After this heartfelt and moving entreaty the tone changes and he has some adventures in a forest and encounters a wolf which runs away after some shots are fired. Hungry as ever, he comes upon some meat and a portion of watermelon which he eats on the spot. He blesses God who has apparently heard his prayer. The sentry confiscates what is left of the watermelon.]

Meanwhile I was attacked by nightmarish sleep. About an hour later I was feeling very cold. A stream of trembling covered my body. My outer garment had been taken from me three days ago on the order of Yussuf the corporal on the pretext of bringing loaves from the baker and dividing them amongst the regular army: that means bringing bread on horseback and on [the backs of] soldiers in winter coats and small square tents. Day after day I demanded my coat from him but he puts me off as I go to and fro. Three days later I once again demanded it and he answers that he doesn’t need a coat in order to bring back bread. While I was trying to wake him [I saw that] it was under the bench inside his tent. He shouted at me and cracked a whip intending to beat me. It is therefore understandable that I gave up my coat since I didn’t need it at this time, for as far as I knew the winter was taking its time to arrive. We were still facing the High Holy days and the joyful festival of Sukkot. If my luck were to increase I would lie upon a sickbed and enjoy a long illness until the coming of the delayed peace. In my opinion it would be a great enjoyment to refresh my dry bones and for that reason I am prepared to give up my greatcoat.
But the time came when I needed a coat. I was cold and I was suffering. I called my friends Yassin and Shukri, the Christian private soldier, who brought his coat and covered my shivering body. I told him the story of the horrors of the forest. It seems to me that I stopped my short conversation [by falling into] a light doze and then I fell into a deep sleep. In an hour and a half I woke up: my mind was wandering, my head was dizzy, my body was burning like a flame that continued blazing. If I was not mistaken, my wish and my prayer had been answered, that I have decided therefore to become ill. How good and how pleasant – but I was complaining because of the problem of thirst. My tongue was parched with thirst. Cries burst out of me, I must have water, in the name of God. Somebody scolded me and said Allah will fulfil your wish. Shukri, who was in the same situation, hurried to his bag and took out his water bottle and gave me some water; but he had very little water and it was not enough to slake my terrible thirst.

On this irrigated land this [one] crucial thing is not to be found, and anyone who possesses a couple of sips of water has sold his water for a full price. And here I shout for water and I have no money. To hell with it, but if not for the half a watermelon that my sentry had taken away from me – may he suffer from diarrhoea – I would have broken my thirst. The outcome is that I suffered terribly and it seems to me that this is a very dry year for this barren land. The soldiers throw things at me at will, and complain that I do not allow them to sleep.

I have to say that when the fever attacked me I was myself only for a short while. Within my temperature I was talking nonsense all the time, without being conscious of it. Until my temperature had gone away I mumbled in my burning fever and muttered like a drunk and again I mumble and then sleep intermittently.

Suddenly: ‘On guard.’ The duty officer conveys this to me.

‘What you talking about Shukri Effendi? I’m seriously ill. Go away from me, my friend, are you joking – I’m very, very ill.’

‘Yes, yes everyone is ill. Whenever the duty officer comes and calls you to stand guard you are very quick to pronounce this
well-known saying: “I am ill.” Do not shirk the yoke thrust upon you: get up quickly. Do not delay me, I have to produce about 50 soldiers for guard duty and to surround the field so I don’t have time for nonsense.’ [This argument continues for a while]. [2, 136] As it happened, Yassin was standing on guard opposite a fountain and he had his water bottle filled to the brim and I drank until it was empty and until I had finished. We were three races, we were a brotherhood without any difference of religion or race, like brothers from birth. After I had drunk my fill I fell asleep, the sleep of the dead.  

The Doctors  

The sun came out of its hiding place and appeared in all its glory on the face of the earth. At seven o’clock the doctor’s orderly appeared. He usually came every day with the order: all those who are ill [reveal yourselves]. Shukri advises me and persuades me to go to the military doctor, a Christian from Aydin. Half an hour later I was standing in front of him, [dressed] in a heavy military cloak. His eyes pierced into me angrily. [2, 137] He tells me to rest a while and then the patients appear one after the other.  

‘What’s wrong with you?’ he asks me.  

‘I am being ruled by a high temperature and the fever attacked me during the night.’  

‘This temperature that rules you, and the fever, where are they?’  

‘In my entire body. The fever has not disappeared. My hands are burning like fire.’ He feels my wrist and he says, ‘Take a rest for a complete day.’ This is the treatment I received: a rest for what isn’t a full day, but even this is for the best because it is Rosh Hashanah today and so I am free from all drills and guard duty and from every kind of job for the entire day and the whole night.  

Nobody, none of the officers small or large will be able to force me to do any kind of hard labour. I had sold my portion of bread which was my entire possession, and my money had been stolen from me on the authority of the thieving officer Sabri Effendi, the major. If I were to become hungry I have nothing to
eat but as it happens I was not hungry at this time. I must mention that when a soldier becomes ill and decides to go to the doctor and has not had breakfast, the healthy soldiers have made a rule, led by the duty officers, to gather the sick person’s portion of food and divide it among the group.

I recline among the tents empty of the soldiers who have gone to the exercises and military marches in the morning on the difficult slopes of the hills and [also] some of the usual drills: this is the rule of the exercises. [(2, 138) As in an earlier section when he felt unwell, he is sent to the kitchens to shell peas since he is unable to do guard duty. The soldiers accuse him of stealing peas, but the cook defends him; he eats peas and marmalade and feels better. The soldiers return and tell him that the excessive work – or training – they have done is preparation for many of their number being sent to the front, ‘because of the claims on the army from frontline areas’. (2, 141) Amon’s fever returns, he suggests that he may have gout, and he offers his food ration for water. He becomes sick to his stomach. After his condition deteriorates, he is sent to the doctor.]

I was sitting on a low stool close to the door of the doctor’s rooms. I found a source of water and I drank it until I had had enough. I was waiting for my turn to go into the doctor’s room because inside the room a number of soldiers were waiting their turn. In the meantime I prepared to bare my arm and to see what was happening on it. I raised my sleeve and I looked carefully: on the bicep and below it I saw a great white and reddish boil, a kind of minaret but round [for] I had never seen a square boil. In the middle there was a red dot like the head of a pin. Once again I rubbed it and looked again at its pinkish margins.

A quarter of an hour later the orderly called me. I saluted and stood in front of the doctor. [2, 143] At the beginning he frowned and narrowed his eyes while looking at me again and again. The cotton circlet on his head was made of fabric, light green and blue with a purple button on its visor. He asked sharply: [in Turkish] ‘Soldier, what’s the matter?’

‘I am the patient from yesterday.’
‘Good, therefore the patient of today’s not here?’
‘I am the one, sir.’
‘And the doctor of yesterday and today is me. If you are unable to speak more quickly than this, to hell with you, and if you refuse to go to hell tell me quickly what you are doing here.’

[My] misleading bits of conversation did not appeal to him, therefore I answered him briefly but in turn:

‘Sir, I have a high fever and my arm is burning with a terrible heat.’

‘Pull up your sleeve.’ He examined it and felt it with his finger. While he was examining it he added:

‘Yes, and perhaps you scratch and dig at it with some kind of rusty pin to give you a chance to lie down, isn’t that so?’

‘No, that’s not right, sir.’

‘So what, then?’

And I began to present him with a long story about everything that had happened to me the previous night. But he answered briefly, ‘Be quiet’, and instructed the orderly to take me to the hospital with a group of other sick soldiers. I returned to the tent, I took off my wonderful clothes and put on other garments, which were tattered as usual. [The walk] from the encampment of tents to the hospital took an hour on foot.

Then new arrangements began: first of all I went to the bathhouse to have my head and my beard and my private parts shaven. After that came new clothes: [they were] a cotton shirt, a vest, reddish trousers with broad seams, like Charlestonos, an orange jacket and a firm skullcap.

After all these things I lay in a bed that had been made up, plumped and white and clean of all dirt and filth, and [indecipherable word] that light up my life, a joyful sentence. A total rest that I had been longing for, for so long. I was happy and jubilant, yet groaning; the pain had ceased but the fever was burning.

Who knows how many days I had to remain here. I was unable to find out. A high fever with a boil, this was not clear. When would I be able to have a meal – this seems to be in the near future. If I were to be ill for at least 30 days my plea would be
completely answered. I thank ‘the one who said “vehayah ha’olam”’ apparently I knew [This volume ends here, in the middle of a sentence. He mentions many possible reasons for his illness but it is probably septicaemia or typhus, according to his symptoms and the length of time spent in the hospital (three months), rather than gout, vitiligo or psoriasis, all of which he surmises. Typhus, malaria and cholera were widespread throughout the forces. Typhus was also called the ‘spotted fever’. A more rounded version of this experience is to be found both in the fragments and in Volume 4. His illness and hospitalization allow us an insight into the medical systems of the time and place. As Fragment 16 relates, shortly before Rosh Hashana in an unspecified year, he becomes ill with a high fever.]

Fragment 16

[16, 53] I was shivering and my teeth were chattering but Yussuf Shaoush had taken my long coat when he went to fetch some loaves of bread to divide among the army. When I asked him to give the coat back to me he said he hadn’t taken it and I didn’t need a coat. When I said, here it is, under the bench, he raised is whip to hit me. Of course I surrendered my coat to him, and my teeth were chattering. I called the Christian Shukri who brought his [own] coat and I told him this entire story. I went to sleep and a terrible fever assailed me.

[His two friends, Shukri and Yassin bring him water and he has a night’s rest. The following day the doctor’s orderly gives him a glass of cold water, ‘and this was my gift until my turn comes to see the doctor’. To this point the story is identical. He has been shelling peas in the kitchen.]

[16, 61] I fill my kitbag with peas in front of the soldiers and the soldiers called the cook and said to him, ‘This soldier has filled his bag with peas.’ He shouted at them and said, ‘You are as much thieves as he is.’ In the afternoon I ate cooked figs and a few peas afterwards because I had sold my bread, and I drank as much water as I required through Shukri and Yassin who came from the military
exercises. The entire army that had been out on exercises and came back in the evening, and those who stood on guard, did not have to have further exercises. No fewer than 30 soldiers must stand on guard every day and these are released from exercises.

In the evening my temperature went up, together with a pain in my elbow and in the night, the second night of Rosh Hashana, my temperature rose and the pain was so bad that I couldn’t sleep for a moment and I shouted ‘Water for the sake of God’ but there was no water in all the camp’s tents because everybody was thirsty and I had given my bread in exchange for a water bottle but there is no water until the morning and I suffered terribly. The doctor’s orderly arrived and asked ‘Who are the sick ones here?’ I followed him to the doctor’s door and there was a plate with a glass of cold water. And so I waited until it was my turn to go into the doctor’s [room].

I saw that on my elbow there was a closed, swollen sore with pink all around it and in the middle a yellow point. The orderly told me to go into the doctor’s room and asked what was wrong… [He told me] to lift up my sleeve and when he saw [what it was] he told the orderly to send me to the hospital, but first to the bathhouse. After being shaved on the head and the beard and in the private parts [I was given? I put on?] long red trousers and a short white coat and a skullcap on my head. I rested on the bed and had a good sleep for Rosh Hashana. At three o’clock in the afternoon I was woken by a tapping on my back. I opened my eyes and I saw four people standing in front of me: the doctor, not the one who had examined me in the morning, a Christian, born in Aydin, but a Turkish doctor from Istanbul, and a pharmacist and a nurse, all dressed in white. The nurse had a pen and white cloth in her hand. ‘What is wrong with you, soldier?’ I was confused and I answered in Arabic, ‘I don’t know.’ [16, 63] At that moment the doctor slapped me on my cheek and I fell back on the pillow in a faint. After this I smelt a sharp smell in my nose and I woke up. I saw two people on each side and they were touching me and they shouted at me and said, ‘When you’re in your house you may reply thus but not here.’ Quickly tell us what’s wrong with you? And when did you come?’
‘Aujourd’hui.’
‘Why are you speaking French?’ I didn’t know if I was speaking French or Turkish since I did know one or the other.
‘What is your name and which is your unit?’
I must answer these questions in Turkish if I am not to receive another slap because yesterday I had answered in Arabic, a foreign language for them.
‘How many days have you been ill?’
‘Two days.’
‘And did you scratch your arm sometime? How does your arm feel?’
‘Itchy and painful.’
He ordered [the orderly] to go and bring a bandage which he put on my arm and a wet towel on my forehead and [he gave me] a small glass of medicine and I fell asleep until the second day when I was once again awoken by a tapping when they brought me a glass of soup. The patient in the bed next to mine told me that the doctor and the nurse had been angry at the slap on my face and the doctor said that this was an unusual occurrence. It is true that the doctors do hit the patients but not when they have a high fever. When they slapped me yesterday my fever was 39 degrees. At noon they brought me milk, and sour milk at three o’clock in the afternoon.

At three o’clock in the afternoon all the patients sat in their beds ready for the doctor and I was waiting and trembling in case he should slap me again. They stood in front of all yesterday’s patients.
‘How are you feeling, mister?’
‘Je malade.’ [His French is faulty.]
‘And what is your name, and to which unit do you belong?’
I must answer these questions only in Turkish lest I receive another slap. I had answered them yesterday in Arabic, which is a foreign language to them and that’s why they had hit me.

When I leave the hospital the doctor will give me a small chart on which all these and symbols are written, together with the date [of the time] I have remained in the hospital. When I read these details to him he was satisfied and he said, ‘From where do you
have French? Are you a devoted Ottoman?’ I told him that I only know a few words and that’s all. The doctor examined me from my heel to my head. My temperature was 30. He put the thermometer under my arm. The sore had grown to the size of a walnut and the doctor ordered the orderly to change the dressing three times a day and on the eve of Yom Kippur they did an operation after taking away blood and pus. They took strong, pungent oil and put it on a wick made of linen; they put this in the opening of my sore. After the end of Yom Kippur I moved into a large room containing 60 men and in the morning the doctors [and] the nurses came to visit the patients and they spoke French. When the doctor came he greeted me with ‘bonjour’. When my temperature rose the nurse, Fatima (that was her name), ran to bring me wet towels and she took blood from my finger for examination. There was one Jew amongst all the patients and sometimes he would come and talk to me. . . . [The Jew tells him that he is from Manisa, that he has a grocery store but had to leave his wife and child behind because of the war.] 16, 66 We would converse until he left the hospital and someone came in his place whose name was Daniel. He was about 20 years old. When the doctor saw that Daniel was speaking French he said, ‘He is a Jew: it is clear that the Jews are not uncivilized – the lowest Jew knows three languages.’

I remained there for three months Tishri (September–October), Heshvan (October), Kislev (November–December). At Hanukkah I left the hospital after the doctor had examined me briefly and he and the nurse said ‘bon arrive’ [sic].

I returned to the tents but there were no tents there. The entire area was empty of people as when I went to the city of Menemen where the army was encamped. I asked about my legion to which I belong and I also saw some of the soldiers with whom I had been together on the hill and they told me that the legion had been divided into a number of different sections. The larger section went to Halvagiköy [or Halvogiköy; this name, as Amon transcribes it, does not appear on any map of Turkey], about three hours by foot. ‘Please take me with you’, I said. ‘Why not?’ One of them went to tell the major, Sabri Effendi, who was by chance
the same Sabri who had entered this command and who had stolen all my money. [16, 67] A soldier told me, ‘I asked Sabri if you could come with us but he yelled at me and told me that you should quickly go to Halvagiköy because that’s where you should be.’ I walked for an hour and a half in one go. The sun was burning and it turned to purple and then sank upon the horizon. Suddenly there was noise and thunder and a large cloud appeared above me and there was thunder and lightning and unexpected rain fell to the ground. A fog covered the land; an hour ago I had not seen a single cloud. Where do I go, where should I turn for help? I can’t tell the difference between East and West. Lord of the universe, Lord of peace, when will the world war come to an end? I’m prepared to be ill again for another three months as before, until the war comes to an end. To be ill is a peaceful rest. At this moment there was a flash of lightning and I saw a large wagon coming from the north. I stood up and went towards it. One soldier was sitting in it and with cries and pleading I asked him to take me and I will secure whatever he wants – if he is going to Halvagiköy. ‘Get on’, he said. ‘How much do you want me to pay you?’ ‘Nothing, I am a soldier like you.’ [16, 68] ‘Thank you, my dear friend. We are brothers in suffering’, I said. ‘Where are you from?’ I told him that I had been in the hospital in Menemen for three months and I am ill and I was discharged today which had been a bright day. If I had seen the clouds before leaving the city I would not have gone to Halvagiköy. [It turns out that the soldier whom he has met is the one who had guarded the bridge in Manisa against the enemy aircraft.] The rain and endless lightning interrupted our conversation. Fortunately the road was free of sand but in spite of this the wagon moved heavily until we came to a place I deeply disliked.

‘Why have you come to us?’ said Mustafa Shaoush, ‘Therefore you can go to hell.’ ‘Hell is right here’, I said. He took wood that was partly burnt and partly reddened by the fire and threw it at my face and I was forced to run away from him. In the morning I was sent to the recovery room called istiratat. It was a law that whoever comes from the hospital has to rest there for 15 days. [16, 69] I had spent the money I had from the sale of my gold ring
on food which I had bought from the soldiers whose health was poor, for some of them had sold their meals in order to save money. My meals in the hospital had not been sufficient; I was still hungry for food; even in the middle of the night I would dream of eating and eating and I wake up and I am hungry and if I had something to eat I would eat [incomprehensible word] with honey. My entire purpose [focus, concentration] was to eat and have meals, for all my meals during the day and night didn’t satisfy me and now that I have a rest for 15 days my money has run out. I have nothing but my emaciated body, without exaggeration.

The Captain ordered me to take off my clothes and said, ‘You are resting and eating sweetmeats [two incomprehensible words]. The unfortunate soldiers are going to Doronge Okdei in Damascus and they don’t have any clothes.’ I took off my clothes and I put on other clothes that were dirty and patched and I took off my shoes and gave them to him and I had goatskin sandals on my feet. I shivered all day from cold and hunger. There were five soldiers in this recovery room with a corporal supervising them. [(16, 70–1) He meets a barber whom he had known as a soldier in Manisa, who has come to shave the men, and receives some food from him, initially the remains of his meal. The soldiers complain that as Muslims they are entitled to it, rather than the Jew. Later the barber brings Amon a meal.]

They took me to the army in Halvagiköy for new exercises without shoes and it was getting colder in Tevet [February]. I was shivering, with a heavy load on my shoulders. When the captain saw that I was shivering without a coat and without thick trousers he ordered me to stand on guard in the kitchen until new clothes came and I had to limp on one leg because the second one had come into contact with glass between my toes. But I happily I went to work for the cook in a nice warm place beside the cauldrons filled with meat and peas and the cook gave me a portion in addition to lunch, because the one who guards the kitchen eats three or four times as much. Those who come from the exercises and eat breakfast or lunch or supper never get up
satisfied but if they have money they buy loaves of bread from the soldiers or from outside. Those who have no money remained hungry all the time especially at night. I guarded in the kitchen for eight days and I sold my bread and I managed to save a little bit of money for a rainy day, and on the ninth day the captain ordered all the soldiers to wash their clothes a long way from the city. And I am without clothes and without shoes and with my bare feet I broke little fragments of ice that were all along the way.

[16, 73] In the evening when we returned, while still halfway a heavy, flooding rain came down and once again we had to go and bring wood for the fire. I refused to go without shoes. Mustafa Shaoush [sergeant] rushed towards me with a whip, intent on beating me. Of course I ran away from him and I brought wood for the fire. I lay down on a little bit of straw in place of a bed and I slept without [having eaten any] food, shivering and drenched. In my sleep I felt very cold and I felt the water streaming under the straw. In the middle of the night the Un Bashi [corporal] came and said get up and go on guard duty. ‘I am wet and sick’, but he called out and yelled at me to get up. ‘But I’ve had no water to drink.’ ‘That is nothing to do with me.’ I took my gun and went on guard duty. I was shivering with cold and my teeth were chattering and after my gun fell down I sat on the ground, my whole body slid down of its own accord, my gun was on my knees and my hands were battling with the cold. Half an hour later I heard footsteps coming towards me. ‘Who goes there?’ No answer. It was the sergeant Mustafa and he said to me, ‘You’re sitting down – don’t you know the army regulations?’ And he came towards me intending to hit me and I immediately ran away inside and left my gun on the ground.

[(16, 75) He is punished by the corporal for running away and leaving his weapon behind.] Army law dictates that anyone standing before an officer or a staff sergeant or an ordinary corporal or even a sergeant must stand with his hand at his forehead until he says [stand at ease] and if this doesn’t happen he must stand like that perhaps all day long. Meanwhile parcels of new suits had arrived and strong new shoes and I took
whatever I had chosen according to the section of military law. I put them on and it seemed to me to be like a festival. Thick stockings, a new grey/light blue cap with a gold metal button, a purple strap on my belt until some of the army [people] envied me, and at the head was Mustafa. In his evil eyes I was showing off in front of all the soldiers and I thought that today the world war had begun.

In the night I couldn’t stand on guard because my legs were painful and I woke up in the morning screaming. I took off my shoes but there was nothing [to be seen] on my feet, they weren’t swollen but I couldn’t lean on them. The corporal said, ‘Go to the doctor’, and in ten minutes the doctor’s orderly arrived. I stood in front of the doctor with great difficulty. ‘What’s the matter?’ I told him that all my bones were aching. If yesterday I had thought I had a festival with my new suit, today the doctor will betray me with a drill [uncertain meaning], so what should I answer. ‘Tell me, what’s the matter with you?’ ‘I cannot put pressure on my legs.’ ‘When did you [first] feel this way?’ ‘Last night’, and he ordered his orderly to bring some vessels and he told me to urinate into the glass. He put the glass on the flame for five seconds. [16, 76] Afterwards he examined the urine and he said to his orderly, ‘Take him with all the patients to Menemen.’ All the soldiers had gone on a wagon and there was no other wagon [going] to the hospital in Menemen. ‘This is not my problem [said the doctor], go however you can and take Sa`id’ (this was the name of the orderly). [He goes with Sa`id on foot towards Menemen but cannot walk. They agree to return to the army base and while they are struggling back they meet an unsympathetic doctor who slaps Amon on the face and demands that he go on his way. ‘An army doctor has no consideration for a soldier’s plea.’] Once again I tried to take about 20 steps and then I sat down and Sa`id shouted bitterly ‘Get up Yahud.’ I told him to go away but he did not have permission to leave me by myself, therefore he put me on his back until he began to breathe heavily. He left me then and I sat down because the pain was doubly great on my heels and above them and I began: Lord of the Universe, in my tears my troubles have mounted until they are above my
head and how long must I suffer these tribulations. [16, 77] And I wept with many tears, and from a distance we see a Turkish peasant woman coming towards us. ‘Why is this soldier weeping?’ Sa`id tells her. ‘Very well, therefore’, she said, ‘get up onto the donkey’, upon which there were two barrels of milk, and with Sa`id’s help and a boy’s I got up [onto the donkey’s back]. An hour later she said, ‘I’m sorry to have to leave him but I am going to the north; the milk must be delivered in the appointed time.’ I got off and sat down. [Eventually he was reduced to crawling on all fours until some women came by with asses, and he and Sa`id went with them to the market, but eventually Sa`id had to carry him. Meanwhile he had developed a fever. Some of the Turkish women brought him water to drink. Eventually he was taken to the hospital on horseback.] This horse belonged to the captain who had seen my terrible troubles, and he had taken me to the bathhouse. Just as the first time, I was happy to be really ill. I wish I could have been ill until the end of the world war. Very happily I fell asleep on the bed. [He remained in the hospital for ten days without specifying the nature of his illness. Eventually he was discharged and on his way to Izmir.]

[The following material, headed ‘On the Ship’ appears in the fragments (4 and 21) but not in the volumes. Some of the writing in Fragment 21 is illegible. The fragment’s exact chronology and context are uncertain. It appears that Amon has been discharged from the hospital and once again separated from his battalion. This section is enlightening in its insight into the end of the war. (Fragment 21, 1–3) Amon and a companion, guard or servant called Ibrahim are in Menemen. Amon is seeking fellow Jews in the town. Ibrahim tells Amon:]

‘Yehuda, quickly, Hassan Bash, the sergeant, has come up to me and said to go to him quickly.’ I stood in front of him, saluting, and he instructed us to eat here and then immediately to depart for Izmir. ‘But Yehuda, as long as you have the rifle, I have to guard you with eyes at the back of my head, just as Hassan Effendi has told me to do.’ [Amon asks the sergeant:] ‘And why do we have to go to Izmir?’ ‘Because yesterday the entire army went by train to Izmir to the Punta (that is its name)’ and the train
will not wait for you, my friend. Hurry, eat your meal and go from here to the Punta. You and Ibrahim. Have you heard me? Go quickly from here because a telegram has arrived about a ceasefire and peace. A treaty has been signed between all the governments. This is immutable truth and it is correct.’ Amen and amen. The two of us, Ibrahim and I, had already heard this joyful news from the corporal. [They catch the train to Izmir and find lodgings for the night in a farmhouse.] We spent the entire night in companionship and when dawn broke we went to Izmir where we arrived at 11 o’clock before noon at the beautiful town that was decorated with various flags. Military people were strolling, English, French, Italians Australians and sailors all of all kinds. ‘Ibrahim, now the news of the ceasefire has been confirmed and has come true is this not so?’… The soldiers were joyful and in high spirits because of this truthful message that had come from the General in Izmir. Instead of manoeuvres [there were] dances and storms of applause and songs. It seemed to us that the next day we would be free and in a few days’ time we would go home.

[After a few incidents Amon awaits a ship in Izmir.] I lay down and went to sleep immediately. I was free of guard duty all day and all night. Two days later we saw the first ship on the Izmir coast. This was a white English ship. On its mast flew a white flag as a sign that there were prisoners-of-war and sick and wounded soldiers on board. [Men] were taken prisoner during the war by the glorious English and after the ceasefire and the peace had been signed the ship had dropped anchor and the prisoners were handed back to Turkey. The joy was very great and universal for all the citizens of Izmir. They began to [incomprehensible word] in noisy applause, [there were] deafening whistles and [chants of] Long Live glorious Turkey, Long Live the peace. The exercises and manoeuvres were over and there was no more guard duty or forced labour… [However, they had to help in loading sacks of foodstuffs onto the ship.] Because of my joy that I was on an English ship my hunger stopped for a while. We reached the shore with 50 soldiers, and a Turkish boat took us to the great European ship. For the first time after the horrors of the war I see European military personnel wearing hats on their
heads. The ship was so big that it contained 3000 soldiers and the choking stench wafted...my joy turned to sadness when I saw this terrible sight. [This sentence is illegible but probably refers to either the wounded or to the crowding.] I didn’t have to help any more. I looked about here and there and grew very sad when I saw the sick and wounded soldiers: one who has one eye and the second is filled with mucus up to his eyes. Anyone seeing him is disgusted, but all of them wore nice new clothing, particularly a long coat to the feet. There were soldiers on one leg and those without arms up to their shoulders and the sleeves of the coats were free of all arms and hands. There were some dead men, the mortally wounded who had been unable to endure their pain. Behind all these there were orderly and clean beds with wounded men wrapped in white bandages who did not seem to be suffering too much, and those without a leg only a kind of thick beam on which his head is held...in one of the beds there is half a body...well shaven with a long moustache. You could hold him to your chest without any difficulty. As much as I had been hungry beforehand, now my appetite disappeared when I saw this terrible thing. The Turkish boat filled up with people and went away. I stood in a corner to watch the soldiers being taken in a large boat to the shore and next to me sat a Turkish soldier. I looked at his face and eyes and [saw that] the whites of his eyes were blocked with brown and red, appearing to be one large pupil but both of his eyes were clean of pus. [21, 29] He looked at me with his brown eyes. ‘Soldier, are your eyes painful?’ ‘No.’ ‘And why are the whites of your eyes covered with red and brown that make them look like a large pupil? Did they beat you?’ ‘No, brother, this happened to me from the steam and smoke of the cannons that were hammering our enemies.’ ‘But you didn’t feel any pain at that moment?’ ‘No, no my brother I have no sign of pain.’ ‘Have you been prisoner of the English for a long time?’ ‘[Indecipherable] months.’ ‘And how did the Europeans treat you?’ ‘Not good and not bad: see what they gave us to eat yesterday, some dry [indecipherable] and we need the teeth of a camel to gnaw them if we didn’t have any teeth, and an orange. This is all I have had since yesterday. Sometimes they cook pots
of rice only with water, not a drop of oil. The English have a great name in the eyes of the nations but their deeds are not to be believed. On my life and in my soul I am telling you the truth.”

I left the ship on my own and I went aboard a boat [on which there were] six soldiers and there I found a few soldiers from our unit and then we went straight to the army base and ate breakfast without appetite. We told the lieutenant that there are sick soldiers from both our units on the ship... On Friday we were free to walk in the streets. This is the first time that we took a break to stroll and tour. It seems that we can depend on this last ceasefire.

[Amon continues his journey from Izmir to Pozanti and Konya by train. The trains are as crowded and chaotic as they were when he arrived. The sick and the healthy are put together in railway cars. He still suffers from lack of food, to the extent that he has to eat orange peels; when he is given an apple, he wonders whether to keep the skin for a later date. Bread was so scarce that the men existed on a half loaf a day. He develops a fever on the train and is taken off and sent to a hospital in Aydin where he remains for twenty-five days. When discharged, he finds he has the wrong baggage, including the incorrect discharge papers. He continues his journey to Aleppo. Thereafter there are no further details of his journey home. Two fragments (22 and 4) contain the following identical section:]

[Fragment 22, 1] One night on a dark midnight I had a surprise. Suddenly [I hear]: ‘Get up and go and stand on guard.’ My heart beat forcefully – what has suddenly happened? What guard duty? I have gone through eight circles of hell and I received three certificates in place of one: my discharge papers – one was lost in Izmir and the second one was counterfeit and the third I received in Aydin; this last one helped me more-or-less to get out of the cities of Turkey and Syria and I came to where I am now. Now what? After all, the governments signed a peace treaty. A terrible cry burst out of the depths of my heart and my throat and when I awoke, it was only a dream. Still, cold sweat covered my breast and my forehead. My family came to see what was wrong. I was trembling with fear and terror. I answered, ‘No
matter, go back to sleep.’ A stream of joy caressed my stormy heart. I knew that all of this was only in a dream, something that happens normally to everybody. Now here I am lying in my soft and pleasant bed with a pillow and a counterpane and blankets. My eyes rested on the four corners of the house for I am a new person. There is no corporal, there is no exercise, there are no manoeuvres, there is no guard duty. I am myself, corporal and captain and colonel and general, I am even king and emperor. My heart was beating with joy. I am so happy. Had there not been a world war I would never have felt the happiness that I felt on this night.

I couldn’t sleep because of my great happiness so I said softly to myself: all the order of war has passed; from now on there will be joy, salvation and consolation: the Lord of Blood arose and took revenge, filled his yearning soul, confused enlightened nations, made them fight each other in [political] parties and made of them pure brothers. The Allied forces smote the Central Powers. What had been hidden was revealed, consciences were overcome...now there is no sin and no transgression and no distortion; no lack and no death. The lives of millions were lost and are no more, but a bitter worry remained in the minds of many families. Apparently no one knows who caused such a dance of death and horror: was it Germany that caused the spilling of innocent blood without a treaty? Was it the glorious and praiseworthy Austria? Neither, but a lottery that occurs frequently every twenty-five years. Some say that the guilt lies with these leaders: Forgach, Sozonov, Pasich, Berchtolt, Gazel, Mr Tisza and Graf dem Mutzen. But this is not the time to speak [about these things]: I am happy with my lot with the help of my Rock and my King, joy has risen and sighs and groans have abated. With the help of the Lord above, the Lord of peace and Praise. Once again I slept peacefully. **Thus ended the war of destruction**.
Notes

1. This is similar to a description of the military commander of Jaffa, Hassan Bek, by Menahem Sheinkin, one of the leaders of the ‘New Yishuv’: ‘He came to Jaffa as an Arab commander without culture, a soldier with a stringent personality, a devout Muslim and in addition to this, a man with a nervous illness. He found himself an adjutant, a Bedouin: a dwarfish man who was as quick as a deer in spite of his crooked legs, as sly as a cat, as cruel as a tiger and he too, lacked culture and he was zealous…The character of these two officers is worthy of attention because their brutish appearance and their attitude to people aroused terror in the entire area and among the Jewish citizens, especially those who did not understand the Arabic language.’ Quoted in Natan Efrati, Mi-mashber le-tikvah. Ha-yishuv ha-yehudi be-‘erets yisra’el ba-milhemen ha-‘olam ha-rishonah [From crisis to hope: The Jewish settlement in Palestine during the First World War] (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1991), p.20.

2. In fact, Raphael’s advice was sound. Amon was later able to sell the ring for Turkish banknotes which bought him food.

3. Officers and men wore khaki uniforms, but some of the dress uniforms were blue. One star on the shoulder cord indicates a lieutenant. The blue uniform was the full dress of an artillery officer. While it seems unlikely that this officer would have received an ‘ordinary soldier’ in full dress, Amon’s descriptions of uniforms and equipment is usually accurate. Nevertheless, he would have seen many varieties of uniforms during his time in the army.

4. At one point, while Amon is standing before the cruel, fearful sergeant-major, the object of the complaint, with his usual exaggeration and hyperbole he says that out of fear his knees were beginning to dance the Charleston. The Charleston originated only in 1923. To add to the confusion of memory and dates, the corporal mentions their having been present when Enver Pasha visited ‘the city’. ‘The shoes you received from Istanbul a few months ago with the uniform that you left behind before the arrival of Enver Pasha and you put on another new uniform.’ Enver Pasha visited Istanbul in 1917, so it is possible to surmise the date of Amon’s encounter with the sergeant-major.

5. Mune is a city in the province of Kastamonou in the far north of the country and unlikely to be the place to which Amon is referring. There are five fortress castles in Turkey, but none with that name.

6. Part of a song of praise sung in the morning Sabbath and festival services.

7. This is Amon’s pun: בֶּן הָעַשְׁיָמִי.

8. A city in Turkey’s Aegean region.

9. City in north-western Turkey.

10. This is a cleverly-chosen allusion to Isaiah 40:3: ‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’

11. An amah is about twenty-one inches, a little less than two feet.


13. In modern times, Pyrroline is a chemical compound, similar to an insecticide.

14. A city near the west coast of Turkey in Izmir province.

15. Amon’s footnote.


17. Amon is quoting phrases from Psalm 64:6–8.
18. Muhammad V. Rashad or Mehmet Reşat (1909–18). He succeeded to the throne of the Ottoman Empire when the Young Turk revolution of 1909 deposed his brother, Abd al-Hamid II. As a constitutional monarch he exercised no actual power. ‘He is “the father of the nation” and it behooves him to act as one. The despot governs through fear and the constitutional monarch governs through affection.’ Quoted in Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p.132. Muhammad died shortly before the Turkish surrender and was succeeded by his brother, Muhammad VI.

19. Here Amon uses a pun (פסוק ההברכות בתשובה החרות) (47).

20. Amon is having fun at the expense of biblical style and the Haggadah.


22. There appears to be a crew of three: the pilot, the engineer or mechanic and the adjutant.

23. The Ottoman Air Force used red as an arm of service colour from 1915 onwards. Prior to that they were part of the engineers and wore their blue insignia with a white metal balloon badge on the collars.

24. Once again a mention of ‘Charleston’, which as a dance was invented in 1923, but Amon may be referring to something else. Generally, Charleston trousers were herringbone in design but it is doubtful that he was referring to those. He probably means trousers that were wide at the thigh and narrow at the knee.

25. Deut. 23:25

26. Amon sometimes delights in reporting unsavoury detail. For example, in one of the fragments (3, 28), he and his unit are about six hours’ distance from Izmir and billeted close to the seashore. He describes in detail the camp’s latrine arrangements. The latrines are built on the shore, with the sea serving as a flushing medium. According to Amon’s description, this does not always work and the results are both comical and disgusting.

27. He mentions ‘forced labour’, indicating that he was in one of the Amale battalions but it was perhaps not as severe as some of those in Palestine. The men were given clothes and they were armed. There is no doubt, however, that they were treated as pack animals and that they suffered from constant hunger.

28. Amon inserts the word ‘Alkotif’ or ‘Elkatif’ between parentheses. He mentions it again later.

29. This is a well-known name among the Bulgarian community in Jerusalem.

30. This is part of the evening prayer.

31. Amon writes this name as ‘Milamin’. Menemen is a district of İzmir Province, as well as the district's central town.

32. These are all biblical terms, signifying the tools used in biblical times, not necessarily related to modern implements. Amon, therefore, allows us an approximation of the work they were doing. He might not have known the modern terms, as he did not know the Hebrew word for a wheelbarrow.

33. This is the most interesting relationship in the memoir. Amon often feels impatient and hurt by Raphael, who is both a Jew and an NCO and clearly torn between loyalty to his Jewish friend, and his duty and responsibility as a serving soldier.

34. He uses both terms, *nitma* `and *mitbolel*, for ‘assimilated’, indicating not only the gravity of his situation, but also the richness of his vocabulary.
35. This incident is repeated many times throughout the diary: someone owes him money which has never been repaid ‘to this day’.

36. The meaning of this sentence is not clear. The importance of it is Amon’s mention of the two daily newspapers. Do’ar hayom was founded in 1919, running until 1936. Ha’aretz was founded in 1918, and given its present name in 1919.

37. Psalm 18:10. The reference is to God’s grandeur, accompanied by angels and cherubs.

38. This is a leitmotif of the entire diary. Amon, justifiably, does not believe it.


40. ‘Palm water’. This is a purgative.

41. There were many types of grenades in use during the First World War. The one Amon describes seems to resemble most closely the so-called ‘cricket ball grenade’: approximately 4 inch hollow steel balls some of which had a lug at the bottom with sections of wire threaded through. However most were spherical with no lugs at all and with a zinc or copper alloy threaded plug at the top which stuck out about 2mm. Through this protruded a hollow fabric shrouded fuse which terminated in a copper alloy removable shape presumably to stop water getting into the fuse or to protect it from fraying.’ See http://members.fortunecity.com/milit/ukgrenades.htm and http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=86117 for interesting correspondence about Ottoman grenades. See also David Nicolle, The Ottoman Army 1914–18 (Wellingborough: Osprey, 1994), p.18.

42. He has written: ‘For the bed is too short for a man to stretch himself.’ (Isaiah 28:20).

43. הלכת את הארץ גזרה.

44. Amon adds to the officer’s words the equivalent of ‘touch wood’ – that is, ‘without the evil eye’, בליעין רעה, which is a play on words.

45. These tales are lengthy and often repetitive, always heavily embroidered and unlikely to have taken place precisely as according to Amon’s narrative. Yet certain facts emerge from them: the lack of army discipline; the cruelty and venality of the NCOs and officers alike; the lack of any form of justice or system of appeal. Occasionally Amon is reprimanded as a Jew. His story of the target practice continues for further pages.

46. Further evidence that despite the instances of fantasy this memoir also leans heavily towards autobiography is in Amon’s comment about Bakir having joined the army at 20 ‘and he is in the permanent force to the present day and now he is now about 30’. There is a marginal note that changes 30 to 25, indicating either that Amon is referring to a person rather than a character, or that his arithmetic does not compute.

47. Amon was born in 1878, therefore the year in which this incident takes place is 1918.

48. I have not been able to identify these mountains.

49. Amon’s subtitle.

50. See Judges 9.

51. We do not know which year he is referring to, since there are many stories that take place on Rosh Hashana.

52. Rimon is both a grenade and a pomegranate.

53. Izmir was bombed and occupied by Allied troops in 1918. Once again Amon mentions the month of Tishri, September, and the date, 1918. This was the period shortly before Rosh Hashana. The festival of Rosh Hashana occurs more than once in the memoir, and the question is how many times he spent the festival in the army.

54. A marginal note has ‘or 1919’.

55. Similar to plus fours.
56. He had previously encountered a Jewish officer called Mushum concerning boots and he had come away with a very negative impression of him. Subsequently, Mushun had intervened to Amon’s benefit in a number of dire situations. However, there were a few Jewish officers in the Ottoman army, and Mussa/Mushun is not an uncommon name for a Jew, a derivation of Moshe.

57. Beit mikhseh le‘aniyim, lit. ‘the shelter for the poor’), a new neighbourhood built in the late 1850s and 1860s: see Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, ‘The Growth of Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century’, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 65, 2 (June 1975), p.262. In the mid-eighteenth century, few of the Jews in the Jewish Quarter owned property. In 1857 a group of Jews who had come from Holland and Germany bought a large square in the south-western corner of the Jewish Quarter, using halukkah monies. Their purpose was to build modern homes and to ease the terrible crowding. Wealthy individual Jews were also given permission to build their homes in that area. The ‘Shelter for the Poor’, which was by then a company, built a group of houses, among the most beautiful in the Jewish Quarter. During the 1948 war, much of it was destroyed and its inhabitants dispersed. The fact that Mussa Effendi lived in that area may indicate that he was a man of means.

58. This was perhaps a university or a military academy.

59. From the fragment in which this incident originally appears, we are able to examine Amon’s method of composition. The fragment provides the outline of the story, while the final text elaborates and fills in the details of the narrative, to heighten the pathos, the suspense and the readers’ expectations. One must assume that the basis of this incident is true: Amon and a fellow Jew requested leave for Rosh Hashana, and were refused: ‘On the eve of Rosh Hashanah in the year 1918 (because in the meantime the army was gathered at Manisa), I and another Jew called Hahalbi requested permission from the lieutenant for two days’ leave. After many requests he wrote a note and gave it to me to give to the captain. The captain looked at me: ‘What, are you a Jew?’ He laughed when he greeted me, ‘my friend’ [in Hebrew].

‘What, is Sir a Jew?’ I said.
‘A pure Ashkenazi Jew.’
‘From which city are you?’
‘From Jerusalem.’
‘Oh, I am also from Jerusalem.’

At that moment, after shaking hands warmly I thought that I saw my entire family and Jerusalem all altogether. The entire conversation continued in pure Hebrew on his part. ‘Where does Sir live?’
‘In the old city and my name is Moshe, called Mussa Effendi at the moment.’
‘And I thought Sir was a pure Gentile.’ At the end of the conversation he looked at the note and he said he would like to do everything he can but he does not have the authority to allow me [to have leave] without the authority of the Colonel and he immediately wrote a different note and gave it to me with a farewell blessing. I took Hahalbi right away and we went to the Colonel. After waiting for an hour the Colonel was not there. We went four times and he was not there.’ From this point onwards the narrative is identical. This is page 54 of Fragment 16.

60. ‘How can we sing a song of the Lord on alien soil?’ Psalm 137:1–4.

61. This Moroccan piyyut begins the Rosh Hashana prayers and the New Year in the Sephardi style. It is a love poem of the little sister – the people of Israel – sung to her
God. The poem conveys her troubles and suffering in the darkness of exile. It begins, ‘The little sister – her prayers / she prepares and proclaims her praises. / Oh God, please ease her ailments / May the year and its evil end.’ The poem also holds hope for a good year and a plea for deliverance from exile. It concludes with the words ‘May the year and its blessings begin.’

62. ‘Od lo avda tikvatenu’: from the song that later became Israel’s national anthem.
63. A reference to the Passover Haggadah.
64. ‘My eyes wept’ (Lamentations 1:16).
65. See Judges 5:6.
66. The meaning of this sentence is unclear. We do not know whether he is referring to a downed enemy plane or an aircraft that will capture them.
68. Psalm 88:2.
69. This wishing for illness or even death is not unusual in First World War accounts. In particular, see Nahmias’s diary and Avigdor Hameiri’s memoir, Bagehenom shel mata [In the lowest circle of Hell]. ‘Only one thing that hasn’t happened to me so far: a sickness that will save me from this life. I don’t have the strength in me to put an end to my life. Who is watching over me so that I don’t become infected and become free of all of this? More than once I’ve eaten together with them from one bowl and I sleep right next to them.’ Hameiri, Ba-gehenom shel mata (Tel Aviv: Joseph Shreberk, [n.d.]), p.335.
70. קרליצרלי
71. ‘How good and pleasant it is / when God’s people live together in unity.’ Psalm 133:1. Set to music, this verse has become one of Israel’s most popular folksongs.
72. Isaiah 41:17.
73. Lit. ‘the sleep of a marmot’, i.e. a very deep sleep.
74. This is Amon’s own subtitle.
75. Much appears to have happened between the period of Rosh Hashana Eve and this event: it is unlikely that Amon has the correct timescale, although he mentions that he became ill on the second day of Rosh Hashana. This festival is frequently referred to in various contexts in the fragments.
76. Illness and hospitalization recur frequently in the fragments and are the central topic of Fragment 3.
77. A term connoting God.
78. The reason for the slap was that he was forbidden to answer them in Arabic, which they did not understand, and from that point on he attempted to speak to them in French. On the top of four pages in the diary he has written words in French in excellent, sloping handwriting: aujourd’hui; un peu; bon arrive; Je suis malade; comment vous parlez-vous; monsieur; bonjour.
79. In answer to the doctor’s questions, he gives details of his unit but it is very difficult to determine its exact identity, due to problems of translating the terms he provides. He gives what appears to be his battalion, his section, his legion and his unit, all of which the doctor writes down on a ‘tablet’ (Fragment 16, 64). פלא轹נה נשתת, תדד רביישית: ולשאה שאית, מלוחות שרה, למוח אתרי:フラレビ, 살_LSBיאת, בבליון שאית, למוח אתרי:フラレビ, 살_LSBיאת,_base, 벌리ון שאית, למוח אתרי:フラレビ, 살_LSBיאת, Legion, Sixth Squadron, Fourth Company.
80. Punta (the point), a district of Izmir (Smyrna). During Ottoman times this was the neighbourhood of middle-to-upper-class families. It is now called Alsancak.
81. Some of the gases used by both sides caused blindness.
82. Johan Graf von Forgach, Austro-Hungarian diplomat of Hungarian origin who played a prominent role during the First World War.
83. Possibly Alexander Samsonov, who served in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 and in 1914 was given the command of the Russian Second Army at the outbreak of the First World War.
84. Nikola Pasich, Serbian Prime Minister 1912–19.
86. This name is unknown.
87. Count Istvan Tisza, Hungary’s President from 1913.
88. This could be Franz Graf Conrad von Hőtzendorf, a controversial military strategist, who planned the Habsburg monarchy’s campaigns during the war.
89. The emphasis is Amon’s.
Haim Nahmias was born in 1885 in Monastir in Macedonia, part of the Ottoman Empire. He immigrated to Palestine in his youth and lived in Nahlat Zion in Jerusalem. Originally a shoemaker, he later became a stalwart of the Sephardi Jewish community in Jerusalem. During the first two years of the war, Nahmias paid the full ransom but in the third year the Ottomans annulled this possibility. Since Nahmias had a wife and five children he decided to hide from the authorities and became officially a deserter (firar) for which the penalty was death. In 1916, Jemal Pasha had decreed the hanging of a Muslim, a Christian and a Jewish deserter in Jaffa as a warning to others. Nahmias hid from the authorities until his young wife died and he was obliged to come out of hiding for the shiva, the seven days of mourning. At the end of this period, when he heard that the military police were seeking deserters, he had no choice but to enlist. He was conscripted and transported from Jerusalem to Western Anatolia.¹

Dr Avner Peretz, Nahmias’s translator into Hebrew, writes that the diary remained in the family’s hands for some years after it was written but no one read it (because of the difficulties of the script and the language). It remained in the house of the diarist’s son, Judge Professor Shlomo Nahmias, but it disappeared for many years until it was recently rediscovered in a storeroom.²

The diary was handwritten in Ladino, interspersed with Turkish words and phrases, at the time of the events themselves, and only recently translated into Hebrew. It was composed in the form of notes written at the time that were later extended into a continuous narrative.³ The entries are not dated consistently, only sporadically. The bulk of the diary deals with Nahmias’s journey from Jerusalem to Anatolia, with only a few pages
covering the months of his prolonged stay in Milas and Muğla in mid-1918, the war’s end and his return to Jerusalem in December 1918.

Nahmias’s writing is literate, even literary, and expressive; his text is factual, a record of his physical and emotional experience, without evaluation or conjecture. He wrote with a greatly moving eloquence about the death of his beloved wife and noted that when he joined the army, only eight days after her death, he was still raw with grief, a grief that lasts throughout the period of the diary. His agony over her death at the early age of 35 was intensified by the terrible conditions that accompanied his long journey. Generally, without this added heartache, his experience mirrors that of other Jewish soldiers as recorded in their memoirs and diaries. Rather than social or political commentary or the war itself, the diary’s context is the journey, Nahmias’s travelling with his unit throughout the day and sleeping in barracks, mosques or fields at night, constantly on the move in what appears to be a purposeless and unexplained odyssey from Jerusalem through Syria and Turkey to the western provinces of Anatolia.

The diary, which covers spring 1917 to autumn 1918, begins shortly after his enlistment, on 11 March 1917, when he was brought to a military police station in Jerusalem and thrown together with thousands of ‘wild people’ whom he described as dirty, reeking and brutish, creating an unbearable din. And so he began his terrible journey by train and by forced march probably in one of the Amale units, probably attached to the Ottoman Fourth Army. He often mentions the ‘חيلة המשלוח’ (‘heyl mishloah’, expeditionary force or transport battalion) without specifying the nature of its duties. There was no battlefront in Anatolia and, while some of the labour units trained their men in the basic use of weapons, Nahmias – unlike Amon – was neither armed nor trained, although he mentions going out on manoeuvres but without indicating their exact nature. Only some time into their service were he and his comrades given rudimentary army uniforms.

Nahmias’s camp contained 600 men, a mixture of Arabs, Armenians, Kurds and Jews. He did not report any instance of friendship between the ethnic groups other than a single occasion, towards the war’s end, when he strolled with an Arab friend. Generally he had no affection for his fellow soldiers, calling them ‘wild’ and ‘barbaric’ people whose company he abhorred. At first the Jews were largely spared the whip because they showed no inclination to desert and generally paid the required ‘fees’. This
is contradicted by Amon, who reports constant vicious beatings with sticks, batons and whips, which no Jews, Muslims or Christians escaped. However, Nahmias commented on the poverty of the Turkish soldiers themselves, as ill-dressed, cold and hungry as the men they were controlling. This may explain the extreme cruelty of the guards, police and NCOs but not that of the officers, who were generally comfortable and well fed, as we see from the memoir of Ragip Nurettin Ege.

The various barracks in which the ‘ordinary soldiers’ were housed were crude and unpleasant. They also represented the Jewish conscripts’ first encounter with lice, fleas and mice, the unvarying companions of the servicemen on every front in the war. In all First World War accounts, lice are featured as one of the worst afflictions the men endure and in Nahmias’s account this is no different. They were like scorpions, he writes, and the men passed the night sleeping on the floor, with their bodies bleeding from the bites. With an unquestioning acquiescence, reminiscent of Hacohen’s comments about the fellahin in his diary, Nahmias notes that for him the conditions were unbearable but for most of the men, the majority of whom were Arabs, they were an improvement on their normal lives and therefore not as harsh. Their food, made from coarse wheat flour, was so unfit for consumption, wormy and bloated, that even a passing dog disdained it. The men were starving. In his diary Amon stresses that there was no worse torture than hunger, a sentiment echoed by Nahmias more than once.

The Jews attempted to contact the local Jewish authorities in Damascus and Aleppo, to little effect. The indifference shown by the army officers is echoed by that of many of the Jewish communities and their Chief Rabbis in the towns through which the battalions passed. For example, during Passover the Jewish conscripts in Nahmias’s unit attempted to contact the Chief Rabbi of the local community in Adana for help in obtaining the appropriate food, but their request went unanswered. Only towards the end of the war were members of the Jewish communities of the Western Anatolian towns responsive and welcoming.

Apart from the themes of food, the cold, the filth accumulating on the men’s bodies (impossible to wash off) and the constant hunger and beatings, other recurring motifs characterize this diary: the cruelty and irrational behaviour of the responsible officers; their corruption and the effects of bribery; the relentless thieving from the packs and even the
clothes of the men; and the apparently aimless, almost surrealistic, travelling from place to place in freight cars, as Nahmias writes: ‘crowded...like sardines in a barrel, choking in the crush, weary of the weight of the people leaning on us...the body entirely torn’.

In all their weariness and misery the Jews did not abandon the festivals or their prayers. At the start of their journey, the twelve Jews in Nahmias’s crammed railcar insisted on praying the evening prayer, against the wishes of the guard in charge. This adherence to ritual and the memory of festivals typifies these two war diaries, as the Jews attempted to retain some semblance of their dignity and identity. Nahmias, a pious Jew and a man of some learning, attempted as far as possible to observe the festivals, yet his diary witnesses both the preservation and the attenuation of his faith. After observing a Jewish friend weeping, he writes: ‘While his tears poured down his cheeks and wet the new growth of his beard, we all raised our hands to heaven to ask for mercy. But from whom? There was no one to turn to. Who would be fortunate enough to see death? But we were not favoured with this good fortune to achieve such a precious treasure! This favour was not granted to us’ [266; numbers in square brackets refer to page numbers in the Ma`ale Adumim edition of the Hebrew translation of the diary].

Even in these dire conditions, Nahmias was inconsolable at being compelled to eat hametz on Passover. Generally, unable to avoid army regulations, the Jews worked on the Sabbath, ate non-kosher food and bread on Passover but attempted in every way to avoid these infractions, and only when Nahmias was starving after refusing to eat the army rations did he surrender and eat what was available.

Shortly after Passover they were set to work. Nahmias does not specify its exact purpose but it seems that his unit replaced pack animals, which were needed at the front and which were, in any case, in short supply. The men do not appear to have been building roads, laying tracks or felling trees, as recounted by Amon. Instead they shifted stones in order to secure the soaked ground; they marched carrying bricks, lengths of rope and rolls of heavy barbed wire on their backs. Those suffering from disease or injury were forced to continue marching with the weighty loads. Most of the Jews were working in the clothes in which they had left their homes.

From time to time, after this exhausting day-long toil, the men would be forced to remain on their feet for hours at a time, singing praises to the
Sultan. Or, too tired after their days of marching and labour to care even about the lice, they were nevertheless not permitted any rest and were immediately marched to the local train stations to continue the journey. The cost of transporting these thousands of exhausted, weakened, ill, hungry and thirsty men across Western Turkey was a drain on the resources of an already embattled empire.

The story continues – one of repeated brutality, suffering, useless cruelty by their own officers, sickness, filthy conditions, lack of water, overcrowding, thieving, bad food and hunger. Those who had insufficient money to pay for food were forced to exist on army rations which were greatly inadequate. Nahmias reached a point of crisis, suffering his most devastating hour in which he engaged in a form of introspection akin to a spiritual journey, an agonized review of his life. The superior officers lost no opportunity to insult and curse the non-Muslims with the sobriquets ‘Arab English’ and ‘traitor infidels’, yet Nahmias does not report any specific instances of anti-Semitism, only a generalized distrust of the Jews. Jews were not marked for worse treatment than that of other groups. As Amon commented in his diary, they were all ‘brothers in suffering’. Officers would hang soldiers, regardless of their ethnicity, on the slightest pretext, even a fabricated one of ‘spying’ through which so many men met their deaths.

Notwithstanding a period of respite towards the end, the diary is a testament of despair. Nahmias’s misery is frequently so acute that, like Amon, he can do nothing more than cry out to God and inscribe his longing for death. And yet he and his comrades, those he mentions by name, all of them pious Sephardim, proved to be as resilient, resourceful and courageous as the Ashkenazi Zionist pioneers whose conditions, while difficult, were more bearable than those of the Ottoman conscripts. These military representatives of the ‘Old Yishuv’ – itself regarded by the ‘New Jews’ as a relic of medievalism – discovered that they were equal to the demands of modernity, having been thrust into it without preparation.

In spite of the severity of the camp conditions and their exhaustion, Nahmias and his companions were able to spend a few evenings singing and dancing with their Turkish counterparts. These evenings of entertainment, arranged by the officers, took place frequently, with the daily toil forgotten for a few hours. An interesting, and perhaps paradoxical, footnote to his diary, provided by his son, is that for the remainder of his life,
despite his trials in the Ottoman army, Nahmias drew great enjoyment from Turkish songs, ‘and every time he heard a Turkish song or melody he would melt with pleasure’ (12).

Despite the high subjectivity of the diary, Nahmias was aware of his surroundings, carefully noting down the names of towns and villages along the route, details that would probably be regarded as spurious by a diarist in normal times. He created a detailed map of the locations through which he passed on his journey from Jerusalem to Izmir (Smyrna) and Istanbul. Perhaps only intended as an aide-memoire, this compulsive mapping, which adds historical value to the document, located the writer in time and space. He mentioned the arrival of Armenians whose city had been destroyed, and demonstrated that despite his self-concern he was not indifferent to the suffering of others. Shortly after his spiritual nadir during which he once again longed for death, his situation changed: he was called to the office of the Kamaykam, whom Nahmias describes as a decent man, elderly and courteous, who promised to take him under his wing as the battalion’s master craftsman, a maker of shoes.

In addition to its role in testimony and the preservation of memory, writing helps the war diarist to extract himself from the battlefield or, in the case of Nahmias, from what is no less than a prison camp. His awareness that many of his fellows failed to survive makes his task of recording events more imperative. Furthermore, many war diaries and diaries kept in prison camps are written as acts of resistance: while Nahmias wrote of periods of intense despair and hopelessness, the diary itself is the clearest indication of his refusal to succumb to an incomprehensible and murderous environment and, above all, to keep a grip on his identity:

above all the worst thing was that writing caused me so much pain, to go over it [his experience] again and of course because it involved so much misery. Many times I’d thought I’d stop writing. But I didn’t want this either. I wanted to put everything in writing and to show how great my efforts were to keep on writing, much more than that of others, for many of them began to write but tired of it, but I didn't cease my efforts to continue. (282)

Throughout this diary, Nahmias is unafraid to reveal an entirely non-heroic self, a man whose moods change rapidly, who veers from despair to
resignation, who weeps frequently and yearns for death. His lament for his dead wife is one of the most moving passages in the text and the repeated evocation of his suffering and that of his companions provides a distressing insight into the lives of men whose experience behind the lines was often worse than in the trenches. However, the diarist is always divided into the experiencing self and the writing self, and it must be assumed that much of Nahmias’s daily experience has been omitted, particularly towards the end of his ordeal. Nonetheless, he is more candid than many other diarists in revealing his strong emotions, particularly his grief and desolation, which are among the diary’s leitmotifs. He exposes an element of humour in his evocation of some of the events, compassion for his comrades and other victims of the war. Generally, however, we learn little about his personality other than his unshaken piety, which leads to his conviction that all will be well, in fact, a newly discovered toughness. The army experience taught this gentle Jerusalem-born Jew to use his wits in order to survive, as the Arab and Turkish conscripts had been doing all along.

After his ordeal, Nahmias, having survived the war, returned home, providing the happy ending to his war service. However, despite the joy at his survival his homecoming was a bitter one: he had lost two of his children to starvation.

Nahmias died aged 63 in July 1948 during the siege of Jerusalem.

Memories of My Father’s House, the Late Haim Abraham Nahmias

Professor Shlomo Nahmias

[5] Praise be to the Lord, the Creator of the world that we are worthy of his righteousness, who has kept us alive and sustained us and let us reach this day when we are able to publish the diary in which there is the memoir of our late father.

Our teacher, Raban Shimon Ben Gamliel, says: ‘Monuments are not made for the righteous; their words are their memory.’ My father my teacher, my mentor Haim A. Nahmias, may his memory be blessed, may his soul rest in the mysteries of the heavens, his words are his memory. When we read the exercise
book of his memoirs, we see his revered and noble image in our mind’s eye. Honesty, wisdom, humility, poetry, love, mitzvot and good deeds were all combined in his character.

This exercise book had disappeared for a long time. We knew about its existence but we were afraid that it had been lost a generation ago, it seems, during our move from Jerusalem to Ashkelon. With all the problems, we almost despaired of finding it until by chance, my wife Clara, bless her soul, searched in the cellar of our house and, amazingly, brought it up from the depths of oblivion. We rejoiced at the appearance of the exercise book; we were like those who had discovered a great booty, since this is not a trifling thing. The words written in it speak for themselves. They will bear witness like a thousand witnesses. The exercise book is written in Ladino in the Solitro script (‘half-pen’),\(^{12}\) which was the writing common in those days. We searched for someone who knows Ladino, who has a mastery of Hebrew and mainly, who is familiar with this script. After many attempts we came upon Dr Avner Peretz, the Head of the Ma’ale Adumim Institute for the preservation of Judeo-Spanish and its culture.

The way the exercise book is written is astonishing, given the horrifying conditions of its composition as they emerge through reading the text. The suffering and torture did not spoil the order [of events]. My father, my teacher and my mentor, may his memory be blessed, was greatly painstaking in his writing, as in his work, in the way he lived and in his civic activities. He is counted among those giants of the spirit for he embraced honesty, fidelity and attention to detail with all his heart. Modesty was for him a deeply ingrained natural quality. It was the modesty of charm, justice and congeniality, cordiality, respect and the love of his fellow man. Wisdom and simplicity were combined in his exalted image. He was a scholarly man. As was his decency, so was his humility. He was a man of conversation, who engaged his listeners. How pleasant it was to listen to his stories that flowed in simple language, like a soaring fountain. His house was open to everybody. He spoke with good taste and knowledge, everything was well made, and in its time. [6] His language was clear, immersed in and interwoven with allegories and pearl rhymes. I
cannot recall him ever raising his voice. He always conducted his conversations serenely, and was renowned for his gentle manners. He conducted himself as Aaron the Priest; loved peace, pursued peace and established peace.

My father my teacher, Haim Nahmias, was born in 1885 in Monastir Province, Macedonia (which was formerly part of the Ottoman Empire). He made aliya in his youth and settled in Jerusalem the Holy City, initially in the Old City, and later in Nahlat Zion quarter in the new city. Later he moved to the Yegia Kapayim community and was one of its founders. In addition to his work, he devoted days and nights to public work. His radiant figure was distinct in his wisdom and his bright and fresh mind.

During World War I, he was forced to enlist to the Turkish Army. His trials and tribulations during this period of his life are detailed in this diary. The truth was recounted in his writings. These accounts of his life open a window and offer a glimpse, depicting and exposing an intriguing picture of the events that took place in the Turkish Army in general. They also offer interesting reflections on the fate of the Jews who were enlisted to the Turkish Army, and how the Jewish inhabitants were treated.

The recruitment of Jewish residents to the Turkish army was a controversial issue. Some people reasoned that serving in the army of the rulers could potentially promote the interests of the Jewish population, and would positively influence decisions regarding the fate of the land when the war ended. And indeed, some budding volunteer groups were emerging around the country. The movement was supported and encouraged by some of the Jewish leaders. They thought that the loyalty of the Jewish people to the Ottoman Empire ought to be demonstrated, and this was a suitable way to achieve that. There was also a covert objective to derive benefits from the recruitment of Jewish youth to the army, in order to lay the foundations for the establishment of a Jewish Army. Some travelled as far as Istanbul in order to acquire advanced army training, and obtain an officer’s rank. The most prominent example is Moshe Shertok (Sharrett) who served as an officer, and later admitted that ‘this is where my ambition to be involved with the army had formed; from a burning desire
to learn military strategies, and from the experience of becoming an officer in the Turkish Army. This strong desire was driven by a determination to defend the dignity of a suffering nation, tormented by Turkish mercenaries and the Arab mob.\textsuperscript{14} But only few brought this idea to fruition. The vast majority of people rejected it, since the army was, after all, governed by a corrupt and tyrannical regime, which was despised particularly by the Jewish residents.

Meir Dizengoff’s description is particularly intriguing: \textsuperscript{7} ‘The Jewish troops were led like lambs to the slaughter. They were dragged to battle without any recognition of duty to the land or to the people. The Turkish Jewish soldier strolls about, bare and destitute, tortured and disgraced by starvation, grime and severe illness. Deserted like a strayed dog, to bear the cold, heat, and other misfortunes.’\textsuperscript{15}

I heard the following anecdote from my late father: a Turkish judge was sitting at the centre of the bench. The prosecutor sat to his right and the defendant to his left. The common way to tilt a court case in one’s favour was by bribing the judge (offering \textit{baksheesh}). The currency that was mainly used as a bribe was the \textit{majid} [Turkish currency]. That was the way things were done. In one of the trials, one side offered the judge a coin, in the customary way, under the table. The judge then tipped the scales in his favour. At the end of the trial, the judge went to his office, and discovered that the coin that he received was not a \textit{majid} (which was as good as gold) but a \textit{bishlik} (which was worth a penny). The furious judge cried: ‘What terrible corruption there is in this country!’

The volunteer movement mentioned earlier was a futile sacrifice. It involved separating the enlisted men from their land, their country, their families, parents, wives and children, and this occurred when things at home were at their worst. Many people could not obtain even a slice of bread. There were dreadful scenes of children chasing Turkish soldiers to collect the orange peels that the soldiers threw away. Many starving children dragged themselves to the rubbish heaps to find food remains, to alleviate their hunger even a little. Infectious diseases were rampant. The
medical system was declining. The Turkish army raided pharmacies, and confiscated everything they could find. Countless people died every day due to illness, physical depletion, famine and thirst.

The army commanders treated the Jewish soldiers with distrust, contempt and hostility. Many of them were sent to the *Amale* labour camp to work in inhuman conditions; working in the desert without shelter from the cold and the heat, sleeping outdoors with no covers, and provided with contaminated food that was not fit for human consumption (see the *Report of the Zionist Directorate to the 12th Congress*, Jerusalem, 1921, p.183).

A shocking description can also be found in Yehuda Burla’s writings: ‘The 6th *Amale*, a cursed and dreadful labour camp, had more than one thousand people just nine months ago, and now has only four hundred. [8] The doomed regiment. In the winter, the Beer-Sheba stream swept away more than two hundred people, within minutes, and they keep sending more people to die here, from the heat, parasites and diseases.’16 Some founded an underground network, which aimed to assist the British Army in conquering the Land of Israel. The main function of the organization was military intelligence, that is, espionage against the Turkish army and for the British Army. The network was established in 1915 by brothers Aharon and Alexander Aaronson and Avshalom Fineberg. The name of the renowned organization was NILI. They also delivered information to the central Zionist organizations, about the abusive Turkish conduct against Jewish residents (mainly in Jaffa). The Turks exposed the network on 13 September 1917. The Aaronson family members were investigated and tortured. Sarah Aaronson pleaded guilty and assumed responsibility for the entire enterprise. She was brutally tortured, and while misleading her investigators, she took her own life.17

During this time a phenomenon that was understood, accepted and approved, spread throughout the land. Thousands of army deserters and defectors were hiding in various places. This was the tendency of the majority of the Jewish population during this period. Many were hiding in attics, and were known as ‘the Attic
Troop’. Turkish soldiers searched for them, going from one quarter to the next, while the fugitives were moving from one attic to the next. This ‘cat and mouse’ game went on in this way for some time, as one side was searching, and the other hiding. My late father was also among those hiding, but when his beloved wife Hannule (term of endearment for Hannah) died, he was forced out of his hiding place to sit shiv’a [seven days of mourning]. He was then caught by the authorities (there may have been a denunciation), and was forced to enlist in the Turkish army. Under these tragic circumstances, and influenced by the Mukhtar’s [Headman’s] directive, he was forced to part from his family.

Before he was enlisted, my father was able to stockpile a supply of food for his family which included his mother Esteria (Kokhava) and his five children. The care of his children, Amnon, Zion, Avraham, Sarah (Sarina) and Pnina, was entrusted to the devoted grandmother Esteria. She cared for them in faith and dedication ‘as a nurse carries an infant’. Before he went away my late father was able to organize for his son Avraham to attend the Takhkemoni school. He asked his friend, Mr Ilan, who was the principal of the school, to care for him. The trouble was that the food supply was stolen from the house and the condition of the family was at its worst. Grandmother was taking care of five children single-handedly. The deprivation had left its mark, and all the children suffered from undernourishment. There was no one to turn to for help. When Grandmother Esteria learned that lunch was provided at Alliance School [9], she managed to transfer Avraham to that school. Every morning she gave him a box, and asked him to save the bulk of his food for his brothers and sisters, in order to ease their ‘sorrow of hunger’. But ‘a handful does not satisfy the lion’. Sadly, two of the children (Amnon and Zion), the youngest, passed away. Saving lives was not an objective for the authorities. When my father returned from the army, his mother presented to him the three children who had survived, his son, Avraham, and the two girls, Sarina (Sarah) and Pnina. When my father asked, Where are the other two? His mother answered: Thank God that these three children are alive, the other two have died of starvation.
It is interesting that my father did not mention the theft of food in his diary. He might have known who had stolen the food but avoided exposing their disgrace in public. That was his way. But he carried his anger in his heart.

After his release from the Turkish Army, he went back to work in his shop named ‘Hatehiya’ in the Old City. He advertised the reopening of the shop. My nephew, Reuven Baruch, found an announcement in a museum in the Old City, which was titled ‘Hatehiya’ (with a double meaning).20

Some time later he married his second wife, Victoria Aburabia, who was a descendant of a rabbinical family. Her brother, Rabbi Amram Aburabia, God rest his soul, was the Chief Rabbi of Petah Tikva. She was a Zionist in her heart and soul. Love of Israel and love of humankind always guided her courteous ways. Later she contentedly Hebraized her name to Nitzhia [Eternity]. She gave birth to three daughters, Kokhava, Yokheved, and Hannah, and two sons, Avner, who was the youngest, and Shlomo (the author of these lines).

My father was, as noted earlier, one of the founders of Yegia Kapayim community, and indeed he enjoyed the fruits of his labour, in the sense that ‘You will eat the fruit of your labour; blessings and prosperity will be yours.’21 In his voluntary public work he served as the treasurer and as the cantor of his community’s synagogue.

We lived in a modest two-bedroom apartment that had a toilet in the garden, which we shared with other families who lived in the yard. There were seven of us living in our crowded apartment: my father and mother, my three sisters, my brother and myself. From time to time we had visitors who stayed with us for vacation and relaxation: my step-sister Sarina’s children, uncles and cousins, and other relatives. The mattresses and blankets were spread open. All were welcomed with love, warmth and with open arms. None of us has ever said: ‘The place is too narrow for me.’22

During the difficult periods, frugality was accepted with understanding and love, and without a hint of complaint. I remember that in one of my conversations with my father, he
apologized for not being able to provide for us and cater to our
needs in the manner that he had wished for. I answered that there
is nothing wrong in this situation. On the contrary, there was an
advantage in scarcity, because for us, in any case, one could not
say ‘so Yeshurun grew fat and kicked’.23 I felt that my response
satisfied him. As Ben Haha, a contemporary of Old Hillel said,
‘according to the pain, so are the rewards’.24

My father used to rise early for his morning prayers. On
Saturdays he chanted the Sabbath hymns, which he loved, and
sang energetically, happily and elatedly. We enjoyed listening to
his song of prayer, so delightfully sung and superbly melodious.
To this day, his voice still resonates in our ears, singing his
favourite hymns, such as: ‘Ki eshmorah Shabbat’, ‘Yismehu ba-
malkhutkha’, ‘Sameah Moshe bematnat helko’.

He particularly cherished the songs of the pioneers, with
whom he identified unequivocally, and adored. He infused us
with his passion, and oftentimes we jointly immersed ourselves
in singing.25

Naturally, he was touched by the songs of the Golden Age of
Spain. For example, he enthusiastically sang the ‘Shir ha-mayim’
written by Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gebirol, while at the same time
explaining to us the exact meaning of each and every word, and
the background from which it originated. We were delighted to
sing these songs along with him as we sat around the table, during
and after our meals

He adored Eliezer Ben Yehuda, the reviver of the Hebrew
language. He praised him often, and so we asked to follow his
example and speak only Hebrew. We could not speak much Hebrew
with our grandmother, Yoheved Aburabia (my mother’s mother),
since she did not know the language, and therefore the modest
knowledge we have acquired of Ladino, can be credited to her.

Despite the hardship that he had experienced during his army
service, he derived great pleasure from Turkish music, and
whenever he heard Turkish songs or Turkish music, his pleasure
was obvious [lit: ‘he would melt with pleasure’].
He was widely renowned for his expertise and vast knowledge. Everyone sheltered in his shadow. His figure radiated afar. He was loved and cherished by all. Those around him yearned to hear his words. Every evening the neighbours gathered in our home, and his conversations were eagerly absorbed. His love and devotion to Israel knew no bounds. He was wholeheartedly a Zionist. He was strongly attached to Jerusalem, the city in which he was born and raised.

He was known as a dynamic person, highly active in the community. He served as a member of the Sephardi community, and served in the directorate of the *Ozer dalim* [Help the needy] association for the Monastir immigrants. Our home was used every year as the site from which flour for Passover was distributed to the poor. As a member in the Union of Tradesmen, he was one of the founders of the *Halva’ah ve-hisakhon* [Loan and saving] corporation, and was elected to serve as a board member.

He helped make peace between opponents, and his home was a gathering place for the learned. People connected with him through bonds of love. His words were always amiable, and yet he always kept a guard on his tongue. He never took part in listening to or spreading rumour or hearsay. He had a sharp and wise vision, and merciful and compassionate heart.

In the Sabbath tractate (page 31:71) Rabba’s words are cited: ‘when a man is brought to his final justice, he is asked: have you negotiated in [good] faith, made time for the Torah, procreated and raised children, expected deliverance, deliberated with wisdom, and discerned one thing from another?’ It appears that the positive answers concerning my late father were self-evident. It is interesting, though, that according to Rabba, the first question one is asked upon entry to the world beyond, is ‘have you negotiated in [good] faith?’

The founder of the *Tenu`at hamussar,* Rabbi Israel Salant, affirmed that in matters of finances and trade, one has to be no less prudent than in the deeds that one observes between man and God. There is a tale about a ritual slaughterer and inspector who came before Rabbi Israel Salant and said that he can no longer fulfil the sacred duty, since it carries a weighty responsibility and
apprehension regarding the provision of ritually impure or non-kosher food to the people of Israel. Rabbi Israel Salant asked him: ‘What will you do for a living?’ and he answered: ‘I will engage in commerce.’ ‘Negotiating in the market?’ Rabbi Israel Salant then became solemn and said: ‘If this is so, then you should go and study the Hoshen mishpat.’\(^{28}\) Know that in Shulhan arukh,\(^ {29}\) there are only 60 marked columns for learning the laws of ritual slaughtering and impure food, while the Hoshen mishpat has 426 columns.

I remember an event that my late father told me about, where he quoted the price of certain merchandise to a customer. It appears that there was a miscommunication between them. As she wasn’t fluent in the language, she laid a sum on the table that was higher than what he had asked for. He indicated that the sum was incorrect. The client apologized and increased the sum. He indicated negatively again. [13] She apologized once again and added more money. The misunderstanding went on, until finally he took only the sum that he had specified to begin with from the pile of money, and gave her back all the rest with thanks.

That is how he conducted himself. He held high moral values, which derived from the integrity of his soul. He was always mindful of doing what is morally good and ethically right: ‘Do good before of God, and be decent in the eyes of men’ [Rabbi Akiva]. He cherished the truth and loathed lies. I remember how he explained that ‘Lies have no legs.’ While we were discussing this, he took up paper and a pencil and wrote the words ‘truth’ and ‘lie’. Then he referred to the word ‘truth’ (אמת) and showed me that each of its letters has two solid legs. Then he showed me that in the word ‘lie’ (שקר) the first letter has one leg, the second letter has one short and one long leg, and the third letter has only one leg.

In addition to his vast knowledge and wisdom, he excelled in extraordinary qualities, of which kind-heartedness and love of humankind were his characteristic mark, a reflection of God’s virtues, in the sense that ‘I am with him in times of trouble.’ He advocated patience and tolerance, and we all loved him for that.
On August 3rd 1936 (15th of Av), his son Avraham, may his memory be blessed, passed away. He was very young – in his early twenties. It was a grave blow to my father, my mother Nitzhia, may her memory be blessed, and to all our family. The medical condition that lead to Avraham’s death began as a tooth or mouth infection, which at first seemed uncomplicated. The problem was that the medical resources and the methods of treatment during those days were deficient. And so, the holy day of the feast of the 15th of Av became a day of family mourning for us. Avraham was buried at on the Mount of Olives, close to his mother Hannule.

On the eve of World War II, my father, who anticipated the evils of the war, sent an urgent and emotional letter to members of the Jewish community in Monastir, imploring them to flee as quickly as they could, and, if possible, to come to Israel. The trouble was that the routes to Israel were blocked. Nevertheless, many responded to his call and left Monastir in good time, heading for Seattle, USA. Sometime later, a member of the Jewish community in Seattle came to visit and he informed us that a magnificent community (of Monastir origin) had been established there, and in appreciation of his actions they perpetuated his name.

Late in his life, the most significant event for the Jewish people and for the inhabitants of Zion took place: the declaration of the independence of Israel, and the establishment of the State of Israel. My late father was fortunate to witness and to experience the fulfilment of a two-thousand-year-old dream. He was beaming with happiness, but at the same time, he had shared the suffering of the Jewish people, and its fear.

My father passed away on July 7th 1948. Those were days of war all around the country, but especially in and around Jerusalem, which was the under siege. He had been suffering from high blood pressure for a long time, and the tension of this period only worsened his condition. Of all the gems inlaid in his character, his ability to accept his own suffering gently and silently, was noticeable during this late period of his life.
A remarkable individual has departed from us, who held inside him purity of heart, integrity and honesty, and infinite love: love of Torah, love of the people and love of the country.

He grew up in good reputation and died in good reputation. Sadly, he died prematurely, at the age of 63, while he was still able to walk among the living and contribute. The pious man, who was pure-hearted and clean-handed, was well liked by people and God. Our lives were impoverished when he departed. His death has ended his suffering, but we were orphaned, with no consolation. His pure soul will reside in heaven. May his memory be blessed, may his soul be bound in the bonds of life.

My late father acquired a burial place for himself on the Mount of Olives beside his wife Hannule and his son Avraham, but because of the security situation during that period, the roads to the Mount of Olives were blocked, and they could not bury the dead in that cemetery. Thus, he found his last resting place in the Sanhedriya cemetery. When we left Bikkur Holim hospital, his friend Yehuda Russo explained that according to the Jerusalem custom the son does not walk behind his father’s coffin and he ordered me to return home. I did as he instructed me. I assumed and hoped that at a later time it would be possible to bury him on the Mount of Olives. In the meantime, the word ‘provisional’ was written on his tombstone, according to custom. However, in practice, the temporary has become permanent.

My sister Kokhava, daughter of Victoria and Haim, was born in Jerusalem in 1923. She married Eliyahu Kabali in 1941 and gave birth to three children: Drora, Nitza and Yitzchak. The family lived in Makor Barukh, not far from us.

On July 8th 1948, the first ceasefire of the War of Independence failed, and the battles carried on for ten days around the country and for eleven days in Jerusalem. On the third day, Israeli forces attacked several commanding positions that held the village of Ein Karem. The mission was assigned to the Yehonatan Squadron, which included young Gadna cadets. On that day, while we were sitting shiva and mourning our father’s death, ten Jews were killed in Jerusalem in the exchange of artillery fire. Nine of them were soldiers and one was a civilian – my sister
Kohava, who was killed by a shell that penetrated directly into our house in Yegia Kapayim. May her soul rest in peace.

We would like to thank all those who assisted us:

Dr Avner Peretz, who responded to our request, and took upon himself the task of deciphering, transcribing, and translating the diary, and thus turned the inaccessible text into a comprehensible one, thus ‘deciphering of the mystery’. We are grateful to him for writing an introduction, and adding a glossary, and an index, and for editing the diary and preparing the book for printing.

To my cousin Raphael Mimran and his wife Tzila, who in their enthusiasm, would not wait for the translation to be finished and sat night and day to make a preparatory translation of every section that Dr Peretz had deciphered and reproduced. To all the others, family members, friends and acquaintances who showed great interest in the translation and publication of the diary, and assisted by their advice, comments, pictures and knowledge of the family.30

Haim Nahmias’s Diary

[252] One of the more bitter days of my life that I will never ever forget is the 17th Adar 5677 [11 March 1917] at dawn when I was already being sought [the authorities had already dogged my footsteps and had revealed my hiding place]. My friend, who was like a brother to me, and a neighbour, Señor Itzhak Issaschar Sarfaty who was the headman of the village of Nahlat Tsiyon, advised me to present myself for military service. And I went without thinking too deeply about it, and without doubting the explanations put before me, I did not waste any time in doing this on that day.

So it happened that after I had registered in the office I was sent to the military police [he transliterates the term in Turkish] under the command of Ramzi Bey, a man of short stature and a serious mien with burning eyes, who did not normally raise his head unless a woman suddenly appeared before him to make a request, and she was always welcomed very nicely and never
refused. When I entered the building of the military police that evening I came upon thousands of uncivilized people whose barbaric cries could deafen the hearer. A choking stench arose from them. Their appearance would terrify the world. A despairing encounter, not to put too fine a point on it! All of these people had been gathered together in the police headquarters ready to be sent to the army and I almost lost my senses. I didn’t know if what I was seeing with my own eyes was being revealed to me in a dream or awake, for I did not ever expect to find myself in this filthy and ill-mannered company.

Very soon I felt very weak and I also felt that my end would come if I continued to endure like this. Therefore I gathered together some new strength in order to break away from this malevolence, even though I felt as if I had fallen from a great height into a deep chasm when I found myself in the heart of that disaster, begging in vain for a shelter. From moment to moment my situation worsened. In the end, it was Ramzi Bey himself, the commander of that place, who pointed me to one of the rooms, intending for me to find some friends there. And indeed he had not misled me, and in that room I did find Senor Raphael Meyuhas and Senor Rahamim Shako who were also deeply in despair, but even so in a better condition than I was because they had already been there for few days before me. My neighbour, the headman, was running between the door and the window like a person under the influence of drugs, to make it easier for me and get me out of this, to spend the night in my house but unfortunately he met with a refusal because the commander was not prepared even to listen to his requests.

We spent the night in deep darkness. From time to time I begged for death but I was not privileged to discover it. It is impossible to describe those moments and to add to the trouble of my heart, above all a melancholy heart like mine, for only eight days earlier I had buried my dearest wife who had left me and dealt me a deathly blow.

The 18th Adar [12 March] arrived, the time when many women and children stood at the windows with baskets, bottles of milk,
cakes and other things in their hands. For me the whole of this scene with these people was a shock, since I was sure that my fate was the worst of all, because Hannula, my Hannula, would not appear here like the other women did. She has fallen asleep for eternity, she is resting in her grave and she will not come to stand at the side of her husband who at this moment is in such a despairing situation. But after a few moments my neighbour Madame Rachel and her sister Tamar Trabolos offered me cakes and oranges. After I had received this, together with some comforting words that dampened my feverish feelings a little, they left me. In this way the day passed and also the night of the 19th of Adar when we accepted all the unpleasantness as taken for granted.

When the 19th dawned I was not the same person that I had been beforehand, because I had not really mastered my thoughts. My body shivered like a reed when I thought about my little ones, the orphans; it was not enough that they had been torn from their mother’s arms but also from their father whom they had thought to comfort them. Now even their father would not come home to embrace them. How a family and a home have been destroyed, those that endeavoured to behave fittingly, ready to live a happy life, and now a catastrophe! Everything is ill-fated.

In the evening of the 19th I was allowed to go home to sleep after a Greek acquaintance of mine had interceded for me, or it is more correct to say, because of his wife. We have already said that never was there a woman who left with empty hands. This was the result of an entire day’s trouble of my loyal employee David Barfi who did not rest until they had achieved a night of liberty for me on the 20th.

After I had embraced my youngsters, whom I had found in a state of despair, before dawn broke on the 20th, I prepared myself to go to the Mount of Olives with my mother. We were accompanied by a neighbour, Señor Aharon Seri. We reached the grave of the unfortunate Hannula, and immediately I embraced the stones and I wet them with tears of blood. It is too difficult to describe everything I felt when I saw how my dear noble wife had been buried in a graveyard at the age of 35, before her time,
leaving five small children. She sowed but she did not reap, she laboured but she did not benefit. At the time that she should have seen goodness, she left the world and joined those who were resting in the world of truth, leaving darkness and gloom behind her. In the end I left her grave, after the clock showed me that I was obliged to return to the military headquarters, leaving my heart and my soul there. I returned to the military headquarters with a bitter heart and almost without breath.

The 21st dawned and we were ordered to appear before four doctors who were waiting for us. [254] Those four doctors efficiently examined 50 people. Five of them were let go and the rest were made to stand in a line even though they were suffering from various things, accompanied by guards and with special supervision. We were taken to the same headquarters in which we were placed into a single room that had been made ready for us, together with some cruel guards. When one of us asked to go outside [to attend to his needs], he had to receive permission and among ten who had requested this only one was allowed to go out. You always had to have pretzels or cookies [with you] in order to receive permission.

In the afternoon of the Sabbath, 22nd Adar 1917, we were organized into a line and they counted [heads] as one counts goats, five or six times, while the merciless sun struck us cruelly. [In spite of] our thirst for water to quench the great heat, we were not allowed to go to the nearby tap whose water was flowing.

The move to leave and part from our beloved city and from our beloved family caused weeping and sighs and groans, as if the end of the world had come. Every man, one by one, wanted to embrace his children before going on his way but he was not allowed this joy, only to see what was before him and to wet handkerchiefs with the pain of parting, without knowing where to and when. The gendarmes were beating the backs of those unfortunate people with their rifles.

The officers, holding whips in their hands, without wanting to leave them idle, joyfully laid them on the backs of those who had been sent to the army. In this way we reached a station surrounded by a great many soldiers and gendarmes as if we were thieves and
murderers. After we had paid the introductory fee twice according to their official instructions, for today they say ‘fee’ and the next day they refuse to take and shove you into the army. At any rate, they are concerned only with inflicting great and bitter suffering at home, houses filled with children without a penny to their name because no person deserves money other than them. But they had already promised me to support our family with 30 grush\textsuperscript{31} a month per person.

When we were already in the train, or more accurately, pushed roughly into the railcars – for, to tell the truth, every one of us was gazing at his family with such great longing in the face of the cruelty of preventing us from parting with any kind of embrace from our children – with the ringing of a bell the train announced that we were going on our way. The railcar was filled with shouts and cries, weeping and sighs and groans of pain that would break the heart of all who heard them. It would be impossible even for a person who had a heart of stone not to weep. We turned towards the place that we had left and knew that our hope had gone and we had already been wrenched cruelly from our beloved city and our family.\textsuperscript{32}

By the time the train reached the first station, Battir,\textsuperscript{33} two people were already missing from our railcar. They had thrown themselves out of the window and run away. [255] At the second station, Dayr Aban,\textsuperscript{34} we were told that many had run away from other railcars, something that made our escort very angry indeed. He was an Armenian officer called Istefan Effendi. He took up his weapon in his right hand and began to beat the guards very cruelly, asking how they could have allowed these people to escape? To tell the truth, his words were not unreasonable, because money played the most important role in Turkey, even among people of the highest orders, and it goes without saying for the barefoot and almost naked guards, who would wait to see who of those sitting in the railcar would throw out a cigarette butt so that they could pick it up and satisfy their desire for tobacco. This was also the case with orange peel.

There were twelve Jews in our railcar, all of them noble and handsome and pure of heart, who remembered and took the trouble to maintain the evening prayer with a \textit{minyan} [quorum]. One
guard, who was called Ubrukh, and who managed to receive the largest portion of whipping from his officer, began to order everybody to keep quiet, in order to prevent anyone getting up to pray. Because of this the name Ubrukh stuck to him for it means ‘sit down’ in Arabic. With this word Ubrukh commanded everybody to sit down. But because we Jews were devoted to our prayer we continued with it in the name of ‘Kiddush hashem’, martyrdom, and we did not stop. The cries rose to such an extent to the point that the Sergeant Major appeared and after he had heard what was happening he supported us and therefore we won our battle.

We spent the first night in the railcar in terrible distress and crowding, because everyone was crowded together, head and feet, with our bodies beaten and wounded. We placed the blankets on each others’ backs because some could not lift them due to exhaustion.

Finally, with morning, we saw a station and its name was Dera, which was in the Galilee. What beautiful and joyful fields! We saw high mountains and streams of water flowing from them whose sound did not cease. In short, very much joy, but not the kind that our hearts could really savour nor could we relish this landscape. Even if they had put us into Gan Eden, Paradise, this would be no more than a black hole for us, like the pit into which the righteous Joseph was thrust. At this station we recognized a Jew, the honourable gentleman Dr Neiman, who held out his hand the moment he saw us with a warm blessing of welcome and almost lifted our dark spirits.

After we got down from the railcar we were placed in a line and counted. We were sitting in the field and given breakfast: some crushed and cooked wheat [bulgar] divided among the groups of ten people at a time, each one according to the rules of food distribution and I could not bring myself to taste the abominable military portion.

After breakfast everybody was placed in a line and counted many times because the arithmetic never worked out, there were always more or fewer. [256] After they had grown tired of trying to reach the correct number we were put back into the closed railcars, surrounded by escorting guards. Our Ubrukh was placed
over the guards. He was very hostile to us and his purpose was only to cause us suffering and not to allow us to forget his instructions, that is, not to repeat the previous day’s prayer.

The train went on its way, passing through various stations, accompanied by the sound of the water that didn’t stop for a moment, and the scene we saw lifted our hearts. But we were not able to enjoy the freshness and delight of nature, particularly we Jerusalemites who are used to dryness, even though here such a great treasure was revealed to us. To tell the truth, we were like a hungry lion who sees his fine prey, but he is chained up and cannot move either forwards or backwards from where he is.

The second night passed with our being a little calmer, because we realized that this is our fate and we have to bear it. We cleared the bench in the railcar for the weaker one among us so that he could lie on it. Three others were underneath the benches and the rest were left crowded together with bent knees until the morning, when a very important station appeared which was called Afula.35 Here too we discovered a Jewish brother, Señor Yellin, the son of the honourable gentleman David Yellin, the head of the Hebrew schools in Jerusalem.36 After pleasant greetings from this gentleman we were taken off the railcars and once again counted like goats and after a short while we were free to stroll in the town. We found a lot of displaced Armenians with their wives and children who were offering bread for sale to the travellers. We reached one of the shops and there they sold us yoghurt.

After we had taken it I went to a barber to cut my hair that was bothering me a great deal. Before the barber had finished his work I saw the cursed Ubrukh the gendarme and in his hand was a big stick, taller than him. In his need to take revenge on me this miserable man commanded that he forbids the haircut and he raised his stick. But because the barber was a very strong young lad he fought with this stupid man, Ubrukh, and they were separated after a few moments and the barber completed his work.

Here, too, they offered us breakfast in cans, but here our commander found it necessary to separate the Jews so that they should not be mixed with the other soldiers. In the morning we reached the station of Damascus. After we got off the railcars we
were taken to the transport division surrounded, as usual, by gendarmes. When we arrived the officer ordered the gendarmes to lie down and every one of them received his portion of beatings on the soles of his feet. When the sergeant’s turn came he received three times the number of blows than the others. This was because it became known that one of the passengers had escaped with his help, or to be more exact with the help of one gold Napoleon according to what the same sergeant admitted afterwards. \[257\] After the beatings had ceased the latter was handed to a special guard and sent to trial.

We were counted again many times and afterwards we were shown the hut in which we were destined to spend our days in Damascus. In the field, which was very broad, there were nine huts of 15 metres long and 10 metres wide, built very simply from mud. We were put into the main hut and we put our bundles, which we had taken off our shoulders, down onto a mat spread on the ground, and we sat down to rest a little. We spent the night in great distress after we lay down to sleep. It was not possible to close an eye. From the ground upon which our bodies rested, all sorts of ‘wonderful things’ arose and fleas, lice and mice flowed from every hole. Even our makeshift pillows rose and fell like a mechanical lever because of the mice that passed under our heads. But we were destined to suffer not only this affliction; we had also to suffer from the men. Going outside was difficult and it involved a great deal of discomfort. You had to ask the sergeant permission five or six times until the permission was granted and we were allowed to go outside and urinate, always accompanied by five people. But the moment we received the permission to go outside it was also given to all the nine huts, which included close to 1000 men amongst whom were all sorts of barbaric people who did not experience any kind of misery in the these conditions I have described, because for them this kind of life was like paradise. All these thousand people had to use the 15 latrines that were allotted and you were lucky to find a space there easily. The moments of freedom passed while the whips of the police began to fly. In this way we were forced many times to return [to the huts] as we had left them and to wait for the next time to go out.
During the day we were able to receive a loaf made of wheat flour which, at a different time, one would have cleansed for oneself of harmful ingredients. The loaf was so small that it left nothing but the taste in our mouth. We tried to throw our food ration to the dog that had been there but to our chagrin even the dog didn’t find it appropriate to eat, even though he tried to do so a few times. But after he had sniffed it a few times he gave up on it and he left it without even tasting it.  

Damascus was one of the cities known in the Arab world, which in the past we would regularly mention our desire to go and visit. But now we were there without being able to see it. This city was famous in its own right but not for us. It was shown to be very hostile to us. It happened many times that they brought a number of foodstuffs for sale to the huts but [it was] pitilessly expensive. [258] When the price was so high they didn’t sell anything and truth to tell they could not sell it even for a lower price, because not only the vendor would have to be supported by our trade. The halvah and the cheese that we were sold also supported a number of the local non-commissioned officers for the permission that they gave him [the vendor] to enter the huts, and so it was that everything was sold for a very high price.

When the doctor appeared we were ordered to get rid of our beards immediately and to go to the bathhouse. The columns were made ready and vicious [-looking] straps appeared. When we saw this we asked: why have they taken out the straps right now? Are they going to tie us up? And indeed we were not mistaken. Many straps were bound around arms throughout the column. However, thank God, we were not honoured in this way because they said that Jews don’t escape and that they are also esteemed and noble and have paid the [military] fine. This was on Friday the evening before the Rosh hodesh, first of the month of Nissan, when we went out to the bathhouse, accompanied by so strong [a contingent of] guards as if we were murderers. We stood together in the same column with those whose arms were bound. Finally we reached the bathhouse and we heard the most shocking screams there: two savage men were plucking beards unflinchingly with their razors. Among us Jews there were five
who were very religious, to the point that they were prepared to sacrifice everything that they had in order that their beards should not be touched. We tried all sorts of stratagems from our side in order to save their beards but to no avail. A nasty gendarme and a barber stood opposite our column with his accursed razor. We begged him to accept money to leave the religious men with their beards. The business was done and the money was immediately paid. A few moments passed and the one barber, accompanied by a medical orderly, appeared and claimed the beards of those who had not yet been shaven, at any price. At this those Jews turned very pale and we begged them to give up their beards to the barber because had this not been done they would begin to lay their whips on our naked bodies, because our clothes had been sent away for disinfection. Finally the beards were shaved off and there was nothing left for us to do but to remain completely naked to our very flesh, until eight o’clock when our clothes were returned, missing many items, like shirts, shoes and so on. The clothes arrived and everybody fell upon them like thieves, each and every one to grab his clothes out of a savage and unpleasant confusion. Therefore many of us were left without certain specific articles of clothing. When we were dressed they brought bundles of straps and they began tying together the arms of most of the men and we were returned to our hut.

We spent the night in the second hut that had been specially prepared for us, those coming back from the bathhouse, without forgetting the two people who had escaped from among those whose hands were bound, and the non-commissioned officers were afforded their measure of beatings with a very hard stick on their legs. The day of the Sabbath, the first of the month of Nissan [24 March], was a very pleasant day from the morning. [259] I in particular felt greater pressure than anybody else, wanting to embrace my children even if I were to pay for this with all my possessions. After we had spoken to a number of people an idea occurred to us to submit a petition to the major [Bin-bashi] with my request to pay the ransom if this were possible with a pair of shoes, and that he should let me know how many pairs and within how much time, and I would be prepared to accept the conditions
that he would set put for me. When the petition was ready and after I had paid the necessary fee, and after I had implemented the [necessary] steps for the petition to come before the major, he promised me that he would do everything he could for me. At the same time, once he heard what I had done, an Armenian from Jerusalem made haste to initiate the same thing; he was a maker of horseshoes.

The following morning we were taken with our bundles outside our huts into a very long line. When our turn came, with the papers they had handed out to us in our hands, ready to go on our way, of course I was the one who shouted loudly that I had submitted a petition and I wanted to meet the major.

After a few comings and goings, and also having given something to the sergeants in order to achieve my request, here I am in front of the major. He asked me what I wanted and I explained to him about the petition that I had submitted the previous day and that I was waiting for an answer and now they were taking me on a journey. Immediately he ordered the secretary to hold back the two [men] who had submitted the petitions but the secretary replied that he was not able to do so because the names had already been erased from his notebook. Therefore the major turned to me and assured me that the petition would bear fruit and that I should not worry about the order to set out on my journey to Aleppo because I would be returned from there in a few days’ time. I asked him if I could add a few words but the secretary was very hostile and had already indicated with his eyes that the matter was concluded. Three guards had already appeared and accompanied me to the column that was leaving for the journey.

In relation to the second request by the Armenian: he was separated from the column five minutes before we began our march by an Armenian officer who had acceded to his request to leave him there. And so I saw that privileges were given to the one who was regarded as worthy and not to everybody.

We began to march to the station after a large number [of men] had had their hands bound. We reached the station where we were thrown like stones into the railcars, in a crush that cannot be described, to the point of suffocation, sitting one upon the other
because these railcars were not passenger cars but freight cars or animal cars. Therefore we spent the night great misery.

We passed the stations of Tu’albak, Mas’oudia, Muslemiya and many others whose names we could not see because of the dark night. Considering the terrible crush in which we found ourselves, 50 people to each railcar, we were unable to decipher the names of the stations that we were passing. The day dawned and we stopped at a station called Ariak. We got off there and went into a very wide field in which they began to count us without ever coming to the correct answer. The number was always less than it should be. Finally some food was brought to us and we sat down, ten people to each group, around the military ration.

It was as if the vapour of hell arose from this field and the sun was burning from above until we all felt very bad. This is how the day went by until the evening. When evening came we were brought to the railcars. We were squashed together like sardines in a barrel and the journey began while the locomotive sounded its whistles. At midnight we reached Homets and afterwards Hamah. They took us to eat when everybody’s eyes were closed. We were cruelly exhausted and we ate our military ration and the train went along its way like an eagle. At dawn we had stopped at a station that was crowded with people. Among the crowd we saw a Jew. We lost no time in waving to him to come towards us and we immediately gave him a letter to send to the Chief Rabbi, the Honourable Hizkiyahu Shabtai, and in it there was a request that he do something for us as we approach the Festival of Passover, if it were possible for him to remove us from the transport section.

Organized into a column we were brought to various mosques in which we were divided, some here and some there. Oh! A miserable mosque whose walls brought sorrow to our hearts. We wanted to be close to people but there were only wretched and despised Arabs, and to be in their company was worse than death. The week that we spent in this mosque was one of terrible suffering. To tell the truth, if our stay there had been prolonged by even a few days I do not know what our end would have been.
On Friday we were told to go the bathhouse. We went out to the bathhouse after one of the 18 Jews among us, S. Shapira, who fell ill, was taken away by the medical services. We got to the cruel bathhouse in which, to tell the truth, it needed a spade to scrape all the mud sticking to our legs as we tramped along. It was very difficult to get the mud off them. We had to pay a bathhouse attendant in order to avoid washing. And so we spent the whole of the Friday in this dark bathhouse. We paid an attendant for his supervision even though he did not go into the bathhouse. In truth they say: he who goes into a bathhouse will not emerge without sweating. But we came out of the bathhouse without sweating and we left after shaving our beards with a blunt blade. From there we were taken to a broad and well-built barracks resembling a palace and then and there we lay upon planks with our bundles. Immediately we prepared a letter to the Chief Rabbi because we hadn’t seen where the first letter had been swallowed up. This letter was taken by a pleasant Jewish boy who had some job to do in the palace. He promised us faithfully that he would take whatever steps were necessary and appropriate so that we should be taken out to freedom the following day. When night came we were all very weary after everything that had happened to us and we wanted to sleep a little. [261] After we had put our heads down on our so-called pillows our eyes closed but it was impossible to sleep. Out came communities of very red fleas that fell upon our bodies without mercy and sucked away the little blood that still remained in us. It seemed that we could see how the fleas danced joyfully, having finally found new guests to ensure that they would not be prevented from fulfilling their needs.

With all of this we thought, let them do as they please, and we tried to sleep at any cost. Oh, what a dreadful night. We managed to get to three o’clock (Turkish time) and the sergeants with wooden sticks in their hands began to rain blows on the backs of the [men in the] rows in which we were arranged. From the first blow all of us were already on our feet and on our faces was the question what has happened? Immediately a staff sergeant appeared with a flashlight in his hand and he called out the names
of those who had to go out. In twenty minutes we were taken out with our bundles on our shoulders. Food was handed out to us and with closed eyes and in the freezing cold and the dampness that was utterly unpleasant, we stood in line the entire night until one o’clock in the morning [sic] when we were taken to the train station in the darkness, stepping and stumbling, accompanied by various military police, very oppressed by those who would yell ‘Yanash, yanash’ (‘Quickly quickly’) and immediately lay into us with their batons on our backs that would stick to someone who was unlucky. Then there were other police who would shout ‘Yavash, yavash’ (‘Slowly slowly’) and they also used their whips cruelly. Without knowing what to do, yanash or yavash, fast or slow, we reached the station after we had been waiting for eight hours under the open sky, freezing with cold, but thanks to the Blessed Lord we did not become ill. After we had remained in the station for about an hour and a half we went onto a railcar without being allowed to approach the vendors of bread or bagels that we wanted to buy as food for the journey, in their [their superiors’] fear that the vendor would take some of us into his tray... [ellipsis Nahmias’s].

After it had sounded its whistle indicating the beginning of the journey, the train leapt forth like an eagle just as an Arab attempted a jump and in the wink of an eye he disappeared through the window and was outside, in spite of the three policemen with the rifles in their hands, snoring within a few moments deep in sleep. And so another young man leaps with such ease from the window, he also tried to do this, but everybody knows that ‘fools rush in where angels fear to tread’. All of his efforts were of no avail. In this way the Great Sabbath passed. Meanwhile we were still hoping that perhaps the Chief Rabbi would remove us from the fortification in Aleppo, that they would hurry and take us out at midnight. On the evening of the Great Sabbath we reached Salahiye, a place in which, after many repeated head counts but without ever reaching the correct number, we were put inside a barracks, which was a miserable place whose floor was earth and sand that became mire because of the water that was dripping from the barrels of drinking water.
Not only this, but above us there was another level in which there were other soldiers who did not take the trouble to go down in order to urinate. They performed their bodily functions in this place itself where people were living on the floor underneath, forced to receive this gift. This was in addition to all the ‘good’ that we had in this place like fleas, worms, lice, insects, filth and stench. It was everything with nothing left out until we had to say the blessing of *Hagomel* when we left this place.

On top of all of this we were very depressed because we had been separated from a large number of our Jewish comrades so that from among eighteen Jews we were only seven who had been taken to the barracks. For two days we longed to see the sky but who would be so fortunate? We remained there suffocated among almost a thousand men, all of them savages. On the third day we were taken outside during tallying and division of soldiers, following which we were also separated, to be taken to a different barracks. Our joy was boundless for perhaps we would emerge from such terrible darkness but unfortunately the barracks to which we were taken was seven times worse than the one we had known, in dreadful crowding without being able to breathe and a terrible burden on the heart. We attempted to give a few coins to the guard so that he would at least allow the seven Jews to remain together because all the barbarians who surrounded us wanted to be in our midst in order to steal our money because our clothes indicated to them that we had money. But the guard was not one to do the right thing, and he separated us in a certain way: he put us together in one corner on the upper level and it was a small consolation that we were still together. We were very hungry because the military ration in this hostile city was one dry cracker that the worms had already penetrated and left only the crust on the outside, nothing else. The rations seemed to us always to be intended for the dogs of the place and it really seemed that they were cared for and fat like someone who had been well fed by the military rations.

Four hours later tens of sick soldiers were taken out and sent to the hospital, among them one of our friends, Señor Raphael Shako. He was taken to the hospital in which two people lay in
one bed. Because of this, many ill people remained [in the barracks]. They did not want to complain about their pain so as not to be taken to the hospital to lie there, one suffering from fever together with one suffering from typhus, put together without distinction. When night came upon the world and we were [lying] there with closed eyes, our legs and heads crowded together, we heard terrifying cries because thieves had stolen seven gold pounds from someone, then four pounds and many other things in the same way. In an instant the entire world was yelling, thousands of people but, as usual, without any outcome.

The next day after we had made the acquaintance of one of the corporals, he behaved nicely towards us and allowed us to go out and walk about in the nearby town, accompanied by one guard. [263] Of course and as things went, we paid both of them for the good fortune that we had been privileged to obtain, and in the wink of an eye we went to the town. There we found mostly good things. After we had sat down in a café and drunk some tea we calmed down a little, and went to walk around in the gardens of fruit trees that were there. We breathed fresh air which certainly helped to dry the stench that arose in us. The town was almost in ruins because a short time ago its Armenian citizens had been banished from it and in their place Armenians who had been exiled from other places were brought here.

The time came to return to our prison and with trembling hearts we went back to our dwelling that seemed to us to be a burial while we were still alive. Within five minutes we had already forgotten the pleasant things we had enjoyed, as if it were not us who had spent that time of well-being. With great difficulty we set the soles of our feet in that place. The night was already coming down and spread its darkness on the wasteland. While some of the people were already asleep we heard some very strange cries. We were convinced that some kind of theft had taken place and in the wink of an eye we had already put our hands on our chests to check that we were not among the victims, but we soon realized what had happened. Five people had done some business with one of the sergeants, having paid a certain sum in order to be allowed to escape during the night, and after
they had paid the agreed sum they had gone out to freedom. After they had taken a few steps, this same sergeant told his companion, who very quickly ran to help certain guards to catch the deserters. Within a few moments those were returned and on the orders of the captain who commanded the place, a veritable rain of beatings came down upon them, without their even being aware of where the batons were coming from. Many batons were broken but others had already been ordered. After all these beatings the five were tortured together, in the sense that all of their personal needs had to be performed together. This was the most savage custom. And because of all of this dreadfulness I, in particular, suffered a terrible pain in my heart for the whole night, added to which was the thirst that increased my suffering, and above all the information that came to our ears that in the morning we would have to go on foot, because there were not enough railway lines here. Thousands of worrying thoughts vexed me; should I put an end to my life, but I pushed this away from my mind because of my desire to see my children and the condition they were in. Just as many times in the past, I wanted to die, but I quickly remembered the popular saying that this too will pass – with the hope that everything would pass but there was also a need to gird oneself with patience.

Morning came and we found ourselves already organized into columns in order to go on our way. We saw that among the 600 people of our camp, there were the rest of the Jews that we had left in Aleppo. Our joy rose boundlessly and we once again met the entire group. Of course we told and we heard about what had passed during the days that we had been separated. In this way we marched a certain distance until we reached the slopes of a mountain. The officer who was with us ordered us to climb up the mountain so as to shorten the journey. [264] This was a very pitiless path that took away our last breath and dried our palates in a way that cannot be described. To all of this was added the ‘good’ behaviour of the brutal sergeants who brought down cudgels on the backs of the weak men, combined with yells ordering them to march four-by-four, but oh! how can we march even two-by-two, when you have to jump over the rocks with
your bundles on your shoulders and your heart pounding endlessly.

After we had crossed the mountain in front of us we reached a plain in which there was a stream of water. The coolness and clearness of its waters made our miserable selves happy, for there was no breath left in our nostrils. Without waiting for an order from the commander we took our bundles off our shoulders and when we sat down on the banks of the river we dipped the last of our crackers into the water so that we could eat them. I lost no time in taking off my filthy underwear and put on clean ones. I washed the dirty ones in the river and I spread them out in the sun and waited for them to dry but right away the order was given to get up so I gathered together my wet clothes and after I had put them into my kitbag I joined the column and began to march. After walking for a half an hour we saw another terrifying mountain whose peak was in the sky and we had already received word that we had to cross this mountain. Oh what a catastrophe! This mountain was doubly higher than the one that we had left behind us but what could we do? Patience!

We began to climb, as our breath became shorter and our hearts pounded ceaselessly. The dust in that place left its terrible impression and changed a man’s appearance to that of a beast. There was no one among us who did not look different. All of us were in the same miserable condition, white became black from the dust and black became white. Even though we were walking together with our friends all the time we could not recognize each other. Our eyes were so full of dust and dirt as were our ears and nostrils as well. But something amazing happened: there were other younger Arabs who leapt upon the mountains like deer without showing any fatigue. Two of this wretched type intended to run away; immediately the commander followed behind them on his horse and right away fired his rifle, until eventually he was able to catch up with them and turned the group of five people bound together to seven. While the escape of these two was going on, and until they were caught, we could rest. And to tell the truth, if this miracle had not happened we would certainly have had to climb that mountain, something that took four hours on foot.
Among the Jews there were two Ashkenazim who were very filled with Torah, and they kept us busy with verses from Psalms. For example, ‘Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.’ For David himself, may he rest in peace, there were no torments that did not inflict themselves on him, even after he had become a famous king. And therefore what are we, as opposed to a king? They taught us that our complaining about life is sinful and we only have to gird ourselves with patience. Thanks to these words we could [bear to] pass the time and so we reached a certain river into whose waters we plunged ourselves in the wink of an eye, and washed our faces until their colour had changed and we could be observed once again as people and not as animals.

After a half hour’s rest we went on our way since nearby was the town Hassan Bagri. When we were already in the centre of this miserable, deserted Armenian town the commander asked where he could put the guests he had brought with him. After a few moments he came back and ordered us all to go through a certain door that he showed us. The entire company began to go in until our turn came and we found ourselves inside with pounding hearts crying and shouting to our comrades to join us so that we should not be separated and we would be protected from the threat of theft. But we were out of sight, and our companions were not amongst us and we remained further behind. When the half of the people had gone inside we heard cries that there was ‘no more space’ and that everybody was crowded in there, one on top of the other, but the sergeants who had cudgels and guns in their hands didn't want to know about ‘no space’. With kicking and beating on the bodies of those who cried ‘there’s no space’ they forced them to go inside. When another group went in, already a quarter of the people were inside so that it was impossible even to put one upon the other and no more could be packed in because 600 men were shoved into a stable of ten metres by seven that could only hold 300 men. But like a dog running away from beatings they did not flinch and went in, stepping on people that were already inside, tramping on their
heads, hands and eyes without being able to distinguish them. There was no choice, we had to go in. The darkness was terrible. The brutality was unbearable. The rain of blows on the eyes and heads or anywhere did not stop. We thought that our end was near. Everything that we had suffered previously was gold compared to what was happening here. But everything was in vain, the sergeants were shouting to go inside and lashing [everyone]. In the end we realized that it was impossible to go in like this because the screaming that came from inside due to the crowding was too shocking. But as I have said, those [sergeants] didn’t know the meaning of ‘no space’.

Then they began to push those that were beside the door in a barbaric way with rifles and whips until a scream arose that was so terrifying that it would make a stone weep. All of them were begging for mercy but were met only with refusal. The commander went away to enjoy himself in the company of some Armenian woman while the soldiers’ bodies were squashed under so much whipping but none of this caused this great Lord to feel heat or cold, in other words, it had no effect on him. How great was the pain, how terrible was the evil! When I saw that our bodies were caught between the hammer and the anvil I turned to my companion and I saw him weeping. What is wrong dear Raphael? Why are you weeping? See, they are pulling out my only remaining eye. Oh, my dear friend, what can I say to you? The terrible beating I received on my eye has caused me dreadful suffering. [266] While he was still saying this I also felt a thrashing on my back. As was my custom I asked one comrade, Rabbi David, whether he could say anything from the Torah that would pacify him [his friend]. How great was the catastrophe, how great was the evil! I discovered that this man was also weeping. Here I lost my senses when I saw how such a holy man weeping while his tears poured down his cheeks and wet the new growth of his beard. We all raised our hands to heaven to ask for mercy. But from whom? There was no one to turn to. Who would be fortunate enough to see death? But we were not favoured with this good fortune to achieve such a precious treasure! This favour was not granted to us. And so I turned simperingly to the sergeant
who was beating us and said a few words to him in Arabic. God helped me and the sergeant turned to listen to me. Without delay I offered him two majids for the two of us, a payment that would allow us to sleep in the street. In the wink of an eye this gentleman wasted no time in receiving the gift from us, from me and from Raphael Meyuhas, together with another Arab who had joined us, who had also paid like us, and the sergeant put us into a very low space underneath the wooden veranda. We spread our blankets on the ground and managed a little rest without considering the dampness in this place. And who knows what other things there were there, like frogs, worms and all sorts of insects climbing on our bodies. And so we spent the night in terrifying dreams and horrible visions in which we saw extraordinary scenes. We felt as if they were already leading us to the slaughter or to an even more terrible place. But all this passed and the darkness of the night melted away, while the day displayed the much-awaited beautiful rays of the sun.

The preparations to move out were completed and within a few moments we were in a wide field in which a camp had been set up in one long line. After they had counted us many times, always angry at not being able to reach the correct number, they gave two of us at a time pieces of thin cake. This was supposed to be our loaf. This thing, which would not be given to a baby as a piece of fruit, had to sustain us for twenty-four hours during which we had to march! But then our commander acceded and released us from the line, a group of Christians, all of them well-to-do traders, together with us Jews, and he handed us to one of the guards who took us to the required place. In the meantime the commander was busy doing a good whipping and breaking batons and whips on the bodies of some savage Kurds who had stolen a purse and a certain sum of money from the commander himself. But all of the whips’ toil was to no avail because the beatings left no impression on these bodies, as tough as wooden poles, dressed so strangely, as if rocks had been beaten. In the end we left the camp and went on our way, accompanied by a guard detail that the officer had allocated to us.
At 12 o’clock European time we reached a village. There we stopped beside flowing water that enlivened the heart of all who saw it. We bought eggs from the villagers, we made a fire and boiled them. After our meal we began to march without being restricted. We were very happy to be separated from the column of those ‘animals’. We looked like a group of tourists. With great enjoyment, with song and elation we went along our way. The mountains we saw were so high; it had not occurred to us that there were mountains like these in the world. All of them were covered with dense forests and also foggy with very heavy cloud. We were accompanied by a cheerful river whose water was sweet. We turned to look around us and saw other mountains laden with so much snow that to our Jerusalemite eyes it was miraculous, because in Jerusalem a year in which snow fell was very rare.

While we were busy looking at what was happening along the way we reached Mamora,\(^{31}\) about which we already knew because it is a hub of rail transport. We were soon given some tents, one tent for 15 people, since they had separated us, while the rest of the camp had to march to the disinfection area because they were filthy. We remained under the open sky until 10 o’clock, European time. Afterwards they showed us the tents that were awaiting us and in which we spent the night very satisfied, having been relieved of the freezing cold, particularly since we are people of the East who were not used to this kind of cold. When we thought of all the things that had happened [to us] we felt as if we were in paradise. We spent two days in Mamora. We alone had been given the tents, for not only did the rest of the soldiers have to sleep on the ground, they also had to undress in the middle of the field while their clothes were taken to be disinfected, so that they remained naked without any covering for over four hours.

After a short while of sober reflection the realization of our distance from Jerusalem dawned on us, as if we had been plunged from the highest heights to the lowest depths. After we had begun our lives with so much joy and satisfaction, now we found ourselves thrust far away and in despair, without anybody close to our heart. It was all terrible, it was all miserable. And so we all thought about the position in which we had been placed. But I
was the most miserable of all. I had lost my noble lady Hannula before I had left. I do not know with whom I had left my children. I only have a mother and I don’t know whether she could bear the burden of children for she has no more strength. She has had her share of burdens and now she has reached the time to have a little pleasure rather than becoming reacquainted with pain in her old age and to begin once again to look after tender young children. All of this passed in my mind and caused me to shed a flood of tears without being able to stop. Dejectedly I remembered our house in which so many of our friends used to come together to have fun and enjoy themselves.

Certainly that house that used to be the most joyful of all was now perhaps the most sorrowful of all, struck down with grief. The children, who used to jump for great joy, are surely sitting in a corner without receiving a gift from anyone. Still toddlers, they do not know what has suddenly happened to the Nahmias house and family. How unfortunate I am! Today, two days before Passover, the 13th of Nissan [this is 1917], instead of being involved in the pleasant preparations for the agreeable festival ready to be enjoyed, instead of being busy with my successful business enterprises, here I am thrust between mountains whose appearance created terror in me, here in Mamora next to Adana, with nothing to my name. But this is what the Lord the Blessed Lord has decreed for us and we must accept it. While I was sunk in reflections such as these an Arab Jewish soldier appeared before me and suggested that without delay I should telegraph the Chief Rabbi of Adana to implement the necessary steps to remove us from the transport unit camp during Passover, or for the first night at least, when we reach Adana, since the preparations for the journey had almost been completed. And so it was that we lost no time in collecting money for the telegram. A few hours later we were already summoned to begin our journey, bundles on our shoulders, and we began to march. After we had been walking for about a half an hour we reached a kitchen and there we were given our rations, and this was the first time I had tasted a military ration that was possible to eat and not
entirely bad. All of us Jews ate, even the religious men Rabbi David and Rabbi Hirsch. They ate but they could not eat the meat, only the cooked dish.

After the meal we were already ready for our journey when the officer accompanying us asked us if we would like to eat more. We answered him that we were seventy [people], which was true. We began to march again and reached the station within half an hour. After this we sat down on our bundles. We waited for an hour until the train arrived while I, in spite of everything, was lost in thoughts that I didn’t want, but what medicine is there for this? They would not leave my mind. And so three hours passed but no train had yet arrived. A whisper went out around that there would not be any travelling today. Once we had heard this rumour it spread and we were told that it was true; we took up all our bundles again and returned to our place. This time all the Jews were saying: ‘any delay is for the best’.

Unfortunately they did not want to give us our tents for the night, and we spent the night in the field under the open sky, having many terrifying dreams and horrifying visions but it all passed thanks to the Blessed Lord and we remained in good health. In the morning we woke up to rain that did not stop, that fell on us and wet us to the very marrow of our bones. Instead of cooked food they handed out a portion of rusks, that had to be broken with a stone. [269] Since we had left Aleppo [we] had not seen bread apart from these broken rusks. They did not like to give them [to us] whole because when they were whole, we were not able to take out the good parts, but when they broke them they would give us one or two little pieces that will never ever amount to a half.

The movements for the journey began, the bundles were on the shoulders, and in a few moments we were already at the station. We were accompanied by constant rain and Rabbi Hirsch had not forgotten that this was the day of the burning of the hametz and without losing any time he made a small fire from a few slivers and this had to do for the burning of the hametz that he had collected from the Jews’ packs. We asked him, since we are forced to eat hametz on Passover what is the use of burning
hametz? His answer was that everyone was obliged to fulfil the obligation until the very last moment. [We did this until] 12.30 European time, the time the train began to move out, and we were already in the railcars. These made us feel human again, because they were well stocked and we sat down like human beings on comfortable benches. So we left Mamora and we reached Adana in the evening. We were allowed once again to alight at the station, but soon returned to other cars, animal cars that were also open, and we continued our journey without having met a single Jew at the station, anyone who would do us a favour and release us for the night of the *seder* as we had requested in our telegram from Mamora, or at least to give us a few commemorative *matzot* as we had asked for in our telegram.

At midnight we reached the station Kolakκ where we alighted with our bundles on our shoulders. We went on foot almost for an hour and a half and then reached a village called Kurd Mussa. We had just reached this accursed place and we felt very bad when we remembered that the night of Passover had just passed and into what terrible darkness we were plunged. Instead of singing the Haggadah we were jumping about with our bundles on our shoulders. Instead of the proper *matza*, we were breaking all the minor and major laws. Instead of maintaining the law and eating *matza* we were not able to feel our hands and feet. When we reached the village and after we had been organized into columns, the preparations for our meal began and I felt the most terrible anxiety in this tormenting darkness. What dreadful fortune! Is this the night of *shimurim*? I asked myself. I had begged for death many times. I would be happy to encounter it but good fortune was not my lot. I was sinking in a storm of emotions, reflecting on visions of despair which, to tell the truth, did not leave me and were even worse than those endured by others. Ultimately these wild, black [his reference is uncertain: wild, black thoughts or wild, black men] that forced me to awaken from my strange dreams when I saw how the guards were standing with their whips in their hands, ready to beat anybody who wasn’t hurrying to the meal, but who cared about food now? Even though we were very hungry after not having eaten for an
entire day we made the mistake of thinking think that Adana would save us.

With all of this, we wished to go to sleep out of sheer despair, but we didn’t know any place that would be suitable for sleep. At two o’clock in the morning those of us who had paid the military fine were separated from the savages, and of course without our having eaten, they [the NCOs?] took us to a very wide field and placed the unfortunate savages all around so that they could see how we had been settled in filth [of the field]. Even more than this, we could see the tents opposite without being allowed to go to sleep in them because our commander, a certain captain, whose appearance was like that of a murderer, was certain that he could get us to part with even more money because he said that we are rich and must pay so as to be able to sleep in the tents. It seemed clear that this was a type whose eyes were filled with disaster, who wants everything he sees, whether it be our clothes, or some jewellery we had brought with us, people who were unable to part with their rings and their watches with valuable chains. But it didn’t really help. The tents were given to us and we slept on Passover night, anxious and filled with bitter impressions that blighted our lives.

In the morning we awoke half dead and hungry as usual. But how can we eat hametz on Passover? And how can we bear this hunger without eating? Everything was dreadful and ill-fated. Instead of dressing appropriately to go to the synagogue to say a prayer and to sing the Hallel we were organized into columns according to the commander’s instructions and we were inspected and they took five grush from every man without our knowing why. They did this again three hours later.

In the end they gathered quite an impressive sum. Meanwhile we had to make certain that we were fortunate enough to be put into one of the Germans’ automobiles. In their generosity they allocated two large lorries that could carry about 50 men, but a group of Christians from Beirut had already pre-empted us through one of their acquaintances who was a soldier at that place. When we approached the men who looked after the
automobiles, one of whom was a Jew, Hawaja Salim, he told us that it was impossible to accept more men because the German was not prepared to accept more than 50 people. Then he told us that he had taken the trouble to ask Yosef Mizrahi and Eliyahu Levi the if there were more Jews to put onto the list, but they had answered that there were no others but the two of them, and one other called Bey Baba Bukrali who usually helped them carry their bags and served them in certain ways. All of our pleading was in vain and in spite of showing him how exhausted we were nothing helped us because he kept saying, ‘I did what I could and I did ask on your behalf but these comrades of yours didn’t care about your welfare.’ Therefore nothing was any use! What could we do? When we saw that there was no way of doing anything and we would have to march on foot, we asked Yosef Mizrahi and Eliyahu Levi why it was impossible to do us this favour and stipulate the names of the Jews?

[271] Their response was, as always, to blame each other. We were very sad to see this, that Jews don’t come to our aid at a time like this. Our depression was so profound that it embittered our souls. What should we think of first? So much wickedness, our exhaustion was so great, as were our misery and the headaches because this was the second day we hadn’t eaten, so what should we do? We couldn’t bear it any longer, we had to eat. Meanwhile it was time for lunch when we were called to receive our loaf, and I have to tell the truth, forced ourselves to eat immediately and to satisfy the hunger that was killing us. This accursed rusk was the first unleavened food we had eaten. While I was saying these words to the Lord of the Universe: ‘I do so honour the festivals and I am careful not to impair the sanctity of every festival, and now I am eating unleavened food on Passover’ I was breaking pieces of the rusk and putting them into my hungry stomach, while my eyes were shedding endless tears like a river.

The commander is once again calling us, lining us up and passing in front of us, informing us now that we have to pay for a bathhouse to which he is leading us. He gathered another sum altogether up to 60 lire. But I did not immerse myself in a bath
and soon I was clever enough to jump in among a paying group standing apart and to one side. After the payment of the sum they were all preparing to go out to the bathhouse, but it appeared that there was no bathhouse at all in this city. In the afternoon we received permission from the sergeant, after having given him a sum of money, to go to the shops to buy something. Once we had reached the shops we bought some dates and almonds and similar things. While my friend Raphael Meyuhas was busy choosing his dates he made the acquaintance of a German and signalled to me whether I would like to sell my watch and chain. Because I knew a little bit of German, and because I wanted to speak to that man a little, I answered him in the affirmative in German. I added a few other words, and the German was surprised and right away he asked me where I was from and how I knew German. I answered something, and he quickly called a superior and a third man and all of them joined me in conversation. I lost no time in summoning my friend Raphael, because he knew German better than I did. And so, a quarter of an hour went by and in the end they told us that they dealt with automobiles. We immediately made our request known, and they immediately replied that they were responsible for two vehicles and that they would tear up the old list and allow us to prepare a new one by ourselves in place of the first one. Excited and joyful, we took them to our hut in which there were other people who knew German and the three Germans were very happy to find themselves in an entire group of German speakers. [272] At that moment one of the sergeants sidled up to one of the Jews and raised his hand to beat him. He had almost managed to do this, and the German sergeant rose up like a murderer and shed a few blows upon him and added a few words saying: these are not your Arabs, these are Germans!

The word went out to those who were preparing to get into the lorries and they soon realized that their authority [to travel] had been torn up and replaced by the other one we had made. All those with whom we had pleaded an hour ago were now pleading with us with their requests. But we did not behave the way they did: we marked the allocation for the Jews on our list and we added the Christians from Beirut to them, demonstrating the
difference between Jews and Christians. At the same time we included Senor Yosef Mizrahi and his friend Eliyahu Levi. All of this, I have to say, was truly something of a miracle that happened to us.

So it came about that when night came we all climbed up into the lorry which was already waiting for us and we went on our way to Shamalan by lorry, but unfortunately half an hour later one of the lorries broke down and had to be tied with ropes to the first one from behind, and so some of the passengers had to get down, among them a Jew, but this happened without our knowledge and it was just bad luck. So we continued on our way and at dawn we were already in the small town of Shamalan. There they recommended some other Germans who were responsible for motors and they promised to take us to Pozanti. We spent one night in Shamalan and the next day we were already on our way, while most of them [the others] were marching by foot while we, about forty men, stayed behind until the next day, to leave in the lorry. But within a half an hour we were summoned to the area commanding officer and he ordered us all to proceed immediately on foot and therefore our plans were ruined and we had to march, as it had been ordained from Heaven. This was the commander’s ‘kindness’; he did not want us to rest or to save us from this march.

The sun beat down mercilessly and we are marched to Kadri Kaan [Khan?]. We saw mountains whose height, above the clouds, was miraculous and always covered with dense forests from which we cut excellent beams and boards. Flowing water accompanied us all the time, arising from under the rocks and their sound distracted us from our thoughts. Our journey to Kadri Kaan passed in this way and when we arrived there we were very weary. A large place had already been prepared for us in which we all stretched out after we had spread out our blankets, and we slept there on the third night of Passover. The cold was absolutely terrible. I hurried to wash my dirty underwear in a river that was our temporary neighbour. In a hospital bed there we discovered a Jew, a money-changer, who came from Jerusalem and who was about to die.
We arose early in the morning knowing that we had to begin our journey and by the evening we were already in Pozanti, and after we had been standing in a line we were taken out and separated, those of us who had paid the fine \[bidilijim\] were handed to a different sergeant who led us to a different place and separated us according to his understanding of who was cleaner. For the rest, their clothes were taken to be washed after they had been forced to strip in the middle of a field. Afterwards we were taken into a hut, which looked very good from the outside. And truly, we were ready to sleep well because we were so tired. But the cursed lice, the smallest of which seem to be like carob seeds, ran about on us to torture us with their stings. Like scorpions, they would run as quickly as if they had been sent out on a mission. We spent the night with our bodies flowing with blood.

Morning came and we were made to stand in a line ready to go on our way. After two hours spent in the field waiting for an order to go to the train, we were suddenly ordered to return to the hut and from there somewhere else in order to dry out a certain place that was covered with water, and here we began our first army labour \[angriya\]. All these people dressed in costly suits and with their soft hands, we collected stones from heaps of stones and threw them into the water. We were on our feet all day, our bodies broken and twisted until there was no longer any feeling in them and at the same time being beaten with whips and batons to get us to complete the task. And that is how we spent the day, longing for the night, to sit in one place, to find rest and sleep little, even if accompanied by the lice. Because of our exhaustion and the sleepiness that never left us, were we were sure that we were going to [be able to] sleep. But we quickly realized that that our plans were basically wrong. In the evening, when we arrived in Pozanti from the [place of] forced labour (which was far from the city), we were given our military rations in the centre of a field and we immediately went on our way. We were taken to the station and we remained there almost until midnight in the dry cold which tormented us because we were like dead bodies stretched out upon the ground. We were unable to move from side to side. We climbed into the railcars that were waiting for us after
we had parted from a friend of ours from Jerusalem whom we had come across, Señor Salmon Hazan. He convinced us that we should write letters to Jerusalem, promising that he himself would deliver them to our families once he had been issued with a confirmation of release that he hoped to receive in order to go to Jerusalem. At the same time he brought some foodstuffs for us. After we had parted from this nice young man, who had given us much joy, the train began to move and went on its way, while we were crowded in the cars like sardines in a barrel, suffocating from the pressure and exhausted from the weight of people leaning on us and we, like them, were leaning on others. We spent the night in great distress, because of our weariness and the nights without sleep.

[274] When we saw the train flying like an eagle, we realized that we were only moving further away from Jerusalem. We passed through seven great tunnels, apart from those that we had not seen in the night when sleep had caught us in its net. When we woke up in the morning we asked to be allowed at least to wash our faces and our eyes that had been painful. On the Thursday, the seventh day of Passover, at 11 o’clock European time, we reached Konya, an attractive city in which, to tell the truth, we could breathe a little air and buy a few things, but you had to be like a robber in order to get permission from the man supervising us. But no one prevented us from going into the market. We discovered that Konya is an entirely Turkish city and its inhabitants are almost all Turks (Muslims). It was full of mosques but cheerful. There was a tram pulled along by horses. Afterwards we received a loaf, which was not at all bad. It was large and white, prepared, it seems, especially for the seventh day of Passover…[Nahmias’s ellipsis] We spent the rest of the day in Konya and at night-time the train left and at midnight it brought us to Eskishir [Eskişehir]. The moment we arrived we were taken off the railcar in order to receive our loaf and the military rations that had been made ready for us. We were in cold, bright, fresh air for about two hours, arranged in a line in the darkness of the night and in the cold that caused our entire body to shiver so that we gave away the best of our food in order to be
under a roof and not under the open sky. The worst of all was that the military rations were already swollen because they had been waiting for us after having been put on the ground and had become covered with such so much dirt because of the wind. Once the military rations had been distributed we were once again in the railcar in which we spent the rest of the night and in the morning we woke up in Eskişehir. There we went to the market next to the station. We discovered some tall bakery shops. Without delay we bought as much as we wanted. As usual I was accompanied by my companion Raphael Meyuhas, and we were speaking Ladino. We met a young man who asked us where we were from. After we had replied to him he was very happy to have met Jews, particularly me, a neighbour. After we had chatted for a long time he asked me if I knew certain people in Jerusalem and it became clear that they were members of my family. He knew my mother and that she had one son and he meant me. This young man, whose name was Abraham Cohen, was born in Monastir, and he introduced us to a family of Ashkenazim that lived there, and they offered us matza so that we could have a taste of Passover. As we moved on we came to know other places and we were made known to other Jewish families. We remained in Eskişehir until 10 o’clock in the morning and then we went on our way to Bildjika, a place abundant with large gardens in which we were welcomed with coffee and fried food. There were also German inhabitants there and particularly especially tended gardens. We went on to Tuzluk after passing through twelve tunnels and a few very tall mountains that could serve as a lofty protective wall. Waterfalls gushed from these mountains, streaming and thundering. We spent a bad night in the railcars in quarrels that almost reached the point when knives were drawn and this was only because of the crowding. As to sleep, we were already almost used to the fact that in the nature of this world there is no sleep.

In the morning we reached Tuzluk. After we had stopped in a large field for close to an hour, we were taken to another field and organized into one long line. Then the doctor did an inspection and removed a group of sick people amongst us and the rest were sent to the bathhouse. We reached the bathhouse; the sergeant
ordered all of us to undress in the middle of the field, because he wanted to disinfect all our clothes. Taking our clothes off in the middle of the field was difficult for us, but who could disobey an order? Unwillingly we began to carry out the order and when half of the group was already naked a different sergeant appeared with a superior [officer] and he laid his whip on the backs of the naked bodies yelling ‘are you not ashamed to take all your clothes off in the middle of a field?’ Therefore he immediately ordered everyone to get dressed. We got dressed with difficulty and then a different sergeant with an even more superior officer appeared, beating on the backs of the naked men, [saying] why have they not yet undressed? Therefore the time had come for us to undress again. We remained naked for 10 minutes, waiting to see what the next order would be, why we were still being burnt by the sun and our bodies crushed by all manner of dirt from the way, like lice, fleas, bugs and everything bad, apart from not having slept for a long time. But the thrashing on the naked bodies was unbearable. Finally the new order came not to take our clothes off again and we began to dress. We went into the bathhouse and after two hours that we had lost dressing and undressing, finally, once we had entered the bathhouse, they gave us our clothes that had been taken for disinfection and we were under the showers whose floor was filled with filth. Because all the showers were occupied some powder came down on us, and even before we had wet our bodies the sergeant came yelling that we should get out of the showers. We went out and into a room in which we waited for about two hours for them to bring our clothes. Thanks to the Blessed Lord our clothes arrived but a number of articles were missing. While I was still busy with my parcel of clothes which were lacking two flannel shirts, I saw another sergeant wearing one of them. I leapt up shouting [and] took [them] back by force. Thus ended the Ceremony of the Bath. We left the bathhouse with bodies that had been well beaten and many of our group were badly wounded by the heavy thrashing they had received. When we encountered one of the officers, one of our group gathered courage and told him about the dreadful behaviour of the sergeants, and showed him his leg which was bleeding profusely from the whipping. The
officer asked, ‘Are you Arabs paying ransom? Arab, English it makes no difference.’

In the evening they took us to another field where we were supposed to receive our military rations. We were held in the most freezing cold until 11 o’clock European time. In the end the military rations of unpeeled apples in a bowl of indeterminate metal arrived. After the meal we were taken to sleep in a place that appeared to us to be our enemies’ building. [Unclear: perhaps the building, which looked as if it might belong to the Allies.] [It] had many rooms around quite a large courtyard close to the seashore.\(^67\) In the end we spent the night there. In the morning we woke up and in the wink of an eye we were all gathered together in a column and taken to another place after a good number of those among us had changed their clothes in the morning, thinking that we had reached the place in which we would have respite from all evil.\(^68\) All of them were in shirts, collars and multicoloured ties, gold rings and straps with watches, with beautiful overcoats until they looked like Lords [sic] but unluckily the evil was still continuing. They took us to a certain place and then they loaded everyone with three bricks, each of which weighed nine \(\text{okas}\),\(^69\) and all of us were taken inside with this load. Very quickly those whose hands had been covered with gloves became porters while we were still carrying bundle clothes on our shoulders, our arms and legs trembling. We could not bear any more. Our bodies were entirely destroyed but what way out was there? There were some sick people, who could barely stand on their legs. Even these had to receive this ‘gift’. They couldn’t walk. Seeing this, the sergeant gave ten heavy blows of his whip on the sick soldiers’ backs. Nothing helped, neither weeping nor tears. They had to carry the weight. In the end a more merciful staff sergeant arrived. He arranged that those sick people would only carry two bricks, no more. You can imagine our terrible condition. Streams of sweat flowed from the fancy overcoats, the gloves and the spectacles. Everything became filthy in the worst possible way. After we had walked for over an hour, we reached the place where we could unload. We
put down the bricks and sat down to recover with the good breakfast they had given us.

Afterwards they gathered us together again and stood us up for the doctor’s examination, for he was obliged to see us. After the doctor had completed his work a number of us spoke to him in German because he knew some words in that language, and we told him about our terrible situation, [that we were] thirsty for a little water which they don’t allow us to have. He immediately ordered that they give us water and then took us to a place in which there were a number of iron bars. Immediately three of us were ensnared to carry a bar weighing 100 kilograms. We began to march. We were certain that we were going to be taken to a place nearby. That’s how confused we were! Totally exhausted after such great efforts, with crushed shoulders and backs broken to pieces – when you want to rest a little they don’t let you. The sergeants, with their superiors, mercilessly pushed us along and so, after a march lasting three hours and ten minutes, we reached the place. We fell down like the dead with utter exhaustion. [277] After we had rested beside the water we once again went on our way to return to where we had come from. Do not forget that this was a three-hour march. After a rest of about a half-hour we were once again made to stand in a line and taken to a certain very wide field on the order of a captain who was holding a whistle in his hand. He paced while blowing his whistle and each time he blew it we had to shout ‘Long Live the Sultan’ three times. We were on our feet for almost an hour without being allowed to sit down or walk. Afterwards we were taken to another place where there were tents which we entered, thirty men to a tent. The crowding and weariness are indescribable. But despite the exhaustion we passed the night in song but not for happiness – and without forgetting the afternoon and evening prayers. We were not, of course, able to sleep. First of all, because our bodies were crushed and our arms seemed to have been torn from them. Second, because we had always been surrounded by thieves we had to be careful not to fall asleep. Finally morning came, and we left the tent, when our turn came [to go] to the sea in a few broken boats which were of no use at all. The sergeants had already appeared with their whips and
didn’t waste time laying them on the backs over the smallest thing that appeared to them to be a fault. But thank God we were careful to avoid being hit, even when they gave us the pejorative names of ‘Arab-English’, ‘traitorous ransom-payers’. This day, the 25 Nissan, was the day we had to sail by sea in a boat that had been made ready for us but [as] the sea was very stormy and the boat was very small they didn’t dare to send us on it from Tuzluk to Haydar Pasha. We spent the rest of the day in Tuzluk, repairing the tent, which a wind tried to uproot and take to the air. All of us, thirty people toiled to carry stones and ropes. Others laboured with spades and in this way we repaired our tent. We spent this night also in singing and prayers, without forgetting the afternoon and evening prayers. One of the Jews among us called Tawfik Ulman from Beirut, who had never sought Jewish company, took part in our prayers. Because he was a jolly young man, he danced, jumped, sang and so on. He didn’t leave us alone for a moment. Out movements and our gestures made everyone happy and let them forget their troubles. On Wednesday 26 Nissan we were ready for our departure after the weather and the midnight storm had passed. And so we were sitting in a line with our bundles of clothes waiting for an order to embark. Two Armenian boys passed by and stood before us. When I saw their features and discovered how much they resembled my children I embraced them while weeping a few tears when I remembered my house, my city and my store which had nourished me honourably for so long. [278] I spent some very difficult minutes and I shed a quantity of tears, with my head bent so that no one should see. All my efforts to prevent myself from choking had no effect because the little [Armenian] brothers had not ceased engaging me and made me remember my children and my mother and whether she was able to manage the young children. But afterwards, I found some new strength so that I shouldn’t lose my mood [become depressed] completely. I imagined all the good that was waiting for me. I’ll go home and embrace my children and my mother and all my dear ones. And so it happened that I awoke out of the dream I was dreaming and then I saw that the time had come to go on our journey.
Everyone was ready, bundles in hands. I did the same, and at 11.30 we embarked on the boat that was waiting for us and at 2 o’clock in the afternoon we reached Selimiye in Constantinople where we could slake out thirst for water because unluckily we had spent twenty-four hours on the boat without water. We bought a goatskin of water for one bishlik. When we reached the port of Selimiye we encountered many [female] sellers of water for a half a mitalik per glass. There was a Jewish woman among the water-sellers who gave us water and refused to accept money once she knew that we were Jews.

This Jewish woman spoke to us about Jerusalem with such longing and yearning that she aroused our nostalgia in us once again. We parted after a short conversation. The time for entering the barracks had arrived, everyone with their bundles on their shoulders entered a very large hut 250 metres long by 15 metres wide, which was meant to be for horses. We sat down there with great sadness and the kind of emotion that almost broke us into pieces when we lay down to sleep on our blankets spread on the damp earth. It was difficult to shut our eyes and we heard strange shouting and some weeping and we were told that a thief had stolen 3 lira. He was caught in a moment. And so we spent the night in fear until day came and immediately we were outside in our clothes following the shout: ‘Outside.’ I was, as usual, accompanied by my friend Raphael. We sipped the sahlav that was sold in the area and after we had eaten some halvah we returned to our place.

Afterwards they put us into a large and splendid mosque from the time of the Sultan Selim and that’s why it was called Selimiye. We went inside and looked at the beauty of the building, all made out of marble. The dimensions of the stairs and columns drew a person’s attention. In the corner of the building the framework of the steps was also made of marble and was very beautiful. This palace was built in 1219. In the end we spent the day in the courtyard of this place and the rain found time to soak us mercilessly as we were in the open air.

In the evening we were offered our military ration of potatoes. Afterwards we went to the boat that was waiting for us and it took
us to Sirkaji [unidentified]. A half an hour later we reached Sirkaji. We disembarked on the shore in the darkness, we passed over the famous bridge which really was something to arouse our amazement. The beauty of the tramways [sic] was a most splendid thing. The electric lighting spilled its illumination so that all our troubles were forgotten. With singing and dancing we reached the camp of the transport unit during the night. We remained there until they had listed all the soldiers, 700 souls. Afterwards everyone went into huts to sleep. It was after midnight when we went into the huts. I found a space between two Jews because even here we were accompanied by thieves whose work never stopped while others were sleeping. Another Jew, Rabbi Hirsch, who was also sleeping beside me, was robbed of all his possessions from inside his pack, even his tefillin. We spent Friday and the Sabbath in Sirkaji, on the eve of the first of the month of Iyar, in an indescribable crush. The place in which we slept was extremely narrow. We were like sardines in a barrel, so it seemed. On Sunday we were all taken out and organized into rows and after they had called out a group of names, those whose names had been called out were separated and taken into a building. There they changed their civilian clothes and they were turned into soldiers. But we, the sons of Jerusalem, did not appear on the list as yet. And so we remained for another day. We were seven Jews from Jerusalem. They took us into a barracks that was really very nice. There we all slept on iron beds and it was unusually clean, unlike in other places. We had to walk about without shoes. The military rations were good. After staying there for about an hour we were again ordered to leave the place. We went outside, as usual with our bundles. When we went out we encountered two Germans who had been asking for us. These had been called by one of our Jerusalemites who knew the German from Jerusalem who was his commander a year ago. Now he was stationed in Constantinople. This German met our friend who was called David Monzon. After he had spoken with him, he promised that he would do him some favours. But almost immediately we had to join a column and we were quickly taken to the bathhouse which was unlike a military bathhouse, but one
that although small was very nice, with hot and cold water taps, soap and everything there should be. This was a special officers’ bathhouse. After our bath unluckily we were taken to the same previous hut but it was now completely empty. We spent the day and the night there. In the morning we awoke in despair: when would the German arrive, the one who had promised David Monzon that he would help as much as he could, him [Monzon] and us, but unfortunately this was a vain hope and nobody came.

In the afternoon we were taken outside in a column to a place where a doctor was waiting. [280] After an examination after which he decided that we were all healthy we were taken to a building in which we were given military uniforms and we abandoned our civilian clothes which unfortunately we couldn’t keep and unluckily we weren’t even able to have a breath of fresh air because of the sergeants’ hurry. They encouraged us with their whips [to] ‘Hurry up’ because all they wanted to do was to take [something] from the pockets of our civilian clothes since due to our hurry many things were certainly left in them, which was indeed the case, because many had left purses and so on. Apart from this, other sergeants had already cast an eye on the good clothes that remained and they were in control of all the clothing. In the end we left this building as absolute soldiers, dressed in a grey shirt and black trousers, all made of simple cotton, woollen socks, very heavy shoes and an army hat on our heads. And so we emerged all ready, and in the wink of an eye they let us sleep in a very large storeroom. We spent a night there tormented and miserable because of the number of people, one of top of the other. It was very dark. If anyone wanted to go out, he had to step on men. So it happened that many times men stepped on me and tramped on my body. There was no sleep after we were asked to stand on guard because of the many thieves in our company. Unfortunately the clothes they had given us had no pockets, and we had to hold our purses in our hands. Thus day broke, and while it was still dark we were taken out and very quickly, with our loaf and a few olives in our hands, we went to the boat and sailed to Pandirna.75 We endured eleven hours of travelling filled with suffering. The sea was stormy and the strong wind froze us.
The boat rocked like a cradle. When we reached Pandirma that night, as we disembarked we had to be seen by a doctor. It so happened that I was the first in the line for examination. The doctor said to his companion, ‘Look at this soldier by God! Strong and healthy’, while he was examining me and feeling my muscles. We all passed by him and we crossed the city by road to reach a hut, exhausted unto death. We slept but every moment we were in fear of thieves. One must not forget that the day had gone by; since dawn when they gave us bread and olives and three o’clock in the afternoon when they gave us bread, 30 hours had passed during which they had given us nothing at all to eat. There were people among us who didn’t even have a coin and were waiting only for the loaf and were fainting from hunger.

So it happened that when they gave us the bread we swallowed it with little chewing. We spent the second night on the lower floor. There I suffered from strong stomach pains, I lay underneath spread out on the ground with no one to pay any attention to me. Precisely at these times a man remembers his home and the situation we are in. But to tell the truth if you always think about this you will have no good health and strength left to withstand all this. We would quickly change our mood in order to forget all our tribulations and we would begin to laugh and make jokes. [281] In this way we ask the Blessed Lord to change everything to joy.

We woke up early the next day. It was quite late and we were without food. There is nothing worse than hunger. There was no one to buy from. We were forced to bear the hunger even while we still had some coins, but we couldn’t eat them. In addition to this, we had received anti-typhus injections with needles as wide as a spindle. And thus we spent that day. In the evening we were taken outside to distribute the loaf. After all the bread had run out there were still thirty people who had not received any. They returned us [inside] and told us that within the hour those who had not received their bread would receive it and they gave us some olives as military rations and this was in honour of the festival that they were celebrating that evening, because it was the day of the new king’s coronation.76 Afterwards they brought
us a few raisins that were divided up and we had to bless the sultan for them. We arose early the next morning, looking like animals because it was the third day that we hadn’t washed our faces because they hadn’t given us any water. I’ll never forget how two barrels of water were standing before us but they were guarded. Woe is he who takes from that water. He will be severely punished for this sin. The lack of food and the lack of washing our hands and faces made us look as if we were all the same colour. Let’s not forget also that the cold also caused us terrible misery even though this was the month of Iyar [April–May]. We didn’t even know where we would be sent. Some said to Izmir, some said to Jana – only that the Lord May He Be blessed should make it all come out well!

In the afternoon of Friday 15 Iyar 1917 they took us out and organized us in a column and brought us our loaf. From there they took us outside the city to a few tents that had been prepared for us. After they had separated those among us who knew Turkish, they appointed them as sergeants and those who knew only a little of the language as מפקד כותה (lit. Section Commander]. On Sabbath eve we ate our military rations of grain and we returned to the tents when a stormy rain began to fall and the cold was so cruel that there was no colour left in us. The sound of the wind and the rain affected us badly under the top of the tent. And so we spent Sabbath night and the rain had not stopped the next day. When anyone went outside he couldn’t free his boots from the mud because they became very heavy. On this Sabbath day we remembered everything we had known in the past compared to everything that was happening to us now. We remembered all this. Weeping and wailing had become natural to us because there was not a small difference but a very large difference. Afterwards we realized that weeping would avail us nothing and we bore all the misfortune with some calm. Unfortunately we were commanded by a military man who was not worth the smallest coin. You want to eat, to dress or to read but you are not free to do this because you are dependent on him and he does not permit you to do these things. [282] Even when writing something you have to guard it from everybody, and
above all, the writing causes me so much unhappiness because it is a terrible sadness to go over it [all] again, and certainly there is very much misery involved in this. Many times, I thought to stop writing. But I didn’t want this either. I wanted to put everything in writing and to show to what extent my efforts to continue writing were much stronger than those of others, because many of them had begun to write, but they soon wearied of it and I could not stop my efforts to continue, in my supplicating the Lord Blessed Be He to return me quickly to my house and to my children and my acquaintances [so that I could] tell them what had happened to me.

On Sunday 7 Iyar 1917 we all gathered together to be taken to another place in which we had to separate stones and put them in a different place. Everyone had to do this forced labour. I did not take part in this, because the sergeant found it proper that I should remain to supervise the clothes. And so I was saved from this matter. But I suffered in this place because there was nothing to eat because we were on the mountain a long distance away from Bandirma. We could wait for our loaf and military rations but no more. On Monday 8 Iyar it was still very cold so that we could not go outside our tent. That same day a transport arrived from Istanbul with another five Jews, quite known to me, among them a Bukharan Jew from Jerusalem, Senor Benjamin Jihan. After we had met we spoke a little and we were cheered up to a certain extent but actually the same Senor Jihan was one of the richer people in Jerusalem who had many servants in his house and here he also had to participate in forced labour. This made me take the situation calmly. In order not to lose the future it seemed appropriate not to allow ill temper to control us in the most difficult moments.

On the 10 Iyar all of us were taken outside and they gave each of us two loaves and we had some immunization in our chests [and we went] directly to the train. On the way to Izmir we counted about 14 important tunnels and many beautiful stations, fields and orchards that were pleasant and heartening. The names of the stations were Sijirzi, Aksikali, Ojizi-kul, Balikistra, Jokorhasin, Sujujuk, Garasok, Yakujak, Manisa, Orsigoy. These
were the stations that we saw during the day, apart from those we passed during the night whose names we did not know. We spent the night in the railcar in terrible crowding to the point that I have no desire to set it down in writing. Also we had already become used to it. On the way we encountered many Greek refugees, all of them women without any men, who had been exiled from their land, weeping in a way that aroused the viewer’s compassion. Despite their being deep in their own feelings, this did not prevent them from giving us water which they kept in their jars, certainly because they thought we were Christians. [283] They aroused the greatest pain and pity when you saw that these were entire families with their children, women nursing children and lying in the road without any protection. So it happened that I raised my eyes to the heavens and asked the Master of the Universe, ‘How is it possible that you have brought such a disaster upon the world that you so wisely made? How is it possible that you have forgotten this world and you don't want to see it any more? You didn’t want to destroy the city of Tarshish and you sent Jonah the prophet to go and prophesy to its inhabitants and he did not visit upon them the terrible misfortune that had been your intention. But now you do all of this. And we are forced to accept your commands because they are your desire.’

Afterwards we passed the station Muradiy and Menemen in which we were given the opportunity to eat very tasty yoghurt. We also went past the station Shishili, which was filled with lovely, gleaming vines, some of them desolate because there was no one to take care of them due to conscription to the army. Afterwards we passed by a small, very beautiful town which was called Karşıyaka.78 The houses were built in a very affluent way. I was almost inclined to think that here I am in a neighbourhood of Tel Aviv Jaffa. It was very pleasant to see them. This town was just before Izmir, an hour’s journey by train. Afterwards we passed by a small town called Halke-Bugar. All these lovely towns were Greek.

At noon we reached Izmir. We were immediately taken to the transport unit military camp. There we spent the night after an unpleasant wash in the bathhouse, where we remained, about 200
men, until nightfall naked to the marrow of our bones, after they had taken our clothes for disinfection. With morning we arose and after they had placed us in line, they divided about half of us and took us to the station for a journey to Aydin after we had eaten a military ration of barley and sorghum bread which was smaller this time than in the past. This was the exalted Izmir, which we impatiently and very much wanted to see. We deluded ourselves that this would be an end of all the terrible things [that had befallen us] but unfortunately it turned out that we still had to bear them.

At two o’clock European time, in the afternoon, we boarded the train and went to Aydin. We had a very bad night in the train. Apart from the terrible crowding, it was also unpleasantly cold because they were no doors in the railcar. We passed through two tunnels, one of which was very long, about a quarter of an hour’s journey. And because they were no doors in the railcar, the smoke of the locomotive came in while we were still sleeping, and suddenly we felt that we were almost choking and everyone suddenly and all at once began to cough, very strongly, so that it seemed as if the heart was being pulled out of its place, an unbearable sensation!

With dawn we reached Aydin and we were immediately taken to a mosque, accompanied as usual by guards. A few hours later they took us to a bakery. We were given a loaf of bread and then from there we went straight to the military fortress. After they had divided us up as they wished to they took us to the commanding officer who divided us up again. I gathered courage and told him that I am a shoemaker. He immediately told me that this is fine. He chose my friends Eliyahu Levi, Yosef Mizrahi, David Monzon, Rabbi Hirsch and me. He separated the five of us, and said that we must remain under his command as members of a special service. But afterwards he asked Elijah about his occupation and when he answered that he is a pharmacist and that he knows some languages, the commanding officer seemed to be very satisfied and he asked to which religion he belonged, if we were the same as he. When he heard that we were all Jews, he shouted at the top of his voice, what will be done with so many
Jews and he put us back in the line and only kept Eliyahu, after he asked him to help him as his children’s teacher. We were brought to a different mosque, together with 23 Turks, that is, Muslims. We spent the night in the mosque in the company of my friend, Raphael Meyuhas, because the rest of the Jews had been taken to another place. Dawn broke, and I awoke and when I saw where I was and remembered my terrible situation, I wept a little because of the way I was feeling. Afterwards I began to think of the outcome of this bad life, for I had been a householder, a citizen of Jerusalem, and I had supported myself honourably – and now to reach this level…[Nahmias’s ellipsis] In the end, they brought us the military ration that included flour bread, and even I realized that hunger forced me to eat this food. But more than eating I wept when I saw how bitter my situation was, without a single friend, without a single person close to my heart, even without Raphael Meyuhas who had gone for an eye examination. Without a slice of bread to break my hunger, without being allowed to go outside the barracks. This was the worst day of all the recent days. On Friday 11 Iyar, in the loveliest season, the time to enjoy everything good, either in the house or in the shop, in the week of Shavuot, a time when I would work and enjoy the fruits of my labour. Now I am inconsolable, hungry, without clean underwear to change into, in the company of Turkish soldiers with whom I hated to sit. Oh what tribulation! Oh what bad luck! I was convinced that the next day would be better but it just became worse. Master of the Universe, why and wherefore have I been appointed to such terrible evil? I have never stolen, I have never beaten anyone, I have never treated anyone badly. Where is my dear Hannula, that she should arise and see the darkness in which the one who loved her so much is plunged? Where is Hannula? You passed by me and didn’t want to see, or to hear the terrible misfortune has befallen me. My most admired Hannula, who has placed a curse upon us that we should be separated in such a terrible and miserable way? I have been plucked from my children, from my mother, who has not yet seen any joy from her only son. What a terrible year! So much evil and suffering have come to me. What should I say first? Master of the
Universe, do I deserve all this? [285] But with my hand on my heart I have to say that no one is to blame for my situation except myself, because I have not shown myself to be satisfied with life. I always complained. I wanted things to be better. I was jealous of others whose house was better than mine, whose clothes were better and their status higher than mine. I complained needlessly while I lacked for nothing. I did not see those beneath me. And so it happens that I reach this point and I see it is good that you have tortured me so that I should learn your laws. And now Master of the Universe. I only beseech one thing. To have the good fortune to embrace my mother and my children, please make it so that I will return to Jerusalem quickly as quickly as possible. And I will not be among those who are joyful in their evil, but the opposite, I will be grateful. I will enlighten others: ‘Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.’

While I was deep in this mood, sergeants came and took us to a different mosque after we had been organized into a column. They counted us and they divided us into units, each overseen by an Un Bashi (Corporal) and his sergeants. I was in charge of a group of ten (Bishinji Manga) under a certain corporal who was not very young, and very shy before me and he didn’t force me to do anything at all, no formal roster or assignment, or anything like that during the few days that I was under his command.

In the afternoon, my friend Raphael had not yet arrived and I was in a very depressed state. In the end I appeared before a certain Arab sergeant, Abu Izzam, who had always treated me honourably and he immediately asked me what was wrong. I told him that I am very pressured and I asked him whether I could go out to stroll in the city. He immediately received permission and we went out together and we walked a good few miles [כברת דרך]. After we had drunk some tea in a café, while I was strolling, I met some Jews. One of them, a noble young fellow, Salmon, took me to the synagogue. There before the holy space I shed many tears, but I was consoled by finding myself within the courtyard of Jews, surrounded by women and men. They all asked me about Jerusalem and they were interested in me. From there we went to meet the Chief Rabbi Rabbi Yaakov Asher, who also very quickly
consoled me. Afterwards we walked a little more and then return to the mosque where I found the captain who was an Arab from Beirut, Daut Effendi Namzit. He asked me if I possessed the tools of my trade after I had declared my occupation to him. I said no, but if he would allow me I would immediately go and buy them. He allowed me to go out and once again I went to the market and I bought certain tools to begin my work. Afterwards while I was walking I met a Jew called Aderet the Teacher who had been in Jerusalem and I had helped him to store his tools of coffee distribution in my shop about two or three years ago. When he saw me he immediately embraced me like a brother, consoled me and immediately implored me to go to his house, but I refused to do so for the moment, because his wife was ill and in the hospital, therefore I could not go. [286] And so I parted from him and returned to the mosque. I showed the Officer the tools I had bought. He promised me that I would be the battalion’s shoemaker and I couldn’t contain my joy. So I spent the night, still without my friend Raphael, alone and unconsolled within the assembly of barbarians, whose presence made me nauseous. It was the Sabbath morning. The officer was prepared to take the battalion out to the field for military exercises. Unfortunately I was among them. We came together and went out for the exercises. After about two and a half hours we returned tired unto death, especially me, still in deep depression. I saw that there was no difference between me and the others even though I was a shoemaker. I wept in great torment. I didn’t know what was going to happen to me. When I saw that the walls around me had grown taller I called out to my grandparents sleeping in the soil these many years, to my father and to my dearest one Hannula who had so recently taken her place in the cemetery, in the springtime of her days. In the end, so deep in distress I wished for death – but without the good fortune to find it. It’s true what people say: ‘After the thickest darkness, the dawn will surely come.’ Thus it was for me in the darkest of dark moments.

At that moment Señor Eliyahu Levin, who had remained behind in the commander’s office, appeared. He had been looking for me, saying that the commander wanted me. I couldn’t
hide my joy because I knew that he wanted me to be a shoemaker. I hastened to go to him together with Eliyahu Levin who introduced me to the commander, who appeared to me to be a serious man, brown-skinned and slim. He wore a pair of spectacles on his nose. His hair was nearly white. He seemed to be about 60 years old. His pips indicated that he was a Kamaykam. He ordered that my name be taken while promising me that in a few days’ time I would be placed under his supervision. I turned to leave, parting from him respectfully, of course saluting, without knowing exactly how to do it. My happiness was boundless because I felt that I would be rescued from this cursed unit which was dependent on sergeants and corporals, for whom my duty was to stand upright every time they passed by. I also had to honour the sergeant [lower rank] who was always scratching, afflicted with boils. All these things, for which I had never prepared myself, these were the things that were killing me and ruining my health.

After the terrible sadness of that day I became ill, lying in torment with stomach pains. Meanwhile the officer, Daut Effendi, appeared and asked me why I had been called to appear before the battalion commander Massad Bey. He knew that I had been summoned and that my name had been taken. He began to appear to be friendly by saying to me: ‘Know that you will be well pleased with the battalion because I am exactly like you, an Arab, and I promise to protect you forever. I shall not take you out to training exercises, so that you should be satisfied.’ I immediately complained that I didn’t have enough space to lie down on, being ill and lying on the paving stone. [287] He ordered that they should give me the room that had been prepared for a divisional captain of communications, and this captain was informed that there was no room for him in this house and that he would not be able to tell me anything different. At the time he [Daut Effendi] implored me to tell the battalion commander that I am not a master shoemaker, only a repairer of pieces of old shoes. I heard these suggestions from him many times, because this man wanted to use my power for his own ends. It is very possible, that he prevented my having to go out to exercises
because he wanted me to work for him. This was his programme. But the light overcame the darkness, and within three days I was already crowned as the battalion shoemaker, in the sense that I was taken out of the division and placed in a room with three other soldiers from headquarters, so that I was the fourth. Nothing stopped Daut Effendi from visiting me, declaring that I would suffer terribly if I did not immediately return to his division, because I am obliged to go to the battalion commander and declare that I am not a maker of new shoes. He had his reasons for planning his actions in this way, because he looked at me like a wolf looks at a sheep. He wanted to ‘milk’ me at every turn. He had already got a pair of shoes out of me that we had made for him, me and Raphael Meyuhas. A pair of shoes that was shown to all the officers, all of them saying as one man: ‘This is the artist of the division.’ Eventually, this came to the ears of the battalion commander. Not only that but my friend Eliyahu Levin was with the battalion commander. I had forgiven him for the coldness he had shown to the Jews on the way, as I have already mentioned. And now he was very friendly. He did not stint in his praise of me so that I should be liked by all the officers, above all Massar Bey. They all treated me with respect, calling me master artist. After a week of moving about and making the acquaintance of Yehuda Eidin, coming and going in the family homes of Bar-David, Bar-Maimon, Mirzhan, Bekhor Nahum, Yosef Gatinyo, Bekhor Shaul, N. Senior, Ganon and many other families all of whom treated me with great respect. We were always being invited to visit and they constantly wanted to meet us and without growing tired of us.

A week and a half later I was called by Massar Bey who showed me a certain number of army shoes, ordering me to take them apart and to repair them as new, according to the measurements he would show me. And I, out of respect, accepted the work and I began to do it in the shop of a Greek shoemaker, to whom I was introduced by Kadri Bey a 75-year-old Colonel who had replaced Massar Bey who had gone to Izmir. I worked in the shop of the Greek whose name was Michalaki. The work I had done with my hands was always praised by all the expert
craftsmen of Aydin and even the shop owner honoured me greatly and implored me to make some pairs of shoes for his shop, for good payment.

[288] I had already begun to earn [back] my expenses. A different Greek, whose name was Nickolaki, passing by the shop, truly admired me and did not allow me to become unhappy. He let me confess the story of my life, and he spoke a great deal to me, until he helped [me to] let go of my sadness. We spent a certain amount of time in this way. Afterwards Señor Eliyahu Levin and I offered to give a few lessons in Hebrew in the evenings in the great synagogue. There we had 50 pupils, divided into two classes, and they had already begun to demonstrate good progress, so that the affection that the Jews had for us grew enormously. At that time I was being helped by a family called Abulan Buga that did my washing, always refusing to accept any payment, because I had begun to give a few lessons to his son and his daughter, so that the family took care of everything for me. And thus about eight weeks passed in Aydin. Afterwards, the commander gave us the order to make ready to leave for Muğla. This information did not please the people [the Jews] of Aydin. Three evenings before we left, they organized a party for us with songs and melodies in the most heart-warming way. It seemed to us as if we were in our own homes. On the day of our parting from Aydin, our students came to accompany us and after they had given us a basket of fruit as a gift, we embraced and therefore our parting was very difficult. Above all, one of the pupils was Jacob N. Senior, who was one of the best pupils and who had made great progress in the Hebrew language and also admired it with his whole heart. Another student, whose name was Señor Jacob Karako, had received special lessons from me during the daytime for good payment. He was very sorry to see me go. All of them parted from us leaving great affection in the depths of our hearts and they expressed the same feeling towards us.

Our journey to Muğla took place on the Tuesday 9th Tammuz, 1917 [29 June 1917, which was a Friday]: we marched for four
days passing many Anatolian villages. In the nights we slept in the fields. Fortunately it was already summer. The foot march wearied us very much of course, but what could we do?

On Friday we reached Muğla. We slept in a hotel, not with the other soldiers. We rested. We went to the markets of Muğla, where we found only one Jew, whose name was Señor Mushun Halfon. He was the only Jew living in Muğla. He was a tinsmith. His wife and children lived in Milās about 12 hours away from Muğla. Similarly we found another family, the wife of Dr Perahia called Allegra and her younger sister, a young woman of 17, who lived with her sister, because Dr Raphael Perahia did not live in Muğla. He was doing his military service in Antalya as a captain. Also an aunt of Madame Perahia was visiting the house of her friend whose name was Mme Zafira. This entire family was from Milās and was in Muğla only by chance. We spent some time [with them] and they implored us to visit them regularly. [289] At the same time, we made the acquaintance of the young people in Muğla, all of them pupils at the Sultan’s school. They honoured us when they said, these are the children of the Hebrew nation, about whom it is said that they are very wise and they know many languages, but they do not know a single word of the Turkish language. Because this was their month of Ramadan, according to their custom their nights were spent in recreation, accordingly they did nothing without our being present.

The summer passed in this manner and the High Holy Days were approaching. Longing for home once again became unbearable. The first festival, Rosh Hashana, arrived. Without delay we got together a group of Jews and broken-heartedly we organized the prayers. I was the cantor for the Mussaf and it was an opportunity for me to weep many tears, when I said the following words: ‘Because of our sins we have been exiled from our land and sent far from our soil.’

Rosh Hashanah passed and we prepared for the holy day of Yom Kippur. We realized that we had no place to organize the prayers because we had to stay in this place for an entire day, and we were not allowed to use the place in which we had celebrated
Rosh Hashanah because it was a room within a mosque. After we had sought many [places] but found none, we decided to do it in our house. There we organized a sufficient meal, bread and watermelon, and the prayer began. During the night and the day we wept a great deal because of the sorrow we felt. Yom Kippur passed but Sukkot had no substance for us because no one wanted to start praying [again]. And so it happened that the Festival of Sukkot was not even marked. One Saturday some time after the festivals, when we were sitting with Madame Allegra, the wife of Dr Perahia, she told us very sadly that she had to tell the truth that she alone knew and we did not, and that was that the police were searching for us with an accusation of spying.

No pen can describe our terror. Our hearts did not cease trembling. We could not sleep. And if we did once fall asleep it was only to have a nightmare in which we saw that we were standing before the cruel interrogator, whose eyes and look brought horror upon us. At other times we saw in our dreams how they took us to be hanged because at that time hanging someone was not a very serious business. They would condemn people to hanging or another form of execution on the slightest pretext. Ultimately we were forced to stop going into any of the houses, in case we brought unpleasantness to someone. In this way four or five weeks passed, but after this time we were already aware that the police had forgotten about us because they knew that it was not us that they suspected. The testimony of a Turkish officer, who knew a little Arabic, saved us in the following manner. [There was] a simple Greek barber, who had become a Muslim, a wicked man, whom I had already deemed not to be a decent person. [290] We would go to him for haircuts and my friend Eliyahu Levi opened his mouth a little too much, talking about all the Turkish losses and the Allied victories. These things and others were told to the field security [officer], who was not alone in ordering the police to pursue us, and to follow our footsteps. And so it happened that on Yom Kippur he himself went to the area around our house and saw how more than twenty Jews were entering and leaving our house because they had been there at the time of the prayers. This hunter following us had no
doubt that we were nothing but spies. This is how the matter began and it became wrapped up in a very heavy cloud. Then it reached the ears of the officer I have just mentioned, and because he needed a pair of shoes to be made for him, when he chanced to be opposite the police station he happened to speak well of us and caused every stain of doubt to be wiped clean.

The police chief heard about this, he who had seen with his own eyes more than twenty people going in and out of our house, most of whom were Jews, and he was certain that all these young men were spies and that they were making propaganda for their Zionist land and that they had been sent by the Zionist movement. Then, the officer took over, explaining that today, when the Chief had seen more than twenty people in our house, was a festival of prayer among the Jews, and since here in Muğla there was no prayer space for the Jews, they had got together in this house and they had prayed. Afterwards the matter was carefully investigated and seen to be correct. And so it happened that they stopped following us and we spent the winter in Muğla in terrible cold and frost, mainly because we were living in a wooden house with many broken windows, and beneath this house there was a river whose noise was terrible. But the weeks close to Passover approached, and we were getting ready to go to Milâş to spend the festival there, because we had been invited by a number of good Jews who would spend time in Muğla for purposes of trade and after we had become friendly with them. Thanks to the Blessed Lord they liked as and they were waiting for us. It happened that our commanding officer gave us twenty days of leave and we went to Milâş. I went to the house of Señor Musani Franco, and Eliyahu’s friends to the house of Señor Nissim Franco. They looked after both of us very well, much better even than in our house. Many families regretted that they were not fortunate enough to have hosted us and others took us by force to spend one day in their homes. All the people of the Jewish quarter gathered together to listen to us and at the same time to entertain us with songs and celebrations. In the evenings very nice parties were organized in our honour. Above all I must recall the generosity of Mr Yaakov Buro, Reuvan Tural and the head of the
Jewish community Señor Yehuda Halevi and Señor Nissim Franco, a member of the family of Señor N. Zion Amato, the representative of the Chief Rabbi of Milãs. [291] They were very sorry that the head of the household wasn’t in Milãs because we had been guests in his house a number of times, also in the house of Señor Alzaraki, Señor Moise Levi and his father Señor Raphael Levi. The young women of Milãs, too, treated us very well, such as Mlle Luna Matzliyah, the headmistress of the school, Mlle Luna Israel, a teacher, Mlle Sereno, and also Miss Shoshan, a teacher of Turkish at that school. All these, together with the entire neighbourhood, did not allow us to be alone for one moment. Afterwards the question of Hebrew in the school arose and they implored us to give a short lecture, something we could not refuse to do, on the Sabbath during the hol hamoed days of Passover. The lecture was organized in the community of Simhat Halev, in the presence of all the inhabitants who hung on our every word. The lecture went on for about an hour, after which Señor Bekhor Shoshan thanked us for what we had said about Hebrew and Jerusalem. After that the head of the community, Señor Yehuda Halevi, rose. He also thanked us for our few words that had allowed them to feel much pleasure in our reminiscences about Hebrew and Zion and said that they echoed in the ears of every listener, and similar sentiments.

That day the sum of 200 lira was collected for Hebrew. Afterwards they implored us to sing a few songs in Hebrew and we did not hesitate to fulfil their request and we ended with the song ‘Hatikvah’ which we sang very well and which all of those present honoured since they rose to their feet until the song was over. We could see that many of the people shed tears of joy and all of them embraced us fervently since we had allowed them to enter into a Jewish paradise, so, joyful and longed-for from time immemorial. In this way we were given a great deal of encouragement. All of Milãs admired us with their entire heart. After all this we all joyfully said the evening prayer. After the prayers, arguments arose between the citizens who wanted to invite us to their homes. The community leader won and we went to his house. After the festival together with the twenty days of leave
that we had been given we parted from Milâs, while embracing all the sons of Milâs with enthusiasm and affection.

We reached Muğla, the place of our army service. For each of us, the situation changed. My friend Eliyahu was sent to Milâs as a pharmacist in a military hospital there, and he was received very well there, also by all the people of Milâs who said, the time has come to save the schoolchildren and therefore my friend Eliyahu was taken as a Hebrew teacher in the Milâs school. He began to work enthusiastically and his students were already progressing. I would receive letters from Milâs every week and sometimes twice a week and they always told me that they would do everything they could for me to be sent to Milâs as well because I was also needed in the school, but unfortunately [292] this went on for only a short while because to my great sadness the enemies of the Jews do not keep still for a moment in order to embitter our lives. Therefore they told stories to the local Kamaykam who was a terrible anti-Semite. He brought it to the attention of the battalion commander Massar Bey that this man [Nahmias’s friend Eliahyu] is a propagandist and therefore he had to be brought back from Milâs within a short time. This was done, because in a few weeks’ time, my friend was back at my side. He was called to the commander without knowing why. The commander told him that he had to leave Milâs and to serve in the hospital in Ula 88 in which there was not a single Jew. Therefore, the following day he began his new job.

Immediately after we had returned from Milâs I was told that the commander had fallen in love with another shoemaker, particularly because he was able to exchange a Jew for a Turk, and he decided to send me to one of the units that were subordinate to his battalion, but a few days later he realized his mistake and he understood that, according to his needs, he could not be parted from me because the new shoemaker was no use for anything. They told me that I must go on doing my job without changing anything and the [Turkish shoemaker] became a servant at the commander’s entrance. The end of summer was going well, thank God. I spent three of the months of summer in the house of Madame Allegra, the wife of Dr Perahia. They gave me a room and the two sisters took care of me...
and saw to all my various needs. Three months later friend arrived: Moshe Bermak arrived from Aydin, a student of the high school in Jaffa, who persuaded me to rent a house and we lived together and divided our expenses for food.

The festivals after Elul approached and I was looking forward to seeing Milas but I didn’t know whether I could go there without being invited, especially at that time. Our commander Massar Bey was relieved and in his place Hulusi Bey arrived, a very serious man before whom all the officers trembled, as did the entire army. The order was issued that every non-Muslim soldier would be transferred to the Labour Battalions but because that order had been given during the time of Massar Bey it turned out that I remained the only Jewish soldier in the whole of Mugla. Also at that time a labour office was established for all the craftsmen and I was transferred to this place as chief craftsman. Therefore I did not have an opportunity to take any leave and I was very upset. I stood before Fa’in Bey, the manager, telling him that I did not have the tools for my work and how was I able to work? He replied that everything was shortly about to arrive from Izmir. Every craftsman had to bring his private tools and to begin work. I took advantage of the opportunity by saying that my tools were in Milas and if they would allow me to go there I would bring them back. He replied that I must make a request to the commander Hulusi Bey because nobody could do even the smallest thing without an order from him. [293] Because many high-ranking officers who held important posts were my acquaintances, not because they loved me but because they enjoyed the fact that their overshoes and boots would be repaired according to their requirements and as quickly as possible, they made it possible for me to receive eight days’ leave. I did not hesitate in taking advantage of this leave. I reached Milas and went straight to the house of Senor Musani Franco, because he had invited me in three letters imploring me to request leave in order to celebrate the festivals in his house. The Milas inhabitants’ welcome was very warm. On Yom Kippur the cantor Nissim Israel implored me to be his assistant while the cantor of Milas’s second synagogue was away from Milas, they [members of the second synagogue]
intended to take me to their community and I was confused. I didn’t want to break any promise to Nissim so I did not promise them anything, because they had behaved dishonestly, and when I was walking to the synagogue, some young men were waiting for me, they who embraced me and took me into the synagogue. So we prayed the prayer of Yom Kippur, and we also spent Sukkot, altogether 22 days with an eight-day pass.

I was prepared for the catastrophe awaiting me from the new commander Hulusi Bey. I returned to Muğla and when I was standing before one Mulazam Fuad Effendi, the commanding officer, he was very angry with me but quite quickly my friend Moshe Bermak let him known that a bottle of Arak, that had been brought from Milăs especially for him, was waiting for him. His demeanour changed and he held out his hand and interested himself in my health, mentioning that he had sent me for eight days and meantime 22 days had passed so I had certainly been ill. I told him that he was correct in what he had supposed and I gave him written regards from the doctor in Milăs, which I had bought with a banknote. Immediately he assured me that everything would be well and that I should not worry. And it was all soaked in Arak. The battalion commander himself sent for me to work in his house. He asked me what the meaning was of this delay, and I replied that I had been ill. He warned me that I should not do this again and I was sent to make three pairs of shoes for him as quickly as possible. This commander was sent to another place, and another commander called Kassim Bey replaced him. He was a decent man. But the talk about peace occupied us very much and we were not interested in whether our commander was decent or not. In the meantime I kept my post as head artisan in the labour office and so days passed without my working at all because my tools had still to arrive.

The officers gave us a lot of work and I, together with two other workers, one Jew, the other a Turk, went to work in shops in the market in order to fill the officers’ needs. [294] And so the officers treated me with respect. News about the peace was spreading more and more from day to day, and we were waiting impatiently for the time of peace. The rumours that Bulgaria had asked for a separate peace added to our joy.89
After Bulgaria had made a separate peace it became clear that this was the sun that had banished the darkness. These pillars of light caused all the clouds that had covered the world for four and a half years to disappear. A few days after this we heard the declaration of the ceasefire and following this they began to hand the soldier their orders of discharge. And so I was discharged, to the joy of all my friends.

All that time we had longed to have some kind wound in our legs or in our hands for which we would be discharged from army service but we did not achieve any kind of wound, while the ones who were blind or lame were the lucky ones because they were privileged to be free and not tortured under the Turkish hammer. Then when the lack of comfort no longer applied we didn’t have to worry about anything other than remaining alive, to enjoy, breathe the fresh air of freedom, for only justice and equality would rule from now on. With all the excitement surrounding the news about the success of righteous people in the world I already had my discharge papers in my breast and I was on my way to Aydin. I had been saved from the hostile frontline of the World War but I found myself on the battlefront of the Spanish war [Spanish flu] and I was fixed to my bed for ten days until I overcame the sickness and I continued on my way to Izmir. There I was welcomed by my friend Senor Yaakov Ponpas. I remained in his house for about seven weeks that passed in various kinds of enjoyment and ease surrounded by good people, among the best and the most exalted. After seven weeks. I went on my way to the city I had so much longed for. After a few problems along the way we reached Aleppo within eleven days. I remained in Aleppo for eight days until I was allowed to leave. After that I was already in Damascus and after spending eleven days in Damascus I received confirmation from the English commander and I went to Haifa and from there to Jerusalem. My entrance to Jerusalem caused me the greatest joy. I could not believe that my legs were standing once again on the holy soil that had been so longed for. My friends and companions did not weary of embracing me again and again.
Notes
1. This was in spite of the fact that Ottoman military law prescribed that ‘A young married man whose wife is dead or divorced leaving children is exempted. The care of the latter is the duty of the young father.’ See Erik Zürcher, ‘The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice 1844–1918’, International Review of Social History, 43, 3 (1998), p.443.
3. ‘As the author himself declares these are notes of the diary that he wrote during the events. Nahmias is proud of the fact that he continued to write, contrary to others who began but rapidly despaired of it, and he even emphasizes his purpose in writing. He wrote on various papers and pages that he had come by. After the war he copied his notes into an orderly notebook but this does not make writings a “memoir.”’ Personal correspondence from Dr Avner Peretz, translator of the diary from Ladino into Hebrew. I am grateful to Dr Peretz for this comment.
4. As I have already noted above, the transport units were part of the army support infrastructure to which the Labour Battalions belonged as well.
5. The men were regularly shaved of all head, face and body hair.
7. An Ottoman officer, Co. Sadik Sabri, reported that more than half the recruits in his battalion remained in their civilian clothing. See Hikmet Özdemir, The Ottoman Army 1914–1918: Disease and Death on the Battlefield (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2008), p.36.
8. In his diary Amon describes these frequent evenings of celebration, and Arieli Orloff, in his novel Yeshimon, based on his own experiences in an Ottoman military band, describes one of them in detail. For a vivid account, also see Alexander Aaronson, With the Turks in Palestine (Dodo Press, 2009), pp.10–11.
10. This is the introduction by Haim Nahmias’s son, Shlomo Nahmias, to the translation of the diary from Ladino into Hebrew. I have footnoted the titles that Professor Nahmias placed in his text.


19. [Nahmias’s note] A popular proverb: ‘There is no satisfying the lion.’


23. [Nahmias’s note] Deut. 32:15. One becomes ungrateful on becoming rich or important; or one turns on the person who made the success possible.


27. [Nahmias’s note] A strict ethical educational and cultural movement that developed in Eastern Europe in the 19th century, particularly among Orthodox Lithuanian Jews. Its founding is attributed to Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin Salanter (1810–83).

28. [Nahmias’s note] A section of Rabbi Jacob ben Asher’s compilation of Arba‘ah Turim. This section treats aspects of Jewish law pertinent to finance, legal procedure and loans.

29. [Nahmias’s note] The most authoritative code of Jewish law.

30. [Nahmias’s note] This section was translated from Hebrew with the help of Dr Rona Hart.

31. A grush is worth 40 paras, a small item of currency.

32. This is one of the major differences between Nahmias’s and Amon’s styles: Nahmias expressed strong emotion whereas Amon generally maintains an ironic distance from the events and, despite describing a similar scene (see pp.75–6), rarely lets us become aware of his feelings.

33. Between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

34. A Palestinian Arab village 21 kilometres west of Jerusalem, depopulated during the 1948 war.

35. Situated in Jezreel Valley on the crossroads to Tel Aviv, Tiberias and upper Galilee, Nazareth and Bet Shean.

36. David Yellin, 1864–1942, Hebrew scholar, educator and lexicographer. He taught at the Alliance Israélite Universelle and later became a professor at the Hebrew University. He was elected the first deputy mayor of Jerusalem and was one of the founders of the Hebrew Language Academy.

37. A story by the Hebrew novelist Yehuda Burla, who was a military interpreter during the war, concerns the execution of a group of deserters after they had been caught. Among them is a sergeant, a noble character, loved by the men, whose honour is undermined through being accused of negligence in allowing the men to escape. Araf Shaoush, the sergeant, is not executed but relieved of his decorations and ‘beaten formally’ – that is, symbolically – in front of his unit, a greater humiliation which leads to his suicide. War
stories like this one constitute a hybrid genre, neither fiction nor historiography, but clearly based on the author’s lived experience. Both as trustworthy and as untrustworthy as the diary accounts, such stories create good correspondence with them. Yehuda Burlsa, ‘Aref Shaoush’, in *Bli Kokhav* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1988), pp.165–75. For a discussion of genres of war writing, see Glenda Abramson, *Hebrew Writing of the First World War* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008).

38. In his diary, Ihsan Turjman reports that when the army on the Suez front ran out of feed for the pack camels, the soldiers were ordered to crush their biscuit rations and feed them to the animals. The camels refused to eat them. See Salim Tamari (ed.), *Year of the Locust: A Soldier’s Diary and the Erasure of Palestine’s Ottoman Past* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011), p.115.

39. from the Book of Esther (6:7), ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.’ My thanks to Dr Avner Peretz for pointing this out.

40. Cities in Syria.
41. Possibly Arak, a small town in Syria.
42. Possibly Homs, a city in western Syria.
43. A city in Syria, north of Damascus.
44. The Sabbath before Passover that falls on 10 Nissan.
45. A city in Syria.
46. Blessing of Deliverance. ‘Blessed are Thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who bestows good to sinners, even as he has bestowed to me every good.’
47. As we have already seen, the railway system in the provinces was very limited, single track and fragmented and unable to cope with large volumes of military traffic. See Nicole, *Ottoman Army*, p.24.
49. I have not been able to identify this town in Turkey.
50. Nahmias gives no reason for their preferential treatment. It is most likely that a large sum of money changed hands.
51. Nahmias has written ‘Mamora’, the location of which is uncertain. Amon mentions this location early in his diary. They could not mean Marmara, which is in the north-east corner of Turkey, because they were travelling towards the west.
52. Nahmias was a master shoemaker.
53. A city in southern Turkey.
54. The burning of the leaven. On the evening before Passover, observant Jews search their homes, ensuring that all *hametz* – that is, any of the forbidden food – has been found and removed. The final search is conducted the evening before Passover eve and on the following morning whatever *hametz* has been found is burned.
55. A town in the south-west of the country.
56. *Leyl shimmurim*, lit. ‘a night of watching’: a night of worshipping God through eating the matzot and remembering the exodus from Egypt.
57. This is unclear. It obviously did help because they slept in the tent.
58. Lit. ‘Praise’. Passages from Psalms 113–18, said on all festivals.
59. Nahmias uses the present tense here, to distinguish between the action and his feelings and thoughts.
60. Often these towns are difficult to identify because of Nahmias’s spelling.
61. Nahmias writes this as ‘Pizanti’. Pozanti is a small city and a large district in Turkey’s Adana Province, on the main road from the city of Adana up across the Taurus Mountains.
62. There are unaccountable leaps in the narrative. Nahmias might have edited the material.
63. A large city in the Central Anatolia region of Turkey.
64. A city in north-western Turkey and the capital of the Eskişehir Province.
65. Probably Bilecik, the provincial capital of Turkey’s Bilecik Province, not far from Eskişehir.
66. A town and district of Konya Province in the Central Anatolia region of Turkey.
67. This sentence appears to be incomplete.
68. Evidently they thought they had reached freedom, or were about to be rescued. The reason for the change of clothes is not clear.
69. *Okas*: a Turkish unit of weight equal to about 2.75 pounds.
70. Haydarpaşa, Istanbul, a port at the southern entrance to the Bosphorus.
71. A resort on the on the Bozburun Peninsula.
72. Corn milk.
73. The Selimaniye Mosque is in Edirne, a city on Turkey’s western coast. It was built on the order of Sultan Süleyman (Süleyman the Magnificent) in memory of his father. This mosque is covered with valuable tiles and fine paintings. It is very unlikely that it was the one used as a military barracks. The only mosque in the Konya district built in 1219 is the Alaeddin Mosque.
74. The Sarachaşane Bridge (Sarachaşane Köprüsü), also known as the Sultan’s Bridge, is an Ottoman bridge across the Tunca river in Edirne, The bridge was built in 1451. It is one hundred and twenty metres long and five metres wide, with eleven piers and twelve arches. The bridge was repaired during the reign of Sultan Mustafa II in 1706.
75. Bandırma, on the southern shore of the Sea of Marmara in south-west Turkey.
76. Sultan Mehmed VI (1861–1926) served as the last Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1918 until he was overthrown in 1922.
77. These are transliterations of his names, which are unidentifiable. It is possible those names have changed in modern Turkey, or that Nahmias’s transliterations are faulty, or that the towns and villages at which the train stopped were too unimportant to include on a map. However, his mention of the main towns and cities, Aydin, Menemen and Izmir indicate the region in which they were travelling. They were moving south, close to the Aegean coast.
78. A district of İzmir Province in Turkey. It is a north-western district of İzmir, part of İzmir’s Greater Metropolitan Area. The Levantines, who were the wealthy class of İzmir during the later Ottoman period, still have mansions standing around all parts of İzmir. As Nahmias describes, in Karsiyaka, several of the mansions are to be found along the waterfront, where they are fully restored for the public to see. See http://www.iwasinturkey.com/wiki-guide/Kar%C5%9F%C4%B1yaka.
79. Nahmias’s meaning is uncertain here: Aydin is a short distance from Izmir. It is possible that Nahmias was mistaken about their destination, because it is unlikely that they would have travelled to Aydin and then back to Izmir. However, their route, as Nahmias accurately describes it, similar to Amon’s description, is so incoherent that a side trip to Izmir cannot be ruled out.
81. A representative of the Sultan in peacetime. In wartime a military rank equivalent to lieutenant colonel.
82. Capital of the Turkish province of the same name, Muğla is a small inland city.
83. An ancient city in south-western Turkey. Jews came to Milâs in the nineteenth century and constituted the second largest minority group there after the Greeks. Members of the Franco, Perahia and Amato families were prominent professionals and civil servants.

84. A city on the Mediterranean coast of south-western Turkey, the eighth most populous city in Turkey and now the country’s biggest international sea resort.

85. Additional prayer introduced to replace additional Temple sacrifices on Sabbaths and festivals.

86. Part of the *Mussaf* prayer.

87. The intermediate days between the beginning and end of Passover.

88. Ula is a district, as well as the central town of the same district in Muğla Province in south-west Anatolia.

89. On 25 September 1918, British forces entered Bulgaria. Two days later, a Bulgarian Republic was proclaimed at the small town of Radomir led by Alexander Stamboliiskiy (who was to become Prime Minister in 1919), but despite having 15,000 troops at his command, he was defeated by loyal forces in a three-day battle at Vladaya. On 28 September, Bulgaria began armistice talks with the Allies and hostilities ended on the Bulgarian front at noon on 30 September. After the war, Bulgaria signed the Treaty of Neuilly, similar to the Treaty of Versailles in its terms. The Bulgarian army lost 90,000 soldiers during the First World War, more than much larger countries like Canada and Australia. See [http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/minorpowers_bulgaria.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/minorpowers_bulgaria.htm).
Glossary of Hebrew Terms

Aliyot: waves of immigration of Jews to Palestine. There were five main *aliyot* between 1882 and 1939, mainly from Central and Eastern Europe.

Haggadah: the story of the Jews’ exodus from Egypt read on Passover eve.

Halukkah: a form of charity to support the ‘Old Yishuv’, mainly from abroad.

*Halutsim/halutzim*: lit. pioneers, Jewish immigrant labourers in Palestine.

*Hametz*: food forbidden on Passover.

*Hamsin*: a hot desert wind.

Hanukkah: festival of lights occurring on the 25th day of *Kislev* (November–December) to commemorate the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabees, second century BCE. Hanukkah is observed for eight days and a candle is lit on each evening of the festival.

*Hapo`el Hatsa`ir [The Young Labourer]*: an anti-militarist Zionist group active in Palestine from 1905 until 1930, which sought to establish the Jewish settlement in Palestine through labour and the development of the land.

*Heder*: Hebrew Sunday school.

*Maror*: bitter herbs eaten on Passover eve.

*Matsah/matsot*: unleavened bread/s eaten on Passover.

*Minyan*: quorum of ten men required for public prayer.

*Moshava/ot*: An early Jewish settlement or settlement town in Palestine.

*New Yishuv*: usually dated from the arrival of the first of the Zionist groups in Palestine in 1882.

*NILI*: Acronym (Hebrew) for ‘The eternity of Israel (God) will not lie’: a secret underground organization and network during the war, with the purpose of spying for the British.
Old Yishuv: a popular term for the Jews living in Palestine, mainly in Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias and Safed, before the immigration of members of Zionist movements in 1882.

Po`ale tsiyon [The workers of Zion]: a movement of socialist Zionists founded around the turn of the twentieth century.

Passover (Pesach): commemorates the story of the Exodus, in which the Children of Israel were freed from slavery in Egypt. Passover begins on the 15th of Nissan (March–April) and is celebrated for seven or eight days.

Rosh Hashana: the Jewish New Year that begins on the first day of Tishri, the first month of the Jewish calendar (September–October).

Seder: The eve of Passover ritual feast.

Shavuot: Festival of Weeks occurring on the 6th of Sivan (May–June). Shavuot commemorates the day God gave the Torah to the nation of Israel assembled at Mount Sinai.

Shiva: seven days of mourning.

Sukkot: the Festival of Tabernacles that remembers the small dwellings in which the Children of Israel lived during their forty-year sojourn in the desert. The festival begins on the 15th of Tishri (September–October) and lasts seven days, during which time Jews are expected to live – or at least to take meals – in sukkot (huts, booths).

Tefillin: phylacteries; a pair of small black leather boxes containing scrolls inscribed with verses from the Torah, donned by observant Jewish men during the morning prayer.

Yishuv: The Jewish community in Palestine prior to the State of Israel, including the pre-Zionist era (Old Yishuv) as well as the Zionist and mandate eras (New Yishuv).

Yom Kippur: the Day of Atonement, on the 10th of Tishri. Jews traditionally observe this holy day with a 25-hour fast.
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1. Turkish troops, led by a military brass band, march through Constantinople. Civilians can be seen on the streets. Image No.Q45359, reproduced here by courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

3. Ottoman soldiers leaving through the Damascus Gate, Jerusalem, 1916.

4. First Ottoman train to arrive in Beersheba, 1917.
5. Bootmakers in the Ottoman army, 1917.

6. Jamal Pasha, the Commander of the Ottoman forces in the land of Israel. Courtesy of the State of Israel National Photo Collection.

7. Yehuda Amon as a young man.
8. Yehuda Amun in old age.


10. The Nahmias family. Haim Nahmias (right), his wife Nitzhia (left), and his children Hannah, Avner and Shlomo (standing, right).