

The Diary of Sami Yengin, 1917-18: The End of Ottoman Rule in Syria

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My aim is to tell a story about the Ottoman army in Syria¹ during World War I through the experiences of Sami Yengin, a twenty-two-year old Turkish-speaking conscript from Kopalıŝta – which was part of the Ottoman Vilayet of Drama (in what is, today, Eastern Macedonia). Sami kept a wartime diary from 1917-18 which was published in 2007 by the Turkish Military Archives as *Drama'dan Sina-Filistin'e Savaş Günlüğü – A War Diary: From Drama to Sinai-Palestine*.² Yengin wrote nearly every day for the better part of two years, dealing extensively with food rations, troop movements, battle, the conditions of the soldiers, his thoughts, fears and desires, as well as a very detailed account of the Ottoman retreat from Syria. His experiences can be added to a small but growing library of diaries from the war years in Syria, including Nasri Bik Lahhud al-Labki,³ Ihsan Turjaman,⁴ Conde de Ballobar,⁵ Khalil Sakakini,⁶ and Mordechai Ben-Hillel Ha-Cohen.⁷

My argument is that the oft-reported brutality of the Ottoman army must be understood in the context of the severe conditions in which the famished and impoverished soldiers lived. These were soldiers in uniform only, conscripted against their will, offered worthless paper money as compensation (if they were given anything at all), often provided no provisions during their conscription, training, combat and retreat operations; given little (or no) water during combat operations; and exposed to ungodly harsh work and battle conditions. They were torn from their families, forcibly dispatched across mountains and deserts, and exposed with alarming regularity to some of the worst diseases humans have ever known. Seen from the perspective of the soldiers, the occupation of Syria during World War I looks profoundly different from the view taken by their detractors, and it is this perspective I shall try to capture below.

Sami Yengin's journey takes us from Drama to Gaza – and then all the way back to Drama, with visits in nearly every town and village along the way. He writes about dreams which invariably involve his family,⁸ the joys of buying cigarettes,⁹ troop movements, daily rations, sleepless nights, his feelings of loneliness, boredom, excitement, pain, hunger and freezing cold, and his desire (often unfulfilled) of eating the succulent fruits from villages that lined his pathway to battle.¹⁰ The highlight of his day usually involves sending and receiving mail from family back in Drama.¹¹ Most of all, Yengin constantly praises God for his continued survival, and seeks His blessings: “*Cenabihak hayırlar ihsan eylesin.*”

Yengin also divulges his desire to desert on multiple occasions, and exclaims at one point that he was set to desert if he did not pass an exam which would land him an accounting clerk position.¹² But he did pass the exam and did get his coveted position as an *aide-de-camp* writing reports for the army. This seems to be the reason why from about mid-March 1918 onwards the diary is extremely rich with precise quantitative details of daily food rations, troop headcounts and desertions. We will deal with many of these issues in greater depth below – including 1) long-distance marches and battle; 2) food and water 3) interactions with the local population; and 4) desertion. But before we delve any further into the diary, let's step back for a brief overview of the Ottoman army apparatus in Syria during World War I.

Who Made Up the Ottoman Army in Syria?

The exact ethnic composition of the Ottoman army in Syria is not known, nor does it seem possible to determine, given that soldiers were frequently shipped back and forth between fronts. Nor is it particularly meaningful to draw clear lines between Arab and Turk, at least from Yengin's perspective.¹³ In fact, ethnic differentiations rarely if ever surface in the diary. Yengin writes nearly every day for close to two years without bothering to tell us much of anything about the ethnic character of his brigade. In fact, the word *Türk* does not appear anywhere in the diary. Still, it has been suggested that a majority of conscripts that served in Syria were Arabic speakers, although these included large numbers of (non-Arab) Turks, Bulgarians, Albanians and Kurds.¹⁴ The highest ranks of the military hierarchy, however, seem to have been primarily Turkish speakers or Germans. The same general trend seems to have been true for the military courts and the military (read state) bureaucracy: the highest echelons of power were primarily Turkish speakers, while the rank and file were Arabic speakers.¹⁵ Still, at least one Arab diarist from the war, Nasri Bik Lahhud al-Labki, lashes out against what he perceived to be evil Arabs that dominated the military courts and administrative offices of the army.¹⁶

What about their socio-economic status? Most of the soldiers conscripted in combat units and fighting on the fronts must certainly have come from the poorest backgrounds, usually the peasantry. This is evident in that soldiers from wealthier families had options: they could pay the *badl askeri*, the exemption tax; work as professional tailors, doctors, telegraph workers or bureaucrats, such as Tawfiq Canaan; bribe officers to escape military

service, as was the case with Nasri Bik Lahhud al-Labki; or land cozy office jobs close to home, as was the case with Ihsan Turjaman.¹⁷ Religious affiliation mattered a great deal, and non-Muslims were significantly more likely to be forced into agricultural labor, construction, garbage collection, or to be placed in military training but without arms.¹⁸

Journeying Across an Empire

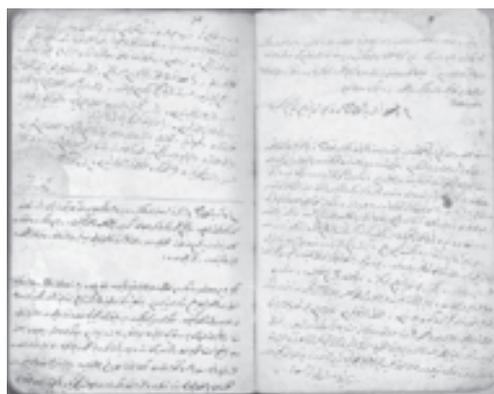
Now let's get to know our protagonist, Sami Yengin. On the second page of his diary, his journey to battle is already well underway: "On 28 May 1917, we set off from Haydarpaşa [on the Anatolian side of Istanbul] to some place I'd never heard of. Meanwhile, the train passed by Erenköy, Bostancı and Kızıltoprak. In order to bid us farewell, the masses came running after the train, the look on their faces utterly distraught, leading me, as well, to shed tears of blood."¹⁹ Yengin, originally from Drama, an Ottoman Vilayet within the Salonika district, was destined for the Empire's southwest flank, Gaza, where he would see combat against the British.

Yengin crossed Anatolia and much of Syria, reaching Ramla,²⁰ where the rest of his journey to Gaza would proceed on foot through sandy and mountainous terrain. "Finally, I had to take off my shoes and walk in socks. I have no idea how I was able to walk on the scorching hot sand that day."²¹ The following day Yengin managed to buy a pair of shoes in a village along the way, but they were too large for him. That still made Yengin better off than many other conscripts, who had no shoes at all and made the long trek with little more than rags tied around their feet.²²

On his way south from Ramla to Gaza, the diary continues with a blow-by-blow account of the fall of Gaza from the perspective of the Ottoman troops. By the time of the British attack on Gaza and Beersheba on 2 November, known as the Third Battle of Gaza, Yengin had reached southern Palestine, where, inter alia, he was responsible for moving supplies to and from the front and rear of the battalion. With the fall of Gaza imminent, he describes his rapid withdrawal to Ramla, where he was forced to march for some eighteen hours – covering some seventy kilometers. Yengin wrote: "our shoes had broken into little pieces."²³ From Ramla, Yengin proceeded to Nablus, and then Jerusalem and Jericho, where he crossed the Jordan River on the way to Salt. From Salt he returned to Jericho and then Jerusalem. As the enemy began to close in on Jerusalem in December 1917, Yengin fled again with a number of other soldiers covering eighteen straight kilometers [due east toward Jericho] in the pouring rain, until they reached a well.²⁴ That was one of dozens of sleepless nights for Yengin, who had only his coat to protect him from the harsh winter weather.²⁵ When he had fled Jerusalem, all that was left in his pocket was a half-lira bank note and eight kuruş in silver coins. There were still heavy clashes between the British and the Ottomans, who were pursued eastward and northward to the Cebel-i Ektef line by the end of December.²⁶ Sleepless nights and freezing cold days with little to no shelter marked the winter months of 1918,²⁷ as did preparations for battle and fortification,²⁸ reconnaissance missions,²⁹ and of course land and aerial bombardment,³⁰ artillery exchanges,³¹ and fallen comrades³² in the defense of Ottoman positions in the Jordan Valley, east of the Jordan River and the front line

between Ottoman and British troops – which stretched east-west from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea at a point north of Jaffa.

For Yengin, things quieted down in the summer months of 1918, and the monotonous routine of life and sleepless nights seem to have driven him a bit crazy. “I find myself totally deprived, it’s been a week without any sleep. 22 hours of work, and 2 hours of sleep...”³³ Yengin also writes of his extreme boredom and desperation. His daily entries start to read the same; accounts of stocks and supplies, rations and troop movements. *Bugünlerde canım son derece sıkılıyor*. “These days the boredom is unbearable.”³⁴



Two pages from the original diary. Source: *Yengin, Drama'dan Sina-Filistin'e Savaş Günlüğü*, 134.

Yengin’s journey was typical of the movements of Ottoman recruits, which in many cases stretched across the entire geographical length of the Empire, from the capital to the farthest-flung corners of Anatolia, Syria and Iraq. Many other soldiers in Syria frequently mention similar daily hardships, sleepless nights, and long marches, including Şerif Guralp,³⁵ Alexander Aaronsohn,³⁶ Jirjius Kert’an³⁷ and others. Time and again we learn that no basic provisions were given to the soldiers during recruitment and training. Not even the upper echelons of power – Friedrich Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein, Falih Rifki Atay, Jamal Pasha, Mustafa Kemal and others – could escape the long and tortuous marches, all of whom crossed the Anatolian Peninsula to the Syrian front.³⁸ This was an army on the move. We will return to Yengin’s detailed account of the fall of Syria in the late summer and fall of 1918, but first let’s examine some of the other severe challenges the Ottoman troops had to face.

Water Shortages

Yengin’s diary also gives us a sense of the acute shortage of water suffered during combat operations and cross-empire journeys. On his way from Ramla due south in late August 1917 to fight on the Gaza front, Yengin describes the situation of soldiers: “right at sunrise, we set out. The same hardships on the roads ... there was no shade anywhere and there was not a sip of anything to drink. These hardships seem to be the reason why three of my teeth were in constant pain that day.”³⁹ When his unit reached Gaza, during its defense in late August and September 1917, Yengin wrote that “the kitchen wagons caught up [with us] from the back. Here, dinner is fed to the soldiers. Even if you gave one gold lira, there was no water. With great difficulty I barely got a canteen of water from the kitchen wagon, which came from the rear. That night, I managed with just that water.”⁴⁰

A few weeks later, Yengin discusses further water shortages among the soldiers

commanded to move to the Gaza front.

I fell out of utter exhaustion and suffering. Finally, on 14 September 1917, I was struck with bloody diarrhea. The loose bowels continued for three days. On 16 September, our battalion was again ordered to the front. We began to move in the morning.... finally, we took shelter today in the Vadi-i Baha. Here, as there are no villages, there is no water. Water was being supplied by a motorized pump in Jerusalem,⁴¹ which was a distance of some five hours [from the front]. Each soldier was given a few cups of water per day, to be used for laundry, washing, in a nutshell, all the needs of a soldier.⁴²

On the next page, Yengin continues: “since the moment we departed from Beyti Decan [Bayt Dajan] on 25 August [until 3 October], we did not see a single surface of water, and so our withdrawal [to Diyab] was extremely difficult.”⁴³ By January 1918, this is what Yengin had to say about water: “we did not have any silver coins left [and only 35 kuruş of paper money]. Our only remaining helpers were ourselves and Cenabihakk [God]. Today, you have no idea how happy I was to get my hands on some water so I could wash my head.”⁴⁴

If water was scarce on the southern front in late 1917 – as Yengin indicates – then it probably was a great deal worse during the Ottoman assault on the Suez Canal in January and February 1915. Recall that, in the first place, the mainstay of the forces that pushed towards the Canal from Beersheba in late 1914 and early 1915 had to depart in two waves because water resources were too scarce to move this mass of humans and animals at once.⁴⁵ As it is, the total mass of troops may well have numbered as high as fifty thousand,⁴⁶ and Ottoman troops and camels would have had to carry most of the water they needed from Jerusalem to Beersheba to the Suez Canal, with only minimal reliance on the Sinai wells.⁴⁷

The accounts we read confirm the great severity of the water shortage. It was totally forbidden for soldiers to use water for laundering, washing or other personal -uses.⁴⁸ Atay, an officer in the assault, remarked that, in one case, an army commander would not even give any extra water to one of his high-ranking officers who hadn’t washed his face in many weeks. One soldier recalled that water became so precious that some soldiers sold their share to others for silver coins.⁴⁹ Others greedily gulped down donkey and camel urine to stave off the thirst (although urine tends to have high levels of salt, and is not particularly conducive to quenching thirst).⁵⁰ In fact, men armed with bayonets were stationed at each water hole to protect them, while those caught drinking more than one canteen of water during a twenty-four-hour period were given severe punishments.⁵¹

The little water that could be extracted from the Sinai desert wells was not exactly thirst-quenching. In one case, a doctor seeing one of the commanders’ assistants fill his canteen with such murky water, shouted “I forbid you from drinking that water!”⁵² As Prüfer, a German officer who served in the Suez campaign of 1915, recalls,

Even Cemal Pasa himself suffered equally from ‘wicked tasting, barely drinkable’ water. The liquid drawn from hastily engineered desert wells

was usually salty or muddy, while in other cases it was just rainwater stored away in filthy petroleum cans. It was largely thanks to the ‘astounding performance’ of German medics, Prüfer reported from the field, that only twelve men fell seriously ill during the grueling march to the Suez Canal.⁵³

Prüfer clearly had plenty of reasons to exaggerate German successes, and his estimate of only twelve casualties seems remarkably low given the conditions we read about above. Whatever the casualty figures were, this brutal trek across hundreds of kilometers of uninhabitable terrain was marked by constant exhaustion and thirst – and certainly also hunger, to which we shall now turn.

Lack of Food

Food is constantly the subject of discussion and obsession in Yengin’s diary, whether it is an observation about the fruit grown in the towns and villages that he passes through,⁵⁴ or a description of the food rations given to the soldiers. Yengin records that, for at least three days, while crossing the Jordan River in late November 1917 in retreat from the British attack on Gaza, he was receiving a total of three hundred grams of maize and cornflour a day.⁵⁵ Some weeks later, his situation improves: “... thank God we had prepared bread. We got a few kilos of wheat and 2 kilos of sesame oil ... I managed to roast an eggplant in some sesame oil. This night I ate a tasty and scrumptious dinner.”⁵⁶ And so Yenin and the other one hundred and twenty-seven⁵⁷ members of his battalion feasted on eggplant and bread that day. After months of battle and meager rations, Yengin wrote on 6 December: “... thank god we succeeded in getting some cooked food today.”⁵⁸ By 11 February 1918, Yengin was rejoicing: since having left Istanbul, the only cooked food we had was bulgur soup, 90-year-old ox meat, and rotten sesame or olive oil. Tonight, we were astonished! We were given (fresh) oil, bulgur soup, grapes and pressed fruit (*pestil*).⁵⁹ On 14 March 1918 the ration was ninety grams of meat (*kavurma*) and for lunch, one hundred grams of grapes;⁶⁰ the next day he writes: “100 grams of biscuit (*peksimet*) and 500 grams of grapes for lunch, then cooked chickpeas for dinner.”⁶¹ By March and April the rations seem to have improved: on 16 March 1918, one piece of bread, one hundred grams of meat, one hundred grams of bulgur, one hundred grams of nuts, four hundred grams of grapes and ten grams of flour;⁶² on 17 March 1918: two hundred grams of wheat, one hundred grams of goat meat, eighty grams of figs and one hundred grams of *pestil*.⁶³ From about this point onwards, Yengin has his *aide-de-camp* position writing reports for the army, and so he documents nearly every day how much food he is given, a truly fascinating window into the day-to-day life of the soldiers. Most frequently, the following foods were given to the soldiers: a meat bulgur dish or a red lentil and bulgur mix,⁶⁴ grapes, bread, nuts, barley, corn, broad beans, olive oil, molasses, vetch and salt.⁶⁵ It seems that, by summer 1918, some stability had finally settled and daily rations had improved.⁶⁶ If one compares the amounts cited here by Yengin to other accounts of soldiers’ food rations, one would find that they are comparable in some cases, or else indicate that the food rations were

actually much lower than has previously been suggested.⁶⁸ One officer, Fuad Erden, with more than a hint of sarcasm, wrote that the biscuits distributed in the 1915 Sinai Campaign were “mature, fluffy, tepid, splendorous, magnificent, scrumptious ...” (with many more superfluous and satirical adjectives, but one gets the idea).⁶⁹

When the Ottoman troops were in retreat due north from Damascus, food again became scarce, and the troops were required to purchase their own provisions.

Even though my money was accepted in Mahs⁷⁰ things are sold here at exorbitant prices. A canteen of water costs 2 or even 3 *metelik*. 62 dirhems of grapes cost 1.5 kuruş, cheese costs 10 kuruş, 1 egg costs 2.5 kuruş ... not only did these meager proportions leave me hungry, but they also gave me painful hemorrhoids. I had no strength left to march. I have left behind my humanity.⁷¹

Whatever the case may be, it is clear from these figures, as well as from reports by other soldiers, that getting enough to eat, especially during conscription, training, battle and retreat, was a constant source of anxiety. Ihsan Turjman,⁷² Alexander Aaronsohn⁷³ and Khalil Totah⁷⁴ all complain of abysmal rations. One eyewitness from Dayr al-Qamar (in Mount Lebanon) described the situation of the soldiers as follows: “The Turks [i.e. soldiers] also suffered from starvation. They were known to sell their guns for five paper pounds or two loaves of bread. After various military setbacks, the officers pulled out leaving behind the soldiers. We saw them eat grass.”⁷⁵ Apparently it must have been relatively common for soldiers to sell their guns: On his flight from Jerusalem to Jericho, Yengin wrote that “we also wanted to sell our revolvers, but couldn’t find anyone to buy them.”⁷⁶ Another eyewitness recalls that the “Turks suffered [also] ... starving Turkish soldiers were seen crawling on their bellies eating grass. They dressed shabbily and were paid only 50 grams of a wheat a day.”⁷⁷ Other soldiers, weak and desperate for food, tried to steal from the local population, which in some cases led to their capture (and subsequent death) at the hands of the local population! Dr. Glazebrook, the American Vice Consul living in Jerusalem, had this to say about the food situation of the soldiers in September 1917: “The starvation of the Turkish troops is terrible. The Germans, who are on lines alongside of them, are living on comfortable daily rations procured at great cost by direct railway from Constantinople. The Turks are reduced to a bit of bread and an onion per day, and if they can get this they are content.”⁷⁹ By the war’s end, many Ottoman soldiers were left desperate, often seen begging for food on their way home to their cities, towns and villages.⁸⁰

Living Conditions

Living conditions seem to have been quite poor. When troops were on the move, they often slept in tents that could hardly have offered much in the way of shelter. On 27 August 1917 at 1:00 a.m., Yengin tells us that his unit reached Iraq el-Manshiyeh. “That

night, we pitched our tents, and rested there until the afternoon of 28 August ... Because of the poor condition of the road and the mass of sand everywhere that night, we did not reach Jerusalem⁸¹ until morning. Despite having just set up our tents, after one or two hours of pseudo-sleep, it was morning, and we woke up.⁸² On his way to Salt in late November 1917, he writes: "I slept on top of the boxes of accounting records."⁸³ In multiple instances during Yengin's retreat from Jerusalem in the winter of 1917-18, tents could not be pitched and he was forced to sleep in the open air in freezing cold weather.⁸⁴ To shelter from the cold and mud, the troops would tear branches from the olive trees to sit or lie on. "Even if we could lie on the branches during the day, this didn't help us fall asleep one iota at night."⁸⁵ Throughout the diary we read about sleepless nights and breaking dawn.

But Yengin should have considered himself lucky to have had a tent in the first place during combat operations, something not afforded to most Ottoman troops in the first Suez assault in January-February 1915, for instance. Instead, a number of soldiers recalled that they would scrape a hole in the sand with their bare hands and sleep in the open air.⁸⁶

The troops stationed in cities seem to have been better off. Some slept at home, such as Ihsan Turjman. Others, like Alexander Aaronsohn, chose to bribe an Arab officer with blankets for permission to sleep off base at the Jewish-owned hotel in Safad during his initial conscription.⁸⁷ Apparently military barracks were not terribly enticing places to stay. Khalil Totah agrees about conditions in Jerusalem, writing that "the sleeping accommodations were like pig sties."⁸⁸

As we suggested above, cleanliness and sanitation were not exactly top priorities for the military administration: Sami Yengin went forty days between bathing sessions (which consisted of three copper buckets of water) in September and October 1917, and then fifty days without washing his back in December-January 1917-1918.⁸⁹ Then, after washing his clothes in January 1918, Yengin discovered some one hundred and forty-eight lice in his shirt, and five hundred in his pants. Then after trying to kill them with his bare hands, he proceeded to burn them with his cigarette.⁹⁰ Apparently the cigarette failed to finish the job, as only a few months later he found another hundred lice in his clothes.⁹¹

Encounters Between Soldiers and Locals

Another interesting aspect of the diary is Yengin's touristic ventures and his comments about the locals. He writes in his diary that on 27 June 1917 he

obtained permission to leave the camp in order to see Damascus, leaving early that morning. After walking for a about 15minutes, I boarded a trolley and I saw all of Damascus ... The water in Damascus is very cold and pure. As much as it is pure, it is also in abundance. At all of the mosques and coffeehouses, there are very large fountains....The same day, at 9:00, I visited the large and famous Umayyad Mosque ... 25 meters to the east is the grave of the Selahaddin Eyyubi ... I visited this as well.⁹²

After a week-long retreat from the Gaza front in November 1917, Yengin reached Nablus, and first described the city as opulent: “I cannot describe to you just how bloody rich those people are, and their buildings too.”⁹³ From Yengin’s point of view, after having spent months on the Gaza front, Nablus may very well have seemed like paradise.

Yengin was not unique in this respect. Turkish soldiers frequently mention in their memoirs receiving days off or stopping with their entire unit to travel around the cities and sites of interest in Syria – especially Damascus, Jerusalem and Baalbek.⁹⁴ Notwithstanding, it is not always clear how much contact the troops had with the local population – and, as one soldier explicitly writes, the contact between soldiers and the local population was quite minimal.⁹⁵ These sightseeing ventures seem relatively innocent, and more than one anecdote suggest as well that Ottoman soldiers stationed near villages were not always the plundering maniacs that have become part and parcel of the standard accounts of the Ottoman army. In some cases, we read stories of amicable relations between the army and the local population.⁹⁶

Desertion

Yengin recorded that on 1 October 1917 three soldiers from his regiment were caught trying to escape to the enemy side. Gallows were set up around an unused well near the military headquarters’ health facility on the Gaza front. The soldiers were bound to the gallows by the shoulders, legs and waist, with the entire regiment watching. Their crimes were announced, and they were blindfolded. Three military squads stood at a distance of some twenty meters and opened fire on them.⁹⁷ Although it is unclear how often this kinds of public execution took place, we know from Yengin’s diary that desertion was a daily occurrence. Desertion accelerated towards the end of the war, and in October 1918, the numbers began to increase drastically: seventy-four deserters on 19 October 1918, thirty-five on 24 October 1918 (eight of whom were unarmed), and then seventeen more on 25 October 1918.⁹⁸

Although no one really knows what percentage of the Ottoman army deserted, one estimate has put the figure as high as one third.⁹⁹ In some cases, the state’s response seems to have been lenient, with relatively innocent notices published in the local press declaring amnesty to all deserters who return to their work battalions.¹⁰⁰ In many other cases, however, punishments seem to have been quite harsh, as in the above instance, and anyone who failed to return to their battalion by the specified time was to be summarily sentenced to death by the *Diwan al-Harb*, the military court.¹⁰¹ This was the case on the battle front, as Yengin describes it, but also in the towns and cities of the region, such as the public hanging of two Jewish, two Christian and one Muslim deserters at Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem on 29 July 1916.¹⁰² Although it is not clear how often public executions took place for desertion, one source has it that “there was never a morning ... which did not show two or three Arab deserters dangling from some beam or telegraph pole.”¹⁰³

Consider the story of one of the victims of the army’s desertion policy, Yosef Amozig, who worked in Beersheba as a tailor for the army and was hanged to death on 29 July

1916 in Jerusalem. His commander had reportedly sent him to Jerusalem to buy textiles for two new suits along with a note of authorization. Whilst Amozig was in Jerusalem, working in his shop, whistleblowers informed the authorities of his whereabouts, who came in the middle of the night to arrest him. Amozig explained his presence there, to no avail. His mother, Hanina, came to the barracks where he was being held, and he told her to fetch the authorization note. She searched everywhere, and, eventually, after some two weeks, located the note. All excited, she milked her goats, boiled the milk and prepared a white loaf of bread to bring to Yosef upon his release. On her way to deliver the note, she encountered people shedding bitter tears. It was too late. Amozig's body was already dangling from a beam in front of Jaffa Gate.¹⁰⁴

The End of Ottoman Rule

Yengin narrates in detail his withdrawal from Syria and the end of some four hundred years of Ottoman rule in the region. Ottoman positions had come under attack by late summer 1918, and his diary entries quickly begin to read like a thriller novel. We learn of the Ottoman retreat and withdrawal from the mountainous interior of Palestine, the Battle of Arara and the attack at Sivri Wood (or *Sivritepe*) on 18-19 September 1918.¹⁰⁵ On 22 September, Yengin and his comrades crossed the Jordan River with the British right on their tail. Forced to push through half the night to distance themselves from the British Yengin now faces additional attacks from Arab raids along the way. "By the time we had reached Ajlun ... we were all extremely exhausted," he writes.¹⁰⁶ "My boots had fallen apart. Nothing remained of my left boot."¹⁰⁷ A week later Yengin reached Damascus, which the enemy had occupied since 30 September, causing him to retreat further, until he reached Hama on 7 October. The next leg of his trip would be a train ride from Hama to Aleppo. The train departed from Hama at 5:00 a.m., and Yengin was exhausted and hungry. "There was nothing to eat."¹⁰⁸ By 24 October, the enemy was just twelve kilometers behind. "I took a position on top of a large pile of dust on the road ... all the while I saw 2 enemy armored vehicles about 1000 meters in the distance. I opened fire."¹⁰⁹ While another division stayed behind to continue firing on the incoming British troops, Yengin hitched a ride in an automobile which would take him further north.

Five days later, on 31 October 1918, Yengin writes: "Nothing to report about the brigade today. The soldiers are given the same food. Even soap was distributed. Word was received today that an official ceasefire and armistice agreement had been reached."¹¹⁰ The war had officially ended, and so had Ottoman rule in Syria. Some soldiers were immediately discharged, others gradually followed over the next few weeks.¹¹¹ Yengin discussed how Ottoman units began to divide up animals and supplies amongst themselves before they dispersed: the machine gun division, for instance, received one mule and one horse from the Third Army.¹¹² Further requisitions seem to have been collected from the villages in and around Kurt Kulak and el-Zari [sic].¹¹³ Yengin continued along with his unit to Öksüzlü, Anedan, Meydan-ı Ekbez and Kuru Hocalı.¹¹⁴ A Colonel Kazım Bey came to collect weapons from the soldiers.¹¹⁵ From there, the journey continued



Sami Yengin's travel route from Drama to Filistin (black) and back (grey). *Source: Yengin, Drama'dan Sina-Filistin'e Savaş Günlüğü, 133.*

(on foot) to Hasanbeyli. A donkey-wagon was given to the Health Department to carry the belongings and supplies of the weak soldiers.¹¹⁶ The daily marches were marked by 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. departures, with fifteen-minute breaks on the hour. Tents were erected at night for accommodations in Osmaniye, Mustafabeyli, Ceyhana and finally Adana, where Yengin stayed for three days.¹¹⁷ Crossing the Seyhan river and reaching Yenice, Yengin and his unit set up camp for the night. "I cannot describe the dryness of the cold that night. We had no coal or wood [to burn]."¹¹⁸ The journey continued along to Gülek, Kürtümusa, Kavaklıhan, Damlama, Kadirhan and Pozantı. "Today, in Pozantı, I met with Ahmet Bey from Drama, but the commander of the brigade did not grant me permission to [leave the unit and] go together with Ahmet Bey. I was saddened terribly."¹¹⁹ From Pozantı, the "indescribable" freezing, muddy (and sleepless) nights continued as Yengin reached Çiftehane, Kölsuz, Niğde, and Keserhisar.¹²⁰ A few days later, on 27 December 1918, Yengin and his troops managed to sleep the night in the coffeehouse of a friend, and proceeded the next day to Konya, an eighteen-hour march. From Konya, Yengin managed to catch a train, something that must have been a major relief, given he had already crossed half of Anatolia *on foot*.¹²¹

From Konya, the next destination was Afyonkarahisar and then Izmir, where Yengin found himself amidst some two thousand soldiers trying to get back to Istanbul, all of whom "attacked" the wagons when the train arrived. Seventy soldiers squeezed into the wagons, with another thirty or so outside perched on the top of each wagon.¹²² They proceeded along to Uşak, Alaşehir and Ödemiş, where Yengin had an uncle, Mehmet, and so he was able to wash up and do a bit of laundry on 3-4 of January 1919. They reached Izmir on 25 February 1919. But since there were no trains or ships to Istanbul (or Selanik), Yengin stayed with his uncle in Ödemiş for two months. Just to get from Izmir to Istanbul

was going to cost Yengin 1,200 kuruş! “I have been longing for this moment for three years ... and now there is no transportation,” Yengin wrote in complete exasperation.¹²³ Finally, on 5 April 1919, he was able to pay 500 kuruş for a third-class seat on a train from Izmir to Bandırma. From Bandırma Yengin had to pay another 122.5 kuruş to get a spot on a freight ship to Istanbul, where he stayed for a few weeks. On 1 May 1919, Yengin departed Istanbul, passing through Okçular, Inces, Sarışaban, Kavala and finally reaching Drama. In his last diary entry he writes “we reached Kopalışta on Sunday in the evening. Finally my sojourn in foreign lands (*gurbet*) had come to an end.”¹²⁴

Conclusion

Stories of the evil Turks have pervaded popular consciousness as well as scholarship from the war period to the present day. I am not arguing that the army or the state were benevolent institutions, or that the military occupation and martial law were justified, or that the Ottomans did not plunder or steal from the local population. Rather, I have tried to give a human face to soldiers, especially the “evil Turks” among them, whose experiences of hardship, hunger and longing for better days have been all but drowned out by nationalist amnesia. They were not all evil Turks, and, as I have tried to show above, many if not most of them seem to have been coerced as much by the circumstances of famine, pain, dislocation and targeted execution as the people of Syria themselves.

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Endnotes

- 1 I use the term Syria to refer to what were the Ottoman provinces of Syria, Aleppo Beirut and the districts of Mount Lebanon and Jerusalem.
- 2 Sami Yengin, Ahmet Tetik, Sema Demirtaş and Ayşe Seven (eds.), *Drama'dan Sina-Filistin'e Savaş Günlüğü*, (Ankara: Genel Kurmay Basımevi, 2007). Sami's son, Cahit Yengin, donated the diary to the *Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Arşivi* (ATASE) [Turkish General Staff Military History Archives and Strategic Studies Institute]. The editors also include in the appendix a number of pictures of Sami Yengin taken after the war, images of the diary itself (which was, of course, written in Ottoman script), as well as a number of maps of the Ottoman Empire and Greater Syria (which include battle details, troop movements and so on). An electronic copy of the book can be found at: <http://resmitarih.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/DramaSinafilistinSavasGunlugu.pdf>. Accessed 17 November 2013.
- 3 The diary was found in the Archive of the Lebanese Maronite Patriarch, and dates to 1920. It was published with a rich introductory chapter on the war, by al-Ab Rimun Hashim, *Jawānib Tarikh Jabal Lubnan* (n.p.:Manshurat al-Jamia'a al-Antoniya, 2007), before page 1.
- 4 Idem, Salim Tamari (ed.), *Am al-Jarad, al-Harb al-Uzma ma-Mahu al-Madi al-'Uthmani min Filastin* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 2008); idem, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
- 5 Idem, Edwardo Manzano Moreno and Roberto Mazza, eds. and trans., *Jerusalem in World War I: The Palestine Diary of a European Diplomat* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).
- 6 Akram Musallam, ed., *Yawmiyat Khalil*

- al-Sakakini, al-Kitab al-Thani: Al-Nahda al-Orthodoksiya, al-Harb al-'Uthma, al-Nafi fi Dimashq, 1914-1918* (Jerusalem and Ramallah: Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center and the Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2004).
- 7 *Milhemet ha-Amim 1914-1918: Yoman* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1981).
- 8 Yengin, *Drama*, 12-15, 29-30, 42-3, 46, 57, 64, 67, 126.
- 9 See, for instance, 11 February 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 33.
- 10 E.g., 6 September, 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 8.
- 11 In one case he even learned that his uncle sent him and his aunt 150 lira! 28 June 1918, Yengin, *Drama*, 96.
- 12 See entries on 5, 19, 23, 24 and 28 April 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 62, 64, 68, 69, 72.
- 13 This was not the case with other soldier diarists, such as Ihsan Turjaman, who talks a great deal about the ethnicity of the soldiers and officers.
- 14 Adil Manna', *Tarikh Filastin fi Awakhir al-'Ahd al-'Uthmani, 1700-1918: Qira'a Jadida* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 1999), 261; Cemal Pasha, *Memories of a Turkish Statesman, 1913-1919* (London: Hutchinson, 1922).
- 15 Nicholas Z. Ajay, *Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut, 1914-1918: The War Years* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgetown University, 1972), 274; The British reported similarly that "The Court Martial of Beirut and Aleh [Mount Lebanon] is composed of 5 or 6 officers of whom only one is Arab..." "Situation in Syria," p. 4, Foreign Office (FO) 371.2777, The (British) National Archives, (TNA).
- 16 While living in exile in Adana, he was accused of being an Armenian on the side of his paternal uncle, Dr. Butrous Labki al-Lubnani al-Ba'abdati, who was registered under the name Budrous, which is close to the Armenian Bedros. Then he was accused of desertion, and thus was required to pay the *badl naqdi*. Here is what he had to say about the affair: "After 4 days 'Adil Bik issued an order to arrest me with the reason that I am a deserter from military service ... and I was referred to the *Diwan al-Harb*, the military court. Having seen the fanaticism (*ta'asub*) of the Arabs, and their bad side, led me to forget the *ta'asub* of the Turks and their oppression. In fact, the president of the *diwan* (military court) was an Arab, Muhammad Bik from Hama. The president of the [administrative] office was an Arab, 'Arfi Bik from Aleppo. And had it not been for the compassion of the *bari*, as well as the money [i.e. bribe], they would have
- sentenced me to death as they did with two from my unit, killing them by firing squad. But, as for me, and the rest of the Egyptians, Samians, Cypriots, and Lebanese, they [the military court] were satisfied with double the payment of the *badal naqdi*, which we paid." Hashim, *Jawanib Tarikh Jabal Lubnan*, 107.
- 17 Ihsan Tourjaman, Wasif Jawhariyya, Khalil Totah, 'Umar al-Salih al-Barghouthi and Tawfiq Canaan, all from (relatively) prominent families or self-made intellectuals, managed to obtain non-combat positions in the Ottoman army. See Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar, eds., *al-Quds al-'Uthmaniyya, fi Mudhakkarat al-Jawhariyya: Al-Kitab al-'Awal min Mudhakkarat al-Musiqi Wasif Jawhariyya, 1904-1917* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2003), 241; 'Umar al-Salih al-Barghouthi, Rafif al-Barghouthi (ed.), *al-Marahil* (Beirut and Amman: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 2001), 13-14; Salim Tamari (ed.), *'Am al-Jarad, al-Harb al-Uzma ma-Mahw al-Madi al-'Uthmani min Filastin: Ma'a Ayyam Muthira fi Hayat al-'Askari Ihsan al-Qasira, Yawmiyyat Jundi 'Uthmani 1915-16* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 2008); Thomas Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine: The Diaries of Khalil Totah* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009), 193-220; Khaled Nashef, "Tawfiq Canaan: His Life and Works," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 16 (2002): 20; See also Eric Zurcher, *The Young Turk legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 170.
- 18 Mehmet Beşikçi, *Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War: Between Voluntarism and Resistance* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 136-7; Gad Frumkin, *Derekh Shofet bi-Yerushalayim*, (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1954), 179; Alexander Aaronsohn, *With The Turks in Palestine* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916), 23-7; Bertha Spafford Vester, *Our Jerusalem* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 234; Tamari, *'Am al-Jarad*, 127; Zurcher, *The Young Turk Legacy*, 171-2.
- 19 Yengin, *Drama*, 1-2. "Tears of blood" may have been written with a hint of hyperbole, but public processions and painful goodbyes were common across the Empire. In early-to-mid August 1914, one German living in Nablus, for instance, recalled daily mass processions of troops, camels and wagons along the Hijaz railway line. "The women and children moaned, wept, chanted and prayed along the roadside." See Gerda Sdun-Fallscheer, *Jahre*

- des Lebens* (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf Verlag, 1985), 473. Another soldier, Jirjius Kert'an, tells of his conscription into the army in Damascus, and the painful goodbyes that accompanied his departure. "I had to serve in the Turkish army ... I was called up and sent straight off to the Cadet School in Damascus. They would not allow to go [sic] and see my people before leaving. They all had to come to the station to see me off. My poor mother was crying the whole time. I was trying to comfort her." From Jirjius Kert'an, 10 March 1918 (letter to Davidson), R.T. Davidson Papers 400 (1916-1923), 64, Lambeth Palace Library Archives (London).
- 20 Thus from Kızıltoprak, Yengin proceeded to Eskişehir and Konya. Three days later, on 31 May 1917, his unit reached Pozanti, located at the foothills of the Taurus Mountains. Since the railway across Taurus Mountains was still under construction in May 1917, Yengin's unit proceeded on foot to Gülek, then from Gülek to Mamure by train, then from Mamure to Islahiye again by foot. Then he boarded another train from Islahiye to Aleppo. From Aleppo, Yengin continued along to Baalbek, Rayak and finally Damascus, which was the seat and headquarters of the Fourth Army in Syria. By August 1917, his unit reached Ramla (Palestine) by train. Yengin, *Drama*, 2-6.
- 21 Yengin, *Drama*, 6.
- 22 Nasif Bik Abi-Zayd, *al-Asr al-Damawi* (Damascus: Matba'at al-Mufid, 1919), 161; Sdun-Fallscheer, *Jahre des Lebens*, 485; Muhamad Rafiq Tamimi and Muhammad Bahjat, *Vilayet Beirut*, (vol. 2) (Beirut: Matba'at al-Iqbal, 1917), 28; Aaronsohn, *With the Turks in Palestine*, 8-9; Zurcher, *The Young Turk Legacy*, 178-9; Ajay, *Mount Lebanon and the Wilaya of Beirut*, 173.
- 23 Yengin, *Drama*, 19-20.
- 24 8 December 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 25.
- 25 Yengin, *Drama*, 25. For more on freezing cold weather, rain and wind, see entry on 26-27 December 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 27. Yengin records further sleepless nights in March. See entry on 30 March 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 54.
- 26 For more on the battle details, see, for instance, Mesut Uyar and Edward J. Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2009), 269-71.
- 27 Yengin, *Drama*, entry of 30 March 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 54, 55.
- 28 E.g. entries on 10, 11, 14, 18-20, 27-8 of April 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 60-2, 65-66, 72, 80, 83, 109.
- 29 E.g. entries on 17-18, 20, 25-6 April 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 62, 66, 69, 75.
- 30 See, for instance, Yengin, *Drama*, 16-29, 40-41, 45, 56, 72.
- 31 18 April 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 62.
- 32 See, for instance, entries on 23 February 1918, 26, 28 April 1918, 16 May 1918, *ibid*, 35, 70, 72, 73, 80.
- 33 4 May 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 76.
- 34 13-14 June 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 93. For more on his boredom, see 5, 7 July 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 97, 98.
- 35 Şerif who first served in Gallipoli, made the trek with his unit across the Anatolian Peninsula, first on a train to Konya, then on foot during the winter from Konya to Pozanti, Tarsus, Adana, and finally Aleppo (it seems that not all soldiers were as lucky as Yengin to have rail connection between Konya and Pozanti, a distance of some 246 kilometers). When Şerif arrived in Aleppo, his unit encountered other Ottoman soldiers whom he describes as disheveled, barefoot, treading on ice and snow, causing him to shiver upon seeing them. See Şerif Güralp, *Çanakkale Cephesinden Filistin'e: Bir Askerin Günlüğünden* (Istanbul: Güncel Yayıncılık, 2003), 59-63.
- 36 The infamous Alexander Aaronsohn of the Nili Gang described his own conscription, where he was marched northwards for four days from his home in Zikhron Ya'akov, with no provisions, food, or supplies. He writes that recruits presented themselves to the recruiting station in Acre. They were originally told that once their names were registered, they would be allowed to provide themselves with money, suitable clothing, food, and a chance to say goodbye to their families. Instead, they were marched straight to Safed, where their garrison would be located. During their four-day march – some 54 kilometers – they were given no provisions: "Any food had to be purchased from their own funds, so the recruits pillaged the little farms by the wayside – first poultry and vegetables, then stray horses. Apparently some of the pillaged Arab farmers traveled with the military recruits all of the way to Safed to try to recover their stolen goods." This must certainly have been the kind of the pillage and plunder we so often read about, but it makes a little more sense with some context and background. Aaronsohn, *With the Turks in Palestine*, 8-9.
- 37 Kert'an reports that "I remained in the [military] school for 4 or 5 months, and had to pay for my food, accommodation, and

- clothes all through the service. After getting the diploma, I was sent to Homs, where I remained for some time as a cadet. When I could [sic] bear any longer, I deserted and came home all the way back.” From Jirjius Kert’an, 10 March 1918 (letter to Davidson), R.T. Davidson Papers 400 (1916-1923), 64, Lambeth Palace Library Archives (London).
- 38 See Cemal Pasha, *Memories*, 140-41; Güralp, *Çanakkale Cephesinden Filistin’e*, 59; Fuad Gücüyener, *Sina Çölünde Türk Ordusu* (Istanbul: Anadolu Türk Kitap Deposu, 1939), 14; Falih Rıfkı Atay, Muammer Sarıkaya (trans. from Ottoman) *Ateş ve Güneş* (Istanbul: Pozitif Yayınları, 2009 [1919]), 15. Atay, for instance, wrote that the trek from Istanbul to Suez led soldiers to forget even their most miserable escapades experienced on the Sinai front itself! Atay, *Ateş ve Güneş* 15.
- 39 Yengin, *Drama*, 6.
- 40 Yengin, *Drama*, 8.
- 41 The Turkish word for Jerusalem used in the diary is *Cemame*.
- 42 Yengin, *Drama*, 9.
- 43 Yengin, *Drama*, 10.
- 44 10 January 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 31.
- 45 Shimon Robenstein, *Ha-Ma’amatzim Ha-ermanim-Turkim bi-Tehume ha-Handasah, Khipuse ha-Mayim veva-Khakla ‘ut be-Sinai uva-Negev be-Milhemet ha-‘Olam ha-Rishonah* (Jerusalem: Sh. Rubinshtain, 1989), 11.
- 46 On Ottoman troop totals, Liman von Sanders claimed 16,000. See his *Five Years in Turkey* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1927), 431. Fuad Erden estimates 20,000 in *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Suriye Hatıraları* (Istanbul: Ercan Matbaası, 1962), 11; Edward Erickson says 50,000 in *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 70; Bargouthi and Totah estimate 30,000 in *Tarikh Filastin*, 218; and Cemal Pasha *Memories*, 151, says no more than 25,000.
- 47 İsmet İnönü, Sabahattin Selek, ed., *Hatıralarım: Geçlik Subaylık Yılları, 1884-1918* (n.p.: Burçak Yayınları, 1969), 171.
- 48 Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harbi’nde*, 31; Münim Mustafa, *Cepheden Cepheye: İhtiyat Zabiti Bulduğum Sırada Cihan Harbinde Kanal ve Çanakkale Cepheslerine ait Hatıralarım* (Cağaloğlu/Istanbul: Arma Yayınları, 1998 [1940]), 26.
- 49 Mustafa, *Cepheden Cepheye*, 26.
- 50 Abi-Zayd, *al-‘Asr al-Damawi*, 162.
- 51 Atay, *Ateş ve Güneş*, 50.
- 52 Atay, *Ateş ve Güneş*, 50. He added that the water holes were infested with “a thousand kinds of insects, microbes, and God knows what else.” See Atay, *Ateş ve Güneş*, 50.
- 53 As quoted in Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power* (Camb., Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 174.
- 54 In September 1917, for instance, Yengin tells us about the food supply in some of the Arab villages near the southern front, as the Ottomans were in the process of retreating north: “Finally, on 6 September, 1917, following orders, we withdrew to the Kofka village. Here, our brigade was busy with fortifications. In this village, grapes and watermelon were abundant.” But, as usual, silver coins were the only acceptable form of payment, and so Yengin went without fruit that September. See Yengin, *Drama*, 8; Yengin writes further: “In between Rayak and Aleppo I saw quite a beautiful town called “Baalbek.” The entire surround area is made of gardens. The gardens are pure apricots. The water and air are lovely. The natural view is marvelous. We traveled alongside a stream that followed our path from the Rayak station to Damascus. The stream flowed mellifluously with ice-cold water. The apricots, quince orchards, mulberry groves, apple orchards [in the] surrounding area, along with the natural view, enters ones soul, so to speak. This region is apparently famous for *pestil* (thin sheet of sun-dried fruit pulp).” See Yengin, *Drama*, 3-4. Of Jericho, Yengin writes: “Jericho is a beautiful place, and abounds with bananas, tangerines, oranges and figs.” 23 November 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 22.
- 55 Yengin, *Drama*, 23. In early December, he was given only flour. 10 December 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 26.
- 56 16 December 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 27.
- 57 9 December 1917, Yengin, *Drama*, 30.
- 58 6 December 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 27.
- 59 Exclamation mark in the original (published) version. 11 February 1918. *Drama*, 33.
- 60 14 March 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 41.
- 61 15 March 1918. *Drama*, 41.
- 62 16 March 1918. *Drama*, 43.
- 63 17 March 1918. *Drama*, 43.
- 64 This was the case for much of September and October 1918. See Yengin, *Drama*, 100-115.
- 65 Yengin, *Drama*, 43-92.
- 66 In one case he writes that the rations in early July were olive oil and bulgur soup for breakfast and a bulbous (onion) bulgur mash for dinner, coming to a grand total of a healthy

- 2,634 calories. 7 July 1918. *Drama*, 97-8.
- 68 Compare these figures documented by Yengin to those found elsewhere in the literature by Zurcher, who suggests that daily rations for Ottoman soldiers writ large were, in theory, 900 grams of bread, 600 grams of biscuit, 250 grams of meat, 150 grams of bulgur (broken wheat), 20 grams of butter and 20 grams of salt. In Haifa, in 1918, daily bread rations were 900 grams. In Palestine, they were 300-600 grams, while in Damascus they were 500-600 grams. See Zurcher, *The Young Turk Legacy*, 179-80. Other commonly cited figures on food rations for Ottoman troops come from the 1915 Sinai campaign rations: 600 grams of biscuit, 150 grams of either dates or olives, 23 grams of sugar and 9 grams of tea (the tea was cold and without sugar). İnönü, *Hatıralarım*, 167; Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde*, 18, 33-4, 71.
- 69 Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde*, 33.
- 70 This must be a village between Hama and Damascus, but the author was not able to identify it.
- 71 7 October 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 106.
- 72 Ihsan Turjman, the Jerusalemite conscript, encountered the same kind of discrimination: "Ya subhan Allah," he wrote, "Does the military gather rice for the officers only and we, the soldiers, our rights are trampled all over?" Tamari, 'Am al-Jarad, 145.
- 73 He tells us that virtually every night the Arab soldiers at his base in Safed would sing and dance. "The themes were homely: 'tomorrow we shall eat rice and meat.' Aaronsohn, *With the Turks in Palestine*, 15
- 74 Khalil Totah, a famous Palestinian educator and writer who also served in the Ottoman army, wrote in one instance in his diary that "we had no breakfast for 3 months" during his military training in Jerusalem in 1914. "When the Turks were so kind enough to feed us," he added, "we ate bread, cheese and cucumbers. Hungry for some Arab food. Can't get it." Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 208, 210.
- 75 Anonymous interview cited in Ajay, *Mount Lebanon and the Wilaya of Beirut*, 397.
- 76 10 December 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 26. The fact that Turkish soldiers sold their guns is confirmed by at least one other (somewhat embellished) anecdote, in which an Arab desirous of purchasing a weapon from an Ottoman soldier is tricked out of three gold lira getting nothing in exchange. See also İbrahim Arıkan, Selman Soydemir and Abdullah Satun (eds.), *Harp Hatıralarım: Bir Mehmetçiğin Çanakkale-Galiçya-Filistin Cephesi Anıları* (İstanbul: Tımas Yayınları, 2007), 193-5.
- 77 Interview with Mr. Halim Musa Ashqar, cited in Ajay, *Mount Lebanon and the Wilaya of Beirut*, Appendix I, 18.
- 79 Interview with Dr. Glazebrook, 28 September 1917, R.T. Davidson Papers 400 (1916-1923), p. 20, Lambeth Palace Library, London. The hunger was compounded by typhus. As Nogales recalls, the Ottoman sixth army stationed in Syria was plagued with typhus brought about on malnourishment, which the German doctors apparently called "hunger typhus." Ajay, *Mount Lebanon and the Wilaya of Beirut*, 412.
- 80 'Izzat Tannous, *The Palestinians: A Detailed Documented Eyewitness History of Palestine under British Mandate* (New York: I.G.T. Co., 1988), 43.
- 81 The original Turkish for Jerusalem here is "Cemame."
- 82 Usually his unit slept in tents, sometimes managing to sleep in empty houses people had fled due to the fighting between British and Ottoman forces. See entry on 6 December 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 24. In other instances, it was harsh cold that kept him up all night, as indicated in the entries of 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 January 1918. See Yengin, *Drama*, 30.
- 83 26 November 1917, Yengin, *Drama*, 22
- 84 See, for instance, 28-29 December 1917. Yengin, *Drama*, 29.
- 85 15 March 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 42.
- 86 İnönü, *Hatıralarım*, 167; Mustafa, *Cepheden Cepheye*, 25; Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde*, 18, 33; Erden's words must be treated with some caution, however.
- 87 Aaronsohn, *With the Turks in Palestine*, 17.
- 88 Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 194.
- 89 Yengin, *Drama*, 10, 31, respectively.
- 90 10 January 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 31.
- 91 15 March 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 42.
- 92 Yengin, *Drama*, 4.
- 93 Yengin, *Drama*, 20.
- 94 Another soldier, Mustafa, for instance, toured Jerusalem on his day off. See Mustafa, *Cepheden Cepheye*, 23; Şerif Güralp, as well, writes about his days off in Jerusalem. Şerif Güralp, *Çanakkale Cephesinden Filistin'e*, 65-6.
- 95 One Turkish soldier who fought on the Palestine front wrote explicitly that "we basically had no contact with the townspeople ... we neither relied on them nor are we able to become friends with them." See Gücüyener, *Sina Çölünde Türk Ordusu*, 17.
- 96 An anecdote from Zionist residents quartered for about a month in Hulda during the early

- months of the war claims the Zionists remained on good terms with the Ottoman soldiers that had camped just outside the settlement, adding that “the military commander ensured that our fields did not suffer at all, and that not one object was taken from the Colony.” A. Ruppin, 29 March 1915, p. 5, Central Zionist Archives (CZA) Z3/1480. We have another account of an Ottoman soldier who writes of assisting the local population of Ramla combat trachoma, in Rahmi Apak, *Yetmişlik Bir Subayın Hatıraları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988), 157.
- 97 Yengin, *Drama*, 10; For further stories of public hangings on the Gaza Front, see Suzanne Schneider, “A Different War, a Different Zion: Yehuda Burla and the WWI Jewish Experience,” Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, New Orleans, LA, 12 October 2013.
- 98 Yengin mentions that further desertions from his battalion were very frequent: on 29 March, 20 April, 31 May, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 12, 25-26 June, 7-8, 11, 15, 18-19 July, 1, 5 August, 14, 19, 21, 23, 25, 30 October, 1, 25-26 November. See Yengin, *Drama*, 54, 66, 86, 87, 89, 90, 92, 93, 94, 98, 99, 100, 101, 106, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 115. For the “unarmed” (*silahsız*) deserters, see Yengin, *Drama*, 110.
- 99 Zurker, *The Young Turk Legacy*, 177-78.
- 100 *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* 8 June 1915; 11 June 1915; Other non-lethal punishments were also possible: A doctor in the Ottoman army from Baalbek, for instance, Ibrahim Efendi Hashish, who apparently fled to Italy and France, was warned that if he did not present himself to the *Diwan al-Harb*, he would be stripped of his civil rights and all his assets would be seized. See *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* 8 June 1915.
- 101 9 June 1915. For more instances of public executions for desertion, see *Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 9 May 1915; 24 June 1915.
- 102 For the Damascus firing squad execution, see *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 22 June 1915; for the Jaffa hanging, see Yisraeli ‘Oded and Yosef Greenbawm, “Yosef Amozig, Khayat Yehudi she-Guyas le-Tzeva’ ha-Turki ve-Nitlah be-Sha‘ar Yafo ‘al lo ‘Avel ba-Kfo,” *Ariel* 176 (2006): 80.
- 103 Raphael De Nogales Méndez, *Four Years Beneath the Crescent* (New York, London: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1926), 273.
- 104 Yisraeli and Greenbawm, “Yosef Amozig,” 80-82.
- 105 18-19 September 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 104-5.
- 106 22 September 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 105.
- 107 Yengin, *Drama*, 105.
- 108 8 October 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 106.
- 109 24 October 1918, Yengin, *Drama*, 109-110.
- 110 31 October 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 112. The treaty was actually signed on 30 October 1918, known as the Treaty of Mudros.
- 111 See, for instance, entry on 16, 20 November, 18 December 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 118, 124.
- 112 3 November 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 113.
- 113 100 kilos of barley and 400 kilos of millet were taken from the villages in this region of northern Syria. See entries on 6 November 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 113.
- 114 7-8 November 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 114.
- 115 10-11 November 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 116-7.
- 116 23 November 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 121.
- 117 24-25, 30 November and 4 December 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 121-2.
- 118 8 December 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 122.
- 119 15 December 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 123.
- 120 24 December 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 124.
- 121 28 December 1918. Yengin, *Drama*, 125.
- 122 1 January 1919, Yengin, *Drama*.
- 123 This is what he wrote in a letter to his family on 3 March 1919. Yengin, *Drama*, 127.
- 124 1 May 1919. Yengin, *Drama*, 129.