

James R. Russell, *Harvard University,*
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem,
russelldeep@gmail.com

**AND THE BOOK WAS NOT CONSUMED:
THE FORTY DAYS OF MUSA DAGH
AND THE NAZI HOLOCAUST**

Abstract: Franz Werfel, a Czech Jew who lived in Vienna and wrote in German, published his novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, about armed resistance to the Armenian Genocide, at the time of the rise to power of Adolf Hitler. It became an international bestseller, translated into some 35 languages, and was read as a warning of what the Nazis intended for the Jews. During the Nazi Holocaust the book served as an inspiration to the Jewish fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto and elsewhere in occupied Europe; the plan of the Yishuv for a last-ditch stand, if the Germans broke through to Eretz Israel, was named after Masada and Musa Dagh. The US government, under Turkish pressure, prevented Hollywood from making a feature film of the novel, which thus lapsed into obscurity — and America continues to this day officially to deny the historicity of the Armenian Genocide. Hitler (may his name and memory be blotted out) infamously asked on the eve of World War II, “Who remembers the Armenians?” Given the ubiquitous popularity of Werfel’s novel he may have intended, not to suggest they were already forgotten, but ironically to surmise that everyone in fact did remember them, but it did not matter because nobody cared or would do anything to help. The Holocaust unfortunately proved him correct, but books still did inspire the desperate heroes of the resistance to fascism.

Keywords: Armenian Genocide, Nazi Holocaust, Franz Werfel, Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Derenik Demirjian, Franz Kafka, Hollywood, Moses, Dina Abramowicz, Masada plan, Yad Vashem, David Mamet, William Saroyan, Raffi, Bertha Russell (née Bronya Zanger).

*Джеймс Расселл, Гарвардский университет,
Еврейский университет в Иерусалиме*

**И КУСТ НЕ СГОРАЕТ:
РОМАН *СОРОК ДНЕЙ МУСА ДАГА*
И МАССОВАЯ РЕЗНЯ ЕВРЕЕВ
В ГОДЫ ВЕЛИКОЙ ОТЕЧЕСТВЕННОЙ ВОЙНЫ**

Резюме: Франц Верфель, чешский еврей, живший в Вене и писавший по-немецки, во время прихода к власти Адольфа Гитлера опубликовал свой роман «Сорок дней Муса Дага» о вооруженном сопротивлении геноциду армян. Этот роман стал международным бестселлером, был переведен на 35 языков и служил предупреждением о том, что именно нацисты предопределили евреям. Во время нацистского Холокоста эта книга вдохновляла еврейских борцов и в варшавском гетто, и в других местах оккупированной Европы; план Ишсува стоять насмерть, если немцы пробьются к Эрец-Исраэль, был назван в честь Масада и Муса Дага. Правительство США, под давлением Турции, запретило Голливуду съемки художественного фильма по этому роману, который после этого ушел в небытие, а Америка продолжает и по сей день официально отрицать историчность геноцида армян. Гитлер (да будет стерто само его имя и память о нем) покрыл себя позором, спросив накануне Второй мировой войны: «Кто теперь помнит армян?» При невероятной популярности романа Верфеля, он, возможно, именно этого и хотел, однако по иронии судьбы это как раз и предполагает, что про армян помнили, а вовсе не то, что они были забыты, но это не имело значения, ибо никому не было дела или никто ничего не делал, чтобы им помочь. Холокост, к несчастью, доказал его правоту, но книги все еще вдохновляют героев сопротивления фашизму.

Ключевые слова: геноцид армян, нацистский Холокост, Франц Верфель, восстание в варшавском гетто, Дереник Демирджьян, Голливуд, Моисей, Дина Абрамович, план Масада, Яд Вашем, Давид Мамет, Уильям Сароян, Раффи, Берта Рассел (урожденная Броня Зангер).

Va-yira mal'akh Hashem elav be-labat esh mitokh ha-sneh va-yar 've-hineh ha-sneh bo'er ba-esh, ve-ha-sneh einenu ukal.

(“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”)—*Shemot/Exodus*, 3.2

Bar Kokhba: *A knekht vi nor er nemt di shvert in hant, er vert oys knekht* (“A slave, as soon as he takes the sword in his hand, ceases to be a slave.”)—Shmuel Halkin, “Bar-Kokhba”, *Moskver Melokhisher Teater* (Moscow State Theater), 1938

PREFACE

This study began as a paper delivered at the conference, “From Musa Dagh to the Warsaw Ghetto: Armenian and Jewish Armed Resistance to Genocide”, Harvard University, 31 March 2016, which was conceived and hosted by the Mashtots Chair, and supported and co-sponsored by NAASR and the Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard. The noted Holocaust scholar Prof. Deborah Dwork of Clark University in Worcester, MA delivered the first paper of the conference.¹ Although the title and topic of the meeting was *armed* resistance to genocide, she chose to speak instead of acts of nonviolent courage, in particular the well-known case of the pedagogue Janusz Korczak. First he refused to leave Nazi-occupied Poland unless *all* the orphans in his care were evacuated with him. Then he refused rescue from the Warsaw ghetto on the same grounds. In the end, he went with his little charges onto the cattle car for the one-way trip to the death camp of Treblinka, where all were murdered on arrival. I was angered and exasperated at the time: Why depart from the stated theme this way? And did not Korczak understand what he was up against? Surely saving even a few children was worth it, even if not all could be rescued. Whose lives was he playing God with? What makes this kind of a man a hero, and how could what he did possibly be understood as resistance? I fumed quietly to myself about it for some time, even as I was consumed by the multiple exhausting and traumatic tasks of moving across a continent and leaving everything familiar behind forever.

Since coming to California I have thought again about it all and see Prof. Dwork’s conference paper somewhat differently, though serious reservations remain. In retirement I am devoting time to the practice of the Commandments

¹The entire conference can be viewed on the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research [NAASR] site on YouTube.

and the study of Torah within the Hasidic tradition of Chabad, and in the process have learnt something of my own ancestry. I knew my father, Yosef *Boruch* (“Joseph the Blessed”) is descended on his mother’s side from the Hasidic sage of Kraków, Rav Kalonymos Kalman Epstein (b. ca. 1753), whose commentary on the Pentateuch, *Ma’or va-shemesh* (“The Illumination and the Sun”), is a central classic of Hasidism in its golden age. Because of the merit of this ancestor, children in his line bear the epithet *boruch*; my Dad inherited it when in the year of his birth, 1927, his namesake was *niftar* (passed away, as one says respectfully of a righteous man or woman) in Kraków. I have since learned of another descendant of Rav Epstein and thus also our relative, Rav Kalonymos Kalman Shapira, who was the Piaseczner Rebbe — a renowned sage and leader of a Hasidic community near Warsaw on the eve of the Second World War.

He was the author of guides to pedagogy far ahead of their time in their insights into child psychology and the importance of kindness and respect for children, and a devoted family man. His beloved wife was so great a soul mate and scholar that once he returned to work after a short break to find that she had completed an essay on Torah that he had left half finished on the study table. She passed away in the late 1930s. It was a terrible blow and Rav Shapira was still mourning that hard loss and trying raising two children on his own while leading his congregation when Germany invaded Poland, on 1 September 1939. The terror bombing of Warsaw began a few days later. Rav Shapira’s only son Elimelekh, a young man who was already a great scholar and *tsaddik* (righteous man), was wounded in an air raid: his father and their relatives ran from one overcrowded hospital to another in the chaos, while the boy lost blood and his wound became infected. Finally he was admitted for treatment, and Rav Shapira went briefly on an errand as the family waited in the hospital vestibule. He returned to find them all dead, killed by a bomb; and his son Elimelekh died a few days later. The Germans reserved their heaviest bombings and other sadistic acts of violence for Jewish holidays: for Hasidim, who consider a holiday incomplete if it happens without joy, this behavior of a satanic enemy posed an extra challenge. And then the Nazis entered the city: in short order nearly 400,000 Jews were confined to the tiny space of the ghetto. Rav Shapira was offered an opportunity to escape, but he would not leave his Hasidim without their spiritual leader; so they went to the ghetto together. There he risked death to hold clandestine services and teach Torah, encouraging his flock every Shabbat with mystical teachings on the *parasha* (Torah portion) of the week about inner light and joy, redemption and faith, even as thousands in the ghetto succumbed to typhus and hunger. Then came the deportations to Treblinka beginning in July 1942 — the ones in which Dr. Korczak and his children perished — and the sermons ceased. Rav Shapira collected what he had written into a book, wrote a cover letter, wrapped his package, or time capsule, or message in a bottle, as securely as he could, and buried it in early 1943. The Nazis killed him shortly thereafter.

A construction worker digging in the rubble found the bundle after the war, a treasure of perhaps the last words of *Chassidut* (Hasidic wisdom, understanding, and knowledge) written in Eastern Europe — in the lands where once there flourished a unique, brilliant, joyous, profound spiritual civilization. That world is now lost, but authentic Torah learning and piety endures, and one can now read and study *Esh Qodesh*, “The Fire of Holiness” in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English. So, Dr. Korczak in his way, and my own family member the saintly Rav Shapira in his: both resisted the Nazis non-violently by refusing any compromise or accommodation with evil, by living and acting according to their own values, by refusing in every way they could to co-operate. In their chosen paths, they exemplified love, courage, and *mesiras nefesh* (self sacrifice). They too were heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto, though of a different kind than the men and women who took up arms in the Uprising on Pesach (Passover) 1943.² They, like the ghetto fighters, knew it was unlikely they would survive. The choice between violent and non-violent resistance has precedent, of course, in Jewish history, the *locus classicus* being the events of the first century chronicled by Josephus. In the war against the Romans of 66–73 CE some of the embattled Judeans chose to make a last stand on Masada and fight to the death, while others chose to live. The latter founded a study house at Yavneh and ushered into being Rabbinic Judaism: both were legitimate kinds of resistance.

One does not wish here to privilege, however, the idea of non-violent resistance to evil, of turning the other cheek, over armed struggle. Judaism recognizes that some wars are not only just but must be fought by force of arms, with no category of conscientious objection permitted: these belong to the category of *milchemet mitsva*, “war of commandment”. This study deals in large part with the war called by Russians the second Great Patriotic War, a war sanctified as *Священная Война*, the Sacred War. Though Dr. Korczak and Rav Shapira fought it in their own way, armed struggle was necessary, and morally better.

1

In 1935 a Soviet Armenian writer, Derenik Demirjian, published a novella, *Girk' tsaghkants'*, “The Book of Flowers”, about a medieval illuminated manuscript that contains two texts. The first, composed by the abbot of a non-

² Aryeh Wineman has published translated selections of the *Ma'or va-shemesh* with commentary in *Letters of Light*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015. See also Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994. Rav Shapira's story is but one of those of hundreds, thousands of Orthodox Jews who acted similarly: see *Shema Yisrael: Testimonies of Devotion, Courage, and Self-Sacrifice, 1939–1945*, translated from *The Shema Yisrael Encyclopedia* by Yaakov Lavon, Southfield, MI: Targum Press, Inc., and Kaliv World Center, Bnei Brak, Israel, 2002. For an introduction to the latter I am indebted to my teacher and spiritual leader Rabbi Levy Zirkind of Chabad of the Central Valley.

astery, is about the divine Great Architect of the universe and the dignity of men, His masons and builders, and the nobility of labor. The second is a poem that describes how its author, a young monk and acolyte of the abbot named Zvart' ("joyous, gay, alert", an appellation of the angels and an epithet of the morning light in an ancient Christian hymn), met his own sun-like spirit, who endowed him with the art of poetry. Demirjian based the first part of his fictional tome on the work of Hovhannes of Erznka (modern Erzincan), a scholar of the thirteenth century who translated from Arabic into Armenian parts of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, a kind of encyclopedia of humanist, naturalist, esoteric, and philosophical teachings. He intended it for the use of a local fraternity of young Armenian men whose purpose was partly philanthropic and partly military: to serve and defend their community. They met to study and converse together, too; for Hovhannes also composed for them a constitution in which he stressed the need to learn from the teachings of all faiths and peoples without prejudice.

There were a number of such Armenian conventicles, called "fraternities of the brave" (Armenian *ktrchvorats' miut' iunk'*) and the like; and they were analogous to the similar organizations of *futuwwa* and *javanmardan* (Arabic and Persian, "young men") in the Muslim world, especially among speakers of Iranian languages (among whom are included the Kurds). The social and ideological roots of these groups probably go back to pre-Islamic Iran, and have a resonance with the proto-Mithraic associations of Armenia and Western Iran and the mystical orders such as the Ahl-e Haqq and Yaresan that endure among the Kurds of those regions down to the present day. The second part of Demirjian's imaginary manuscript book is inspired by several medieval verses, in particular a famous poem by Kostandin of Erznka, also a historical figure, who lived perhaps a century after his countryman Hovhannes but who belonged to and wrote for the same fraternity as his predecessor. In the novella, the abbot dies and his young acolyte, hated and envied by most of his ignorant, benighted fellow monks, perishes in a dark cell. The manuscript, though, endures: invaders pillage and destroy Armenia, and the book is carried away into captivity. At one point, a soldier stays the hand of a comrade about to use it for kindling, saying, "One does not burn books." In the end, the precious relic survives the Armenian Genocide.

About a year after Demirjian's work was published, Mikhail Bulgakov wrote his novel *The Master and Margarita*, considered by many (including this writer) the greatest work of twentieth-century Russian prose. The Master is a fictional writer whom Soviet critics and literary hacks are persecuting for a novel he has written about Pontius Pilate. This novel forms a book within the book and is a masterpiece in its own right, bringing to life the trial of Jesus and the colors, smells, and sunlight of first-century Jerusalem. In despair, the Master burns the manuscript. But towards the end Mephistopheles, who has come with his retinue to Moscow to expose and irritate the toadies of the new regime with

various subversive demonstrations of magic, magically plucks it, unharmed, out of his own hearth fire, declaring famously, *Рукописи не горят!* “Manuscripts do not burn.” Bulgakov did not know Demirjian, but both were well aware of the public book-burnings that had begun in 1933 soon after the Germans elected Hitler as their leader, and of the censorship and destruction of books by Stalin’s police in their own country.³ Bulgakov’s book was to see the light of day only decades after his own death.

Franz Werfel, the author of *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, was a Jew born in the New Town of Prague in September 1890. He wrote, like his countryman Franz Kafka, in German — the Slavic-speaking Czechs and Slovaks had been ruled for centuries by the German-speaking Habsburgs, and were united in the independent, democratic republic of Czechoslovakia only at the end of World War I. Many Jews in the country spoke and wrote mainly in German, the cosmopolitan tongue of Austro-Hungarian culture, business, and science, but this linguistic allegiance, coupled with their minority religion, tended to make them doubly alien to some of their Christian Slav neighbors. But in the era of nationalism it became quickly evident that they were not Austrians or Germans either; and Kafka’s work reflects this sense of unbelonging to the point of absurdity, in the lethal, paranoid cosmos of his oneiric tales. Kafka’s sense of cosmic hopelessness was so extreme that, far from taking measures to preserve them, he *ordered* his books to be burned when he died. (Some scholars have compared this dying wish to the command of the Hasidic master Rav Nachman of Breslov that his own writings be burned. Rav Nachman found this world so bleakly depressing, and so unlike the created world God was supposed to have made, that he expressed doubt as to its very existence. But he believed firmly in the Otherworld, and perhaps because of that reality commanded also that Jews not despair.) Werfel was but one of the many scientists, thinkers, and artists whose works were to feed the flames a few months after Hitler’s rise to power; but the Nazis reserved a special hatred for his greatest novel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (henceforth to be abbreviated *Musa Dagh*). He had completed and published it in Austria and Switzerland even as fascism was hardening its grip on Germany, next door. The book became almost instantly a world bestseller and remained so through the 1930s.

Musa Dagh deals with a heroic episode of armed resistance by a people the Nazis generally despised, the Armenians, to the campaign of deportation and

³ *The Book of the Journey* (Arm. *Girk’ chanaparhi*) of the poet Yeghishe Charents, an illustrated meditation in verse on the longue durée of Armenian history, culture, politics, and romance, was burned by the censors at Erevan in 1933. As the American writer Philip K. Dick said succinctly in *Radio Free Albemuth*, “Once the authorities open a file on you, they never close it.” Charents himself was arrested and murdered in 1937. See J. R. Russell, “*The Book of the Way (Girk’ chanaparhi)* of Yeghishe Charents: An Illuminated Apocalyptic Gospel for Soviet Armenia,” Armenian Studies Program Occasional Paper Series, University of California, Berkeley, Stephan Astourian, general ed., Spring 2012.

mass murder by Ottoman Turkey in World War I. The Nazis, since the formation of their party in the early 1920s, had admired Turkey's solution of the Armenian Question and the creation in its wake by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk of a mono-ethnic, corporate fascist state: they saw it as a template for their own policy towards the imposition of fascism on Germany and the elimination of the Jews.⁴ *Musa Dagh* implicitly connects the Armenian and Jewish fates, so the German authorities confiscated and destroyed in 1934 and later any copies of the book they could find. Turks burned Werfel in effigy in the streets of Istanbul. All the bonfires did not consume this epic about the heroes of the mountain named after Moses, though; even as Demirjian's and Bulgakov's magic manuscripts survived. Far from being destroyed, it was itself to burn, like the bush of its Biblical namesake, with a divine fire that did not consume it but instead ignited the hearts of the Jewish resistance fighters in the ghettos and forests of Eastern Europe during the Holocaust, to which the Armenian Genocide was for the Nazis a welcome and useful precedent; and for Werfel, a dire warning. The book that was not incinerated, but lived and burned with its own fire, is like Demirjian's manuscript a testament to universal human values and the intrinsic dignity of man.

2

On 13 July 1915 the Ottoman government had ordered the Armenians of the villages near the north Syrian coast in the vicinity of the Mediterranean port of Alexandretta (present-day Iskenderun) to prepare for deportation in a week's time. Some had met survivors of the death marches that had begun in the late spring of that year and had assimilated the impossible, unbearable truth: the "resettlement" being forced upon them was merely a deceitful euphemism for annihilation. Others, persuading themselves that they were after all useful citizens innocent of any crime and would be spared if they followed orders, did what most normal civilized people in a modern society probably would do. Unable to think the unthinkable, they chose to obey the wartime decrees of what they believed to be a legally constituted government. Those compliant citizens perished. In his recent studies of the phased deportations of Armenians from Anatolia into the towns and deserts of northern Syria, Dr. Khatchig Mouradian has shown how the Ottoman authorities used deceit and euphemism as tactics to assure the compliance of their bewildered victims. They also employed some Armenians as accomplices and collaborators, dangling before them the illusory hope of survival. The Nazis were to repeat all this in the Final Solution: stages of deportation, false assurances, *kapos*, and all.

⁴Dr. Stephan Ihrig, a young German scholar living and working in Israel, has illuminated in a series of brilliant volumes over the last few years the fascination of the Nazi party from its inception with the Ottoman Turks' "Final Solution" of the Armenian Question, Atatürk, and the Turkish Republic.

But about five thousand villagers faced the deadly truth and chose armed resistance instead: led by a core force of a few hundred men, they ascended the nearby *Musa dagh* — the mountain of Moses (*Musa lerr* in Armenian) — and repelled assaults by the regular army, the police, and local Muslims incited to *jihad* against the “infidel” Christians. They were desperately outgunned and outnumbered, but they were ingenious strategists. When the Turks brought in heavy artillery, the lightly armed Armenians launched nocturnal commando raids behind enemy lines to kill the gunners. When the attackers swarmed in force up the mountain, the Armenians released piles of rocks held back by heavy logs, crushing the enemy in a manmade avalanche. Meanwhile, messengers and swimmers stationed down below on the coast managed to get word of their community’s plight to the French navy. Miraculously, a battleship, the *Jeanne d’Arc*, rescued nearly all the Armenians — some 5000 souls — on 5 September and conveyed them to a refugee camp at Port Said in British-controlled Egypt.⁵ Their descendants live today in Lebanon, Armenia, and the United States. Many live here in Fresno, California.

Franz Werfel, who had published his first poems in 1918, was already a famous writer when he traveled twice to the Middle East, in 1929 and again in 1930. He saw Armenian orphanages in Damascus, where he was shocked and moved by the spectacle of scarred, disfigured children who had survived the Genocide. He visited the village of Yoghunuluk on Musa Dagh, which was then still under French mandate rule as part of Syria. Many Armenians had returned to their villages after the war and a monument to the rescue in the shape of a ship was erected in 1932 on the summit. Within a decade, though, France was to cede the entire Hatay district to Turkey, and most of the Armenians there fled to other parts of Syria, to the Anjar in Lebanon, and to the USA. There are still two small Armenian churches functioning in the region: in the Musa Dagh village of Vakifli, and in the port of Iskenderun [Alexandretta], some 35 miles to the north. I visited both in 1997 and a local Armenian, taking me for a walk along a country road so that government spies might not overhear our conversation, told me of the Turkish authorities’ demolition of the ship monument. There are other memorials to the uprising now in the Republic of Armenia and in Lebanon. Although he was not yet in those days a supporter of Zionism, Werfel was well aware of anti-Semitism; and when he visited the land of Israel (then British-mandated Palestine) he saw the horrifying human and material destruction wrought by local Arabs in the pogroms against the Jews. He was deeply shocked by what he saw.

⁵ Hundreds of able-bodied men languishing at Port Said begged to be allowed to form a unit in the British Army. This request was repeatedly turned down, on the grounds that Armenians were not a martial people (this despite the fact of the Musa Dagh uprising itself) and that the mere fact of Armenians fighting on the Allied side might incite the Turks to atrocities against unarmed Armenian civilians. By the time England brushed aside the last petitions, there were few Armenians in the Ottoman Empire left to kill.

After his return to Europe, Werfel set to work on a book focusing on Musa Dagh. He was aided by Armenian monks of the Catholic Mekhitarist order on the island of San Lazzaro, Venice, who translated for him the first-hand account of the siege, defense, and rescue by the Rev. Dikran Antreassian (1888–1961).⁶ The latter was educated at American Protestant schools in Aintab (present-day Gaziantep) and Marash, and at the age of 27 headed the central administrative council responsible for law, order, and defense on Musa Dagh. Werfel meticulously researched his book for two years, even studying meteorological records archived at Vienna of the prevailing weather conditions in Syria in the summer of 1915. The book brims with ethnographical, historical, and linguistic data about the Armenians — in many ways it is as much an introduction to Armenian culture as the fictionalized chronicle of a heroic episode. Werfel mined historical documents on the Genocide, and employed almost verbatim the account of the German pastor Johannes Lepsius of his failed attempt to persuade Enver Pasha to put an end to the campaign of extermination, except that he added this phrase, culled from the biological racist theories of the Nazis about the Jews: “Between humankind and the plague bacillus there will be no peace.”⁷ Werfel meant the book, then, to be both a reminder and a warning. When he introduced completed chapters to the audience

⁶Pat[ueli]. Tigran Andrēasean, *Zēyt'uni anjnatuut' iwnə ew Suētiyoy ink'napaštpanut' iwnə (banaxōsut' iwn Amerik'an Mišəni mēj)*, Gahirē: Tparan Z. Pērpērean (Rev. Dikran Antreassian, *The sacrifice of Zeytun and the self-defense of Suedia (a lecture at the American Mission, Cairo: Z. Berberian)*). The first edition came out, of course, before Werfel's novel was published; a second edition was published with a preface by the author in Armenian dated 20 June 1935: he writes, on pp. 6–7, that the new edition was prompted by Werfel's “splendid novel, a masterpiece, whose glorious reception, granted on every side, has made the history of the self-defense of Suedia a matter of contemporary relevance (*ayžmēakan*) once more.” This edition was reprinted by the association of Musa Dagh survivors in Fresno, 1985. Some of the Rev. Antreassian's descendants live here still. The English edition is: Knarik O. Meneshian, tr., Rev. D. Antreassian, *Escape to Musa Dagh or The Banishment of Zeitoun and Suedia's Revolt*, Armenian Missionary Association of America, 1993.

⁷Wolf Gruner, “Peregrinations into the void? German Jews and their knowledge about the Armenian Genocide during the Third Reich,” *Central European History* 45, 2012, pp. 1–26: Lepsius had published and distributed by the summer of 1916 some 20,000 copies of his report; in January of the same year Karl Liebknecht, a Socialist deputy in the Reichstag, took the floor and demanded: “Is the Reich Chancellor aware of the fact that during the current war within the allied Turkish Empire, the Armenian population has been expelled from their homes and slaughtered by the hundreds of thousands?” Germany was in fact assisting the process; and when the German wife of the deported Armenian poet Roupen Sevag pressured her embassy at Constantinople to help find him (he had already been murdered with most of the other artistic and community luminaries rounded up on 24 April 1915), she was threatened to silence. She fled Turkey with their newborn child, settled in Switzerland, and brought her children up speaking French. She never set foot on German soil again to the end of her life (see James R. Russell, “The Bells: From Poe to Sardarapat,” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 21 (2012), pp. 127–168). As for Liebknecht, he and Rosa Luxemburg were murdered by German fascists soon after the end of World War I.

at public readings before the book was finished, Werfel declared: “In our own day, one of the oldest and most venerable peoples of the world has been destroyed, murdered, almost exterminated... [and not by] warlike enemies, but by their own countrymen.”⁸ There are Biblical allusions that make explicit the connection between Jewish and Armenian themes: the actual duration of the entire saga, including the siege, of Musa Dagh was over fifty days, but the number forty chosen by Werfel echoes the forty years Moses led the Children of Israel through the desert to the Promised Land after the exodus from Egypt. Moses was a prince in Egypt who had first to rediscover his own people and only then guide them to redemption. Similarly, the hero of Werfel’s novel, Gabriel Bagradian, is an assimilated, westernized Armenian who has lived twenty years in Paris and on the eve of World War I has returned to his native Armenian village with his French wife Juliette and western-educated son Stephan. Like Moses, who died on Mount Nebo and never entered the Promised Land that stretched out before him, Bagradian dies fighting on Musa Dagh while his flock are rescued down below, on the coast. The hero’s very name reflects the tortured split in his identity, or perhaps the encounter between two different strands in Armenian identity itself. His first name (which he would have pronounced in Western Armenian as Kapriel), that of the archangel Gabriel in Christian faith, is Hebrew and means “God is my champion or strength”. His surname comes from the noble and regal Bagratuni clan and is of pre-Islamic Iranian origin, from *baga-data*—“made by the god”. The Bagratids first claimed descent from the titan Tork^ç, Hittite Tarkhundas, a god of thunder; after the conversion of the Armenians to Christianity, they began to trace their ancestry also to the house of David. The Russian general Bagration, a scion of the Georgian branch of the Bagratid line, became a character in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, which Werfel surely knew.⁹

One of Werfel’s public readings, of the chapter “Art and Conscience”, at Breslau in early December 1932, was the scene of a chilling coincidence. Adolf Hitler, nearing the end of his successful electoral campaign, was staying at the same hotel, and Werfel’s wife Alma saw the soon-to-be dictator surrounded by his praetorian guard in the lobby. She thought he looked like

⁸Most incidents and statements from the life of Franz Werfel mentioned here, where not otherwise cited, are recorded in the authoritative biography by Peter Stephan Jungk, *Franz Werfel: A Life in Prague, Vienna, and Hollywood*, 1990.

⁹This kind of tendentious naming, to reflect the competing elements in a hero’s character, is typical of the great European novelistic form. Compare Dostoyevsky’s Rodion Romanovich Raskol’nikov in *Crime and Punishment*: Rodion contains *род*, “native”; *роман* alludes to the non-Slavic Byzantine (East Roman) bearers of the Christian creed and thus to Muscovy as the “Third Rome”; *раскол* “schism”, to the modern Russian tradition of dissent and revolutionary thought and activity. And the three names blend in sonorous alliteration. On Tork^ç, see J. R. Russell, “Polyphemos Armenios,” *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 26, 1996–1997, pp. 25–38.

a frightened young man; and Werfel, too, dismissed him at first as posing no serious threat.¹⁰ But the writer was very soon to learn otherwise. Even though he submissively signed the declaration of loyalty demanded of members of the Prussian Academy of Literature immediately after the Nazis' accession to power in February 1933, it was to no avail and the latter still banned his books. Werfel's books were also publicly burned, together with other classics of German and world literature and thought, on 10 May of the same fateful year in various German university towns — just two days after his expulsion from the Prussian Academy of Sciences. One recalls the prophetic warning of the German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine many years before, that those who begin by burning books will end by burning men. Werfel, working at feverish speed, completed *Musa Dagh* later in the same month, and it was published in November 1933 to critical acclaim in Austria and Switzerland. The book was actually printed in Germany, too, though without publicity, and sold well; but a Turkish journalist was among the critics that pointed it out and successfully pressured the Nazi authorities to take action; so *Musa Dagh* was prohibited and confiscated from stores, libraries, and private collections in February 1934. After the ban Werfel wrote from Italy to his mother-in-law, "In the so-called best years of my life and after working without pause, I now stand on the ruins of myself... In Germany I have been deleted from the book, and the books, of the living, and since I am, after all, a German writer, I am now suspended in empty space."¹¹

One can readily sympathize with his sense of having been uprooted; yet although he himself now inhabited a void, his book lived in a cosmopolitan and polyglot world. The book sold briskly in the original German in Austria and Switzerland. It was translated almost at once into some thirty-five languages, including Polish, Hebrew, and Yiddish, ensuring an avid Jewish readership throughout Europe; and the English version, somewhat abridged from the original, became an instant bestseller in the USA.¹² On 1 May 2015, in a commemoration of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, the *Forward*, a left-leaning American Jewish weekly paper in New York, published in its inside pages an article on the book and its popularity in the ghetto resistance, recalling the words of the enthusiastic reviewer in *The New York Times* in 1934, that it is a "story which must rouse the emotions of all human beings."¹³ That same *Times*, which showed scant sympathy to Jews before, during, or since the Holocaust, still had drawn on 30 March 1933 a comparison to the fate

¹⁰ Peter Stephan Jungk, *A Life Torn by History: Franz Werfel, 1980–1945*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990, p. 139.

¹¹ Jungk 1990, p. 146.

¹² *Hairenik Weekly* interviewed Werfel aboard the line Ile de France on its way to dock in Manhattan: he told their reporter that *Musa Dagh* had been translated into 35 languages.

¹³ Edna S. Friedberg, "The Armenian Genocide novel that became a best-seller in the Warsaw Ghetto," *The Forward*, New York, 1 May 2015, p. 20.

of the Armenians when protesting the grim plight of the Jews in Germany.¹⁴ The relevance of *Musa Dagh* to the news of the day was surely a factor in its popularity: others closer to the nightmarish events that were unfolding in Germany drew the same parallel. The day after the *Times* article, 31 March 1933 — when the Nazis launched their nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses — Prof. Victor Klemperer wrote in his diary at Dresden, “Instead of Germany... this sounds more like Armenia.”¹⁵ On 17 August 1934, Willy Cohn, a Jewish historian and teacher in Breslau (where, one recalls, Werfel and Hitler had stayed at the same hotel two years before), noted in his diary, “Now I am reading a book by Werfel, *Musa Dagh*. This great novel deals with the fate of the Armenians during the World War. How much relation is there to the fate of the Jews? In the end, however, nobody in the world helped the Armenians, and this nation perished.”¹⁶

People read the novel down to the end of the decade and the outbreak of war. The Hungarian Jewish mathematician John von Neumann, who had emigrated to the USA by 1939, read a book in which *Musa Dagh* was cited, from which he concluded, he wrote, that what he called “an Armenian outcome” was possible for the Jews of Europe.¹⁷ *Musa Dagh*, then, was not just being read on its own — other books were referring to it. This equation of Armenians and Jews was at the forefront of people’s minds through the 1930s, on the threshold of World War II, and as the war began: Richard Lichtheim, the representative of the Jewish Agency in Switzerland, wrote to the Zionist leadership on 12 October 1939, when the Second World War was into its second month, “We have to face the fact that under German rule two million Jews will be annihilated in a no less cruel way, perhaps even crueler, than one million Armenians who were

¹⁴ Gruner 2012, p. 16.

¹⁵ Gruner 2012, p. 2. Victor Klemperer was a professor of French literature at Dresden whose gentle wife managed to shield him from deportation till close to the end of World War II. They were just about to be arrested, when the Allied bombing of Dresden, which created a firestorm that destroyed most of the city and its inhabitants, happily incinerated the Nazi police records. His more famous and fortunate relative, the conductor Otto Klemperer, had managed to escape to the USA. Victor kept a diary of the war years, in which he noted, among other things, that ordinary Germans from all walks of life had tried to help or encourage him in one or another little way through those terrible times, with the sole exception of his academic colleagues, not one of whom showed any solidarity — not one did or said anything at all. He recommended that they all be hanged and the corpses left dangling from the branches of trees as long as hygienically possible. In the context of American academia one shares something of his experience, with one or two shining exceptions to the dark overall picture, and can emotionally appreciate his thoughtful suggestion. After the war, Klemperer published a pioneering book on the jargon of Nazi, *Lingua Tertii Imperii: LTI* remains a (largely unheeded) warning against the power of administrators and their bureaucratized perversions of human language.

¹⁶ Gruner 2012, p. 18.

¹⁷ Stefan Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians, from Bismarck to Hitler*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016, p. 365.

destroyed by the Turks during the last war.”¹⁸ Lichtheim had served the Jewish Agency in Constantinople in World War I; so perhaps he had some direct knowledge of the earlier horrors. Werfel’s readers evidently drew from the novel, as well as from what they knew of the Armenian massacres from other sources, the conclusion that the rescue of the Armenians of Musa Dagh was, however glorious, still a unique victory in the midst of a general catastrophe — the exception, as it were, that proved the rule. It highlighted despairing defiance, not the hope of happy endings.

One of the biggest Hollywood movie companies, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, acquired, the year after the book’s publication, the rights to film *Musa Dagh* and paid Werfel \$ 20,000, a very solid sum during the Great Depression, for the option. On 5 July 1935, the Armenian-American *Hairenik Weekly* reported Werfel’s statement in an interview that MGM had budgeted two million dollars for the film and had chosen the famous Armenian-American director Rouben Mamoulian, whom Werfel admired, to head the project. However as soon as the news broke, Turkey exerted pressure on the US State Department, which in turn coerced MGM’s executives into abandoning the movie.¹⁹ There have been some amateurish, low-budget attempts at making a movie of the book since, but nothing on the scale of a real feature film. The suppression of the plans for a Hollywood movie has been suggested as the point at which the book began to slip into oblivion; or, it is also argued, the events of World War II simply eclipsed it.²⁰

Even as Turkey and the US State Department were quietly preparing to blackmail MGM, the book’s author visited the USA and was welcomed as a celebrity and lionized as a hero by the local Armenian community. Avedis Derounian, an Armenian-American survivor of the Genocide living in New York City, attended a gala dinner for Werfel at the Hotel Pennsylvania in the city on 5 January 1936 that was attended by 300 people, including various notables among whom were Bishop Mampre Calfayan, Commissioner Edward Corsi, and Henry Morgenthau. The latter, a Jew from a wealthy, established family, had resigned in protest as American ambassador to the Sublime Porte

¹⁸ Gruner 2012, p. 19.

¹⁹ See for a full history of the episode Edward Minasian, *Musa Dagh*, Nashville, TN: Cold Tree Press, 2003. The American authorities’ craven behavior with respect to the Armenian issue and relations with Turkey was and remains the rule, not the exception.

²⁰ My learned friend and colleague Prof. Abraham Terian, who grew up in Jerusalem, recalled to me in conversation in March 2016 in Fresno, CA, that in Israeli society Musa Dagh was the primary symbol of the embattled and outnumbered Jews’ defiance till Yigael Yadin’s dramatic excavations of Masada—the mountain fortress above the Dead Sea where the Zealots held out against the Romans till 73 CE, when they committed mass suicide rather than be taken captive and subjected to the indignities of slavery. Israel Defense Force recruits today take the oath, *Shenit Matsada lo tipol*, “Masada will not fall again.” One might observe that both Jews and Armenians shared yet an earlier exemplar of such desperate struggle that permeates the literature of both peoples: the Maccabees.

during World War I when his superiors refused to act upon his protests over the Armenian killings. Armenians remember him as a hero and his descendants still take an active interest in Armenian causes. On 9 January Derounian reported on the banquet in a somewhat incongruously chatty style in his regular column for the Boston *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, citing Werfel's address to the distinguished guests: "In Germany my books are forbidden: they were taken from the cellars and all copies destroyed. In Constantinople, my effigy has been burnt — I'm very glad." Werfel returned to Europe, where he was feted at a banquet in Paris attended by the captain of the *Jeanne d'Arc*. Following the Nazi *Anschluss* — the annexation of Austria to the Third Reich in 1938 — Werfel fled to Paris, then to the USA. He died in Los Angeles in 1945.

As for Derounian, he went on to publish in 1942 under the pseudonym John Roy Carlson his bestselling classic of investigative journalism, *Under Cover*, about Nazi activities in pre-war America. In the preface, he drew comparisons between contemporary fascism, the Armenian Genocide, and nationalist extremism within the Armenian community itself.²¹ After the war, though, Derounian faded into obscurity, marginalized in the Cold War era for his left-liberal political views and somewhat eccentric personality.²² *Under Cover* was barely remembered,

²¹ He mentions in particular the murder of Abp. Ghevont Tourian, a relative of the first great Western Armenian poet, Bedros Tourian. The Archbishop, a survivor of the rape of Smyrna in 1922, served as Primate of the Armenian Diocese in New York and came into conflict with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation for, among other things, his refusal to display the tricolor flag of the pre-Soviet Republic of Armenia lest it offend the Soviet authorities, who controlled the Mother See of Echmiadzin. ARF leaders killed him in December 1933 during the Divine Liturgy in the Holy Cross Church of Armenia on West 187th Street in Manhattan. A recent ARF history of the Armenian parishes in the USA practices a kind of historical denial of its own by passing over in silence this fateful event. Derounian considered the ARF homegrown Nazis; and in World War II, two of the most prominent ARF leaders, Dro Kanayan and Nzhdeh, led an Armenian Legion that fought for the Germans. There is a deep strain of Armenian folk anti-Semitism, though it is seldom as virulent as in other Christian ethnic groups. And some pre-war Armenian scholars in Europe such as Prof. Artashes Abeghian of Munich University, brother of the Soviet Armenian scholar Manuk Abeghyan, made an ideological accommodation with the Nazis. Most of the legionnaires were Red Army POWs whose choice was the Legion or a lingering death in German concentration camps. And Armenians, like other Soviet citizens, had suffered in the Stalin terror. Hitler mistrusted the Armenians and kept them from most front-line fighting, assuming they would try to escape. But thousands of American-Armenians in the ARF fought bravely in the armed forces of the United States; and many thousands of Armenians from the homeland fought and died in the ranks of the Red Army. I knew Derounian slightly when I was working for the Armenian Diocese in Manhattan in 1979–1980. He used to spend his days reading in the library of B'nai Brith in Midtown. His ideological opponents in the ARF, angered by his exposures, had targeted him and denounced him as a Communist sympathizer in the McCarthy era, and in the last years of his life he seemed nearly a broken man. His archives repose at NAASR in Belmont, MA, and though they have been mined for dissertations he still awaits a biographer.

²² Derounian's postwar book, *From Cairo to Damascus* (New York: Knopf, 1950), presciently warned that radical Islam was to pose a far more dire challenge to the West and its

and the Armenian cause was largely forgotten as well. Still, the playwright Arthur Miller and the crooner and heart-throb Frank Sinatra were among the American celebrities who knew *Musa Dagh*; the Czech dissident playwright Vaclav Havel read it in a Communist prison in 1979 and pronounced it “wonderful”.²³ He was later to become President of the Czech Republic and Nobel Prize laureate.

Musa Dagh is a largely forgotten book today. But at the time of the outbreak of the Second World War it is hard to find anyone who had *not* read it. That fact must cast in a strange light the infamous, oft-quoted remark by Hitler in 1939, “Who remembers the Armenians?” Of course he himself did, simply by asking the question. And he was drawing the same comparison of the Armenian massacres to the ones he was planning on the eve of his attack on Poland, that *Musa Dagh* itself suggested. It would seem that almost everybody actually *did* remember the Armenians, and *did* compare what had happened to them with what had begun to happen to the Jews of Europe. Werfel’s novel was a bestseller. But it made no difference, since most people who were not simply struggling to survive from one day to the next in the years of the Great Depression, and could pay attention to the course of world events, were paralyzed by a feeling of impotence. Others were apathetic; and others still were sympathetic to the Nazis. Hitler’s comment may thus have had an intended irony: nearly everybody *does* remember the Armenians, but the point is that *it doesn’t matter* that they do!

Avedis Derounian had reported on Werfel’s *Musa Dagh* book tour for the newspaper of the Armenian social democrats; and Werfel’s popularity cut across the very sharply divided party lines of Armenian community life. The anti-Soviet, nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation’s *Hairenik Weekly* covered the writer’s visit to the USA with the same enthusiasm as its bitter ideological enemies that supported Soviet Armenia and Stalin. On 8 March 1935 that paper summarized a remarkable lecture on *Musa Dagh* by Rabbi Leon Fram of Temple Beth-El, Detroit, MI. He saw the treatment of the Christian minority in a Muslim society as a parallel to the historical persecution of the Jewish minority in Christendom. The Rabbi added, in tones of outrage, that just as humanity was indifferent to the Armenians and accepted Turkish mistreatment of them because it was the action of a government, now it was stupidly and impotently appeasing Hitler, whose economic and social marginalization of the Jews was a step towards their annihilation. And the world, he concluded bitterly, was eagerly preparing to be his guest at the Olympic games the next year, 1936.

Short memory, malign indifference, cowardly appeasement of tyrants, and acceptance of atrocities as a state’s internal affair: these factors guaranteed the success of genocidal policies through the 20th century and have continued to do

democratic institutions than Communism. After traveling undercover through the Arab world during the Israel War of Independence, Derounian finally dropped his disguise and crossed into Israel, which he loved and imagined as a model for a future independent Armenia.

²³ Ihrig 2016, p. 364.

so unabated into the 21st. The Genocide Convention of the UN has accomplished nothing; and the surreal anti-Semitism of its cultural wing, UNESCO, would present a challenge even to the pen of a Kafka or Bulgakov. And even most of those who saw through all this and did speak up still felt powerless to resist. A lone assassin like the young Herschel Gryszpan in Paris, or David Frankfurter in Switzerland, might take down a Nazi official, much as the Armenian hero Solomon Tehlirian had hunted down and killed one of the masterminds of the Genocide, Talaat Pasha, on a Berlin street after World War I. But there was not yet a Jewish state with an army to defend the Jews and offer them a place of refuge: Israel was reborn in 1948, just a decade too late to rescue a third of the nation. For it was exactly ten years before, in 1938, that the western democracies, assembled at the Evian conference with the ostensible aim to assist refugees, had concluded their deliberations with the decision to do precisely the opposite and close their doors to Jewish immigration. The Jews of Europe were trapped from that point on. The British authorities blockaded the Land of Israel: the policy formulated in their White Paper on the eve of the war was one of appeasement of the Arabs and hostility to Jews, despite the overtly pro-German sentiments of the Arab national movement. Americans, still suffering from the Great Depression and animated by isolationism in the wake of World War I, were extremely hostile to immigration. Anti-Semitic and racist sentiments in this country were very strong. Ships crowded with fleeing Jews had nowhere to go. The USA turned away the *St. Louis*, which sailed back to Hamburg. Most of its passengers were later murdered. Britain prevented the *Struma* from docking at Haifa: it sailed away and was torpedoed by accident by a Soviet submarine in the Black Sea, with no survivors. Everybody remembered and did not remember the Armenians.²⁴

3

The first genocide of the century, then, however well it was known, from *Musa Dagh* and many other sources and testimonies, did not spur any effective human solidarity on the ground or move towards collective security in the chambers of government; it served as a blueprint and encouraging precedent for the second.²⁵

²⁴ In the Soviet Union, Lenin had supported Atatürk; and thanks to Stalin's nationalities policy the Armenian districts of Nakhichevan and Artsakh (Nagorno Karabagh) were assigned to Azerbaijan, whose people had participated in the Armenian Genocide. *T'rk'atyats 'ut'yun*, "Turcophobia", was a punishable offense in Soviet Armenia. After the war, the Stalin regime encouraged Diaspora Armenians to be "repatriated" to the impoverished Armenian SSR and presented the country, not without reason, as a reborn Armenian homeland. But it was only after street demonstrations in Erevan in 1965 that the Soviet authorities permitted the erection of a monument to the Genocide at Tsitsernakaberd in Erevan and published a Black Book of the massacres.

²⁵ As a law student Raphael Lemkin, who was to coin the term "genocide" and to shepherd the United Nations' Genocide Convention, had followed the trial of Soghomon Tehlirian for the assassination of Talat Pasha at Berlin on 15 March 1921. (Germany's right-wing

There were no Musa Dagh-style mass rescues for the Jews, not then and not ever. No gentile army, then or to this day, ever undertook any mission, of any kind, to save Jews from murder. The only Allied military operation whose specific purpose was to help the trapped Jews of Europe was the mission the year after the Uprising, 1944, of the Hebrew poet Hannah Senesh and a handful of her other teenage comrades from the Yishuv — the Jewish community in the Land of Israel — to warn the Hungarian Jewish community of their impending destruction and to facilitate escape. The raiders were captured and killed and their mission failed; and the notorious refusal of the Allied command to entertain pleas to bomb the railroad tracks to Auschwitz and slow the transports guaranteed the success of Adolf Eichmann’s carefully worked out plan for the rapid deportation and gassing of about a million Hungarian Jews there. It is almost — but only almost — beyond belief that military and other historians still offer excuses and justifications for Allied inaction. But if they did not, what would they have left to write about? To the dictum “Publish or perish” one might add “Publish about the perished.” The western Allies did nothing: they were absorbed with the war effort in general. They could not believe the reports they received about the death camps. They had other priorities. In the end they were content to let the Jews die. In 1944, when most of the victims of the Holocaust were already dead, according to one poll most Americans considered the Jews the greatest threat to world peace, more than the Germans or Japanese. It was politically impolitic for President Roosevelt even to mention the Jews, much less expend what Americans are wont to call their “blood and treasure” helping them. As it was, he was often derided as “Rosenfeld” — a crypto-Jew. The British, though they had welcomed Jewish children from Germany to their own island home in the *Kindertransport*, were worried lest many European Jews survive the war and want to make their way to the Land of Israel, upsetting the West’s precarious relationship with the Empire’s Arab suppliers of oil. Arab and Muslim public opinion was already largely pro-Nazi.

Even the Soviet Union, with its official Jewish Antifascist Committee, felt it safer to describe victims of mass killings on its own territory as Soviet citizens than to specify when they were Jews, lest the morale of Red Army soldiers be compromised if they were made to feel they were fighting to save the Jews, not

press was uniformly pro-Turkish in its editorializing about the trial.) He recalled asking his law professor at the time why it had been impossible to convict Talat in his own country. His teacher replied with a metaphor to explain state sovereignty: If a farmer owns a flock of chickens and kills them, it’s his business. If you interfere, you’re trespassing. Lemkin exclaimed in shock, “But the Armenians are not chickens.” The incident led him to consider how to create a system of justice that would render unnecessary vigilante revenge like Operation Nemesis (Ihrig 2016, pp. 370–371). No genocide since 1915 has been prevented. And as for the United Nations, the American representative Daniel Moynihan following the “Zionism is racism” resolution said all that needs to be said about that rogues’ gallery: “The inmates have taken over the asylum.”

just the Motherland. After the war, Stalin scotched plans to publish a Black Book on the Holocaust, and in short order set in motion the bogus Doctors' Plot and anti-"cosmopolitan" campaign, as a prelude and pretext for the mass deportation of what was left of Soviet Jewry. That episode began with the mass shooting of the Soviet Union's best surviving Yiddish writers and poets. It was easiest to let the Holocaust take its course and salve one's conscience by decrying it after the fact, if one had a conscience. Most had no conscience and have none now: where the killing fields were, nobody learned any historical lessons. Stalin's second planned Holocaust stalled only because the tyrant died on 5 March 1953, but state-sponsored anti-Semitism endured till the late 1980s, with broad popular support.

The Warsaw Ghetto fighters were the heroes of a second *Musa Dagh*, but it was one with no sea and no rescue vessel on the horizon. There were other, smaller ghettos and other uprisings, all just as desperate, all doomed. The ghetto at Vilna, the city that had been called in the past the Jerusalem of Lithuania for its Torah scholarship, was perhaps the first to bear the brunt of the evolving Final Solution. The leader there of the left-Zionist youth organization *Hashomer Hatsa'ir* ("Young Guardian"), Abba Kovner, declared in a manifesto on 1 January 1942, "Hitler has plotted to murder all the Jews of Europe." Nobody, perhaps, had said as much before, so plainly and in so few words — *all* the Jews were targeted. Kovner, who led the Vilna uprising, survived the liquidation of the ghetto to fight as a partisan in the forest. Mordechai Anielewicz, who was to lead the Warsaw ghetto uprising, was actually trained in Vilna and went to Warsaw from there to organize the Jewish resistance.²⁶ Anielewicz died in the uprising;

And what of Werfel's *Musa Dagh* in this hopeless maelstrom? Despite the horrendous conditions of the ghetto in Vilna, the Jews established a library there, on Strashun Street. By then, perhaps two thirds of the inhabitants of the ghetto were already dead. The library assembled some 45,000 volumes; Abba Kovner donated Hashomer Hatsa'ir's collection to it. Of the roughly 20,000 Jews left alive, 2,500 were registered readers; and by the summer of 1942 there were about 5,000 readers per month. At the end of that year the ghetto theater even held a celebration to mark the 100,000th borrowing of a book. Dina Abramowicz, who survived the war to become director of YIVO in New York, where I met her briefly many years ago, worked at the Strashun Street library. She recalled that women who were relatively well off came to borrow the serialized Russian sentimental novels churned out in the interwar years by the publishing houses of nearby Riga, in Latvia. Around two in the afternoon, children coming home from school would arrive to read Jules Verne and Mark Twain. Adolescents often wanted books by Soviet writers such as the unreadable classic *How the steel was tempered* — they longed for liberation by the Red Army and for Com-

²⁶On the remarkable life of the hero Abba Kovner see Dina Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow: The Life and Times of Abba Kovner*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.

munism to strike down their German and Lithuanian fascist tormentors. Young members of Hechalutz and other Zionist organizations came to the library in the afternoons, especially on Sundays, to read about the conditions of workers and peasants in the modern world. They liked Theodore Dreiser, Leon Feuchtwanger's *The Wars of the Jews*, "and especially," Abramowicz recalled, "the remarkable book by Franz Werfel, *Musa Dagh*... The idea of a total annihilation of a racial group, the method of destruction, the helplessness of the victims, and the futility of diplomatic rescue efforts — this presented such an astonishing similarity to our own situation that we read the book with a shudder, receiving it almost as a prophetic vision, revealing for us our inevitable fate."²⁷

Another librarian at Strashun Street, Herman Kruk, wrote in Yiddish in a report while the library was still functioning: "*Musa Dagh* is an analogy; *War and Peace*, the Crusades, the Inquisition — all are analogies to the present. Consequently, just now there is a demand for this type of literature. The broad mass of readers does not seek analogies, however. For them, what suffices is reading matter that removes them from reality, carries them off to distant regions, whether *via* detective stories, suspense, romance, and so forth. Where one person loses himself through amusement, the other does so by seeking to understand and comprehend."²⁸ Those who felt either resigned to their fate or powerless to change it, then, opted for escapist literature; those who were ready to resist, or preparing to do so, were likely to include *Musa Dagh* on their reading list.

Hundreds of ghetto fighters and others were inspired by *Musa Dagh*, and both its author and its readers understood clearly from the start that it was intended both as a call for justice for the Armenians and as a warning about Hitler's intentions towards the Jews. For the embattled Jews of the ghettos and forests, it served in addition as a model for resistance. Mordechai Tannenbaum, the commander of the Jewish underground in Bialystok, wrote on 25 May 1943 to Bronka Klibansky: "*Musa Dagh* is now in fashion among us. If you read it, you will remember it all your life. It's by Franz Werfel." Haike Grossman, a Hashomer Hatsa'ir activist in the same city, wrote of the resisters: "They educated themselves; their challenge and their task impelled them to become strong and human at the same time. That is what the movement and the nice books they read taught them. During that period, they read *Musa Dagh*. The book was passed from hand to hand." There was a debate at Bialystok on 27 February 1943 about whether to try to flee the doomed ghetto or to stand one's ground

²⁷ Dina Abramowicz, "The Library in the Vilna Ghetto," in Jonathan Rose, ed., *The Holocaust and the Book*, Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001, pp. 167–168.

²⁸ Herman Kruk, "Ghetto Library and Ghetto Readers, Sept. 15, 1941 — Sept. 15, 1942, tr. by Zachary M. Baker, in J. Rose, *op. cit.*, pp. 194–195. I take this occasion to note that Zachary M. Baker, who has served as a librarian of many Yiddish and Jewish collections including YIVO, and, most recently, of the Judaica collection of Stanford University, is this writer's cousin and a friend since early childhood.

and fight. The transcript of the discussion was carefully buried and was dug up after the war. Hershel Rosenthal said: “Our fate is decided. There is, therefore, nothing left for us but one path, which is to organize a collective resistance in the ghetto at all cost; to regard the ghetto as our *Musa Dagh*, and to add a chapter of honor to the history of Jewish Bialystok and to our movement.” Yitzhak Zuckerman (*nom de guerre*, Antek) was the deputy commander of the Warsaw ghetto revolt. Zvika Dror, a member of Antek’s kibbutz, recalled: “When he wanted to explain to us, he said the Warsaw ghetto uprising could not be understood without reading *Musa Dagh*.” Dov Ben Efraim (*nom de guerre*, Lutek), leader of the Jewish underground in Czestochowa, went to the forests “with the purpose of organizing a ‘*Musa Dagh*’.” William Mishell, describing his life as an adolescent boy in the Kovno ghetto, wrote, “*Musa Dagh*... made an indelible impression upon us. The bloody, ruthless massacre of over a million Armenians by the Turks in 1915, in full view of an entire world, reminded us of our fate... Our analysis of the book indicated that if the world did not come to the rescue of the Armenians, who were Christian after all, how could we, the Jews, expect help?”²⁹

The book, which had been translated into Hebrew in 1934, impressed and inspired the *Yishuv* (Jewish community) in the Land of Israel as well. In an article on it the writer Dov Kimhi compared *Musa Dagh* to Masada. And when Erwin Rommel’s Afrika Corps was advancing across North Africa towards Egypt in 1942, the military leaders of the *Yishuv* prepared for a last stand on Mount Carmel, should the Nazis break through to the Land of Israel. The Hagana commander Yisrael Galili and others referred to the plan alternatively as *Musa Dagh* or Masada.³⁰ Masada is, as was briefly mentioned above, the mountainous desert redoubt on the Dead Sea, south of Jerusalem, where Herod had built a palace and constructed a huge cistern, insuring a supply of water. There the *Qana'im*, the Zealots, held out for three years against the Romans after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. When the legionnaires had constructed a ramp (using slave labor and mixing the dirt with the bodies of dead prisoners) and were about to break through their defenses, the nearly one thousand men, women, and children on Masada committed suicide rather than surrender and endure the horrors of slavery under the Romans. Josephus describes vividly the desperate heroism of the *Qana'im* in his history of the war. Masada is a powerful and local symbol; yet Werfel’s novel continued to inspire Israelis after the Nazi Holocaust. Yossi Harel, a Zionist fighter who managed to smuggle some 20,000 Holocaust survivors to the shores of the Land of Israel through the postwar British blockade, packed only a few things for his missions: some-

²⁹ Yair Auron, “The Forty Days of *Musa Dagh*: its impact on Jewish youth in Palestine and Europe,” in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998, pp. 147–164.

³⁰ Auron 1998.

thing to eat, the Hebrew Bible, the poems of Hannah Senesh and Natan Alterman, and a copy of *Musa Dagh*.

Despite all this there is no mention of Werfel or his book in the Israeli national museum-memorial of the Holocaust at Jerusalem, Yad Vashem. The latter, a state-supported monument to which most every foreign dignitary visiting Israel is taken as a matter of routine, was established the year of this writer's birth, 1953, and was completely renovated and re-inaugurated half a century later, in 2005. The Minister of Justice of Turkey, Cemil Çiçek, attended the latter ceremony. Two months later he attacked a conference on "Ottoman Armenians" held at Boğazıcı (Bosphorus) University at Istanbul, calling it a stab in the back of the Turks for memorializing that unmentionable people, and lamented his inability to bring criminal prosecution against the organizers. The exigencies of *Realpolitik* have affected the scholarly mission — and, one would have to add ruefully, something of the moral reputation — of Yad Vashem. In an article published in 2012 the scholar Amos Goldberg goes further, suggesting that the Holocaust is being used as a "screen memory", that is, remembering one thing in order to forget something else.³¹ The Armenian Genocide is that something else. An acquaintance, Meline Zakian La Porta, now living here in Fresno, California, is a specialist in book restoration. She lovingly repaired the first edition of *Musa Dagh* and other rare volumes for Yad Vashem's display of the books the Nazis destroyed in bonfires. It is there in the pile, and is listed — but without further comment. It is her impression that most of her Israeli colleagues at Yad Vashem would welcome discussion in the interpretive main exhibition of Werfel's book and the Armenian Genocide itself.³²

In *The Wicked Son*, a jeremiad against Jewish self-hatred and assimilation of anti-Israel tropes, the playwright David Mamet refers often to the Armenians and the Armenian Genocide. He quotes the famous, defiant affirmation of Fresno's greatest son, the Armenian-American writer William Saroyan, which in its original, uncensored form reads: "I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose history is ended, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, whose literature is unread, whose music is unheard, whose prayers

³¹ Amos Goldberg, "The 'Jewish narrative' in the Yad Vashem global Holocaust museum," *Journal of Genocide Research* 14.2, 2012, pp. 187–213, esp. pp. 203–204. As part of this lamentable *Realpolitik*, Israel supplies arms to Azerbaijan, which ethnically cleansed its Armenian population in the late 1980s and is still waging war against the Armenians of Mountainous Karabagh (Artsakh) even as I write these lines. The hatred of Armenians in Azerbaijan is pathological in its ferocity. Three years ago I met a Harvard undergraduate, a native of Los Angeles whose father is Armenian and whose mother is Jewish. He was then the captain of the college fencing team and an Olympic trainee, but was denied a visa to Baku because of the — ian ending of his name. The situation was resolved only when the US State Department issued him temporary travel papers in his mother's maiden name.

³² Conversation with the author in Fresno, CA, on Erev Shabbat, 11 March 2016.

are no longer uttered. Go ahead, destroy this race. Let us say that it is again 1915. There is war in the world. Destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them from their homes into the desert. Let them have neither bread nor water. Burn their houses and their churches. See if they will not live again. See if they will not laugh again. See if the race will not live again when two of them meet in a beer parlor, twenty years after, and laugh, and speak in their tongue. Go ahead, see if you can do anything about it. See if you can stop them from mocking the big ideas of the world, you sons of bitches, a couple of Armenians talking in the world, go ahead and try to destroy them.” David Ben Gurion, the Prime Minister of Israel, put it more succinctly about his own people: *‘Atidenu eno talui ba-ma yomru ha-goyim ela ba-ma ya ‘asu ha-yehudim*. “Our future does not depend upon what the gentiles will say, but on what the Jews will do.” Mamet condemns those who scorn the victims of the Holocaust as sheep. The same image of sheep had disturbed Armenian activists in 1915. At the beginning of the Rev. Antreassian’s book on the Musa Dagh uprising is the following poem, whose Armenian text I provide with my translation (the poem does not appear in the English version).

Yaraġabani tel

Azatut‘ean Astucoyn

*Oĉ‘xari pēs al mort‘uil mi tar, Tēr,
Iraw, Hayn al t‘ē azat es stelcer:
T‘ē mez april ĉ‘es kamenar mardkōrēn,
Ariwci pēs gēt‘ t‘ol mēnil kamk‘d neren.*

*Struki pēs t‘oyl mi tar or vatōrēn
Mer mahn angam gazanabar gorcadren:
Al kə bawen mahu xžduž gorcik‘ner,
Zor darerov Hayun vray en p‘orjer*

*T‘ēew mahn isk mezi hamar al šat ē;
Erb oĉ‘ mēk get aynk‘an ariwn kē hosē;
Ork‘an Arak‘s, Ep‘rat, Tigris u Čihan,
Ur anpatuac kōys diakner pahuec‘an.*

*Bayc‘ t‘ē ĉ‘kay azat april mez hamar,
Aysk‘an azat c‘eleru mēj anhamar,
Gēt‘ mer mahə azat əllay ew ardar,
Mardu pēs, Tēr, mez mēnil tur k‘aġabar*

*Akiwlinē
11 Noyembēr 1915
Gahirē*

“In place of an introduction:

To Freedom's God.

Lord, let us not be slaughtered like sheep:
Truly, if you have created Armenians, also, free,
If you do not will that we live as men —
At least grant that we die as lions, then.

Do not allow that they, bestial, make
Even our death a slave's end, base —
There are already enough lethal weapons, savage,
That they have tried on Armenians over the ages.

Still death for us were already too much
When no river so brims with spilt blood
As the Araxes, Euphrates, Jihan and Tigris,
Whose deeps keep the dishonored corpses of virgins.

But if for us a free life is not meant to be
Amongst the numberless races free,
Let our death be free and just, then:
Grant that we die, O Lord, bravely, as men.

Aquiline³³
11 November 1915
Cairo”

As we have seen, people with different responses to catastrophe read different sorts of books. Many who did nothing read escapist literature. *Musa Dagh* was one factor that motivated Jews to fight back against the Germans and their many allies, or at least strengthened the resolve of those already prepared to do so. The 19th-century Persian Armenian writer Raffi's novels *Jalaleddin* and *The Madman* (Arm. *Khent'ē*), which are about resistance to depredations by Muslim marauders, had in their turn similarly motivated some of the Armenians who fought back in 1915 against the Turks. And the Book of Maccabees had inspired their ancestors, led by the warrior-saint Vardan Mamikonian, to resist the overwhelming might of the Sasanian Empire when its king, Yazdegerd II, tried to re-impose Zoroastrianism on the newly-Christianized Armenians in the fifth century.

³³This is the pen name of the widely published author and editor Haykazun Xandamurean (Haigazun Khantamurian), b. Gurin village, Sebastia (Sivas), 1874, d. 11 August 1943, Cairo. See B. M. Hovakimyan, *Hayoc' cackanumeri bararan* [“Dictionary of Armenian Pseudonyms”], Erevan: Erevan State University, 2005, pp. 49 s.v. *Akuline*, 620.

So it may be said of some books, then, that not only are they not incinerated; their pages are themselves of a fire that ignites the hearts of brave men and women and inspires them to action, to armed resistance. Often they fight in vain; and when one speaks thus of the effect of reading on life, one cannot help but think of Cervantes' hero who read too many romances about knights and then went tilting after windmills. Quixotic quests often leave in their wake, though, true victories without which the world would a place with even less freedom or hope than it now has. And as it is, there is very little of either, anywhere. Resistance to tyranny really is obedience to God. Both sword and pen have their place. And one cannot recall too often the warning that all that is required for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

I would like to offer the foregoing in memory of an old friend who died long ago, but whom I remember most every day. My grandmother Bertha (née Bronya) Russell, a descendant of Rav Kalonymus Kalman Epstein of Kraków, was born in the village of Wolka Turebska near Rozwadów in Galicia in 1900 and emigrated to New York at the age of six with her family. She embraced with joy the wonders of the new world, and went from the slums to high school, then college, then a wonderful career as a high school history teacher. When the Second World War came she saw from afar the entire world that she and her ancestors had known, reduced to nothingness; but in the 1930s our family had supported the beleaguered Spanish Republic and in the 1940s she would patiently knit woollen caps for soldiers of the Red Army. Years passed, and her grandson became a teacher, facing new challenges, new adventures, and adversity, too, of a very old kind.

She was aware she was dying; and in our last conversation, shortly before she passed away in the fall of 1981, my grandmother, with her sharp grey eyes, the delightful smile that creased all her face, the modulated voice that could pass from the English of Shelley and the *koine* Greek of the Sermon on the Mount to *mamaloshen* — to Yiddish, the mother tongue — left me with this advice that I have passed on to my own pupils, “Darling, cultivate your own garden. But every now and then go outside and throw a brick.” Amen.

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