

Baptism by Snow: The Ottoman Experience of Winter Warfare During the First World War

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In the vast literature on the First World War, studies on the involvement of the Ottoman Empire occupy only a small percentage of what has been written so far. One important reason for what is in fact a serious shortcoming is the continuing domination of military historiography by Eurocentric ontology and epistemology, which creates “others” out of non-western states and societies, in most cases either neglecting them or ensuring that they appear only when they are in conflict with the west.¹ From such a viewpoint, which perceives warfare in battlefields outside Europe as a sideshow to the main event, aspects of the Ottoman participation in the war are often studied only with relevance for the European powers’ own perspective, which results in an incomplete understanding of the First World War as a global conflict.² The problem is aggravated by the language barrier arising from the fact that Turkey’s wartime sources are linguistically accessible only to a small number of scholars who are trained in Ottoman Turkish.³

Writing truly global histories of what was a global conflict, however, requires the overcoming of these obstacles and a thorough understanding and incorporation of the Ottoman involvement in the studies on the First World War. This essay hopes to make a modest contribution to this quest by focusing on a particular aspect of the Ottoman participation in the war, i.e. the experience of the fighting man in winter warfare.

Climatic conditions are an important factor influencing military operations and frontline experience, and history attests that lack of preparedness can not only make life miserable for the soldiers, but also doom entire armies to failure

1 For an insightful discussion of Eurocentrism in military historiography, see Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 66–103.

2 It is striking that some serious studies on the First World War that discuss each of the belligerent states separately do not even devote a chapter to the Ottoman Empire. For example: Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, ed. *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh GmbH & Co KG, 2009).

3 The alphabetization of the Turkish language was changed from Arabic to Turkish script in 1928 as part of the efforts to modernize the newly founded republic.

and disaster. Winter is, from a military perspective, “a season with a clear predominance of below-freezing temperatures, freeze-up of open water bodies, accumulation of snow cover on the ground, and shorter periods of daylight”,⁴ and in this sense, winter warfare differs substantially from military action in warmer seasons. During the latter half of the 20th century, military organizations have drawn on the experiences of the armies of Napoléon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler, who have attempted – and failed – to invade Russia during winter, in order to study the distinguishing characteristics of cold weather warfare and to propose measures to increase their own armies’ operational preparedness. According to these studies, major setbacks associated with winter warfare are restricted mobility and logistics support on snow- and ice-covered terrain; serious health threats such as frostbite and hypothermia, combined with the difficulty of performing adequate medical services on the field; difficult orientation due to adverse weather; guns and other mechanical instruments freezing and becoming inoperative under low temperatures; difficulties of constructing defences on frozen earth; and reduced range of bullets, as well as reduced impact of explosives falling on deep snow.⁵ Military planners are required to take these effects into consideration and prepare accordingly, ensuring first and foremost that the troops are provided with suitable gear and equipment; adequate shelter is available; and guns, ammunition and other mechanical instruments are properly maintained.

How prepared was the Ottoman army for winter warfare during the First World War, and consequently, how did the Ottoman troops experience fighting under extreme climatic conditions? Instead of tackling these issues solely from an operational perspective, this essay focuses on individuals to investigate the factors that shaped the experience of snow and ice during the war. For this purpose, the encounters of the men of the Ottoman Third Army in the Caucasus and the 15th Army Corps in Galicia, both of which fought against the Russian army, albeit under different structural conditions such as geographical features, transportation and accommodation logistics, availability and quality of equipment, and access to allies’ support, are studied comparatively by making use of diaries and memoirs from the front line. Through a discussion of the

4 George K. Swinzow, *On Winter Warfare* (Hanover: US Army Corps of Engineers Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory Special Report, 1993), 2.

5 In addition to Swinzow’s treatise, see Allen F. Chew, *Fighting the Russians in Winter: Three Case Studies* (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1981), viii; *German Winter Warfare* (Washington D.C.: U.S. War Department Military Intelligence Division, 1943), 1–11; *The Soviet Army: Specialized Warfare and Rear Area Support* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 1984), 9.1–9.2.

differences in outcome caused by divergent conditions prevailing in these two theatres of war, the essay compares the experiences in these two fronts, and offers commentary on the factors shaping winter warfare experience during the First World War from an Ottoman vantage. Within this context, and in order to elaborate on how this experience resonated in the Turks' national narrative, the study also examines the representation of winter battles in Turkish literature, discussing how the experience is reproduced and transmitted to the new generations.

Winter in the Caucasus 1914–1915

The Caucasian theatre in the First World War covered a wide territory including the Southern Caucasus, Persian Azerbaijan and Eastern Anatolia. The latter region, a large portion of which remained under Russian control after the Turco-Russian War of 1877/78, is an area marked by mountains above three thousand metres that separated regions, plains, and a small number of towns and villages. As a contemporary observer wrote in 1915, the Eastern Anatolian region, which he called the “Siberia of Turkey”, was dominated by a sub-arctic winter climate with snow staying on the ground for half of the year, and hence “active operations (were) hardly possible except in late spring, summer and early autumn”.⁶ There were instances when the Turkish units stationed in the region during the war reported snow building up to one and a half metres on the ground and temperatures as low as minus 26°C.⁷

This territory witnessed a series of battles between the Ottoman and the Russian armies throughout the war. After hostilities began in Europe, the Ottoman Empire ordered general mobilization as of 2 August 1914, and commenced preparations in line with the campaign plans, which called for a major concentration of forces in the Caucasus in advance of an opening offensive against the Russian army.⁸ Accordingly, the Third Army was ordered to assemble in Erzurum, a major Turkish town in the heart of Eastern Anatolia, and it was there most of the personnel of the Third Army – particularly those coming from the warmer parts of the empire – encountered the notion of cold

6 David George Hogarth, “Geography of the War Theatre in the Near East”, *The Geographical Journal* 45, no. 6 (1915), 462–63.

7 Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 58.

8 *Ibid.*, 42.

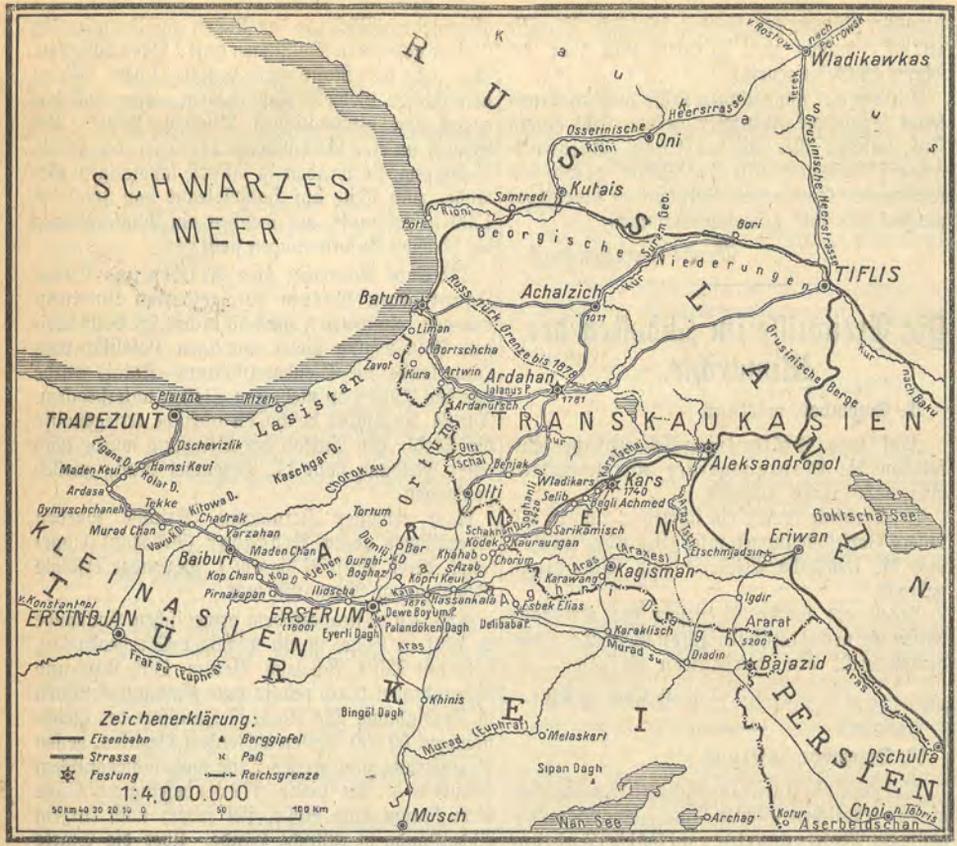


FIGURE 3.1 Contemporary overview of the Caucasus. STREFFLEURS MILITÄRBLATT. FELDZEITUNG 1/1915 (9. JANUARY 1915), 12.

winter for the first time. Ali Rıza Efendi,⁹ a medic corporal with the Third Army who arrived in Erzurum in October 1914, did not have a favourable impression of the town:

Generally speaking, the city is an old relic itself. It is a fortified area in every sense; there are cannons and redoubts all around. The streets are uneven, the houses are worse, and there are not many windows. ... As far as I have learned from the friends at the hospital, who are natives of

9 Ali Rıza Efendi, who adopted the surname “Eti” when Turkey introduced the Law of Family Names in 1934, was born 1887 in Erzincan. A merchant by profession, he was enlisted in the 102nd Regiment of the Third Army, which took part in the Sarikamış campaign. After the war, he worked as a public servant, and passed away in 1950 in Istanbul.

Erzurum themselves, decency is very low here. Storekeepers are bigoted and dirty, especially the cooks. Even if I stay hungry for fifty-five days, curse me if I eat from them. ... Do not look for wood. Coal is expensive, five *kurush*¹⁰ per *okka*,¹¹ up from four in peacetime. Wherever you look at in the city, even when you look at the clothes people are wearing, it says something about the winter. ... This is not a place to live.¹²

The unfavourable conditions mentioned by Ali Rıza were only to worsen dramatically as the winter approached and the Ottomans drifted into the war, which began when the Russians crossed the border on 31 October 1914, two days before the official declaration of war, and proceeded westward into the Ottoman territory capturing a series of villages along the Sarıkamış-Erzurum road. Despite the initial successes by the Russian army, however, the Ottoman High Command was convinced that the enemy could be encircled and thrown back, hence a counter-offensive was ordered.¹³ However, conditions on the field were not as pleasant as they seemed to the military planners in Istanbul (Constantinople), and the army was not adequately prepared and equipped for an offensive under winter conditions. The commander of the Third Army, Hasan İzzet Paşa,¹⁴ was aware of the situation.

Colonel (Col.) Ziya Bey,¹⁵ commander of the 83rd Regiment, recalls Hasan İzzet Pasha saying: “In the Balkan War, the equipment of the army and clothing of the soldiers were perfect. Yet we had lost then. Now, our equipment is deficient, the clothing of the soldiers is in tatters. God willing we can win this time”.¹⁶ He had a point, because as hostilities commenced in the Caucasian

10 *Kurush*, also referred to as *piastre*, was a sub-unit of the Ottoman currency *lira*, and one *lira* equalled 100 *kurush*.

11 *Okka* was an Ottoman measure of mass, weighing around 1.28 kg.

12 Ali Rıza Eti, *Bir Onbaşının Doğu Cephesi Günlüğü*, ed. Gönül Eti (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2009), 28. Quotations in their original language can be found in Appendix. All translations from Turkish to English are the author's own.

13 Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 54–55.

14 Hasan İzzet Pasha (Arolat), was born 1871 in Istanbul. He fought in the Balkan War, and at the outset of the First World War he was assigned to the command of the Third Army in the Caucasian front. Before major operations commenced, however, he was relieved of his command following a serious conflict with Enver Pasha over battle plans. Hasan İzzet Pasha died in 1931 in Aleppo.

15 Ziya Bey (Yergök) was born 1877 in Artvin. In Sarıkamış, he was taken prisoner by the Russians. He returned from Siberia in 1920, after which he took on several posts in the military, until his retirement in 1931. Ziya Bey passed away in 1949 in Istanbul.

16 Ziya Yergök, *Sarıkamış'tan Esarete 1915–1920*, ed. Sami Önal (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2005), 33.

front, supplies of the Third Army were far from having been completed. Only a fraction of the army's needs were fulfilled, and not only did the weapons, equipment, and ammunition amount to merely half of what was needed, there were serious problems of feeding and clothing the men as well.¹⁷ A telegram cabled by the army headquarters to the High Command in Istanbul on 12 September 1914 reveals how dire the situation was even before fighting commenced:

The total headcount of the Third Army is around 160,000. Only a fraction of these men are adequately uniformed, and the rest are irregularly clothed. What they have on is no more than pants and shirts. Even if the effect of this situation on discipline is neglected, it is without doubt that most of the men are going to fall sick due to the harsh climate of this region. In addition to sewing uniforms from any kind of clothes that could be procured and running the workshops in Erzincan non-stop, we have employed all imaginable methods including stitching coats from sheepskin and shirts from felt. Still, the kind of clothing that we can obtain locally will be only enough to protect a small number of men, while the long and severe winter of this region will cause many soldiers to fall sick and even die. We need at least 100,000 proper uniforms and a proportional number of tents. Moreover, we request any quantity of coats, boots, clothes and tents that can be obtain to be urgently sent to us.¹⁸

The main problem behind the failure to provide adequate equipment and clothing for the Third Army was the lack and inadequacy of transportation infrastructure. The Third Army was operating in a region where railroads were totally absent, as the Ottoman rail network did not reach farther than Ankara (Angora) in Central Anatolia. Land routes were "long and toilsome", hence far from offering an efficient means for supplying the frontline.¹⁹ In the meantime, maritime transport from Istanbul through the Black Sea followed by a hazardous land journey of 360 km from the port of Trabzon to Erzurum was of limited utility, given the threat posed by Russian warships.²⁰ As a result, the Third Army entered the war with a lack of suitable equipment and serious problems

17 Mesut Uyar and Edward J. Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2009), 243.

18 *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı*, vol. 1 (Ankara: T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, 1993), 54.

19 Hogarth, "Geography of the War Theatre in the Near East", 462.

20 Ramazan Balcı, *Tarihin Sarıkamış Duruşması* (Istanbul: Tarih Düşünce Kitapları, 2004).

in the flow of food and supplies. This situation necessitated a greater reliance on the support of the local population; however as the war went on, neither the army nor the local people had the means to support themselves, let alone each other.²¹ Reflecting on the logistics situation of his division at the outbreak of hostilities, Col. Arif Bey,²² commander of the 29th Division, wrote in his memoirs that while there was not much of a problem with food, it was a different story with the clothing:

Since we were making use of army warehouses and the war taxation system, our cellars were full and the men were well fed. We have also benefited from Erzurum's famous sheep and cattle that were procured by the government. ... We were thinking of taking advantage of this abundance not only while we were stationed here, but also over the coming winter and during the operations in the following period. ... Clothing was the weakest and most tragic issue of not only the division but also the entire 9th Army Corps. ... The men were somehow equipped with the summer and winter clothes, cloaks, underwear, boots and mainly sandals that had been confiscated when the 29th Division left the Erzincan garrison, came to the Erzurum plains and spent some time there. Those with summer uniforms were given cloaks, those with winter uniforms were provided with waistcoats and underwear, and in this way we could cover their bodies.²³

Despite the unfavorable material conditions, the Ottoman counter-offensive was launched on 6 November 1914, and over the following two weeks there was intensive fighting first in the vicinity of the town of KöprükÖy, followed by a Turkish offensive towards the town of Azap. The offensive was not adequately coordinated, territories frequently changed hands over this period and although the Ottomans managed to push back the Russians, this came at the cost of high casualties.²⁴ Around KöprükÖy and Azap, troops often had to fight under blizzard, and march through rocky hills and frozen rivers. Not only was the strategic gain minimal, but also the effects of winter had begun to be deeply felt

21 Ibid., 53–57.

22 Arif Bey (Baytın) was born in 1874. A veteran of the Turco-Greek War of 1897, he fought in Sankamış where he was taken prisoner by the Russians. After more than five years in Siberia, he escaped in 1920 and took part in the Turkish Liberation War. In 1926, he was appointed Governor of Antalya. Arif Bey's later life remains unknown.

23 Arif Baytın, *İlk Dünya Harbinde Kafkas Cephesi* (Istanbul: Vakıf Matbaası, 1946), 19.

24 Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 246.

by Ottoman soldiers. Ali Rıza Efendi, the medic corporal, recalls the morning when the order to attack was given:

Suddenly we woke up to a horrendous noise. The order was given to move up. It was five in the morning. I had the tent, which was pitched only an hour ago, dismantled, and the supplies loaded. We were now standing in cold, and there was utter confusion. I will never forget that night. An order is issued, like "First Squadron, move!" yet there is not a single soldier in sight. One man stands up from under the snow, shaking off the snow on his uniform. The poor fellows have snow under them, snow on them. In great misery, we departed at half past seven.²⁵

Almost every single diary entry by Corporal (Cpl.) Ali Rıza Efendi for the period between November 1914 and January 1915 starts with a remark about the effects of the severe cold. For Ali Rıza, one of the best methods of protection against the cold was drinking cinnamon tea or cognac. However, not only were the supplies of these extremely limited, they were reserved for officers, as the most that the common men could do was limited to melting snow in a kettle, and preparing plain tea as long as they had the supplies. In addition to tea, hot soup was an important protection against the cold, for officers and soldiers alike. Ziya Bey, commander of the 83rd Regiment, writes in his memoirs that they were boiling German-made instant soup for the soldiers, even mentioning the brand of the soup: Knorr.²⁶

By the end of November, the frontline had stabilized with the Russians clinging to a salient 25 km into Turkish territory along the Sarıkamış-Erzurum axis; and whilst the weather conditions were deteriorating in Eastern Anatolia, there was no improvement in the equipment and supplies of the Third Army. In a letter he sent after the war to Lieutenant-Colonel (Lt. Col.) Şerif Bey,²⁷ the chief of staff of the 9th Army Corps, commander of the 37th Division, Col. Yusuf Ziya Bey,²⁸ explained the conditions of his unit during the battles of Köprüköy:

25 Eti, *Bir Onbaşının Doğu Cephesi Günlüğü*, 44.

26 Yergök, *Sarıkamış'tan Esarete 1915–1920*, 88.

27 Şerif Bey (İlden) was born 1877 in Köprülü (in current-day Macedonia). In Sarıkamış, he was taken prisoner by the Russians, and spent three years in Siberian prisoner camps, after which he fled to Istanbul and joined the intelligence service. During the early republican period he took on diplomatic and political posts. His life after retirement remains unknown to this date.

28 Yusuf Ziya Bey was born 1880 in Istanbul. He took part in the Balkan War and fought in the First World War, retiring from active duty after the events of Sarıkamış. During the

The division moved to the battlefield in the same way it would walk onto a training field. Our needs were not met. On the contrary, as days passed by, our needs increased even more. Hunger on one hand, nakedness on the other; our hats getting wet because of snow and rain and sticking on our heads; these all made us appear to you, who had full stomachs, as beggars. True, neither did our officers look like officers, nor did our soldiers look like soldiers. But please be assured Şerif Bey, our hearts were full with the light of faith and heroism, as were yours. 600 men got frost-bitten on the way from Köprüköy to Tutak and got gangrenous feet. These were examined by the doctor and sent to the hospital in Hins. [We] could not receive food from anywhere for 16 days. It is only ten sacks of flour that I had to beg for and received from the headquarters of the 33rd Division in Gündiğut.²⁹

Under these conditions both officers and soldiers had to devise their own ways of protecting themselves against the cold. Shelter was difficult to find, and even when it was available there were several other problems related to accommodation. When an army unit was near a village or a town, soldiers camped inside barns and stables, while officers stayed in houses. However, in rural Eastern Anatolia, since these structures were usually scattered around a wide area, assembling the men was extremely difficult, especially when visibility was low due to adverse weather conditions. An additional problem was related to cases of hunger and congestion. Ziya Bey, commander of the 83rd Regiment, explained what happened when men are hungry and needed to stay in overcrowded places:

Hunger and congestion do not only create a pitiful situation, but also lead to the vandalization of village houses. The man tries to tear down the place in which he found shelter, without thinking that this would mean that he would have to stay in the open and probably freeze to death. One night, I heard noises from the rooftop of the barn where the regiment headquarters was stationed. My soldiers went out to check the situation and they saw two men trying to dismantle the roof.³⁰

remainder of the war he assumed several administrative roles within the army. He left the military in 1924, and his life thereafter remains unknown.

29 Şerif İliden, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Başlangıcında 3. Ordu: Sarıkamış Kuşatma Manevrası ve Meydan Savaşı*, ed. Sami Önal (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2001), 137.

30 Yergök, *Sarıkamış'tan Esarete 1915–1920*, 78.

In the open field, where there was no shelter, there were other ways of protecting oneself against the cold, such as the bivouac fire, portable tents, and the room-sized pits that they called “grounders”.³¹ Faik Efendi,³² a reserve officer with the 10th Corps, explains the idea of a grounder in his memoirs:

At a certain distance behind the fire line, the earth is dug out to create a little room. Its top is covered with tent canvas or tree branches. In winter it is possible to have a stove or oven inside. If the top is covered well, you have a village house that can be easily heated up.³³

Under these conditions, instead of holding on to the defensive positions, spending the winter there, and launching the offensive in spring when the weather was better, the Ottoman High Command decided to renew the operations immediately. The plan was an envelopment of the Russian forces through a winter offensive.³⁴ Enver Pasha,³⁵ Minister of War and the generalissimo of the Ottoman Army, embarked to the front, arrived in Erzurum, and took over the command of the Third Army on 18 December 1914. Enver and his staff were convinced that the Russians could be encircled and annihilated at Sarıkamış, however their self-confidence had blinded them to see that the plan was doomed to failure because it did not pay attention to “the lack of intelligence, incomplete logistical planning, the absence of heavy artillery, poor roads and, most importantly, winter weather conditions”.³⁶

The Ottoman offensive began on 22 December 1914, with the troops of the 9th and the 10th Army Corps proceeding towards Sarıkamış. In the initial stag-

31 The Turkish word is *zeminlik*.

32 Faik Efendi (Faik Tonguç), who was born 1889 in Çorum, was a student in Britain when the war broke out. He quit his studies and joined the army as a reserve officer. He was taken prisoner in 1916, but managed to return to Turkey after the revolution in Russia. He spent the rest of his life in Ankara, doing commercial business, and passed away in 1968.

33 Faik Tonguç, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Bir Yedeksubayın Anıları* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2006), 28.

34 Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 55–58.

35 Enver Pasha was born 1881 in Istanbul. As a young military officer, he was one of the key figures of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, and he assumed important command positions in the Turco-Italian War in North Africa and the subsequent Balkan War. Climbing the career ladder fast, he became the de facto ruler of the Ottoman Empire and led the country, and its army, throughout the First World War. After the war, Enver had to leave the country, took part in the Turkic uprising in Central Asia, and was killed in 1922 in Tajikistan by the Red Army.

36 Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 247.

es, they made relatively good progress, however as the weather conditions worsened, the Turks lost orientation and found themselves in a helpless situation.³⁷ It was extremely difficult to walk, and the animals pulling the howitzers were stuck in the snow. To make the situation worse the men did not have proper footwear; they were wearing nothing more than sandals, and incidents of frostbite began to take hold. A private with the 29th Division remembers the conditions under which his unit was moving forward:

As we approached the hill, snow began to fall, accompanied by a storm. One could not see around. It was freezing cold. Before we reached the top, the snow was up to half a metre. Moving forward was impossible because of the snow and the freezing wind. Soon soldiers began to be left behind. Several men could not move any further and died on the spot. The rest began to climb down the hill. After not too long, it was dark, and the night had spread its darkest, most woeful cover on the mountain. ... There was no light whatsoever. Even the stars seemed to be hidden away. It did not matter if your eyes were open or closed; seeing anything was practically impossible. The wuthering of the storm could prevent hearing as well, but we did our best, because hearing and shouting was crucial for our survival. ... At the same time we tried to climb down the hill, but we were slowed down by snow holes. When you fall into one, either you never come out again, or it takes a lot of effort to save yourself.³⁸

The need for adequate clothing was deeply felt during long marches. Both officers and soldiers found ways of improving the quality of whatever kind of clothing they have. An important problem was the wet footwear, which would freeze and cause complications. A common way of solving this problem was by wrapping the boot or the sandal with nylon:

[I] was wearing woollen socks inside my boots and wrapping my boots in nylon. Still my feet would feel cold, and during the day I was walking around until my feet were warm again. At night I would unwrap the nylon, put my feet towards the fire and sleep like that. I lost one of my nylons inside the snow during one of my day walks, and one pair of boots

37 Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 124–25.

38 Metin Tekin, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Anıları: Sarıkamış'tan Sibiryaya* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2007), 22–23.

was burnt in fire while I was sleeping. They would not fit my feet any more.³⁹

We had obtained a pair of nylons to wear on our boots for protection against mud and snow. However, when I was walking on snow, pieces of snow were going in between the nylon and the boot, freezing there, and it was then no more possible to take off the boot without tearing apart the nylon. This is why they were soon gone and we were left only with the boots. There were also problems with those; it was a big issue to take them on and off when they were wet. This problem could be solved to a certain extent by filling in the boots with barley to absorb the humidity and molding them.⁴⁰

For those who had the opportunity and the means, the best way for improving one's condition was to write home and ask the family to send supplies: "I asked my brother to send me new gloves to replace the mohair ones that I had lost on the night of the disaster. He sent me not only gloves, but also a woollen shirt, underwear, tea and sugar".⁴¹

It was truly baptism by snow for the men on the field who struggled to survive the extreme cold, while at the same time the top brass were determined to continue the march towards Sarıkamış, in order to encircle the Russian forces, prevent their retreat to Kars, and annihilate them. The 9th Army Corps had in fact reached the town, but having found itself outnumbered by the Russians it was unable the force the town on its own.⁴² In the meantime, the 10th Army Corps was ordered to cross the Allahuekber Mountains to reach Sarıkamış and join forces with the 9th. The decision to cross a mountain range in the dead of the winter turned out to be a recipe for disaster. An anonymous officer from the 93rd Regiment, quoted by Şerif Bey, describes the fatal march as follows:

We left the village when it was still dark. The privates were following the corporals in complete silence. We had local guides and referring to the maps we had, we believed that we could reach the summit in three hours. We walked twice that long, and the road was still going up. As we climbed higher, the scenery became wilder, but more beautiful. It looked as if the whole place was made of endless snow and rivers. We could see the hills covered with snow and ice below us. I could not imagine how our

39 Yergök, *Sarıkamış'tan Esarete 1915–1920*, 116.

40 Baytın, *İlk Dünya Harbinde Kafkas Cephesi*, 36.

41 Yergök, *Sarıkamış'tan Esarete 1915–1920*, 79.

42 Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 248.

artillerists would make it up this steep snowy mountain. We were climbing under difficult circumstances, but we maintained order and discipline. Finally, we reached the highest point, which was a wide snow plain. ... We were exhausted. A sharp wind blew over us, and then came a snowstorm. Visibility was nil. Nobody could speak or say anything, let alone help each other. The long marching column dissolved. Soldiers went away wherever they could see a black point at the edge of a forest or a riverbank, any place where they could see the smoke from a fire. The corps dissolved and melted away. The officers tried hard, but no one listened to them. I can still remember the scene. A private kneeling in the snow beside the road, screaming, wrapping his arms tightly around a pile of snow, biting it and scratching it with his finger nails. I tried to help him stand up to take him back to the road. He did not respond at all and kept on doing it. The poor man had gone mad. In one single day, we left maybe more than ten thousand souls under the snow in those cursed glaciers, and moved on.⁴³

Another eyewitness, Lieutenant (Lt.) Ahmet Hilmi Efendi⁴⁴ from the 90th Regiment, recalls the crossing:

Allahuekber Mountains! I will never forget the merciless cold of this place, which was turned into a cold and icy grave for the Turk. Soldiers of the 89th Regiment, which was ahead of us, had died one by one every hundred metres. Poor soldiers, on these icy mountains, they had lost their lives not through the enemy's bullets, sharp swords or relentless bayonets, but through the sweet and numbing poison of severe cold. One of them, who did not want to leave his frozen brother behind, was sitting beside him and sobbing. Days without sleep and the severity of cold had broken our defenses. Everybody wanted to go into a sweet and eternal sleep. I did my best to keep my men aware of the dangers of the terrain and of time, telling them that we had to make every effort to escape that damned place. I was in such a condition that I was sleeping and even dreaming when I was walking. When I remembered that this

43 İlden, *Sarıkamış Kuşatma Manevrası ve Meydan Savaşı*, 238.

44 Ahmet Hilmi Efendi (Erbuğ) was born 1897 in Sivas. He fought in Sarıkamış, where he was captured by the Russians, and after four years in Siberia he returned home to resume studies at the War Academy; eventually taking on a number of military posts. Ahmet Hilmi was also a scholar; he taught political science and law, and wrote several books including a textbook for the Afghan Army.

was the sweet and pleasant sign of freezing to death, I felt the need to resist with all my strength. It was clear that a five to ten minutes nap I would have there would turn into an eternal sleep.⁴⁵

The 10th Army Corps managed to complete the crossing losing, according to estimates by various sources, between two-thirds to four-fifth of its men on the slopes of the Allahuekber Mountains.⁴⁶ It was a death march where scores of soldiers were frozen to death not only because their clothing was inadequate for the actual climatic conditions, but also because hunger and fatigue increased the risk of frostbite and hypothermia:

As the marches went on longer, even those soldiers with no illness or deficiency have lost their physical strength due to the lack of food and rest, and froze to death during night marches held on plains on those terrible winter nights.⁴⁷

Despite high casualties, exhaustion, and weakening morale, Turkish troops managed to reach Sarıkamış; however the tide had already turned in favour of the Russians who were bringing in fresh reinforcements from their stronghold in Kars. After four days of trench warfare around Sarıkamış starting on 30 December 1914,⁴⁸ the Russian army launched a major offensive, against which the Turks had no option but to retreat.⁴⁹ During January 1915, the Russians continued to advance towards the pre-war borders, taking a large number of retreating Turks prisoner. They did not advance deeper into the Anatolian mainland, and the frontline stabilized, giving the Third Army the opportunity to recover and reorganize itself along new defensive lines, until the new Russian offensive that would come in May 1915.⁵⁰

There are no exact figures about the Ottoman casualties in Sarıkamış, but as a reliable source in this respect the official history published by the Turkish General Staff states that losses amounted to around 60,000 men.⁵¹ Most of these soldiers were, however, non-battle casualties who died of diseases that

45 Merih B. Erbuğ, ed. *Kaybolan Yıllar: Mülazım Ahmet Hilmi'nin Sarıkamış-Sibirya-Afganistan Hatıraları ve Hayatı* (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 2007), 28–29.

46 Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 248; *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı*, 528.

47 Baytın, *İlk Dünya Harbinde Kafkas Cephesi*, 133.

48 Balcı, *Tarihin Sarıkamış Duruşması*, 219–39.

49 *Ibid.*, 241–59.

50 Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 104–8.

51 *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı*, 535.

originated from adverse winter conditions, such as frostbite, gangrene, hypothermia, and typhus.⁵² After the battle, towns and villages in the region were flooded by wounded, ill and exhausted soldiers. Diseases turned into epidemics in a short time, taking a heavy toll on the army.

After Sarıkamış, hostilities in Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus in general continued throughout the year 1915, during which the world's attention was shifted to another Turkish battlefield, the Gallipoli peninsula. When the fighting ended in this theatre of war in January 1916, some of the veterans of Gallipoli found themselves on trains bound for eastern Europe. Following the major Russian offensive in the summer of 1916, the Central Powers were suffering from a profound manpower deficit in the Eastern Front, and an urgent request was made to the Ottoman High Command to supply troops. As a result of the agreement with their allies, the Turks decided to send their 15th Army Corps to Galicia, 6th Army Corps to Romania, and their 20th Army Corps and 177th Infantry Regiment to Macedonia.⁵³

Winter in Eastern Europe 1916/17

Galicia, a region known as the “historic gate between the two halves of Europe”,⁵⁴ geographically corresponds to the area covering the western regions of current day Ukraine, and the Polish territories to the north across the border. Southern and western boundaries of the region are marked by the mountain crest of the Carpathians, whereas to the north and the west the territory is marked by plains and dense forests, intersected by rivers and marshes. As a contemporary geographer wrote, the part of the region that corresponds to the Northern Carpathian range and the neighbouring plains was dominated by an alpine climate with severe winters and low variations of temperature over the year, while to the east and the south it had a continental climate with cold winters but relatively warmer summers.⁵⁵ In this region, snow stays on the ground for several months, and, as another contemporary account suggests, in

52 Hikmet Özdemir, *The Ottoman Army 1914–1918: Disease & Death on the Battlefield* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press), 50–67.

53 Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 137–49.

54 Basil Paneyko, “Galicia and the Polish-Ukrainian Problem”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 9, no. 27 (1931), 568.

55 Emmanuel de Martonne, “The Carpathians: Physiographic Features Controlling Human Geography”, *Geographical Review* 3, no.6 (1917), 419–20.

early 20th century the greater part of the northern plains were glaciated during the winter.⁵⁶

The 15th Army Corps, commanded by Col. Yakup Şevki Bey^{57 58} arrived in Galicia in August 1916, and was immediately assigned to the Army Group South where it was deployed between two German divisions along a 28 km front parallel to the Złota Lipa River.⁵⁹ When the decision was made to send Ottoman troops to the Eastern Front, the basic principle on which the parties agreed was that in terms of equipment the Turks were to be at the same level as the allied forces they would be fighting alongside. This meant that the 15th Army Corps was to receive the highest quality of weapons, ammunition and equipment available in the Ottoman Army, and if there were still shortcomings, these would be covered locally by the German and Austrian armed forces, both of which eventually supplied machine guns, bomb throwers and other equipment. Uniforms and gear suitable for the eastern European climate were also provided for by Turkey's allies.⁶⁰

The first major Russian offensive in the Turks' sector began on 2 September 1916, and several Ottoman units were heavily engaged in combat. After four days of fighting, Ottoman forces were ordered to retreat to new positions up to 20 km to the rear, and subsequent Russian attacks on these positions were repulsed.⁶¹ Following these opening shots, Ottoman and German units strengthened their lines and closed the gaps, while the Russians were preparing for an

56 Douglas Wilson Johnson, "Geographic Aspects of the War. Part II. The Eastern Campaign", *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 47, no. 4 (1915), 267.

57 Yakup Şevki Bey (Subaşı) was born in Harput in 1876. A veteran of the Balkan War, he served in several battlefields of the First World War, including Gallipoli, Galicia, and Azerbaijan. After the armistice, he was sent to exile in Malta, from which he returned in 1921. Yakup Şevki Bey was one of the leading commanders of the Turkish Liberation War. He passed away in 1939 in Istanbul.

58 During the First World War, it was common for Ottoman army corps to be commanded by colonel-level officers because, as the consequence of a series of pre-war measures aimed at reforming the army by rejuvenating the cadres, there were not enough generals left to occupy high commanding posts. A reform decree issued in 1909, which imposed age limits, had led to the liquidation of more than 10,000 officers and generals, and in early 1914, the first thing Enver Pasha did when he became the Minister of War was to eliminate a large number of the remaining senior officers and generals, particularly those who were deemed to have failed in the Balkan War. See: *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 1 (Ankara: T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, 1996), 106–7, 112.

59 *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Avrupa Cepheseri* (Ankara: T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, 1996), 19.

60 *Ibid.*, 60.

61 *Ibid.*, 22–26.

attack at the Lipicadolna region in the south, which was the link between the Ottoman line and the neighboring German division. On 15 September, Russians launched a major attack, against which the German and Ottoman troops performed a joint operation in the form of a counter-offensive. Despite heavy losses on the Turkish side this operation was a significant success and the Russians were driven back to their starting line.⁶²

After a series of brief skirmishes during October 1916, the following two months passed without any serious contact between the Turks and the Russians. It was now winter in Galicia, and both parties were in favour of strengthening their positions instead of engaging in renewed fighting. Ottoman troops received new gear such as fur cloaks and thick warm overcoats providing total protection against the winter conditions. İbrahim Efendi, a private with the 61st Regiment, wrote in his diary that they were provided with special winter shirts, German coats and Austrian boots covered with felt inside.⁶³ Not only were the Ottoman soldiers in Galicia well clothed and kept warm, but they were well fed too. In terms of the food rations issued, the 15th Army Corps was officially a part of the Austro-Hungarian logistics system, which meant that the soldiers were receiving much more food than they were used to when fighting in Gallipoli. In fact, the amount of meat they were receiving was four times higher than the upper limit stated in Ottoman army regulations.⁶⁴ Moreover, there were daily rations of rum as well, although the majority of the Ottoman contingent did not consume alcohol due to their religious beliefs.⁶⁵ Better food, meanwhile, took some time for the soldiers to get used to:

Our stomachs, which were used to nothing but cracked wheat for months, could not digest greasy meat dishes, and on the second day we got diarrhoea. The boys writhed in pain until their stomachs got used to the new food.⁶⁶

There were no significant clashes in Galicia during the winter of 1916/17.⁶⁷ Although all the parties were well prepared for extreme weather conditions, none of them saw any advantage in escalating the operations during the win-

62 Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 140.

63 İbrahim Arıkan, *Osmanlı Ordusunda Bir Nefer: Bir Mehmetçiğin Çanakkale-Galiçya-Filistin Cephesi Anıları* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2010), 132–34.

64 M. Şevki Yazman, *Mehmetçik Avrupa'da* (İstanbul: Ahmet Halit Yaşaroğlu Kitapçılık, 1953), 19–20.

65 *Ibid.*, 60.

66 *Ibid.*, 20.

67 Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 141.

ter, and this is why the winter experience of the Turks in Galicia is in significant contrast to that of their comrades-in-arms in Sarıkamış, who had inadequate clothing, were poorly fed, and had to fight all the time and under any kind of conditions. Mehmet Şevki Efendi,⁶⁸ a lieutenant with the 20th Division was aware of this contrast:

Galicia's snowy winter had begun in all its severity. Sometimes there was snowfall for days, and the ground was covered with snow up to one metre high. By the end of November, automobiles could not move on the snow mass anymore. The sleighs that we used to see in locals' homes but could not appreciate their value were now in big demand. Mehmetçik⁶⁹ is comfortable at the front, because his grounder is good, his stove is burning, his stomach is full and his back is strong. His only problem is the patrol mission, yes, if he only could evade the patrols. When that eighteen-hour long night of Galicia begins those who have their turn in going on patrol mission wear their white snow skirts on the gear so that they can hide themselves on the snow, they take their weapons and go to their posts in front of the trenches. Here they cannot build a small hut or shanty, not even a big hole, because otherwise the enemy would spot their location and would definitely shoot them down the next day. This is why he kneels down, with eyes looking forward; he begins thinking of his warm grounder or the warm bed of his Fatma in a faraway hometown. If he has been a little pious and did not drink his ration of rum, he would shiver all the time. When I was on the front line, I used to go to those posts, saw how difficult their jobs were and felt sorry for them. Yet I was also thinking that the situation of Mehmetçik in the Caucasus is much worse. Here they are waiting with their back covered and stomachs full. But there, they have to wait with empty stomach and naked on snow.⁷⁰

In May 1917, the Ottoman High Command decided to withdraw the 15th Army Corps from the Eastern Front. The 19th Division left Galicia in June, while the 20th Division stayed for another few months and took part in a major offensive against the Russians in July. By September 1917, there were no Ottoman troops

68 Mehmet Şevki Efendi (Yazman) was born 1896 in Germili. During the war, he fought in Gallipoli after which he served in Galician and Palestinian campaigns, and eventually in the Turkish Liberation War. He resigned from the army in 1946, and was elected to the parliament in 1950, where he served for two terms. Mehmet Şevki passed away in 1974.

69 *Mehmetçik* is the generic term by which the Turkish common soldier is known.

70 *Ibid.*, 108.

left in Galicia.⁷¹ The Galician campaign was the first instance where the Ottoman army had to fight on foreign soil under the orders of foreign commanders. The 15th Army Corps sustained overall casualties of around 15,000 in Galicia, with a further 10,000 men taken prisoner by the Russians.⁷² Although the winter conditions in this region were not as severe as was the case in Eastern Anatolia, Turkish troops nevertheless had to fight under snow and blizzard in Galicia, yet the non-battle casualties they suffered were minimal.⁷³

Winter Warfare in Literature

The experiences of the men fighting on snow-covered mountains are reflected in works of Turkish literature, providing an insight on how the legacy of Sarıkamış and Galicia resonates in the Turks' national narrative. In a sense, these works were composed as a requiem to those who had suffered under freezing cold as they were struggling to fight for the motherland, showing clearly that the Ottomans' experience with winter conditions during the war had gone beyond its meaning in military terms and had become a defining factor of Turkish identity, a part of the national psyche. For instance, in the work of the world-renowned Turkish author Yaşar Kemal,⁷⁴ who narrates the stories of ordinary people in Anatolia, it is common to come across characters whose lives are shaped by what they have experienced in the winter of Sarıkamış. Perikles in *Fırat Suyu Kan Akıyor Baksana* (Look, the Euphrates is Flowing with Blood) is one of them:

The army took to the Allahuekber mountains. Our company came face to face with the Russians. Nobody left standing, we all fell. All of a sudden we were covered with snow. I was wounded, or I thought I was dead.

71 *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Avrupa Cepheleri*, 50–60.

72 *Ibid.*, 64; Cemalettin Taşkıran, *Ana Ben Ölmedim: 1. Dünya Savaşı'nda Türk Esirleri* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2001), 51.

73 Health care for the Ottoman troops fighting in Galicia was provided by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, and according to the records kept by the latter, the total number of Ottoman soldiers who were treated for frostbite and hypothermia between December 1916 and March 1917 was only 267. See: Oya Dağlar Macar, "Galiçya Cephesi'nde Osmanlı Birlikleri ve Sağlık Hizmetleri 1916–1917", *Osmanlı Bilimi Araştırmaları* 10, no.2 (2009), 47.

74 Yaşar Kemal, born 1923 in Osmaniye, is a leading Turkish intellectual and writer recognized throughout the world for his literary output which blends Anatolian legends and folk stories with a modern approach to novel writing. His work has been translated into more than forty different languages.

When my wound hurt I realized I wasn't dead. I was frozen. I knew that freezing meant death, so I said to myself, come on Perikles, stand up! If you can't, you will end up dead!⁷⁵

In Turkish literature, historical novels focusing on certain historical events or periods constitute a genre that has regained popularity over the past decade, and even surpassed its golden age in the 1950s and 1960s in terms of the number of works published and periods covered. The First World War and the subsequent Turkish Liberation War, i.e. the Turko-Greek War of 1920/22, are amongst the most popular subjects providing historical settings for works of fiction.⁷⁶ One such novel, *Sarıkamış: Beyaz Hüzüün* (Sarıkamış: White Sorrow) by İsmail Bilgin⁷⁷ follows the story of Sergeant (Sgt.) Nuri Efendi, a fictional character, who takes part in the Sarıkamış campaign, crosses the Allahuekber mountains, witnesses his comrades-in-arms freezing to death, and ends up in a Russian prisoner train bound for Siberia. Nuri's encounters on the mountains of Eastern Anatolia provide detailed accounts of both the physiological and psychological accounts of extreme winter conditions on individuals under arms.

Soldiers walking in snow were first feeling a pain in their feet, due to the effect of the sandals they were wearing. However, they were ignoring this pain, walking on, and cheering up because the pain was gone. As they moved on, they were not feeling their toes that were wet and squeezed inside the sandal like in a clamp. This insensibility was making life easier for them. ... It was only the fast-walking soldiers who could march without feeling any pain whatsoever. However the insensibility was increasing as they walked on, spreading to the entire foot, and as it reached the ankle, the soldier would fall to the ground, as he was no more able to step on the ground. After having a rest on the snow for a while, they would want to hit the road again so that they would not be left behind, however being unable to step on the ground, they would fall back into the snow. ... This was the beginning of the end. Soldiers whose feet began to freeze were panicking first and trying to crawl forward, in order not to stay

75 Yaşar Kemal, *Fırat Suyu Kan Akıyor Baksana* (Istanbul: Adam Yayınları, 1998), 61.

76 Some examples of this genre are: Buket Uzuner, *Uzun Beyaz Bulut Gelibolu* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2001); Hıfzı Topuz, *Milli Mücadelede Çamlıca'nın Üç Güllü* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2002); Turgut Özakman, *Şu Çılgın Türkler* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2005).

77 İsmail Bilgin, born 1964 in Gelibolu, is a Turkish author known for his historical novels set against the background of the First World War.

where they were and fall prey to wild animals. However, after an intensive loss of strength, they were exhausted, falling on the snow facedown. This was when serenity began, as the soldiers bowed to the inevitable. Sometimes they begged their comrades who were passing by, asking them for assistance. However, no matter how much their comrades wanted to help them, they would not do so, because seeing what condition these men were in, they preferred to economize on their energy so that they would not end up the same way.⁷⁸

This comrade of mine has died recently. There is no point in keeping him inside. I will take him out. It is so cramped inside anyway, we are sleeping above each other. Sometimes I let the corpses I am taking out wait inside the snow. Nothing happens to them in this weather anyway. They do not decay, they do not smell, our only concern are the wolves coming down near the village. Whenever I have the opportunity I go up to the graveyard and try to dig graves. I say I am trying because it is terribly difficult to dig in frozen earth. The villagers were helping us with digging the graves, however they ceased to help when they found out that we were infected.⁷⁹

Another historical novel set during the Sarıkamış campaign is *Sarı Sessizlik* (Yellow Silence) by Cihangir Akşit.⁸⁰ This novel's protagonist is the young lieutenant Sacit Efendi, who, with his squadron, makes every effort to fulfill the order given to him, which is nothing less than crossing the Allahuekber Mountains and taking his men to Sarıkamış. His toughest enemy on the way is not the Russian army, but the winter, or as his major calls it, the "white monster! The white monster will swallow us all, none of us will survive!"⁸¹ As opposed to his commander, Sacit manages to remain psychologically sound by refusing to engage in self-defeating thinking, which is forced upon the men on the mountains by extreme winter conditions:

As he walked ahead, he could see frozen corpses, some of them covered in snow underneath trees, some stiffened while gnawing on trees to satisfy their hunger, some piled one on the top of the other, and others

78 İsmail Bilgin, *Sarıkamış: Beyaz Hüzn* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2005), 130.

79 Ibid., 180–81.

80 Cihangir Akşit, born 1953 in Istanbul, is a retired army general from Turkey, who has published three historical novels, set against the background of the First World War, the Turkish War of Liberation and the Korean War respectively.

81 Cihangir Akşit, *Sarı Sessizlik* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2009), 156.

hanging down from the tress like bats. They were not in pain any more, they looked like as if they were peacefully sleeping in splendid silence. For a moment, Sacit imagined himself like this. Then he said “no, not now” and began to walk faster.⁸²

Sacit symbolizes human determination and resistance to a force, which is much more powerful than himself. In several instances, he says “I will survive, I have to survive, I will survive!”⁸³ He is not afraid of dying, but he believes that succumbing to the winter is a dishonourable kind of death.

In both novels, *Sarıkamış: Beyaz Hüziün* and *Sarı Sessizlik*, the protagonists fight the winter conditions, experience hardship, suffer from the strategic and tactical mistakes of their superiors, yet they manage to survive, and at the end of the day they fall prisoner to the Russians. In both novels, the main enemy is the “General Winter”, while the Russian army appears to be capitalizing on the damage inflicted on Turkish troops by climatic conditions.

The story of the Sarıkamış campaign also has an important place in folk literature, and not unexpectedly, winter is again in the foreground. The traditional *Sarıkamış'ta Ölenlerin Ağıdı* (Elegy of the Fallen in Sarıkamış) consists of 17 stanzas, the last of which reads as follows:

Aziziye is my fatherland
I have laid guns in the Caucasus
My fear is not from the Muscovite
I have lost to the dead of winter.⁸⁴

Sarıkamış appears not only in traditional elegies, but also in contemporary Turkish music, where the content of elegies are combined with modern forms of music. A good example is the *Sarıkamış Türküsü*, the Song of Sarıkamış, composed by Özhan Eren.⁸⁵ The lyrics of the song are as follows:

Snow on Sarıkamış
Under the snow lies my Mehmet

82 Ibid., 189.

83 Ibid., 255.

84 This elegy is attributed to Zala Hatun, a woman from the village of Kayabaşı in what is now the Kayseri province of Turkey, who had lost sons and several relatives in Sarıkamış. See: Ahmet Z. Özdemir, *Öyküleriyle Ağıtlar* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1994), 43–45.

85 Özhan Eren, born 1959 in Istanbul, is a Turkish musician and movie director.

My rose, frozen into snow
As if he were embracing his lover

Some from Yemen, some from Harput
With nothing on but thin cloth
Console your heart, my hero
If the lover does not embrace you, God will.⁸⁶

Both the traditional elegy and the contemporary song reveal how the experience of Sarıkamış has been inscribed in Turkish culture and psyche. It is about human suffering; man fearing nature rather than man fearing man; helplessness against the forces of nature and the futility of fighting against it. It is the common soldier, Mehmetçik, who is the victim; his superiors and particularly the leaders of the army and the country are deemed guilty for having pushed him to the mountains without adequate preparation and for a senseless adventure.

The fact that the winter experience in Galicia was not as traumatic as the Sarıkamış experience is reflected in the extremely low number of works of literature on the Galician campaign as compared to the wide range of fiction based on Sarıkamış. One example of historical fiction on the Galician campaign is *57. Alay Galıçya: Ölümsüz Alayın Öyküsü* (57th Regiment Galicia: The Story of the Immortal Regiment) by İsmail Bilgin, the author of another novel on the Sarıkamış campaign.⁸⁷ It is the story of the 57th Regiment, which, after fighting was over in Gallipoli, was deployed to eastern Europe. The story evolves around Turks' experiences on European soil, relations with the Allied troops and the fighting against the Russian forces. Winter does not appear as a character in this story.

Conclusion

Sarıkamış in Eastern Anatolia and Galicia in eastern Europe were two battlefields of the First World War where the Ottomans fought not only against the enemy, but also against extreme climatic conditions. The outcome was totally different in these two campaigns. In Sarıkamış, extreme winter conditions were combined with irrational strategic planning and insufficient preparedness which spelt disaster for the Ottoman troops, a majority of whom were frozen to death on the mountains. In Galicia, the Ottomans had taken part in

86 Özhan Eren, *Sarıkamış'lı Geçmiş Zaman*, DMC Müzik.

87 İsmail Bilgin, *57. Alay Galıçya: Ölümsüz Alayın Öyküsü* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2009).

combined operations with their allies. Winter was harsh, but adequate plans were made, and the army was well prepared, mainly thanks to the logistical support from Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Ottoman narratives from these two fronts reveal striking differences in the ways winter was experienced by the men under arms. In Sarıkamış, they were hungry, freezing, demoralized and desperate. In Galicia, they were almost indifferent to winter, since they were well prepared against its possible effects. At the end of day, Sarıkamış turned out to be a traumatic disaster; Galicia was a successful military operation marginally affected by the climate. The story of Sarıkamış, where thousands were frozen to death, is told by Turks from generations to generations, and it has become a part of the national psyche, while Galicia is fading into history.

More than a hundred years before the events of Sarıkamış and Galicia, in 1812, a schoolboy from Berlin was watching the remnants of the Napoléonic army retreating into the city:

One saw no guns, no cavalry, only suffering men crippled by frightful wounds, men with hands, arms, or feet either missing or else completely destroyed by frostbite. That the hand of God could strike so terribly, one trembled to believe one's own eyes.⁸⁸

This depiction could easily have been a scene from Sarıkamış, yet the schoolboy was wrong in thinking that it was divine wrath. While extreme winter is a natural event, humans suffering under winter conditions is a self-inflicted phenomenon. The climate is only one of the variables in war planning, the extent to which it influences operations and individuals is a function of how this variable is incorporated into the overall picture. In 1812, the Napoléonic army had lost in Russia not because the winter was too harsh – it was not – but because the soldiers had no winter training, equipment or experience.⁸⁹ Napoléon's mistake was repeated by Ottoman military planners, and the voices from the frontline tell us how the Ottoman soldiers on Allahuekber Mountains suffered from a fatal lack of adequate training, equipment, and experience. In his study on winter warfare, Swinzow asks “why is it that past experience in winter warfare is not considered for the future?” and confesses that there is no answer to this question.⁹⁰ We are also unable to answer the question of why the Turks did

88 Eyewitness by Ludwig Rellstab. Quoted in Anthony Brett-James, ed. *1812 Eyewitness Accounts of Napoléon's Defeat in Russia* (London: Book Club Associates, 1973), 290.

89 Swinzow, *On Winter Warfare*, 14.

90 *Ibid.*, 18.

not draw on the winter experience of Napoléon, when planning the Sarıkamış operations. However, we should bear in mind that for many unanswered questions that remain in the historiography of the First World War, a closer and more rigorous investigation of the Ottoman experience can offer clues, if not direct evidence, that will enable us to understand better the dynamics behind this great conflict.

Appendix: Original Turkish Quotations

Şehir, genel görünümü itibarıyla eski eser. Tam manasıyla bir müstahkem mevki, her tarafı top, tabya. Sokakları düzensiz, evleri daha berbat, pencere pek az. ... Hastanedeki Erzurumlu arkadaşların konuşmalarından anlaşıldığına göre, namus hususu sıfır. Çarşı esnafı pek yobaz ve pis, hele açıcıları fena kirli. Elli beş gün aç kalsam, bunlardan yemek yersem lanet bana. ... Odun arama. Kömürün okkası beş kuruşa, başka seneler dört kuruşmuş. Şehrin neresine, hatta giyilen elbiselere baksan hep şiddetli kışı anlatıyor. ... Bence yer değil vesselam. (Ali Rıza Efendi, *footnote 12*)

Balkan Harbi'nde ordunun teçhizatı askerın elbisesi mükemmeldi. O zaman yenildik. Şimdi teçhizat noksan, askerın elbisesi perişandır. İnşallah galip geliriz. (Hasan İzzet Pasha, *footnote 16*)

3 ncü Ordu'nun er mevcudu halen 160.000 civarındadır. Bunun ancak az bir kısmı elbisele olup kalanı başıbozuk kıyafetindedir. Bunların giyisileri de don ve gömlekten ibarettir. Bu durumun disipline etkisi dikkate alınmasa bile, buranın sert havası ile birçoğunun hasta olacağı şüphesizdir. Sağlanabilen her türlü kumaştan elbise yapmak ve Erzincan atölyelerini gece ve gündüz işletmek gibi tedbirlerden başka, koyut postundan ceket, keçeden mintan yapmak gibi hatıra gelebilecek bütün olanaklara başvurulmuştur. Elbiseleri kısmen iyi olanlara bir şey verilmese dahi, buradan sağlanabilecek bu gibi giysilerle erlerin pek azı korunabilecek ve bu bölgenin uzun ve şiddetli kışı birçok erin hastalanmasına ve ölmesine neden olacaktır. En azından 100.000 erlik elbiseye ve bu oranda mahrutî çadıra gereksinim vardır. Sağlanabilecek kaput, ayakkabı, elbise ve çadırların acilen gönderilmesini. (Telegram from the Third Army headquarters to the Ottoman High Command, *footnote 18*)

[K]olordu anbarlarından ve harp tekâlifî usulünden istifade edildiğinden kilerler dolgun ve birlikler doyumluydu. Hükümet tarafından toplanan Erzurumun meşhur besili karaman koyunlarından ve sığırlarından fazlasıyla istifade edildi... Bu bolluktan yalnızca burada ikamet edildiği müddetçe değil; önümüzdeki kış mevsiminde ve ilerdeki harekât için de faydalanmak düşüncesinde idik. ... Giyim ve kuşam meselesi yalnız tümenin değil 9 uncu kolordunun en zayıf ve acıklı cihetiydi. ... 29 uncu tümenin Erzincan garnizonundan çıkarak Erzurum ovasına geldiği ve burada geçirdiği müddet zarfında ele geçen yazlık, kışlık elbise, kaput, çamaşır, ayakkabı ve daha ziyade

çarıklarla erat şöyle böyle donatılmış, yazlık elbisesi olana kaput, kışlık elbisesi olana da sıcak yelek, çamaşır vermek suretiyle vücudu örtülebilmmişti. (Arif Bey, *footnote 23*)

Birdenbire dehşetli bir gürültüyle uyandık. Hareket emri verilmiş. Saat beş. Bir saat evvel kurulan çadırı yıktırıp yükleri yüklettim, soğukta duruyoruz. Bir buçuk, iki saattir bir harlıt bir gürültüdür gidiyor. Ömrüm boyunca bu geceyi hiçbir vakit unutmaya-çağım. *Birinci bölük hareket*, diye bir emir veriliyor, ortada asker görünmüyor. Karlar altından bir adam silkinip kalkıyor. Zavallıların altı kar, üstü kar. Ağlaya ağlaya, yedi buçukta hareket edildi. (Ali Rıza Efendi, *footnote 25*)

Tümen yükü hafiflemiş bir durumda eğitim alanına çıkar gibi savaş alanına atıldı. Eksiklerini, gereksinimlerini tamamlayamadı. Gün geçtikçe işbu gereksinimler arttı, eksilmedi. Bir yandan açlık, öbür yandan çıplaklık, başlarımızda kardan, yağmurdan ıslanıp yüzümüze gözümüze yapışıp kalmış kefiyeler, bizleri konağınız kapısında durup karşılayan siz toklara dilenci biçiminde gösterdi. Gerçekten ne subayımız subaya ne erimiz ere benziyordu. Fakat kalplerimiz emin olunuz Şerif Bey, kalbiniz gibi inanç ışığı ve kahramanlıkla doluydu. Soğuk ve çıplaklık yüzünden Köprüköy'den Tutak'a giderken ayakları şişip kangren olan altı yüz er doktor muayenesiyle ayrılarak Hins Hastanesi'ne gönderildi. ... Toplam on altı gün bir yerden yiyecek adıyla bir şey almadık. Yalnız dilenerek Gündigut'ta 33'üncü Tümen yönetiminden tümenimiz adına on çuval un alabildim. (Yusuf Ziya Bey in his letter to Şerif Bey, *footnote 29*)

Açlık ve izdiham acınacak bir durum yarattığı gibi, soğukta köy evlerinin yıkılıp yakılmasına da neden oldu. Öyle durumlarla karşılaşıldı ki şaşırılmamak elde değil. Asker yattığı, barındığı binayı yıkıp yakmaya kalkışıyor, sonra da açıkta kalıp soğuktan donacağını aklına getirmiyor. Bir gece baktım Alay karargâhının bulunduğu ahırın damından sesler geliyor. Askerler dışarı çıkıp baktılar ki iki er bizim ahırın damını sökmeye çalışıyor. (Ziya Bey, *footnote 30*)

Ateş hattının biraz gerisinde toprak kazılarak bir odacık haline konur. Üstü çadır bezleriyle veya ağaç dallarıyla kapanır. Kış aylarında ocak ve soba yakılabilir. Üstü sağlamca örtülürse kolayca ısınabilen bir köy evidir. (Faik Efendi, *footnote 33*)

Dağın tepelerine yanaştığımızda, fırtına ile birlikte, sulu sephen başladı. Bir anda, göz gözü görmez oldu. Dondurucu bir soğuk vardı. Tepeye varıncaya kadar, kar kalınlığı yarım metreye ulaştı. Kar, dondurucu ayaz yol almaya fırsat vermiyordu. Artık asker birlikten kopmaya başladı. Çoğu asker yol alamamış ve orada ölmüştü. Kananlar, dağı inmeye başlamıştı. Çok sürmemiş, karanlık basmıştı, gece; en acı, en kara örtüsünü sermişti dağın üstüne. ... Çevrede ışık namına bir şey yoktu. Gözlerin açık olmasıyla kapalı olması birdi. Görmek olayı tamamen devreden çıkmıştı. Fırtınanın uğultusu işitmeyi de engellemeye çalışıyordu ama kulaklarımızı zorluyoruz; dinlemek ve bağırarak kurtuluşumuz için çok önem kazanıyor. ... Bir taraftan da tepelerden aşağı inmeye gayret ediyoruz. Kar kuyuları fırsat vermiyor. Düşen, ya çıkamıyor, ya da uzun süre uğraşmak zorunda kalıyor. (Nuri Efendi, *footnote 38*)

[A]yaklarımı üşütmemek için de yün çorap üstüne çizme, çizmenin üstüne de lastik giydim. Bununla birlikte yine ayaklarım üşür, üşüdükçe gündüzleri ısınmaya kadar gezer dolaşırım. Geceleri ise lastikleri çıkardıktan sonra ayaklarımı ateşe tutar öyle yatardım. Bu yüzden lastiklerimden biri gündüz gezintilerim sırasında karlar içinde kayboldu. Bir çift çizmem de geceleyin uykuda iken ateşte kavruldu, ayağıma olmaz ve işe yaramaz hale geldi. (Ziya Bey, *footnote 39*)

[K]arlı ve çamurlu zamanlarda korunmak için çizmelerimizin üzerine giyilecek birer lâstik edinmiştik. Fakat, yağışta, karlar içinde dolaşırken lâstikle çizmenin arası kar parçalarıyla dolmakta ve akşamları da donmakta olduğundan lâstikleri yırtmadan çıkarmak mümkün olamamaktaydı. Onun için pek çabuk parçalandılar. Sade çizme ile kaldık. Bunlar da ıslandıkça çıkarıp giymek bir meseleydi. Buna karşı çare olarak da akşamları içerlerine arpa doldurarak rutubeti almakla beraber kalıplamak zarureti vardı. (Arif Bey, *footnote 40*)

Felâket gecesinde kaybettiğim tiftik eldivenlerin yerine eldiven göndermesini kardeşime yazdım. O da bana yalnız eldiven değil, yün fanila, don-gömlek, çay ve şeker gönderdi. (Ziya Bey, *footnote 41*)

Konak yerlerinden karanlıkta hareket ettik. Birlikler sessizce kol başlarını birer ikişer izliyorlardı. Kol başlarında kılavuzlar vardı. Haritaya göre üç saat sonra biz doruk çizgisindeki boyun noktasını geçeceğiz sanıyorduk. İki katı uzaklıkta yol aldık, yine yokuştan kurtulamadık. Dağa çıktıkça çevrenin görüntüsü hem güzel hem de yabani bir biçim alıyordu. Her taraf derin ve yalçın derelerden oluşmuş gibi görünüyordu. Biz kar ve buz kayalarıyla örtülü olan bütün bu dereleri, tepeleri ve sonra birçok alçak dağları ayağımızın altında görüyorduk. Topçular bu dik ve derin karlı dağ yolundan nasıl çıkacaklar aklım ermiyordu. Biz, zahmetle güçle fakat disiplin ve düzenden ayrılmayarak çıkıyorduk. En sonunda çıktık. ... Pek yorulmuş ve takatsız düşmüştük. Tam yayla üzerinde keskin bir rüzgâr ve arkasından şiddetli bir tipi başladı. Bu andan itibaren göz gözü göremez oldu. Kimsenin kimseye yardım etmesi ve hatta söz söylemesi, sesini duyurması olanağı kalmadı. Uzun, sonsuz denecek kadar uzamış olan yol kolu dağıldı. Asker enginlerde, dere içlerinde, orman bucaklarında, nerede kara bir nokta, nerede dumanı çıkan bir ocak gördüyse oraya saldırdı ve kolordu çözümlü eridi. Subaylar çok uğraştı. Fakat kimseye söz duyurma gücü kalmamıştı. Hâlâ gözümün önündedir. Yol kenarında karların içine çömelmiş bir er bir yığın karı kollarıyla kucaklamış, titreyerek, çığlık atarak dişleriyle kemiriyor, tırnaklarıyla kazıyordu. Kaldırıp yola götürmek istedim. Er önceki hareketini, çığlığını, dişleriyle, tırnaklarıyla çabalamasını hiç bozmadı ve beni hiç görmedi. Zavallı cinnet geçiriyordu. Böylece şu uğursuz içinde biz belki on bin kişiden çok insanı bir günde karların altında bıraktık ve geçtik. (Anonymous officer quoted by Şerif Bey, *footnote 43*)

Allahüekber Dağı! Burasının amansız soğuğunu hayatımın sonuna kadar unutamam. Çünkü burası, Türk'ün soğuk ve buzlu bir mezarı olmuştu. Bizden evvel geçen 89 uncu Tümen'in askerleri burada her yüz metrede bir donarak ölmüşlerdi. Zavallı kah-

raman askerler, Őu buzlu dađlarda dűŐmanın, kurŐunları, keskin kılıçları ya da amansız sűngűleri ile deđil, Őiddetli sođuđun tatlı ve uyuŐturucu zehri ile hayatlarını terk etmiŐlerdi. Bunlardan birisi donan kardeŐini burada terk etmek istemiyor ve yanına oturmuŐ hıçkırıklarla ađlıyordu. Gűnlerden beri devam eden uykusuzluk ve sođuđun Őiddeti ile daha mukavemetsiz bir hale gelmiŐtik. Herkes burada tatlı ve ebedi bir uykuya dalsın istiyordu. Ben műmkűn mertebe zemin ve zamanın tehlikesinden askerimi haberdar ediyor ve bűtűn kuvvet ve kudretin sarfi ile Őu uđursuz muntıkadan kurtulmak lűzumunun icap ettiđini anlatıyordum. Ben de artık o hale gelmiŐtim ki yűrűrken bile uyuyor ve hatta rűya bile gűriyordum. Fakat bunun donmanın tatlı ve hoŐ bir alámeti olduđunu hatırladıđım vakit, bűtűn mukavemetimi sarf etmek mecburiyetini hissediyordum. Çünkü burada dalacađım beŐ on dakikalık bir uyku bana ebedi bir uyku olacaktı. (Ahmet Hilmi Efendi, *footnote 45*)

YűriyűŐler uzadıkça hiç bir hastalıđı ve arızası olmıyan erat da sırf giyim ve gıda ve istirahat noksanından bedeni kuvvetlerini kaybederek műthiŐ kiŐ gecelerinde yaylalarda yapılan gece yűriyűŐlerinden donuyorlardı. (Arif Bey, *footnote 47*)

Fakat neye yarar ki, aylardan beri yalnız bulgur pilávana alıŐmıŐ olan mideler bu yađlı ve etli yemekleri hazmedemiyor, ikinci gűnű ishal baŐlıyor. Mehmetçikler, mideleri alıŐmıyaca kadar kıvrandıılar, durdular. (Őevki Yazman, *footnote 66*)

Galiçyanın o bol karlı kıŐı tűm Őiddetiyle baŐlamıŐtı. Bazan gűnlerce műddet kar yađıyor, her taraf bir metreden daha fazla bir kar tabakası ile őrűtlű bulunuyordu. ... TeŐrinisaninin sonuna dođru artık arabalar da kar kűtlesi üzerinde iŐleyemez oldular, evvelce yerlilerin evlerinde gűrűp de hikmeti vűcutlarını pek de anlıyamadıđımız kızaklar kendilerini aratturmaya baŐladılar. ... Mehmetçik cephe de rahattır., çünkü zeminliđi gűzel, altı kuru, sobası yanar, karnı tok, sırtı kavidir. Yalnız Őu keŐif koluna gitmek olmasa, hiç, ama hiç Őikáyeti olmıyacak; evet, yalnız Őu keŐif koluna gitmese. ... Galiçyanın o on sekiz saat devam eden uzun gecesi baŐladı mı, keŐif koluna gitmek sırası gelen Mehmetçikler karda kendilerini belli etmemek için beyaz kar gűmleklerini giyerler, baŐlarına beyaz kar baŐlıklarını geçirirler, siláhlarnı alırlar ve siperlerinin ilerisindeki bekleme yerlerine giderler. Buralarda kulűbe veya baraka, hattá bűyűkçe bir çukurcuk dahi yapılamaz, çünkü sonra dűŐman yerlerini tesbit eder ve ertesini gűn mutlaka zimbalar. Onun için karın űzerine çűmelir, gűzler ileride, aklı ya sıcak zeminlikte veya kimbilir belki de uzaktaki memleketindeki Fatmacıđın sıcak yatađında, dűŐűnűr durur. ... Hele biraz sofu kafalıđı tutup da kendisine verilen birkaç kadehçik romu da içmemiŐse mutlaka titrer durur. Ben ileri hatta bulunduđça çok defalar gider ve Mehmetçiklerin bu műŐkűl vazifelerini gűrűrek űzűlűrdűm, fakat dűŐűnűrdűm ki, Kafkas cephesindeki Mehmetçicđin hali daha fecidir. Buradakilerin sırtı pek, karnı tok olduđu halde oradakiler aç karnına ve çıplak kar űstűnde beklemek mecburiyetindedirler. (Őevki Yazman, *footnote 70*)

Ordu Allahűekber dađlarına vurdu. Bizim bűlűk dađın eteđinde Ruslarla sűngű sűngűye geldik. Bizim bűlűkten ayakta kimse kalmadı. Hepimiz dűŐűtik. Bir anda űstű-

müzü kar örttü. Ben yaralanmışım ya kendimi ölmüş sanıyorum. Baktım ki ölmemişim, yaralanmışım. Yaram sızlayınca ölmediğimi anladım. Donmuşum. Donmak ölümdür, biliyorum, haydi ayağa kalk Perikles, dedim, kalkamazsan bunun ucunda ölüm var. (*Fırat Suyu Kan Akıyor Baksana, footnote 75*)

Kar içinde yürüyen erler giydikleri çarğın etkisiyle ayaklarında ilk önce ağrı hissediyorlardı. Ancak bu ağrıya aldirmeden yürüyorlar, sonra ağrının geçtiğine seviniyorlardı. Yola devam ettiklerinde, ilk önce ıslanan ve çarık tarafından bir menegene gibi sıkılan ayak parmaklarını hissetmiyorlardı. Bu hissizlik onların işlerini kolaylaştırıyordu. ... Sadece hızlı yürümeye çalışan erler hiçbir ağrı hiçbir acı hissetmeden yürüyorlardı. Ancak hissizlik yürüdükçe artıyor, ayağının tümünü sarıyor, bileğe gelince yere basamayan er aniden yere düşüyordu. Bir süre karlar üstünde dinlenen erler geride kalmamak için tekrar yola koyulmak istiyor ama yere çok isteseler de basamıyor ve karların içine düşüyorlardı. ... İşte bu sonun başlangıcı demektir. Ayakları donmaya başlayan erler ilk önce panikliyor, burada yol kenarında kalıp vahşi hayvanlara yem olmaksansa, elleriyle, emekleyerek de olsa yollarına devam etmek istiyorlar ancak yoğun güç kaybından sonra yorulup yüzüstü yere düşüyorlardı. O zaman erlerde bir sakinlik başlıyor, kaderlerine razı oluyorlardı. Bazen yanından geçip gitmekte olan arkadaşlarına yalvarıyor, kendilerine yardım etmelerini istiyorlardı. Yürüyen erler arkadaşlarının bu halini gördükçe onlar gibi olmamak ve güçlerini idareli kullanmak için çok isteseler de arkadaşlarına yardım edemiyorlardı. (Sarıkamış: Beyaz Hüzün, *footnote 78*)

Bu arkadaşım az önce öldü. Şimdi onu içerde tutmanın bir anlamı yok. Hemen dışarı çıkıyorum. Zaten içerisi daracık. Üst üste yatıyoruz âdeti. Bazen çıkardığım erleri karda bekletiyorum. Nasıl olsa bir şey olmuyor bu havada. Ne çürüyorlar ne de kokuyorlar, tek endişemiz köye kadar sokulan kurtlar. Bazen fırsat bulursam yukarıdaki mezarlığa gidip mezar kazmaya çalışıyorum. Çalışıyorum, diyorum çünkü buz gibi toprağı kazmak çok zor oluyor. İlk zamanlar köylüler mezar kazmaya yardım ediyordu. Sonra hastalıklı olduğumuzu anlayınca yardımı da kestiler. (Sarıkamış: Beyaz Hüzün, *footnote 79*)

Beyaz canavar! Beyaz canavar hepimizi yutacak, hiçbirimiz sağ dönemeyeceğiz gibi geliyor bana! (Sarı Sessizlik, *footnote 81*)

İlerlerken, ağaç altlarında üzeri karla kaplanmış, bazıları aklıktan ağaçları kemirirken kaskatı olmuş, bazıları üst üste yığılmış, bir kısmı da ağaçların üzerine sığınmış, ama donup salkım saçak yarasalar gibi yerlere doğru sarkmış donuklara bakıyordu. Artık ıstırapları bitmişti, muhteşem bir sessizliğin içinde barış içinde uyur gibiydiler. Sacit bir an kendisini de böyle hayal etti. Sonra, "Yok, hayır, şimdi değil!" dedi ve hızını daha da artırmak için çaba gösterdi. (Sarı Sessizlik, *footnote 82*)

Yaşayacağım, yaşamalıyım, yaşayacağım! (Sarı Sessizlik, *footnote 83*)

Aziziye baba yurdum
Kafkasya'ya tabya kurdum
Benim korkum Ruslar değil
Karakışa kurban verdim. (Sarıkamış'ta Ölenlerin Ağdı, *footnote 84*)

Sarıkamış üstünde kar
Kar altında Mehmedim yatar
Gülüm donmuş kara dönmüş
Gören sanmış yarini sarar.
Kimi Yemen kimi Harput
Üzerinde ince bir çaput
Avut yiğit gönlünü avut
Yar sarmazsa Mevlâm sarar. (Sarıkamış Türküsü, *footnote 86*)