PART IV

THE LAST GENERATION IN KURDISTAN: BETWEEN WWI AND THE IMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL
CHAPTER ONE

JEWISH EXPERIENCE DURING WORLD WAR I: CONSCRIPTION AND EVASION

In 1914, several weeks after the outbreak of World War I, the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany and announced war on Great Britain, Russia and France. In the streets of Baghdad, the authorities announced the nafar-ǎmm (Tur., general conscription) to the beating of drums in the main streets of the city. Many Baghdadi Jews were drafted to the Sixth Army that was dispatched to the snowy Caucasus Mountains to confront the Russian army. Two-thirds of the Turkish force, among them hundreds of Jews, did not return home from the battlefield. The news of the horrors encouraged many Jews to evade conscription to the army. Some deserted their units and sought shelter with Bedouin tribes, while others escaped to Basra, which fell to the British in November 1914. The news from the battlefront reached the Kurdish towns and the remote provinces. This war was known as nasust-seferbalik, signifying misfortune, chaos, and ill-fated travel from which one did not return. During the war, the civil population in the Ottoman territories faced harsh measures, conscription campaigns, and confiscation of goods, shortage of food and even famine, which drove many urban Jews to seek refuge in rural communities under the jurisdiction of tribal aghas. As a result, many urban Jews were scattered in the rural area during the years of the war.

The Jews of Kurdistan had hardly ever served in the Turkish army before World War I. A few exceptions have been recorded: before

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1 This part (IV) deals with the political, economic and martial experience of the Kurdistanis Jews of Iraq from the beginning of World War I up until the mass immigration of the Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan to Israel during 1951 and 1952.


3 Nasust (in NA., fight, war); seferbalik (in Turk., general alert). This name derives from the fact that the Turkish authorities mobilized almost 3 million soldiers into the army and millions of civilians throughout the war.