

Curative Travel during the Great War: An Ottoman Woman's Notes from the Lahmann Sanatorium (1918)

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Context

The following excerpt is from the travel diary of Emine Hanım,¹ written between the years 1916 and 1919, hence, during the First World War. The diary is titled “Avrupa Seyahati Hatırası,” (“European Travel Memoirs”) and features various locations across Europe to which Emine Hanım traveled during these years due to her husband Miralay Celal Bey’s diplomatic mission. The diary was undiscovered until I chanced upon it at the Bahtiyar Sahaf in Kadıköy, Istanbul, in the summer of 2022. I hope to make it available through publication in the coming years.

Emine Hanım’s travel diary is written in a small notebook (11.0 x 13.5 cm) with a light brown cover and contains forty leaves (eighty pages). Some of the leaves have been torn out, and the last page bears scribbles made with a colored pencil, likely by a child. However, these affect only a few pages towards the end, and the rest of the diary has fortunately remained intact despite the century that has passed since its completion. The text is written in tiny, elaborate *rika* script and contains five carefully drawn maps depicting train and ship routes in Europe. Four of these maps show the wartime train routes that Emine Hanım and her family used, while one (from May 1919) depicts the return trip by ship from northern Germany to Istanbul.² The fact that some of these maps show very long-drawn-out routes testifies to the hardships of wartime travel, even for diplomatic personnel.

Although there is still research to be done on her family history, we learn from the diary that Emine Hanım’s paternal grandfather was Süleyman Paşa who bought the Sabuncakis Kiosk in Büyükkada before or around the year 1918, before its transfer to the public treasury in 1924. Her father was Mirliva Ali Rıza Paşa, who served as the commander of the Fifteenth Corps during the First World War.³ She was married to

¹ What surname the author Emine Hanım acquired after the Surname Law in 1934, or whether she lived up to that date, requires further research.

² Map 1 (p. 1): Istanbul – Bucharest, Map 2 (p. 13): Bucharest to Berlin (not through Austria-Hungary, but via Russia, Finland and the Baltic Sea), Map 3 (p. 30): Berlin - The Hague, Map 4 (p. 46): Istanbul – Berlin, Map 5 (p. 64): sea voyage from Hamburg to Istanbul, via the Nordic Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean.

³ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi, Irade Dosya Usulü (İ..DUİT), 178/74 (27 ZA. 1339 [2 August 1921]).

Miralay Celal Bey, who appears to have graduated from the Military Academy (*Mekteb-i Harbiye*) in the year 1304/1886.⁴ At the time when the diary was written, Celal Bey was appointed as military attaché, first to Bucharest⁵ and then to The Hague in the Netherlands.⁶ They traveled as a family, bringing along their little daughter Semiha and two maids named Nazlı and Çelebi.

The diary's content is varied and historically interesting, since one can find ample material on everyday life in wartime Europe: anecdotes involving Ottoman and foreign statesmen, lists of people joining lunch/dinner or afternoon tea gatherings, the daily life of a diplomat's family, price lists for food, and even conversion rates between different European currencies. Besides all this, the diary shows us the ways in which Emine Hanım saw and experienced the politically unstable climate of a world war along with the novelty of traveling to diverse European cities. In the course of these three years, Emine Hanım stayed in Bucharest, The Hague, Dresden, and Berlin for extended periods of time (including a one-year stay back home in Istanbul). During these stays, Emine Hanım and her family were often able to travel to other nearby cities to visit important cultural landmarks and, equally importantly, to visit other Ottoman and foreign diplomats and their families.

The excerpt that I would like to present here belongs to the Dresden episode of the diary's narrative, which stands out as a unique interlude. Unlike her time in other European cities; Emine Hanım's stay in Dresden was unrelated to Celal Bey's diplomatic duties. Rather, it was an instance of wartime curative travel.⁷ According to the diary, Emine Hanım was diagnosed with a kind of nervous illness (*bir nev'i sinir hâstalığı*) towards the end of her one-year stay in Istanbul (May 1917 – May 1918). Her entries in this one-year period are only sporadic, since she most probably intended to

⁴ "304 senesi Mekteb-i Harbiye mezunlarının Dersaadet'te bulunanlarından müteşekkil grup", Salt Araştırma, <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/21682> Last accessed: 21 July 2025.

⁵ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi, Hariciye Nezareti Sofya Sefareti (HR.SFR.04), 646/126 (26 January 1916), 652/89 (12 May 1916), 656/43 (27 August 1916).

⁶ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi, Hariciye Nezareti İdare (HR.İD.), 75/34 (25 September 1917).

⁷ For more on this term, see Marion Stamatu, "Curative travel," in K. Leven and N. Metzger (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Medicine in the Greco-Roman World Online*, eds. Karl-Heinz Leven and Nadine Metzger (Brill, 2024). doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/2950-466X_EMGO_SIM_023639

use the diary to note down travel occasions. However, she does inform us of some of the important events in her life that might have led to a nervous illness, such as the passing away of her mother in July 1917 and the passing away of her aunt in May 2018. She adds the fact that her children went away, which made her feel lonely and added to the condition (*ço-cuklarıñ gitmesi binā'en 'aleyh yalnız kalmaklıgım*).

Emine Hanım informs us that following this diagnosis, the family doctor Dr. Petraki prescribed her a “change of air,” (*tebdil-i hevā*) preferably somewhere away from her homeland.⁸ Asking around about possible health resorts, Emine Hanım and Celal Bey were recommended the Lahmann Sanatorium at Weisser Hirsch, near Dresden.⁹ Not so long afterwards, the family completed the necessary visa procedures and eventually traveled to Germany in September 1918. The sanatorium was located in a village named Weisser Hirsch, or “White Stag,” as Emine Hanım nicely translates it in the diary. The patients had to follow a rigid daily schedule consisting of morning gymnastics in the open air, various baths (including mud baths), and a nutritive diet. I am including her descriptions of the sanatorium complex, as well as of the meal plans. At another point in the diary, Emine Hanım avows her distaste for German food, saying “the food here tastes lame, as in all of Germany.” (*yemekleri tekmil Almanya’da olduğu gibi yavan.*)

On the whole, Emine Hanım’s heretofore undiscovered travel diary can be taken as a rare example of Ottoman women’s travel writing. Another example of this kind, almost contemporary to Emine Hanım’s but much better known in literature, is Zeynep Hanım’s *A Turkish Woman’s European Impressions* (1913) which she wrote in the form of letters to British journalist Grace Ellison.¹⁰ The intended audience of Emine

⁸ Doktor Petraki, at the time Director of Public Health at the Istanbul Municipality (*şehremāneti sıhhiye müdiri*). Recipient of an order of Osmaniye in 1920. Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi, İrade Dosya Usulü (I.DUIT), 63/51 (27 R. 1340 [28 December 1921]).

⁹ Lahmann-Sanatorium, established in 1888 by Dr. Heinrich Lahmann (1860-1905). The sanatorium expanded rapidly in the decades following its inception: by 1900, it was hosting 2000 patients, and by 1921, the number had risen to 5000. It hosted celebrities such as the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1901) and novelist Franz Kafka (1903). See Friedhelm Kirchfeld and Wade Boyle, *Nature Doctors: pioneers of naturopathic medicine* (Portland, Oregon, 1994), 148.

¹⁰ Zeynep Hanoum, *A Turkish Woman’s European Impressions*, ed. Grace Ellison (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Hanım's diary, on the other hand, was likely exclusively herself, and this brings a more personal and transparent tone to her writing. Through these examples of travel writing by women such as Emine Hanım and Zeynep Hanım, we get to hear late Ottoman women's voices not only with regard to their local environments, but also in their subjectivity as observers of "the other," i.e. foreign cultures and cities. The serendipitous discovery of Emine Hanım's *European Travel Memoirs* suggests that there might be other first-hand travel accounts by Ottoman women from this period that have yet to see the light of day.

Transcription

9 [Eylül 1918]

Esāsen İstanbuldan hareketimizde (Dresden)'de Vayserhirş sanatoryumunu tavsiyye // itmişlerdi biz de oraya gitmege niyyet itmişdik. Ve Berlin'de oturduğumuz müddetce muhābere iderek // Prospektusını aldık. Dresdene hareket itdik akşamleyin Vayserhirş //sanatoryumuna vāşıl olduk. Dresden (Elbe) nehri kenārındadır. Vayserhirş (Beyāz geyik) // köyi mürtefa' bir sırt üzerindedir. Elektrik tramvay ile şehre merbūtdur. Tramvayla yarım // sā'at sürer. Vayserhirş haqıqaten cennet-āsā bir maḥaldir. Ormanları güzel // villāları cāmi'dir. Bu sanatoryum bir merkez ḥāstaḥānesi ve sanatoryuma muḳtezā // tedāviḥāneleri ve müte'addid villāları ḥāvīdir. Bize Zu Linden villasında bir //oḡa virmişlerdi. Villa iyi olmadığı gibi soğukca olduğundan şikāyetimiz üzerine // Dora villasına¹¹ naḳl eyledik. Tamāmıyla ārzū itdiğimiz gibi bir köşk.

22 [Eylül 1918]

Vulf Hügel (= Wolf Hügel = Kurt Tepesi) sanatoryum civārında ormanlar // içinde ve gāyet mürtefa' maḥalde bir kale. Neẓāret-i fevka'l-ādesi var. Dresden şehrinden (Elbe) nehri geçiyor // o vādī kāmilen görüliyor. Biraz eglendik ve 'avdet itdik. // Pansiyonda ber vech-i ātī yimek viriliyordu. // Şabāḥleyin 7,5 da süd reḫel tereyağı etmek (bu şoñrakiler pek az miḳdārda) // 10da etmege sürülmüş yoğurtumsı bir şey, ve yemiş

¹¹ Villa Dora, built in 1899-1900, by Reichpietsch. Now located on Lahmannring 15, 01324 Dresden, Germany. See Elizabeth Boer, *Chronik des Kurorts Weisser Hirsch Dresden* (Dresden, 1932), 62f.

// 1de ögle yimegi bir çorba (ba'zen et) sebze şalaṭa muḥakkak bir yemiş // 4te südlü
kahve etmek // 7de akşam yimegi sebze patates yemiş // Bir ögle yimegi listesi

lunch menu in German, cut and pasted on the page:

Kürbissuppe, Wiegebraten, Bohnen, Kartoffeln, Salat, Obst

Yevmiyye yimekler ve tedāvī (iḳāmet ḥāric) ādem başına 28 mark. // Köşkte büyük bir
oṭa için yevmiyye 8 mark viriyorduk. // Hizmetci oṭası için yevmiyye 4 mark. // Semīha
için 2 mark fazla viriyorduk.

Translation

9 [September 1918]

We had heard good things about the Weißer Hirsch Sanatorium in Dresden, so we were already minded to go there when we left Istanbul. While in Berlin, we obtained [the sanatorium's] *Prospectus* through correspondence.

We then traveled to Dresden, and arrived at the sanatorium at Weißer Hirsch in the evening. Dresden is located along the River Elbe. The village named Weißer Hirsch (White Stag) is on a high mountain ridge, and it is connected to the city via electric trams. It takes half an hour by tram. Weißer Hirsch is truly a heavenly place, where one finds beautiful villas built in(side) a forest. The sanatorium complex includes a central hospital with auxiliary therapeutic units and numerous residential villas. We were given a room in the villa *Zu Linden*. It wasn't a good one though, and was too cold. Upon our complaint, we moved to villa Dora. This villa was exactly as we wanted.

22 [September 1918]

The Wolf Hügel [sic] = the Wolf's Hill,¹² is in the vicinity of the sanatorium, deep within the forest and [there is] a castle in a very elevated location. It possesses

¹² The hill is known as the Wolfshügel and the tower on the hill is called the Wolfshügelturm. For brief historical information on the tower, see "Wolfshügel im Albertpark – Geschichte und Erreichbarkeit," *Wolfshügelturm.de*, <https://wolfshuegelturm.de/wolfshuegel.php>. According to the website, the Wolfshügel Tower was built in 1911 as an observation tower designed by Hans Erlwein, and was erected on the Wolfshügel (Wolf's Hill) in Albertpark, Dresden. The website confirms Emine Hanım's remark on "extraordinary views," writing "[t]he tower offered an outstanding view of Dresden." (*Der Turm bot eine hervorragende Aussicht auf Dresden.*) The tower was blown up on May 8, 1945, and only the base remains today.

extraordinary views. The river Elbe flows through the city of Dresden; that valley is visible in its entirety. We enjoyed ourselves [there] for a while and returned.

The sanatorium provided the following meal plan:

At 7:30 in the morning: milk, jam, bread and butter (the latter two in little amounts)

At 10: a yoghurt-like spread on a slice of bread and fruit

At 1: lunch consisting of soup (and sometimes a meat dish), vegetables, salad, and always some fruit

At 4: coffee with milk, bread

At 7 in the evening: vegetables, potatoes, fruit

A lunch menu [lunch menu in German, cut and pasted on the page]

Pumpkin soup, Meatballs, Beans, Potatoes, Salad, Fruits

Daily meals and treatment (excluding accommodation) cost 28 marks per person. We were paying 8 marks per day for a large room in the villa. For the servant's room, the daily rate was 4 marks. We were paying 2 marks extra for Semiha.

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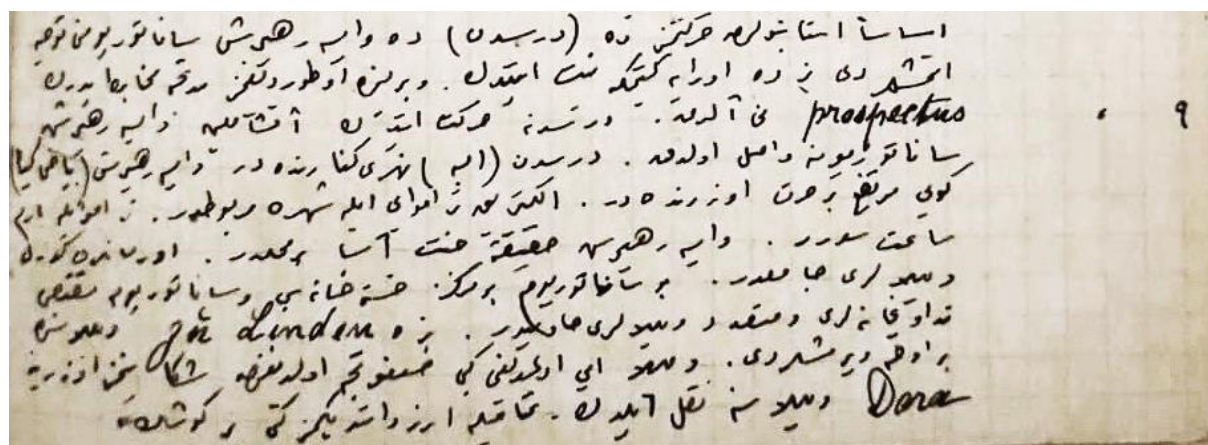
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Facsimile 1



Facsimile 2

