

Sami Schilton

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Istanbul

Turkey

Interviewer: Yusuf Sarhon

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Sami Schilton is a healthy and friendly 84-year-old. He has a very warm personality which is reflected in his kind and smiling face and he is always ready to socialize with his dear friends. He lives in Kurtulus, a district in the European side of Istanbul, with his wife Suzi, to whom he has been married for 47 years and his son Robert. They live in their own flat in an apartment building. They spend their summers in their own flat in Suadiye, a district in the Asian side of Istanbul. Sami and his wife like to go to the cinema, theatre and opera a lot and they also like to travel whenever the opportunity presents itself. The only problem we encountered during the interview with Sami Schilton was the fact that although he could remember names and facts, he could not remember any dates.



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My family background

The paternal side of my family came to Turkey from Austria and settled in Bursa [a city in the Marmara region of Turkey, close to Istanbul]. My paternal great-grandparents used to live in Vienna. That is why our surname is written as 'Schilton', the same as in German because we came here from Austria. Our surname is still written in German in our official documents like passports and identity cards. One of my paternal greatgrandfathers was the Hahambashi [Grand Rabbi] of Vienna and then they gave him the surname of "Deschilton". Our real surname therefore is Deschilton, a title of nobility that the Austrian government bestowed on my great-grandfather. [Editor's note: De Schilton may be the Frankofied version of the name that was most probably von Schilton in the German original.] However, afterwards the family thought it was too much and we did not use that part of our name and only used Schilton. They used to speak German in Austria and of course did not know Turkish. The Austrian government gave us Italian citizenship after World War I, in other words they abandoned us. My great-grandparents were living in Bursa with

Austrian passports, but during World War I, the lands where my family members had been born in were conquered by the Italians and that is why we were given the Italian citizenship. [Editor's note: Probably they lived in those parts of Austria-Hungary that were annexed to Italy after WWI: South Tyrol, Gorz and Gradisca, Istria, Fiume (Rijeka), Zara (Zadar) and some northern Adriatic islands.] We have had Italian citizenship since then. That is all the information I have on my paternal side.

As to my maternal side, I know nothing about them except that they were from Istanbul.

My father's father, Avram Schilton, was born in Bursa. I do not remember the dates at all. He lived in Bursa, but later on he came to Istanbul. They lived in Bursa for long years, but during World War I [1](#), the Greeks came to Bursa, so probably because they wanted to be safe they came to Istanbul. My paternal grandfather dealt in trade, he was a very good businessman. He was a very serious person. He dressed very fashionably, he was always very smart. He was tall and very handsome. He did not have a beard but he did have a mustache. They did not change their family name. They were Deschiltons. Later on I took out the "de" at the beginning. My grandfather could speak Turkish, Judeo-Spanish and French. They used to speak in Judeo-Spanish amongst themselves. He did not have anything to do with politics or any political party. He did not take part in any social or cultural activities either.

My father's mother, Bulisu Schilton (nee?), did not wear a wig but she did wear a scarf over her head. She also dressed fashionably and liked to wear a lot of jewelry, necklaces, bracelets etc... She would mostly wear her kolana [Ladino for gold chain].

That is all I know about my paternal grandparents. I do not know anything about their siblings, either. At that time they did not use to tell children anything, that is why we know very little about them. If they had told us, we would have known of course, but they never did.

My mother's father, Avram Danon, was born in Istanbul. Again I do not remember any dates. My mother's family was called Danon and they never changed their name. My mother's father was a businessman and he advanced a great deal in life. He used to dress very fashionably, whatever the fashion was, you could see on my grandfather. He was of medium height; a very quiet and serious man. He was a seller of sundries. He knew Judeo-Spanish, Turkish and French. They always spoke in Judeo-Spanish amongst themselves. My mother's father had a white beard and he used to wear a kipa. He wasn't involved in any political or social activities. They were simple people.

My mother's mother, Sultana Danon, did not wear a wig but she wore a scarf. Otherwise she dressed quite fashionably. She loved jewelry. She always went around with necklaces and bracelets and kolanas.

My mother's father's side of the family lived in Kuzguncuk [a district in the Asian coast of the Bosphorus]. When my family and I came from Bursa to Istanbul, when I was about one year old, we lived with them for a couple of years. They had a house with a garden and they had chickens in the garden. There weren't any servants. Only a daily cleaning woman would come, probably once a week, to do the washing and the cleaning. They were very religious. They followed all precepts. They practised kasherut, and Shabat. Friday night was very important. They used to go to the synagogue every Friday night, and on all festivals. All the festivals were always celebrated at home, too. They had very good neighbors. They were mostly Jewish of course, but they had Greek

neighbors, too. They got along with their neighbors quite well. I do not remember their ever going on holiday somewhere. I do not have any information about their siblings either.

My father, Robert David Schilton was born in Bursa. He was a good and kind-hearted man. He was quite talkative and had a very modern mentality. He was a serious man. He had a lot of friends and he liked his friends very much. They were very intimate, and the same with his neighbors, too. They were all like brothers and sisters, I remember quite well. My father studied until secondary school. He studied at the Alliance Israelite Universelle [2](#) school in Bursa. After he finished secondary school [8 classes] he started to work. My father did not do military service because he was a foreigner, he had a foreign citizenship. His mother tongue was Judeo-Spanish. He also spoke Turkish and French. With my mother and his parents however, he used to speak in Judeo-spanish. My father's business was very good in Bursa. They lived there for many years. He used to be in the insurance business. The reason they came to Istanbul was the war. During the war they had problems with the Greeks and they had to run away. They came to Istanbul in a hurry to escape the Greeks. They came to Istanbul to live more comfortably. I was about one year old at the time. They did not have a home when they came to Istanbul and they went to live with my mother's family. They lived with them for 2 years. When they came to Istanbul, their economic situation was average. My father worked at a bank in Istanbul, in the insurance department. The bank's name was "Banque Francaise des Pays d'Orient" [the French Bank of Oriental Countries]. It used to be located in Karakoy [a district in the European side of Istanbul] at that time. He worked there for many years.

My mother, Dina Viktorya Schilton (nee Danon) was born in Istanbul. My mother was also like my father, with a very modern mentality. She dressed in the modern way and got along with everybody. My mother was a serious but talkative person, who was also very understanding. My mother also studied until secondary school. She studied at the Alliance Israelite Universelle school in Ortakoy [a district on the European coast of the Bosphorus]. After she finished school, she did not do anything, she became a housewife. Her mother tongue was Judeo-Spanish. She also spoke Turkish and French. However, the language of communication in the family was Judeo-Spanish. Apparently my mother and my father met through a matchmaker but they never told me how they met and got to know each other. They got married in Bursa. My mother went to Bursa from Istanbul and the wedding took place there. I do not know when they got married but they were married at the Bursa synagogue [3](#).

Both my parents used to dress nicely and simply. They did not use to go to any library but they both liked to read a lot. They had a lot of books in Judeo-Spanish and they read them. These were novels about love, or they were books with anecdotes and light reading material in them. They also read newspapers in Judeo-Spanish. I remember the names of two of them for example: El Jugueton [4](#) and La Boz de Turkiye [5](#). Apart from those, they would also get the Turkish papers of the time, too.

My parents were religious. They practised kasherut [kashrut] and Shabat [shabbath] and celebrated all the festivals. They went to the synagogue every Friday and on all the festivals. We used to celebrate all the festivals at home, too. For example, the whole family would gather in Pesah [Pesach] and we would read the Agada [Haggadah] in Judeo-Spanish. We would always visit our relatives during the festivals, like Rosh Ashana [Rosh Hashanah] and Pesah [pesach]. We would go from one relative to the other on those days.

My parents had Jewish neighbors and they got along very well, they all were like brothers and sisters. They were together every day, all the time. They had their tea and coffee together always. There were relatives, too of course. Both relatives and neighbors would gather in a house and then they would enjoy themselves. In those times, there was no radio or television for entertainment, people would entertain themselves by chatting. They used to talk about everything. They did not use to go on holidays then. They did not have the habit of travelling.

My parents were of course members of the Jewish community but they were not active inside the community. They were not involved in any political, social or cultural organization.

Both my parents died in Istanbul, but I cannot remember the dates. They are both buried in the Jewish cemetery. They are buried in the Italian Jewish cemetery [6](#) in Sisli [a district in the European side of Istanbul]. They were buried with a religious ceremony. There was a rabbi at the funeral and I recited the Kadish [kaddish]. Every year we have a meldado [the equivalent of the yahrzeit in the Ashkenazi rite] at the synagogue for them.

My father had three siblings. The first was Yomtov Schilton, who was born in Bursa. He married Rita Danon and they had two sons, Alber and Mishel Schilton. Yomtov was in the stock exchange and was very well off. However, I don't remember exactly when, there was a crisis at the stock exchange once and he lost heavily. I remember, he went to Paris in a panic, on his own. His wife and sons stayed with us while he was in Paris. They stayed with us for 2 years. During that time, my uncle Yomtov went into the insurance business. When he ameliorated his situation, his family went to Paris, too. Then he had a daughter there, Suzi Schilton. Yomtov died in Paris, but I do not know when.

My father's sister, Luiza Abuaf (nee Schilton) was also born in Bursa. She married Salamon Abuaf. Salamon Abuaf had been born in Istanbul. They had two daughters, Sara and Fortune. Luiza died in Istanbul and her husband, Salamon died in Izmir.

Yet another brother of my father's was Viktor Schilton. He was born in Bursa and married a girl called Cecille Leibowitz. They had three children: Nina, Bernar, and Alfred. After Nina got married, her husband's business did not go well, so they left and went to settle in Mexico. Alfred wanted to live in Brazil and he went and settled there and married there. As to Bernar, he lived in Istanbul and became a businessman. My uncle Viktor went to live with his daughter in Mexico after his wife, Cecille died. He died in Mexico.

My mother had 4 siblings; three brothers and one sister. Jozef Danon, Beno Danon, Rita Danon and Izidor Danon.

Izidor left very young and he went to live in Mexico. He lived there all his life. He was in the hotel business. He had a hotel there. He died in Mexico.

Beno lives in Istanbul. He used to be in the leather business. His business was in Karakoy.

Rita lived in Paris and died there.

Jozef lived in Istanbul. He grew up in Ortakoy and was a good businessman. I do not know the birth and death dates of any of them.

As for me, we were 4 siblings, 2 boys, Alber Schilton and me; and 2 girls: Sara Schilton and Suzi Schilton.

Sara was born in Istanbul and unfortunately died when she was 17. Before that she studied at the St. Benoit high school [French Catholic high school in Istanbul]. She studied in the girls' school. At that time, girls and boys studied in different schools. She studied primary school there, too. She was a very good student. She spoke excellent French. Unfortunately, she got tuberculosis and died at 17. I do not know how she got that disease, there wasn't any epidemic or anything, but she caught it. After she got ill, she wouldn't eat and she got very thin. I was quite young at the time but I remember, they were trying to cure her. We used to go to the Italian hospital at Tophane [a district in the European side of Istanbul] to see her. They tried to save her but they couldn't. My mother was terribly affected by the death of her firstborn. I remember quite well, I was 6 or 7 at the time and I remember the state my mother was in. They were very difficult times for our family.

Alber Schilton finished the Jewish Lycee. He studied at the Bene Berit Jewish Lycee [7](#) from primary school to the end of the lycee. I still remember the name of the headmaster of the school; it was Dr. Markus and the teachers were French. After he finished school, Alber worked in different places as a clerk. He worked as a translator at a translation bureau in Karakoy [a district in the European side of Istanbul]. Then when he was 23-24 he got it into his head to leave for Israel. At that time people were contracting what was called "marriage blanc" [french for 'white marriage', meaning a marriage in name only to serve a certain purpose, in this case, entrance to Palestine] in order to go to Israel [Palestine]. They married some girl or boy and divorced when they got to Israel. That is what my brother did, too. He married a girl and they left for Israel. There they got divorced and my brother went to a kibbutz. I don't remember the dates really. He stayed at different kibbutzim for 2-3 years. He went to the Kibbutz Massada [in the Jordan valley] and stayed there the longest. I don't remember the names of the other kibbutzim he stayed at. He did a lot of different kinds of jobs there, picking bananas, cleaning etc... He would do whatever they told him to do. Then suddenly we heard he had become a soldier. This was during World War II, 1939-1945. In those times de Gaulle was in France and he was calling for volunteers to the French army. And Alber, while in Israel, joined the French army. He liked France and the French very much and he joined their army. He went to Africa with de Gaulle's army. They fought there for a long time against the Germans and then they went to Italy. He used to write us letters, saying he was OK, or saying that they were having very difficult times. Then he wrote that he hoped to come back from the war alive and we understood here that his life was in danger. He was fighting the Germans. They fought them in Africa and they fought them again in Italy. The French army was allied to the American and British armies. There was a big battle at a place in Italy called [Battle of Monte] Cassino [8](#), near Naples. Alber died during that battle. They buried him at the military cemetery in Naples. He had died during a bombardment.

One day, (I don't remember when) I received a letter from the French Consulate in Istanbul and the letter said that they regretted to inform us of the death of my brother. They wrote that he had died in such and such a place and in such and such conditions, and that they wanted to talk to me. So I went to the consulate. The Consul himself received me and told me in a very serious and calm manner what had happened. He gave me my brother's belongings and told me how he had died. There was a terrible battle at [Monte] Cassino and Alber had died during the bombardment together with all his soldier friends who were with him at the time. The Consul gave me a big

envelope and Alber's belongings that were in his room. His wallet, photos and all our letters were inside the envelope. Then the Consul told me that the French government was going to give my mother a lifelong salary and they did until she died.

My sister Suzi was born in Istanbul. She studied at the Italian secondary school; she did not go on to study lycee. Then she worked as a secretary at the import-export firm called Anatolian Contoir. She also knew Italian, French and Turkish. Then she married Alex Samuel and they had a daughter called Doli. Then Doli married a guy called Ahituv.

Growing up

I was born in Bursa in 1921. I lived there until I was one, and then my family and I moved to Istanbul and went to live in my mother's father's house in Kuzguncuk. My mother raised me. We did not have a nanny or "mademoiselle" [governess], and I never went to kindergarden either. I did not have many friends when I was little; my mother's friends came to visit and I would sit with them. There were not any children my age at that time among my mother's friends so I did not use to play.

The house in Kuzguncuk had two floors, it was made of wood and had a very nice garden. There were chicken coops in the garden. They did not use to plant anything in the garden. I remember there were also cats. I can't remember how many rooms the house had, but there was a kitchen and a bathroom. The furniture was of the kind everybody had at that time, and they were quite mediocre. We had water from the taps but we did not have electricity, we had gas lamps. We also had braziers and stoves for heating. I remember the books that my grandfather had in the house. My grandfather always read religious books in Hebrew. He was very religious and knew Hebrew very well.

We stayed in Kuzguncuk for 2 years and then moved to Galata [the Galata Tower district on the European side of Istanbul]. My childhood passed in Galata and I also went to school there. There were many Jewish families around where we lived. We had wonderful neighbors; we were like siblings with them. The Jewish community used to be quite big then. We had a synagogue in Kuledibi [Galata Tower district] and there was also the Italian synagogue [9](#). Our Italian synagogue had a hazan [chazzan] and a haham [hakham]. The haham's name was Monsieur Gabay. We also had a mikve [mikveh], a talmud tora [talmud torah] and a yeshiva [yeshivah].

Jews at that time used to live in big crowded groups. We were at Galata, but on the other side of the Golden Horn there was Haskoy, and then there was also Ortakoy, where many Jews lived. I remember there being lots of small tradesmen, like the shoemaker, the tinman, the junkman etc etc, they were all Jewish. We did not have a hamam [Turkish bath] in our district, there was one further away. We used to go to that hamam quite often. We went there with my father; we went to the hamam, washed and came back. I do not have any specific memories of the hamam.

I did not come across any antisemitism when I was little, I never heard of such a thing. We never even knew what antisemitism was.

I remember there being military parades and days on which the Turkish independence [Day 10] was celebrated. It was really very nice. Soldiers used to pass all along the streets. The military

parades were very colorful.

I went to primary school at the Italian San Pietro school [Italian Catholic high school in Istanbul]. This school was beside the San Pietro Church in Kuledibi. I studied there for a year. From there I transferred to the Italian school [Italian Catholic high school in Istanbul] in Tophane and studied there until grade five, in other words I finished primary school there. These were all schools that belonged to the Italian government and they were free. Everything was free, not only the schools but the books and notebooks and uniforms, they gave all that for free. It was something really wonderful.

One of the lessons I liked most was mathematics. I liked it a lot and I was really very successful at it. I was always first in my class in primary school. From grade 2 till grade 5, I was first of my class every year. I was first of my class for 4 years. When I was in primary school I liked my Italian language teacher very much. He was a very nice man and he liked me a lot, too. There was also a gym teacher that I did not like very much; I did not hate him but I didn't like him. He was a very strict teacher and I couldn't do most of the exercises he wanted us to do. For example, there was jumping and I had difficulty doing those jumps and he used to get angry with me. Then there was climbing ropes but I couldn't do that either, the rope used to slip from my hands and I couldn't climb, so he would get angry again. I didn't like his getting angry with me. So I went to his classes very unwillingly only because I had to. That is why I did not feel very nice towards that particular teacher.

At that time, in our school we didn't know what antisemitism or such thing was. There was no differentiation between Jewish, Catholic or Muslims. We had students who belonged to all three religions but there was never a day when one told the other "you are like that, we are like this". It was really very nice then.

I did not have any private lessons in music or languages. We had such lessons in school. We had lovely music lessons, we had singing lessons. We learned how to read music and we used to sing all together. We never learned to play an instrument though.

When I was a child we used to go to the movies on Sundays in winter, and the beach in the summer. We used to go with the whole family. We used to go to the islands [Prince Islands of the Sea of Marmara] for swimming.

In my family, my father used to do the shopping, my mother never did. There used to be a place called Salipazari in our district, near the St. Benoit school [French Catholic high school in Istanbul], and this was an open market. Salipazari was a very famous market and my father used to do our shopping there most of the time. He also used to go to the grocer's in our street.

After primary school I continued my education at the Italian Lycée [Italian Catholic high school in Istanbul]. I studied from grade 6 to grade 12 there. Our school was next to the Italian Consulate. They taught Italian, Turkish, French and English in this school. Those who preferred, could take French or English as a second foreign language. I chose French. We also had to choose between Accounting and Latin; I chose Latin because those who studied Latin at high school could go and study the university in Italy. Those who chose Accounting could not go on to university. At that time I was planning to go to Italy for my university studies. My goal was to become an engineer.

At high school, my favorite teacher was our geography teacher, Prof. Faro. He was not Jewish. He was a very good teacher and was friends with all the students. He used to treat us as a friend, he used to tell us stories and then he would begin classes. He used to start the class by talking to us for the first 5-10 minutes to relax us, and then he would say, "Come on kids, open your books now so we can start class". All the students liked him as much as I did. There were not any teachers that I disliked.

The headmaster of our school was quite a hard man. He was Italian, he came from Italy. He was very strict and had quite a temper. He got angry real fast, and we were all quite frightened of him. I wanted to go to Italy after high school and become an engineer but it wasn't to be. My family's economic situation was not good so I had to start working. I finished high school but couldn't go on, I started to work.

I remember Ataturk's death [11](#) very well indeed. There was a magnificent ceremony for him in Turkey. I remember going to the Dolmabahce Palace to see him but it was so crowded that we couldn't get in. There used to be the mounted police then. On that day, we got scared of the crowds and returned home. That night there were even people who died in the crowds. We told ourselves that we would not be able to make it inside in that terrible crowd and we went back home. We had gone there with our neighbors. There were about 8-10 of us, and we really wanted to see Ataturk but had to go back home without seeing him.

I also remember the Wealth Tax [12](#), but as we had foreign nationality they did not take anything from us. They did not interfere in our business because we had foreign passports. For us, it was as if the Wealth Tax did not happen. It did not affect us at all. However, we did hear about what was happening to others. We heard about acquaintances being sent to Askale, but we did not live any of this.

I had a lot of friends outside school. I had a friend called Hayim, another called Davit. There were many of them but now I cannot remember. I also had Jewish friends from school. There was a Toledo, a Papo, then Hayim who became a dentist and is still alive. The others are not. We used to go out together, go to the movies, go on outings, sit at cafés. Especially in the summer, we would go to garden cafés, sit in the garden and chat.

On Saturdays and on our holidays, we would spend our leisure time at a friend's house if it was winter, and we would always go swimming if it was summer. I would always go out with friends, not with my family.

It so happened that we had many a meal at restaurants with my friends. There was a fast food kind of place at Tunel, called Mandra and there was also a restaurant called Fischer. The Fischer that exists today in Taksim used to be in Tunel in my time. We used to eat at restaurants a lot.

When we grew older we started going out in mixed groups, boys and girls. We met the girls! We had a wonderful time with them. There was Ester Toledo, for example, from the group. She still lives. There was also Beti Konfino. Beti Konfino was my ex-fiancée, whom I had met in that group. We were friends for a time, then we started going out together and then we got engaged. We were engaged for 8 months but we didn't get on very well, so we broke up. In our time mothers used to live with their children. For example, when I got married I had to live with my mother. Beti did not want that, she wanted us to live on our own. That's why the disagreements started and then both

parties decided this wasn't going to work. In the end we broke up amicably enough.

When we were old enough and were going out with girls, we used to go to dancing matinées. There were a lot of dancing places. In the summer, we used to go to Caddebostan [a district in the Asian side of Istanbul, which used to be a summer resort until the late 1970s but is a popular residential area nowadays]. We would first go to the beach there and then we would go to the music garden next to the beach where there was an orchestra that played music during the matinée, which was around 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. We would leave the beach in our swimsuits, had something to eat first and then the music would start, dancing and songs. We used to have a great time. Afterwards we would take the boat from the port at Caddebostan and return to Galata.

I lived in Galata until I got married. I lived in the street across the St. Benoit Lycée. I got married 47 years ago and came to live in Kurtulus [a district in the European side of Istanbul].

I never had a lot of hobbies. I loved to read and to go to the movies. There were a lot of adventure films in my time, cowboy films, you know. I also liked to go to the theatre. At home both my mother and my father read a lot and they always advised me to read, too. I used to read books in Italian in my free time. I liked to read about the lives of poets etc... and also novels. I have not read much in Turkish because we had gotten used to reading in Italian always in school. I also read in French.

I did not participate in any political or cultural activity. I wasn't a member of any club, either.

When I was a kid, we used to apply all Jewish traditions in our home. We practised Kashrut [kashrut], we celebrated all the holidays, and of course we read the Agada [hagaddah] at Pesah [pesach]. We used to go to the synagogue on all the Jewish holidays. We sometimes went on Saturday morning as well. I often accompanied my father to the synagogue. I, myself went every Friday evening.

I learned Hebrew and got a religious education, too. I was privately tutored by our previous Chief Rabbi, Rav David Asseo [13](#). I was his student. I did not go to the synagogue for lessons, our teacher used to come to our houses. David Asseo was not the Chief Rabbi then, he was a professor of Hebrew. 8-10 of us used to gather in a home, every week a different home and he used to come and teach us Hebrew and the Tanah [tanakh]. I never went to the Yeshiva or the Mahazike Tora. My family never taught me anything, they just made sure I got lessons. I used to pray and read the Tora [Torah] on Saturdays; my father usually didn't.

We celebrated my Bar-Mitzva [bar mitzvah] at the Zulfaris Synagogue [14](#) in Karakoy. I went on the teva [tevah]; there was no tradition of making speeches then; we only did the berachot [brochot] and the sefer-tora [Sefer Torah] ceremony. Afterwards, our relatives came to visit to our home and we had a meal together. In my time, these ceremonies were much lighter than they are today. They were much simpler and less of a show off.

The Jewish holidays I liked best were Rosh Ashana [Rosh Hashanah] and Kipur [Yom Kippur]. These holidays affected me a lot with their meanings. Pesah [Pesach] is a difficult holiday and I don't like too much. We can't eat bread, there are a lot of fried dishes and therefore the food is really heavy and there is not much choice either.

There have been a few Salonikan donmes [15](#) among my friends. A colleague of mine at work was a donme Muslim, a Salonikan. He used to say quite honestly: "I came from Salonika, and we settled in Istanbul; now we are Muslims and have forgotten that we are Salonikans". He liked us a lot and would always praise Jews.

During the holocaust in Europe I did not notice any increase in antisemitism in Turkey. What I remember about the war is the experiences of my aunt, Rita Schilton. They used to live in France with their children. They ran away from France at the time of Hitler. They sought refuge in Italy because they were of Italian citizenship. They lived in Milan for two years. They returned to Paris after the war. The fact that they had Italian citizenship saved them.

We heard about what happened to the Jews in Europe at first in very very light doses. There were rumors at first, so there wasn't too much of a reaction in Turkey. We did not understand what was happening. It was later that we slowly got to know what really happened and we were of course devastated. We couldn't believe that something like that could have happened. It wasn't only me, everyone thought the same. There were some refugees who were able to escape Europe but I did not get to know any of them.

I do not know the details about the Struma [ship 16] tragedy but I think it was a terrible thing that happened. They left those people on the boat, they couldn't come to Turkey, they were not given permission, and then the boat sank and the passengers all died. Everyone in the Jewish community then was terribly sad and sorry about what happened.

As far as I can remember, the Thrace events [17](#) were terrible. A lot of horrible things occurred, there were lootings and Jewish families had to run away. Some of them settled in Istanbul, a lot of them went to Israel.

There was also a "Vatandas, Turkce konus" [Citizen, speak Turkish] [18](#) policy in those days. I remember that it was a slogan that was constantly repeated at one time. Everyone started to speak Turkish. Before that everyone used to speak their own language. The Jews used to speak Judeo-Spanish in very loud voices in the streets, on the boats, everywhere. The Turks felt uncomfortable with that and then gradually everyone started speaking Turkish. In fact so much so that today it is only us who can speak Judeo-Spanish. Young people do not know it, they don't understand it nor can they speak it.

Family life

My wife, Suzi Behar Bitek, was born in Ortakoy. Her native language is Judeo-Spanish. My wife's real surname was Behar. When the Surname Law was passed, some Jews took Turkish names, and my wife's family added the name Bitek [turkish for only one] to their surname. My wife's father, Menahem Behar bitek was from Ortakoy, and he was very religious because his own father, Moshe Behar was a rabbi. Menahem Behar therefore raised his daughter with a very strong religious identity. Her mother, Rebeka Rifka Behar (nee Azuz) was a dressmaker. She used to go to the houses of ladies and sew all day.

My wife, Suzi graduated from the St. Benoit Lycée [French Catholic high school]. We are distantly related to her family actually. Our relatives in Ortakoy used to praise this girl a lot. After I broke

up from my first fiancée, Beti Konfino, our relatives said Suzi was a great girl, a very good girl. So I made a decision and one day they introduced us at one of our relative's homes. Then they said, "now that you know each other, why don't you go out together for a while"; so we started going out to get to know each other better. This did not last long because my wife's father was a very strict man; he did not think we should go out together for 6 or 8 months. After a short time he wanted me to make a decision, it was either Yes or No. So I said Yes. But he said, "It is not enough for you to say, yes, I agree. You have to get engaged". So we got engaged in a matter of 1-2 months.

Our engagement was celebrated at home. These things always happened at home in those days. All friends and family were invited, long tables were set, rings were put on each other's fingers and all in all it was a very nice day. We got married 8 months after the engagement. The fact that my wife was Jewish was an important factor in our marriage because at that time it was very unusual to hear about marrying someone who was not Jewish. That was a very very rare thing. Our wedding took place at the Italian Synagogue in 1957. The wedding was really very nice. There was quite a crowd at the Italian synagogue and the atmosphere was great. We had our party that night at the Lido Restaurant/night club in Ortakoy. The Lido was a very famous place at the time and it was ideal for these kinds of celebrations. We had dinner there and it was really a very nice evening all in all.

My wife never worked, she is and has always been a housewife. She is a wonderful cook, she cooks great Jewish dishes. My favorite Sephardic dishes are, 'koftikas de prasa' [leek meatballs], 'pishkado kon guevo i limon' [fish with an egg-an-lemon sauce] and borekitas [pastry].

We had two children. The elder, Rita Schilton (now Rasier) was born in Istanbul in 1958. My daughter Rita went to a Turkish school first, called Tarhan Koleji and then she went to St. Pulcherie French school. [Catholic secondary school, 6th to 8th grades only with two preparatory classes at the beginning] Then she went to St. Benoit [French Catholic high school, 6th to 11th grades with two preparatory classes at the beginning] for the lycée. We did not have a Bat-Mitzva [Bat Mitzvah] for our daughter because there was no such tradition at that time. Rita married Cako Rasier when she was 20. They had actually been together for 7 years before that, since she was 13. They had two children; a boy, Ralfi Rifat Rasier born in 1980, and a girl Meyzi Rasier born in 1987.

My younger child, a son, Rober Schilton was born in Istanbul, in 1964. He was born at the French Hospital and his brit-mila [brit milah] was also done there. My sister's husband, Aleks Samuel held him and my sister brought my son to the hall. Then there was a buffet for the guests. When our son was 13 years old, we also had a Bar-Mitzva [Bar Mitzvah] for him. We had the religious ceremony at the Sisli Synagogue [19](#). Then that night we had another celebration at the Tarabya Hotel ballroom. A lot of guests and relatives came, there was great entertainment, live orchestra etc... Then we cut a big cake, and all in all it was a beautiful fiesta [Ladino for celebration]. He recited a speech both at the synagogue and at the ballroom.

Rober studied primary school at the Kurtulus Primary School [public school], then he went to High School [English High School for Boys] [20](#) for secondary school and he went on to Robert College [21](#) for the lycée. Then he studied Business Administration at Marmara University [22](#) and did his Master's degree at Bogazici University [23](#). He was a very good student and was able to get a very

good and very strong education. He is a talkative person who likes to tell things in detail. He will give every detail of even the smallest thing he is talking about. He never cuts things short, so much so that sometimes we tell him “just cut it short and come to the point”; but he answers “oh, no you are going to listen from beginning to the end”. He never comes to the point quickly but he tells a good story.

We always spoke Turkish with our children. We used to go to the movies with them when they were kids. We had mostly Jewish friends with whom we went to the movies, the theatres, on picnics etc... We would also frequently gather in houses and enjoyed ourselves. When we got together our children would play with the children of our friends of course.

We raised our children according to Jewish traditions. We taught them about all the holidays, Pesah [Pesach], Rosh Ashana [Rosh Hashanah], Kipur [Yom Kippur]. We got them used to fasting since they were quite young. At Pesah [Pesach], the seder was celebrated at our house with our family and my wife’s father who lived with us. It used to be a very nice seder and we read the Agada [Hagadah] beautifully. We weren’t crowded, just our own close family. Our children go to the synagogue during the holidays.

We weren’t able to send our children to the Jewish youth clubs. My daughter got tied up with her husband very early in her life and so she had no time for clubs. They were together since she was 13. And my son somehow never wanted to go. We always insisted that he go but he never wanted to.

We did not go abroad on holidays with my family. My wife and I went quite a few times but not with the children. We used to go to the [Prince’s] islands on a daily basis, not for the whole summer. We went to Suadiye [a district in the Asian side of Istanbul which used to be a summer resort until the 1970s.] for the summer. We have a house there and we have been going there for the summer for the last 40 years.

We learned about the foundation of Israel from the newspapers and the news on the radio. We were strongly affected emotionally and were very happy. We never thought of making aliyah however, because it was a very difficult thing. We didn’t know the language, we didn’t know anybody; on the other hand, we were born here and we were used to the life here, we had an order in our lives here.

In our family, my sister Suzi Samuel’s daughter, Doli went to Israel in the years 1965-1970 and settled there. She stayed there for a few years and then her father said “it’s enough, come back” and she came back.

Today we are not members of any Jewish club or organization but we go to conferences from time to time. We do not take part in any of the volunteer activities.

Our religious practices today are just as they were before. There haven’t been any changes. We go to the synagogue during the holidays. I go to the Italian and Sisli synagogues and in the summer to the Caddebostan synagogue.

We have not had any conflicts with our children about their raising our grandchildren according to Jewish traditions. Our grandchildren are not religious but we do not say anything about this. We do not force them into anything. We let our children make their decisions. Today we still gather

the family and cook for them. When we are alone with my wife we speak Judeo-Spanish, but with friends and our children we speak Turkish.

Our grandchildren did not go to the Jewish school [24](#); they went to Turkish schools. My granddaughter is at university and my grandson has finished university and has become a doctor. He is an oculist.

My granddaughter participates in community activities. She is taking part in a play that is being performed at the 'Dostluk Yurdu' [Jewish youth club in Istanbul founded in 1966].

As for my wife and me, we sometimes go out with friends. My wife goes to play cards with her friends once a week. The men used to gather for poker once every two weeks but we don't any more, we do not enjoy it as much any more. We go to the movies, the theatres and operas with friends quite frequently. We also have a vacation at least once or twice a year inside Turkey or abroad.

I heard about the 1986 Neve Shalom massacre [25](#) from friends at first. I was in Kuledibi [Galata Tower region, European side of Istanbul, over the Golden Horn] that day and saw that people were running. I was curious and wanted to know what was happening. At that moment I saw a friend of mine, Izi Levi, who was also running. "What is going on, Izi?" I asked him. "There has been a massacre at the Neve Shalom and a lot of people died" he said. That's when I learned about it. I waited outside for a while and then I left. I did not want to go inside; I felt terribly sad and a terrible weight on my chest.

During the 2003 bombing of the synagogues [26](#), we were here at home and we heard a terrible explosion. We wondered what was going on and turned on the TV and learned about the bombings at the Neve Shalom and Sisli synagogues. Of course we were terribly sad about it all.

Glossary

1 Alliance Israelite Universelle

founded in 1860 in Paris, this was the main organization that provided Ottoman and Balkan Jewry with western style modern education. The alliance schools were organized in a network with their Central Committee in Paris. The teaching body was usually the alumni trained in France. The schools emphasized modern sciences and history in their curriculum; nevertheless Hebrew and religion were also taught. Generally students were left ignorant of the Turkish language and the history and culture of the Ottoman Empire and as a result the new generation of Ottoman Jews was more familiar with France and the west in general than with their surrounding society. In the Balkans the first school was opened in Greece (Volos) in 1865, then in the Ottoman Empire in Adrianople in 1867, Shumla (Shumen) in 1870, and in Istanbul, Smyrna (Izmir), and Salonika in the 1870s. In Bulgaria numerous schools were also established; after 1891 those that had adopted the teaching of the Bulgarian language were recognized by the state. The modernist Jewish elite and intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was known for having graduated from alliance schools; they were closely attached to the Young Turk circles, and after 1908 three of them (Carasso, Farraggi, and Masliah) were members of the new Ottoman Chamber of Deputies.

2 The Ottoman Empire in World War I

The Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers in October 1914, as they were the ones fighting the traditional Ottoman enemy: the Russian Empire. During the winter of 1914-15 the Ottomans launched an ill prepared campaign in the Caucasus against Russia with the hope to be able to turn the local Turkish-speaking Russian subjects (Azerbaijan) to their sides. Instead the Russian counter-offensive drove the Ottomans back behind the borders and Russia occupied North Eastern Anatolia. In the spring of 1915 the Entente was to occupy the straits (Bosphorus and Dardanelles) and ensure the passage of supply to the Russian Black Sea ports. British troops landed in Gallipoli (Dardanelles) but were not able to expand their beachheads against the army of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Kemal Atatürk); they evacuated in February 1916. Although the Ottomans were able to resist the British in Mesopotamia (Iraq) in 1915, they finally took Baghdad in 1917 and drove the Ottomans out of the entire province. Although the Russians made further advance in Eastern Anatolia they left the war after the October Revolution and according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) the Ottomans were able to regain Eastern Anatolia. Due to the Arab Revolt supported by the British as well as the direct British military intervention the Ottomans lost both Palestine and Syria; Mustafa Kemal was able only to withdraw his forces intact to Anatolia. Sultan Mohammed VI (1818-22) was forced to sign an armistice with the Entente (October 1918) and as a result British and French battle ships reached the port of Istanbul. The Sultan finally signed the Peace Treaty in Sevres in August 1920, according to which the Arab and Kurdish provinces and Armenia were lost as well as the whole of European Turkey with Istanbul, and the Aegean littoral was to be given to Greece.

3 Gerush Synagogue: One of Bursa's Synagogues, renovated in its present form in the 18th Century. It is light, airy and attractive, with an unusual floor plan: a circle of pillars surround the bimah in the center of the room, supporting a dome. Benches are along the walls; the ark is opposite the entrance, and there are attractive stained glass lights over the entrance door. The Gerush's Torahs were brought from Spain by Sephardic immigrants.

4 El Jugueton

Four-page Ladino weekly satirical newspaper, published by Elia Karmona in Istanbul, between 21st April 1909 and 27th June 1931. On 25th April 1914 it was temporarily closed as it used a certain style considered inappropriate when talking about the Grand Rabbi of the time, Rav Hayim Nahum Efendi. Later it resumed publication until a month before the death of Elia Karmona.

5 La Boz de Turkiye

Ladino periodical, published once every two weeks in Istanbul between 1939 to 1949 by Albert Kohen. It was written with Latin letters and concentrated on science and literature.

6 Italian Jewish Cemetery

It was founded in 1866 in Sisli, a district in the Asian side of Istanbul. The cemetery was dedicated to the use of the Italian Jewish community by an order of Sultan Abdulaziz (1830-1876). It has been in use ever since, though today not exclusively by the Italian community.

7 Bnai Brith Jewish Lyceum: With the outbreak of World War I, the Ottoman government froze the

activities of foreign educational institutions in the country. The Jewish youth who used to study in those schools were left helpless owing to the lack of Jewish secondary educational institutions in Turkey. Hence the Bnai Brith secondary school was established in 1914 by the Jewish educator Yosef Niego, who remained its director until 1917.

8 Battle of Monte Cassino: Also known as the Battle for Rome, it was a costly series of battles fought by the Allies at a strategic hill, with an ancient Benedictine monastery, with the intention of breaking through the Gustav Line and seizing Rome. The first battle started on 4th January 1944 and the monastery was destroyed by Allied bombing on 15th February. During three failed attempts to take the heavily-guarded monastery of Monte Cassino, the forces of the USA, the UK, India, Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand lost approximately 54,000 men yet did not manage to seize the city or the castle. The Fourth Battle of Monte Cassino was fought by the 2nd Polish Corps under General Wladyslaw Anders (11th-19th May). The first assault (11th-12th May) brought heavy losses but also allowed the British Eighth Army under General Sir Oliver Leese to break through German lines in the Liri river valley below the monastery. The second assault (17th-19th May), carried out at immense cost by the Polish troops and the key outflanking movement in the mountains by skilled Moroccan soldiers (French Expeditionary Corps CEF), pushed the German 1st Parachute Division out of its positions on the hills surrounding the monastery and almost surrounded them. In the early morning of 18th May a reconnaissance group of the Polish 12th Podolian Uhlans Regiment occupied the ruins of the monastery after it was evacuated by the Germans. The capture of Monte Cassino allowed the British and American divisions to begin the advance on Rome, which fell on 4th June 1944 just two days before the Normandy invasion. Over 74,000 soldiers, including over 1,000 Poles, were killed in the battle. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_18)

9 Italian Synagogue

‘Kal de los Frankos’ in Ladino. The Italian Jewish Community of Istanbul (Comunita Israelitico-Italiana di Istanbul) was founded in 1862, when the community bought a building in Zulfaris street in Karakoy and started using it as a synagogue. The first rabbi of the community was Bensiyon Levi. In 1886 the synagogue was moved to Kuledibi Sahsuvar street. The Italian Synagogue became the cultural center of Istanbul’s Jews with its series of conferences organized every year during the 12 weeks preceeding Pesach. Important intellectuals, such as Rav David Asseo, Rav Isak Rofe, Prof. Eliezer Menda, Moiz Alboher, Rav Eliyahu Kohen, Dr. Yomtov Garti, Dr. Moiz Aksiote, Isak Misistrano, Daniel Behar, Kemal Levent and countless others lectured on subjects pertaining to religion, ethics and morality. The synagogue was restored in 1980 and continues to serve the Jewish community of Istanbul.

10 Turkish Independence Day

National Holiday in Turkey commemorating the foundation of the Turkish Republic on 29th October 1923. The annual celebrations include military parades, student parades, concerts, exhibitions and balls.

11 Ataturk, Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938)

Great Turkish statesman, the founder of modern Turkey. Mustafa Kemal was born in Salonika; he adapted the name Ataturk (father of the Turks) when he introduced surnames in Turkey. He joined

the liberal Young Turk movement, aiming at turning the Ottoman Empire into a modern Turkish nation state and also participated in the Young Turk Revolt (1908). He fought in the Second Balkan War (1913) and World War I. After the Ottoman capitulation to the Entente, Mustafa Kemal Pasha organized the Turkish Nationalist Party (1919) and set up a new government in Ankara to rival Sultan Mohammed VI, who had been forced to sign the treaty of Sevres (1920), according to which Turkey would lose the Arab and Kurdish provinces, Armenia, and the whole of European Turkey with Istanbul and the Aegean littoral to Greece. He was able to regain much of the lost provinces and expelled the Greeks from Anatolia. He abolished the Sultanate and attained international recognition for the Turkish Republic at the Lausanne Treaty (1923). Under his presidency Turkey became a constitutional state (1924), universal male suffrage was introduced, state and church were divided and he also introduced the Latin script.

12 Wealth Tax

Introduced in December 1942 by the Grand National Assembly in a desperate effort to resolve depressed economic conditions caused by wartime mobilization measures against a possible German influx to Turkey via the occupied Greece. It was administered in such a way to bear most heavily on urban merchants, many of who were Christians and Jews. Those who lacked the financial liquidity had to sell everything or declare bankruptcy and even work on government projects in order to pay their debts, in the process losing most or all of their properties. Those unable to pay were subjected to deportation to labor camps until their obligations were paid off.

13 Asseo, David (1914-2002): Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Turkey (1961-2002), Rabbi Asseo was born in Istanbul and attended schools in Haskoy, the city's Jewish quarter. In 1933 he graduated in Rhodes with a diploma qualifying him to teach Hebrew and Jewish religious subjects. In 1933 he began teaching Hebrew at the Jewish High School in Istanbul. In 1936 he became member of the bet din (rabbinical court), later becoming its secretary as well as private secretary to Chief Rabbi Rafael Saban (served 1940-1960). In 1955, Rabbi Asseo also became headmaster of an academy of Jewish learning in Haskoy of which he was co-founder. He was elected chief rabbi by Turkey's Jewish community (Hahambashi) in 1961. As the years passed, he conferred with successive leaders of the Turkish government, cabinet ministers, lesser government figures and leaders of political parties. He also stayed in touch with high-ranking religious figures of Islam and Christianity (Roman Catholicism and Greek and Armenian Orthodoxy). He was also the Secretary of the Conference of European Rabbis.

14 Zulfaris Synagogue

Recorded in the archive of the Chief Rabbinate as 'Kal Kadosh Galata', it is commonly known as the Zulfaris Synagogue, named after the former name of the street of location. There is evidence that this synagogue preexisted in 1671, however, the actual building was re-erected over its original foundations in the early 19th century. In 1890 repair work was carried out with the financial assistance of the Camondo family (major Jewish bankers of Istanbul) and in 1904 restoration work was conducted by the Jewish community of Galata. In 1968 it went through a substantial renovation and in 1979 was assigned to the Thracian (European Turkey) Jewish resettled in Istanbul. Since 2001 it functions as the Museum of Turkish Jews. (www.muze500.com)

15 Donme: Crypto Jews in Turkey. They are the descendants of those Jews who, following the example of Shabbatai Tzvi (leader of the major false messianic movement in the 17th century), converted to Islam. They never integrated fully into the Muslim society though and preserved various distinctions: they married between each other, performed services in distinct mosques and buried their dead in separate cemeteries. Up until the Greek annexation of Southern Macedonia (1912, First Balkan War) they lived in Salonika and were relocated to Ottoman territory (mainly to Istanbul) with most of the rest of the Muslim population later.

16 Struma ship: In December 1941 the ship took on board some 750 Jews – which was more than seven times its normal passengers' capacity – to take them to Haifa, then Palestine. As none of the passengers had British permits to enter the country, the ship stopped in Istanbul, Turkey, in order for them to get immigration certificates to Palestine but the Turkish authorities did not allow the passengers to disembark. They were given food and medicine by the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish community of Istanbul. As the vessel was not seaworthy, it could not leave either. However, in February 1942 the Turks towed the Struma to the Black Sea without water, food or fuel on board. The ship sank the same night and there was only one survivor. In 1978, a Soviet naval history disclosed that a Soviet submarine had sunk the Struma.

17 The Thrace Events

In 1934, after the Nazis came to power in Germany, anti-Semitism was rising in Turkey too. In fear of disloyalty the government was aiming at clearing the border regions of the Jewish population. Thrace (European Turkey, bordering with both Bulgaria and Greece) was densely populated with Jews. As a result of the anti-Semitic propaganda of the rightist press riots broke out, Jewish property was looted and women were raped. This caused most of the Jewish population to leave (mostly without their belongings) first for Istanbul and ultimately for Palestine.

18 Citizen, speak Turkish: In the 1930's and 1940's, the rise of Turkish nationalism affected the Jewish community as well. A former Salonikan Jew, Moise Cohen (1883-1961), who had been in close touch with the Young Turks earlier and took the Turkish name Tekinalp led a campaign among his fellow Jews to encourage them to speak only Turkish to integrate them fully into Turkish life. His slogan was 'Turkey is your home, so you should speak Turkish'. His attempts of the policy 'Citizen, speak Turkish' were largely seen as pressure put on the minorities to speak Turkish in public places. There was a lot of criticism and verbal attacks and jeers on those who did not comply with this social rule.

19 Sisli Beth-Israel Synagogue

Founded in the 1920s by restoring the garage of a thread factory. The first weddings took place in the early 1940s. In the 1950s, with the demographic movements of the Jewish populations from Galata towards the Sisli area, the need to have a larger synagogue became prominent. Two architects, Aram Derogobyan and Jak Pardo designed the project. The new enlarged synagogue started its services in 1952.

20 English High School for Boys

Founded in 1905 in the district of the Galata Tower by the British Consulate, primarily to provide comprehensive education for the children of the British colony in Istanbul. In 1911, Sultan Mehmet V gave the British Embassy a 5-storied wooden building in Nisantasi for exclusively schooling purposes. The school gained the status of high school in 1951 and also became coeducational. In 1979 it was nationalized and renamed as Nisantasi Anatolian Lycee.

21 Robert College: It was founded in 1863 by American educators. Until 1971, there were two campuses, one for boys (with the name of Robert College) and one for girls (with the name of American College for Girls). In 1971, the Arnavutkoy girls campus started co-education under the name of Robert College. On the same date, the boys campus became Bogazici University (Bosphorus University), an English-medium state university. Robert College and today's Bogazici University were and still are the best schools in Turkey, having students from the top 1% of the student population. Through the years, these schools have had graduates in the top positions in Turkey's business, political, academic and art sectors.

22 Marmara University: It was founded in 1883 under the name of "Hamidiye College of Higher Commercial Education" in Cağaloğlu neighbourhood in Istanbul. At the time, it was the only leading higher education institute for studies in economics and commerce. In 1923, with the declaration of the Turkish Republic, the Institute was located in the Rectorate Building in Sultanahmet (historic old city). From 1923 to 1959, the college was called the "Higher Education School of Economics and Commerce". In the year 1959, its name was changed to "Academy of Economics and Commercial Sciences". Finally in the year 1982, the name was changed to "Marmara University". Currently, there are 14 faculties, 9 schools, 11 institutes and 28 research centers.

23 Bogazici University: Successor of Robert College, the old (founded in 1863) and prestigious American school in Istanbul. With the consent of the administration of Robert College it was founded jointly with the Turkish state in 1971. Since then the University has expanded both physically and academically and today it is growing in popularity.

24 Beyoglu Jewish Lyceum

Opened in Sishane by Bnai Brith in 1911, it replaced the Alliance Israelite Universelle schools during WWI as they were banned being supported by France. In the interwar period the institution was Turkified and Hebrew studies were de-emphasized after the 1932 law, that forbade religious instructions in Turkish schools. Today it is located in Ulus and called 'Ulus Özel Musevi Lisesi', meaning Private Ulus Jewish Lyceum.

25 1986 Terrorist Attack on the Neve-Shalom Synagogue

In September 1986, Islamist terrorists carried out a terrorist attack with guns and grenades on worshippers in the Neve-Shalom synagogue, killing 23. The Turkish government and people were outraged by the attack. The damage was repaired, except for several bullet holes in a seat-back, left as a reminder.

26 2003 Bombing of the Istanbul Synagogues

On 15th November 2003 two suicide terrorist attacks occurred nearly simultaneously at the Sisli and Neve-Shalom synagogues. The terrorists drove vans loaded with explosives and detonated the bombs in front of the synagogues. It was Saturday morning and the synagogues were full for the services. Due to the strong security measures that had been taken, there were no casualties inside, however, 26 pedestrians on the street were killed; five of them were Jewish. The material loss was also terrible. The terrorists belonged to the Turkish branch of Al Qaida.