

Die Tükei, die Juden und der Holocaust

By Corry Guttstadt

Berlin/Hamburg: Assoziation A., 2008, 516 pp., ISBN 9783935936491.

Within a larger trend of critically re-writing the history of the early Turkish Republic, the history of the Jews in 20th century Turkey has received a lot of attention lately. In Turkey, there is now a growing body of literature somewhat dominated by the work of Rifat N. Bali.¹ And in Germany as well, there have been some interesting additions to the existing research. Many focus on the *Haymatloz* topic, i.e. the German emigrants who worked in Turkish universities and other institutions in the time of the Third Reich. But there are others who focus on topics more internal to the politics of the early Republic. One example is Hatice Bayraktar's *Salamon und Rabeka* on the image of the Jews in Turkish journals.² Another is Corry Guttstadt's book, where the author attempts nothing less than to revise two dominant historiographic images at the same time. The first is that of Turkey as a country of refuge for Jews during the Third Reich – as propagated by the body of literature on the *Haymatloz émigrés*. The second is Stanford Shaw's claim that Turkish diplomats all over Europe did their utmost to rescue Jews from Nazi persecution. (7-8)³

In seven intensive chapters, Guttstadt discusses and contextualises various aspects of this topic. In the first chapter, "Jews in the Ottoman Empire – 500 years of tolerance and prosperity?" (13-47), the author attempts to overview the history of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. Here, Guttstadt critically re-examines what she calls the "myth of Ottoman multicultur-

alism." Her second chapter, "The Turkish national state and the Jews," (49-108) discusses the history of the early Turkish Republic and the fate of the Jewish population in this new nationalising state. Her third chapter, "Turkish Jews in Europe", (109-156) provides an overview of the various Turkish/Ottoman Jewish groups in Europe. She focuses mainly on Western and Central Europe, where the Jewish population with an Ottoman background was about around 30.000 to 50.000. (109) She discusses each community and country, thus offering great detail on this almost forgotten Diaspora while entertaining the reader with many interesting facts. One example is the history of the Turkish-Jewish community in Vienna. As the Habsburg monarchy was intent on getting its own capitulations within the Ottoman Empire, it respected the rights of Ottoman citizens as set out in the bilateral treaties of 1718 and 1739. Certain clauses contained in these treaties also protected the small number of Ottoman Jews in Vienna. As the Jewish communities in Europe were heavily discriminated against in the 18th century, Jews of other nationalities and even Austrian Ashkenazi Jews took up Ottoman citizenship in order to live more freely in Vienna. (136-138). Another detail highlighted by Guttstadt is that the Ottoman and Turkish Jews in Western Europe were in fact the first larger Turkish immigrant group there, thus, she claims, they were the historical precursors to post-war guest worker immigrants.

We finally reach the core topic of the study with her fourth chapter, "Turkey in the years between 1933 and 1945," (157-167). Here, while exploring the political history of Turkey, she mentions the strong entanglement of Turkey with Nazi Germany. Guttstadt does not fail to point out that Germany's acts of aggression such as the invasion of Poland altered Turkey's attitude towards Germany, at least temporarily. (158-9). She discusses various anti-Jewish/anti-minority measures and incidents such as the *Varlık Vergisi* and the *Trakya Olayları* as well as the image of the Jews as portrayed in the Turkish press. In this context, she also highlights the fact that Turkey was, in total numbers, not an important country of refuge for German Jews. Guttstadt further analyses the role of Turkey as a crucial country of transit for Jews on their way to Palestine and concludes that Turkey actually blocked their way. From 1940 to 1944, of approximately 13,000 Jews who passed almost 5,000 were in possession of so-called Palestine certificates issued before the war, most of the others were only able to pass through in 1944. (256) She claims that already three years before the war, these restrictions on Jewish immigration or transit were in place, thus making them part of "an original Turkish policy," and not one arrived at by direct German influence. (257) Based on these discussions she seems to have laid the foundations to refute Shaw's claims before she even discusses the Turkish government's actions abroad and those of individual diplomats.

In her brief fifth chapter, "Turkish Jews under National Socialism 1933-1939," (259-269) she summarizes the fate of foreign Jews in Nazi Germany in general and that

of Turkish Jews in particular. She claims that there were comparably few interventions by the Turkish embassy on behalf of Jewish citizens of the Turkish Republic. In the sixth chapter, "The revocation of citizenship by Turkey," (271-282) it becomes clear that the German administrative system closely collaborated with the Turkish consular service in ridding Jews of their Turkish citizenship. Finally, her last and by far largest chapter, "The Turkish Jews and the Holocaust," (283-485) deals with the Holocaust itself. She claims here that when the need for protection was at its greatest for Turkish Jews, the Turkish government stripped them of their citizenship. Furthermore, most of those living in Germany and Austria, she claims, had already lost their citizenship in the 1930s. (307) Guttstadt then discusses the fate of the Turkish Jews in each country or relevant spatial category (country, city or region): Germany (311-320), Austria (320-327), Prague (327-332), France (333-410), Belgium (410-428), the Netherlands (428-438), Italy (438-454), and Southeastern Europe (454-467).

Although her criticism of the treatment of the Jews by the early Republic is harsh, she also compares it to that of other South-east European authoritarian states and societies and comes to a rather favourable conclusion: The situation of the Jews in Turkey was comparably much better and modern Anti-Semitism was a fringe phenomenon. Racial Anti-Semitism, as it was propagated by Nazi Germany, was not transported to and internalised by Turkish society. However, the picture that emerges is, like a reviewer in a leading German newspaper has stated, a depressing one: The Turkish government as well as individual diplomats

could have saved many more former Ottoman and Turkish subjects from the fate of the Holocaust than they actually did.⁴

There are two major difficulties with the text. At times, some may find Guttstadt's judgements regarding Turkey overly harsh and not completely balanced. And at other times, the text offers excessive detail, making it less flowing and not a very smooth read. But both aspects are counterbalanced by the sheer vastness and depth of analysis. Guttstadt successfully attempts a deep contextualisation of the topic; weaving threads back to Ottoman history, making use of comparative European history and the history of the non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. As she states in her preface, she does not reduce the Turkish Jews to their role as victims of the Holocaust, but documents and discusses various aspects of Turkish Jewish life in Europe. Guttstadt's book is almost a handbook on the Turkish Jews and any researcher working on 20th century

Turkish-Jewish history will benefit and do well to consult it. Until the relevant Turkish archives are open to historians, this will remain the definitive account of the topic.

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Endnotes

1. Cf. only some of the latest: Bali, Rifat N.: 1934 *Trakya Olayları*. İstanbul 2008; Bali, Rifat N.: *Sarayın ve Cumhuriyetin Dışçibaşısı Sami Günzberg*. İstanbul 2007; Bali, Rifat N.: *The "Varlık Vergisi" Affair – A Study of its Legacy*. Selected Documents. İstanbul 2005.

2. Bayraktar, Hatice: *Salamon und Rabeka – Judenstereotype in Karikaturen der türkischen Zeitschriften Akbaba, Karikatür und Milli Inkilap 1933-1945*. Berlin 2005.

3. Shaw, Stanford J.: *Turkey and the Holocaust. Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution, 1933-1945*. Basingstoke 1993.

4. Kröger, Martin: *Verweigerte Rettung – Ankara, das "Dritte Reich" und die türkischen Juden*. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 April 2009.

Türkiye'de Siyasal Katılım, Tek Partiden AK Parti'ye Siyasal İslam ve Demokrasi Tartışmaları (*Political Participation in Turkey: Debates on Political Islam and Democracy from Single Party Rule to AK Party*)

By **Mücahit Küçükylmaz**

İstanbul: Birey Yayınları, 2009, 159 pp., ISBN 9789752641402.

There are many institutions playing a role in weaving the ideals of democracy into Turkey's social fabric. Many political actors in Turkish politics, which include the leftists, rightists, liberals, and statistes along with those who established the Republic with their military identity, all contributed

to society's participation in the execution of the state affairs. They all had a stake in implementing universal democratic standards in Turkey in general, and within certain strata of Turkish society in particular. The reasons behind these actors' support for democratic ideals vary; some groups were