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GERMAN ACADEMICS IN TURKISH UNIVERSITIES, 1933-1946
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It is well-known that the Nazi regime, acceding to power in Germany in January 1933, immediately began to "purify" German universities by dismissing non-Aryan professors. Since most such universities at the time were state institutions, their staff were state employed and could be easily removed. Many such professors, lecturers and researchers, prominent in their respective fields of research and teaching, numbering more than 1,200 in the first two years of the new regime, were Jews, or married to Jews, or of suspected Jewish origins. Others were considered politically undesirable, accused of Communism or far-leftism. The Nazi assumption of power was followed not only by large-scale dismissals in the universities but by other large and small forms of discrimination against Jewish citizens such as forbidding them to use the reading rooms in public libraries — a galling measure for any scholar. Many Germans, both Christian and Jewish, emigrated between 1933 and 1939, fearing political or personal persecution and knowing that they were unlikely to obtain new employment in Germany. The emigration of academics, mostly Jewish or with Jewish connections, began in 1933 and continued en masse until 1935; there were some who contrived to leave even later. Of these emigrants, some found academic employment abroad — remarkably also in Turkey, thanks to special circumstances which ensured the continuation of their careers and their escape from the dangers of the Second World War in Europe as Turkey remained neutral during most of the war.

The emigration from Germany coincided with the increased interest of the Kemalist regime in the development of education, including that provided by universities. It perceived this as one of the main objectives in the campaign towards modernization on the Western models, with a subsequent emphasis on technological acquisition and industrialization. In view of the very serious problems and challenges involved in ensuring the success of this undertaking, the government conceived a centralized policy of education, in all stages, to be carried out by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry was expected to determine general programs; but in fact it often went into detail as well. Its decision makers appreciated the importance of obtaining advice on education from experts such as John Dewey and others. However, a comprehensive reform of university education remained difficult and in 1931, following Atatürk's personal decision, a Swiss professor of education at the University of Geneva and a former Rector of this university, Albert Malché, were commissioned by the Minister of Education, Reşit Galip Hatipoğlu, to propose university reforms, including an invitation to foreign scholars to teach at university level. Malché then prepared a blueprint for the modernization of Turkey's entire education system, in which

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the compulsory study of foreign languages was emphasized. Some of these proposals — submitted in May 1932 and again in early 1933 — were acted upon when the Darülfünun institution was closed (largely due to Malche’s report) in 1933. At that time, this was the only institution of higher education in Turkey (a technical university was set up only later).

Darülfünun, founded at the end of the nineteenth century, was a conservative institution imbued with the traditions of Ottoman culture, and hardly open to new ideas as the republic’s political leaders perceived them. Only part of the academic staff had been trained in concepts of Western scholarship and some of them were known to oppose Mustafa Kemal’s education reforms. The institute was closed on 31 July 1933 (again a blow at Ottoman cultural heritage) and the following day the University of Istanbul was inaugurated in its stead and on its premises. Out of Darülfünun’s 131 teaching staff only 59 were retained. The need for personnel was obvious, particularly as the academic year was due to start in early November 1933. In addition to several Turkish lecturers (most of them with European training), emigrant German academics were enlisted to establish new disciplines such as a program in sociology and social politics set up by Gerhard Kessler (1883-1963), a former professor of sociology and economics at the University of Leipzig. As a start, thirty-five German academics were soon absorbed in the University of Istanbul and they directed nine of its institutes.

At about the same time, as another component of Atatürk’s vision, the University of Ankara was in the planning stages, joining some existing institutes and adding others to create the faculties of a new university in the capital city. The university was officially established as such in 1946. Thus, the High Institute of Agriculture became the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Ankara in that year. The most publicized of these faculties, named Language, History and Geography, was set up as early as 1936 with 14 foreign professors out of 27. Most of the German emigrants, however, taught at the University of Istanbul; in the natural sciences, the only chair without a foreign professor was that of geology. Other German academics established and directed various research institutes outside the universities.

Turkish historians and educators have named these moves in Istanbul and Ankara reforms. I would rather call them revolutionary in their far-reaching and radical impact not only on university teaching and research, modeled on West European (chiefly German) institutions, but also in their influence on other aspects of life. However one may look at these new policies and changes, it was evident at the time that an intervention by foreign experts was mandatory to carrying them out to a high standard. German scholars had in fact been invited to teach in Turkey during the First World War and immediately afterwards (especially in the domain of medicine), and even more so since the late 1920s. Political developments in Germany during the 1930s offered the Turkish government of the Kemalist era and beyond a new opportunity to engage scholars in larger numbers for the advancement of university teaching and research. Many German and some Austrian academics were appointed to fill the positions vacated by Turkish lecturers retired in the course of changes in Darülfünun and later in Ankara and other cities, to add new disciplines,
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and to contribute to the development of numerous fields, at the center of which were university education in general and the modernization of medicine.

Aware of Turkey's desire for experts, several German professors tried to get themselves and their colleagues invitations to teach at Turkish universities. The first active intermediary, a man who worked with Malché and successfully contacted the Turkish authorities in Ankara on behalf of his German colleagues as early as July 1933 was the Jewish Hungarian-born, former Frankfurt University professor of pathological anatomy, Philipp Schwartz (1894-1977). About 200 German academics, a small part of those who left Germany during the 1930s, immigrated to Turkey. Together with the assistants, technicians and professional nurses they brought with them and the members of their own families, the influx numbered more than a thousand people in all. More close relatives were later permitted to join the German emigrant experts in Turkey. These men and women found a refuge and teaching or consulting positions in Turkey before and during the Second World War. A number of Austrian academics also came to Turkey in 1938-1939, after the Anschluss and the entry of German troops. The best known of these Austrians was Andreas Tietze (1914-2003), the distinguished Turcologist. Other emigrant Austrians were mostly experts in medicine, architecture and engineering. A few came later from Czechoslovakia, such as Friedrich Reiman, a well-known physician. Since they taught in German, we shall consider them as part of the German contingent.

The Turkish authorities (who also saved a number of other Jews in Europe, chiefly in France and Greece, during the Holocaust) received them all generously with two, three or five-year contracts, with options of renewal, and steadfastly refused requests by the Nazi government to deliver the Jewish academic refugees to it on the grounds that most of them were still German citizens. Turkey benefited greatly from their presence. The wide range of their expertise probably indicates the areas in which the Turkish leadership was more immediately interested than in its strivings to promote significant modernization. These included various branches of medicine (including the establishing of modern hospitals), such as toxicology, bacteriology, microbiology, gynecology, epidemiology, ophthalmology, radiology, veterinary sciences and dentistry; pharmacology, chemistry, and biochemistry; engineering, geography, geology, and mineralogy; physics, zoology, botany, genetics, mathematics, plant and wood-science; civil and commercial law, economics and commerce; philology, philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, and library sciences; and also disciplines such as Oriental studies, sinology and Assyriology; astronomy, architecture, urban planning, and archeology; visual arts (chiefly sculpture), polyphone music (chiefly orchestras and opera), an academy of arts, sports and various languages. Emigrant scholars also had a major share in organizing the permanent exhibition of the renowned Museum of Hittitology in Ankara. An official of the German Ministry of Education, Herbert Scurla, visited Turkey twice in the late 1930s. His Scurla Bericht ("Scurla Report"), written in 1939, gives many details of the varied contribution of German academics working in Turkey at the time. His report is enlightening if rather bizarre in the circumstances. By the time of its writing, practically all the German academics in Turkey had been appointed to the areas of their expertise.

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Most of the German scholars and other experts lived and worked in Istanbul, with a minority in Ankara, where many of the above disciplines were gradually introduced. The contracts of the university professors and lecturers stipulated that they would be assisted by Turkish translators but that they should learn the language themselves — which some of them eventually did. Until this happened, if it did, Turkish students of linguistics with a knowledge of German acted as intermediaries although they usually had little or no acquaintance with the subject matter they were translating. The German academics’ greatest merit at the time—probably was to create a culture of study and research, training their students and assistants to approach their disciplines very seriously. Many of the latter became experts in their own right after their teachers had left Turkey. In 1945 and 1946 many of the German academics engaged left Turkey, in a clear case of re-emigration. In those years and later Turkey experienced a severe economic recession and the government had to reduce many posts, even at the universities. In general the salaries of the German professors were not indexed to inflation. Many were aging and the government was not generous with pension plans. Moreover, some of the abler students were ready and willing to start their own university careers.

Emigrants who later published their memoirs in the shape of interviews, newspaper articles and autobiographical works were generally appreciative about their lives and experiences in Turkey, though some admitted that their acculturation, too brief and too abrupt, did not always run smoothly. Still, almost 30% remained in Turkey up to sixteen years after the end of the Second World War. Many felt that they would be more at home in post-Nazi West Germany, while others again preferred to move to the United States, to assume teaching positions at American universities. Palestine, which had welcomed Jewish scholars from Germany and other states during the 1930s, got very few after the end of the war. Israel was not established as a state until 1948 and before that date Palestinian Jews had only two academic institutions, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Polytechnic Institute in Haifa; also, the British Mandate in Palestine adopted a policy seriously limiting immigration. At all events, several of the German positions in Turkey, chiefly in medical fields, were occupied by other German academics who had remained in Germany during the war but were not identified with the Nazi regime.

It may be useful to choose two striking examples of German academics who found refuge in Turkey, and outline their careers there. I shall discuss two cases — first that of Ernst Reuter (1889-1953), partly basing myself on an account by his son, Edzgard Reuter, published in 2004. Ernst Reuter had been mayor of Magdeburg since 1931 and was a member of parliament on behalf of the Social Democratic Party. He was suspected by the Nazis (mistakenly) of being far-left. In 1933 he was arrested and imprisoned until early in 1935. After he got out, he moved to London, where he remained for a while, unemployed, until a friend, also formerly a member of the German parliament and already working as an agricultural expert in Turkey, arranged an invitation from the Ministry of Economics in Ankara for Reuter to come as an expert in community issues and traffic problems. Reuter moved to Turkey with his family and remained there from 1935 to 1946. He was appointed
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professor of communal and finance sciences, focusing on urban planning, at the Mülkiye in Ankara, the well-known College for Political Studies (Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi) which at that time was not yet part of the University of Ankara. During the academic year 1939-1940 he acquired Turkish to the point of being able to lecture fluently in that language, a feat not shared by many other foreign scholars.

Reuter used his teaching and writing functions not only to shape many of his students into scholars but also to work on a number of projects for the Mülkiye which took him to various regions of Turkey. This, together with his fluent knowledge of the language, enabled him to form many personal friendships which continued throughout his residence in Ankara and after his return to Germany. Ernst Reuter never doubted that someday he and his family would return to Germany. His son, Edzgard, who spent most of his youth in Turkey, befriended not only other German but also many Turkish children. However, in view of the family's intention to return to Germany at some stage, Edzgard never attended a Turkish school but was taught privately at home by a German woman married to a Turk, following the contemporary German school curriculum in languages, sciences and history, leading to the Abitur, the final school examination (Edzgard later became prominent in the German car manufacturing industries).

Ernst Reuter, like other German professors in Turkey, was forbidden to participate actively in politics there. He restricted himself to talking politics in private with his German colleagues; their main subject of discussion was, reportedly, what Germany would look like after the war. The main trend was to debate how it could become free, democratic and a member of the community of nations. Reuter not only could not take part in any political activity in Turkey, he could not even make contact with any German organizations active outside Germany. But he preserved his political instincts and became mayor of West Berlin a year after his return to Germany in 1946.

The second career I would like to outline is that of Ernst Eduard Hirsch (1902-1985) about whom one can learn from his autobiography, Aus des Kaisers Zeiten durch die Weimarer Republik in das Land Atatürk (Munich, 1992), translated into Turkish as Anılanm: Kayzern dönemi, Weimar cumhuriyeti, Atatürk ülkesi (1997). If Reuter had to leave Germany under suspicion of far-leftism, even communism, Hirsch had to leave because of his Jewish background. Born to a secular rather than religiously-minded Jewish family, he was baptized, but to the Nazi regime he remained a Jew. An expert in law, Hirsch was appointed a judge in Frankfurt and also a “Privatdozent” at the University of Frankfurt. Dismissed from both posts, he left Germany for Turkey in 1933, the youngest of the professors invited to Turkey, and remained there, particularly after his German passport was revoked in 1938 and he obtained Turkish citizenship. He was appointed lecturer in commercial law at the law faculty in Istanbul; from 1943 on, he taught commercial and civil law and legal philosophy at the University of Ankara. He was one of a group of lawyers and scholars who elaborated a new system of secular law for Turkey on European models, removed from Islamic law, via his university lectures in Turkish, in which he became fluent (although he admitted to having trouble with the continuous changing of the vocabulary to öztürkçe). He published
several books and articles on commercial law in Turkish even after his return to Germany in 1952. This supported his claim that he had not merely lived in Turkey but that he loved both Turkey and the Turkish people.

While Turkish students had usually studied from dictation, Hirsch (and other German lecturers) encouraged bilingual dialogue with their students as well as questions from both teachers and students. Another important undertaking was to organize and enrich all the faculty libraries at the University of Istanbul and render them more suited to research and study. Hirsch was well aware that many Jewish owners of second-hand bookshops in Germany had been forced to close and to sell their stock cheaply. He and other German professors employed assistants to register and catalogue books and periodicals acquired from such bookshops (others later initiated similar measures in Ankara). After his return, Hirsch was elected Rector of the Freie Universität in Berlin during the years 1953 to 1955, a rare honor at any period for a Jew who acknowledged being Jewish. He made the university into a first-rate academic institution.

All or most of the German professors and experts who found refuge and work performed outstanding service in the development of Turkish institutions of higher education and related bodies. All of these profited academically from the emigrant scholars; however, considerations of space do not allow me to describe further individual cases. From personal experience, having taught a semester there in 1974, I know something about the old Mülkiye in Ankara, established in 1859 and granted higher education status in 1877. Later incorporated into the University of Ankara as the Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi, or Faculty of Political Sciences, it is a first-rate institution with a curriculum and a faculty of professors and lecturers that can compete with any in Western Europe or the United States. The same is true of the departments of history and political science at other Turkish universities, whose degrees are recognized by leading institutions around the world. Many Turkish students have pursued their studies in various disciplines at the universities in Europe and the United States, often with excellent results. In many cases these achievements may be ascribed to Turkey's education policies and to the legacy of the emigrant German academics working in the country before and during the Second World War.

These people were saved from the dangers of war and from the destruction of European Jewry. In return, although not numerous, they had a very important role organizing, teaching and promoting research in Turkish higher education. They had a palpable impact on transforming education in the natural sciences, law, economics, medicine, humanities and the arts. They created the first university on the western model, and several institutes in Istanbul and Ankara, wrote the first modern textbooks and introduced a culture of academic research and publication. They also to some extent reshaped Turkey's public health, city planning, architecture, engineering, tax legislation and legal practices, as well as, more indirectly, industry, agriculture and the exploitation of mineral wealth. Some observers contend that, thanks to the German academics, Turkish methodologies of university research and study were brought closer to those of Western Europe. All this was achieved in a remarkably short time. The Turkish authorities realized
the importance of this transformation in the infrastructure and went to considerable effort and expense in providing the necessary physical support — budgets, new buildings, laboratories and libraries. By the time most of the Germans left, Turkey had several thriving universities, an arts academy, a music conservatory in Ankara, a symphony orchestra, an opera company, as well as many other cultural institutions — all functioning at a western standard. Modern university textbooks, written by the Germans or their students, were published and employed in teaching. Foreign academics were instrumental in initiating the publication of scholarly periodicals while others contributed to creating a genuinely Turkish vocabulary for the sciences and medicine. While obviously not responsible for everything, they had an important share in elevating the levels of research and practice in their areas of expertise, also contributing a certain intellectual atmosphere to their ambiance. Simply put, they carried out a transfer of knowledge that resulted in future transfers becoming less necessary and sometimes redundant.

In Turkey itself, not a few of these academics are remembered and respected. Several received honorary doctorates from the University of Istanbul. Among them were the above-mentioned Philipp Schwartz when he was seventy-five years old, in 1969, and Felix Haurowitz, a medical doctor from Prague, four years later. When Curt Kosswig, who had taught zoology at the University of Istanbul since 1937 (and then at the University of Hamburg since 1955), died in Hamburg in 1982, few noticed the event in Germany. In Turkey, however, radio and the press expatiated on this and the government of Turkey gave him an official burial. Four years later, on 30 May 1986, a monument honoring the German academics in Turkey was unveiled by no less a person than Richard von Weizsäcker, the President of West Germany. Then, in 2006, three meetings were devoted in Turkey to the topic: The University of Istanbul hosted a symposium on the 1933 university reform; then Germany's Consulate-General in Istanbul conducted a symposium about the medical contributions of the German professors; lastly, the Turkish Academy of Science organized a conference on the evolution of the concept of university in Turkey.

In Germany itself, too, the asylum offered by Turkey during the Second World War is not forgotten. In the year 2000, the Verein Aktives Museum in Berlin organized an exhibition about the German academics in Turkey, which proved very successful. The tradition is maintained by those academics and many of their successors for whom Turkey was a second national home. The reputation of the German academics still stands high in Turkey today — and with good reason!
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