



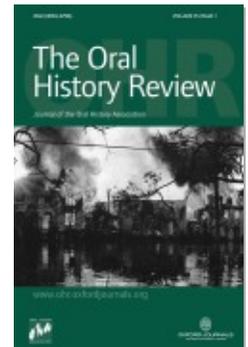
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*Turkey's Modernization: Refugees from Nazism and
Ataturk's Vision* (review)

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TURKEY'S MODERNIZATION: REFUGEES FROM NAZISM AND ATATURK'S VISION.
By Arnold Reisman. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, LLC, 2006. 604 pp.
Paperbound, \$28.00.

In an era when Turkey is known more for its mediocre record on human rights and freedom of speech, Arnold Reisman's *Turkey's Modernization* brings light to a lesser known phase of Turkish history, where Turkey, as a young republic, had opened its doors to Jewish scholars escaping Nazi Europe. In fact, the story of Jewish scholars taking refuge in the newly established Turkish Republic has been a long neglected topic, a subject matter discussed more as "popular knowledge" than "scholarly analysis." In that regard, Reisman's book is an important contribution because it fills that gap with its rich visual and archival material and oral history accounts. The book is also important for documenting the disciplinary diversity of

these scholars, who were indeed pillars of German philosophy and science in between two world wars. This is actually one of the motivations that led Reisman to write this book: "As a sophomore at UCLA," Reisman states, "I remember juniors and seniors excitedly discussing 'the German professor's' philosophy lectures" (xxi). Discovering that many authors of seminal texts he was reading as a graduate student had lived in Turkey was a surprise that Reisman welcomed during his research: "As a first-year graduate student I was unaware that Richard von Mises, William Prager, and Arthur von Hippel, authors of seminal texts I was reading, would appear in the course of my research for a book manuscript on their first exile" (xxi).

The frame of the book consists of documenting two different historical courses. The first relates to the aspirations of modern Turkey toward rapid progress by developing from the ashes of a lost Empire. The second relates to the tragedy of immigrant Jewish scholars, their families, and staff, oppressed and exiled by their homeland. The merger of these historical courses, Reisman argues, served both German and Turkish interests, which the book is dedicated to document.

From an oral history point of view, the book's use of numerous interviews reveals "unwritten" aspects of facts. In Michael Frisch's words, it offers "more history" rather than "how history" (Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, 1990). In other words, the book uses oral history primarily as a methodology rather than as an approach which would focus more on the analysis of narratives. Reisman usually cites interviews as accounts communicating factual events or emotional stances. Under the chapter "Memoirs and then some," excerpts from different interviews provide the reader with a deeper personal understanding of events.

Based on secondary sources, Reisman gives a very short review of the emergence of Turkey as a new republic and the Nazi takeover of Germany. The book has fourteen different chapters, beginning with a review of the "University Reform" that Atatürk, the founder of the Republic, had initiated along with a series of other reforms, and continues with a survey of the German *émigrés* to Turkey. The main body of the book's narrative, however, consists of the six chapters where Reisman delves into the diversity of the scholars, whom he lists as "The Builders," "The Preservers," "The Creators," "The Social Reformers," "The Healers," and "The Scientists." Each of these chapters focuses on individual lives of the distinguished scholars, each coming from a different field. The chapter on "Builders" looks at the role of German architects in the modernization of architecture and city planning of Ankara as the new republic's capital city. Under "Preservers," Reisman explores the contributions of German archeologists in the establishment of a modern approach to archeology in Turkey. "Creators" explains how arts, academies, and opera, fields that the republican regime promoted as Western cultural forms, were introduced to Turkey, by creating conservatories and symphony orchestras. "Social Reformers" focuses on how business, economics, and management studies were introduced as university disciplines. But the two following chapters, the one on the healers who reengineered medicine, dentistry, and public health and the scientists who contributed to astronomy studies in Turkey, receive the most interest by Reisman.

The latter part of the book looks at the problems these scholars encountered in their early years. Distinctly, they had to adjust to difficulties of local conditions and to surveillance by foreign governments, as particular cases like that of Friedrich Christiansen-Weniger, Hubert Metzsig, and Hans Willbrant exemplify. Reisman also calls attention to the apathy of America's Jewish establishment and to the concern by American academics for their German colleagues. The turbulence of World War II, when Nazi armies came very close to Turkey's borders, created an era when Turkey's economic problems and its ethnic paranoia escalated. Besides the rising Turkish nationalism and shortage of funds, Turkification of university circles had begun to be discussed. This led many scholars, Reisman notes, to emigrate to the United States, which proved not to be an easy process. Anti-Semitism, sexism, and age discrimination in hiring these professors at American universities led German scholars to network among themselves. Reisman explains in the last chapters how Albert Einstein received many pleas for help and how many professors faced a "visa in-hand but no job prospects" or "a job in-hand but no visa" situation. He also states that Einstein had at some point considered ways to establish a university for refugees. Thanks to their correspondence and other conduits for communication, these scholars themselves became communication links between colleagues and relatives left behind. Many revisited Turkey in the 1960s, with a certain sense of resentment of not being acknowledged.

Arnold Reisman's book can be criticized for its romantic approach to the overall material he gathered. The book offers a rich corpus of photographs, letters, and public records, but does not situate the story of these scholars within a larger perspective. Escape from the Nazi regime did not only happen in Turkey, other German scholars took refuge in Japan, for instance. Therefore it would be unfair to overlook Turkish aspirations for modernization as the new state had already targeted "progress," be it with German professors or not.

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