
After the National Socialists had come to power, many Jews and political opponents fled the Third Reich. They found refuge in many countries like the USA, the USSR, Great Britain and Argentina. Although not a major destination for emigrants, Turkey was a place of safety for at least one thousand German-speaking emigrants, amongst them many scientists with staff and families. These scientists were employed in executive or advisory positions for modernizing Turkish universities and institutions, leaving irrevocable marks on several branches like medicine, architecture, theater and music.

The book under review was edited by Christopher Kubaseck and Günter Seufert and takes a close look at this phenomenon. It is based on the symposium “Deutsche Exilwissenschaftler in der Türkei, 1933-1945” which was organized by the Orient-Institut of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft and took place in Istanbul, in December 1997. Published eleven years after the symposium, the contributions from that time were reviewed and new ones were added, in order to account for new trends and developments.

The book consists of nineteen articles written in German. After an introduction to the subject, comprising a description of the origins and development of the symposium and summaries of the individual contributions, it follows the structure of the symposium and is divided into five parts: 1. Historical preliminary and recent assessments, 2. The situation at universities—Germany, Turkey and Iran, 3. Opposing interests and conflicts, 4. Memories and eyewitness accounts, 5. Lasting consequences and benefits.

Part one contains two articles by Klaus Kreiser and Regine Erichsen. Klaus Kreiser sheds some light on the first German academic emigrants to Turkey. Between 1915 and 1918, twenty scientists belonging to several disciplines of arts and natural sciences were appointed to the University of Istanbul (Dârülfünûn, House of Sciences) with the goal of modernizing the academic system. Teaching in the Ottoman language and an insufficient Ottoman scientific terminology were the main obstacles for the German professors to achieving this aim. Nonetheless, it was during this time that the foundations were laid for the second university reform in the 1930s and 1940s which, however, would not have been possible without the script and language reform. These reforms made the learning of Turkish less difficult for German academics.

Regine Erichsen provides a first insight into the reception of German scientific emigration to Turkey. In Germany this emigration is viewed in a positive light because the German-speaking scientists were protected against Nazi persecution by the Turkish state and helped in developing its academic system. In Turkey the perception has changed over the last decades. Much as the achievements of the German academics were appreciated by their former students during the 1970s, today they are rejected on account of not having had a lasting influence.
Part two deals with the situation of German academics at universities in Germany, Turkey and Iran. Using the example of Romanist Victor Klemperer, Stephan Conermann illustrates the banishing of Jewish academics from German universities after Hitler’s rise to power on January 30, 1933. The Turkish university reform and the role of the German scientific emigrants are the focus of the article by Martin Strohmeier. Defining a centralist legal framework for the universities, the Ministry of Education did not interfere much in their teaching, research and administration, but rather took care of implementing the Kemalist ideology among students. It is one of history’s many ironies that the purges at the Dârülfünûn provided the preconditions for employing German academics who were themselves banished from universities and who helped reconstructing the academic life in Turkey.

Christl Cantanzaro portrays the emigration and influences of German scientists to Iran during and after the foundation of the Tehran University in 1935. At first glance, this contribution appears to be out of place as the issue of this book is the scientific emigration to Turkey. However, by comparing these two countries with each other, the peculiarities of Turkey become more obvious. It would even have been desirable to extend the comparison to other countries of the Middle East like Palestine for example.

Part three is devoted to opposing interests and conflicts in scientific transfer. In her second contribution, Regine Erichsen gives a historical overview of the German scientific emigration between 1933 and 1945. She points out problems and consequences for Turkey and the emigrants themselves using the example of German librarians. Jean-François Pérouse offers a detailed insight into the architectural contest for the development plan of Ankara between German and French architects (1927/28). He arrives at the conclusion that the long-standing German-Turkish relations in economy and politics and the domination of German scientists and technicians at Turkish universities proved decisive for choosing the plan of Hermann Jansen. Burcu Doğramacı examines in her article the achievements of German and Austrian architects and sculptors employed at the Fine Arts Academy (Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi) in Istanbul. They reformed their disciplines and contributed to the development of Turkish arts. Limited capacities of employment in the field of arts, however, produced reservations about the foreign artists. After the death of Atatürk in 1938 they were gradually replaced by Turkish lecturers. Günter Seufert summarizes four articles by Mete Tunçay and Haldun Özen on the closure of the Dârülfünûn in 1933. Reappraising this event, he argues that intrigues rather than political positions played an essential role in it. The German scientists, in turn, who were appointed to the newly founded Istanbul University did not realize that their positions had become vacant through purges of the academic staff at the former Dârülfünûn.

Part four deals with memories and eyewitness accounts, given by various descendants of German emigrants, who spent their childhood and youth in Turkey. The individual contributions provide a vivid insight into the life in the Turkish exile. For instance, Kurt Laqueur describes in his two contributions the daily life in Ankara and the internment in Kırşehir after the Turkish declaration of war against the Third Reich in