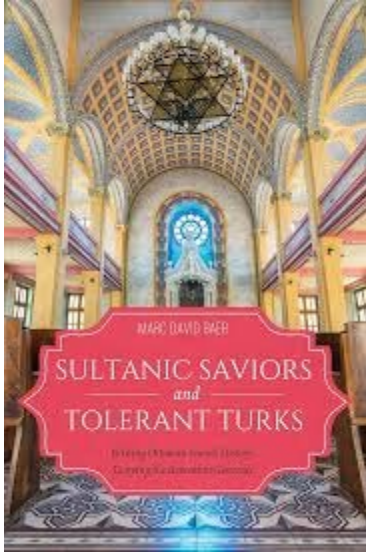


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REVIEW ESSAY

Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks: Writing Ottoman Jewish History, Denying the Armenian Genocide, MARC DAVID BAER, 2020, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, xvii + 338 pp., bibliography, index \$ 45.00 (Paperback), ISBN 978-0-253-04541-6

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A professor of international history at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Marc David Baer is the author of *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Empire* and *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*.

Eschewed a thematic rather than a chronological approach, *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks* consists of a general introduction, eight chapters, a conclusion followed by an epilogue. Chapter 1, "Sultans as Saviors," tells how Mediterranean Jewish writers of the sixteenth century—those who settled in the Ottoman realm and those who continued to be expelled from city after city by the Inquisition—extolled the praises of the sultan in messianic terms. Chapter 2, "The Empire of Tolerant Turks," demonstrates how the early modern Jewish affective disposition was repeated in the first Ashkenazi and Sephardi histories of the Ottoman Empire. Reflecting this, in 1892, on the four hundredth anniversary of their ancestors' having taken refuge, Ottoman Jews organized a celebration of Turkish tolerance. For Ottoman Jews and Muslims alike, historical events and historical memory would be linked to a politics of memory. Both populations saw an advantage in promoting an image of grateful and loyal Jews and tolerant Turks set against the foil of anti-Semitic Armenians and Greeks, the other major non-Muslim elements within Ottoman society. Chapter 3, "Grateful Jews and anti-Semitic Armenians and Greeks," examines how, following the Armenian "genocide" in 1915 and the collapse of the empire within the next decade, Turkish Jews in the new Turkish Republic promoted the same Ottoman-era narrative. Chapter 4, "Turkish Jews as Turkish Lobbyists," relates the role of leading Turkish Jews as lobbyists for Turkey, a mission they were "compelled" to undertake beginning in the 1970s denying "genocide" on Turkey's behalf in the United States, Europe, and Israel. Chapter 5, "Five Hundred Years of Friendship," discusses the ways in which the Turkish Jewish lobby became regularized as the Quincentennial Foundation in 1989, which together with Turkish ministers of foreign affairs and ambassadors abroad sought to improve Turkey's international image. Chapter 6,

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“Whitewashing the Armenian Genocide with Holocaust Heroism,” looks at the view that Turkey had played a major role rescuing Jews from the Holocaust. Chapter 7, “The Emergence of Critical Turkish Jewish Voices,” and 8, “Living in Peace and Harmony, or in Fear?” argue developments in Turkish and Ottoman historiography at the turn of the new millennium.

The book contains no maps, even on matters central to the study’s focus. A set of photographs would seem essential, but there are none. These would assist the reader in identifying and bringing to life many historically significant figures. Moreover, the images would convey the circumstances and challenges of the time. The book also has no tables or charts, no chronologies, no glossary of names and terms, no appendices.

The American scholar relies mainly on memoirs, letters, chronicles and an array of secondary literature (p.9). I would suggest Baer could have paid attention to the Turkish-language Ottoman documents. The major source for his book is the Presidential Office Directorate of State Archives Ottoman Archive (BOA) in Kâğıthane, İstanbul. It houses countless documents on the history and culture of the Ottoman Jewish community for the period between 1492 and 1922. The files of the Ministry of the Interior in charge of the forced Armenian population removals in 1915-16 are located in the following: BOA, Dahiliye Nezareti, Sicill-i Ahval İdare-i Umumiyesi (DH. SAİD) (Ministry of the Interior, Directorate for the Administration of the Population Records); BOA, Dahiliye Nezareti, Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdiriyeti (DH.EUM) (Ministry of the Interior, Directorate General for Public Security); BOA, Dahiliye Nezareti, Umur-ı Aşair ve Muhacirin İdaresi (DH. UAM) (Ministry of the Interior, Administration for the Settlement of Tribes and Emigrants). This is certainly the most reliable extant source from the perspective of Talat Pasha’s career as minister of the interior. Massive quantities of records have been opened up, and many western historians have made extensive use of these materials. But Baer has unfortunately tended to ignore them. It is also regrettable that the author did not consult the Republican Archive (BCA) in Yeni Mahalle, Ankara. The BCA contains documents on the Jewish and Armenian populations of the time, and many current controversial questions can be elucidated through newly accessible references in it. Both the BOA and the BCA are open to scholars. Further, it is surprising not to see references to Ottoman press opinion of the day. Virtually no benefit is made of contemporary İstanbul newspapers and periodicals. The author could have utilized all these to supplement, complement, correct and amplify his findings derived from other sources.

One also wonders why Baer did not use the Archive of the Chief Rabbinate in İstanbul. Curiously enough, no mention is ever made of these repositories throughout the book. Specialists have long known that the history of the Turkish Jewish community could not be fully revealed until thousands of items buried in these files are discovered, studied and brought to light. These presumably have nothing in them that can significantly affect the Jewish community’s security. Beyond a doubt much source material is to be found here. The files once opened, should enable the future researchers to go into considerable depth in Jewish affairs.



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Major inaccuracies and misinterpretations mar *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks*, each chapter containing numerous problems of substance. Baer's statement that "Raphael Lemkin, a man who had witnessed the trial of Talat Pasha's assassin in Berlin two decades earlier, who, reflecting on the common fate of the Armenians and Jews and watching it happening again coined the term "genocide" during World War II" is baseless (p. viii). Lemkin knew very little about Turks and Armenians. Although a man of many languages and talents, Lemkin never studied Ottoman history, never examined Ottoman, Russian, or Armenian archives, and never learned the languages necessary to go through the complete record on the Armenian relocation of 1915-16. Perhaps for this very reason he never commented on the massacre of tens of thousands of Ottoman Muslims in the Balkans in the years preceding the First World War, all of which were extensively documented by western historians. It is to be noted that in his 712-page masterwork *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for World Peace, 1944, though introducing the term genocide, Lemkin does not mention at all the Armenian case nor Talat Pasha's deeds.

It is either not possible to agree with Baer's unsubstantiated contention that "Holocaust denial is rampant in Turkey" (p.1). In fact, the Holocaust is becoming increasingly present in Turkish public life. There has been a considerable effort on the part of the Turkish government, government-supported institutions as well as several civil society organizations to arrange Holocaust-related events and commemorations in Turkey.² Turkey's first officially sanctioned commemoration of the Holocaust was held in Neve Şalom synagogue in İstanbul on 27 January 2011. "Gathering in love, brotherhood and humanity should be our common language to ensure that we must never experience this crime against humanity, this attack against humanity ever again," Hüseyin Avni Mutlu the İstanbul Governor, said after lighting a candle in commemoration of the Holocaust victims with İzak Haleva, Turkey's Chief Rabbi, at the ceremony.³ The official Holocaust commemoration served as a tool to fight anti-Semitism and strengthened national unity and identity by expressing a commitment to human rights, antiracism and tolerance.

At the beginning of 2012, Turkish state television broadcast Claude Lanzmann's Shoah, an epic documentary watched by about five million local viewers. "This is proof of intelligence and courage," Lanzman said. "It is an historical event. Turkey is the first Muslim country to show a film like this." Shoah has been watched by hundreds of millions of people around the world, Lanzman told, but no Muslim country had presented the film on an official television station until now. He hoped that other Muslim countries would follow the Turkish example. The broadcast of Shoah on TRT (Turkish Radio Television) was promoted by the Aladdin Project, an organization under the patronage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, that promotes closer ties between groups. The organization regards

² Pinar Dost-Diyego and İlker Aytürk, "Holocaust Education in Turkey: Past, Present and Future," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, Vol.3, No.3, September 2016, p.260.

³ Anatolian News Agency, 27 January 2011; Şebnem Arsu, "New Film Disrupts Turkey's Holocaust Day," *The New York Times*, 28 January 2011, p.A12.



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education, knowledge and history and a rejection of Holocaust denial as its main tools. Lanzman hoped that other Muslim countries “dare to follow the good example of Turkey and commit themselves to teach their people the universal lessons of the Holocaust.”⁴

In March 2012, several Turkish universities staged an exhibition on Anne Frank, the young Jewish diarist who perished during the last days of the Holocaust. Some fifteen Turkish academics participated in a special seminar in June 2014 at Yad Vashem’s (The Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem) International School for Holocaust Studies. The seminar, which focused on Holocaust studies and geared specifically for Turkish university professors and lecturers, was the first of its kind and followed an educational conference which took place in Turkey at the Galatasaray University in İstanbul in October 2013. The seminar was a joint endeavor of Yad Vashem and the Aladdin Project, and was supported by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims Humanitarian Fund. During the week-long seminar participants had in-depth tours of the museums, archives and sites at Yad Vashem, as well as discussions with leading historians and experts in the field of Holocaust education, history and research. The seminar, part of a series of sessions and online events, followed a special conference organized by the International School, in partnership with the Aladdin Project, in Turkey in October 2013, with a follow-up session exploring concrete projects to teach the Holocaust in Turkey planned for later in the year. “Given the significance of Turkish society in the Muslim world, this is an important step. At Yad Vashem we are witnessing interest in the Holocaust that traverses countries, religion and language and are ready to meet the challenges ahead,” said Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev.⁵

Throughout Chapter 4 (pp.116-153), Baer holds that leading figures from Turkey’s Jewish community were “compelled” by the Turkish state to help improve the country’s international image. Not exactly so. The Turkish Jewry, without pressure of any kind, support what their country is trying to do in this sphere. They are acting on their own. The Jewish community is integrated into the life of the Turkish society and identified with its fortunes. “My role is to find a kind of bridge between my community and my government and my Jewish brothers abroad,” said prominent Jewish businessman Jak Kamhi of İstanbul. This development in Turkish-Jewish relations, undertaken by the Jews within Turkey, can aid not only Turkey but the Jewish community as well, according to those most closely involved. Yakup Baruh, a leader of İstanbul’s Jewish community, stated: “*It’s a give-and-take situation. I’m not concerned that the government is using the Jewish community. The idea came from us. It’s a political point they have in hand to use all over the world. Why shouldn’t they use it. They deserve it. We have lived happily.*”⁶

⁴ Thomas Selbert, “Turkey’s ‘Historic’ Broadcast of Holocaust Film Shoah,” The National, 27 January 2012. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/europe/turkey-s-historic-broadcast-of-holocaust-film-shoah-1.396817>

⁵ “Turkish Academics Attend First-Ever Seminar at Yad Vashem,” 22 June 2014. <https://www.Ynetsnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4533064,00.html>

⁶ Lisa Hostein, “As Turkey Seeks to Build Its Image to World Jews,” *Jewish Exponent*, 30 June 1989, p.29. Lisa Hostein’s article is based on her first-hand impressions in Turkey and her interviews with several



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Contrary to the accusation of Baer, it was Britain and not Turkey which was responsible for the sinking of the refugee ship *Struma* in the Black Sea on 24 February 1942 (p.202). A. W. G. Randall, head of the Foreign Office Refugee Department, in a minute of 7 March 1942, argued over the *Struma* case as follows. The Palestine government had a regular system of visas and was unable to contemplate unlimited, uncontrolled entry of unauthorized persons. It was the intention of the German government to break down this policy, and in order to do this, they made use of unfortunate Jews in the countries under their control. They therefore, by threats prevailed upon numbers of Jews to buy passages for Palestine, without holding out any hope whatever to these unhappy people of their being admitted. Once the Jews agreed to leave they were packed on board quite unseaworthy vessels, the owners of which shared the profits and the guilt of this despicable enterprise. The *Struma* was so unseaworthy that it needed repair several times, and when it eventually reached Turkish waters it was realized that none of the people on board had any authorization to enter Palestine or any other country, it was sent back by the Turkish authorities, and the fatal accident occurred shortly after its return to the Black Sea. It should be realized that all the people on board came from enemy-controlled country, were sent out on the initiative of enemy government or governments and might well have included people actively hostile to the Allied war effort. This showed the extreme difficulty of dealing with such a situation and the fact that—it must be emphasized—the responsibility for this tragic occurrence rested with the persons who instigated and organized the traffic.⁷

Randall wrote on 10 March 1942 again that would-be immigrants on board on *Struma* were all of course technically enemy aliens, and security grounds would have made the acceptance of any of them at least without careful scrutiny highly questionable, but essential facts were that indiscriminate acceptance would have been against British government's declared policy on "illegal" immigration and calculated to cause extreme serious political repercussions in the Middle East at a critical moment of the war.⁸

The Anatolian News Agency said on 20 April 1942 that the Turkish authorities in Ankara had approached the representatives of every country that might be prepared to accept the *Struma* Jews. "Some of the Governments approached displayed no interest, others stated that they could not accept them. The Rumanian Ambassador in Ankara declared that they were Jews of Rumanian nationality who had left the country illegally, and that there was no question of their being returned to Rumania." Refik Saydam, the Prime Minister, proclaimed

prominent Jews in the country. On Jak Kamhi's involvement in Turkey's national questions, see Ekrem Esad Güvendiren, *Hayat Yollarında: Londra'dan Prag'a, Washington'dan Tel Aviv'e Uzanan Diplomatik Yolculuk* (In the Paths of Life: Diplomatic Journey Extending from London to Prague, Washington to Tel Aviv), İstanbul: Som Kitap, 2012, pp.193, 199-222, 207, 214, 222-226.

⁷ The National Archives, Foreign Office Papers, Kew, London (henceforth referred to as FO), 371/32662. Report on the Sinking of the *Struma* and Illegal Immigration to Palestine. Minute (A. W. G. Randall), 7 March 1942.

⁸ FO 371/32662. *Struma* Disaster. A. W. G. Randall (FO) to Lord Halifax (Washington, DC), 10 March 1942.



that Turkey did whatever it could in this matter. Neither materially nor morally did the slightest responsibility rest upon Turkey.⁹

Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, the British Ambassador at Ankara, wrote to his superiors on 8 March 1942 that the Turkish appeal that passengers should be allowed to enter Palestine having been unsuccessful, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs having been informed that the British government saw no good reason why the *Struma* should not be sent back into the Black Sea, the Turkish government felt that they had no alternative but send it there.¹⁰ Jewish scholars Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue conclude that “Turkey was not responsible for this disaster.”¹¹

Baer claims that “when compared with the frequent interventions by other countries in response to attacks against their citizens, scarcely any records of Turkish intervention on behalf of Turkish Jewish citizens can be found” and “consular officials did not extend protection to Turkish Jews living in France whose Turkish citizenship had expired or was uncertain” (p.203). He even goes further: “Turkey made relatively little effort to save Turkish Jewry” (p.204). These assumptions are utterly false. The author fails to adduce a shred of evidence to support these views. In fact, as the United States State Department records amply demonstrate, the opposite was the case. Its archival testimonies, in addition to many others, can be cited to call into question Baer’s allegations.

The lengthy correspondence of Laurence Steinhardt, the American Ambassador at Ankara from 1942 to 1944, illustrates the true case. His despatches contain a good deal of information and shrewd observations. References to the United States manuscripts and records from where documents are drawn will be most useful, as one might need to check the original.¹²

The State Department and the American Embassy at Ankara were closely interested in the large number of Turkish Jews in France. About 10,000 of them, having lost their nationality owing to the provisions of the Turkish law, were in danger of being deported to Poland. Turkish authorities were implored not to withdraw recognition from these Jews. They fell into two categories. Some were Jews whose Turkish nationality was not contested, who had been given full Turkish protection and had either been repatriated to Turkey or had escaped persecution. Others descended from Jews who emigrated from Turkey several generations ago and whose Turkish nationality had been annulled as a result of provisions of the Turkish Citizenship Law adopted on 23 May 1928, which stipulated that Turkish nationals

⁹ Anatolian News Agency, 20 April 1942.

¹⁰ FO 371/32662. Story of the *Struma* Case. Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to FO, 8 March 1942.

¹¹ Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans: The Judeo-Spanish Community, 15th to 20th Centuries*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, p.180.

¹² For an assessment of Laurence Steinhardt as Ambassador at Ankara, see Barry Rubin, *Istanbul Intrigues: A-True Casablanca*, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1989, pp.120-130; idem, “Ambassador Laurence A. Steinhardt: The Perils of a Jewish Diplomat, 1940-1945,” *American Jewish History*, Vol.70, No.3, 1981, pp.341-342.



residing abroad who failed to register with Turkish consulates for a period exceeding five years might be deprived of their citizenship. This second category of Jews, to whom Turkish representatives in France had so far accorded protection, was now threatened with deportation to Poland.¹³

Despite the fact that these Jews no longer had Turkish nationality, and although the State Department recognized by its telegram (No. 67, 25 January 1944) that the Turkish government was in no position to extend protection to them, an official appeal was being made to the Vichy authorities by the Turkish Ambassador to Vichy France, Şevki Berker, who had shown himself sympathetic to Jewish matters. Possibly as a result of Berker's representations, a party of 53 Jews arrived in İstanbul from France on or about 16 February 1944, having travelled by rail through Milan, Vienna, Nish and Belgrade.¹⁴

On 10 January 1944, Numan Menemencioğlu, Turkish minister of foreign affairs, informed Steinhardt that he would take any steps possible to afford protection to those Jews in jeopardy and that, for those who had been able to establish Turkish citizenship; he would demand the same treatment for them as for other Turkish citizens. On 26 January 1944, Menemencioğlu assured the American Ambassador that the Turkish government would exert itself to the utmost to afford protection in these cases.¹⁵

On 16 May 1944, Menemencioğlu informed Steinhardt that the Turkish Ambassador in Vichy had received specific instructions on several occasions to do everything within his power to be of assistance in these cases and that the considerable number of Jews claiming Turkish nationality who had already arrived in Turkey indicated that the ambassador's efforts had been at least partially successful.¹⁶

In the many discussions Steinhardt had had on this subject—with the prime minister and the former minister of foreign affairs, Şükrü Saracoğlu, with the minister of foreign affairs and former secretary general of the ministry of foreign affairs, Menemencioğlu; and with other high Turkish officials—their attitude was one of a desire to cooperate in every way, despite the many and unfavorable difficulties their country faced.¹⁷

Documents in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ankara are replete with references to Turkish diplomatic representatives using their positions to intervene on behalf of Jews of Turkish nationality in Nazi-occupied countries. They interceded in a number of ways to assist Turkish Jews during the Second World War. First, they kept their Turkish nationality up to date by registering them and informing the authorities that they were Turkish nationals whenever it was necessary to assist them against Nazi and Vichy persecution. This was not

¹³ Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Laurence Steinhardt Papers (henceforth referred to as Steinhardt Papers), Box 45: Report on Evacuation of Jews from Europe, 20 February 1944, 1-4.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶ United States National Archives, College Park, Maryland (henceforth referred to as USNA), 840.48 Refugees /6025. Laurence Steinhardt (Ankara) to Secretary of State. Turkish Jews in France, 16 May 1944.

¹⁷ Steinhardt Papers, Box 45, 13.



easy as it might appear. There were about 20,000 Turkish Jews living in France at the start of the war and, an equal number elsewhere in Europe. Some of them had left Turkey as early as the First World War, when residence in France seemed to offer far more advantages. By 1940, many of these Turkish Jews had married French Jews, had children and grandchildren who were French citizens and even taken French citizenship. Some had retained their Turkish citizenship, registering with the Turkish consulates at least once every five years. Others had neglected to do this and lost their Turkish nationality; the Turkish Citizenship Law of 23 May 1928 required Turks resident abroad to register or lose their citizenship. This situation did not seem important to most Turkish Jews in France; it seemed far better to be a French Jew than a Turkish Jew. But when the Nazis began to persecute French Jews, and Turkish diplomats began intervening to exempt Turkish Jews from anti-Jewish laws, those who had lost their Turkish citizenship suddenly found it was far better to be a Turkish Jew than a French Jew. They applied in large numbers to have their Turkish citizenship restored, but this took time, each application had to be referred back to Ankara. In the meantime, these Turkish Jews were subjected to increasingly severe persecution unless they could produce Turkish papers.

Turkish diplomats took various actions. Sometimes they provided false papers. They gave certificates of Turkish citizenship to Turkish Jews who were in imminent danger of being shipped off to forced labor or a concentration camp, or who were threatened with eviction from their houses, apartments or shops. Alternatively, they provided papers stating that they were “irregular Turkish citizens,” whose papers were being “regularized” in Ankara but in the meantime had to be considered Turkish citizens. With all the protections involved. Turkish diplomats at times went to concentration camps or even into the trains shipping Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau and the other death camps to deliver passports and papers, proving that they were constantly applying to German and French authorities to exempt Turkish Jews from anti-Jewish laws.

As a matter of policy, the Turkish government allowed Jews who had been Turkish citizens and were living in France and other areas of Europe to reclaim their Turkish nationality status (which they had surrendered previously) and thus receive the protection of Turkish neutrality. In many cases the Germans respected this decision. The governmental attitude contributed to the inclination of Turkish diplomats to help Jews.¹⁸

For example, on 2 November 1940, the Turkish Consul General in Paris Cevdet Dülger sent the following note to the German Embassy in protest against a regulation that forbade Jews to own or operate businesses in Nazi-occupied as well as Vichy France:

The Consul General of Turkey in Paris, basing itself on the fact that Turkish Constitutional Law makes no distinction between its citizens regardless of the religion to which they profess, has the honor of asking the German Embassy to give instructions to the

¹⁸ <https://www.facinghistory.org/rescuers/selahattin-ulkumen>



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*competent department that the decision that has begun to effect certain merchants of Turkish nationality, because of the regulation of 18 October 1940, be reconsidered.*¹⁹

For the most part the Germans acquiesced to this Turkish argument, as for example in an communication from the German Embassy in Paris dated 18 February 1941:

*Despite the general regulations, the German Embassy is ready to support individual requests by the Turkish Consul General for the exemption of Jews when they have Turkish nationality.*²⁰

Oddly, the French government of unoccupied France based at Vichy was, in many ways, much more devious and difficult in its response to Turkish governmental requests to protect Turkish Jews than the Nazi administration. After Vichy introduced a law on 16 June 1941, requiring all Jews in the territories under its control to register themselves and their property, the Turkish Ambassador to France Behiç Erkin, who had moved to Vichy, stated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

*The Embassy of Turkey has the honor to inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that its Government, having been informed of the text of law no.2333 of 2 June 1941, which under menace of penal sanctions, orders the entering of Jews on a special register along with a mandatory declaration regarding their properties, feels that the measures thus ordered are also applicable to Turkish citizens of Jewish faith established in France. Turkey itself recognizes no discrimination along its citizens according to race, religion or anything else and, therefore, feels ill at ease with such discrimination imposed by the French government on those of its citizens who are established in France, so that the Turkish government can do nothing but strictly stand on its rights in what concerns, those of the latter who are of the Jewish faith.*²¹

Vichy responded by stating that a Jew was a Jew, regardless of nationality, and that all those living in France had undertaken an obligation to obey its laws rather than those of the country from which they originated:

*The Ministry has the honor to inform the Embassy that, in establishing themselves in France, the individuals in question have implicitly agreed to submit themselves to the legislation of the country in which they are guests. The principle has sufficient force that the measures regarding the people of the Hebrew race apply to all Jews regardless, both to those who are of French allegiance as well as those who are nationals of foreign countries.*²²

¹⁹ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive, Karakusunlar, Ankara (henceforth referred to as MFA), File: France-1940. Note Verbale No.605. Cevdet Dülger (Paris) to German Embassy (Paris), 2 November 1940.

²⁰ MFA, File: France-1941. Communication. German Embassy (Paris) to Cevdet Dülger (Paris), 28 February 1941.

²¹ MFA, File: France-1941. Note Verbale No. 6127/914. Behiç Erkin (Vichy) to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Vichy), 31 July 1941.

²² MFA, File: France-1941. Note Verbale No.15722. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Vichy) to Turkish Embassy (Vichy), 8 August 1941.



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It is interesting to note that the United States Embassy in Vichy advised American Jews living in France to accept the French argument on the grounds that they were treating all Jews equally.²³ Turkey, however, resisted the French position on the grounds that the ruling violated the agreements between Turkey and France which stipulated that nationals of Turkey were to enjoy the same civil rights in France that French citizens enjoyed in Turkey, and therefore the law discriminated against Turkish citizens of different religions. Thus the Turkish Ambassador Behiç Erkin wrote to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 9 September 1941, rejecting the French argument:

*While it is natural enough for foreigners to accept the laws of the country in which they live, in accordance with the strenuously expressed view of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs that a foreigner who has settled in a country can be assumed to have accepted the attachment of his state and future to that country's laws, our answer must be that we reserve our rights in regard to a law which discriminates against Turkish citizens of different religion.*²⁴

When Turkish Jews were ordered to join French and other foreign Jews in forced labor gangs, the Turkish Consuls advised them not to report for duty, and sent protests to the French government, which usually led to the Turkish Jews being exempted. Turkish Ambassador Behiç Erkin thus informed Ankara on 15 December 1942:

*I have wired the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs by telegram asking that Turkish Jewish subjects not be included in the decision recently published in the newspapers by the Prefecture of Marseilles that all foreign Jews who entered France since December 1933, who are without work or in need, be gathered together in foreign worker groups.*²⁵

Erkin's successor Ambassador Şevki Berker sent instructions to the Consul General in Marseilles Bedii Arbel on 27 January 1944:

*Jewish citizens whose papers are in order cannot be subjected to forced labor, and if such situations arise, it is natural that we should provide them with protection. The prefects of police should be reminded of the relevant instructions, and it is necessary to intervene with the competent authorities when needed.*²⁶

It is not surprising, therefore, that as Michael Marrus, author of many historiographical studies of the Holocaust, points out, "the Turks felt obligations toward Jews of their

²³ Maynard Barnes, First Secretary of the United States Embassy (Vichy) to Cevdet Dülger, Turkish Consul General (Paris), 17 October 1940. Archive of the Turkish Embassy (Paris), folio 6127, as cited in Stanford Shaw, "Turks and Jews," in Sinan Kunalalp, ed., *Studies in Ottoman and Turkish History: Life with the Ottomans*, İstanbul: The İsis Press, 2000, p.508.

²⁴ MFA, File: France-1941. Note Verbale No.6127/984. Behiç Erkin (Vichy) to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Vichy), 9 September 1941.

²⁵ MFA, File: France-1941. Communication No.1667-1054-6127. Behiç Erkin (Vichy) to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ankara), 15 December 1942.

²⁶ MFA, File: France-1944. Communication No.44/17. Şevki Berker (Vichy) to Turkish Consulate General in Marseilles (Bedii Arbel), 27 January 1944.



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nationalities when they were threatened by deportation from Nazi-occupied states.”²⁷ Henry Feingold, a leading American scholar on the Second World War and the Holocaust, puts the case more emphatically, “Turkey protected Turkish Jews living in France from deportation [to Auschwitz-Birkenau] and protested their having to wear the tell-tale yellow star.”²⁸ As a renowned specialist of the Holocaust, Feingold has a level of expertise on the subject few others can match. According to figures provided by French Nazi hunter lawyer and scholar Serge Klarsfeld, of some 20,300 Turkish Jews in France, 1,659 were killed at Auschwitz-Birkenau—a much smaller percentage than that of Jews in other European countries.²⁹ Interestingly, in his book *An Ambassador and a Mensch: The Story of a Turkish Diplomat in Vichy France*, Arnold Reisman found, using Yad Vashem’s official population data, that a French Jew without Turkish roots had a 3.7 greater chance of dying in Adolf Hitler’s ovens than a French Jew who had Turkish connections. The reason was the intervention of the Turkish Embassy staff in both occupied and Vichy France.³⁰

Baer charges that Cemal Pasha, “one of the men responsible for the genocide, as minister of the navy, commander of the Fourth Army, military governor of Syria, had overseen the deportation of Armenians to their deaths” (p.286), which could not be further from the truth. Actually, as commander of the Fourth Army in Syria and Palestine, Cemal Pasha provided humanitarian protection and assistance to Armenians. He ordered an effective relief effort, as a result of which the vast majority of the relocatees in his zone of command survived. He also took protective measures to keep the Armenians in the city centers. He employed artisans from among the relocatees in army factories and used this opportunity to prevent as many Armenians as possible from being sent to the desert. Cemal Pashe inflicted severe penalties on those who mistreated the Armenians during the forced migration. Similarly, bandits and brigands who assaulted Armenian migrants were heavily punished when their attacks were reported to him. All in all, during the removal of Armenians he wholeheartedly strove to safeguard his charges and make their conditions as tolerable as possible. Generally, individual Armenians spoke well of Cemal Pasha.³¹

On several instances, Baer accuses Talat Pasha as “architect of the Armenian genocide” (pp. viii, 83, 222). No, it is not true. The facts are otherwise. This incorrect assumption provides a false framework for the reader. Yet genocide is not a word that should be tossed

²⁷ Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys Publishers, 1987, p.178.

²⁸ Henry Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995, p.91.

²⁹ Gill Hoffman, “Not Chickening Out in Turkey,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 December 2011, p.17.

³⁰ <https://historynewsnetwork.org/articles/126955>

³¹ The sources are numerous here. See, for instance, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Savunma Bakanlığı Askeri Tarih Daire Başkanlığı Arşivi (Archive of the Directorate of Department of Military History, Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Turkey), Ankara (henceforth referred to as ATASE), Birinci Dünya Harbi Koleksiyonu (Collection of the First World War) (BDHK), Folder: 1768, File: 206, 25 July 1916; ATASE, BDHK, Folder: 533, File: 2084-1-3, 29 May 1917; Hilmar Kaiser, “Regional Resistance to Central Government Policies: Ahmed Djemal Pasha, the Governor of Aleppo, and Armenian Deportees in the Spring and Summer of 1915,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol.12, No.3-4, 2010, pp.173-218.



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around lightly. It is neither a fact nor a historical summation of events. It is a legal term of art. It is invented in 1944 by a lawyer, Raphael Lemkin (a Holocaust survivor) to describe a crime. It was his wish that it be treated as a legal term. It is the worst crime that international law has ever defined. Investigating, analyzing and interpreting history is a matter for historians. Historians establish facts: lawyers must judge whether these facts amount to a breach of international law.

In legal practice, the meaning of genocide is undisputed. It has only one meaning, that given to it by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 9 December 1948 (UNCG). Genocide is a specific crime defined by international law. The UNCG tells us what genocide is and how it can be ascertained. Only a competent local or international tribunal can determine whether an event is genocide, and such a tribunal has not been held on this matter. Such a court decision exists for the Holocaust and for Rwanda but not for the Armenian suffering.

There are a number of factual errors in the text. For instance, Neve Şalom synagogue is not located in Beyoğlu but in the Kuledibi quarter of İstanbul (p.xii); Quincentennial Foundation was not established by “the Turkish state and Turkish Jewish elites” in 1989 but by a group of 113 Turkish citizens, Jews and Muslims alike (pp. 4, 276); Turkey today has not “the second- largest Jewish community in a Muslim-majority country after Iran” but it has the largest Jewish community among the Muslim countries (p.7); it was not Mustafa Kemal, who would name himself Atatürk, “the father of the Turks,” but it was the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which granted this surname to him according to a law which came into force on 2 January 1935 (p.81); in his speech delivered in Adana on 15 March 1923 to the shopkeepers of that city Mustafa Kemal Pasha did not state that “Armenians do not have a share whatsoever” in Turkey but in the Çukurova region itself (p. 81); the remains of Enver Pasha, the former minister of war and the acting commander in chief of the Ottoman armies during the First World War was not reburied in the Memorial and Museum of the Turkish Martyrs Murdered by Armenians above Iğdır on the Turkish-Armenian border in 1999 but his remains were brought back from Belcivan in the present-day Republic of Tajikistan on 4 August 1996 to the Hill of Eternal Liberty in İstanbul for reburial (pp.118-119); it was Sultan Reşad not Enver Pasha who was the commander in chief of the Ottoman armies during the First World War (p.119); in August 1982 Kamuran Gürün was a retired diplomat not a counselor to Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (p.128); Atatürk did not “establish his rebel government” in Ankara in 1919 but the Government of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey was proclaimed in Ankara on 23 April 1920 (p.141); Turkey did not invade and occupy Cyprus in 1974 but it used its right to intervene for restoring the constitutional order of the island according to the treaties of Zurich and London signed between Turkey, Greece and Britain in 1959 (p.145); Salahi Sonyel was not a former Turkish Foreign Ministry official but an independent Cypriot scholar (p.163); the full name of the Turkish minister of foreign affairs was not Hüseyin Numan Menemencioğlu but Numan Rıfat Menemencioğlu (p.200); Selahattin Ülkümen, Consul of Turkey in Rhodes in 1943-1944, did not attain the title of



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ambassador in his career (p.278); Taner Akçam did not flee Turkey following the 1980 coup but escaped from a prison in Ankara in 1977.

Although with both anguish and anger Baer has directed his attention toward discussing the “myths” and “realities” of the past, his work does not offer new and significant insights into the history of Turkish-Jewish relations and does not increase our ability to understand the true nature of this important partnership. Some of author’s hypotheses require a more severe and solid reference apparatus and footnotes. *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks* is in no way a contribution to a long-standing debate.