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Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust

Based on research in about fifty archives worldwide, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust* analyzes the minority politics of the Turkish Republic and the country's ambivalent policies regarding Jewish refugees and Turkish Jews living abroad. Although Turkey stayed neutral during World War II, the country's policies proved crucial not only for the 75,000 Jews who lived in Turkey, but also to the 25,000 Turkish Jews living throughout Europe and the tens of thousands of Jews who desperately sought refuge in Turkey or transit to refuge elsewhere. Contrary to the official Turkish self-portrayal, this comprehensive study by Corry Guttstadt shows that Turkey was far from welcoming toward Jews during the Holocaust era.

Corry Guttstadt is a lecturer in the Department of Turkish Studies at the University of Hamburg and an independent researcher with a focus on Turkey.

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CORRY GUTTSTADT

*Translated from German by Kathleen M. Dell'Orto,
Sabine Bartel, and Michelle Miles*



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA
www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521769914

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First published in 2008 as *Die Türkei, die Juden und der Holocaust*.

First English-language edition published 2013

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Guttstadt, Corry, 1955– author.
[Türkei, die Juden und der Holocaust. English]
Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust / Corry Guttstadt. – First English-language edition.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-76991-4 (hardback)
1. Jews – Turkey – History. 2. Turkey – Ethnic relations. 3. Jewish refugees –
Turkey. 4. Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945) 5. National socialism – Turkey.
6. Jews, Turkish – Europe. I. Title.
DS135.T8G8813 2013
940.53'1809561–dc23 2012032732

ISBN 978-0-521-76991-4 Hardback

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Preface to the English Edition

Three and a half years passed between the publication of the German edition and the English edition of this book. Notwithstanding the overwhelmingly positive reception of the academic community, I was especially touched by the numerous letters from people who experienced and suffered through the events described here or are the children or relatives of the people mentioned in the book. Every one of them was pleased and grateful that this issue was finally being researched and is now the subject of a publication. Thanks to their response, I was able to conduct further interviews and collect even more valuable information, for which I thank them very much.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, for the Charles H. Revson Foundation Fellowship which was awarded to me for 2008–2009, and to the entire staff at the Center for their invaluable help. Although it is not possible to mention everyone here by name, my sincerest thanks go out to all of them. I especially want to thank Vadim Altskan, Benton Arnovitz, Martin Dean, Michael Gelb, Radu Ioanid, Jürgen Matthäus, Traci Rucker, Paul Shapiro, Vincent Slatt, and many others for their unflagging assistance, their expert advice, important reading suggestions, and many enlightening discussions.

I also want to express my thanks to the Fondation pour le Mémoire de la Shoah in Paris for a grant that enabled me to continue research in French archives, as well as the Herbert-und-Elsbeth-Weichmann Stiftung in Hamburg, whose financial support allowed me to conduct further research in Israel.

Since publication of the German edition, several new works have come out on the subject of this book. I would like to mention here Hatice Bayraktar's work *Zweideutige Individuen in schlechter Absicht* (The Malice of Ambiguous Individuals) on the anti-Semitic riots in Thrace in 1934, as well as Sait Çetinoğlu's book *Varlık Vergisi 1942–1944*. Despite recent publications and my continued research, however, no new facts have come to light that would require me to make any corrections. In fact, just the opposite is the case: several documents that were found recently add further detail to the events described in the first edition. For the sake of enabling a speedier translation, however, I have integrated new facts only in special cases in the English version. A compilation of key sources and documents concerning this subject will be published soon with the support of the Beate Klarsfeld Foundation.

After a Turkish translation was published by İletişim in March 2012, I am very pleased that the book is now available to English readers as well. My heartfelt thanks go to Eric Crahan from Cambridge University Press for his wonderful editorial support, and to Kathleen M. Dell'Orto, Sabine Bartel, and Michelle Miles for the translation.

This book was made possible (in part) by funds granted to me through the Charles H. Revson Foundation Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The statements made and views expressed in it, however, are solely my own. I am also grateful to the Emerging Scholars Publication Program at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, especially to Steven Feldman, for their support with the preparation of the book manuscript and proposal.

The translation of this work was funded by Geisteswissenschaften International – Translation Funding for Humanities and Social Sciences from Germany, a joint initiative of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the German Federal Foreign Office, the collecting society VG Word and the German Publishers & Booksellers Association.

Preface

While traveling in Israel in 1999, I happened to find a document in a kibbutz library about the rescue of 105 Turkish Jews from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. As Turkish citizens, they had been liberated in March 1945 and had reached Istanbul on the ship *Drottningholm* as part of an exchange of civilian prisoners between Turkey and Germany. The document's author, Rudolf Levy, was one of those civilians. Although I had spent many years researching the situation of minorities in Turkey as well as Jewish history and the Shoah, this was the first time I had encountered Turkish Jews as victims of the Shoah. Until then, the image in my mind of Turkey and the Holocaust was of the many Turkish public institutions, including the university, that took in Jewish scholars who were persecuted in the 1930s.

A few years passed before I was able to follow up on my "discovery" in the kibbutz library. My journey started at the archive of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, where I had the opportunity to study the list of the 105 Turkish-Jewish prisoners more closely. Most of the families listed who were rescued were from Izmir, Istanbul, Edirne, and other Turkish cities. I was then all the more surprised when I realized in the summer of 2003 that in Istanbul people knew very little about this rescue. I also learned that Turkish authorities had refused to allow most of the liberated Turkish Jews to leave the ship in April 1945 until after lengthy negotiations, and even then they were only allowed to stay in boarding houses, where they were interned. In general, it became clear to me early in my research that the fate of the Turkish Jews who lived through the Holocaust years in Europe and were themselves victims of Nazi persecution has not been a subject of research either in historiography or in the Jewish community of Turkey.

My queries were met with greater interest, however, by many Sephardic Jews in Paris, Brussels, and other cities. Within a short period of time, I was able to find numerous children and grandchildren of Turkish-Jewish immigrants, who told me the story of their families and relatives. They introduced me to the world of the Turkish-Sephardic immigrant communities in Europe, a world that is now lost. This was how I learned that most of the first generation of Turkish immigrants who came to Western Europe had been Jews. As a result, what began as a chance discovery in a kibbutz library became a comprehensive study that would take me to roughly fifty archives in eleven countries to do research that would occupy me for many years to come, and which still occupies me today.

I begin the first part of the book by briefly explaining the special circumstances that contributed to the formation of the Turkish nation-state and to Kemalist policies, while I also discuss the consequences these had for the situation of the Jews. The mass emigration of Jews from Turkey, and the policies that Turkey subsequently adopted regarding these emigrants can only be understood against this background.

For Jews during the Holocaust, Turkey became a potential refuge and a possible stepping-stone leading to Palestine due to its policy of neutrality and its geographic location. This meant that Turkish politics played a vital role in the lives of Jewish Turkish citizens all over Europe and in the rescue of Jews in Southeastern Europe in particular. It is therefore important to keep in mind that Ankara's policies concerning "its own" Jews living inside and outside Turkey and its policies concerning Jewish refugees can only be adequately explained in the context of Turkish politics in the 1930s and 1940s.

I would also like to mention a few matters of form. First, one problem I encountered while writing this book was the spelling of surnames. Jewish names were often written in different alphabets – Hebrew, Latin, or Ottoman Turkish – by the different institutions (Jewish religious institutions, Turkish administrative offices, and French schools) in Turkey during the period in question (the Ottoman alphabet was in use until the introduction of the Latin alphabet in Turkey in 1928). This means that most Jewish names had at least three different spellings. Furthermore, when names written in the Hebrew and/or Ottoman Turkish alphabet were transcribed into the Latin alphabet, many different spellings often resulted for the same name and even the same person (see names such as Nissim/Nisim/Nesim and Masliah/Mazliah/Mazliyah). To complicate things even more, when people immigrated to Europe, new variations of these names arose when they were transcribed into various European

languages. Many people also changed their first names to make them seem more European (choosing, for example, Jacques instead of Isaac). Finally, many names can only be found in Nazi documents, such as prisoner and transport lists, which were often compiled by fellow Jewish prisoners, allowing even further new spellings to occur. Therefore, in order to make the identification of each person possible, I use just one spelling for each person throughout the book. Whenever it was possible to deduce from the documents at hand which spelling a person preferred, I chose that spelling. In all other cases, I refer to the spelling used in the country where the person in question lived the longest. For names of well-known Turkish figures or cities that also have familiar spellings in English, I use the English spelling (I use Ismet İnönü, for example, instead of İsmet İnönü, while İbrahim Tali is left in Turkish). Because surnames were not used in Turkey until 1935, I have included surnames in parentheses for the period before 1935 for better understanding by non-Turkish readers.

All translations into English from sources in other languages are either by the author or the translators of this book. Regarding quotes from English documents, minor spelling and grammatical errors in the original have been corrected without marking and without changing the content.

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Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the help of many friends and people who believed in this project. My sincerest thanks go to Rıfat Bali in Istanbul for establishing contacts and providing documents. Ragıp Zarakolu, also in Istanbul, was always supportive, and his keen interest was a source of constant encouragement while I was writing this book. Michael Studemund-Halévy helped me to better understand the Sephardic world, giving me valuable reading tips and introducing me to many people. I am grateful to Serge and Beate Klarsfeld in Paris for many enlightening discussions and for providing me with many helpful sources. Very special thanks go to Steve N. Sage at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington; his consistent willingness to help me encouraged me enormously.

For their expert advice, criticism, suggestions, and help finding sources and contacts, I thank Doğan Akhanlı, David Angel, Linde Apel, Marc Baer, Hatice Bayraktar, Oral Çalışlar, Sait Çetinoğlu, Jean Engler, Hendrik Fenz, Tuvia Friling, Anat Frumkin, Frank Golczewski, Susanne Heim, Karin Hörner, Christina Kaul, Ulla Kux, Ahlrich Meyer, Raoul Motika, Silvyo Ovadya, Karl Heinz Roth, Bernd Rother, Robert Schild, Barbara Spengler-Axiopoulos, and Alexandra-Eileen Wenck. Sami Kohen in Ankara gave me copies of issues of *La Boz de Türkiye*, which were no longer in print, from his father's archive; Danny Rainer at the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation sent me the unpublished memoirs of the Turkish ambassador Behiç Erkin; and Mirjam Schmidt graciously lent me her master's thesis – my sincerest thanks go out to all of you.

I am extremely indebted to the people who witnessed the events described in this book (see the list of sources for their names). I am

sincerely grateful to them for sharing their time and their memories with me. They willingly answered my questions about their experiences during Nazi persecution, although this brought back many painful memories. I especially want to thank Rivka Cohen and Daniel Natan in Brussels, Haïm Vidal Sephiha in Paris, Victor Sarfati in Nice, Victor Algazi in Marseilles, Nathan Ben-Brith in G'nat Shomron, and Jochanan Asriel in Haifa for sharing their family albums with me and for letting me use their photographs and documents. Many thanks go to Claire Romi and Arlette Bules at the organization Aki Estamos in Paris for helping me to find many of the contemporary witnesses.

I am also grateful to the Ertomis Foundation in Wuppertal, whose generous financial support enabled me to visit archives in the United States and Israel.

I owe much of my research to the friendly expert assistance of many archive directors and staff. My sincere thanks go out to Kevin Proffitt at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati for his excellent assistance, Misha Mitsell and Shelley Helfand at the archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee ("The Joint," or JDC) in New York for their thoughtful support, Atila Aydın at the Prime Minister's Republican Archives (Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi) in Ankara for his generous assistance finding documents, Anke Kandler at the Landeshauptarchiv Brandenburg (BLHA) in Potsdam for her expert help, Ms. Blumberg and Ms. Völschow at the Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde, Karen Taïeb and Diane Afoumado at the Centre de Documentation juive contemporaine (CDJC) Paris, Liliana Picciotto at the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea in Milan, as well as Michele Sarfatti, who patiently explained the complex legal situation of Turkish Jews in Italy, Odette Vlessing at the Amsterdam City Archives, Saskia Simons at the Geheime Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStPK) in Berlin, Klaus Dettmer and Bianca Welzing at the Landesarchiv Berlin for their extensive help finding documents, Hubert Berhout at the NIOD in Amsterdam, Mr. Keiper and Mr. Kröger at the Politische Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes in Berlin for the friendly support over five years, Sophie Vandepontseele and Sylvie Vander Elst at the Service des Victimes de la Guerre in Brussels for their friendly help, Jürgen Sielemann at the Staatsarchiv Hamburg for his generous support finding traces of Turkish Jews in Hamburg, also Ms. Wunderlich in the reading room, and finally Michal Frankl at the Terezin Initiative for providing me with documents and organizing visits to archives in Prague for me. My special thanks go to Michlean Amir at the archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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in Washington; Christopher Murphy at the Library of Congress, who pointed out some of Karl Süssheim's personal documents to me; Christine Gigler at the Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv; Irena Steinfeld of the Yad Vashem memorial for her help and many valuable conversations; Vlasta Mestankova at the National Archives in Prague, who not only found many files for me but also helped me decipher several Czech documents; Rainer Schulze, Thomas Rahe, and Klaus Tätzler from the Bergen-Belsen Memorial for all their assistance; Klara Gissing at the archives of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site for her support of my research; Monika Herzog at the Ravensbrück National Memorial; Laurence Schram in the Musée juif de la Déportation et de la Résistance (MJDR) in Malines for her tremendous help; and Piotr Setkiewicz at the archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, who found documents on Turkish-Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz for me.

For their research assistance and willingness to answer my questions and send me documents, I cordially thank Ursula Schwarz and Stephan Roth at the Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, Barbara Welker and Sabine Hank at the archive of the Centrum Judaicum in Berlin, Helga Wagner at the archives of the Mauthausen Memorial, Harry Stein at the archives of the Buchenwald Memorial, and Julia Rother at the archives of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. Deniz Saporta also helped me by researching names in the archives of the Jewish community in Istanbul.

For their translations, I heartily thank Isabel Meyn and Estelle Alibert (French), Achim Rohde and Inbar Perez (Hebrew), Roberta Marchionni and Susanne Wald (Italian), Inger Hamdorf and Steffen Köpke (Spanish), Klaus Mellenthin and Muriel Meij (Dutch), Lenka (Czech), and Süreyya Turhan-von Leffern and Şeyda Demirdirek (Turkish). For his around-the-clock support when I had one of my many computer crashes, I thank Saffo Can with all my heart, and for their generous support, I also thank Markus Bockshammer, Katja Buchecker, Stefani Guttstadt, Julia Kopp, Tina Look, and Jutta Stephan. Guido van Leemput in Amsterdam assisted me with the logistics and retrieval of documents at the NIOD in Amsterdam, and Eren Ağin in Ankara generously retrieved and sent me documents from the BCA there.

I thank my childhood friend Dagmar Eßer for her careful reading and input; Yasemin Gedik, Beate Kirst, Manfred Trittau, and Sibel Türker for their thoughtful editorial comments; and Klaus Viehmann for his skillful layout and image editing. Very special thanks also go out to my friend and publisher Theo Bruns, who edited my work. His interest in this project

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76991-4 - Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust

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Acknowledgments

made him an excellent conversation partner and a vital help in times of crisis. Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to my two wonderful children, Tayfun and Tavga, who put up with all the hardships brought on by writing this book. They never complained and have been a great help to me.

Abbreviations

ADAP	Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik	Records on German Foreign Policy
AIU	Alliance Israélite Universelle	Universal Israelite Alliance
AJA	American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati	
AJB	Association des Juifs en Belgique	Association of Jews in Belgium
AJJDC	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee	also abbreviated Joint (s. entry “Joint”)
BAL	Bundesarchiv, Berlin	German Federal Archives
BCA	Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivleri	Prime Ministry’s Republican Archives
BDS	Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienstes	Commander-in-Chief of Security Police (SiPo) and SD
BLHA	Landeshauptarchiv Brandenburg	The Brandenburg Main State Archive
CDEC	Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea	Jewish Contemporary Documentation Center in Milan
CDJ	Comité de Défense des Juifs	Jews’ Defense Committee (in Belgium)
CDJC	Centre de Documentation juive Contemporaine, Paris	Center of Contemporary Jewish Documentation
CGQJ	Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives	(French) General Commissariat for Jewish Questions

CHF	<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası</i> (since 1924)	Republican People's Party, formerly the HF <i>Halk Fırkası</i>
CHP	<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i> (since 1931)	Republican People's Party, formerly CHF
CZA	Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem	
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei	German National People's Party
DÖW	Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes	Documentation Centre of the Austrian Resistance
EAM-	Ethnikón Apeleftherotikón Métopon	National Liberation Front
EIF	Eclaireurs israélites de France	Jewish Scouts of France
ELAS	Ethnikós Laïkós Apeleftherotikós Strátos	National Popular Liberation Army
GStAPK	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz	Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation
HICEM	Merging of HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), ICA (Jewish Colonization Association) and EMIGDIRECT (Emigrationsdirectorium)	
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross	
IGCR	Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees	
IKG	Israelitische Kultusgemeinde	Vienna Israelite Community
Joint	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee	
JTA	Jewish Telegraphic Agency	
KEV	Komisarstvo za Evreiskite Vaprosi	Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish Affairs
LAB	Landesarchiv Berlin	Archives of the Land Berlin
MBF	Militärbefehlshaber Frankreich	(German) military commander in France
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi	(fascist) National Action Party in Turkey
MJDR	Musée Juif de la Déportation et de la Résistance (Mechlen)	Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance

Abbreviations

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MP	Member of Parliament	
NARA	National Archives at College Park, MD	
NIOD	Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (Amsterdam)	Dutch Institute for War Documentation
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei	National Socialist German Workers' Party
OJC	Organisation juive de combat	Jewish Combat Organization (in France)
OMBR	Office Militaire Belge de Résistance	Belgian resistance organization
OSE	Oeuvre de secours aux Enfants	Children's Aid Society
OSOBI	"Sonderarchiv" beim Staatlichen Militärarchiv Moskau	"Special Archives," now part of State Military Archives of the Russian Federation, Moscow
OSS	American Office of Strategic Services	
PAAA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts	Political Archive of the Foreign Office, Berlin
Pol VII	(Middle East desk in German Foreign Office)	
PRO, FO	Public Record Office, Foreign Office (London)	
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt	Reich Security Main Office
SA	Sturmabteilung	Assault Detachment (or Storm troopers)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (des Reichsführers-SS)	Security Service (intelligence agency) of the SS
SiPo	Sicherheitspolizei	Security Police
SS	Schutzstaffel	Protection echelon
SVG	Service des Victimes de la Guerre auprès du service public fédéral Sécurité sociale (Brüssel)	"Directorate-General War Victims" of the Federal Public Service Social Security
TBMM	Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi	Turkish national parliament
UGIF	Union générale des Israélites de France	General Union of French Jews
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum	
WJC	World Jewish Congress	
WRB	War Refugee Board	