Berna Pekesen: *Nationalismus, Türkisierung und das Ende der jüdischen Gemeinden in Thrakien 1918-1942* (München: R.Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), 334 pages. [“Nationalism, Turkification and the End of Jewish communities in Thrace 1918-1942”]

by

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This study is the first monograph on the so-called “Thracian events” or Thrace pogroms which took place between 21 June-4 July 1934, and resulted in a massive migration of Thracian Jews to Istanbul to escape violence and death. Though the apparent scope of this book is limited to this phenomenon, it effectively deals with the problems of nation-building in modern Turkey, the successor-state of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. Thus, Pekesen’s study belongs actually to the research literature which concentrate on the crises and processes of imperial disintegration and foundation of new nation-states.

Pekesen’s work consists of introduction, six main parts, one concluding summary, and two appendices. The introductory part (11-37) first draws attention to the historiographical silencing of the progrom through reiterating the “exemplary relationship” which lasted between Turks and Jews throughout centuries by official and semi-official historical writings. The reader is then informed about certain publications on the Thrace pogroms which however are not comprehensive enough. This part is finished by putting forward the main research question; how was it possible that the long-lasting harmony between Turks and Jews came to an abrupt and violent end in 1934?

Part I (38-54) reconstructs the Thrace pogroms in a chronological manner. These include Cevat Rifat [Atilhan]’s previous antisemitic activities; nationalistic public campaign known as “citizen, speak in Turkish”, supported by young members of the Republican People’s Party; the remilitarization of Thrace due to revisionist threats of Bulgaria and Italy; recognition of the Straits and Thrace as top security zones; decision to repopulate Thrace by “reliable” Muslim population; establishment of the General Inspectorate of Thrace in February 1934; statement of İbrahim Tali [Öngören], chief of the General Inspectorate, to remove “Jewish elements” from Thracian economy; promulgation of the Resettlement Law by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 14 June 1934; beginning of anti-Jewish violence in Çanakkale on 21 June which included physical attacks against Jewish individuals as well as plunder of shops and private homes; repetition of similar events throughout Thrace; the statement of Prime Minister İnönü on 5 July to open public investigation about these events; massive flight of nearly 50 per cent of Jews from Thrace to Istanbul, most of whom were not able to return to their ancestral homes.

Part II (55-95) discusses the theoretical aspects of the Thracian events. Pekesen concludes that *pogrom* is a more convenient category to describe these events than for example *ethnic* *cleansing*, since the latter category implies a wholesale ethnic homogenization of a region. She then discusses the relationship between nation-building, modernization, and violence. One crucial aspect of this relationship in view of Kemalism was the formation of a homogenous national identity through the transformation of older, “out-of-date” particularistic identities into a single one.

The next part (96-133) provides the reader a comprehensive history of Ottoman Jewry, its relationship with the Sublime Porte, the process of Jewish modernization and the destruction of the Jewish communities as a consequence of a series of catastrophic wars between 1877 and 1914. As Pekesen argues, the Jews became reduced from an acknowledged *millet* to a tiny minority.

Part IV (134-155) discusses the emerging problems for the remaining Jews during the early years of the Turkish Republic. When peace talks began in Lausanne after the War of Liberation, the Turkish delegation insisted, without success, on the abrogation of minority rights for non-Muslims. However, three years following the Treaty of Lausanne, immense government and popular pressure forced Jewish community to give up their minority rights, which meant the termination of communal self-rule. When the chief rabbi died in 1931, the government refused the appointment of a new one. Jewish schools, institutions and endowments were put under state surveillance, and the setting up of new ones were prevented.

Pekesen then focuses on the policies of assimilation and exclusion, which constitute the two faces of Turkification (Part V, 156-202). Accordingly, Kemalism, despite its staunch secularism, paradoxically preserved Sunni Islam as the backbone of Turkish national identity. While Islam served as a means to assimilate non-Turkish Muslims, it helped to exclude non-Muslims from the main body of Turkish nation. These attitudes went hand in hand with the Turkification of economic life, education, and language.

The last part (Part VI, 203-266) deals with settlement- and demographic policies of the Kemalist regime. Major demographic losses during World War I prompted the government to encourage immigration of Muslims from the Balkans and Caucasus. Meanwhile formal legal measures were utilized to expel non-Muslims, including Jews, from Turkish citizenship at any possible opportunity. Those who still retained their citizenship were subjected to the Resettlement Law, which stipulated the removal of “untrustworthy elements” from strategically sensitive regions, as it took place following the Thracian events. Finally, the Tax on Property of 1942, applied in a discriminatory way against non-Muslims, effectively terminated Jewish presence in Turkish economy.

This study is a significant research on the history of modern Turkish Jewry and its demise in Thrace. It is also a work which sheds light on the nation-building process during the Kemalist era and its effects on other nationalities in Anatolia. It has utilized Turkish, French, German, Israeli, US, British, Swiss, and Alliance Israélite Universelle archives. Pekesen’s evaluations are cautious and balanced. Therefore this book will probably remain for some time one of the main reference sources on the history of late Ottoman and early Republican Turkish Jewry.