

AMIT BEIN:

Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic: Agents of Change and Guardians of Tradition.

ix, 212 pp. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. ISBN 978 0 8047 7311 9.

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This monograph by Amit Bein is the first academic study in English to focus specifically on the ulema of the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic of Turkey. In Turkey recent decades have seen a plethora of popular publications on important ulema of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (mostly from conservative Islamic circles) and a few serious academic works, but until now this interest had not spread beyond Turkey, and any publications were very much part of an internal Turkish debate. In the many studies of the Young Turk period and the Kemalist Republic published over the last thirty years, including my own, the role of the religious professionals, the doctors of Islamic law, has been seriously understudied, even overlooked. The emphasis has been very much on the military-bureaucratic elite that has shaped the dominant discourse and the policies of the Young Turk and Kemalist eras and their specific vision of modernity. It is true, of course, that we have at our disposal important studies on Islamic currents that question the master narrative of Kemalist secularism, most notably Andrew Davison's *Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey* (1998), Hakan Yavuz's *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (2003) and Şerif Mardin's slightly older *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey* (1989), but the results of this research have not as yet been integrated with the historiography of the Young Turk and Kemalist era.

Bein's study bears all the hallmarks of what we may perhaps term the "Hanioglu school" at Princeton University. It has a narrow, clearly defined, focus and is meticulously researched on the basis of a very wide range of archival documents, government publications, periodicals and books, both Ottoman and Republican. The author demonstrates an excellent grasp of the state of the art in academic research.

Chronologically, the emphasis of the book is on the Second Constitutional Period (1908–18), the period of the armistice (1918–20) and the Kemalist republic (1923–45), although the nineteenth-century reforms and the transition to democracy after 1945 both receive attention. Focusing on the period 1908–45 and looking at the late Ottoman and early Republican periods as a continuum makes a lot of sense since the issues facing the ulema in both periods were essentially the same. They met with a quickening of the pace in a development that had already been there for half a century – the gradual erosion of the ulema's hold on the educational system, the legal system and the administration of the pious foundations (*evkaf*). The difference between the period 1908–18 on the one hand and 1923–45 on the other was that in the Second Constitutional Period the degree to which secularization should be an essential component of modernization was still hotly contested, while under the republic the power monopoly of the radical Young Turks around Mustafa Kemal Atatürk left no room for contestation. On the other hand, here too the continuity is perhaps greater than sometimes assumed: once the Unionists had established their own power monopoly in January 1913, they enacted legislation that presaged the Kemalists' policies of the 1920s. During the First World War, education, the sharia courts and the pious endowments were all brought under the jurisdiction of secular ministries.

Bein's most important finding is that it is definitely wrong to look at the late Ottoman and early republican ulema as a monolith, and even more wrong to see

them as the quintessential “other”, the antithesis the progressive secularist Young Turks, in either their Unionist or their Kemalist guise. He shows that the top ulema were deeply divided and that there were basically three currents, one deeply opposed to the secularization of the legal, administrative and educational system. The prime example of this current was Mustafa Sabri, who became şeyhülislam in 1919 but spent his life in exile during the republic. A second current identified closely with the Unionist and Kemalist regimes and enthusiastically embraced plans for the modernization of the Islamic institutions, including a bigger role for the Turkish language in worship and study of the holy texts. Musa Kazım, the Unionist şeyhülislam and reputedly a freemason, symbolized this group, as did Şerafettin Yaltkaya, the favourite theologian of the Kemalist regime. A third current, the largest by far, consisted of those ulema who aimed for compromise, accepting that political power was in the hands of the Unionists and Kemalists with their world view heavily influenced by materialism and positivism, but trying to retain a separate space for the religious establishment in which they could exercise a degree of independent authority. Ahmet Akseki, the long-serving Diyanet official, is a good example of this current, which of course came in for criticism from both sides.

The book’s focus is limited in the sense that it concentrates exclusively on the top echelons of the religious institution: the şeyhülislam, leading professors of theology, prominent Muslim intellectuals and high-ranking Diyanet officials. This omits the main body, the “rank and file” of the provincial ulema, which is a pity because it could be argued that it was in fact this part of the religious institution that underwent the greatest change. In the Ottoman Empire, the top of the religious establishment had been incorporated into the state to an extent that was unknown in earlier Islamic states, but this was not true for the lower-ranking ulema, who were generally independent of the state. These played a very important role in the mobilization of the population during the “national struggle” after the First World War (a topic not covered here) and were turned into members of a state bureaucracy for the first time with the establishment of the Presidium for Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in 1924.

Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic is nicely presented (although surely a more relevant picture than a shot of a clouded sky over modern Galata could have been chosen for the dust cover). The text, though never unclear, would have benefited from more thorough copy-editing on the part of Stanford University Press. This is a minor point, however, and it does not detract from the fact that Amit Bein’s meticulous study is without doubt an important contribution to the historiography of the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic that really fills a gap in our knowledge of the period.

Erik-Jan Zürcher

V. NECLA GEYIKDAĞI:

Foreign Investment in the Ottoman Empire: International Trade and Relations 1854–1914.

(Tauris Academic Studies.) xiv, 232 pp. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011. £54.50. ISBN 978 184885 461 1.

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Although Necla Geyikdağı is neither a trained economic historian nor an Ottoman historian, her book is generously praised by Feroz Ahmad in his foreword (pp. x–xi), which claims that it “fills a huge gap” in understanding the political economy