

## A Novel Study on the Dönme

This first scientific book is the fruit of many years' labor on the Dönme in the Republic of Turkey, and on the hostile attitude of the Muslim Turks toward them. Previous collections on the Dönme dealt primarily with this community in the Ottoman Empire, namely, on the uniqueness of Sabbatai Sevi and his disciples and descendants who converted to Islam in name but continued to observe Jewish commandments in great secrecy. The community's center was in Salonica, but with the Greco-Turkish population exchange that took place after the First World War all of the Dönme moved from Salonica to the Republic of Turkey and Bali's work concentrates on these Dönme.

Rifat N. Bali, born in 1948 and a graduate of the University of Paris, has already published many important studies on the Jews, a few on the Jews of the late Ottoman Empire and the great majority on those of the Republic of Turkey. His books and articles have appeared in Turkish and English. Among his books on the Jews of Turkey: "The Relations between Turks and Jews in the Republic of Turkey"; "The Trakya Events, 1934" is on the series of attacks organized against Jews; "The Varlik Vergisi Affair" is on the onerous tax that was imposed on the minorities in 1942; and the highly detailed bibliograph[-ies] in his books and articles in various languages on the Jews of Turkey that were published between 1993-2003.

Since the Dönme in Turkey are spread between different cities and try to continue to hide the main principles of their religious practice and their special customs researchers have found it difficult to learn the details of their lives and to [gain entry into their inner circle]. Researchers have therefore [been forced to] rely on the writings and utterances that the Dönme have revealed about themselves, which are few in number, and on the utterances of their opponents which are more numerous and occasionally illustrated [?]. Bali has taken great effort to read these sources and although he cautiously but courageously engages the writings of the Dönmes' detractors and gives a reply to their wild ideas and fantastic fabrications. Bali also shows that the circles in Turkey that slander the Dönme are exactly the same circles—sometimes even the same people—who employ anti-Semitic speech against the Jews of Turkey and of the world, as well as against the State of Israel.

Those who hate the Dönme, the Jews and the State of Israel come from three different political currents: the Far Left, which is influenced by the Left in Europe; the Far Right, which is possessed by a nationalist world view that desires to rid Turkey of 'foreigners'; and Radical Islam, which wants to see an Islamic Turkey and seethes in anger against the Dönme, who in their opinion have returned to Judaism and have thereby severely transgressed the laws of Islam. Moreover, there are Turks who are jealous of the economic success of the Dönme who are close to them, of their advanced culture (by virtue of their own schools) and their personal isolation (separate graveyards of their own). Bali produces a large selection of these charges and presents them with a scholarly skepticism, as well as bringing out additional information on the Dönme themselves.

Actually, much can be learned about the Dönme of Turkey on the basis on the reactions of those among them that have agreed to come out publicly through the pointing out of details of their involvement in Turkish society and even their assimilation into it through intermarriage with Muslim Turks. As an

example of the former above the case of Ahmet Emin Yalman can be instructive. Yalman was the editor of a major daily who in 1937 responded to the uproar against him by admitting to his Dönme origins, even though he stressed that the Dönme had largely abandoned their unique customs and traditions and were attempting to integrate into the larger Turkish society.

The discrimination against the Dönme in the public arena also possessed an economic aspect. In November 1942 the Turkish parliament enacted a new tax, the Varlık [Vergisi], whose rates for Muslims were tolerable, but on the Dönme the rate was double (and a tax four times as large as that of Muslims was imposed on the Jews). In the following year the Dönme became the scapegoats of a campaign of slander by the Right-wing, Nationalist and Islamic Radical press and authors. Since the end of the Second World War a variety of articles and other publications—including some weighty works—whose authors claim to reveal the alleged evil intentions and criminal conspiracies [?] of the Dönmes of Turkey. Several of the authors claimed, whether truthfully or not, that they have are renegades from the Dönme and are therefore somehow qualified to speak on the matter.

In most of the written works hostile to the Dönme they are accused of immorality and disloyalty [toward the state and the Muslim majority?], and—even worse: to desire to control and rule Turkey (a small number of the authors claimed that the Dönme are already in control of the country) and it is claimed that they have created a well-directed and coordinated underground conspiracy. In order to ‘prove’ their claims the accusers even accuse that even their political rivals of being Dönmes. The Jews of Turkey are subjected to the same extreme language as the Dönme; in other words, a campaign of anti-Semitic slander that is nourished also by European sources has been and continues to be run, both against the Dönme and the Jews.

The Dönme and the Jews in Turkey have only occasionally responded, and in general , in muted tones. Bali produces ample details on some of these reactions, but does not explain the reasons for their infrequency and restrained nature. The reason for this is probably is that the Dönme have been afraid of being exposed among the Muslim public, while the Jews, who are only some 20,000 in number, have generally preferred to endure the attacks against them and to let them pass [in the hopes] that they will [soon] be forgotten instead of responding and thereby allowing them to continue, as the ensuing scandal is liable to harm them.

The book also contains a number of appendices, a glossary and an excellent bibliography of 20 pages and a 12-page index of names and subjects. This book should be translated into Hebrew.