

Bir Günah Keçisi: Munis Tekinalp

Rıfat N. Bali

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Rıfat N. Bali, an independent scholar who lives in Istanbul, has here produced a major work. A graduate of the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, Bali is today probably the most productive historian of the Jewish population of the late years of the Ottoman Empire, and, more particularly, of the Republic of Turkey. He has published several books and numerous articles on various subjects relating to this theme, in Turkish and in other languages. Of these perhaps the most useful is a 432-page *Bibliography of Books, Theses and Articles Published in Turkey Concerning Judaism 1923–2003* (Istanbul: Turquaz, 2004), a *sine qua non* reference work for any serious study of Jews in the Republic of Turkey.

Bali has now written a three-volume (1220-page) work whose title translates as *A Scapegoat: Munis Tekinalp*. This is a monograph on Moiz Cohen, *alias* Munis Tekinalp (his pen-name) together with a collection of almost all his writings. Tekinalp (1883–1961) was one of the few Jews in the Republic of Turkey who was deeply committed to writing about the politics of the state; most other Jewish intellectuals shunned political involvement. Despite his relevance as an ideologue in the late Ottoman Empire and the first generation of the Republic of Turkey, only one monograph has been written about Tekinalp (by the present reviewer) in English,¹ later translated into Turkish.² and a novel about his life.³

Tekinalp's significance has two aspects. First, his many writings in favour of late Ottoman policies and afterwards his persistent defence of Kemalism. Secondly, his urging of the Jewish community in the Republic to Turkicize itself, chiefly by wholeheartedly adopting the Turkish language in daily use – as a sign of cultural identification with the nationalist policies of the state leadership. Tekinalp was almost alone in the Jewish community in these activities and, of the few who were with him, decidedly the most articulate and prolific.

Bali's three volumes are divided as follows: Volume 1 discusses Tekinalp's written work urging Jews in the republic to Turkicize. This is followed by an analysis of Tekinalp's ideas as expressed in his writings, and by the texts of certain reactions to his ideas, some of them quite aggressive. Bali then discusses Tekinalp's own writings, presented in the second and third volumes of the work.

Volume 2 contains Tekinalp's two manuscript diaries. The first, covering the years 1907 to 1911, was written in French, and Bali gives it in the original language with a Turkish translation. The second, much longer, covers the years 1946 to 1959 (that is, shortly before Tekinalp's death) and was originally written in Ottoman Turkish. It is rendered here in Romanized script. Both diaries attest to the author's commitment to public affairs in a patriotic vein – even when he was merely scribbling for himself.

Volume 3 is a collection of what seem to be all of Tekinalp's newspaper articles, composed in the same style as his other writings but with a perspective apparently intended to encourage and praise the republic's economic progress, mostly during the Second World War and soon afterwards.

An interesting feature of volume 1, in addition to Bali's own perspicacious evaluation of Tekinalp's ideological stance, is a collection of articles by other Turks about Tekinalp and his ideas. Many of them attack Tekinalp and his views, sometimes unrestrainedly. This is probably why Bali titled his book *A Scapegoat: Munis Tekinalp*. Bali likes to emphasize the scapegoat element of Jews in the Turkish republic. He has in fact written a book about the pseudo-Jewish sect, the Dönmes, under the title *A Scapegoat for all Seasons: The Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2008). My only criticism of the present work is the title, for the importance of Tekinalp in Turkey's ideological debates is in his own writings rather than in those criticizing him. Otherwise, this is a scholarly, comprehensive work, meticulously researched, presenting and analysing the works of an interesting representative of Istanbul's Jewish community, and making known his ideological perceptions which can still be profitably studied today.

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Notes

1. J.M. Landau, *Tekinalp, Turkish Patriot 1883–1961* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1984).
2. J.M. Landau, *Tekinalp Bir Türk Yurtseveri (1883–1961)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1996).
3. L. Behmoeras, *Bir Kimlik Arayışının Hikâyesi* [The Story of a Search for Identity] (Istanbul: Remzi, 2005).