The Jews and Prostitution in Constantinople, 1854-1922
Analecta Isisiana: Ottoman and Turkish Studies

A co-publication with The Isis Press, Istanbul, the series consists of collections of thematic essays focused on specific themes of Ottoman and Turkish studies. These scholarly volumes address important issues throughout Turkish history, offering in a single volume the accumulated insights of a single author over a career of research on the subject.
The Jews and Prostitution in Constantinople, 1854-1922

Rifat N. Bali

The Isis Press, Istanbul

2010
Born in 1948 in İstanbul. Graduate of Sorbonne University Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. Author of numerous articles, editor of several books. His areas of studies are: History of the Jews of Turkey in the Republican period, lobbying activities of the Turkish, Jewish, Israeli and Armenian non governmental organizations, Turkish media. He is the author and editor of the following books:

*Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri – Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni 1923-1945*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları), 1999; *Musa’nın Evlatları Cumhuriyet’in Yurttaşları*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları), 2001; *Les Relations Entre Turcs et Juifs dans la Turquie Moderne*, (İstanbul: İstis Yayınları), 2001; *Tarz-ı Hayattan Life Style’a — Yeni İnsanlar, Yeni Mekanlar, Yeni Yaşamlar*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları), 2002; *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri – Aliya: Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü 1946-1949*, İletişim Yayınları, 2003; *Anadolu’dan Yeni Dünya’ya, Amerika’ya Göç Eden İlk Türklerin Yaşam Öyküleri*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları), 2004 (This book was awarded the Yunus Nadi 2005 prize in the category of Social Sciences Research); *Türkiye’de Yayınlanmış Yahudiilikle İlgili Kitap, Tez ve Makaleler Bibliyografyası (1923-2003)*, (İstanbul: Turkuaz Yayıncılık), 2004; *Avram Benaroya: Un Journaliste Juif Oublié Suivi de Ses Mémoires*, (İstanbul: Les Editions Isis), 2004; *Devlet’in Yahudileri ve ‘Öteki’ Yahudi*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları), 2004; *Ümit Kivanç’a Cevap Birikim Dergisinin Yazılıdıği Makalenin Öyküsü*, İstanbul, 2005; *The "Varlık Vergisi" Affair: A Study On Its Legacy Selected Documents*, (İstanbul: The Isis Press), 2005; *Maziyi Eşelerken*, (İstanbul: Dünya Kitapları), 2006; *US Diplomatic Documents on Turkey — I — Turkish Students' Movements and Turkish Left in the 1950's - 1960's*, (İstanbul: The Isis Press), 2006, *US Diplomatic Documents on Turkey — II — The Turkish Cinema in the Early Republican Years*, (İstanbul: The Isis Press), 2007; *US Diplomatic Documents on Turkey — III — Family Life in the Turkish Republic of the 1930’s*, (İstanbul: The Isis Press), 2007; *US Diplomatic Documents on Turkey — IV — New Documents on Atatürk — Atatürk as Viewed by American Ambassadors*, (İstanbul: The Isis Press), 2007; *Saray’ın ve Cumhuriyet’in Dişçibaşı*, Sami Günsberg, (İstanbul: Kitabevi), 2007.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PLACE OF THE JEWS IN THE PROSTITUTION MARKETPLACE OF CONSTANTINOPLE</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;MICHEL SALOMONOVICH CHEF DES MARCHANDS D'ESCLAVES ET AGENT DE LA POLICE SECRÈTE À CONSTANTINOPLE&quot; Edited by ALBERT ETTIGES</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;REPORT OF AN ENQUIRY MADE IN CONSTANTINOPLE&quot; BY S. COHEN</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;PROSTITUTION&quot; by CHARLES TROWBRIDGE RIGSS</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABBREVIATIONS

H.E. : His Excellency
H.M. : Her Majesty
METU : Middle East Technical University
NARA : National Archives and Records Administration
YMCA : Young Men’s Christian Association
INTRODUCTION

When the phrase “prostitution in Turkey” is mentioned, the first place that comes to mind is the city of Istanbul (or, perhaps, its previous incarnation Constantinople) and in particular, its well-known ‘European’ districts of Beyoğlu and Galata. The brothels that were active in the aforementioned districts were restricted to specific streets within each of these districts until the 1960s. As a result, the names “Abanoz street” (in Beyoğlu) and “Zürafa street” (in Galata) are immediately called to mind when speaking about this phenomenon. In addition to the locales, two names in particular come to mind, Şaziye Topçu, also known as “Lüks Nermin”, the owner of Istanbul’s most famous bordello of the 1950s, and Matild Manukyan, the well-known madame and (for a time) the person who led all others in taxes paid. These names were so familiar to the average Turk that they have actually found a place in the country’s popular culture and parlance. “Lüks Nermin” was even mentioned by name by then-Indonesian President Ahmet Sukarno (1901-1970) when, during his 1959 visit to Turkey, he expressed his desire for a girl with whom to spend the night. In response, Topçu sent Sukarno one of her girls from his brothel. After the president’s return to Indonesia Nermin was arrested when it came out that Sukarno had contracted gonorrhea from the woman. As for Matild Manukyan, in a country famous for its tax evaders, she became famous in Turkey as much for her punctiliousness in paying her record tax debts than as the leading madame.

Existing Sources

Despite the fact that Turkish popular culture has immortalized the districts, streets and even specific brothels, and that Hülya Avşar, perhaps Turkey’s most famous celebrity and actress, has been asked to star in a film about the life of Matild Manukyan, there does not presently exist any published research whatsoever on either the brothel owners or other famous

1 For a short biography of her see: Matild Manukyan (1914-2001) see: http://www.biyografi.net/kisiyazdir.asp?kheriid=1209
2 In the Ekşi Dictionary, (http://sozluk.sourtimes.org) which is very popular with university students, there are 25 entries on Matild Manukyan, and four on Lüks Nermin.
personalities connected to this profession. This situation would seem to indicate the following truth: the history of prostitution has remained one of the subjects that researchers in the area of social history have found of little interest. A glance at the recent academic and popular studies that have been written would show that, in general, if there is any interest in the subject of prostitution, it is for the phenomenon in our day. One of the likely reasons for this is the paucity of primary sources with which to work.

When perusing the existing publications that have treated the world of prostitution in Turkey (and these primarily deal with Constantinople), the first thing one notices is just how few such works there are. One of the studies in this field that is frequently cited is a 1987 article by Bosphorus University Professor Zafer Toprak. The article itself was to a great extent based on an article dealing with the world of prostitution found in the book *Constantinople Today* or *The Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople* (edited by Clarence Richard Johnson), which provided a ‘topography’ of social conditions in Istanbul in the 1920s. Zafer Toprak also published two encyclopedia articles on the subject that were based on his original research, although both of these pieces suffered from the liability of being reformatted in order to conform to the respective encyclopedias’ formats and requirements. In his book on 19th century Beyoğlu, Mimar Sinan University Professor Mustafa Cezar devoted one chapter of the book to the subject of prostitution. In the chapter section titled “The Less Attractive Sides of Beyoğlu” (*Beyoğlu'nun Simasının Sevimsiz Tarafları*) Cezar groups these “less attractive sides” into two categories: (a) those deriving from the hegemony of foreigners in Beyoğlu (or, by its former name, ‘La Grande Rue de Pera’) or the adulation and admiration felt toward these foreigners; and (b) the phenomenon of prostitution. When discussing prostitution, the author seems to largely rely on the aforementioned 1987 Zafer Toprak article.

---


4 Mustafa Cezar, *XIX. Yüzyıl Beyoğlu*, (İstanbul: Ak Yayınları), 1991, p. 430.

5 Mustafa Cezar, op.cit. p. 445.
Other sources frequently cited on this subject include Murat Bardakçı’s *Osmanlı’da Seks* (“Sex Among the Ottomans”) (1995), Refik Ahmet Sevengil’s *İstanbul Nasısl Eşleniyordu* (“How [Old] Istanbul Used to Enjoy Itself”) (1985), Giovanni Scognamillo’s *Beyoğlu’nda Fuhuş* (“Prostitution in Beyoğlu”) (1994) and Ahmet Refik’s famous *Dünkü İstanbul’da Hovardalık Fuhş-i Atik* (Traditional Forms of Debauchery and Prostitution in Old Istanbul”) (1st printing 1340/1922). While the serious researcher will find scattered bits of information in these four works, there is precious little information on how this netherworld of the sex trade functioned.

**Non-Muslims and Prostitution**

Until the first years of the Turkish Republic, there were a considerable number of non-Muslims—Greeks, Armenians and Jews—active in all aspects of Istanbul’s sex trade, whether as brothel owners, procurers or prostitutes. The most recent and, as previously mentioned, best known representative of this tradition in the Istanbul Armenian madame Matild Manukyan. In regard to the disproportionate minority representation in this trade, the few existing sources all agree, and this reality has also been reflected in a number of Turkish novels dealing with Beyoğlu. According to a study of Turkish novels set in Beyoğlu, of the 34 non-Muslim protagonists found in these novels, thirteen were brothel owners, while another three were prostitutes.1 Nevertheless, one fact that seems to have escaped all researchers and historians is that those controlling the ‘white slavery’ business in Istanbul in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were foreign Jews living in Istanbul. This phenomenon will be the subject of this study.

The first person to draw my attention to the significant place of Jews in Constantinople’s sex trade was Professor Heath Lowry. One summer day several years back I met Professor Lowry for the first time at Simurg Bookstore, one of Istanbul’s meeting points for scholars, researchers and book lovers. During the course of our conversation he made mention of Edward J. Bristow’s *Prostitution and Prejudice The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery 1870-1939* and the author’s claim that Constantinople was one of the principal centers of the white slave trade during that period. My interest piqued, I secured the work and began my research on the topic. I published my first article on the subject (in Turkish) in 2003.

---

This present book consists of four sections: the first one represents a reworked and expanded version of the aforementioned Turkish article; the second section is a reproduction of the complete text of a report published by an “S. Cohen, Secretary of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women” in the wake of his 1914 visit to Constantinople; the third part is comprised of a section on prostitution from of an article by Charles Trowbridge Riggs titled “Adult delinquency” from Clarence Richard Johnson’s edited work Constantinople Today or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople A Study in Oriental Society; finally, the fourth section consists of a pamphlet by M. Albert Ettiges concerning a white slaver by the name of Michael Salomonovich (alias “Michael Pasha”) that I was led to as a result of a footnote citation in the book by Bristow. In his footnote Bristow mentions the author of the pamphlet but was unable to determine its location. A copy of the pamphlet, which I tracked down to the Austrian National Library, is reproduced at the end of the book. In remaining faithful to the original text no clarifying corrections or alterations have been made.

I would like to thank my friend and colleague Paul Bessemer for translating the book’s introduction, its first section, “The Place of the Jews in the Prostitution Market Place of Constantinople” from the original Turkish and the article by Alphons Sussinski from German into English, Susan Strange for scanning the photos of the white slave traders from the National Archives at College Park, Maryland and Carren Kaston for introducing me to Susan Strange.
THE PLACE OF THE JEWS IN THE PROSTITUTION MARKET OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Constantinople as a Center of White Slave Trade

A common assessment of nearly all of the studies of the sex trade in Constantinople in the 19th and 20th centuries is that non-Muslims held a prominent place in this profession, but none of them fully emphasized or focused on the full role of the Jews. Nevertheless, between the years 1880 and 1939 the Jews played a disproportionately large role both in the white slave trade and in its geographic breadth. The territories and countries of Galicia, Austria, Poland and Rumania were not only significant places of Jewish settlement, but also areas in which the commerce in women was most widespread. The white slavers who were active in Vienna would find women in Bohemia, Galicia and Hungary and send them to Constantinople via circuitous routes in order not to arouse suspicions as to their true purpose. Some of those girls arriving in Constantinople would then be sent on to Cairo, others to Trabzon. The city of Salonica, of whose population the Jews were a majority, was also a city notable for its widespread sex trade and in which the Jews dominated the market. Professor Mark Mazower describes the sex trade in Salonica thus:

An unusual threat, no doubt, and one which testified not only to the authorities’ repressive instincts where women were concerned, but also to the important place occupied by prostitution in the interwar economy of the city: there were no less than 48 licensed establishments in 1928 and

---


3 Edward J. Bristow, op. cit., p. 48.