

Ali Erken. *America and the Making of Modern Turkey: Science, Culture, and Political Alliances*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018. 226 pages. ISBN: 9781788311700.

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On a sunny winter day in 1927, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938), the founding president of the Republic of Turkey, hosted American ambassador Joseph Grew (d. 1965) at the Forest Farm in Ankara. Democratic by nature, he declared, the Turks and Americans could erase old prejudices and forge a world of peace and prosperity. Ninety years later on another sunny day in 2017, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited American President Donald Trump at the White House in Washington, DC. Due to their upholding of common interests and democratic values, he iterated, Turkey and America are vital to global peace and stability. From Atatürk to Erdoğan, Turkey's highest office solicited cooperation from its American counterpart. Given this mutual desire and vision, the Turks and Americans have remained allies ever since that early sunny day so long ago. And yet we know little about why they get along and how they work out their differences.¹

Ali Erken's new book *America and the Making of Modern Turkey* is a narrative of the hard facts that a bilateral alliance registered atop benevolence manifested by both sides. From the beginning of the Turkish Republic, American benefactors gave Turkish beneficiaries major resources to modernize their country posthaste. By tracing these transactions, the author explores "in what ways American philanthropy complemented the political vision of the Turkish ruling elite" (1). At the juncture of Turkey's construction and US expansion, Erken reveals a fascinating network of intellectual, financial, and political exchanges.

Tapping thick descriptions from the archives of the Ford Foundation, Robert College, and the Rockefeller Foundation, he argues that transatlantic dialectics were

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1 "Incredible Turk" (National Security Council, Central Intelligence Agency, ARC 651784 / LI 263.2028); "Trump Welcomes Erdogan amid US-Turkey Strains," *Cable News Network* (CNN), 16 May 2017.

based on knowledge networks – a dynamic phenomenon that, formed by “makers of Modern Turkey and US political-intellectual elites,” functioned as checks and balances (148-49). Orbiting the concept of scientific progress, he reveals various projects related to national development, education, and health. Analysis of these projects gives the reader a historical overview alongside a focused discussion of many characters and their joint ventures, such as the Ankara Science College and the Middle East Technical University.

One measure of development is the quality of health. In a country rushing for rapid growth, public health is an even more critical arena worthy of attention. The first chapter, “Science and Medicine,” describes how the support of the Ford and Rockefeller foundations enabled some notables to make giant strides in preventive medicine, hygiene, and sanitation. For instance, İhsan Doğramacı (d. 2010), Nusret Fişek (d. 1990), and other fellows founded and operated urban and teaching hospitals. Tellingly, along with factories and highways, balance sheets classified these hospitals as items to chart Turkey’s progress.

Another indicator of progress is the quality of education. In the post-Ottoman world, an American-style education could lay the groundwork for creating Turkey’s industry, technology, and transportation. The second chapter, “Remedies of Underdevelopment,” demonstrates that for Turkish elites, infrastructural development proved to be possible as long as philanthropists supplied them with sufficient resources. Founded in 1956, the Middle East Technical University embodied such good prospects.

Although President Celal Bayar (1950-60) reiterated Turkey’s commitment to free enterprise and the free world during his 1954 US tour, foreign investors were still hesitating to penetrate Turkish markets. At this historic moment, the chapter “Age of Experts” illustrates the significance of American enterprise with a view to fostering business, management, and the social sciences. For instance, the Ford Foundation and others strategically invested in ambitious programs such as the Istanbul Institute of Business Administration, and industrious scholars such as Sabri Ülgener (d. 1983) who, as an international fellow, attended the Harvard School of Business Administration. Frequent and intense visits to the US also helped Turkish leaders and scholars develop relations, models, and skills, and apply them upon their return.

Relating to the ongoing debates over science and religion, the final chapter “Humanities and Westernization” addresses how much Turks gained from the American experience. Strikingly the Turkish elites, those members of the educated,

secular, and pro-Western minority class, tended to emulate American culture while scrapping their own.

All challenges and prospects considered, the book concludes that a time-honored alliance between Turkey and the US is both here and bound to stay for good, whether it be against old prejudices or for prosperity and global peace.

In praising the book, historian Şükrü Haniogru says that it delivers “a key insight in understanding political relations between Turkey and the United States after 1923.” Indeed, it may well do that for general and advanced readers. I nonetheless recommend Erken’s study not because it is “well-crafted, tightly argued, and rigorously executed” (ii), but because it is an important study in that it may stimulate further discussion and future research, as well as raise more questions than answers, on this rich transhistorical subject. While reading it, for instance, many readers will try to probe the intriguing surge of nationalism and Islamism in a modern secular country where a scientific entity supposedly superseded the dogmatic identity of a forgotten past.

We ought to locate Turkey-US relations in a larger context by asking questions about ways to reconcile mutual benevolence with controversial US foreign policies and mortal Turkish campus protests during the Cold War. Defining the Marshall Plan as a “sign of good will” in particular, should we regard the elites and philanthropists as holding out a metaphorical olive branch in this story of Turkey’s upward march on the ladder of races and progress? In a broader and deeper view of history as well, much of the continuities and ruptures seem to defy both casual observation and singular causes (see pp. 4-7 for the author’s analysis of Stalin’s death, Turkey in Korea, and Bayar in the US).

Following an analogy made by Mark Bristol (d. 1939), an American diplomat also mentioned in the book, the Ottoman Middle East was “a hornet’s nest,” one filled by “[Turkish] Moslems as hornets” and “stirred up by a small boy,” that is the Christian races. The hornets succumbed to “brutal instincts and fanatical ideas” and the small boy called “the Allies” to “come save him” from being stung by the hornets and yet, “the Middle Eastern races were all alike.” If all these races needed US benevolence after World War I, then why did the Turks deserve special treatment? And how did the US agency, including a discrete group of politicians, merchants, and missionaries, concur in privileging Turkey above other nations in the region?²

2 Mark Lambert Bristol, “War Diary, 25 October 1920,” quoted in Robert Shenk, *America’s Black Sea: The U.S. Navy and Revolution, 1919-1923* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 52, 218; for a potential

Regarding American missionaries, it is difficult to imagine their missions aligning with Turkey's secular vision. Above and beyond espousing Heather J. Sharkey and Mehmet Ali Doğan's polarizing perspective, we should define the terms and content of "a more positive image" that the missionaries helped to "build" (3). A case in point is Cyrus Hamlin (d. 1900), who resigned from the American Board organization after fellow missionaries rejected his proposal to establish "Robert College," a non-religious secular college. Given this, how should we make sense of his *Life and Times*?³ In this case, it may be helpful to imagine some other missionaries as not compromising their religious missions and even considering leaving Turkey – which happened in 1924, when they literally moved the Marsovan Anatolia College from Turkey to Greece.⁴

Ultimately these questions are a testament to the importance of the book. Interested readers may also want to look at other good works by Arnold Reisman, Begüm Adalet, Emrah Şahin, Michael Oren, and Walter Mead. Meanwhile, Ali Erken's *America and the Making of Modern Turkey* serves as a welcome introduction to studies of Turkey, a modern country that has been allied with the US from its very beginnings.⁵

future study of Bristol's complex ideas regarding race, religion, and massacre in the Middle East, see "Mark L. Bristol Papers, 1882-1939," available in Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

- 3 Cyrus Hamlin, *My Life and Times* (Boston and Chicago: Congregational Publishing Society, 1893).
- 4 Mehmet Ali Doğan and Heather J. Sharkey, eds., *American Missionaries in the Middle East: Foundational Encounters* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011); and a critical review of the field's literature, in Emrah Şahin, "Sultan's America: Lessons from Ottoman Encounters with the United States," *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* vol. 39 (2014): 55-76, esp. 57-9.
- 5 Arnold Reisman, *Turkey's Modernization: Refugees from Nazism and Atatürk's Vision* (Washington, DC: New Academia, 2006); Begüm Adalet, *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* (California: Stanford University Press, 2018); Emrah Şahin, *Faithful Encounters: Authorities and American Missionaries in the Ottoman Empire* (Montreal, Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018); Michael Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, reprint (New York: Routledge, 2009).