

Forced Knowledge Transfer: Ancient Near Eastern Studies and German (Jewish) Displaced Scholars in Türkiye in the 1930s and 1940s*

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In the early 1930s, the Republic of Türkiye became a significant refuge for Jewish and oppositional scholars escaping Nazi persecution in Germany. Negotiations led by German pathologist Philipp Schwartz facilitated the relocation of around 1,000 academics to Türkiye, primarily to Istanbul and Ankara. This article focuses on two displaced German (Jewish) scholars in the discipline of Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Benno Landsberger, one of the most significant figures in the field of Assyriology, was removed from his position at Leipzig University by the Nazi regime in 1935. He secured a professorship in Ankara, where he established contact with the charity organization *Notgemeinschaft Deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland* (Emergency Association for German Scholars Abroad). Landsberger played a pivotal role in mentoring refugee scholars, including his former student Fritz Rudolf Kraus, who was employed by the Turkish Ministry of Education at the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul.

This article builds on the case studies of Landsberger and Kraus to explore the dynamics of knowledge production and transfer within Türkiye, particularly in the context of the experiences and contributions of displaced scholars. It focuses on the center-periphery relations between Istanbul and Ankara, elucidating how the dichotomy between the former Imperial capital and the emerging Republican center impacted the arrival and work of refugee academics. This micro-historical approach to the presence and impact of Landsberger and Kraus in Türkiye aims to examine a pattern of mentorship and knowledge transfer, Orientalist perspectives, and their implications for work relations. It uncovers the complex interactions between local and global actors, such as charity organizations, refugees, researchers, and state institutions, amidst the contentious identity policies prevalent in the first decades of the Kemalist Republic.

Keywords: forced academic migration, knowledge transfer, ancient Near Eastern studies, Türkiye, displaced scholars

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In September 1938, Aziz Ogan (1888–1956), the director of İstanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri (Istanbul Archaeological Museums), submitted a letter to the Turkish Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı (Ministry of National Education). In this document, Aziz Ogan indicated that he had received information regarding the recruitment of a certain “Vilhelm Kraus from Germany, who would take care of the conservation of metal and earthenware artefacts for a salary of 280 Lira.”¹ The director expressed his apprehension regarding the decision to appoint a German scholar, a choice made in Ankara without prior consultation with the Directorate of Museums in Istanbul. He highlighted a Turkish employee who possessed comparable qualifications, had completed the necessary training in Germany, and was already active in the museum’s laboratory as a specialist, drawing a salary of 150 Lira.² Against this background, as Aziz Ogan argued, hiring an expatriate at considerable expense would “discourage our current employees.”³ Furthermore, Kraus had already worked in the museum for one year and, according to the director, had not made a significant impact, having failed to produce a complete inventory of the clay tablets. Eventually, Aziz Ogan questioned the rationale behind bringing in foreign expertise when domestic scholars had already demonstrated value in their roles.

Given that there was no individual by the name of Vilhelm Kraus in the museum’s staff, Aziz Ogan was most likely referring to Fritz Rudolf Kraus (1910–1991), who joined the institution in 1937, following the mediation of his former supervisor and mentor, the Assyriologist Benno Landsberger (1890–1968).⁴ Landsberger and Kraus were scholars who had no prospects at German universities and research institutions due to the National Socialist regime and its discriminatory, racist, anti-Semitic policies. In 1935, the Nazis had already forcibly dismissed Benno Landsberger, a professor of Oriental Philology at the University of Leipzig, from his academic position. Despite having been shielded from premature retirement due to his military service in World War I, Landsberger received notification on April 29, 1935 from Martin Mutschmann (1879–1946), the Governor of Saxony, indicating his retirement as of April 10, a decision

1 Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Arşiv ve Dokümantasyon Merkezi, Aziz Ogan Koleksiyonu (hereafter BÜADM-AOK), OGNIST0103802, Aziz Ogan to Saffet Arkan, no place, 3.9.[1]938.

2 BÜADM-AOK, OGNIST0103802, Aziz Ogan referred to Nurettin Akbulut (1898–1977). For Akbulut’s contribution to conservation of cultural assets in Türkiye: Yarlıgaş, “Türkiye’de Kültür Varlıkları Konservasyonunun.”

3 BÜADM-AOK, OGNIST0103802, Aziz Ogan to Saffet Arkan, no place, 3.9.[1]938.

4 For biographical overviews, see Veenhof, “Fritz Rudolf Kraus,” 262–65; Güterbock, “Benno Landsberger,” 203–6.

sanctioned by the Ministry of National Education.⁵ This action drew upon the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, enacted on April 7, 1933, to lend an appearance of legal legitimacy to the process.⁶ The suddenness of his retirement prompted Landsberger to consider returning to his birthplace of Frýdek in Czechoslovakia, but ultimately, he opted to accept a professorship in Ankara.⁷ In Türkiye, Benno Landsberger made significant contributions to the academic landscape and played a crucial role in supporting fellow displaced scholars, leveraging his connections within Turkish governmental circles to advocate for the further admission of refugees to the country. In 1937, two years after his arrival, he brought his former student Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Istanbul as an employee of the Archaeological Museums. From 1941, Kraus held a teaching position at Istanbul University. During his time in Türkiye, Kraus navigated a complex relationship involving his superiors based in Istanbul and various archaeologists and state representatives in Ankara. He stayed until 1949, when he was appointed associate professor of ancient Semitic philology and Near Eastern archaeology at the University of Vienna. One year earlier, Landsberger had already moved to the Oriental Institute in Chicago.

This brief narrative offers an example of the ways in which the admission of refugee scholars was marked by significant conflict, particularly in the context of Istanbul's Arkeoloji Müzeleri. This situation was shaped by two primary forces: the forced academic migration of German scholars fleeing Nazi Germany and the authoritative power and control exerted by Ankara's Ministry over Istanbul's museums, wherein the ministry made personnel decisions unilaterally without consulting the museum directorate. Additionally, factors such as the German-Ottoman/Turkish rivalry, as well as cooperation in archaeology and museums, influenced this dynamic. The Orientalist attitudes of the incoming scholars towards their Turkish colleagues and superiors further complicated the professional landscape within the institution.

Against this background, with a focus on Archaeology and Assyriology, this article examines the migration of displaced scholars and the forced transfer of knowledge to the Bosphorus region, situating it within the broader context of nation-building and its impact on Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Türkiye. It explores the implications of historical German-Ottoman relations, Orientalist

5 University Archive Leipzig (hereafter UAL), PA 0676, 85, Geyer to Benno Landsberger, Dresden, April 29, 1935. See also: UAL, Data Sheet Benno Landsberger, Leipzig, n. date, *ibid.*, 1.

6 UAL, PA 0676, 85, Geyer to Benno Landsberger, Dresden, April 29, 1935.

7 Vacín, *Landsberger*, 5 and 65.

perceptions, and the dynamics of the center-periphery relations regarding Istanbul and Ankara. Against this backdrop, this study examines Landsberger's contributions to the careers of his former students in Ankara and Istanbul. This initiative underscores the importance of mentorship, knowledge transfer and dissemination in advancing archaeological scholarship. It sheds light on relations between local and global actors and intergovernmental, state, and non-state organizations. Notably, students such as Fritz Rudolf Kraus played a significant role in transmitting their expertise to the Archaeological Museum in the former Ottoman capital while also engaging academically at the university. In this context, the analysis explores how the dynamics of the center-periphery relationship shaped his activities and experiences in Istanbul.

*German (Jewish) Academic Migration to Türkiye:
Arrival on the Shores of the Bosphorus*

In the 1930s, Türkiye was perceived by many German displaced scholars as a marginal academic environment, positioned at the periphery of Europe with no “European” academic tradition. This perception led many scholars to pursue opportunities in regions viewed as more prestigious, such as the United Kingdom or the United States.⁸ However, Türkiye evolved into a crucial node for professional prospects and support networks that provided essential aid for refugees. This development presented a viable means of evading Nazi persecution amidst the genocidal threats prevalent in the area dubbed the Bloodlands by historian Timothy D. Snyder.⁹ To outline the emergence of Türkiye as a significant haven for refugee scholars, we need to direct our gaze to events that unfolded in Zurich in early 1933.¹⁰

8 Fischer-Defoy, “Notgemeinschaft,” 31; Widmann, *Exil und Bildungshilfe*.

9 Snyder, *Bloodlands*.

10 In this context, it is important to note that Türkiye also served as a refuge for Hungarian academics persecuted by the Nazi regime. For instance, in 1934, the legal scholar András Bartalan Schwarz (1886–1953) accepted a position as an instructor of Roman and comparative law at *İstanbul Üniversitesi*. In 1933, he was deprived of his professorship at the University of Freiburg (Breisgau) by the National Socialists. He subsequently migrated to England, where he taught in London and Oxford. Hamza, “András Bartalan Schwarz (1886–1953).” Furthermore, the Turkish government invited Hungarian experts to assist in the modernization of different sectors of the country, including the system of higher education, administration, and infrastructure. Emre Saral provides a “List of Hungarian experts appointed by the Council of Ministers.” Saral, “Türkiye-Macaristan ilişkileri,” 472–96. For general research on Hungarian-Turkish relations in the 1930s, see: Karagülmez, *Türkiye-Macaristan siyasi ilişkileri* and Çolak, “Atatürk döneminde kültürel, siyasi ve ekonomik bakımdan Türk-Macar ilişkileri (1919–1938).”

In the spring of 1933, Philipp Schwartz (1894–1977), a professor of Pathology at the University of Frankfurt, received alarming warnings from a colleague regarding his imminent arrest by Nazi authorities.¹¹ Consequently, Schwartz made the decision to flee Germany, relocating with his son to Zurich. They found refuge in the residence of Schwartz’s in-laws, where his wife and daughters joined them shortly thereafter.¹² Although the immediate threat of persecution seemed diminished in Zurich, Schwartz was persistently confronted with distressing reports about the suspension, expulsion, arrest, maltreatment, and suicides of university faculty across Germany.¹³ By April 1933, he had observed that many of his colleagues, typically engaged in academic pursuits in cities such as Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, and Würzburg, had been displaced and were seeking work in Switzerland. Faced with the inadequate responses regarding the integration of refugees into Swiss universities, Schwartz and fellow professors recognized the necessity of taking matters into their own hands.¹⁴ Shortly after his arrival in Zurich, Schwartz, alongside notable figures such as Max Born (1882–1970), Kurt Goldstein (1878–1965), and Siegfried Walter Loewe (1884–1963), cofounded the Beratungsstelle für Deutsche Wissenschaftler (Advisory Point for German Scholars).¹⁵ This initiative later evolved into the aforementioned Notgemeinschaft Deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland, which became a vital resource for German-speaking scholars fleeing persecution.¹⁶

Within a few months, the organization had compiled a comprehensive card index cataloguing individuals at risk, including some already detained in Germany or seeking asylum in exile. With the establishment of this “self-help” organization, Schwartz received counsel from Josef Messinger, the cantor and religious teacher of the Jewish community in Bern. Messinger advised Schwartz to collaborate with Albert Malche (1876–1956), a Swiss educational reformer who was tasked with restructuring the Turkish university system in 1931.¹⁷ Prior to 1931, the

11 Schwartz, *Notgemeinschaft*, 39; Pauli et al., “Philipp Schwartz,” 550.

12 Schwartz, *Notgemeinschaft*, 40.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Archiv für Zeitgeschichte (hereafter AfZ), ETH Zürich, Schriftgut: IB JUNA-Archiv/HD 1167, Uebersicht über die Tätigkeit der Notgemeinschaft Deutscher Wissenschaftler im Auslande, Zürich, während des Jahres 1933/34, Zürich, 1. Mai 1934, 1. See also: Benzenhöfer et al., *Goldstein*, 24, footnote 36; Schmidt, “Fritz Rudolf.”

16 Schwartz, *Notgemeinschaft*, 42; Fischer-Defoy, “Prolog,” 11; Guttstadt, *Türkei*, 213; Benzenhöfer et al., *Goldstein*, 23–26.

17 AfZ, Schriftgut: IB JUNA-Archiv/HD 1167, Uebersicht über die Tätigkeit der Notgemeinschaft 1933/34, Zürich, 1. Mai 1934, 1. See also: Peukert, “Einleitung,” 12. In detail: Schwartz, *Notgemeinschaft*,

Turkish system of higher education was centered around one university established during the Ottoman era in Istanbul. However, this institution was perceived as a challenge to the Kemalist leadership in Ankara.

The Dârülfünûn-i Şahane (Gate of Sciences) in Istanbul, established in 1900 and modeled after the French educational system, had become increasingly contentious in the face of Türkiye's modernization efforts. Although the university initially maintained some autonomy amid the Kemalist reforms, it gradually became associated with an anti-Kemalist, reactionary and conservative faculty.¹⁸ In light of ongoing reform discussions and particularly following Malche's proposals, the Turkish government sought to recruit foreign scholars willing to relocate to Istanbul, ultimately aiming to dissolve the Dârülfünûn in favor of a newly established university that would be able to compete with "Western" standards.¹⁹ In 1933, Malche set out to begin a contracted tenure in Istanbul to initiate this transition.²⁰ With the assistance of the Swiss reformer, Schwartz engaged with representatives of the Turkish Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı and eventually with its Minister of Education, Reşit Galip (1892/93–1934).²¹ Supported by Galip, Schwartz successfully negotiated the candidacies of approximately 30 scholars for positions in Istanbul.²² This development allowed the Turkish government to implement significant reforms in its higher education system, and, most importantly, to abolish the former Ottoman Dârülfünûn.

Schwartz later characterized the negotiations as a reciprocal exchange between "two organisms in solidarity."²³ During their discussions, Galip referenced the fifteenth-century expulsion of Byzantine scholars from Constantinople and its subsequent impact on the Renaissance. He argued that by welcoming these scholars and thus fostering the knowledge transfer initiated by the expulsion of German scholars by the Nazi Regime, Türkiye would be positioned to "receive a gift in return from Europe."²⁴ This arrangement proved mutually beneficial:

41–43. See also: Guttstadt, *Türkei*, 212–14; Kreft, "Der vergessene Retter," 124–25. About Messinger, see: Abelin, "Messinger, Josef."

18 Guttstadt, *Türkei*, 212–13, 213 Fn. 204. About *Dârülfünûn's* history: Kuran, "Küçük Said Paşa," 125; İhsanoğlu, *Dârülfünun*; İhsanoğlu, *The House of Science*; Yalçın, *Entwicklungstendenzen*.

19 Guttstadt, *Türkei*, 213.

20 T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Cumhuriyet Arşivi (hereafter TCDA-CA), Ankara, 30-18-1-2/34-16-7, Decree Mustafa Kemal, Ankara, 13 March 1933.

21 Schwartz, *Notgemeinschaft*, 44–45.

22 Ibid., 45.

23 Ibid., 46.

24 Ibid., 47.

while the Notgemeinschaft facilitated the employment of numerous professors in Türkiye, the Turkish government could leverage their expertise to initiate educational reforms. Schwartz captured the successful outcome in the phrase “not three, but 30,” indicating that a total of 30 professors at risk of Nazi persecution would be offered positions in Türkiye.²⁵ The outcome of these negotiations alleviated concerns for both Malche and representatives of the Notgemeinschaft.²⁶

Ultimately, the Dârülfünûn was officially dissolved on July 31, 1933, resulting in the dismissal of 157 faculty members, including 71 full professors.²⁷ This action underscored the government’s dedication to reimagining higher education in alignment with its modernist agenda. On August 1, 1933, İstanbul Üniversitesi officially opened its doors, marking a new chapter in Türkiye’s academic landscape. While 27 Turkish professors were employed, 38 foreign professors started at the newly established university on the shores of the Bosphorus, where they engaged in various disciplines, including medicine, natural sciences, law, economics, and the humanities.²⁸ For the employment of foreign scholars, Ankara spent 2.4 million Turkish pounds between 1934 and 1938.²⁹ The German Foreign Office initially viewed the emigration of German scholars to Türkiye positively, hoping it would enhance diplomatic relations with a potential ally against the Soviet Union. However, the appointment of predominantly Jewish academics sparked suspicion among Nazi officials. Following a failed attempt in 1934 to influence Ankara’s modernization efforts regarding İstanbul Üniversitesi, Herbert Scurla (1905–1981), a government councilor in the German Ministry of Education, was commissioned to inspect Türkiye in 1939.³⁰ His mission aimed to influence appointment policies, but he encountered resistance from Turkish politicians. In the same year, many five-year fixed-term contracts for German-

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 47–48.

27 Schwartz, *Notgemeinschaft*, 41–43; Peukert, “Einleitung,” 12; Guttstadt, *Türkei*, 212–14; Konuk, *Auerbach*, 61.

28 Fischer-Defoy, “Notgemeinschaft,” 31; Fischer-Defoy, “Prolog,” 11; Erichsen, “Deutsche Wissenschaftler,” 41.

29 Fischer-Defoy, “Prolog,” 11; Konuk, *Auerbach*, 50.

30 The report signed by Jürgens, a Foreign Office’s employee, does not have a date but mentions a visit to Istanbul from June 5 to 13. Although the specific year is not stated, it was likely 1934. The report serves as documentation for an oral report titled “Notes on Constantinople.” Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter PA-AA), RAV 107/163, n. pag., Notes on Constantinople, no place, no date. For Scurla’s mission, see Fischer-Defoy, “Prolog,” 11. For in depth research on the so-called “Scurla-Report,” see Grothusen, *Der Scurla-Bericht* and Şen and Halm, *Exil unter Halbmond und Stern*.

Jewish academics were extended. Simultaneously, Ankara used expiring contracts to enforce expulsions, particularly targeting Jewish refugees, highlighting the contradictory dynamics of academic migration and political pragmatism.³¹

In 1933, Schwartz himself migrated to Istanbul, where he assumed the position of Head of the Department of Pathology at İstanbul Üniversitesi and played a key role in the establishment of its medical faculty. As a representative of the Notgemeinschaft, Schwartz continued to provide support to members of his network (individuals who were victims of Nazi persecution) as they navigated their transition into exile in Türkiye. While economist Fritz Demuth (1876–1965) took over the Notgemeinschaft's chairmanship, first in Zurich and later in London from 1936 onwards, Schwartz remained the organization's representative in Istanbul.³² This role transformed the Notgemeinschaft into an advisory entity, facilitating interactions between Turkish state and governmental institutions and persecuted scholars. In collaboration with Malche, Schwartz was instrumental in laying the groundwork for academic appointments within Türkiye. His efforts thus contributed significantly to providing a temporary avenue of opportunity for a select group of persecuted academics, making him a crucial arrival broker.³³ He played a pivotal role in organizing the immigration of refugee scholars fleeing Nazi rule to Türkiye. Following the establishment of İstanbul Üniversitesi, this initiative facilitated the systematic placement of scholars, their assistants, and family members in exile.³⁴ Consequently, the Republic of Türkiye served as a largely temporary sanctuary for scholars escaping the oppressive climate of Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945. During this time, approximately 800 to 1,000 German-speaking academics found refuge in the country, aided significantly by the Notgemeinschaft. It soon took part in a global response to this emerging forced academic migration, as various charity and self-help organizations were established across Europe and the United States to support and facilitate opportunities for those affected.³⁵ As part of a global network of charity organizations, its offices in Zurich, New York, and Istanbul became pivotal points of contact, providing recommendations to universities and developing support systems for persecuted academics.³⁶

31 Fischer-Defoy, "Prolog," 11; Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin, *Haymatloz*, 34.

32 Demuth, "Emigration," 10. See also Neumark, *Zuflucht am Bosphorus*; Möckelmann, *Wartesaal Ankara*.

33 For the concept of the "arrival broker," see Hans, "Arrival brokers," 381.

34 Schwartz, *Notgemeinschaft*, 44–50; Guttstadt, *Türkei*, 213.

35 Lühr, "Solidarity."

36 Demuth, "Notgemeinschaft," 10–12.

The collaboration between the *Notgemeinschaft* and the Turkish government merged into the recruitment of a significant number of displaced German scholars across various disciplines by Türkiye. From the perspective of the Kemalist regime, these scholars served the national initiative, which was to professionalize the system of higher education in Türkiye. It is important to note that from the outset, the Turkish government anticipated that the foreign experts, who were referred to as such in official contexts rather than as refugees or displaced scholars, would serve in Türkiye for a designated period. Their primary role was to educate future Turkish elites who would subsequently assume responsibility for the training of Turkish academics. Furthermore, these scholars were expected to adhere to the national agenda of fostering a homogenized Turkish identity. This expectation was particularly pronounced within the domain of archaeology, especially concerning the interpretation of ancient civilizations, but also the management of Ottoman heritage. The dissolution of the Ottoman university represents a significant component within the broader context of Ankara's multifaceted social, historical, and sociopolitical interventions.

The Kemalist Approach to the Ottoman Legacy

Kemalist nation-building was characterized by a pronounced suppression of Ottoman heritage, yet, as articulated by Hakan Yavuz, the “imperial ghost” continued and continues to haunt both the Turkish state and Turkish society, a phenomenon that has persisted since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.³⁷ The origins of this haunting can be traced to the transition from empire to republic, which was fundamentally a “top-down initiative.”³⁸ This metamorphosis was predicated on a policy of state-imposed amnesia: “The legacy of the Ottoman Empire, along with its cultural practices, was never fully debated due to the Republic’s policy of ‘forgetting the Ottoman past’ to forge a new national and secular (Turkish and Western) identity.”³⁹ Although secularization efforts within the museum sector in Istanbul had commenced during İkinci Meşrutiyet, the post-1908/09 revolutionary Second Constitutional Period, museum stakeholders resisted the complete erasure of the Ottoman era from collective memory. This perspective underscores the Müze-i Hümayun’s (Imperial Museum) role in showcasing ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman art, which

37 Yavuz, *Nostalgia*, 6.

38 *Ibid.*, 6.

39 *Ibid.*

was subsequently demoted yet maintained as a testament to a diminishing imperial legacy. The emphasis on preserving Islamic art from specific historical periods (specifically Seljuk and Ottoman) represented a preliminary step in the nostalgic reclamation of other historical eras.⁴⁰ Through the preservation and musealization of Islamic relics, museum director Halil Edhem (1861–1938) advocated for an understanding of Islamic rule as a shared yet predominantly influential past in shaping Ottoman identity. This focus on the construction of a “national heritage” ultimately served to legitimize the power of the Turkish Sunni elite over the diverse ethnic mosaic of the empire’s territorial expanse. An increasing opposition to European influences within the Ottoman Empire emerged, particularly on the eve of World War I.

Despite the political and geographical changes, exhibitions of prestigious artefacts continued to convey the cultural significance of regions or states. Halil Edhem, alongside his long-time collaborator Aziz Ogan, adeptly navigated the evolving political landscape to retain their scholarly agency. Collectively, they undertook a mission to excavate Türkiye’s ancient history, emphasizing the crucial role of Turkish archaeology in the national historical narrative.⁴¹ Although Ankara emerged as the focal point for these efforts, former Ottoman officials aligned themselves with the “socio-political agenda of creating a national identity from the outset” of the Turkish Republic.⁴² As Zygmunt Baumann later outlined, the aims of nationalism materialized in the 1920s and 1930s,⁴³ wherein, with regard to Türkiye, the primary objective of the national archaeological museums’ politics of memory was to validate the nation’s claims to territorial sovereignty.⁴⁴ This aim is encapsulated in the comments of Selahattin Kandemir in his 1933 work “Etiler” (Hitler; Hittites): “A tree that doesn’t have its roots deep in the soil cannot grow. The root of national power is national identity. What creates national identity is national history.”⁴⁵

Turkish archaeologists collaborated across disciplines with scholars and intellectuals to construct a unified historical narrative. Their collective efforts culminated in the establishment of the Türk Tarih Kurumu (Turkish History Society) on June 4, 1930. One of the foundational aspirations of the early

40 Willert, “Nostalgizing,” 19–24.

41 Tanyeri-Erdemir, “Archaeology,” 381.

42 Ibid., 382.

43 Baumann, *Retrotopia*, 80.

44 Willert, “Nostalgizing,” 20.

45 Kandemir, *Etiler (Hitler)*, 3. Also quoted in Tanyeri-Erdemir, *Archaeology*, 382.

Republican nationalism was to encompass a broad array of cultures and historical lineages within the national narrative. The *Türk Taribinin Ana Hatları* (Outline of Turkish History), completed in 1930, articulated a comprehensive territorial definition of the homeland of all Turks, asserting that “the homeland of the Turks is Asia.”⁴⁶ Building on this premise, the publication addressed the influence of the “Turks” on various civilizations within this expansive continental context. This work laid the groundwork for the *Türk Tarih Tezi* (Turkish History Thesis), which permeated educational materials. In essence, the thesis romanticized and glorified Turkish history, positing that the Turks were an ancient people whose origins lay in Central Asia. Through a series of migrations, they eventually populated regions extending to present-day Türkiye, enriching local civilizations across diverse territories from China and India to the MENA region, the Balkans, and parts of Europe.⁴⁷ The thesis also contended that the Turks were direct descendants of the Hittites and Sumerians, thereby legitimizing their influential role across various civilizations and territories, including the Aegean.⁴⁸ Ultimately, this thesis functioned as a justification for territorial claims in Anatolia, while also reflecting a yearning for a homogenous society, representing the Turks as the “legitimate heirs” to these ancient civilizations.⁴⁹

The first two decades of the Turkish Republic marked a significant chapter in the intersection of archaeology and national identity in Türkiye. This era was characterized by two primary objectives: the Kemalist initiative to forge a national identity and the simultaneous efforts to erase the Ottoman legacy. The Turkish state actively utilized archaeology as a tool for nation-building, prompting extensive efforts by archaeologists to uncover material evidence that would support this narrative. During this timeframe, several Turkish archaeological excavations were undertaken at sites deemed important to contribute to the burgeoning narrative of Turkish nationalism.⁵⁰ The process of de-legitimizing the Ottoman legacy within the Republic of Türkiye reached its peak in the educational sector in 1933, when the Kemalist government made use of the recruitment of German displaced scholars to systematically dismantle the

46 Türk Tarih Kurumu, *Türk Taribinin Ana Hatları*, 275.

47 Ibid. For a short discussion on its contents, see Tanyeri-Erdemir, *Archaeology*, 382.

48 Türk Tarih Kurumu, *Türk Taribinin Ana Hatları*, 275; Tanyeri-Erdemir, *Archaeology*, 382; Dinler, “The Knife’s Edge of the Present,” 739.

49 Dinler, “The Knife’s Edge of the Present,” 740.

50 Among them were sites such as Göllüdağ, Alacahöyük, Ankara, and Sarayburnu (Istanbul). Tanyeri-Erdemir, *Archaeology*, 384. See also Dinler, *The Knife’s Edge of the Present*, 741.

Dârülfünûn-i Şahane. This symbolized a significant power transition from the former Ottoman capital to the new republican center. Ankara, a remote Anatolian town during the Ottoman period, emerged as the epicenter of modern, secular republicanism, deliberately distancing itself from Istanbul's imperial legacy. This shift consolidated power in Ankara, marginalized the Ottoman legacy in the former capital on the shores of the Bosphorus, and established a new center-periphery dynamic. As Ankara became the political capital, it redefined the relationship between the two cities, positioning itself as the focal point of political authority while Istanbul remained the cultural and economic hub. This ongoing contention over resources and influence mirrored deep divides, which were further manifested in the positioning and personnel policies within museums.

Cultivating Foreign Expertise in Türkiye

“There is no doubt,” wrote Aziz Ogan to the Minister of National Education, Saffet Arıkan (1888–1947), in 1936, “that great importance has been attached to antiquities and museum affairs in our country since the proclamation of the [Turkish] Republic.”⁵¹ Expressing his regret over not having had the opportunity to meet with Arıkan in Ankara, the director of Istanbul's Archaeological Museums emphasized that the minister had committed to visiting the museum in Istanbul. However, Aziz Ogan aimed to highlight an urgent issue regarding the education and training of Turkish students in the field of archaeology. He noted that while many young Turkish scholars were pursuing degrees in various archaeological departments, there was a critical need for the cultivation of qualified experts capable of conducting scientific research and the dissemination of knowledge on valuable and rare artefacts housed in Turkish museums. This included carpets, manuscripts, miniatures, weapons, ceramics, and tiles of Iranian, Chinese, Japanese, and European origins. Aziz Ogan stressed the importance of swift action in addressing this gap, stating, “If we are to rely on the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, I regret to say that we have no experts knowledgeable about the aforementioned works in the Topkapı Sarayı [Topkapı Palace] and other museums, nor do we have individuals capable of comprehending literature in Western languages pertinent to these subjects.”⁵² Consequently,

51 BÜADM-AOK, OGNIST0103802, Aziz Ogan to Saffet Arıkan, no place, 10.8.[1]936.

52 Ibid.

Aziz Ogan urged the minister to prioritize “that a few of the young people sent to Europe for education should be trained as Orientalists,” thereby enhancing the expertise available in Türkiye’s cultural heritage institutions.⁵³

In the 1930s, Turkish students participated in various exchange programs. However, Aziz Ogan’s call for a structured transfer of knowledge from Europe to Türkiye, specifically concerning the education of Turkish students in Archaeology, yielded outcomes that diverged from his original intentions. Notably, a significant number of displaced German (Jewish) scholars who sought refuge in Türkiye included experts in disciplines such as Archaeology, Assyriology, and Near Eastern Studies. These scholars shared their expertise with Turkish students, but they also supported and fostered their own professional networks, thereby influencing the academic environment in their host country. The contributions of refugee scholars to the formation of arrival infrastructures in Türkiye are poignantly illustrated through the case study of Benno Landsberger, who migrated to Ankara in 1935, approximately one year before Aziz Ogan reached out to Saffet Arıkan. Although the specific circumstances surrounding Landsberger’s initial contact remain unclear, it is plausible that the *Notgemeinschaft* might have played a role in facilitating Landsberger’s appointment as a professor at the newly established Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi (Faculty of Language, History, and Geography).⁵⁴ Faced with uncertainty regarding the acceptance of this invitation, Landsberger ultimately made the decision to move to Ankara, motivated by the hope to engage in scholarly endeavors in a peaceful setting.⁵⁵ Upon his arrival in Türkiye, Landsberger encountered substantial challenges associated with forced migration and the practicalities of a forced knowledge transfer, particularly the language barrier. It was difficult for him as an exiled scholar to access his research materials, as he had been separated from these resources due to his displacement. To mitigate this, he organized shipments of his books from Saxony to Ankara and the purchase of parts of the library of his deceased academic teacher Heinrich Zimmern (1862–1931) to lay the foundation for his academic work in exile.⁵⁶ Moreover, the abrupt interruption of his research activities in Leipzig significantly impacted him, especially as his former

53 Ibid.

54 Reismann, *Turkey’s Modernization*, 62; Vacín, *Landsberger*, 66.

55 Vacín, *Landsberger*, 66–67; Streck, “Altorientalistik,” 358.

56 Archive of the Institute for Near Eastern Studies of Leipzig University, Landsberger Archives (hereafter AINES-LU), no. 3, Benno Landsberger to Karl Friedrich Müller, Friedek, September 17, 1935. Material accessible online via <https://www.gkr.uni-leipzig.de/en/draft/altorientalisches-institut/forschung/landsberger-archives>; Vacín, *Landsberger*, 69.

institution denied him the opportunity to continue supervising his doctoral students.⁵⁷ In December 1935, Landsberger communicated a sense of “despair” in a postcard to a student, expressing his isolation from academic developments in Germany and the lack of interaction with colleagues.⁵⁸ He made efforts to maintain correspondence with former colleagues and students, despite the restrictions imposed by the National Socialist Regime that effectively precluded his return.⁵⁹

Early in his exile, Landsberger voiced considerable anxiety regarding the prospect of isolation and his perception of being relegated to the periphery of the academic community to which he was accustomed. He felt increasingly disconnected from his prior projects, colleagues, and students. For Landsberger, as for many other academics seeking refuge in Türkiye, the country was initially envisioned as a temporary refuge, merely a stepping stone towards potential relocation to the United States. Consequently, he wrote an application for the position of “Chair for Semitic Languages” at Columbia University in New York shortly after his arrival in Ankara. Although the application is undated, it was likely composed in 1936.⁶⁰ While this attempt to emigrate was either never thoroughly followed by Landsberger or ultimately unsuccessful, it may have facilitated his gradual acclimatization to his new environment. Subsequently, Landsberger made significant strides to adapt to life in Türkiye, acquiring proficiency in Turkish and beginning to teach and publish in the language.⁶¹ Additionally, he encountered further obstacles, particularly in the realm of archaeology, as scholars at Turkish universities were expected to align their research with national priorities. In this context, Landsberger was confronted with a central goal of early republican nationalism, which aimed to create a homogeneous cultural identity that would establish a historical connection to the state’s territory by constructing a coherent national narrative.

57 UAL, PA 0676, fol. 103, Göpfert to rector of Leipzig University, Dresden, June 15, 1935.

58 AINES-LU, no. 8, Benno Landsberger to Karl Friedrich Müller, Ankara, December 19, 1935.

59 Ibid.

60 AINES-LU, no. 5, Benno Landsberger to Columbia University, no place, no date. On May 22, 1936, the chair holder Richard James Horatio Gottheil (1862–1936) died, leaving the professorship vacant. Bloch, “Gottheil,” 2–3; Oelsner, “Benno Landsberger.” Vacín contended that Landsberger ultimately “dropped the idea” of migrating to the United States. Landsberger communicated to Kraus that he was “not active enough” to pursue this idea. This statement may imply that he either did not exert sufficient effort in completing the application or chose not to submit it, leaving the draft unaddressed. Vacín, *Landsberger*, 66, fn. 246 and 73 fn. 268; Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, Ankara, June 18, 1939, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 383.

61 See for example Landsberger, *Sam’al. Karatepe*.

The state-sponsored focus on ancient civilizations, notably the Sumerians and Hittites, as the foundational roots of the “Turkish people” underscores a selective disregard for other significant ancient cultures. Landsberger critically examined the role of the Faculty of Language, History, and Geography at Ankara University, established in the academic year 1935–1936, asserting that its primary aim was to reinforce the prevailing state ideology.⁶² As previously outlined, this state initiative involved the construction of a narrative that emphasized the perceived superiority of Turkish culture through historical and linguistic research.⁶³ In light of these developments, Mustafa Kemal (1881–1938) placed significant emphasis on the academic faculty. The passing of the Prime Minister in 1938 raised concerns for Kraus, who argued that the fields of Archaeology and Assyriology, represented by four professors in Türkiye, along with his own position at the museum, were a direct result of the Kemalist interest in archaeology and philology. Kraus feared that the future of these disciplines within the modern educational framework might be jeopardized or further constrained.⁶⁴

While acknowledging the criticisms of the nationalist objectives and scientific methodologies prevalent in Turkish scholarship, Landsberger also recognized Türkiye’s potential as a refuge for individuals escaping the persecution of the Nazi regime in the mid-1930s. He identified a unique opportunity to act as a broker for refugees, advocating for the needs of persecuted Jews by facilitating local support systems and coordinating employment contracts. Fritz Rudolf Kraus, a former student of Landsberger at Leipzig University, was among the scholars whom he helped secure a position in Türkiye.

62 AINES-LU, no. 1, Benno Landsberger to Karl Friedrich Müller, Ankara, December 12, 1937. Modern research examines the role of the Faculty regarding the construction of a Turkish identity. In this regard, Hayriye Erbaş portrays the Faculty as “a cornerstone of the Republic,” underlining its role to enforce state ideology. Erbaş, *Bir Cumhuriyet Çınarı*. Close ties existed between the Ministry of Education into the Faculty, parts of it served as “kind of a think tank of the Republic.” Xypolia, “Racist Aspects of Modern Turkish Nationalism,” 118–19.

63 Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache*, 16–52; Strohmeier, “Wissenschaftsemigranten,” 72.

64 Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Werner Kraus, Istanbul, November 10, 1938, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 298.

Fritz Rudolf Kraus in Istanbul

As an arrival broker, Landsberger played a crucial role in preparing, negotiating, and concluding Kraus's contract, despite his former student's hesitation regarding the work contract and the inherent relocation to Istanbul. Before agreeing to sign the contract, which was initially limited to ten months, Kraus sought the opinion of his former professor. From Ankara, Landsberger referenced the views of Paul Koschaker (1879–1951), a lawyer and legal historian affiliated with the University of Leipzig and subsequently with the Seminar for Oriental Legal History in Berlin.⁶⁵ Aware of the limited options available to those facing persecution, Landsberger encouraged Kraus to sign the contract. Additionally, he provided Kraus with essential practical advice concerning his impending arrival in Istanbul.⁶⁶

In preparation for his possible relocation to the Bosphorus, Kraus undertook several inquiries in Leipzig. He solicited his father's opinion by sending a draft of the contract with Reşat Şemsettin (1903–1953), a representative from Ankara's Ministry of Education. He also took into consideration the necessary permits for his travel, including the deregistration from military service. He meticulously measured his books to ascertain the logistics of their shipment to Istanbul.⁶⁷ Ultimately, Landsberger succeeded in persuading Kraus to accept the position in Türkiye, reiterating the importance of signing the contract.⁶⁸ Landsberger further recommended that Kraus establish contact with his future employer, the archaeologist Aziz Ogan, prior to his departure for Istanbul.⁶⁹ Eventually, on July 14, 1937, Kraus formalized his contract with the Turkish Ministry of Culture in the building of the Turkish Embassy in Berlin, subsequently arriving in Istanbul on July 28 and commencing his work at the İstanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri on August 2.⁷⁰ Throughout his transitional process, Kraus received consistent

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid. See also: Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, Leiden, August 16, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 75.

67 Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Siegfried Kraus, Leipzig, June 23, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 53.

68 Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, Ankara, June 26, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 53–54.

69 Ibid., 55.

70 Notarized translation of the employment contract, July 14, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 58; Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Benno Landsberger, Istanbul, August 10, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 64; Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Benno Landsberger, Istanbul, August 10, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 64; Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Werner Kraus, Istanbul, September 19, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 92. See also: Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Leonie Zuntz, October 7, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 103.

support from his doctoral supervisor, Landsberger. This assistance included recommendations for local contacts and a commitment to provide financial support until Kraus received his first salary, facilitating his settlement and the management of living expenses.⁷¹ Notably, Kraus arrived in Istanbul without any financial reserves, having not received payment by the end of August 1937, which led him to accept Landsberger's offer.⁷² Additionally, as noted by Jan Schmidt, Kraus benefited from financial aid provided by the Notgemeinschaft during his time in Istanbul.⁷³

The correspondence between Landsberger and Kraus also contained internal information regarding work contexts in Istanbul and Ankara. Kraus reported to Landsberger that he had had a conflict with his supervisor, Aziz Ogan, on the very first day of his appointment, suggesting that the clash could have been avoided had he possessed more experience in the "Orient."⁷⁴ Kraus expressed dissatisfaction with his superior's apparent lack of commitment and voiced concerns over the task of cataloguing the museum's entire collection of clay tablets, a duty that fell short of his professional expectations and standards. He relayed that such a task could be accomplished by anyone, implying a perceived misallocation of his expertise.⁷⁵ Kraus further highlighted the inadequacy of Ogan's understanding of the necessary actions and objectives associated with the role, pointing to an arrogance and Orientalist perception on his part in relation to his Turkish supervisor.⁷⁶ In contrast, Aziz Ogan brought considerable experience to the role, having trained under Halil Edhem, the director of the Müze-i Hümayun (Imperial Museum, now İstanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri) in Istanbul, and, eventually, becoming his successor as museum director in Istanbul. Aziz Ogan was instrumental in advocating for the autonomy and independence of Ottoman archaeology against foreign influences, actively opposing the paternalistic attitudes and notions of inferiority promoted by Prussian-German archaeologists toward Ottoman and Turkish scholars.⁷⁷ Aziz Ogan had collaborated with German archaeologists on efforts to preserve archaeological sites in Syria in 1917–18, and after 1923, Ogan played a significant

71 Ibid., 54–55. See also Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, Ankara, June 26, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 55; Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, Leiden, August 16, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 75.

72 Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Benno Landsberger, Istanbul, August 25, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 82.

73 Schmidt, "Introduction," 25.

74 Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Benno Landsberger, Istanbul, August 10, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 64.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid., 65.

77 *Willert*, *Kulturbesitz*, 552.

role in establishing the Archaeological Museum in Smyrna/Izmir.⁷⁸ Both he and Halil Edhem later resisted the republican government's neglect of Ottoman heritage. During the Late Ottoman Empire, Aziz Ogan and Halil Edhem had disappointing encounters with Prussian-German archaeologists. The latter refused to perceive Ottoman colleagues as equals and prioritized the scramble for objects for their own metropole.⁷⁹ Potentially, the appointment of Fritz Rudolf Kraus was reminiscent of this unpleasant memory for the Turkish archaeologist Aziz Ogan, who perceived the presence of the young refugee scholar in his institution critically. However, he did not directly pursue Kraus's dismissal, but rather appeared to acquiesce to the presence of the foreign scholar and the role of the central government in Ankara in determining personnel choices.

Aziz Ogan expressed dissatisfaction regarding the decision by Ankara to employ German archaeologists at the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul, further complicating his professional engagement with Kraus.⁸⁰ From the onset of their collaborative work, contrasting perspectives on work and scientific endeavors emerged, resulting in initial tensions that also influenced relationships with other Turkish colleagues at the museum. Kraus perceived that Ogan regarded him as an unwelcome presence, a view compounded by the belief that he had been assigned to assist the director against his will and was viewed pejoratively as Landsberger's "young man," tasked with performing scientific labor. Kraus characterized the atmosphere at the Istanbul Museum as "hostile to Ankara and reactionary," suggesting a reluctance among staff to engage with him due to their perceived inadequacies in his field of expertise.⁸¹ He noted the overarching desire among Turkish colleagues to remain unperturbed by someone who was both diligent and knowledgeable, which he believed created a sense of embarrassment regarding their own professional capabilities.⁸² This climate was reflected in assertions made in articles published in the national daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* (Republic), which promoted the view that scientific contributions at Turkish

78 Willert, *Kulturbesitz*, 694–713; Willert, "Nostalgizing."

79 Willert, *Kulturbesitz*, 791–92.

80 Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, Ankara, May 14, 1942, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 822; Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, Ankara, May 30, 1942, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 828.

81 Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Hans Ehelolf, Istanbul, August 8, 1937, in: Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 70.

82 Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Benno Landsberger, Istanbul, August 10, 1937, in: Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 64.

universities should originate from capable “Turkish scholars” trained in Ankara, Istanbul, and Europe.⁸³

Kraus’s arrival at the museum coincided with the—for Kraus—unfortunate circumstance of Samuel Noah Kramer (1897–1990), a Sumerologist dismissed from the University of Chicago, being awarded a Guggenheim Foundation scholarship to research the clay tablet collection at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum from 1937 to 1938. According to Kraus, Kramer offered to undertake the cataloguing responsibilities assigned to Kraus, further complicating the position of the refugee scholar.⁸⁴ For decades, the tablets had received minor attention. A pivotal moment occurred when Landsberger dedicated his efforts to the collections and successfully obtained support from the Ministry of Culture and Education for systematic preservation and cataloguing. Landsberger’s commitment was not solely rooted in his passion for academic advancement; it stemmed from a desire to foster educational opportunities for his Turkish students and to employ Kraus.⁸⁵

Notably, Fritz Rudolf Kraus did not report any instances of anti-Semitic remarks or acts by his Turkish superiors or colleagues in his correspondence with Landsberger or family members. However, like many Jewish scholars in Türkiye, he spent his years in exile in a degree of isolation from Turkish society.⁸⁶ Despite professional contacts, his personal interactions primarily involved other foreign exiles, contributing to a sense of separation. The distanced position of many exiled scholars from non-persecuted Germans did not shield them from anti-Semitism in their immediate environment.⁸⁷ Kraus’s attempts to engage with Istanbul University for seminars and potential professorship were met with animosity from German professor Helmuth Bossert (1889–1961), who exhibited a widely criticized affinity for the National Socialist Regime and expressed reluctance to allow Kraus, whom he referred to derogatorily as a “half-Jew,” to participate in his academic seminars or assume a position as a colleague.⁸⁸ This

83 Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Hans Ehelolf, Istanbul, August 12, 1937, in: Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 70. See for example Nadi, “L’Université” and “La collaboration.”

84 Kramer, *In the World of Sumer*, 51–57; Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 70, fn. 32.

85 Schmidt, “Fritz Rudolf Kraus,” 11.

86 Hillebrecht, “Vertürken?,” 162–71.

87 The community of German refugees in Türkiye described themselves as “Colony B,” formed as a distinct group in opposition to a pro-National Socialist faction known as “Colony A.” The latter group persisted in Türkiye until 1945 and included official representatives of Nazi Germany and expatriate supporters of the Nazi state. Hoss and Büchau, “Deutsche Kolonie B,” 100–11.

88 Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Benno Landsberger, Istanbul, March 9, 1940, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 480.

resistance from Bossert, combined with the uncertain status of Kraus's contract, exacerbated the challenges Kraus faced during his period of exile. However, Bossert was employed by the Turkish government to publish Hittite sources, and he incited controversy with certain aspects of his theoretical contributions.⁸⁹

(En-)Forced External Expertise

Kraus's appointment by the Ankara authorities generated some concerns, particularly among the Museum's staff and Aziz Ogan. As noted at the beginning, the museum director informed Ankara of the presence of a Turkish employee assuming Kraus's responsibilities at a reduced salary. In seeking employees for the workshops at the museums, as Aziz Ogan underlined, the directorate would prioritize individuals who embodied modesty and were inclined to serve as assistants rather than those aspiring to senior positions with high salaries. Since the director's appointment at the museum, he was committed to sustaining the laboratory's operations, which played a pivotal role in training specialists from within the community of Turkish scholars. Aziz Ogan explained that his commitment would stem from his conviction that significant and reliable results could only be expected from individuals who were familiar with the Turkish language and cultural context. However, since he was unable to ascertain the exact impact of Kraus on the museum, he proposed that the directorate's perspective would be solicited regarding future personnel brought into the museum.⁹⁰

In his efforts to secure academic opportunities for Kraus, Benno Landsberger, Kraus's former doctoral advisor, lobbied the Turkish authorities and collaborated with Cevat Dursunoğlu (1892–1970), General Advisor for Higher Education Affairs at the Turkish Ministry of Education.⁹¹ Consequently, the decision was made to appoint Kraus to the Istanbul Archaeological Museums. This appointment, however, was executed unilaterally by the authorities and faced considerable opposition from the museum's administration, especially Aziz Ogan, who perceived it as a threat to his autonomy and asserted his right to manage personnel decisions independently.

The response to the complaint was unequivocal. On September 15, 1938, Saffet Arıkan addressed the matter by sending a letter to Istanbul. In his reply,

89 Notizen über Konstantinopel als Unterlage für mündlichen Bericht, o.O, o.D., PA-AA, RAV 107/163, 9.

90 BÜADM-AOK, OGNIST0103802, Aziz Ogan to Saffet Arıkan, no place, 3.9.[1]938.

91 Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, Leiden, August 16, 1937, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 75–76.

Arıkan acknowledged the request made by Aziz Ogan, expressing his esteem for the museum director as both a colleague and a friend. Nevertheless, he emphasized that he put his “primary duty above all else.” Ultimately, he insisted that he was “the superior who will decide whether to seek an opinion [...]”⁹² Arıkan concluded his message with a firm assertion of this commitment: “I hope this letter will be the first and last of its kind from you.”⁹³ There is no documented evidence indicating that Aziz Ogan made further attempts to appeal Kraus’s appointment. However, the museum director persisted in creating barriers for Kraus, notably by not applying in a timely manner for the extension of his contract upon expiration. The archival records substantiate Kraus’s unstable contractual status, particularly given that his contract underwent annual renewal between 1940 and 1949.⁹⁴ These manipulative tactics proved largely ineffective, however, as Kraus consistently secured contract renewals through his networks in Ankara, albeit often under conditions that provided only minimal stability.

Kraus sought to leverage his position and professional connections to influence not only the terms of his contract but also the personnel decisions within the museum. In April 1941, on the day of the signing of a new contract, Kraus wrote to his mentor, Landsberger, indicating that the new agreement was valid for only nine months, despite the Ministry of Culture having the authority to conclude a one-year contract. Kraus expressed his discontent with this small “‘security’- and recovery period,” labeling it “unpleasant.”⁹⁵ Additionally, the new contract introduced a stipulation that prohibited the publication of museum texts without prior permission, a restriction that extended beyond the duration of the contract itself, whereas previously, such a prohibition was applicable only during the term of the agreement.⁹⁶

92 BÜADM-AOK, OGNIST0103802, Saffet Arıkan to Aziz Ogan, no place, 15.9.[1]938.

93 BÜADM-AOK, OGNIST0103802, Saffet Arıkan to Aziz Ogan, no place, 15.9.[1]938.

94 See decrees and work permits signed by the president of the Republic of Türkiye, Mustafa İsmet İnönü (1884–1973); preserved in TCDA-CA, Ankara, 30-18-1-2/90-18-10, Ankara, February 28, 1940; *ibid.*, 30-18-1-2/99-69-19, Ankara, August 4, 1942; *ibid.*, 30-18-1-2/101-16-4, Ankara, March 6, 1943; *ibid.*, 30-18-1-2/101-33-8, Ankara, May 12, 1943; *ibid.*, 30-18-1-2/102-43-17, Ankara, June 15, 1943; *ibid.*, 30-18-1-2/105-38-13, Ankara, June 10, 1944; *ibid.*, 30-18-1-2/110-27-9, Ankara, April 14, 1946; *ibid.*, 30-18-1-2/116-20-4, Ankara, March 13, 1948; *ibid.*, 30-18-1-2/118-105-16, Ankara, March 19, 1949. Decree Mustafa Kemal, Ankara, 13 March 1933.

95 Fritz Rudolf Kraus to Benno Landsberger, Istanbul, 9.4.1941, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 712.

96 *Ibid.*

Kraus utilized his correspondence to convey information to Landsberger regarding recent personnel developments, particularly addressing “the question of müzecilik [museum service].”⁹⁷ In addition to his role in cataloguing clay tablets, Kraus’s new employment contract mandated that he also oversee the training of graduates in Sumerology and Assyriology. Kraus expressed concerns over the ambiguity of this requirement, characterizing the two academics involved, Muazzez İlmiye Çığ (1914–2024) and Hatice Kızılay, as “decent, well-behaved, docile,” yet he contested their ambition. He noted that their work ethic resembled “that of younger schoolchildren who have been left unsupervised for 14 months.”⁹⁸ Kraus further critiqued the prevailing practices within the museum, highlighting a pattern of tardiness and early departures among the staff. He gave an unfavorable evaluation of their performance, remarking that they typically managed to catalogue only 100 to 120 edited Boğazköy tablets, a figure he deemed inadequate, as he anticipated a yield three times greater.⁹⁹ Additionally, Kraus lamented a pervasive attitude centered on “hakkımız” (our rights), contrasting it with the absence of discourse regarding “vazifemiz” (our duties).¹⁰⁰

In his critique of academic education in Türkiye, Kraus underscored a prevailing tendency in the field that individuals were not expected to develop independent capabilities. Specifically, he noted that as “Etitoloji şubesi mezun” (Graduates of the Department of Hittitology), they had been assured of the opportunity to engage with Hittitological collections in cities such as Istanbul or Ankara. Nevertheless, their aspirations did not align with roles as museum officials; instead, they expressed a desire to collaborate on unedited Hittite texts. Kraus was tasked with providing private instruction in Akkadian and Sumerian, with the intention of transferring his expertise to these graduates. He expressed concern regarding their apparent reluctance to engage with subjects beyond their established focus. In this context, Kraus highlighted a critical discrepancy between his contractual obligations and the expectations placed upon him. According to a stringent interpretation of his employment agreement, he found himself under no formal obligation to assist the two graduates of Hittitology, who were anticipated to acquire knowledge of “müzecilik,” probably referring to the training in conservation, from him. This situation placed Kraus in a precarious position, as he was mandated to file monthly reports while being

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid., 713.

cognizant of a clause in his contract that allowed for dismissal without compensation on grounds of “muvaaffakiyetsizlik” (failure).¹⁰¹ Kraus ultimately conveyed to Landsberger that the Directorate of Antiquities in Ankara was progressing towards establishing a coherent concept, perspective, and commitment regarding the field of museum studies.¹⁰² He expressed dissatisfaction with the vagueness of the obligations outlined in his employment contract, seeking clarity regarding his responsibilities. Kraus remarked, “The emergence of the first graduates from the Ankyran [Ankara] faculty, who are now serving as the initial cohort of Turkish museum professionals educated in scientific methodologies yet lacking a clear vision of interest in their future careers, presents an unfortunate spectacle. They are essentially spending their time in museum positions, subsisting on modest state-provided salaries.”¹⁰³ Furthermore, Kraus emphasized the need for museum officials to receive proper training within Türkiye, urging Landsberger to advocate for this initiative in Ankara.¹⁰⁴

Kraus perceived his “museum service-duties” as a cumbersome obligation. To navigate this challenge, he proposed fulfilling his contractual requirements through a one-hour lecture.¹⁰⁵ Landsberger viewed this as a valuable opportunity for Kraus to expand his knowledge and remarked, “Should you acquire and disseminate a general understanding of museum practices, informed by the journals you have discovered and the numerous experiences you have gained from various museum impressions, it would be highly beneficial. Such an endeavor would neither hinder the consolidation of your expertise, as I had anticipated and you agreed upon, nor conflict with your contractual commitments.”¹⁰⁶

The correspondence ultimately highlights that Kraus aimed to utilize his time at the museum to impart his knowledge to Turkish experts. However, this desire for knowledge transfer was complicated by precarious employment contract conditions and ambiguous language regarding Kraus’s responsibilities. On the one hand, Kraus’s strong sense of duty motivated his commitment to the dissemination of knowledge; on the other hand, he harbored concerns about potential contractual repercussions (specifically, the risk of contract termination)

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., 714.

104 Ibid.

105 Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, Ankara, September 28, 1941, in Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 719.

106 Ibid., 720.

should he be deemed in breach of contract while working in Istanbul. In contrast, the situation in Ankara presented a different dynamic, as Landsberger found himself overwhelmed with a heavy workload, mainly focusing on the education of future Turkish Assyriologists. Landsberger expressed concern for the upcoming academic years, highlighting his commitment to completing “three to five doctoral theses, a history lecture, a history seminar, and various doctoral and other classes.”¹⁰⁷ In his correspondence, Landsberger addressed the involvement of Muazzez İlmiye Çığ and Hatice Kızılyay, referring to their role in the museum as the “chapter of deficiency.”¹⁰⁸ He assured Kraus of his intention to investigate the issue further and contended that the contributions of both women to the museum were limited. He proposed that one be reassigned to a different position, possibly as a librarian. Additionally, he recommended that the other focus on the organization of the clay tablet collection, suggesting her appointment as the administrator for this initiative.¹⁰⁹

The displaced scholars’ initiatives demonstrate that they actively sought to influence the personnel decisions within the museum, despite the repercussions these decisions had for Turkish employees. This engagement not only facilitated operational responsibilities but also contributed to enhancing the museum’s overall effectiveness and its training programs. Ultimately, the advocacy by Landsberger, who collaborated with Hans Gustav Güterbock (1908–2000) to lobby the ministry in Ankara, was pivotal. They persuasively contended that they had been given tasks that did not suit their expertise. Landsberger suggested appointing Hatice as Kraus’s assistant, while Muazzez was deemed “unsuitable” for roles as a librarian or bibliographer. Nevertheless, both scholars remained within the museum’s services and, in 1952, they collaborated with Kraus and later Landsberger to publish a work on clay tablets from Nippur.¹¹⁰

In addition to his museum work, Kraus, like Landsberger, received the chance to transition gradually to a more active role in teaching, and he was appointed by the university to teach courses in Ancient Near Eastern History. His lectures drew significantly on the discoveries made during his cataloguing endeavors in the Archaeological Museums. Kraus got his first experience as a teacher in 1940, when he participated informally and without compensation in

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

110 Çığ, et al., *Eski Babil Zamanına Ait Nippur Hukukî Vesikaları*; Çığ et al., *Eski Babil Zamanına Ait Nippur Menşeli İki Okul Kitabı*.

a seminar on the Cimmerians. Initially, Kraus instructed in German and utilized an interpreter to communicate with students. Eventually, he adapted and began delivering his lectures in Turkish. After approximately one and a half years of advocacy from Landsberger at the Ministry of Education in Ankara, Kraus secured a position as a paid assistant lecturer in Sumerian and Assyrian at Istanbul University in January 1942. The initial contract was set to expire on May 31, 1943, but it was subsequently renewed.¹¹¹ Kraus held his first class on March 9, 1942, within the Dolmabahçe Palace premises, as the old structure on the university campus in Beyazıt had been deemed unsafe and later succumbed to fire. He typically had between 30 to 50 students in his classes, predominantly female. The educational contributions of German Assyriologists, Hittitologists, and Archaeologists, including Landsberger, Güterbock, and Kraus, formed to a large extent the foundation for the study of Sumerology, Assyriology, and related fields in Türkiye. These academic disciplines continue to be a vital part of the curriculum at Turkish universities today. As Jan Schmidt noted, among the most notable students of Landsberger, Güterbock, and Kraus was Muazzez İlmiye Çığ, who was initially intended to be trained as a conservationist under Kraus’s mentorship. In addition, several other scholars engaged with Kraus during his presence in Istanbul, including Mustafa Kalaç, Halet Çambel (1916–2014), Emin Bilgiç (1916–1996), and Muhibbe Darga (1921–2018).¹¹²

Conclusion

The experiences of refugee scholars in Kemalist Türkiye during the 1930s and 1940s offer a revealing case study of significant and multifaceted engagement with forced knowledge transfer. The experiences of Benno Landsberger in Ankara and Fritz Rudolf Kraus in Istanbul exemplify the diverse attitudes of Turkish authorities, institutions, and colleagues toward foreign expertise, ranging from full support of newly arrived individuals to concerted efforts to impede their prospects. Simultaneously, the case studies of Landsberger and Kraus represent a pattern of knowledge transfer and show the impact of Jewish refugee scholars in Türkiye. While operating within the framework of Turkish state doctrine, which was centered around the homogenization of the country, both Landsberger and Kraus played instrumental roles in mentoring a generation of

111 Schmidt, “Fritz Rudolf Kraus,” 16.

112 Ibid., 16–17.

scholars, thereby ensuring the continuation and evolution of scholarly traditions in Türkiye. Ultimately, their contributions not only advanced the academic profession but also laid the groundwork for a scientific infrastructure that could compete on a global scale, echoing the aspirations of the Kemalist vision for a modern Türkiye. The arrival of persecuted scholars from Nazi Germany enriched the academic landscape in the host country and contributed to the modernization of higher education.

Despite varying degrees of acceptance, it is evident that Turkish authorities recognized the invaluable opportunity presented by these refugee academics and sought to harness their expertise to advance the nation's academic and identity-political ambitions. This strategic instrumentalization of the brain drain from Nazi Germany allowed the Turkish state to dismantle the remnants of the Ottoman *Dârülfünûn* and to implement crucial reforms that aligned with Kemalist ideals. The involvement of various state authorities on the Turkish side and the non-governmental *Notgemeinschaft* underscores the collaborative efforts that facilitated this transformative process. To facilitate the effective transfer of knowledge in Near Eastern Studies, Landsberger leveraged his distinctive position in Ankara to establish an infrastructure for newcomers. This initiative was supported by his network of contacts within Turkish ministries, enabling a robust framework for collaboration, influence, and information exchange. In this context, it is noteworthy that Landsberger relied on Cevat Dursunoğlu and Saffet Arkan to advocate on behalf of his protégés.¹¹³ Simultaneously, he engaged with the *Notgemeinschaft* to develop a support infrastructure that aimed to maintain a high degree of independence from Turkish government agencies and representatives.

Despite the underlying homogenizing tendencies of the Kemalist project, scholars like Landsberger and Kraus used their positions to establish collaborative efforts and influence educational practices, thereby enriching the academic landscape. While some correspondence, such as that of Fritz Rudolf Kraus, reveals an Orientalist perspective, the overall contributions of these exiled scholars to the training of Turkish professionals and the development of archaeology and Near Eastern Studies in Türkiye reflect the positive outcomes of this enforced knowledge transfer.

113 When Saffet Arkan was Turkish ambassador in Germany between 1942 and 1944, Landsberger urged him to intercede on behalf of his mother to enable her emigration to Türkiye. Benno Landsberger to Fritz Rudolf Kraus, no place, December 17, 1942, in: Schmidt, *Istanbul*, 898–899. See also: Vacin, *Landsberger*, 83–84.

Within this delicate atmosphere, refugee scholars faced extreme uncertainties and had little space for their resilience. Still, they contributed extensively to knowledge production in their host country in the case of Ancient Near Eastern Studies in the 1930s and 1940s and left their imprint on the system of higher education in Türkiye.

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