



The German Spirit in the Ottoman and Turkish Army, 1908–1938: A History of Military Knowledge Transfer by Gerhard Grüßhaber.

Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018. Pp. 289. ISBN 978-3-11-055289-8.

Review by Alaric Searle, Nankai University (alaric_searle@163.com).

Gerhard Grüßhaber's study¹ of German-Turkish military contacts, knowledge transfer, and personal friendships in both war and peace concentrates on the period 1908–38, that is from the Young Turk era to the death of President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Since several historians² have already examined in detail the German military mission in Turkey in 1882–1918, it is surprising that he devotes only his final chapter exclusively to post-1918 cooperation. Nonetheless, his treatment of his subject is informed by a mastery of both German and Turkish archival sources and relevant secondary material in Turkish, German, and English.

After an introductory chapter, the second provides an overview of what Grüßhaber identifies as the “peak of knowledge transfer.” While he does mention Turkish officers sent for instruction to Germany, he is chiefly concerned with the influence of German officers immediately before and during the First World War. Chapter 3 less successfully considers the cases of two German proponents of developing paramilitary youth organizations to build military spirit in both nations in the same period. The final chapter, the most original in the book, surveys various aspects of German-Turkish military cooperation between 1918 and 1938 and—extremely briefly—during World War II.

The book's three main chapters are far too long and two of them (3 and 4) establish no clear line of argument. The author tends to present short assessments of individual themes or sources, but does not quite weave them into a coherent whole. Thus, in the third chapter, he discusses two German proponents of paramilitary organizations for boys, but treats their impact on Turkish thinking in separate sections. Since the 57-page chapter demonstrates that there were only limited effects of the German model on the Turkish debate, readers are likely to wonder whether the extended analysis reveals much about German-Turkish military relations, apart from a number of interesting details.

Chapter 4, however, repays close reading, though it, too, ranges over too many disparate subjects in its nearly eighty pages. The author first discusses the unfolding of postwar historical assessments of the triumphs and failures of the German-Turkish alliance in World War I. He clearly demonstrates that the Turkish armed forces resented the joint command arrangements during the war: many Turkish officers felt the German commanders dictated too much during the conflict, without taking account of the lower literacy levels in the Turkish armed forces. This is a significant insight, since conventional wisdom is that the alliance worked extremely well, with

1. Orig., diss. Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich 2017.

2. E.g., Hans Werner Neulen, *Die Adler des Kaisers im Orient 1915–1919: Unser Freund, der Feind* (Aachen: Helios, 2016); Bernd Langensiepen, et al., *Halbmond und Kaiseradler: Goeben und Breslau am Bosphorus, 1914–1918* (Berlin: Mittler, 1999); Jehuda L. Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe: Die preußisch-deutschen Militärmissionen in der Türkei, 1835–1919* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1976).

German commanders providing excellent advice and squeezing the maximum tactical advantage out of the Turkish divisions. The upshot was that the Turks became convinced that they must avoid being relegated to a junior role in any future alliance.

The chapter then shifts to the problematic role of German advisers employed as instructors in Turkey between the wars. The solution the Turks eventually decided on was to diversify the advice they received from foreign armies: though thirty-six retired German army and navy officers taught in Turkish military academies, French, British, and American instructors were also involved, especially in air force affairs. The chapter concludes with a section on the emergence of Turkey's armored force, where, again, German input was by no means the only source of guidance.

Unfortunately, it must be said that Größhaber was ill-advised to publish his dissertation in English. His text is peppered with "Germanisms," misused prepositions, mistranslations—e.g., "analphabets" instead of "illiterates" (20)—obvious typographical errors, ill-fashioned metaphors, stilted syntax, and too literal translations of original German phrases. He should have published his work in German or with an American or British university press; or, best of all, taken greater pains with his manuscript.

On the other hand, readers with no knowledge of German will benefit from a number of useful insights in the book. Gerhard Größhaber has persuasively shown that, following Turkey's experience of a German-dominated alliance before and during the Great War, German military experts and theorists became only one of several influences on the Turkish military. Thus, although the style and rhetoric of National Socialism appealed to some Turkish officers, the country very wisely avoided being dragged into Hitler's war. On the negative side, the author notes, a long-term consequence of the close military cooperation between the two countries was that the German understanding of the officer corps as a "state within a state" encouraged the Turkish Army to believe it had a right to act as the guardian of their country's political stability.