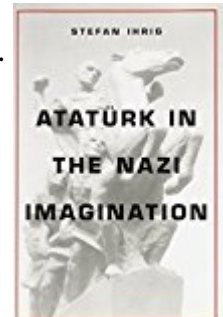


**Stefan Ihrig.** *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014. 320 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-36837-8.



**Reviewed by** Emre Sencer

**Published on** H-German (June, 2017)

**Commissioned by** Nathan N. Orgill

When analyzing the rise of the Nazis, academics often tend to overlook how insecure the movement was in its early years. In their search for a counterweight to the emerging Weimar republic, Nazis and other radical right-wing movements of the early postwar period looked for examples of countries and leaders who opposed the series of post-World War I treaties. They scoured the map for examples of British and French hypocrisy in and around Europe. Theirs was a struggle to deny the moral supremacy of the war's winners. The ideologues of this trend based their claims on internationalist principles on the one hand (Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points), and nationalist outrage on the other. According to these commentators, Wilsonian principles had been replaced by an unjust international order, symbolized by the Versailles Treaty, that mistreated states such as Germany. The image of a heroic nation, betrayed from within and surrounded by enemies, was a favorite trope of right-wing agitation, and it was shared by most radical nationalist movements of the early 1920s.

In this richly documented and exhaustively researched study, Stefan Ihrig investigates the Nazi movement's obsessive interest in modern Turkey and its leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Focusing on the image of Atatürk as a national savior and state-builder, Ihrig examines how fascinated the extreme Right and radical nationalists in Germany were with Atatürk's Ankara government and its achievements in the interwar era. The resulting analysis carries some surprising findings for specialists of both German and Turkish history. Ihrig demonstrates that the Turkish nationalist movement, its leader, and his policies were much more influential for the Nazi worldview in the 1920s than many other potential examples, including Mussolini's Italy. Ihrig's claims about the early influences upon the Nazi movement will no doubt appeal to many in an era when cross-cultural and transnational analyses find increasing supporters. In particular, those who look for European right-wing echoes of single-party-era Turkey's policies will benefit from Ihrig's most seminal finding, that in the develop-

ment of the Nazi movement's ideas, Atatürk's Turkey acted as a role model. As the Nazis saw it, the Turkish experience was a reflection of their own anti-Versailles, anti-imperialist, anti-Western struggle. It was just that the Turks under Atatürk had arrived there earlier than the Germans.

A major contribution of Ihrig's work is to discuss the Nazi views of Kemalist Turkey within the broader context of modernity. As he details in the book's epilogue, Atatürk's Turkey represented a form of positive modernity for the Nazis, arising out of the experience of total war and nation building. As the Nazis endlessly refashioned the image of Turkey according to their political and ideological needs, however, the only constant in this process was Atatürk: a "chiseled-in-stone" figure, as Ihrig describes him (p. 229). For the Nazis, the Turkish "success story" was unthinkable without the leadership principle. From state building to its approach to minorities, New Turkey was a "hypermodern" example to be emulated. Whether this portrayal amounts to describing Turkey as an example of "*völkisch*" modernity, as Ihrig calls it, however, deserves closer inspection.

The book begins with the story of the Turkish nationalist insurgency against the Entente occupation and the sultan's government in 1919, then proceeds in chronological order to the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. Ihrig first covers the impact of the Turkish nationalist struggle on the German Right in the early Weimar years. In the second chapter, Ihrig continues with the early Weimar nationalist movements up to the November putsch of 1923. Chapter 3 covers the Nazi fascination with Turkey and Atatürk as its leader in the 1930s. The fourth chapter analyzes the creation of an Atatürk hagiography in the National Socialist education system. Chapter 5 turns the focus to Turkey's place in the Nazi conception of the modern *völkisch* state. The final chapter looks at the development of this fascination with Turkey during World War II. In this way, Ihrig provides a thorough analysis of the Nazi obsession with Tur-

key and Atatürk from 1919 to the end of the Nazi era.

In the first chapter, we are introduced to a detailed overview and discussion of nationalist terminology in the early Weimar years (for example, irredentism, national action, and national revolution). Ihrig begins by stating that Turkey was a "major Weimar media event" (p. 10). Turkey's struggle against the Entente occupation and the new European order that emerged after World War I fired up the German nationalist imagination and led to a focus on this country that can only be described as a fixation or obsession (p. 11). Ihrig offers a very close reading of a broad spectrum of German newspapers from 1919 to 1923. The difference between "active vs. passive politics," later a staple of the Nazi lexicon, anchors these newspaper contributors' understanding of the Turkish nationalist movement. What the Turkish resistance symbolized for them was active politics. The revision of the Versailles system could only come through "action," not through "talk." The author provides examples not only from articles and editorials but also illustrations from the German press of this period that hammered this point home. In their view, Turkish nationalists and their leader exemplified everything that wasn't Weimar. Ihrig notes that this narrative "Germanified the Turkish topic" (p. 64). Unearthing this connection is what makes the book's thesis so original.

Ihrig takes his thesis further in chapter 2 by describing just how much the Nazis "grew up with Turkey" in the 1920s (p. 70). As early as December 1920, the party organ *Völkischer Beobachter* was already pro-Turkish in its coverage of Middle Eastern affairs. Especially the newspaper *Heimatland* emphasized the point that the Turkish case was also one of "stab-in-the back," and took a strong stance against treaty fulfillment policies. Ihrig correctly notes that one would expect an equally intensive coverage of Italian developments during the 1920s, but this was not the

case. Instead, the radical right-wing press focused on the nationalist cause in Turkey before it did on Italy, and highlighted the importance of the “Turkish Führer” (p. 80). Ihrig distinguishes a shift in Nazi publications during this period. By October 1923, when the Turkish Republic was declared, the Nazi press was focusing more intensely on what it termed “Turkish lessons,” the methods and solutions for nationalist liberation as an example for Germany. It is interesting to note that the Ankara government was contrasted with the so-called Jewocracy of Weimar and its inability to withstand fulfillment policies. Ihrig provides examples from the writings of Hans Tröbst, who served on the Ankara government’s side during the 1919-22 conflict. Tröbst gave a glorified account of the nationalist struggle in his writings, praising the “direction and goals” of the struggle and its “iron energy” against local opposition (p. 83). It is quite clear that in the eyes of a commentator like Tröbst, the struggle of the Ankara government against the provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres was an instructive alternative to Weimar Germany’s attitude toward the Versailles settlement. The Turkish example (as opposed to the situation in the Germany of 1919) represented “National will” (p. 84). The parallels between Germany and Turkey, which Ihrig discovers in Tröbst’s articles, become uncannier with the mention of the comparison between Versailles Poland and “Sèvres Armenia” (p. 83). In addition, according to Ihrig, one of Hitler’s key political advisors during this period, Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, was the former German vice consul in Eastern Anatolia, who witnessed the Armenian Genocide; presumably, he was the source of Hitler’s knowledge about the fate of Ottoman Armenians. Ihrig returns to this connection in chapter 5.

The book’s third chapter is in a way the pivotal chapter, whose conclusion outlines some of the most important arguments of the work about the level of emphasis placed by Hitler and other Nazis on the supposedly *völkisch* nature of Atatürk’s Turkey. According to Ihrig, Hitler’s 1933

description of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a “star in the darkness” underlined the affinities between the two regimes and initiated what Ihrig calls a “minor cult” around Atatürk (p. 115). Ihrig states that for the Nazis, Turkey was the first example of a modern, *völkisch* state and first to implement “the Führer idea in a modern context” (p. 145). This is a theme which Ihrig revisits at various points in the book. Just how useful the term *völkisch*, a concept based on the uniquely German experience going back to the nineteenth century, is in the Turkish case is open to debate. But it is clear that both during Atatürk’s lifetime and immediately after his death in 1938, the Nazi press and Hitler often referred to Turkey as a model, a form of modernity to which Germany should subscribe.

By chapter 4, Ihrig begins to delve deeper into what Atatürk may have meant to the Nazi leadership, their sympathizers, and the broader reading public in Germany in the 1930s. He points out that books about Atatürk and the Turkish World War I experience sold quite well in interwar Germany; indeed, “nowhere in the world, except for Turkey itself, were as many books on Atatürk and the New Turkey published as in interwar Germany” (p. 151). The bulk of this publishing bonanza focused on the life of the leader, but another popular topic was the military prowess of Turkey in campaigns such as Gallipoli. The concepts of leadership and charisma, personified in the Turkish president as the “perfect Führer,” occupied center stage in the hagiographic accounts published in the 1930s (p. 149). His 36-hour marathon speech to the parliament in 1927, the *Nutuk*, also found ample coverage in the German press. Ihrig further demonstrates that in the minds of the pro-Nazi commentators, Atatürk exemplified the leader figure who could unite in his person such themes and concepts as national will, people’s war, national sacrifice, and soldier-statesman. Nazis seemed to identify a clear parallel with Hitler, and with the Führer ideal in Atatürk. Furthermore, Ihrig explains that the Nazis were also

impressed by the way they thought Atatürk dealt with the opposition, and how he demanded and obtained obedience from the military and the nation. In other words, they were drawing “German lessons from a Turkish life” (p. 158). This of course is an important claim, one which Ihrig mostly proves and which provides one of the groundbreaking arguments of the book.

It is in the fifth chapter that Ihrig moves on to his analysis of the German perception of post-1923 Turkey and its transition from empire to republic, outlining the Turkish practices and policies that resonated with the National Socialist framework. Here he reiterates the Nazi fascination with Turkey as a modern *völkisch* state. Ihrig argues that the Nazis endlessly fashioned and re-fashioned Turkey in their image, and their understanding of the Turkish example reflected their ideology. This process also included a deep interest in the “Turkish methods” of dealing with minority questions. In connection with this argument, Ihrig returns to the matter of the Armenian Genocide. Carefully tracking the history of German coverage of the genocide and the anti-Armenian attitudes of right-wing commentators from the early 1920s on, he maintains that the German radical Right was in general hostile to the plight of the Armenians. Ihrig clearly defines a negative attitude toward minorities as an identifying characteristic of the *völkisch* state, and his reading of single-party, republican Turkey fits into this scheme. He provides ample examples from the negative references to the Armenians by numerous Nazi authors, and draws parallels between the ways the Nazis commented on the Jews and the Armenians. This analysis also allows him to highlight the Nazi visions of “old” vs. “new” Turkey (that is, Ottoman vs. Republican), where emergence of an officially homogenous state in the place of a multinational and multicultural one was a success story to be emulated.

This chapter also includes analysis of the Nazi coverage of several major Turkish reforms of the

Kemalist era, such as secularization and limits on the role of religion in politics; involvement of women in the public sphere; and the development of Ankara as the model metropolis of the young state. Ihrig rightly assumes that the Turkish reforms fit into the Nazi perception of a nationalist, authoritarian, modernizing nation. Themes such as rebuilding the state from the ashes of defeat, mobilizing a healthy nation for the future, and encouraging physical fitness and fertility all were highlighted by Germans as they refashioned the Turkish example to fit a Nazi framework. But he is also quick to point out in the same chapter that by the end of the 1930s, the foreign policy aims and priorities of the two states were diverging. This divergence began to create tensions in the Nazi attitude toward Turkey, especially considering the German-Italian alliance during this period and the apparent sympathy in the German press for the Arab cause over the annexation of Alexandria by Turkey. Nevertheless, Ihrig points out that the level of German media coverage of Spain and Italy never approached that of Turkey. The Turkish case was one of special “twinning” to Hitler and the Nazis, despite prominent Nazi ideologues’ insistence on the uniqueness of the Nazi experience and its Führer.

In the final chapter, Ihrig carries his analysis to the period after Atatürk’s death and World War II. Despite its neutrality in the conflict, Turkish excitement over the possibility of a Soviet defeat had its roots in pan-Turanism, an ideology that found support in some Nazi circles. A series of high-ranking Turkish officials visited wartime Germany, including its concentration camps and propaganda journals. At the same time, however, Turkey was clearly an opponent of Italian schemes in the eastern Mediterranean and it was also determined to resist pressure to join the war. But Ihrig claims that Hitler’s own interest in Turkey mostly helped to minimize negative perceptions of the nation, even after Turkey broke off diplomatic relations in 1944.

*Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* is a bold and path-breaking book. It draws attention to a largely overlooked connection between Nazi Germany and Kemalist Turkey, and contributes to the scholarship on the cross-fertilization of authoritarian nationalist ideas in the post-World War I years. However, perhaps using some Turkish sources would have helped to clarify whether this fascination was mutual, especially during World War II. The focus on Turkey as a modern *völkisch* state might require further discussion. And so might the argument that the Turkish experience of “ultimate” and total war provided a model for the Nazis; Hitler presumably did not need the Turkish example to offer to Germans the options of either victory or destruction. But these are minor objections. Ihrig’s book is an insightful and highly original work. In the future, it will be difficult to discuss the transnational undercurrents of the radical Right in interwar Europe or German-Turkish relations under the Nazis without taking into consideration Ihrig’s arguments.

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**Citation:** Emre Sencer. Review of Ihrig, Stefan. *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. June, 2017.

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