

## Refuge in research: Walter Ruben's exile and internment in Turkey

Nazan Maksudyan, Freie Universität Berlin / Centre Marc Bloch

### Abstract

This paper follows the plight of Walter Ruben (1899–1982), an Indologist who had begun his career in Frankfurt am Main and later became one of the leading Indologists of the German Democratic Republic. In mid-1930s, he escaped Nazi persecution by seeking exile in Turkey. Relying on archival research in the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) and the Prime Ministry's Republican Archives (BCA) in Istanbul, the Turkish press, and oral historical sources, together with the publications of Ruben during his Ankara years, I bring to light Ruben's life trajectory during his exile and internment with a balanced analysis of his 'production of knowledge' as a scholar at risk. The scholarly pressure and difficulties Ruben faced as an endangered scholar hired by a single-party authoritarian state delineate the precariousness and vulnerabilities of life as an exile academic. His original research and writing during his forced internment in Kırşehir, on the other hand, marks another dimension of his exile years, namely his endless effort to look for a real refuge within his intellectual production.

### Introduction

This paper follows the plight of Walter Ruben (1899–1982), an Indologist who had begun his career in Frankfurt am Main and later became one of the leading Indologists of the German Democratic Republic. In mid-1930s, he escaped Nazi persecution by seeking exile in Turkey, a foreign and an entirely unfamiliar country.<sup>1</sup> I trace his exile trajectory, research, and publications in order to give an overview of his precarious existence as

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an exile and an endangered scholar in an authoritarian country. Ruben's entering Turkey as 'a scholar at risk' was made possible by a larger set of historical factors. Certain historical factors jeopardized his employment prospects. Under the Nuremberg laws, he was designated a "*Halbjuden*" ('half Jew') or "*Mischling*" (pejor. for a person of 'mixed race')<sup>2</sup> as his father was Jewish. This meant that he could legally be ostracized and disenfranchised as a 'non-Aryan,' which seriously endangered his future employability in Nazi Germany. He was spared the purges until 1935, because of the exceptional status granted to those who were veterans of World War I (*Frontkämpfer* [front fighters]). With the cancellation of the *Frontkämpfer* clause, his authorization to teach (*Lehrbefugnis*) was declared "expired" in 1937.

Historical factors also made him functionally useful to the Turkish government, which had officially launched a centrally directed program of cultural renewal and racial scientism. The Kemalist leadership had ambitious political plans to completely refashion the country, its cultural institutions, and its artistic and musical traditions, along with the old university. The 'University Reform' of 1933 translated into purges of hundreds of professors, who were considered unsupportive of "the principles of the Turkish Revolution."<sup>3</sup> The establishment of 'modern' universities in Turkey, staffed with ideologically obedient cadres, coincided with the sudden expulsion of an entire academic elite from the universities and public institutions of Hitler's Germany. As a result, eighty-two German professors signed contracts to teach in Turkey in 1933–34. In the coming few years, these professors in turn hired other foreign assistants, lecturers, and medical or technical staff—many of whom themselves belonged to a persecuted group. In the end, the émigré community amounted to almost 150 Germans and (former) Austrians, who were employed as full professors, lecturers, and academic assistants at universities in Ankara and Istanbul.

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<sup>2</sup> This was how the regime officially defined Ruben when he was referred to in the Scuria Bericht (Kobes 2008: 228).

<sup>3</sup> As a result of one wide purge, out of a total of 240 academics working at Istanbul University, 157 were removed from office—71 professors, 13 assistant professors, and 73 research assistants (Dölen 2010).

Walter Ruben was employed at the University of Ankara thanks to arrangements made by Phillip Schwartz. The chair offered to Ruben in 1935 at the Institute of Indology in Ankara University's Faculty of Language, History, and Geography was central in the education of the young republic's nationalist cadres. Along with the neighboring disciplines of anthropology, history, Sumerology, and Hittitology, his discipline was a crucial part of the period's ethno-racial scholarly mobilization "to rewrite the history of the Turks and fight with the prejudices and stereotypes against them"—which were common in European public opinion (Maksudyan 2005a; 2005b).

The topics of Turkey as 'a country of exile' for scholars escaping Nazi persecution and the extent and significance of the accompanying 'knowledge transfer' have attracted considerable scholarly attention (Cremer and Przytulla 1991; Bozay 2001; Kubaseck and Seufert 2008; Dogramaci 2008a, 2013; Guttstadt 2013; Konuk 2010). The earliest academic work on the subject, Horst Widmann's *Exil und Bildungshilfe* (Exile and Educational Aid) had a considerable impact on future scholarship in terms of expressing praise for the modernist reforms of Atatürk and the hospitality provided to "German-speaking" (*deutschsprachige*) academics (Widmann 1973).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, a number of memoirs of émigré academics present a very rosy picture of Turkey as a country of exile, exalting the role of the then modernizing country in saving scholars and scientific inquiry (Neumark 1980; Hirsch 1982). Another factor that has impacted the visibility of Turkey in exile studies was the presence of relatively famous figures, such as Ernst Reuter (1889–1953)<sup>5</sup> and Philipp Schwartz (1894–1977),<sup>6</sup>

4 Horst Widmann (1927–2014) was not one of the scientists who had sought refuge in Turkey, but he worked as a lecturer at Ankara University Faculty of Language, History, and Geography between the years 1961–65. He also conducted research in Turkey between 1968–70 with a DAAD scholarship.

5 Ernst Reuter (1889–1953) was a German politician and urban planner. Reuter became known as the elected mayor of Berlin at the time of the city's division in 1948. Reuter lived in exile in Ankara between June 1935 and November 1946, working as an administrative expert for the municipality, an economic advisor, and a professor of urbanism (*Şehirçilik*) at the university. Reuter built up a network of relationships among the large number of persecuted scholars and artists in Turkey. He founded the resistance movement *Deutscher Freiheitsbund* and constantly communicated with party friends to bring about the end of the Nazi regime (Möckelmann 2013).

6 Philipp Schwartz (1894–1977) was a Hungarian-born neuropathologist, who lived in Germany, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United States in the course of his life. He studied medicine in Budapest and earned his doctorate there in 1919. In the same year, he became an assistant at the Senckenberg Institute of Pathology at the University of Frankfurt, where he earned his Habilitation in 1923, becoming an associate professor in 1926 and a full professor in 1927. He was among the first of those dismissed from their posts for being Jewish in 1933. He fled with his family to Zurich, Switzerland, where he founded the *Notgemeinschaft deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland* (Emergency Assistance Organization for German Scientists Abroad) to help other refugees find new employment, notably establishing contacts with Turkish universities. Together with Albert Malche, Schwartz convinced the Turkish government to appoint the persecuted German professors to the free positions in its higher education system (Schwartz 1995).

whose recollections and accounts of Turkey were also quite positive. The paradoxical situation in Turkey at the time—namely, the magnitude of the repression of minorities and opposition, ethnic nationalism, and racism that were shaping domestic politics, academic production, and educational policy—has only rarely been contextualized (Guttstadt 2013). To what extent was it possible for a scholar at risk to find security and a real home in Turkey?

First of all, the Turkish government had a clearly hostile stance toward its own ethnic and religious minorities, especially during the 1930s, paralleling the rise of the fascist regimes in Europe. For the majority of the German-Jewish refugees, Turkey was not on the map as a destination of exile. As Corry Guttstadt aptly notes, Turkey was never mentioned in statistics on countries providing refuge for Jewish exiles (Guttstadt 2013: 83–86). Only a decade before, one million Armenians had been persecuted, deported, and killed under Ottoman rule during World War I (Kévorkian 2011). After the foundation of the new republic in 1923, the country deported its Greek-Orthodox residents in exchange for Muslims living in Greece (Kolluoğlu 2013). Moreover, the anti-minority policies of Turkey<sup>7</sup> led to the continued emigration of Turkish Jews out of Turkey to Palestine, France, and Italy during the 1930s. Liselotte Dieckmann, who worked as a lecturer in German and Greek under Leo Spitzer at Istanbul University, found the "new nationalism" in Turkey to be "fanatical and cruel." It led not only to the massacre and expulsion of non-Muslims, but also to the country's hostile self-separation from Europe and from Islam. "The younger generation resembled the Nazis in many ways" (Dieckmann 1964: 122–123).

Furthermore, Turkey in the 1930s and 1940s did not only accept German-Jewish 'scholars at risk;' serious numbers of NS-regime supporters and officials were also in the country. The mutually supportive stances of the two regimes resulted in several cases of collaboration and investment in developing the ties between the two countries. Some institutions, like the "Higher Institute for Agriculture" (*Yüksek Ziraat Enstitüsü*), founded in Ankara in 1933, were established and run by professors carefully selected and sent by and loyal to the NS government. In the gardens of the German consulate in Tarabya, there was even a Hitler Youth camp. In Istanbul, the polarization between the German colony (*reichsdeutsche Kolonie*) and the 'refugee group' steadily increased. The émigré academics always felt suspicious of the unfriendly looks they got from the 'older Germans' (Dietrich 1998). They had fled their country, but still they could not escape the pressure. Nazi Germany was financially supporting racist associations, publications, and newspapers, while German spies and their Turkish collaborators were pushing Nazi propaganda. Foreign Minister Ribbentrop and Ambassador von Papen were behind the distribution of large sums to Turkish media establishments to boost positive PR for the Nazi regime.

7 On anti-minority policies in Turkey, see Bali (2000); Çetinoğlu (2009); Bali (2005); and Akar (2000).

Clearly, the Turkish state provided refuge to exiled academics purely for political-utilitarian reasons, rather than scientific or humanitarian ones. One case in point in which utility was clearly preferred over scientific excellence was the Turkish government's refusal of a request by Albert Einstein in 1933: Einstein, acting as the honorary president of the *Union des Sociétés pour la Protection et la Santé de Populations Juives* (OSE, Union of Societies for the Protection and Health of Jewish Populations), applied on behalf of forty "experienced specialists and prominent scholars" in medicine, asking that they be allowed "to continue their scientific and medical work in Turkey" and to work for a year even without any remuneration.<sup>8</sup> OSE's application was rejected on the pretext that this offer was not reconcilable with the "laws and regulation of the country."<sup>9</sup> Ruben was allowed to remain in Turkey from 1935 to 1946 simply because he could serve the needs of the government. Moreover, in direct opposition to the euphemistic and nostalgic representations of Turkey as a 'safe haven' for 'scholars at risk' stands the fact that almost all of these émigré academics moved on to other countries after the end of the war. They had to stay in Turkey during the war, as their choices as 'scholars at risk' were limited. However, many of them moved to the United States and other countries, or else returned to Germany, after 1945. Dieckmann bitterly wrote that Turkey would never become a "second home" (*keine zweite Heimat*) for exile academics, as the United States would prove to be in the future (Dieckmann 1964: 126). Ruben was no exception to this trend. At different points during his exile in Turkey, he tried to secure employment elsewhere (e.g., in India in 1936, in Frankfurt in 1937, in Berlin in 1946), rather than staying in Ankara. Relying on archival research from the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) and the Prime Ministry's Republican Archives (BCA) in Istanbul, the Turkish press, oral historical sources, together with Ruben's publications during his exile years, this paper brings to light Walter Ruben's life trajectory during his exile and internment with a balanced analysis of his 'production of knowledge' as a 'scholar at risk'. The article starts with an account of the internment of German nationals in 1944–45—among whom were Walter Ruben and his family—to provide an alternative entry point to the generally positively described experience of German exiles in Turkey. The next section introduces Ruben's biography, including his arrival and residence in Ankara, and delineates the scholarly pressure and difficulties he faced as a 'scholar at risk' hired by a single-party authoritarian state. The third part of the article draws a different portrait of Ruben as a scholar who was 'exiled in exile'. I focus here on his internment in Kırşehir as a second degree of exile and his struggle to survive as a researcher under trying circumstances. The conclusion provides a discussion of the exilic experience of endangered scholars.

<sup>8</sup> Prime Ministry's Republican Archives (Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi, hereafter BCA), 030-10-00-00, 116/810/3/7, 17.09.1933.

<sup>9</sup> BCA, 030-10-00-00, 116/810/3/4, 05.11.1933.

### The internment of German nationals

Towards the end of the Second World War, in August 1944, the government of Turkey broke off relations with Germany. On August 5, they asked all resident Germans—as members of a belligerent country—to leave the country within ten days (Yalçın 2011: 249–250; Bakar 2016: 97). After the declaration of this order, more than 600 German citizens returned to Germany, whereas more than 1,000 did not dare to go back.<sup>10</sup> In remaining, they risked being sent to the 'internment' locations in three remote cities in central Anatolia: Kırşehir, Çorum, and Yozgat. During the last week of August, more than 400 deportees were sent from Istanbul to these cities in four separate convoys.<sup>11</sup> About 200 others from Ankara also joined them around the same time. In other words, there were slightly more than 600 German citizens interned in the three cities of Kırşehir, Çorum, and Yozgat. None of these cities had good communication services, and they had actually served as banishment centers for exiles during the Ottoman period (Daşcıoğlu 2007). They were in the middle of nowhere, but close to Ankara, making it easy for the government to keep internees under control.

Those who could not or would not go back to Germany were supposed to be interned in mid-1944; however, in practice, the internees were usually those whom the Nazi government called "Half-Aryans" (*Halbarier*) and those who had left Germany for political reasons. Among the community of émigré scholars, most of the professors were exempted from internment. The possession of a Turkish passport, which a few professors were granted, was one solution. Others, like Philipp Schwartz, managed to be exempted through a Czechoslovak passport received from the exile government in London (Eckstein-Schlossmann 2012: 89). Furthermore, many émigré university professors, state employees, and medical doctors were granted exemption by the government without such documents, because they were deemed 'useful exiles' for the host state.<sup>12</sup> The internment of the more than 600 Germans lasted about sixteen months, from August 1944 to December 1945/January 1946. There were no pre-installed camps for them (no barbed wire or barracks); instead,

<sup>10</sup> "Türkiye'de kalan Almanlar", Tanin, 16 August 1944. The newspaper gives the number as 1500.

<sup>11</sup> The first convoy consisted of around 110 people, though in some accounts it was 113 ("Gözaltı edilen Almanlar", *Cumhuriyet*, 24 August 1944). The second convoy comprised 134 people ("Anadolu'ya sevk edilen Almanların 2.kafilesi", *Son Posta*, 26 August 1944). The third group was the most numerous with 147 internees ("147 kişilik Alman kafilesi daha sevk edildi", *Son Posta*, 28 August 1944). And the last group was relatively small with 27 people ("Dün de Anadolu'ya 27 Alman gönderildi", *Cumhuriyet*, 29 August 1944).

<sup>12</sup> Eugen Merzbacher (who was not interned himself) wrote the following from Ankara to Carl Zuckmayer (who was in Barnard/USA) on 18.10.1944: "The political attitude and reliability were not taken into account in the internment. The [Turkish] authorities said that it was too complicated to make a distinction and a sighting here, as has been done, for example, in the U.S.A. and England. As a result, a large number of 'non-aryans' (*Nichtarier*), political refugees, and persons who have for years fought for the political direction that Turkey is trying to follow are among those sent." Nachlass Carl Zuckmayer, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

they stayed as temporary residents in rented houses. They were neither allowed to work (to earn money) nor could they leave the cities where they were interned. It was prohibited for them to use their cameras and take photographs, and with a declaration on December 27, 1944, they were also barred from using postal services. When the war ended in May 1945, the situation of the interned German citizens did not change. Even their radios were confiscated in June 1945.

### *Producing a life in exile*

About 300 people, mostly from Istanbul, were interned in Çorum. They all traveled by train to Çerikli and then were put into small busses (*minibüs*) and driven for about 140 km farther. Among the scholarly community, Traugott Fuchs<sup>13</sup> and the wife of Fritz Neumark<sup>14</sup> were among those interned in this city.<sup>15</sup> The émigrés were first housed in pensions and later in rented apartments, even though the city did not have enough rental homes to house so many families. The relationship between the locals and the internees was characterized by distrust and a somewhat hostile attitude (Bozay 2001: 94). Still, the interned German citizens found ways of integrating into the community through their specializations. A printer repaired the printing machine of the city; a carpenter repaired several houses; a plumber managed to connect the water from the fountains to the houses; a stove master repaired a number of stoves; a tailor woman taught locals how to sew new fashioned dresses and "frilled aprons," which became quite famous (Yalçın 2011: 326–327). Most interestingly, a butcher found out that the area was full of wild boars. Although the people of Çorum did not eat pork, he opened a butcher shop to meet the needs of the Germans. The villagers could thus shoot wild animals and then sell them to the "German butcher".

Based on Ernst Engelmann's report, there were 260 Germans interned in Yozgat in December 1944. Half of them were in a needy situation. While those in Çorum and Kırşehir received a monthly allowance of twenty liras from the Turkish Red Crescent—which was not at all sufficient—those interned in Yozgat only received ten liras for their livelihood (Yalçın 2011: 343–344). The internees in Yozgat were first housed in a school and then in a khan, a guest house for travelers. Only a small

13 Traugott Fuchs (1906–1997) was a philologist, painter, poet, teacher, and musician. When Leo Spitzer was removed from his chair by the Nazi purges, Fuchs held a protest in Spitzer's favor. He was arrested and expelled from the university. Spitzer came to Istanbul in 1933, and Fuchs followed him in the same year.

14 Fritz Neumark (1900–1991) was a professor of economics and finance. After his dismissal, he emigrated to Turkey in 1933. He became a professor at the University of Istanbul. In 1952, he returned to the University of Frankfurt am Main as a professor and was its rector from 1954 to 1955 and from 1961 to 1962.

15 Fuchs stayed in Çorum for thirteen months and away from his books and notes, he painted intensively. His thirty-two "Çorum paintings" are impressive witnesses of the country, its people, and life in Central Anatolia before 1950 (Fuchs 1986). With the intervention of the American Embassy, Fuchs was able to return to Istanbul in August 1945, where he was employed by the (American) Robert College (BCA, 30-10-0-0, 99/641, 16.08.1945).

number of them could stay in rental houses. Their contact with the local community was minimal. The memoirs of Schwester Engelburga Strobel, a teacher from the St. Georg school, feature a number of sad stories. The locals were quite biased towards the Germans. They were called infidels, and the children threw stones at them (Dietrich 1998: 390). Still, the internees established several institutions to support themselves. Austrian nuns established a kitchen to feed the poor and needy. They also opened a school for young children, where the sisters took over the teaching (Bozay 2001: 91; Dietrich 1998: 389). Those who were musical founded a group and even organized a concert at the beginning of 1945. A number of children were able to learn ballet, and others were engaged in theater. Thus, the internees organized performances for the local community (Yalçın 2011: 344–345; Bozay 2001: 92; Dietrich 1998: 390).

The internee community in Kırşehir, about 200 people, were mostly sent from İzmir and Ankara. They lived in rented houses in the vicinity of Ahi Evran neighborhood. Most of the scholarly community were interned in Kırşehir. Walter Ruben, on whom the rest of this paper particularly focuses, was interned with his family in Kırşehir in August 1944. The economist Fritz Baade,<sup>16</sup> the musician Eduard Zuckmayer,<sup>17</sup> and the art historian Ernst Diez<sup>18</sup> also stayed in that city. The internees developed cultural activities in their seclusion: Diez gave lectures on art history, and Zuckmayer founded a choir that performed a concert to celebrate Pentecost in 1945 (Dogramacı 2013: 74).

### *Religion and relief*

In Çorum, the interned community asked for a place of worship and were granted a three-story house in Alaybey sok. The first floor was used as a cafeteria, the second as a church, and the third as a school. The Germans in Yozgat were also granted the right to open a

16 Baade was against the "internment" terminology. He wrote retrospectively in 1965 that their stay in these cities was not a "forced stay" (*Zwangsaufenthalt*) or "internment" (*Internierung*). They were simply given political asylum rights (*Asylrecht*) and that is why they were held in these cities, which had nothing to do with "detention camps" (*Internierungslager*).

17 Eduard Zuckmayer (1890–1972) was a German music teacher, composer, conductor, and pianist. He immigrated to Turkey in April 1936. With the recommendation of Paul Hindemith, Zuckmayer became a teacher at the music teachers' seminar (*Musiki Muallim Mektebi*) and at the state conservatory (*Devlet Konservatuire*) in Ankara.

18 Ernst Diez (1878–1961) was an Austrian art historian. He joined the NSDAP a few months after the annexation of Austria in 1938 and in 1939 became an extraordinary professor in Vienna. In 1943, he traveled with his Turkish student Oktay Aslanapa to Istanbul at the invitation of the Turkish Ministry of Education, where he became the professor of Islamic art at the University of Istanbul and established the Institute for Art History. He was interned in Kırşehir from 1944 to 1946. His book *Türk Sanatı: Başlangıcından Günümüze Kadar* [Turkish Art. From its Beginning to the Present] was written during this time. After its publication in July 1946, the book led to scandal and protests by Turkish nationalists due to its recognition of Armenian influences on Turkish art and comparisons with Byzantine art. This led to Diez's dismissal in 1949 (Dogramacı 2008b).

church, where they held a service every Sunday. One of the nuns interned in the city, the aforementioned Engelburga Strobel, reported that the first mass was celebrated on the same day they arrived. Later, "almost all internees" gathered for the church services. Armenian locals also took part in the services, until they were forbidden to do so (Bozay 2001: 91; Dietrich 1998: 390).<sup>19</sup> In Kırşehir, one large house was transformed into a synagogue, and there was also a Catholic priest and a few Austrian nuns.

The émigré community in Istanbul and Ankara was also concerned with organizing relief measures for the interned. The salaries of the interned former state employees were cut off, they were not allowed to work, and not all of them were wealthy. For some of the internees, their only income was "poor support" from the Turkish government, which was impossible to live upon. The International Rescue and Relief Committee (IRRC) helped those who were politically engaged against Nazism or fascism (pro-democracy intellectuals, members of the labor movement, etc.) and the funds of the *Notgemeinschaft* founded by Philipp Schwarz, were also used to help those in need, though they were not enough.<sup>20</sup> In light of this situation, the non-deported scholars from Ankara formed another relief committee:

Last Friday we formed a committee consisting of the following members to support the needy Ankarans in Kırşehir: Bodlaender, Ecksteins, Klein, Landsberger, Marchionini, Merzbacher, Rohde, Salomon. We collect from the Ankarans every month 600 TL (Bonatz bears the lion's share), which is sufficient to support individuals with 50 TL, couples with 80 TL, and families with 100 TL a month.<sup>21</sup>

Eugen Merzbacher<sup>22</sup> was chosen to bring the money collected to Kırşehir every month. During one of these trips Merzbacher was examined by the police, and all the money he had was confiscated. As a result, the committee decided that Erna Eckstein<sup>23</sup> should take

<sup>19</sup> St. Georg-Archiv: Schwester Engelburga Strobel: Die Zeit der Internierung in der Türkei und danach Aug. 1944–1947/48. (Niederschrift aus dem Gedächtnis). Provinzhaus. Unpublished Manuscript n.d. Strobel notes that: "Yozgat used to have a large Armenian population. According to Sister Engelburga, 12,000 Armenians were beheaded in the village during the persecution between 1915–1920."

<sup>20</sup> The *Notgemeinschaft deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland* (Emergency Assistance Organization for German Scientists Abroad) was an organization founded in 1933 by Philipp Schwarz that provided new jobs abroad for scientists persecuted in National Socialist Germany. See also note 3.

<sup>21</sup> From Marchionini to Rüstow, Ankara, 4.11.1944. Nachlass Rüstow, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK), N 1169, Nr. 43, Bl. 395.

<sup>22</sup> In 1935, Eugen Merzbacher (1921–2013) fled with his family as persecuted Jews from Germany to Turkey, where his father worked as a chemist. He studied at the University of Istanbul, and after graduating in 1943, he taught at a secondary school in Ankara for four years. In 1947, he went to the USA and studied physics at Harvard University.

<sup>23</sup> Erna Eckstein-Schlossmann (1895–1998) studied pediatrics in Düsseldorf. From 1923 to 1933, she was the director of the infant and toddler care section of the Auguste-Victoria-Haus of the Red

over these trips, assuming that the name Eckstein was some protection. The relief committee also collected books and helped set up a library in the city (Eckstein-Schlossmann 2012: 90).

### Walter Ruben: an Indologist in Ankara

Walter Ruben was born on 26 December 1899 in Hamburg as the son of the Jewish merchant Albert Elias Ruben and his Protestant wife Emmi Geister. He attended Gymnasium and had already begun Sanskrit lessons in that higher secondary school (Abitur 1917). After school, he was drafted to the First World War (1917–18). From 1919 to 1924, he studied Indology, Greek, Latin, and Philosophy at the Universities of Hamburg, Berlin, and Bonn. Ruben wrote his dissertation on the Ramayana with Hermann Jacobi at Bonn University in 1924, and he was greatly influenced by the African cultural anthropology of Leo Frobenius, with whom he later studied in Frankfurt (Manjapra 2014: 284). He received his Habilitation degree in 1927 and worked as an adjunct professor (*Privatdozent*) at Bonn University (1927–31) and in Frankfurt (1931–35). In 1933, Ruben was allowed to stay at the university as a veteran of the First World War (*Frontkämpfer*), but in 1935, he lost his private lectureship (*Privatdozentur*) at Frankfurt University because he was classed a "half-breed" (*Mischling*). The Ruben family then spent some time on Walter Ruben's mother's small farm in Odenwald. Through the mediation of his former professor Heinrich Lüders<sup>24</sup> in Berlin and through the direct involvement of Philipp Schwartz, he was able to sign an initial contract for 3 years to be employed as a professor and establish the Chair of Indology at the newly founded University of Ankara.



Fig. 1: Ruben Family's apartment in Sümer Street, Ankara, 1936. Dogramaci, 2013: 42.

Cross (Düsseldorf). She was persecuted as a Jew and emigrated together with husband Albert Eckstein to Turkey in 1935. The Turkish government did not grant her a work permit as a doctor, but she accompanied the research trips of Albert Eckstein to the villages of the country, where they studied the state of health of Turkish children. After the war, she was invited to take an active role in the construction of a children's clinic in Ankara.

<sup>24</sup> Heinrich Lüders (1869–1943) was an Orientalist and Indologist. In 1931–32, he was rector of Berlin University. He retired in 1935 and devoted himself mainly to research, as he was denied a teaching license for political reasons.

Philipp Schwartz, the founder of the *Notgemeinschaft*, was a colleague and an acquaintance of Walter Ruben from the University of Frankfurt. After securing contracts for dozens of academics at the University of Istanbul, Schwartz managed to arrange a second wave of hiring for the establishment of the University of Ankara in 1935, which included Ruben (Kobes 2008: 208). In November 1935, Ruben migrated to Turkey with his family: his wife Carlota and two sons, Gerhard and Wolfgang. The next year, in the winter of 1936/37, Ruben made a six-month trip to Bengal with the support of the Research Institute for Cultural Morphology in Frankfurt/Main and the Turkish Ministry of Education. The stipend from the German side was arranged by Ruben's former teacher, the Frankfurt anthropologist Leo Frobenius (Manjapra 2014: 87). During this trip, he met Tagore in Calcutta and studied the Asur, a tribe of iron-smiths (Ruben 1939a).<sup>25</sup> Then, he went to Frankfurt and Hamburg and spent a year "evaluating his research results" (1937).<sup>26</sup> In fact, the entire family went along with Ruben to Germany in 1937, as their older son, Gerhard (born in 1927), was reported to be ill with pneumonia in Ankara. It is probable that both in India and then back in Frankfurt and Hamburg, Ruben was actually evaluating the possibility of finding another position, other than the one he had in Ankara. In the end, Ruben spent the first two years of his exile almost entirely outside of Ankara and partly in Germany. In the meantime, Ruben received a letter from the University of Frankfurt declaring that his authorization to teach (*Lehrbefugnis*) was officially withdrawn. In the autumn of 1938, the Ruben family decided to move back to Ankara and start their life in exile once again.<sup>27</sup>



Fig. 2: Ruben Family visiting the village of their "milkman" in Ankara, 1939. Hillebrecht, 2000: 163.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Ruben (1939a), *Eisenschmiede und Dämonen in Indien*. [Ergebnisse einer Reise, die mit Unterstützung des Forschungsinstitutes für Kulturmorphologie in Frankfurt a. M. und des Türkischen Unterrichtsministeriums durchgeführt wurde]. Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie 37.

<sup>26</sup> The children stayed in a pension in Uffing (southern Germany).

<sup>27</sup> The living conditions of the emigrant families in Ankara were favorable: Their houses were predominantly in Yenisehir ("the new town") and were externally inspired by the Bauhaus style. In one building there were usually four and at most six apartments, which met European standards. This local concentration of emigrant families was advantageous to social and family life (Hillebrecht

According to the "Scurla Bericht," the report prepared by Dr. Herbert Scurla, who made an inspection trip to Turkey from 11–25 May 1939 as a representative of the Reich Ministry of Education, Ruben was "politically harmless and completely reserved" (*politisch harmlos und völlig zurückhaltend*) (Şen and Halm 2007). It is noted, however, that until 1936 Ruben had been a member of the local group of the *Internationaler Arbeiterhilfe* (IAH, International Worker's Aid) in Frankfurt (Möckelmann 2013: 268) and a pupil of the *Masch* (Evening school of Marxism).<sup>28</sup> Ruben also probably received the publications of the *Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland* (National Committee of Free Germany) at his home address in Ankara (Kobes 2008: 228). While Ruben's sympathies were defined as leaning towards the communists, he never became a full member, neither in Frankfurt nor in Ankara.

In his own words, Ruben became a Marxist quite late in life, at the age of fifty-one and at Humboldt University (HU). Herbert Scurla was largely correct in considering him politically inactive during his Ankara years. In a resumé written in 1950, most probably as part of his 'application' to Humboldt University, he noted that in the past fifteen years abroad, in Turkey and Chile, he had unfortunately had no opportunity to acquire "Marxist literature." Therefore, he concluded that he felt "the need to receive Marxist training, as this is the only way to make my scientific work fruitful."<sup>29</sup> Later, in an "autobiographical sketch" that he wrote after his retirement in 1965, Ruben noted that he was not "trained as a Marxist," until he studied Marxism in 1952/54 as a student of the so-called "Evening University of Marxism-Leninism" (*Marxistische Abendschule*) at the HU.<sup>30</sup> His new research approach to Indology at the HU and his conceptual understanding of what Indology (Indienwissenschaft/Indienkunde) is, would have immense significance upon an entire new generation of scholars (Heidrich 2002).

### Serving the Republic of Turkey

Ruben was quite a productive scientist and managed to publish a number of works even during the first few years of his exile (Ruben 1936, 1939a, 1939b, 1939c, 1939d). Expectedly, he was under pressure to fulfill his duties as the chair of the newly founded Indology Institute of Ankara University. As a sign of gratitude for his research trip to India and his lengthened "research evaluation" in Germany, he "donated" the 1200 photo-

2000: 114). The Ruben family lived next to the Merzbacher family; on the same street, the Eppensteins and the Laqueurs also lived, diagonally opposite the Eberts, and at the next crossroad were the Kleinsorges.

<sup>28</sup> *Autobiographie auf Englisch* (9 pages), Nachlass Ruben (NL Ruben), Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW), Box 11/2.

<sup>29</sup> *Lebenslauf*, 2 Seiten, 14.10.1950, Nachlass Ruben (NL Ruben), Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW), Box 13/1.

<sup>30</sup> *Autobiographie auf Englisch* (9 pages), Nachlass Ruben (NL Ruben), Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW), Box 11/2.

graphs he had taken in India and a collection of items from Indian high culture and Indian worship to the Indology Institute (Ruben 1942a: i).<sup>31</sup> The establishment of Ankara University's Faculty of Language, History, and Geography (Dil Tarih Coğrafya Fakültesi, DTCF) in 1935 was an important turning point in the ethno-racial scholarly mobilization of the period (Maksudyan 2005a). For the young republic, several new scientific disciplines, including anthropology, history, Sumerology, Hittitology, and Indology, were crucial "to rewrite the history of the Turks and fight with the prejudices and stereotypes against them"—which were common in European public opinion (Maksudyan 2005b). The founding scholars of the DTCF—Wolfram Eberhard<sup>32</sup> in Sinology, Benno Landsberger<sup>33</sup> in Sumerology, Hans Güterbock<sup>34</sup> in Hittitology, Georg Rohde<sup>35</sup> in Philology, and Walter Ruben in Indology—were not chosen by chance, but were meant to fill in ideologically critical disciplines (Ergin 2016: 187). In his memoirs, Ernst Hirsch underlines that the invitation of these professors was directly connected to their providing "the scientific basis for Atatürk's the-

ories of language and history" (*wissenschaftlichen Hintergrund für die Sprach- und Geschichtstheorie Atatürks*) (Hirsch 1982: 334).

It is plausible to assume that Ruben and his fellow scholars were aware of the tasks expected of them. As an Indologist, Walter Ruben was expected to establish connections between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia. The first conference that he was commissioned to give as part of the single-party regime's official conference series was on the similarities between Buddhism and Shamanism (Ruben 1939b, 1939c). The Republican ruling elite, while waging a war against the long-established allegiance to Islam, was praising Shamanism as the 'national religion' of the Central Asian Turks, the supposed forefathers not only of the Turks but of all human civilization. According to the newly introduced "Turkish History Thesis" (*Türk Tarih Tezi*), Central Asia was the origin and home of the "Turkish race," who had spread out in successive waves to the rest of the world, bringing civilization to the new lands they settled (Çağaptay 2002). The single-party regime's interest in India was to offer an alternative theory, tracing so-called 'Aryan whiteness' back to the Indian subcontinent. Walter Ruben was of great importance in this endeavor in as far as he could suggest a connection between the origins of Indian religious practices and Turkic peoples, as opposed to 'Aryan' influences (Ruben 1939b, 1943a).

In a second area of contribution to the Turkish History Thesis—and through a larger body of work—Ruben examined traces of trans-cultural interaction, relying heavily on ethnographic data, namely oral traditions, fairy tales (*Märchen*), stories, and songs. In fact, following his field research in Bengal in 1936–37, his scholarly works stressed the relevance of ethnographic and archaeological data for cultural history, together with the significance of comparative methods.<sup>36</sup> From 1940 onwards, he wrote a series of articles analyzing the "tales of Turks and Indians," focusing largely on the similarities between them (Ruben 1940, 1941a, 1942b, 1943b). Ruben wrote on what he originally called the *Märchenbeziehungen*, or "fairy-tale relations"—as opposed to the international relations—between Turkey and India (Khayyat 2018: 175). His publications in the first issue of the journal *Indology Studies* (İndoloji Araştırmaları) of Ankara University were based on these connections. With a text entitled "*Ein Indisches Motiv bei Goethe und Thomas Mann*" (An Indian Motif in Goethe and Thomas Mann), he stressed the ancient Indian origins of certain motifs in German literature (Ruben 1941b). Soon after, he was asked to trace these same origins to the Turkish oral tradition. In his article "*Ende gut, alles gut' ein Märchen bei Indern, Türken, Boccaccio, Shakespeare*" ('All's well that ends well' – A Fairy Tale among the Indians, the Turks, Boccaccio, Shakespeare),

31 "1936/37 kışında tetkik maksadile Hindistana gitmek için Türk hükümetinin bana gösterdiği kolaylıktan dolayı müteşekkirim. Kismen Hint yüksek kültürüne, kısmen de Hint ibtidallerine ait olan eşyadan ibaret bir koleksiyonla, şimdi fakültenin İndoloji Enstitüsünde bulunan 1200 fotoğrafı Türkiye'ye getirdim."

32 Wolfram Eberhard (1909–1989) was a German sinologist and ethnologist. In 1937, fleeing from the Nazis, he became a professor of sinology at Ankara University, a position he held for eleven years. He was instrumental in the development of sinology in Turkey and studied the folklore of Turkey. In 1938, he named his second son "Anatol," a name borrowed from the region (Anatolia). In 1948, he was offered a chair at the University of Berkeley, where he taught as a professor of sociology until 1976.

33 Benno Landsberger (1890–1968) was one of the most important German Assyriologists. Dismissed from the civil service in 1935, Landsberger accepted an offer to work at the University of Ankara, where a new humanities faculty with a historical focus was being established (Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi). In 1939, he managed to arrange a residence permit for his sister and bring her from Vienna to Ankara (BCA, 30-18-1-2, 86/19, 06.03.1939). In 1948, he accepted an offer from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, where he worked until 1955.

34 Hans Gustav Güterbock (1908–2000) was a Hittitologist, who had since 1931 taken part in the excavations of Hattuşa (Boğazköy), the Hittite capital located in Turkey. Due to his father's Jewish descent, he lost his museum direction job in Berlin. In 1935, he was offered a position as a professor of Hittitology at the newly founded University of Ankara in Turkey, together with his academic supervisor Landsberger. At the same time, he continued to work at the Boğazköy excavation. During this time, Güterbock contributed greatly to the establishment of the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. After the Second World War, Güterbock first went to the University of Uppsala, then after a year he obtained a position at the Oriental Institute of Chicago, where he remained until his death.

35 Georg Rohde (1899–1960) was a classical philologist. In 1935, Rohde was called to Ankara University on the recommendation of the philologist Eduard Norden, where he founded the Institute for Classical Philology and also built its library, a huge task to be accomplished. Rohde also played an advisory role in the selection of works for the "Translations from the World Literature" (*Dünya Edebiyatından Tercüme*) series and, along with his assistants, translated Plato's *Politeia*.

36 In an autobiography written in English after his retirement in 1965, Ruben noted that during his Turkey years, he "tried to find the place of India in the history of mankind, walking more or less on the path of the comparative Vienna School." *Autobiographie auf Englisch* (9 pages), Nachlass Ruben (NL Ruben), Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW), Box 11/2.

he managed to find both Indian and Turkish origins of classical works of European literature (Ruben 1943a). In addition to literary production, he also noted the importance and ancientness of biographical writing in Turkish, Persian, and Indian history in an article presenting statesman biographies as the earliest literary form (Ruben 1941c). In other words, the regime's desire to argue for the ancient origins of Turkish literature and history were largely fulfilled with these scientific contributions by a renowned European scholar.

In terms of his scholarly output contributing to Indology, Walter Ruben's Ankara years became quite fruitful towards the end (Ruben 1943c, 1944a, 1944b). His two books, *History of Ancient India* (Eski Hind Tarihi, 1944d) and *Indian Middle Ages* (Indisches Mittelalter, 1944c) provided an extensive overview of 1,000 years of Indian history. Although the connection of these detailed and area specific studies to the Turkish pseudo-scientific self-exaltation project was not openly clear, a review of Ruben's book written by his assistant and translator Abidin İtil<sup>37</sup> emphasized the importance of studying Indian history for Turkish national culture (İtil 1945).

In a resumé (*Lebenslauf*) penned in October 1950, Ruben wrote that, "*In alle den Jahren in der Türkei konnte ich wissenschaftlich frei arbeiten, unbehindert vom politischen Druck.*" ("In all those years in Turkey, I could work in academic freedom, ~~unhindered by political pressure~~").<sup>38</sup> It is curious that the last bit of the sentence was deleted by Ruben himself on the typewritten page. This delicate formulation hints that while he enjoyed some academic freedom ("*wissenschaftlich frei arbeiten*"), he was—at a second glance—not actually free from political pressure, thus the deletion: ~~unhindered by political pressure~~.

### Walter Ruben in Kırşehir

From August 1944 to December 1945, the Ruben family was among those interned in Kırşehir. As noted earlier, almost all émigré scholars were excused for some reason and did not have to be interned. Thus, Ruben was among very few scholars who were not exempted, despite his holding the Chair of Indology. Apparently, Ruben had made himself 'unpopular' in the eyes of the regime:

For the internment, individual people were singled out—completely arbitrarily! Only the following could be recognized: There were single women, clergymen—of all kinds, political suspects, those who had made themselves unpopular. (...) My father had made himself unpopular: In a doctoral examination he had failed a student who was an active Nazi and could do nothing. And that was resented. There was nothing to be done.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Abidin İtil was employed in 1940 as an assistant for the Chair of Indology (BCA, 30-18-1-2, 90/12, 08.02.1940); he was then appointed Professor of Indology in 1963 (BCA, 30-11-1-0, 302/36, 30.12.1963).

<sup>38</sup> *Lebenslauf*, 2 Seiten, 14.10.1950, Nachlass Ruben (NL Ruben), Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW), Box 13/1.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Gerhard Ruben, 17.08.1999 (Hillebrecht 2000: 83).

The Ruben family was deported on very short notice. They were told that they would be sent to Kırşehir within twenty-four hours, and so they had to dismantle everything and be ready to travel, taking with them only the vital necessities. Walter Ruben could not bring his small library nor other resources to work. Neither was he allowed to bring his camera or take photos. Nevertheless, he succeeded in taking his typewriter, his little Erika, along. Even under these restrictive circumstances, he continued his scholarly activities. He made use of his time by studying the history of the city and its adjacent area. Ruben toured all around the city for about an entire year, talking to and interviewing people from all different statuses and classes (Ruben 2002: 258–260). While still in Kırşehir, Ruben completed his manuscript, 300 machine-typed pages with thirty-one illustrations, within nine months, exactly on May 1, 1945. In the very first section, "Subject and Working Method of this Book" (*Thema des Buches und Arbeitsweise*), Ruben describes his own motivation as the following:

When the Soviet army had driven back Hitler's Wehrmacht from Stalingrad to Warsaw, Turkey broke off political relations with Germany and sent some Germans to Kırşehir. So, on August 29, 1944, I came to this idyllic small town, to this oasis in the inner Anatolian steppe, and had time to study it. *I am neither a Turkologist nor a general historian, but even as an unemployed Indologist I could not miss this opportunity.* As far as I know, no European historian has yet been offered the opportunity to spend several months in such a small town within Anatolia ... and to have real contact with the people (*in echten Verkehr mit dem Volk zu treten*) (Ruben 2003: 3).<sup>40</sup>

Of course, *as an Indologist, I would rather have been confined (konfiniert) in an Indian city.* But even so, I am glad that I could spend the terrible war years in this ancient oriental city and get to know its life (Ruben 2003: xiv).<sup>41</sup>

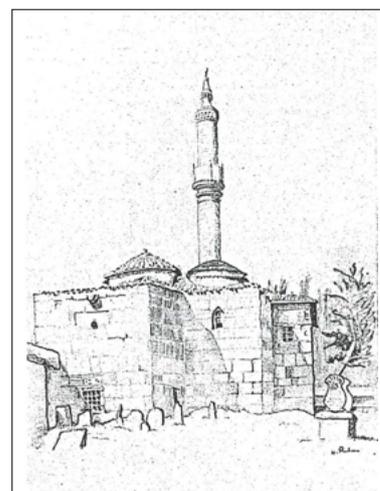


Fig. 3: Walter Ruben's drawing of the Tomb and Mosque of Ahi Evran, 1944-45. Ruben, 2003: 55.

<sup>40</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>41</sup> "*Natürlich wäre ich als Indologe lieber in einer indischen Stadt konfiniert gewesen. Aber auch so bin ich froh, dass ich die schrecklichen Kriegsjahre in dieser altertümlichen orientalischen Stadt verbringen und ihr Leben kennen lernen konnte.*" Italics mine.

He also compared his situation as a deportee (*Deportierter*) to that of a hostage named Johann Schiltberger, who had been captured by the Ottoman army in 1396, and whose *Reisebuch* (travel journal, published posthumously in 1477) offered a detailed eyewitness account of the Ottoman Empire (Ruben 2003: 3). In other words, under circumstances of confinement and disconnectedness from the outside world, Ruben felt himself compelled to do something. It was certain that the Germans would be kept in this small town until the end of the war, but that was not in the foreseeable future at the time. So, Ruben had to keep himself busy for his peace of mind. His son noted that his father needed to concentrate on his research in order to overcome the difficulties imposed by the circumstances of exile—and later internment. When there was a tense moment at home, Gerhard Ruben realized that he could escape it by asking his father a question concerning his research. This would immediately calm him down, and an enjoyable conversation would follow (Ruben 2002: 257). While completing his work, Ruben had no access to a library. However, assuming that there was hardly any existing research about the city, he limited himself to what was locally available. Ruben built a friendly relationship with the mayor of the city, Cevat Hakki, who was also a local historian, writing for the local newspaper. He also used a few articles written by Nahid Sırrı and Hilmi Ziya Ülgen and referred to the Ottoman yearbook for 1907 (*Salname*) and the 1935 census for statistical information. But his book was essentially based on field research, observations by the author, and first and foremost on conversations with residents (Ruben 2003: 5). In his preface, written on May 1, 1945, he expressed his heartfelt thanks to the people of Kırşehir with whom he lived in close contact and his gratitude for the kindness that was shown to him everywhere. In the very last sentence of the preface, he also makes note of the hospitality (*Gastrecht*) he had received in the past ten years, which enabled him to continue his Indological and historical work in "Germany's darkest time":

*Ich wünsche allen Kirsehirern für ihre schöne Stadt alles Gute und hoffe, dass meine Arbeit die Aufmerksamkeit türkischer Kreise auf einige wichtige Punkte richten und in ausser-türkischen Kreisen Verständnis für die schwere Lage des türkischen Volkes im Kampf um den Fortschritt wecken wird, des türkischen Volkes, das uns zehn Jahre lang Gastrecht und mir die geistige Freiheit in meiner indologischen und historischen Arbeit in Deutschlands dunkelster Zeit gewährte* (Ruben 2003: xi).<sup>42</sup>

In a later (re)interpretation, namely in the foreword he wrote in 1952, once he was a tenured Professor of Indology at the Humboldt University in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, i.e., East Germany), Ruben

<sup>42</sup> "I wish all the inhabitants of Kirsehir all the best for their beautiful town and hope that my work will draw the attention of Turkish circles to some important points and will arouse understanding in non-Turkish circles for the difficult situation of the Turkish people in the struggle for progress, and I thank the Turkish people who gave us hospitality for 10 years and gave me intellectual freedom in my indological and historical work in Germany's darkest time."

criticized the Turkish government. He noted that the government had very strong sympathies for Hitler's government. Moreover, it was only during his internment that he realized the "statist character of the Kemalist Republic" and the "reactionary character" of 95% of the population (Ruben 2003: xiii). The fact that the people were "incredibly backward" (*unglaublich rückständig*) was actually not their fault, but that of the government.<sup>43</sup>

The manuscript provided a unique ethnographic and historical study of Kırşehir and its environs. Ruben dealt with the geological and geographical disposition, the historical location of the city. The book introduces all the city quarters, streets, and buildings. There is also significant research about the trade, crafts (and the absence thereof)<sup>44</sup>, customs, and material culture practiced in the city. With his intimate observations of Anatolian life at the end of the Second World War, Ruben succeeded in providing deep insight into a small-town. He also focused on the historical artefacts and cultural heritage of the city. For him, the city was "like almost every Anatolian town" a treasure trove for the historian, giving a glimpse into each and every historical era: One could find stone tools, agricultural artifacts of the first townspeople of the Bronze Age—the Sumerians, the pointed shoe of the Hittites, ancient tumuli (hill graves) and rock graves of the Romans, and a sanctuary of Dionysus from the Greco-Roman period. The book provides an account of the city's ancient history, as well as its important Seldjukite and Ottoman history. In it, Ruben focuses on Seldjukite architecture, the history of heterodox Islam (especially the Bektaşî order), and also the artisanal guild system (*Ahi teşkilatı*). Using a comparative approach to cultural studies, he had already compared Indian culture with that of the ancient Orient and ancient Greece. In Kırşehir, Ruben found Indian influences in a mosque, which strengthened his assumption that the trade route from India to the West had led through this region.

Soon after his return to Ankara, Ruben managed to publish a few articles in Turkish on his findings in Kırşehir (Ruben 1945, 1947a, 1947b, 1948; Ruben and Sayılı 1947). These studies received interest at the time and initiated new research in the coming decades.<sup>45</sup> However, the approximately 300 pages of his manuscript,

<sup>43</sup> In his "autobiographical sketch," he criticized the American influence in Turkey as the reason behind this: "I had to accept an offer of the State's University of Santiago in Chile, because I did not wish to stay in Turkey, where, under American pressure, the anti-democratic development went on." *Autobiographie auf Englisch* (9 pages), Nachlass Ruben (NL Ruben), Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW), Box 11/2.

<sup>44</sup> He specifically noted the absence and/or decline of certain crafts, which he connected with the expulsion and massacre of Greeks and Armenians, who had actually "lived here peacefully with Turks until twenty years ago" (Ruben 2003: 4, 179–180). At that time, there was only one Armenian family (of three people) in the city; they were actually from Yozgat and had converted to Islam (Ruben 2003: 4, 227).

<sup>45</sup> Ottoman historians working on subjects relating to the history of heterodox Islam, the artisanal guild system, or land and ecology refer to Ruben's work on Kırşehir (Faroqhi 1976: 52; White 2011: 65–66, 109).

which he tried in vain to publish both in the GDR and in Turkey, fell into oblivion. Thanks to an exhibition of the Verein Aktives Museum on the internment of stateless Germans in Turkey,<sup>46</sup> Walter Ruben's older son Gerhard was able to speak about the manuscript and had the chance to praise it.<sup>47</sup> The renewed interest in the lives of exiled scholars and the period in general contributed to the publication of the book in 2003.

### Life after exile

After eighteen months of internment, shortly before Christmas in 1945, the internees were told that they were free to return at their own expense, or they would have to wait about fourteen days for a train from Ankara. At Christmas of 1945, most of the internees returned to their 'homes' in Ankara and Istanbul. Naturally, everybody wanted to return, but the financial burden made it impossible for some, who had to wait until January 5, 1946 to return at the expense of the Turkish state. The Ruben family was able to return before Christmas.

As the war was finally over, Walter Ruben considered returning to Germany. There was pressure from their larger family and friends in Germany to return.<sup>48</sup> And other politically active émigré scholars, such as Ernst Reuter, wanted to go back as quickly as possible to take part in the 'reconstruction of the country.'<sup>49</sup> Ruben also wanted to try his chances in the new Germany and so received permission from the Turkish government in 1946 to stay for several weeks in his homeland. However, his negotiations with the "German Central Administration for Popular Education" (Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung) in Berlin about a job opportunity were unsuccessful. As a result, he continued to work for another two years at the University of Ankara. During this time, the family made several trips around the country. In 1946, Ruben visited the villages in the steppe between Ankara and Akşehir. In 1947, he went again to Kırşehir to clarify "the problem of the astronomical well in the Caca Bey mosque" and to take some photographs of the city. In 1947, the family also went north to visit the Black Sea area.<sup>50</sup>



Fig. 4: Ruben Family shortly before leaving Ankara, 1947. Hillebrecht, 2000: 82.

In 1948, unable to go back to Germany and probably tired of his exile in Turkey, Walter Ruben decided to take up an offer to be the Chair of Anthropology at the University of Santiago de Chile.<sup>51</sup> His wife Carlota Ruben was from Cochabamba, Bolivia, and so the Ruben family had at least some relatives in that part of the world. In 1949, Ruben took a research trip to Bolivia, and his results proved again his inclination to connect cultures and civilizations. But, South America did not become a home for the family. In the beginning of 1950, the entire family relocated to the GDR. Soon after, Walter Ruben was appointed as Professor of Indology at the Humboldt University in Berlin and Director of the Institute of Indian Studies. His review (*Überprüfung*) by the Central Committee of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) for emigration from the West (*Westemigration*) in 1952 caused him great distress,<sup>52</sup> but Ruben was able to become a full member of the Academy of Sciences of the GDR in 1955. He developed his greatest efficacy as an Indologist at the Humboldt University and became the central figure to develop cultural relations with India in the GDR (Manjara 2014: 284). In 1959, he was awarded with the National Prize; from 1961 to 1968, he worked as the scientific secretary of the Academy Class for Languages, Literature, and Art (*Akademie-Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur, und Kunst*); from 1963 to 1965, he served as the director of the Institute for Oriental Research (*Institut für Orientforschung*). Walter Ruben died in Berlin on November 7, 1982.

were stored in an album, showing the itinerary of the journey to the coastal regions of the Black Sea (Dogramaci 2013: 70).

<sup>46</sup> Verein Aktives Museum (2000b), *Haymatloz. Exil in der Türkei 1933–1945*. <https://www.aktives-museum.de/ausstellungen/haymatloz/>. Accessed 17 April 2020.

<sup>47</sup> In an interview with Martin Schönfeld, Gerhard Ruben stressed that he still had a copy of his father's Kırşehir manuscript and that he was trying to type it up on his computer. He also had the chance to praise the content of the book referring to the massacre of Armenians and the dervish orders in the city doing espionage work for the Ottoman sultan (Verein Aktives Museum 2000a: 34–35).

<sup>48</sup> In a letter written to A. Rüstow, dated Ankara, 2.5.1946, Ruben noted how his mother was begging for him to return. "Yesterday I got a letter from my mother from our village in Germany. The good old woman longs for her children and grandchildren and asks when we are coming. She doesn't mention anything about economic or political things, only that the village wouldn't understand if I didn't come home immediately." Bundesarchiv Koblenz, N 1169, Nr. 47.

<sup>49</sup> For more information on Ernst Reuter's exile and return, see Möckelmann (2013).

<sup>50</sup> During the journey, Ruben took picturesque landscape photographs as well as views of ancient cities by the water. The photos

<sup>51</sup> "In Chile I spent one and a half years (1948/49) and became interested in the history of the Indians of the Cordillera. Thanks to the University, I had the chance to make two trips to the desert of Atacama in the north of Chile and to Lake Titicaca and Tiahuanaco with its old ruins in Bolivia." *Autobiographie auf Englisch* (9 Pages), Nachlass Ruben (NL Ruben), Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW), Box 11/2.

<sup>52</sup> The report stressed that the family should receive a lot of attention, since Walter Ruben was friends with "agents" like Prof. Reuter and Dr. Baade. *Aktennotiz von Anton Joos, Kaderabt. des ZK der SED*, 20.04.1952 (Hillebrecht 2000: 83).

## Conclusion: scholarship in exile

As a concept in the social sciences, exile predominantly refers to 'intellectual' and/or 'artistic' contexts or biographies (Suvin 2005). Most works written on the concept come from the fields of literary studies, cultural studies, and art history and approach exile as a habitus and, despite its psychological heaviness, as a productive place (Suleiman 1998; Eagleton 1970). Much of the contemporary interest in exile can be traced to the intellectual benefits of the exiled to the host country or to the universal depository of knowledge. Research usually concentrates on 'enlightening aspects' and not so much on the difficulties or needs of the exile. From a socioeconomic perspective, academics were definitely a privileged group of refugees, who were in possession of intellectual capital, international contacts, marketable qualifications, and linguistic expertise. In the case of Ruben and many others who came to Turkey at the time, they were offered a contract beforehand, and they came as esteemed foreign guest professors. However, approaching the subject with the concept of 'scholars at risk' shakes off such romanticizing prejudices and uncovers the scholars' vulnerabilities.

The focus of this paper, namely the life trajectory of Walter Ruben in exile and internment, aspired to provide a more balanced analysis of the production of knowledge in exile. The analysis of Ruben's scholarly production during his Ankara years emphasizes how, in a different locality and in a different sociopolitical setting, the recipients of the produced knowledge are entirely changed. There is a need to take into account the questions of 'knowledge for whom' and 'knowledge for whose ears.' In that respect, Ruben's works from 1938 to 1944 portray his obligation to please the Turkish government and assist the regime in establishing pseudo-scientific truths about the ancientness of Turkish peoples and civilization. This episode brings to light the vulnerability of Ruben as a 'scholar at risk' in an authoritarian country, where academic institutions and the production of knowledge were entirely controlled by the state. As a refugee scholar, he did not have great chances but instead had to follow orders to keep his precarious employment.

His fifteen months long internment in Kırşehir, on the other hand, was a period in his intellectual life during which he more acutely experienced three dimensions of exile: exile as a person, exile as a place, and exile as a condition. Specifically, his internment is a window into how he experienced his exile as associated with a place. The geography, the spatial dimension, of exile is always an important factor to understand both the person in question and the emotions involved. Moreover, geography also invites us to undertake a thorough analysis of the constant mobility of the exiled person, viewing exile as a place that was never fixed. The Ruben family came to Ankara in 1935, but immediately afterward, Walter Ruben left for Bengal. The family then tried to return to Germany in 1937, but they came back to Ankara again in 1938. Towards the end of the war, they were interned in central Anatolia, and in 1948, they migrated to Chile. In other words, they lived through those two decades with a series of disconnections from and reconnections

to home, as well as belonging to a new country. Walter Ruben's years in exile open up the question of multiple exilic routes and the perpetual exile.

His work as an ethnographer in Kırşehir also emphasizes the impact of disciplinary background. As an area studies specialist, Ruben had the added advantage of making his research relevant in different contexts. He was an Indologist in Kırşehir, Anatolia, an area foreign to him. However, he could translate his methodological background as an Orientalist and a trained anthropologist and his field research experience into an opportunity. Even in the context of deportation and internment, without even having a library at his disposal, he could still do new research. His search for an impulse for new research 'in captivity' is reminiscent of other wartime captives, especially Fernand Braudel, who wrote *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World at the Time of Philip II) as a prisoner of war in Mainz and Lübeck in 1940 and in the four years following his captivity.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, accounts of extremely productive émigré scholars, who continued their research and writing under very difficult conditions, biasedly stress the intellectual benefits of exile (Burke 2017). Edward Said criticized such romanticizing and Eurocentric views of exile in his 1984 essay "Reflections of Exile." He urged the researcher to go beyond Joyce, Nabokov, and other cosmopolitan exiles in 1920s Paris and to think instead of "the uncountable masses" of "unknown men and women" all over the world (Said 2001: 139).<sup>54</sup> Still, a closer look at the personal circumstances of the actors and the psychological difficulties involved also proves that intellectual labor and research may provide some form of escape and cure, helping the individual scholar deal with personal misery and transcend the depression of everyday life in exile.

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<sup>53</sup> For more on captivity and intellectual production see Pathé and Théofilakis (2016).

<sup>54</sup> It is, however, curious that Said regards Eric Auerbach's exile in İstanbul as the enabling condition for the writing of his masterpiece *Mimesis* 1942 (Said 1983).

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**Nazan Maksudyan** is Einstein guest professor at the Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut at the Freie Universität Berlin and a research associate at the Centre Marc Bloch (Berlin). She was a "Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe" (EUME) Fellow in 2009–10 and an Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung Postdoctoral Fellow at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient in 2010–11 and in 2016–18. The general focus of her research is the social and cultural history of the late Ottoman Empire (18th–20th centuries) and modern Turkey, with special interest in children and youth, gender, sexuality, education, and the history of sciences. (nazan.maksudyan@fu-berlin.de)

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