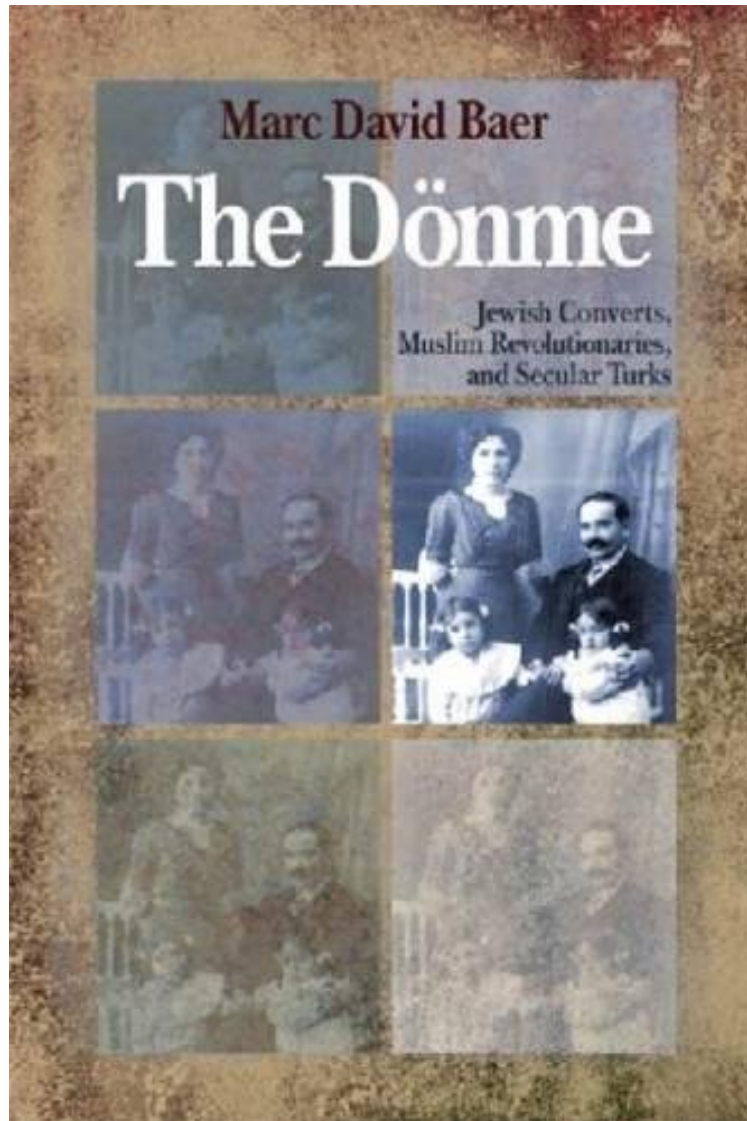


[Library ebook] The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks

# The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks

Marc David Baer

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**Marc David Baer : The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Yasmina Lokmanoglu Very interesting 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The Hidden Jews of Turkey By S. Cranow In the Thracian city of Edirne , a want

to be messiah is given a choice, conversion or death. Seems harsh but considering that Sabbtai Tzvi was talking of over taking the Sultan then the penalty seems rather reasonable . The Jewish messiah converted . His followers were in disarray and of those he had many. The mainstream Jewish establishment opposed him for his heretical views and changes to the Jewish religion .Some Jewish followers returned to the fold. Others converted along with him. Some completely left the fold. Many Ottoman Jews were of Spanish Descent so converting to another religion was deemed an acceptable way to save your life.Those Jews who converted to Islam and secretly followed his teaching were called the Donme. Outwardly they were Muslims but in private they followed Shabtai Tvi's teaching in secret. For two hundred plus years the Donme had a twisting and turning history in Turkey.Alienated from other Jews and quasi excepted by Turkish Muslims the Donmeh were able to carve out a niche for themselves. There were three sects of Donme. The kapnanci, Karakas and Yakubi.The first two groups of Dinmeh allied themselves with certain school of Sufi Islam. The Kapansi were allied with the Bektashi school. The second Karakas was allied to the Mevlevi school. The Yakubi were unaligned.The Dinme kept themselves apart from everyone else in the Ottoman Empire. They married amongst themselves, went to their own schools, built their own mosques, had their own graveyards and neighborhoods. The different groups did not even mix with the other groups of Donme.The Karrakas group opened the Tarraki school. The Kapananci opened their own school called something like Teriket. The schools taught a progressive curriculum of European languages and business acumen. They also taught morals and the values of hard work.Each group of Dinmeh lived in their own neighborhood. Their style was rich and somewhat different than the rest of the Turks. Many of the houses were interconnected with underground tunnels. This served for rituals , secret meetings and safety.The Dinme were not recognized as having their own millet. They were considered Muslims albeit with some suspicion as to how sincere they were. The Dinme had their own mosque with their own variation on Jewish practice and Muslim practice. They also had their own communal leader complete with their own laws and jails. The Turks frowned on such autonomy.The Dinme became part of Ottoman society , even rising to high positions of government . They were also successful business people, often times importing tobacco and timber. The Donme were also well travelled.Their main city of habitation was in Salonica , located on the Grecian part of the Ottoman Empire . In 1909 change was in the air. Many Donme played an active role in Young Turks and their reform. So did the Sufis and the Masons. Many Donme were Masons. The Masons took an active role in helping the Young Turks come to power.It was during this time that serious suspicions fell upon the Donmeh. The Islamists accused them of promoting immorality and undermining the spirit of Islam. The secularists felt they were not genuine Turks and were trying to undermine the Turkish nationWorld War I would bring profound changes for all Ottoman citizens. Armenians and Greeks were massacred. The treaty of Lausanne inaugurated a swap of populations between Greece and Turkey. Muslims to Turkey and Christians to Greece. It was not easy for newcomers and neither side really trusted the Dinme. People were short changed on property exchanged and newcomers with different customs were not always welcome with open arms.The World War II years brought even more negative change. Being Turkish was a racial category. Jews, Donme , Armenian , and Christians were given a wealth tax and forced into conscripted labor. In the end the Dinme were forced to assimilate.This was a worthwhile read.20 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Once upon a time there was a fountain that delivered cherry juice in ThessalonikiBy Emre SevincFinally an intriguing account of a very important part of Turkey's history that is highly readable yet conforming to highest academic standards. I consider Dr. Baer a very brave person, because as far as I know the topic of 'dnme' or anything related to Sabetay Sevi is very controversial in Turkey. Conspiracy theories regarding those people (who are often called 'Sabetayist' in Turkish) are dime a dozen. It is only after reading this book that I gained an amount of more or less objective knowledge about this part of Turkish - Ottoman history. The author not only provides a great deal of references (as should any respectable historian do) but also provides his sociological analyses of a people who witnessed huge transformations such as the catastrophic forced population exchange (between Greece and Turkey) during 1920s, the fall of Ottoman empire and foundation of Turkish republic and the changing role of religion throughout these big events.There are still some mysterious parts which probably need more light to be shed upon but I think this will require another book and maybe further interviews. The author says that the topic was considered to be very sensitive by some of the people he interviewed and some of them who accepted to give information refused to do so after a week. I think this shows that the topic is still very alive for these group of people whom Muslims did not consider real Muslims and claimed that they were Jews, yet at the same time Jewish communities plainly claimed that those people were not Jews and followed the orders of a false prophet, a heretic according to them. As if this was not enough, those 'dnme' people from Thessaloniki were also engaged with Sufi orders to complicate the analysis even more. I guess when people are looking for clear-cut categories, black and white distinctions, not being identified 'cleanly' with a 'well established and more or less accepted' category poses a lot of problems for some.I really wonder what the reactions will be when (and if) this book is translated into Turkish, it may put an end into some of the conspiracy theories (because the author claims that based on his research the people who were supposed to follow Sabetay Sevi are no longer a closed group, they married with other people and assimilated into the general Turkish population long time ago) or at the same time it may trigger even more conspiracy theories (thinking about Dr. Yalin Kk, a famous Turkish author who is one of the champions of these kind of conspiracy theories, I'm inclined to believe

that this option is a strong one). I sincerely recommend this book to anybody who wants to understand the early years of Turkish Republic as well as the Ottoman period with its events that led to the new country better. The reactions as well as strategies employed by a very interesting and highly intellectual group of people who really had a very mysterious position and did not marry outside of their group for a very long time is anything but boring. Dr. Baer wrote one of the most exciting history books I've read for a long time. If only I could go back in time to visit that fountain built by Hamdi Bey, the mayor of Selanik then, and which delivered cherry juice...

This book tells the story of the Dnme, the descendants of Jews who resided in the Ottoman Empire and converted to Islam along with their messiah, Rabbi Shabbatai Tzevi, in the seventeenth century. For two centuries following their conversion, the Dnme were accepted as Muslims, and by the end of the nineteenth century rose to the top of Salonikan society. The Dnme helped transform Salonika into a cosmopolitan city, promoting the newest innovation in trade and finance, urban reform, and modern education. They eventually became the driving force behind the 1908 revolution that led to the overthrow of the Ottoman sultan and the establishment of a secular republic. To their proponents, the Dnme are enlightened secularists and Turkish nationalists who fought against the dark forces of superstition and religious obscurantism. To their opponents, they were simply crypto-Jews engaged in a plot to dissolve the Islamic empire. Both points of view assume the Dnme were anti-religious, whether couched as critique or praise. But it is time that we take these religious people seriously on their own terms. In the Ottoman Empire, the Dnme promoted morality, ethics, spirituality, and a syncretistic religion that reflected their origins at the intersection of Jewish Kabbalah and Islamic Sufism. This is the first book to tell their story, from their origins to their near total dissolution as they became secular Turks in the mid-twentieth century.

"Marc David Baer vividly describes how this ancient, secret sect of Jews, about which little has been written until now, fit into the Islamic world without being found out." (Jewish Book World)"At last, an engaging yet non-sensationalized history of the Dnme that places their history in the broader context of the later Ottoman empire and emergent Turkish Republic, showing how this group so vital to the Empire's many later gains, its transition to a republic, and its 'cosmopolitan' character ended up largely erased from the historical record." (K. E. Fleming author of *Greece and Jewish History*)"Part detective novel, part historical account, Baer's illuminating study wades through centuries of myth, an ingenious array of sources (archival, oral, architectural, literary, and epigraphic), across the boundaries of nations, and through the life and death of the Ottoman empire in order to reconstruct the history of a misunderstood group—the descendants of the sect of Shabbatai Tzevi, the seventeenth century false messiah and Jewish-to-Muslim apostate. More than the history of a single ethno-religious group, this vivid book meditates on how modern boundaries (those that divide Muslim from Jew, Greek from Turk, secular from pious, nationalist from traitor) are constructed, maintained, and mythologized." (Sarah Abrevaya Stein, University of California Los Angeles)"The book is clearly written and provides much data and analysis on the cultural, social, economic, and political life of the Dnme . . . This is a major study of a community that contributed greatly to the growth of Salonika and to the emergence of modern Turkey." "Baer is dealing with an extremely important and sensitive topic. That the followers of Rabbi Shabbatai Tzevi did not really convert, but continued to practice their religion in secret, continues to be a widespread belief in Turkey. This unique book is of great relevance and significance to modern Turkey in understanding the fate of the many communities that were caught in between the transition from empire to nation state in the Middle East." (Resat Kasaba University of Washington, editor of *Cambridge History of Modern Turkey*, Vol. 4)"In Baer's hands, the story of the Dnme becomes . . . a rather familiar modern morality play—a story of strangeness annihilated by the pressure of sameness." (Adam Kirsch) About the Author Marc David Baer is Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Irvine. His first book, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (2008), won the Albert Hourani Prize from the Middle East Studies Association.