

## Osteuropa und der Nahe Osten – East Europe and the Middle East

**Veranstalter:** Verband der Osteuropahistorikerinnen und -historiker e.V. (VOH); Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung; DFG-Schwerpunktprogramm „Transottomanica“; Gießener Zentrum Östliches Europa, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen (GiZO); in Kooperation mit dem Centrum für Nah- und Mittelost-Studien, Philipps-Universität Marburg (CNMS)

**Datum, Ort:** 11.04.2019–12.04.2019, Marburg

**Bericht von:** Philipp Winkler, Lehrstuhl für Neuere und Neueste Geschichte mit dem Schwerpunkt der Geschichte Osteuropas, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

While contacts between Western Europe, especially the former colonial powers, and the Middle East have long received great attention by historians, the relations between Eastern Europe and the MENA region remain, as JULIA OBERTREIS (Erlangen) put it in her welcoming address, in some cases „not just understudied, but even *unstudied*“. The conference was organized by the Association of Historians working on Eastern Europe (Verband der Osteuropahistorikerinnen und -historiker e.V., VOH), the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe - Institute of the Leibniz Association, the German Research Foundation (DFG) Priority Programme „Transottomanica“ and the Giessen Center for Eastern European Studies, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen (GiZO) in cooperation with the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the Philipps-Universität Marburg (CNMS). It attempted to at least partially fill those gaps and make some forays into this uncharted territory. The timescope of the conference, which featured contributions in German as well as in English, was very wide, ranging from the early modern period to the Chernobyl catastrophe and the end of the USSR.

STEFAN ROHDEWALD (Gießen) gave an overview of the conference's scope and pointed to the many different forms of exchange between the Middle East and Eastern Europe over the centuries. As director

of the Priority Programme „Transottomanica“ he stressed that this project does not regard regions as eternal, clearly defined entities, but takes into consideration the consolidation of concrete social networks in spatial terms and their transformations in local and global interconnectivities.

The papers of the first section focused on the construction of knowledge on the „Orient“, the important role played by state actors in supporting scientific research on and exploration of the region and, in conjunction, the role of research and science in supporting the strive for political, economic and geostrategic penetration of the region.

TAISIYA LEBER (Mainz) presented her research on Russian knowledge about the religious situation in the Middle East in the early modern period, focusing on Egypt. This knowledge was mainly transferred through networks of orthodox pilgrims, monks and nuns moving between Russia and the Middle East. They transmitted narratives about persecution and oppression by Muslim authorities in their home countries, with the clear intention of garnering support from the Russian rulers; those in turn used the opportunity of supporting the Middle Eastern Christians to present themselves as pious and righteous rulers and protectors of the Orthodox faith.

Then, LILIJIA WEDEL (Göttingen) (paper read out by HEIDI HEIN-KIRCHER) had a view at cultural and scientific activities of European powers in the Middle East, especially Palestine, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The many research institutes run by European missionaries pursued not only scientific, but also geostrategical and political interests and were, accordingly, in the cases of Russia as well as the Western powers, generously supported by their respective governments. Furthermore, they published and presented the results of their research in different forms in their home countries, thus working to construct and transmit a certain image of the Orient at home and kindle interest in it. She also pointed out that while Russian researchers had a clearer interest in the Orient as the ancient land of the Bible and Christian revelation, Western scholars mainly viewed it as an „exotic“ area.

ROBERT BORN (Berlin) followed the Mid-

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dle Eastern pursuits of Josef Strzygowski. The Austrian art historian, who had worked on Armenian and Byzantine art, saw Eastern Europe as a „mediator“ between Western and Oriental art forms. The Habsburg Monarchy especially was apt, in his eyes, to fulfill this role. Born pointed out that Strzygowski and other Austrian scholars of the Orient, in developing scientific networks and institutions for the exploration of their research area, were tightly connecting these endeavours to possible Austrian influence in the region.

The discussion revolved around the question of the (often vastly) different interests held by the involved actors from both sides of the exchange, and called for a greater focus on the role of objects (pieces of art, relics, etc.) in forming the picture of the Orient in Europe.

The second section started with DENNIS DIERKS (Jena) presenting his analysis of the connections between the two reforming journals *al-Manar* (Cairo) and *Behar* (Sarajevo). In an effort to „provincialize Europe“ (Dipesh Chakrabarty), he pointed out that European Muslims viewed themselves as part of the periphery of the Muslim World, favourably looking to its centers, like Cairo, the home of *al-Manar*. *Behar* discussed typical questions of Islamic reform discourse, constructing a „Crisis of Islam“, asking how Islamic society could become so backward in comparison to the Western world, and how it could be reformed to catch up with it again. While there was no direct contact between the journals, they knew about and mentioned each other. *Behar* viewed *al-Manar* as a model, and *al-Manar* in its turn took pride in the fact that a European journal would look up to it and accept it as an authority on Islamic reform discourse.

VLADIMIR HAMED-TROYANSKY (New York) dealt with Muslim migration between Eastern Europe and the Middle East: In the 50 years before World War I, over three million Muslims moved to the Ottoman Empire, fleeing war and persecution in the Russian Empire and Eastern Europe. The Sublime Porte erected an early „refugee regime“, welcoming the immigrants and even luring Muslims from the Caucasus to settle within its borders. The word „muhajir“, which refers to the

group of believers that emigrated from Mecca to Medina together with the Prophet Muhammad, was used to describe the newcomers. This gave them a religious connotation and made helping them a religious obligation for Ottoman Muslims, while concepts of citizenship did not play any role in their reception and treatment. The Ottoman government also tried to resettle them in the Balkans and use them in programs of economic rebuilding, but this proved to be a failure, and their settlements even led to violent conflicts with other inhabitants.

In the discussion, the use of the term „muhajir“ and its connotation in different contexts and epochs was treated, questioning if its mere use necessarily always harkens back to the early Islamic period and thus intentionally gives religious importance and interpretations to those addressed by it. Different, historical as well as contemporary, examples of its usage were discussed in order to understand the complex meaning of this term, oscillating between religious and secular meanings. Furthermore, the settling of the immigrants was compared to similar contemporary settling programs in the USA and the Russian Empire, whereby Hamed-Troyansky stressed that the Ottoman program was unique in specifically perceiving and receiving the immigrants as „refugees“.

The second day started with the presentation by PETER POLAK-SPRINGER (Doha), who examined the Palestinian press in the interwar period with regard to its reporting on the situation of Jews in Europe. The press focussed its attention on Poland, the country with the biggest Jewish population in Europe at the time, which was viewed as the center of European antisemitism before the rise of Nazi Germany. The newspapers and journals mainly viewed the plight of the Jews with sympathy, but also connected it to their own fate, as they were aware of the fact that the persecution of Jews in Europe would enhance immigration to Palestine – a circumstance that also kept them from proposing it as a safe haven. Later on though, other voices appeared in the Palestinian press adopting openly antisemitic viewpoints and defending the anti-Jewish measures taken by European governments.

ADÉLA JUNOVÁ MACKOVÁ (Prague) talked about Czechoslovakia's economic relations with the Middle East in the interwar period. Having inherited 60 per cent of the Habsburg Empire's industrial capacity, the new country was in need of foreign export markets, and the Middle East was regarded as a promising, yet risky area for economic activities. Thus, in the 1920s and 1930s a network of embassies and contacts was built up by the Czechoslovak state to foster export to the region; especially after the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 the MENA region was seen as an alternative outlet for Czechoslovak products. Again, the familiar topic of close collaboration between the scholars and researchers of the Oriental sciences and geostrategic state policies can be observed here, as the example of Alois Musil shows.

After that, ELISHA SALIVON (Stuttgart) presented a study on the Eastern European Jewish „Turner“ movement and its relations to the Middle East. Drawing on sources from Krakow and Lemberg, he examined its activists' view of Israel as the future home for a sportive, active, new Jewish man. Hence, the Turner movement also organized travels to Palestine, as its activists believed that their ideal of the new Jewish man would only be completed when he would live in a new Jewish homeland there; they thus also contributed to the export of Central European Sports culture to the Middle East.

The discussion further expounded the picture of Poland in the Palestinian press: the possible British influence on Palestinian viewpoints was brought up as a promising research question. Polak-Springer also pointed out that Poland was hardly mentioned outside the Jewish question, and Palestinian interest in the country was limited to this specific topic.

SWETLANA BOLTOVSKA (Marburg) then talked about the view of the Egyptian author Mohamed Makhzangi on the Chernobyl incident. Being a student in the USSR, he lived in Kiev while the catastrophe happened and later published a fictionalized account of his experience, which was viewed as representative of the position of both a „witness and victim“. He brought, as Boltovska stressed, an

interesting new dimension to the discussion by introducing a Third World point of view, stressing that for many people from Africa, it didn't really matter if they were contaminated or not, as their life-expectancy was much lower than that of Europeans anyway.

PHILIPP WINKLER (Erlangen) analyzed visitor's accounts by three Egyptian and Syrian thinkers (Ḥusnī Sabāḥ, Aḥmad Bahā' ad-Dīn, Muḥammad Mandūr) who visited the Soviet Union in the 1950s after Stalin's death. Their accounts have to be seen in the context of their home countries' relations to the Soviet Union and the authors' socialist inclinations. Though their writings contained some criticism of Stalinism and the state's atheism, they generally showed the Soviet system in a favorable light and presented the country as modern, well-organized and wealthy. Thus, they suggested its system as an attractive alternative to Western capitalist countries.

CHRISTIAN SAEHRENDT (Berlin) presented his study on the foreign cultural policy of the German Democratic Republic with regard to Syria and Iraq. Art – in the shape of „socialist realism“ – was used as a medium to strengthen the ties of the socialist European country to the not always ideologically and politically compliant Bath Party regimes, who were important partners of the Eastern Bloc in the MENA region. These regimes in turn could use this artistic cooperation to foster their legitimacy and to disavow the artistic opposition to their rule.

The discussion asked about the commonalities and differences between the Arab visitors to the Soviet Union in Winkler's and Boltovska's papers respectively, pointing out the different perspectives of mere visitors and people who lived there permanently as „foreigners“.

In the final discussion the participants agreed on the pivotal importance of fostering topics in the framework debated during this conference, encompassing namely entanglements between Eastern Europe and the MENA Region in concrete social and discursive networks consolidating larger spatial horizons well beyond the much better known and researched connections of the regions considered here to Western Europe. By further exploring North-South interconnections

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between Eastern Europe and the Middle East, relationships of these regions to Western Europe can be really distinguished in a global framework, too. The advancement of such studies and the high desirability of publications about the topic were thus discussed, which is why a volume with the contributions to the conference is now being planned.

### Conference overview

Julia Obertreis (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg): Begrüßung (Welcoming Address)

Stefan Rohdewald (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen): Einführung: Osteuropa und der Nahe Osten (Introduction: Eastern Europe and the Middle East)

*SEKTION Osteuropäisches Orientinteresse vor 1914 (Eastern European interest in the Orient before 1914)*

Chair: Julia Obertreis (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

Taisiya Leber (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz): Wissen über die Multireligiosität der Osmanischen Gesellschaft im Moskauer Reich der Frühen Neuzeit (am Beispiel Ägyptens)

Lilija Wedel (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen): Der Orient inspiriert die Großmacht Russland. Auf der Suche nach der Umsetzung des „Entdeckungsmaterials“ im Nahen Osten (zweite Hälfte des 19. bis Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts)

Robert Born (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin): Josef Strzygowskis Orient-Entwürfe zwischen wissenschaftlichem Interesse und wirtschaftspolitischem Kalkül

Commentary: Florian Riedler (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)

*SEKTION Imperiale Verflechtungen zwischen Nahem Osten und Osteuropa (Imperial Entanglements between the Middle East and Eastern Europe)*

Chair: Florian Riedler (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)

Dennis Dierks (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena): Verflochtene Modernen. Bezugnahmen und Wissenstransfers zwischen den bei-

den muslimischen „Reformzeitschriften“ al-Manār (Kairo) und Behar (Sarajevo) vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg

Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky (Columbia University, New York): Muslim Refugees in the Balkans and the Making of the Ottoman Refugee Regime, 1860–1878

Commentary: Stefan Rohdewald (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)

*SEKTION Postimperiale Erfahrungen und Beziehungen in der Zwischenkriegszeit (Post-Imperial Experiences and Relations in the Interwar Period)*

Chair: Heidi Hein-Kircher (Herder-Institut Marburg)

Peter Polak-Springer (Qatar University, Doha): Between Fear and Sympathy: The Palestinian Arab Press on Anti-Semitism and Authoritarianism in Interwar Eastern Europe

Adéla Junová Macková (Masaryk Institute and Archive, Prague): Czechoslovak Relations with the Orient

Elisha Salivon (Universität Stuttgart): Ostjüdische Reisende nach Palästina und deren Einflüsse auf die Turnkultur

Commentary: Zaur Gasimov (Orient-Institut Istanbul)

*SEKTION Der „Ostblock“ und der arabische Raum während des Kalten Krieges (The „Eastern Bloc“ and the Arab World during the Cold War)*

Chair: Stefan Rohdewald (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)

Svetlana Boltovska (Herder-Institut Marburg): „Ein Ägypter zwischen Moskau und Tschernobyl“: Das Ende der Sowjetunion durch die Augen eines ägyptischen Schriftstellers

Philipp Winkler (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg): Arab Visitors' Accounts of the Socialist Experiment

Christian Saehrendt (Berlin): Nation Building mit Hilfe der bildenden Kunst. Auswärtige Kulturpolitik der DDR in Syrien und im Irak

Commentary: Julia Obertreis (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

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