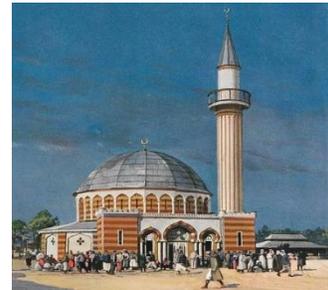




## Muslims in Interwar Europe

### *Two Interwar Books\* in a Boom on Regional Islam*

It would be daring to review in usual detail the 19 chapters of the two books. Instead, I will offer a focused look on chosen academic trends, name the books' authors and contents, and end with an outlook on research. Fortunately, each author put in his text the conclusions with endnotes and tables of literature. Also, both books, which resulted from conferences, are available in e-versions. Thus, I shall not equip this overview with more bibliographic data than necessary, but pick only a few works for marking older and newer trends.



Wünsdorf's Mosque of [Halbmondlager](#)

Unlike today, early studies about Muslims in Europe embraced the global era in a more conducive climate. During the 1990s, many scholars were driven by a bold consciousness of coming and belonging together. So, some works started also inspiring trends on:

- Arabs and other Muslims in Berlin and Europe;
- Western Colonialism (missing a long lasting Eastern version, Islamic Colonialism);
- Asians and Africans in German speaking lands and beyond;
- German-Arab, German-Indian and German-Iranian clubs;
- Arabs, Jews and Germans in the Mideast and Europe;
- Germans in the Mideast (often as part of the cultural, social or diplomatic history);
- Mideast and Europe bridging both regions also by highlights of global and regional comparative studies such as 125 years of the Sues Canal.<sup>1</sup>

Swiftly, positive attitudes almost dried out with the endless wars and terror, not only in the Mideast. After 9/11, and similar attacks all over the globe, the storm of hostilities got worse and also turned academia upside down. Political Correctness—that often deviates from academic values and aims at the suppression of free speech—reached dangerous levels. Higher education looks like a split battleground, and positions are often occupied by persons without any basic regional and language skills. Driving against those powerful trends, both books keep high standards.

However, after the German unification, the finally reorganized archival centers of Berlin gained more attraction. So did the pioneering works on Muslims in Germany by the late Gerhard Höpp who had ties with many centers in America, Arabia, Israel, the Netherlands, Russia, Great Britain, France and Poland. He engaged as spiritus rector of some striking projects, a couple of them still resonating in those two books under review.<sup>2</sup>

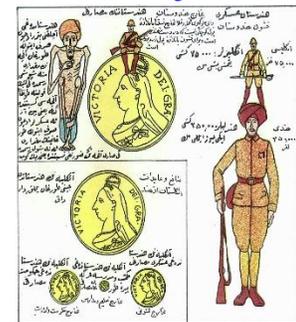
Above all, there grew a need for research on how Muslim concerns and conflicts were settled, or not, from 1919 to 1939, and from 1914 to 1946 as in the second book. In light of multinational parts of Europe, the studies are designed in a transcultural fashion. This Muslim life in interwar Europe quickly unfolded into a wider field of research. Partially driven by discoveries in Berlin's and Istanbul's Islam policies that attracted then and now more Muslim and Islamist residents to Europe, and enhanced by a unique 2015 mass immigration from Mideastern lands, which traces back to the first waves around 1900, the focus shifted from the interwar Mideast to ties within the Islamic Europe in that era.<sup>3</sup>

Inevitably, now studies serve as historical background between former times, including ensuing hot and cold wars, and today's global war against Islamism. Besides an all-time topic such as the European empires and the Middle East, in 2008 the theme of Islam in interwar Europe emerged as a first swallow in the sky of Islam and Muslims in Germany that contains also articles on Muslims in interwar Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Other works tried to bridge Europe and the Mideast by specific periods, as for instance Nazis, Islamists and the Making of the Modern Middle East, or Islam in Europe, Revolts in the Middle East which are continued in a variety of books that combine transregional histories in the triangle of multi-regional comparative studies—Regionalhistorische Komparatistik—of America, Mideast and Europe.<sup>5</sup> Lately appeared more regionally focused studies like Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2013 boomed topical books which included as a major trend a focus on Islam and Nazi Germany, the German-Ottoman jihad in World War One, the Nazi-Islamist jihad in World War Two, the Cold War Islam policies of the divided Germany and plots against Christian and Jewish minorities within the European states, Islamic lands, the Ottoman Empire and the Mideastern successor states. In another trend, books focus on the immediate aftermath of wars or shed light also on German circles in those lands and ideological key points of Islamism and jihadism, mixes of minority and Jew hatreds such as anti-Armenianism.<sup>7</sup>

Berlin's Jihad [Instigation](#) in India



Thus, both "interwar books" were written on recent parallel tracks without being able to take some other same-time studies into account, mostly for one reason: they belong to an obvious 2013 to 2016 publishing boom on similar subjects about ties between America, Germany, Europe, the Mideast and Islamic communities therein. A debate goes on about Euro-Islam or Europeanized Islam as reform Islam in relation to many kinds of Islamism and regional Islam interpretations.

### Neverland: A "Continent as Colonizer"

How Muslims settled in Europe as minorities of newcomers from 1919 to 1939, or up to 1946, is also the key focus of those two books by known authors. In the first book, Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad and Mehdi Sajid present an introduction to a trans-cultural history of Muslims in interwar Europe—which is the era of all following contents. The scholars raise guiding questions, for example, how Muslims interacted in new lands of residence, what impacted ties to co-religionists in states of origin and their views on life in Europe or what

kind of challenges their stay in Europe had on the societies there. Other questions might have been the German-Ottoman origin of ideas and organizations in the European [exile](#) or how Muslims coped with newly emerging atheistic streams like Nazism and Communism.

Some Muslims nurtured strains of Islamism. As they discovered Europe from within, their Islamists displayed an inclination to Nazis. But the claim of a "continent as colonizer" is questionable. Not all Europeans were of that kind, certainly not Germany in the Mideast, for it had no colonies there and lost in 1919 all the others.

Historically, colonialism emerged as a two way lane between the Mideast and the West with an obviously never ending colonialism of Islamization in a much longer duration than the recent "caliphate" indicates.

Yet, the British, French and Dutch colonialisms were often discussed, though less often recognized by those Muslims of inter-war Europe as an integral part of the Euro-American enlightenments. But they knew the old colonialism and compared its Islamist and Western brands.<sup>8</sup> Now a few words about the books' contents.

Ties and Chances by [Railways](#)



### **Cultures and Modernity**

Gerdien Jonker tackles religious modernity and conversion to Islam in Berlin. Umar Ryad deals with the Salafiyya, Ahmadiyya and European converts to Islam. Likewise Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld discusses the conversion of European intellectuals and the case of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje. Naomi Davidson researches social assistance and "religious" practice in Paris. Klaas Stutje unpacks Indonesian Islam in Europe with a focus on Muslim organizations in the Netherlands and beyond.

Ali Al Tuma writes about Moros and Cristianos under religious aspects of the participation of Moroccan Soldiers in the Spanish Civil War. Egdūnas Račius explores Muslims of Lithuania and the predicament of a torn autochthonous ethno-confessional community. Zaur Gasimov and Wiebke Bachmann reflect transnational life in multicultural space in the light of Azerbaijani and Tatar discourses in Europe.

### **Stories East-West, North-South**

The second book on transnational Islam, on the other hand, enlarges the scope. Not only does one text include World War One and reaches until the end of 1939, but some of the articles go further. David Motadel shows the making of Muslim communities in Western Europe. Nathalie Clayer investigates the transnational ties of the Albanian and European Islam in Albania. Richard van Leeuwen explores two Ulama traveling to Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Muhammad al-Wartatani and Muhammad al-Sa'ih. Götz Nordbruch analyzes Arab scholars at the Institut de Droit Comparé in Lyon, a rereading in the history of Arab-European intellectual encounters.

Umar Ryad writes about a Salafi student, orientalist scholarship, and Radio Berlin in Nazi Germany: Taqi al-Din al-Hilali and his experiences in the West. Mohammed Alsulami examines Iranian journals in Berlin. Humayun Ansari debates Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali's Transnationalism: Pan-Islamism, Colonialism, and radical politics. Ali Al Tuma

surveys victims, wives, and concubines in the light of the Spanish Civil War and relations between Moroccan troops and Spanish women.

Those cases and topics call for new comparative ways and biographies. The conversion of Germans to Islam for instance, which then still rarely occurred, found its contemporary continuation in "Being German, Becoming Muslim" with some East German touches.<sup>9</sup> Comparable are also interwar calls to jihad from Europe to the Mideast with parallel or recent examples of similar appeals, though from the Middle East to "within" the West.

### **For the Lust of Knowing**

Lacunae lie in theoretical frameworks deducted from this fresh richness. Also, two times German detachments of soldiers served in the Mideast, 1914 as partners and even leaders of Ottoman troops in Europe and Asia, including Arabia and the Caucasus, and in 1941 with Italian troops in North Africa. Returning home, profound spin-off effects ensued, often with former comrades in arms like (the German Chancellor to be) Franz von Papen or the ex-general Erich Ludendorff. Both aided Islamists, the 1927 Berlin Islam Institute and their 1931 calls to a parallel boycott of Jews in Germany and in Palestine. Clubs like the Orient Club and the friendship societies came about on multiple sides based on shared war experiences too. Future research may turn to those war beginnings and the under-reflected economic, cultural and academic facets of interwar Muslims and their European counterparts.<sup>10</sup>

Often authorities tried to accommodate the needs of the new arrivals, just later to be blamed that their "segregational work" did cement the lives of the "others as the eternal outsiders." To study many aspects of a former "learning by doing," adds a practical value to both books. In the art of presentation some texts set examples. Others, in the second book, appear to be fetched out of another work and dumped in with almost more endnotes than text pages, which does not exactly further a reader's lust of knowing.

If and when a "Euro-Islam" emerged in the Weimar and Nazi eras, is still an open point for the differences among the Muslims and Islamists, their sects, aspirations and agendas, partial integration or often isolation, more embedded in the transnational webs than in the host lands. How did early generations of national and global Islamists like Alim Idris fit into this phase?

Sooner rather than later inclusive histories of Muslims in Europe are due, then synoptical works on them and other world regions. Next steps may include a closer look into the second half of the past century and into more cross-comparisons of Muslim minorities in Europe with minorities in Islamic lands, with Christians and Jews in the Mideast and India. The two books on "Muslims in interwar Europe" are treasure troves of individual fates and group attitudes. Both fill academic gaps and will surely advance to the core of the topical books.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz

\***Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad, Mehdi Sajid**, eds.: Muslims in Interwar Europe. A Trans-cultural Historical Perspective. Leiden: Brill 2015, 242 pp., ISBN 978-9-00-428783-9.

\***Götz Nordbruch, Umar Ryad**, eds.: Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe. Muslim Activists and Thinkers. Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2014, 250 pp., ISBN 978-1-13-738704-2.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ausländerbeauftragte des Senats, Hg., Araber in Berlin, Berlin 1992; Heidrich, Joachim, ed., Changing Identities, Berlin 1994; Höpp, Gerhard, Hg., Fremde Erfahrungen: Asiaten und Afrikaner in Deutschland, Österreich und in der Schweiz bis 1945, Berlin 1996; drawn of conferences on European-Mideastern ties, some books I edited with related articles therein like Berlin-Kairo: Damals und heute, Berlin 1991; Jenseits der Legenden: Araber, Juden, Deutsche, Berlin 1994; 125 Jahre Sueskanal, Hildesheim 1998; August Bebel, Die Muhamedanisch-Arabische Kulturperiode (1884/89), Berlin 1999; with Wajih A.S. Atiq, Ägypten und Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert im Spiegel von Archivalien, Kairo 1998.

<sup>2</sup> An overview contains my obituary In memoriam Gerhard Höpp (1942-2003), in Orient 44(2003)3, pp. 339-347.

<sup>3</sup> Schatkowski-Schilcher, Linda, Claus Scharf, eds., Der Nahe Osten in der Zwischenkriegszeit, 1919-1939, Stuttgart 1989; Friedman, Isaiah, British Miscalculations, The Rise of Muslim Nationalism, 1918-1925, New Brunswick 2012, my review in H-Soz-Kult 21.05.2015; Zürcher, Erik-Jan, ed., Jihad and Islam in World War I, Leiden 2016, my review in Mittelost Mosaik 2016, Berlin 2017, pp. 166-169.

<sup>4</sup> Clayer, Nathalie, Eric Germain, eds., Islam in inter-war Europe, New York 2008; Al-Hamarneh, Ala, Jörn Thielmann, Islam and Muslims in Germany, Leiden 2008.

<sup>5</sup> See my review on Matthias Middell Weltgeschichtsschreibung, Süddeutsche Zeitung 18.05.2006, pp. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Schwanitz, Wolfgang G., ed., Germany and the Middle East 1871-1945, Princeton 2004; with Barry M. Rubin, Nazis, Islamists and the Making of the Modern Middle East, New Haven 2014; Motadel, David, ed., Islam and the European Empires, Oxford 2014; Górak-Sosnowska, Katarzyna, ed., Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe, Warsaw 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Schwanitz, Wolfgang G., Islam in Europa, Revolten in Mittelost, Berlin 2013, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2014; my books Mittelost Mosaik 2013, Berlin 2015; Mittelost Mosaik 2014, Berlin 2016; Motadel, David, Islam and Nazi Germany's War, Cambridge 2014; O'Sullivan, Adrian D. W., Nazi secret warfare in occupied Persia (Iran), New York 2014; Gossman, Lionel, The passion of Max von Oppenheim, Cambridge 2013; Ihrig, Stefan, Atatürk in the Nazi imagination, Cambridge 2014; Ihrig, Stefan, Justifying Genocide, Cambridge 2016, my review in H-Soz-Kult (19.01.2017).

<sup>8</sup> Abd al-Aziz Jawish explained Islamic Colonialism in „Die Islamische Welt“, Berlin, June 1, 1917.

<sup>9</sup> Özyürek, Esra, Being German, becoming Muslim, Princeton 2015, my review in Middle East Quarterly, XXII(09/15/2015)4.

<sup>10</sup> Economics in my articles Changing or Unknown Identities? The Example of the Deutsche Orientbank AG in Cairo and Alexandria (1906-1931), in Heidrich, Joachim, Changing Identities, Berlin 1994, pp. 401-413; Aziz Cotta Bey, deutsche und ägyptische Handelskammern und der Bund Ägypter Deutscher Bildung (1919-1939), in Höpp, Fremde Erfahrungen, Berlin 1996, pp. 359-384).