

IDEALS OF ERUDITION AND TENDENCIES OF EDUCATION IN GERMAN ISLAMIC STUDIES DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Introduction

At the opening ceremonies of the Berlin Seminar for Oriental Languages, which was founded along the lines of the Paris and Viennese academies, Eduard Sachau announced that the graduates would “not just study, but rather learn to communicate in foreign languages”.

The role of “critical and comparative research of oriental languages” was to remain the task of the twenty oriental professors at the university while the objective of the Seminar was to “equip the student with the tools outside of philology” (*Bericht* 16).

Academic Oriental Research

This, at first glance, handy distinction reflected especially well the day’s conception of humanities in general, and oriental philology in particular. The universities saw themselves as institutions, which performed basic research in accordance with the Humboldt ideal of erudition. According to Max Weber, privileged positions in German society were not given to specialists, but rather to those who possessed general knowledge (Ringer 1987: 41).

The lack of practical requirements and educational considerations was also reflected in the opinion of some of the specialists: Theodor Nöldeke first sent students home so that they would learn Arabic grammar. He did not want to teach “num-skulls” and “lazy bones”¹. The separation of practical training did not make it any easier to answer questions about the field and the objectives of oriental research; questions which already had been discussed in the 19th century. Beyond that “the critical and comparative research” resounded differently as the sounding board changed, even if the resonance was, as it is today, within a small circle.

The formulation of a philological understanding at the end of the century by a Semitist such as Eduard Sachau, does not lack a certain undertone of self-assertion or self-assurance. In the colonial powers there were already objections being voiced about this manner of dealing with the orient because they did not meet with the ‘imperial responsibility’. In Germany, by contrast, the Indo-Germanic languages were considered to be of significantly greater importance for linguistic research than the

¹ Letter from Theodor Nöldeke to C. H. Becker from the June 27, 1915. Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin. Rep. 92. C. H. Becker’s private papers. File 3138.

semitic languages. Of the former, who, as Praetorius once put it in 1895, "by nature tended more to the occidental" (Praetorius 1895: 547), one expected more insight into our own linguistic history (Plank 1995). The latter was the segment of human history which the philologists had made their own and was the subject of research according to their methods.

Governmental Support

Long before 1871 some German states had entertained commercial contact and consulates overseas. Here, too, there were orientalists employed, but even with the founding of the German Reich there were still no "real reasons" to promote oriental studies². Only when the Reich officially joined the colonial powers, did non-university societies such as the Vorderasienkomitee (Near East Committee), the Vorderasiatische Gesellschaft (Near East society), the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (German Orient Society) begin to receive government grants for their research activities and expeditions (Wölffling 1965). The Association for the Study of Palestine (Deutscher Verein für die Erforschung Palästinas), had been founded as early as 1877.

With a wary eye on England and France, the Kaiser and certain government officials considered the documentation as well as the collection of the ancient Mesopotamian works of art and inscriptions as a task befitting of the cultural importance of the German Reich. Simultaneously, it was possible by means of the academic achievements in the Near East to appeal to the economic interests. The construction of the Baghdad railway is one example of such.

From the perspective of the specialists of the ancient orient or the archaeologists, the systematic archaeological digs were proof of the academic value of their activities. With these activities they were able to compete with the prestige of the natural scientists.

University Development

The expansion of the educational opportunities at the university at the turn of the century, with the admission of larger numbers of students, 21.000 in 1880 compared to 56.000 in 1911 (Ringer 1987: 55), was a result of and caused the *alma mater* to at least implicitly expand educational tasks. Larger numbers of students required more materials in the libraries and the professor's studies were no longer large enough for the lessons. Although they were of no importance for teacher training, the oriental and as never before the Semitic languages participated in this growth.

² One example of an orientalist as a diplomat is J. G. Wetzstein (1815-1905), who represented the Prussian state in Damascus. See: Hulm 1989. The term 'äussere Veranlassungen' was used by Gustav Flügel (Flügel 1834: 211).

When the Göttinger Seminar was established in 1901, it became clear how the argumentation oscillated between the desire to at least partially systematize the instruction on the one hand and the obscure image of the field for which research was to be conducted on the other hand. The request for an oriental seminar was the same as for a residual category: "...because the philological seminar stuck to the task of training teachers and elsewhere linguistic studies more that fell apart"³.

At the outbreak of the First World War, there were eleven other German universities with oriental departments; Giessen, Frankfurt, Münster and Halle established departments during the war. That Germany's largest university did not receive an institute for Semitic studies until 1928 is to be explained by the often disputed, but nevertheless hardy existence of the Seminar for Oriental Languages. The exact point in time of the establishment and the specific fields of specialization were determined by a conglomerate of traditions at a university, the background of the students, the desires of the professors and the ability to gain the favour of the respective minister of culture.

If, for instance, in Breslau, today known as Wrocław, a wide range of courses in orientalism were offered, this was due to the intention of binding the wayward province more closely to Prussia, and to establish Breslau as the cultural centre of the German-speaking population. The earliest references to establishing oriental studies in Breslau which I have been able to discover stem from Rabbi Abraham Geiger in 1840⁴. Even if this proposal was not implemented directly, the existence of the rabbinical seminar always contributed to a sufficient number of students. According to Brockelmann's memoirs (Sellheim 1981: 28), the instruction there developed satisfactorily.

I should like to quote Carl Heinrich Becker's reasons for financing a department for oriental studies at the University of Bonn as an example of how Islamic studies became established in the German Reich: "With the increasing German interest in the orient, the expansion of our economic sphere of influence, the positive development of German cultural and educational policy in the orient, it has become necessary to offer the student of the primarily industrial state of Rhineland the opportunity to deal with the historical and current oriental problem in the early part of their studies"⁵.

³ The Dean of the philosophical faculty to the ministry of culture on the 2nd of August 1901, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin, I HA, Rep. 583.

⁴ University-Archives of Breslau, Acta betreffend das Lehrfach der Orientalischen Sprachen und die Personalien der zu demselben gehörenden Dozenten, 1840-1899. File F 99, p. 1-2.

⁵ Letter from C. H. Becker to the Prussian Ministry of Culture, June 25, 1914. Nordrhein-Westf. Hauptstaatsarchiv. File: Orientalisches Seminar der Universität Bonn, NW 5, Nr. 599, p. 12. The file is now found in: Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Berlin.

Thanks to Eduard Sachau's 1903 list of instructors who taught oriental languages, with the exception of Indo-Germanic ones, at German universities⁶ we know that more than one third of the instructors required, namely 37 of 93, stemmed from theological departments. Whatever the affect on content from the theological studies, be it Christian or Judaic, this number proves that the field of semitics could not possibly have expanded in the same manner as it did, had it not been for the experts in this field, or that an academic accompaniment of the growing interest in the Near East was possible as a result of the knowledge of Semitic languages in theological seminaries.

In connection with this expansion, which spanned a period of only 20 years, there was a sort of pioneering spirit which several orientalists — in this case experts in the Prussian Academy of Sciences — expressed before the First World War as follows: "There is a tendency to refer to our era as the age of natural sciences, but it would be equally correct to refer to it as the age of oriental studies..."⁷

Oriental organizations formed in Munich, Bonn, Münster and other cities with the intention of decimating knowledge of the orient amongst the educated population, show that this euphoria was not limited only to the university. During this period, the orientalists enthusiasm expanded beyond national boundaries with international contact contributing to the exchanging the stigma of the book-worm for the glory of a cosmopolitan (Bourdieu 1989: 133). The results of this cooperation took concrete form in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

The Results of the First World War

The First World war brought this atmosphere to an end. The orientalists in Germany joined in the general populations's enthusiastic support of the war. Becker's and Snouck Hurgronje's discussions about the definition of the *ġihād* and the involvement of various experts such as Martin Hartmann in the *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient* and Enno Littmann's service in the army are proof of this enthusiasm (Heine 1984).

If the war began to take its toll on the optimism of the Islamists — Hellmut Ritter wrote the following to Carl Heinrich Becker from the front in Palestine: "It appears as if here one is already too enlightened to be able to think of theocratically associating religion and politics"⁸ — the consequences, that is the loss of overseas ter-

⁶ This list by Sachau was sent to Professor W. Lexis (Göttingen) on the 10 of October 1903. Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin, Rep. 208a, vol. 15, p. 218.

⁷ Reasoning of seven members of the Prussian Academy of Sciences from the 9th of November 1910. Archives of the Prussian Academy, File II-I, 17, p. 140-151.

⁸ Letter of Hellmut Ritter to C. H. Becker on the 6th of March 1915. Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin. Rep. 92, File 3521.

ritory and the limited opportunities for working abroad, led to a reevaluation of the objectives and content of the discipline. Under these conditions, there was no need for institutions which only trained people for practical assignments. The Hamburg Colonial Institute was integrated into the newly founded university and almost all the instructor's positions for Turkish were cancelled. The Foreign Office expressed no further interest in the Berlin Seminar for Oriental Languages: in the process of coming to terms with the defeat, the seminar was accused of teaching the language of the gutter, which did not allow one to speak to the hearts of the oriental powers that be⁹. Oriental seminars were only established in the universities of Königsberg and Tübingen. The former enjoyed 'the special attention of the Berlin ministries', because East Prussia was separated by the so-called Danzig Corridor. Amongst the semitists, however, it was known as a banishment, or in the best case, as a stepping stone¹⁰. The Tübinger theologians successfully countered the ministries' proposal to replace oriental languages with Slavic philology by pointing out the long tradition of their co-operation with the former¹¹.

Instead of the International Orientalists' Conference, a German Orientalists' Meeting was arranged as a forum for specialists. At its first meeting in 1921, Carl Brockelmann commented on the increasing differences of the oriental studies as a change compared to the turn of the century, pointing out that the dispute within the classical philology between the followers of Gottfried Hermann and those of August Boeckh had never occurred. He expressed the hope that when the "shame" and the post-war difficulties had been put aside, that normal research could become the order of the day once again. The Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (German Oriental Society) reacted by further dividing their journal, which now contained an additional section for both semitics and for Indo-Germanic and Iranian studies.

At the same place Becker pleaded for the inclusion of the Near East-Islamic world in the study of European history. In his opinion there was a connection through the joint ancient history, in whose study Islam plays a key role. In this manner he shifted the emphasis of the interest from an understanding of the orient to the European observer's identity (Brockelmann 1921; Becker 1922: 10 respect. 18). The parallel to the Indo-Germanists of the nineteenth century, who had "by nature tended toward the occident", can hardly be overseen.

⁹ Remarks from the Berlin professor of Chinese de Groot, cited on the 29 of February 1920. Geheimes Staatsarchiv. Rep. 76 V a, Sekt. 2, Tit. X. Nr. 124, Bd. X, p. 4.

¹⁰ Der Minister für Wissenschaft, pp. an den Finanzminister am 29.3.1920. Geheimes Staatsarchiv. Rep. 76 V a, Sekt. 11, Tit. IV, Nr. 21, Bd. XXVIII, Bl. 476. In general young orientalists accepted the chair in Königsberg, yet left it as soon as possible, for example G. Bergsträsser, H. H. Schaeder, and Erich Bräunlich.

¹¹ The Dean of the philosophical faculty to the ministry of culture on the 17th of February 1922. University archives of Tübingen, File 2051101.

As the Minister of Culture for Germany's largest state, he was in a position to at least potentially exhibit his influence in the selection of professors. The pattern of establishing the Semitic professorships during this period shows how difficult it was to implement the program.

His promotion of Islamic studies can more readily be seen in the works of individual academics and his journal "*Der Islam*". In connection with the reappointment of the Berlin professorship for semitics and the head of the Seminar for Oriental Languages, a division of the Semitic philology was expressly described: "The separation of Islamic studies from Semitic philology is not only justified by the limitation of man's working capacity, it is in the essence of the material. The study of Islam only deals with the Arabian population of the Semitic people, but beyond this with peoples whose language is not Semitic, Persians, Turks, Indians, Malaysians, etc. It has to study the development and spread of Islam from its roots in Arabia throughout Asia and Africa, from the days of Mohammed to the present day where problems of the Islamic population represent an essential factor in the colonial-political and the general political problems"¹².

Reservations about emphasizing the historical aspects at the cost of philology were expressed primarily by the second largest university, the University of Leipzig, which was especially well-known for oriental studies. August Fischer's journal "*Islamica*" was intended to be dedicated to the study of language and culture. In the end the subject matter of the two organs hardly varied¹³.

At other places it was decided to limit Islamic studies to determining additional questions or continue as before, which, in view of the cultural sovereignty of the states, represented no problem.

In contrast to classical philology, where discussions amongst experts had led to the development of classical studies, Semitists and Islamists staked their claims without any discussion. Where discussions did take place it was not in the open. Historical surveys of the discipline concentrated on the expansion of the various areas of research. Questions pertaining to methods or objectives were not a subject for publication. Only correspondence amongst the scholars, calls and explanations for filling positions offered insights into the objectives of those occupied with the orient.

In the brief span of the Weimar Republic, which viewed objectively only lasted of one-third of a scholar's life, research in Islamic studies shifted away from the religious aspects toward classical studies. The stone and paper monuments of pre-

¹² Berufungsvorschläge der Phil. Fak. vom 22.1.1921. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Berlin, Rep. 76 V a, Sekt. 2, Tit IV, Nr. 68 B, Bd. II, Bl. 61.

¹³ "*Der Islam*" was dedicated to the history and culture and "*Islamica*" to the language and culture. A comparison between the articles published in the two journals shows that not only the subjects, but also the authors were roughly the same.

Islamic Arabia and works of Arabian literature received more attention than the development of Islamic theology or the religious practices of the Muslims. If the dissection of the revelations and the associated passages had previously been the primary objective of studies, now the attention was turned to the contributions made by Arabian and Persians scholars in literature, the sciences and arts.

The institutional separation of church and state, the replacement of the ottoman Empire by the secular state of Kemal Atatürk and the political grouping according to national identity rather than religious faith in the Near East were the backdrop for this change, which resembles that of what is referred to as a paradigmatic change in scientific theory.

Islamic Studies during the "Third Reich"

At the beginning of the "Third Reich", the majority of the specialists feared not only the anti-intellectual affect of the new powers, but a disinterest in the orient as well and hurried to rid it of the reputation of being an ivory-tower activity, by spelling out "its relevance for the present day and the current objectives" (Schaeder 1936).

To be more precise we must speak of those who retained their positions — about one third were removed from office for reasons of race or politics, or hindered from advancement in their careers (Hanisch 1995). As decisive as these actions were for the biographies of those affected, the specific areas of study were not disregarded as a result of the removal of competent persons.

Owing to the fact that the nazis did not have a uniform policy for dealing with the orient and that there were considerable differences of opinion amongst the various offices, in other words the ministry of Culture, the Foreign Office, Rosenberg's office, and the SS-foundation "Das Ahnenerbe", radically different offers were accepted without a problem. Franz Babinger and Walter Hinz criticized in a memorandum in 1933 that German "oriental research to date had been too much an appendix to religious and rabbinical studies and had emphasized the linguistic aspects at the cost of the historical ones".

The Leipzigers reacted with a publication which emphasized that the essence of the oriental people is more clearly pronounced in non-historical literature than in historical works. In addition, they stated that only solid philological works would be of long term value and the real orientalist had only pursued rabbinical studies to a minor extent¹⁴.

While the majority of the philologists balked at placing typological linguistic families in connection with genealogical lineage, the change of the hermeneutic

¹⁴ E. Bräunlich, A. Fischer, B. Landsberger, Stellungnahme zu der Ausarbeitung des Professors Franz Babinger und Dr. Walther Hinz, betr. die Morgenlandforschung im Neuen Deutschland. Stand und zukünftige Aufgaben (without a date: 1933). Geheimes Staatsarchiv. Berlin, Rep. 208 a, Nr. 23, S. 151ff.

horizon can be documented by the application of the Leipzig Semitic Institute to be renamed the oriental Institute. According to the faculty, the name stemmed from the time when oriental studies dealt almost exclusively with Semitic languages: "As a result of the extraordinary expansion of the fields of research in the Near East studies during the last few decades, the previous relation has shifted dramatically. The successful digs in the ancient Near East created new fields for assyriology, such as the Sumerian, which were inseparably connected through the cuneiform characters. On the other hand, Arabic studies have been charged with completely new tasks as a result of the appearance of comparative Islamic studies and the emphasis on cultural-historical and contemporary-historical problems, which offer new insights into the Turkish and Indo-Germanic New-Persian"¹⁵.

Subsequently the term Semitic was removed from any department names — with the exception of Breslau and Munich. There, as a result of reappointments, ordered by the Reichserziehungsministerium (the national ministry of culture), a complete and total break with the previous teaching and research traditions occurred. Otto Spies in Breslau paid as little attention to continuing the comparative linguistics of Semitics as Bertold Spuler did to the Koran research of Gotthelf Bergsträsser or Otto Pretzl¹⁶.

The immediate needs of the Nazi's *weltanschauung* caused the Islamists working in cultural-historical fields to emphasize the ancient historical-cultural bonds of the Indo-Germanic and Iranian cultures before the rise of the medieval religions (Schæder), or they claimed that the Islamic religion had changed from being a legislative religion to a religion of opinion (Taeschner) (Schæder 1943; Taeschner 1940: 207).

At the Foreign College, an institution founded to replace the Seminar for oriental Languages, the students were to be taught foreign languages with the intention of "deepening their own sense of national consciousness"¹⁷.

If one were to gain the impression that in the period prior to World War II the claim of forming personalities had been extended to training institutions, during the war there developed a previously unknown demand for language skills and expertise. The previous difference between the scholars and the practical experts became irrelevant. A distinction between the academic and non-academic education was only reproduced in the military ranks. Even persons who had previously been classified as po-

¹⁵ Letter by the directors of the semitistic institute to the Saxonian ministry of culture from the 15th of July 1934. Archives of the Leipzig University, File Phil. Fak. B 1, 14, 41, vol. 1, p. 2.

¹⁶ The source for this observaton is the university prospectus of the respective years. The appointment of B. Spuler in 1943 is documented in: Bayrisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Mk 5 a/71 a 23, Akten der Ministeriums, Universität München, Ordentl. Professur für semitische Philologie und Islamwissenschaft.

¹⁷ Grundsätze über Ziel und Aufbau des Unterrichts an der Nationenwissenschaftlichen Auslandsfakultät der Universität Berlin (1936), Bundesarchiv Potsdam, Rep. 76, File: Reichserziehungsministeriums, No.1249 Auslandshochschule, p. 104.

litically unreliable were charged with tasks. Women who had special qualifications were then also given the opportunity to make a name for themselves¹⁸.

The New Beginning

Upon the conclusion of World War II, the majority of the specialists in the former West Germany hurried to remove their discipline from the practical world and replaced it into the ivory-tower (Schaefer 1946: 452). No longer was the "essence" of Islam the object of their research, but the creation of handbooks, encyclopedias and atlases (Fück 1944: 251; 1955: 327-8). The meagre retrospection left semitic studies to linguistics and Jewish history and religion to Jewish studies. Arabic and Islamic studies were considered philological disciplines (Paret 1968). Solid philological research, this, undoubtedly, greatest German contribution to oriental research was recalled with the intention to continue along these lines. On the basis of such a selective understanding of the field, however, questions were not raised about academic studies of the history or the current situation of the Near East countries.

To date it appears that an attempt has been made to interpret the vice of a selective viewpoint as the virtue of a lack of colonial possessions in Muslim countries. The price of this perspective appears to me to be a continued incompetence to participate in the discussions about current developments in the region. Through a critical examination of inherited traditions, it might be possible to minimize the danger that repressed elements enter unreflected into the discussion and that undifferentiated phobias hinder current debates.

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¹⁸ Some individual careers illustrate this. For instance Alfred Siggel (1884-1959) and Hans Alexander Winkler (1900-1945) were examples for unreliable persons who occupied positions during the war. Annetta von der Gabain (1901-1993) became recognized as an academic lecturer during the war.

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