

MOBILITY DYNAMICS BETWEEN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE NEAR EAST

Exploring a Cross-Regional Shared History

Albrecht Fuess / Heidi Hein-Kircher / Stefan Rohdewald

The recent political rapprochements between Putin's Russia and Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia seem to result from current strategies and to be part of the political goal to establish a new world order. The Russian engagement in Syria since the outbreak of the civil war there is to be assessed as part of this politics, to support the authoritarian regime there and to diminish American influence in the MENA region. Even the Russian support of the Palestinians against the Israelis since the latter's foundation fits in this scheme. These obvious and recent relations should be assessed in a historical perspective, not least since there have been long economic, cultural and political traditions of contact between Eastern Europe and the MENA region, beginning even in the Middle Ages.

Although the importance of relationships between East European countries and the Middle East has become prominently evident since Russia's involvement in the conflict in Syria, they have obviously a very much longer history. The Soviet Union's Middle East policy – including its position against Israel, which was supported by Arab forces – is reproduced in present-day politics of Russia in several ways. The same is the case for the Russian Empire's religious policy of protecting Orthodox Christians and the Pilgrimage to Jerusalem. For example, acting minister of foreign affairs, Sergej Lavrov, not only has studied Oriental Studies, but is honorary member of the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society:¹ This society was founded in 1882 by Alexander III. and was relevant well beyond 1916: It continued to be active, though it was renamed and reorganized several times during the Soviet Union as part of the Academy of Sciences. Since 1992, it is bearing again its historical name. Its main popular and scientific publication, the “(Orthodox) Palestinian Collection (Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik)” has been appearing since 1882 until 1916. It had some volumes published since 1954 (without the adjective “Orthodox”) and is regularly printed again since 2003 (now again with the adjective “Orthodox”). Among other initiatives and aims, with these publications alone, the association is again an important factor fostering the imperial nar-

1 Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov in an interview for the website of the named society, 25 July 2016 <https://www.ippo.ru/news/article/ministr-inostrannyh-del-rossii-sergey-lavrov-dal-i-402035> (last accessed 10 July 2022).

rative or the remembrance of the same, i.e. the protection of Orthodox Christians in the (post)Ottoman Near East by Russia and rather direct Russian influence in the whole region. The other way round, MENA (Middle East and North African)-states like Iran and Saudi Arabia have used their relations to Russia since the Russian invasion into Ukraine, to foster their economic and political position through an improvement of their trading relations with Russia: in the case of Iran through the sale of drones and in the case of Saudi Arabia, ironically, in the purchasing of oil. Here, one can find a sort of coalition against Western states' foreign policies criticizing their political systems, but also find that the "usage" of the MENA states for political issues has a long history.² The MENA states themselves seem however to play the east-west dichotomy actively for their own interest in the year 2023. Remarkable reproachments have happened between Saudi-Arabia and Iran and between Egypt and Turkey. The impression is that the regional powers try to stabilize the Middle East again and switch into a balance policy between Russia, China and the West and try to gain the best deal for them which witnesses kind of a Bandung nostalgia.

Russia and other members invited Egypt to join the BRICS organization in 2023; Egypt, Iran, Saudia Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Ethiopia acceded to it already in January 2024. This enlargement strengthens Russian ties with the MENA region. They are fostered even more through the current Israeli war in Gaza since October 8th 2023 which has initiated political leaders in the Middle Eastern countries to argue that American and European allies of Israel have condemned the Russian invasion of the Ukraine as crime against humanity but have failed to do the same concerning the ongoing military operations in Gaza and to bring the current Israeli government to talk seriously about a two states' solution. This process of multi-polarization of regions and the revival of bilateral relationships without EU's influence does even grow stronger as the UNO proves to be powerless because it does not contribute to the pacification of conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and seems to be only considered when the UN Security Council leans towards one's own opinion. The shared experiences as conflict regions might therefore bring Eastern Europe and the Middle East closer together again, especially when it comes to the military sector. For Russia, this not unforeseeable development is a very 'timely' and welcome effect of its support for Hamas' military wing and its strategic cooperation with Iran now, during and before October 2023, reaching potentially well beyond the general distraction from Russia's war against Ukraine.³ Seeing and comparing entanglements across the conti-

2 E.g. Ghazal Ahmadi, *Iran als Spielball der Mächte? Die internationalen Verflechtungen des Iran unter Reza Schah und die anglo-sowjetische Invasion 1941* (Frankfurt a.M. et al.: Peter Lang, 2011).

3 Jonathan M. Winer, *Essential Questions about the Russia-Hamas Link: The Evidence and its Implications*, November 28, 2023, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/essential-questions-about-russia-hamas-link-evidence-and-its-implications>. (last accessed 30 January 2024).

nents, already in 2019, Daniel Serwer contextualized war and peace in Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosova, the Middle East and Ukraine/Russia.⁴

However, a main issue for the Middle East is its vulnerability in terms of food supply and water irrigations. Some countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia can pay for this with natural resources towards Eastern Europe but others like Egypt with its population of over 100 million people import more than 50 % of its annual wheat consumption from Ukraine and Russia, the ongoing war since February 2022 had heavy implications on the economy.⁵

While relations between Western Europe, especially the former colonial powers, and the Middle East have been studied for a long time, the connections between Eastern Europe and the Near East and Middle East or in general the MENA region have not yet been studied systematically or have remained in several topics even unstudied.⁶ Research on the regions has evolved during the last at least 70 years very much according to “areas” within “area studies”, which have not been seen in a very much shared context. Yet, these regions historically overlapped to a large degree, if we think about the territories of the Ottoman Empire not only in Southern, but in Eastern Europe from the Romanian tributary states to Poland-Lithuania and Ukraine to the expanding Russian Empire, reaching out to the Caucasus and Caspian Sea region, or the “larger” Black Sea region as a whole.⁷

It is of course remarkable that the two regions we are dealing with in this volume are called “Eastern regions”. Daniel Varisco remarkably states in this context in respect to the Middle East: “Before the east had a middle, or even near-sighted and far-fetched stretches, it was in principle a convenient rational marker for a world in which some directions were more significant than others.”⁸ The “easternization” of the regions of analysis here has to do with their regional situation in respect to Western and Central Europe and a colonial or postcolonial hegemony which shapes the geography of the World until now, but if we put the two regions into direct perspective North-South or forest and arid regions might be more fitting categories.

Despite the importance of the MENA Region for Eastern European and not only for Russian history, however, the historical multilateral relationships be-

4 Daniel Serwer, *From War to Peace in the Balkans, the Middle East and Ukraine* (Cham: Palgrave, 2019).

5 Eckart Woertz, *Oil for Food: The Global Food Crisis and the Middle East* (Oxford: OUP, 2015).

6 Now: Sandrine Kott, and Cyrus Schayegh. “Introducing the CEH special issue ‘Eastern European – Middle Eastern Relations: Continuities and Changes from the Time of Empires to the Cold War’,” *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 4 (2021): 463–477.

7 Cf. the Handbook on the History and Culture of the Black Sea Region. Editors: Ninja Bumann, Kerstin S. Jobst Stefan Rohdewald, and Stefan Troebst: De Gruyter [in preparation for 2025].

8 Daniel Martin Varisco: “When did the Holy Land Stop Being Holy? Surveying the Middle East as Sacred Geography,” in: *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*, ed. Miachel E. Bonine, Abbas Amanat, and Ezekiel Gasper (Stanford: SUP, 2012), 119.

tween the relevant empires, namely the Russian Empire, the Habsburg monarchy, Persia/Iran, Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire, have been seldom sufficiently examined, both in terms of historical depth and supra-regional breadth. Cultural imaginations and representations important for Eastern European societies' identity building have been become an important research topic since the turn to 21st century. For the Early Modern period, particularly Polish-Lithuanian Sarmatism has been researched.⁹ One particular form of interpreting the Eastern European – MENA-region relations is that of the political myth of some Eastern European nations' role of being *antemurale christianitatis*, which has been assessed with regard to its identity building role.¹⁰ The relations between the orthodox churches and Islam were historicized through the lens of conversion and missionizing people.¹¹

The main topics in historical research have been the international relations in which the emergence of conflicts and the pursuit of gaining dominance has been focussed. With regard to nineteenth century, Russian-Ottoman relations and their pursuit of dominance have been studied.¹² The Russian and Habsburg orient policy and relations to the declining Ottoman Empire and particularly their common

- 9 E.g. Martin Faber: *Sarmatismus. Die politische Ideologie des polnischen Adels im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz 2018); Magdalena Dlugosz: *Sarmatismus versus Orientalismus in Mitteleuropa / Sarmatyzm versus Orientalizm w Europie Srodkowej* (Wiesbaden: Frank und Timme, 2012); Gisela Drossbach and Mark Hengerer (eds.), *Adel im östlichen Europa. Zwischen lokaler Identität, Region und europäischer Integration* (Berlin: Frank und Timme 2021).
- 10 Liliya Berezhnaya and Heidi Hein-Kircher (eds.), *Rampart Nations. Bulwark Myths of East European Multiconfessional Societies in the Age of Nationalism* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Book, 2019); while Paul Srodecki, *Antemurale Christianitatis. Zur Genese der Bollwerksrhetorik im östlichen Mitteleuropa an der Schwelle vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit* (Husum: Matthiesen, 2015), analyzed the emergence of this myths in political rhetorics.
- 11 Robert P. Geraci, (ed.), *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001); Agnès Nilüfer Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014); Eileen Kane, Russian Hajj: *Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Fajzulchak G. Islaev, *Islam i pravoslavie v Povolž'e XVIII stoletija: ot konfrontacii k terpimosti* (Kazan': Izdat. Kazanskogo Univ., 2001); Josef Glazik, *Die Islammission der russisch-orthodoxen Kirche: Eine missionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung nach russischen Quellen und Darstellungen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1959), for contemporary Russia see: Juliet Johnson (ed.), *Religion and Identity in Modern Russia: The Revival of Orthodoxy and Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
- 12 E.g. Viktor Valentinovich Taki, *Tsar and Sultan. Russian Encounters with the Ottoman Empire* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016); Andrew Robarts, *Migration and Disease in the Black Sea Region. Ottoman-Russian Relations in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (London et al.: Bloomsbury, 2018), Viktor Taki, *Russia on the Danube. Empire, Elites, and Reform in Moldavia and Wallachia, 1812–1834*, (Budpest et al.: CEU Press, 2021), a comparative analysis: Adrian Brisku, *Political Reform in the Ottoman and Russian Empires. A Comparative Approach* (London et al.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

borderlands have been of interest with regard to the conflict between them.¹³ Equally inadequate has been the research on the stances East European countries, and especially the Soviet Union, took towards the Middle East and “Middle East Conflict” in the 20th century,¹⁴ while the history of Palestine as a Jewish homeland and the resulting conflict with the Palestinians has been more deeply researched.¹⁵ Overviews of the entanglements between Eastern Europe and the MENA-region give mainly studies focussing the overlapping regions of interest: E.g. the Crimea as a strategic part of the Black Sea region¹⁶ connecting Eastern Europe and MENA geographically¹⁷ has been of interest as well as the Caucasus as a zone of transfers and entanglements.¹⁸ Only currently, a couple of edited vol-

- 13 Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz (eds.), *Shatterzones of Empires. Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 2013), a volume which was trend-setting for historical research on the contested borderland regions. See also e.g. Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans. Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy, 1908–1914* (Toronto: Toronto Univ. Press, 1981); with regard to political strife because of nationalism: Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires. Central Europe, the Middle East and Russia, 1914–1923* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2022).
- 14 Political science studies like Karen Dawisha, *Soviet Foreign Policy Towards Egypt* (London et al.: Macmillan 1979); Jaan Pennar, *The U.S.S.R and the Arabs. The Ideological Dimension* (London: Hurst, 1973); Walter R. Duncan and Carolyn Mac Giffert Ekedahl (eds.), *Moscow and the Third World under Gorbachev* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Pr., 1990); Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, *Die sowjetische Politik im arabisch-israelischen Konflikt* (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1991); Helmut Hubel, *Das Ende des Kalten Krieges im Orient. Die USA, die Sowjetunion und die Konflikte in Afghanistan, am Golf und Nahen Osten, 1979–1991. Auswirkungen für Europa und Deutschland* (München: Oldenbourg, 1995); Ray Takeyh and Steven Simon, *The Pragmatic Superpower. Winning the Cold War in the Middle East* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2016), Taline Ter-Minassian, *Colporteurs du Komintern. L'Union Soviétique and les minorités au Moyen-Orient* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1997).
- 15 For example Boris Morozov, “Zamena”. *Vsylvka osuzhdennykh sionistov v Palestinu: 1924–1934* (Moskva: Rossijskij gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyj universitet, 2019); Arie Kochavi, *Indirect Pressure. Moscow and the End of the British Mandate* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2004); Ziva Gallili y Garcia, *Exiled to Palestine. The Emigration of Zionist Convicts from the Soviet Union, 1924–1934* (London: Routledge, 2006); Muriel Asseburg, *Palästina und die Palästinenser: Eine Geschichte von der Nakba bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Beck, 2021).
- 16 The Black Sea was of interest for several studies like Charles King, *The Black Sea. A History* (Oxford: OUP, 2004); Carlos E. Cordova, *Crimea and the Black Sea. An Environmental History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Ivan Biliarsky (ed.), *The Balkans and Caucasus. Parallel processes on the Opposite Sides of the Black Sea* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publ. 2012).
- 17 Kerstin S. Jobst, *Geschichte der Krim. Iphigenie und Putin auf Tauris* (Münche: DeGruyter-Oldenbourg, 2022).
- 18 Only a few studies focus the Caucasus, Murat Yasar. *The North Caucasus. Between Moscow and the Ottoman Empire, 1555–1605* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2022); Dominik Gutmeyr, *Borderlands Orientalism or How the Savage Lost His Nobility: The Russian Perception of the Caucasus between 1817 and 1878* (Wien: LIT, 2017). Cf. also: Christoph Baumer, *History of the Caucasus. At the Crossroads of Empires* (London and New York: I.B.

umes is dealing with Eastern European-MENA-region relations in a comparative historical perspective. Mariusz Kałczewika and Magdalena Kozłowska try to break-up a Western European respectively American centric perspective and to connect regional developments with global processes and phenomena, naturally in a selective choice of case studies. Hence, they start with the premise, that “the East European condition, shaped by its self-perceived and externally ascribed peripherality, in-betweenness, and otherness, has defined the way this region has shaped its relations with lands and people outside Europe”,¹⁹ while another hypothesis of their approach is that Eastern Europe’s “ambivalent status” has to be assessed “in the context of Orientalism”²⁰ – an approach which is taken up by Markéta Křížová and Jitka Malečková but with a particular focus on the Habsburg-MENA-region relations in nineteenth century.²¹ The recent emergence of such edited volumes connecting different topics of research shows how fruitful the critical application of “orientalism” could be to open new fields of research and topics. It also shows the desiderata for further historicizing the Eastern European – MENA-region relations which leave the imperial / power-related perspective. But such comparative studies do not fulfil the task of providing an inclusive perspective of a shared history particularly in the borderlands and zones of contact coined by everyday entanglements on the regional / local level. Scholars have claimed such a perspective about 10 years, but with regard only to the Balkans.²²

These preliminary remarks and the following related questions are referring to and emphasising research which the DFG Priority Programme Transottomanica has already done with a broader temporal focus reaching from 1500 to the mid-20th century, exploring ‘Transottoman’ mobility dynamics: ‘Transottoman’ means there, here and hence a focus on societal ties and communication practices producing spatial relational condensations or crossimperial migration societies that emerged as a consequence of intensified mobility, migration and trans- and post-imperial rivalries in general between and across Muscovy/Russia, Poland-Lithuania, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia as well as their successor states. Seen from such a Transottoman perspective, historical societies in this geographical range, i.e. across Eastern Europe and the Near East, developed mobility dynamics

Tauris, 2021). A political sciences and juridical perspective: Thomas Kruessmann (ed.), *The Caucasus in Europe-Asia Connectivity. The Promise of Infrastructure and Trade* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2023).

19 Mariusz Kałczewika and Magdalena Kozłowska, “Introduction,” in idem (eds.), *The World Beyond the West. Perspectives from Eastern Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2022), 2.

20 Idem, 3.

21 Markéta Křížová and Jitka Malečková (eds.), *Central Europe and the Non-European World in the Long 19th Century* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2022).

22 Karl Kaser, *The Balkans and the Near East: Introduction to a Shared History* (Wien et al.: LIT, 2011); Sabine Rutar, *Beyond the Balkans. Towards an Inclusive History of Southeastern Europe* (Wien et al.: LIT, 2014); Cf. Helmedach, Andreas et al. (eds). *Das Osmanische Europa. Methoden und Perspektiven der Frühneuzeitforschung zu Südosteuropa* (Leipzig: Eudora, 2014).

that evolved and interconnected in chains of situations and formed dense social, and always spatial, network structures over centuries, consolidating society across the empires. This approach goes well beyond studies on individual empires or still rather few studies on bilateral relations, as established area studies rather segregated these regions of interest (Eastern Europe, MENA region) from each other and discouraged researchers from seeking a common history beyond the container spaces of regions that appeared to be separated. Thus, this Transottoman perspective is a post-area studies approach and relates to large-scale processes of migration, mobile knowledge, travel, trade, and mobility, consolidating society and encompassing the aforementioned empires and successor states from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries.²³ Central for this perspective is the observation, that the Ottoman Empire, after its expansion to Syria and Egypt at the beginning of the 16th century, functioned in our context as a pre-modern hinge and juncture, connecting on the one side Eastern Europe and the other side the Middle East, and developed as an integral part of both as well. Across the Empires, transregional networks evolved, involving Poland-Lithuania, Iran and Muscovy, which were linked likewise with growing intensity since the 16th century – ideas, materials and people circulated and became Transottoman through their mobility.

Societal mobility and migration society can easily be seen as central to the very historical genesis of all the empires or commonwealths involved.²⁴ In the early history of the empires of the Safavids and Ottomans, military mobility dynamics between the interwoven rival ‘moveable empires’ were of pivotal importance, revealing significant societal interdependencies.²⁵ Similarly, the rapid growth of Lithuania to the Black Sea in the 14th century evolved in direct rivalry to Moscow and the Golden Horde, as well as the expansion of Muscovy to Kazan and Astrakhan in the sixteenth century into territories of the Golden Horde and then the Ottoman Empire and Persia gave rise to significant increases in mobility across all named territories, which naturally changed the whole of the relevant societies – and accelerated the change of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and later Poland-Lithuania, as well as or even more that of Muscovy into multireligious and vast realms within what we call Transottoman inter-imperial migration dynamics.²⁶

- 23 Introducing the Transottoman approach and the state of the art of research on Eastern European/ Near Eastern entanglements: Stefan Rohdewald, Stephan Conermann, and Albrecht Fuess (eds.), *Transottomanica. Osteuropäisch-osmanisch-persische Mobilitätsdynamiken. Perspektiven und Forschungsstand* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019). See the other open access volumes published in the relevant series: <https://www.transottomanica.de/pub/vrseries>.
- 24 Benedikt Stuchtey, “Security, Mobility, and the Colonial Connection. Concluding Remarks,” in *The Mobility-Security Nexus and the Making of Order*, ed. by Werner Distler and Heidi Hein-Kircher (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2022), 293–302.
- 25 Reşat Kasaba, *The Moveable Empires. Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); Richard Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran. A Political and Social History of the Shahsevan* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997).
- 26 Andreas Kappeler, *Rußlands erste Nationalitäten. Das Zarenreich und die Völker der Mittleren Wolga vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert* (Köln, Wien: Böhlau, 1982).

Destination as well as original societies, including their immobile parts, were changed by the mobile actors, which from a meta-level can be seen as Transottoman migration society.²⁷ ‘Circulation societies’²⁸ rather than ‘diasporas’ of Jewish, Armenian, Greek, Arab and Multani long distant merchants constituted migration society locally and transregionally.

The study of migration is a large section of mobility studies which have become anew a focal point in history, sociology and political science since the rise of the new mobilities paradigm.²⁹ Hence, migration studies were influenced by this paradigm shift as well as by the cultural turn and the re-emerging interest in migration since the migration crisis in the 2010s when hundred thousands of migrants particularly from the MENA region have come to Europe. Migration is generally defined as a spatial, (multi)directional, or circular mobility of people and families, over a relatively long period, with a change of their place of residence, that is, where they spend their lives. In the last decades, the focus of research has shifted to interaction patterns and feedback effects beyond the settings of arrival or departure to transnational or trans-imperial societal networks.³⁰

In the Transottoman context, the Ottoman Empire played a key role as a hub for the circulation of knowledge in general.³¹ Knowledge flows not only affected astronomy, mathematics, and medicine, but also business practices, military strategies, and nautical knowledge.³² The emergence of regional education centres in the early modern period, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards, led to the dissemination of the practice of printing, knowledge production, and knowledge exchange.³³ For example the theologian Petro Mohyla, a native of the Ottoman tributary regions of Moldova and Wallachia, founded an Orthodox academy modelled on Jesuit colleges in Polish-Lithuanian, i.e. Ukrainian Kyiv in

27 Maritsa V. Poros, *Modern Migrations. Gujarati Indian Networks in New York and London* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press., 2011), 161.

28 Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean. The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2011).

29 John Urry and Mimi Sheller, “The New Mobilities Paradigm,” *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 2 (2006): 207–226.

30 Cf. Hans Peter Hahn, Georg Klute (eds.), *Cultures of Migration: African Perspectives* (Münster: LIT, 2007), 10.

31 On knowledge in the Transottoman setting: Dierauff et al. 2021; about the concepts of knowledge mobilities: Sibylle Baumbach, Beatrice Michaelis, and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Travelling Concepts, Metaphors, and Narratives. Literary and Cultural Studies in an Age of Interdisciplinary Research* (Trier: Wiss.Verl. Trier, 2012); Doris Bachmann-Medick (ed.), *The Trans/National Study of Culture. A Translational Perspective* (Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter, 2014).

32 John Darwin. *After Tamerlane. The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

33 Helmedach, Andreas et al. (eds). *Das Osmanische Europa. Methoden und Perspektiven der Frühneuezeitforschung zu Südosteuropa* (Leipzig: Eudora, 2014).

1632, which was soon not only copied in Moscow, but also in the vassal states of the Ottoman Empire on the Danube.³⁴

Orthodox Church leaders unfolded both pastoral and extensive diplomatic activity between the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Europe, coordinated by the Orthodox Patriarchate in Constantinople. Moscow's interests in the near East were bolstered by these roles, opening its horizons and the way to Jerusalem. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the institutionalisation and professionalisation of academic knowledge evolved and became core for the creation and legitimization of imperial narratives.³⁵ This is exemplified by the establishment of the Oriental Faculty in St. Petersburg, in 1856, and the founding of the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople/Istanbul, in 1895.³⁶ At the same time, the change of visual representations and the consolidation of public media across the empires can be found in cartography³⁷ or in journalism.³⁸ The making of Muslim modernity evolved not least within our Transottoman context. Not only in the Eastern European,³⁹ but also in the MENA setting, experts in the natural sciences or engineering also began to pursue imperial and, after 1918, national careers in political service. The emergence of colonial powers transformed the movement of people, goods, and ideas from the mid-nineteenth century onward, reinforcing new globalized, imperial, and national logics of action that produced new dynamics of rivalry, escalating in new Transottoman migration dynamics across the empires in our focus.

Comparative research on the relevant empires has covered these developments for now only marginally. Under the new challenges and in mutual observation and rivalry, new, postimperial or national concepts evolved within the empires or in emancipation from them. Experts in national agitation and revolution circulated since the end of the 19th century, and with them attempts at constitu-

34 Gerhard Podskalsky, *Griechische Theologie in der Zeit der Türkenherrschaft 1453–1821. Die Orthodoxie im Spannungsfeld der Nachreformatorischen Konfessionen des Westens* (München: Beck, 1988), 309, 318.

35 Kreiser, Klaus. "Wissenschaftswandel im Osmanischen Reich des 18. Jahrhunderts?" In *Europa und die Türkei im 18. Jahrhundert*, edited by Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, 433–446. Bonn: V&R Unipress, Bonn Univ. Press., 2011.

36 Tolz, Vera. *Russia's Own Orient. The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011); Kerstin S. Jobst, *Geschichte der Krim. Iphigenie und Putin auf Tauris* (München: DeGruyter-Oldenbourg, 2022).

37 Steven Seegel, *Mapping Europe's Borderlands. Russian Cartography in the Age of Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); see as well: Jordan Branch, *The Cartographic State. Maps, Territory, and the Origins of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: CUP 2014).

38 Adam, Volker: *Rußlandmuslime in Istanbul am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges. Die Berichterstattung osmanischer Periodika über Rußland und Zentralasien* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang 2002).

39 Kohlrausch, Martin, Katrin Steffen, Stefan Wiederkehr (eds.): *Expert Cultures in Central Eastern Europe: The Internationalization of Knowledge and the Transformation of Nation States since World War I*. (Osnabrück: Fibre 2010).

tional revolutions in Russia, Iran and the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁰ During the Russian, Iranian and Young Turk constitutional revolutions of 1905/1908/1911, intellectuals travelling between the empires became crucial.⁴¹ Russian Muslims in Istanbul informed the Ottoman public about the Tsarist Empire on the eve of the First World War, and in particular about the Muslims in Central Asia and on the Volga.⁴² Programmatic is Michael A. Reynolds's study *Shattering Empires* (2011), devoted to the collision and collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires in the Caucasian-Anatolian borderlands of 1908–1918. Even wider was the web of imperial rivalries (Great Game) in Central Asia⁴³ and regarding Russian and British interests in Iran. During the Balkan Wars and World War I, politically enforced migration, expulsions, or flight due to war or economic disaster, as well as genocidal exacerbations have been introduced to illiberal transimperial societal modernities – attaining pivotal importance well beyond our focus region.⁴⁴

Due to the Turkish and Iranian relations with the internationally boycotted Soviet Union after 1917, the Iranian corridor for allied logistics to the Soviet Union until 1945, the long Turkish neutrality during World War II and then Turkey's NATO membership, the East-West antagonism played out between Eastern Europe and the Near East very directly. During the Cold War and with the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the greater region became one of several central arenas of large-scale conflicts and regional cleavages in a global context during the 20th century.

Since the 1980s, the concept of large-scale wars has spread from the Middle East to (South)Eastern Europe: The Arab-Israeli wars were followed by another large-scale war, the Iraq-Iran war of 1980–1988. Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent Iraq wars occurred in parallel with the post-Soviet disputes in the Caucasus (the war over Nagorno Karabakh 1988–1994) and the post-Yugoslav wars starting in 1991.

Since 2011, Syria and, after 2014 and 2022, with the Russian war against Ukraine, even more areas have become war zones, in which old Transottoman

40 Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires. The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918* (Cambridge, New York: 2011), Touraj Atabaki, “Disgruntled Guests. Iranian Subalterns on the Margins of the Tsarist Empire,” In Idem (ed.) *The State and the Subaltern. Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran* (New York New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

41 James H. Meyer, *Turks Across Empires. Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856–1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014).

42 Adam, *Rußlandmuslime*; Al'fina Sibgatullina, *Kontakty tjurok-musul'man Rossijskoj i Osmanskij imperij na rubeže XIX–XX vv.* (Moskva: IV RAN, 2010); Mustafa Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims. Islam, Empire, and European Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015).

43 Mehmet Saray: *The Russian, British, Chinese and Ottoman Rivalry in Turkestan* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 2003).

44 Cf. Stefan Rohdewald, “Afterword: Transitions from a Transimperial to a Transnational Context,” In *From Empire(s) to Nation-States: Population Displacements and Multiple Mobilities in the Late Ottoman Empire*, edited by Catherine Horel and Catherine Severin Barboutie (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2023).

actors such as Russia, Iran, and Turkey, in addition to the U.S., France, and the U.K., repeatedly confront each other and consolidate the dynamics of European or Transatlantic security policies confronting translocal neo-imperial rivalries and large refugee flows: Today more intensely than for the last 100 years, Russia, Iran, Turkey and Ukraine – as successor of Poland-Lithuania –, but also Poland itself appear to be all very much entangled in a setting of rivalry, confrontation, competition and cooperation against or with some of these partners. As approaches to transregional security as the OSCE have been derailed namely by Russia, old fashioned attempts to establish Russian or Eurasian, Iranian, Turkish and Saudi Arabian zones of influence are competing with other, European or Transatlantic initiatives: As much as they are mutually overlapping they are, thus, constituting, seen from a meta level, (post) or neo-Transottoman society. This Transottoman perspective, of course, is not just focusing on networks within its focus, Eastern Europe and the Near and Middle East, but includes their situatedness in larger contexts and flows between the Indian Ocean World and Western Europe, or the other way round, across the Empires in our sphere of interest.

Although we very much wanted to get contributions about the image of the Middle East in Eastern Europe, we could not acquire proposals concerning related questions, which to a large degree remain to be analyzed: Among them would be, if Eastern Europe seen from the Near East and vice versa were considered to be a specific region, or more specifically a region of “backwardness”, as perceived by Western Europe (Said), or then, a region of conflict? Was namely Russia understood to be a (backward) European imperial power (Wolff) or, rather, orientalized as an Asian power? What was the view of Eastern Europe’s ethno-religious diversity against the background of the Middle East’s own multi-confessional or multi-religious societies? Was South Eastern Europe perceived as a backward and conflict-ridden region, as it was the case in Western Europe (Todorova)? Similar questions concerning the image of the Middle East in Eastern Europe, have been addressed increasingly during the last years, especially about Poland⁴⁵ and Russia’s internal and external Orient.⁴⁶

Another package of questions about the post-revolutionary eras, Socialist “development aid” and, earlier, imperialism has been formulated in the Call and is answered in the volume partially: What roles played Russia and/or the Soviet Un-

45 Born, Robert, Andreas Puth (eds.): *Osmanischer Orient und Ostmitteleuropa. Perzeptionen und Interaktionen in den Grenzzonen zwischen dem 16. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: 2014); Born, Robert, Sarah Lemmen 2014 (eds.): *Orientalismen in Ostmitteleuropa. Diskurse, Akteure und Disziplinen vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bielefeld: 2014).

46 Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient. The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Victor Taki, “Orientalism on the Margins. The Ottoman Empire under Russian Eyes,” *Kritika* 12 (2011) 2: 321–351; David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism. Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2010).

ion in the Ottoman Empire and Iran in the past and what roles does it play in the Middle East now with regard to military, technological, economic, political and religious engagement? Such questions should be important for today's events, too: How can we characterize the historical background of the current situation and the war in Syria? Are there particular practices which were common in Russian warfare in Syria that can be observed now in Russia's war against Ukraine?

Concerning the field of knowledge flows, topics as system critique, reforms, unrest and war were included to the fields of central interest of the conference call, but were not extensively analysed eventually, either: Can the *An-Nahda*, i.e. the Arabic cultural renaissance since the 19th century be viewed in the context of other "renaissances" in the region (for example, in Ottoman Bulgaria), and can the revolutions of 1905 (in Russia and Persia), as well as in 1908 and 1917 be viewed in an overarching context? Was there perhaps a partial relationship between the Eastern European reception of the "Spring of peoples" (1848) and the "Arab Spring", e.g. via the "Prague Spring" or other such "springs" that took place in other countries? How were, or are, the Balkan wars of 1912–13 and the post-Yugoslavian wars received in Palestine and how has the current war in Syria been received in present-day Bosnia?

These and other questions, only partially answered in this volume should be followed in the future – for now, we are happy with the articles we were actually able to prepare and to present a kaleidoscope of current research which will hopefully evoke more research questions:

The volume's papers are arranged in a mostly chronological order, reaching from the Early Modern period to the 21st century. With a focus on the construction of knowledge about the "Orient", Taisiya Leber elaborates on how knowledge about the multi-religiousness of Ottoman Egypt in early modern Russia was fostering and conditioned by Russian discourses about the religious, salvatory role of the new empire. *Vis-à-vis* representatives of Russian society, they conceded the assumption that Russians were an Orthodox people and empire chosen by God, whose vocation was to protect Orthodoxy worldwide.

Stefan Rohdewald introduces further entanglements between and across the religions and denominations, namely in Poland-Lithuania, and within a larger European setting reaching out to the Ottoman Near East. The article focuses on texts by Muslim Tatars, who embraced the Christian reformatory antitrinitarian terminology known in Poland-Lithuania, and texts by Ibrahim Müteferrika (contra Trinity) as well as by Dmitrie Cantemir (pro Trinity, but nevertheless with broad usage of a text by a well-known Polish Antitrinitarian). As a result, the contribution shows how Muslims and Orthodox Christians were inscribing themselves into then fashionable reformatory Christian discourses about (and especially against) Trinity, that were spreading across Poland-Lithuania and the centers of the Ottoman Empire, and which were compatible with fostering their own denomination.

Lilija Wedel presents discourses on cultural and scientific activities of European powers and Russia in the Middle East, namely Palestine, around 1900. European missionaries pursued not only scientific, but also strategical and political interests and were, as a rule, supported in doing this by their governments. Pub-