

German-speaking Orientalists with an Interest in Kurdish Studies and their Local Interlocutors: Encounters, Co-Productions, and Entanglements

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ABSTRACTS

This paper explores processes of knowledge production in the emerging field of Kurdish studies during the second half of the nineteenth century by examining the entanglements between German-speaking scholars and their various Ottoman-Kurdish interlocutors. The emergence of Kurdish studies is examined as a transregional phenomenon: German-speaking researchers collaborated and competed with their European counterparts, while they also closely interacted with Kurdish-speaking interlocutors in the Ottoman Empire on different levels. Far from being passive providers of information, local informants acted as intermediaries and utilized the encounters to foster their own interests. All of those levels are explored as in constant conversation, mutually reflecting and cross-referencing each other.

Der Beitrag untersucht Prozesse der Wissensproduktion im sich in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts etablierenden Forschungsfeld der Kurdischen Studien und nimmt dazu die ambivalenten Beziehungsgefüge zwischen deutschsprachigen Forschern und ihren osmanisch-kurdischen Gegenübern in den Blick. Deutschsprachige Wissenschaftler standen im Wettbewerb mit Wissenschaftlern aus anderen europäischen Staaten, interagierten aber auch mit kurdischsprachigen Akteuren auf verschiedenen Ebenen. Lokale Informanten verhielten sich bei diesen Begegnungen nicht passiv, sondern traten als Vermittler auf und nutzten die Zusammenarbeit für ihre eigenen Zwecke. Alle genannten Ebenen werden hier als im ständigen Austausch und wechselseitiger Beeinflussung verstanden.

1. Introduction

The impact of imperialist and, in particular, Orientalist perceptions on processes of knowledge production has been studied intensively for decades.¹ However, it has been pointed out recently that the contemporary, often critical perspective of Ottoman intellectuals on Orientalist research and European misperceptions and clichés is still largely missing from the picture.² I argue in the following that to overcome the deceptive binary between active and dominating imperialist scholars on the one hand and passive indigenous objects of study on the other, not only Ottoman intellectuals, but also local interlocutors, assistants and informants of European scholars need to be considered.³ Given that we mostly deal with the results of research, with finished monographs and straightened-out published studies, however, it can be difficult to capture the complex and multi-level processes of knowledge production which preceded these publications. As it will be shown, the emerging field of Kurdish studies offers a unique opportunity to include both Ottoman-imperial contributions and local voices. To this aim, I explore the history of the academic discipline of Kurdish studies as a subfield of German-speaking Oriental Studies, drawing on published and unpublished writings of early representatives in the field, along with their research strategies in doing fieldwork and collecting information on the ground. More specifically, I ask how encounters with Kurdish-speaking interlocutors from the Ottoman context – both with Ottoman intellectuals and local native speakers – shaped the perspectives, research opportunities and output of selected German and Swiss Orientalists during the second half of the nineteenth century. From the 1880s onward, an increasing pluralization and rivalry of imperial claims and projects can be observed.⁴ This tendency also played out in the emerging field of Kurdish studies, where we encounter German-speaking researchers collaborating, but also competing with, colleagues working from Britain, France or Russia. Their interactions are complicated by the fact that scholarly audiences and discourses were not congruent with imperialist territorial claims or borders. Widely received research in German in the field of Kurdish studies was, for example, also published in St. Petersburg by Peter Lerch.⁵ In addition to these imperial entanglements, researchers also interacted with Kurdish interlocutors on different levels: Frequently asked to translate, comment or provide guidance, Ottoman-Kurdish intellectuals with contacts to Europe and proficiency in European languages played an active part in shaping the field of Kurdish studies. They channelled research interests in ways meaningful or beneficial to them, offered advice

1 E. Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London 1978; B. Schnepel et al., *Orient – Orientalistik – Orientalismus: Geschichte und Aktualität einer Debatte*, Bielefeld 2011.

2 Z. Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing About the Orient. A Critical Discourse (1872–1932)*, Istanbul 2021, pp. 13–56.

3 Taking my cue from debates about knowledge production in social anthropology, notably from P. Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, Berkeley 1977.

4 K. Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement. German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empires*, Cambridge, MA 2014, pp. 3–4.

5 P. Lerch, *Forschungen über die Kurden und die iranischen Nordchaldäer*, St. Petersburg 1857; see also below.

and source material and, in some cases, responded with their own interpretations and even outright criticism. Often overlooked, a second group of actors was involved in these German-Kurdish encounters as well: During their research trips, scholars were eager to build rapport with local Kurdish speakers. I argue that far from being passive or neutral providers of information during these encounters, local interlocutors acted as intermediaries, tutors and research assistants, using the collaborations to foster their own interests and improve their social and economic standing.⁶

2. Parameters and Priorities of Nineteenth-Century Kurdish Studies

So far, the historiography of Kurdish studies has mainly focused on aspects that are most evident and accessible to us today. As part of the history of Oriental studies more broadly, research has zoomed in on European protagonists in the field, along with their institutional affiliations and academic networks.⁷ This approach has identified three institutional contexts of knowledge production as particularly relevant – with overlaps, but also competition and mutual prejudice between them: Academia, the ecclesiastical missions in the Orient, and diplomacy. German-speaking researchers were active participants in all three contexts, but they were neither confined to Imperial Germany geographically nor acting in isolation. Scholars based in Russia – some of them publishing in French or, indeed, German – in particular had taken the lead in the emerging field of Kurdish studies for much of the nineteenth century.⁸ Alsancakli highlights that systematic studies in the field had only begun around 1800. Christian missionaries, who depended on being understood in local languages for their missionary work to be effective, paved the way as early experts on Kurdish, recording colloquial language, compiling glossaries and gathering information on grammar.⁹ Their findings, however, percolated only gradually into academic discourses. By the mid-nineteenth century, Kurdish was still listed as a dialect of Persian in many reference works, receiving cursory scholarly attention at best.¹⁰ However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a more thorough linguistic study of Kurdish came to be seen as a desideratum, and filling this gap emerged as a shared priority for researchers from different backgrounds. Some of them were interested in Kurdish for geopolitical reasons, while others hoped to gain a deeper understanding of

6 Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, p. 6.

7 Most recently S. Alsancakli, *The Early History of Kurdish Studies, 1797–1901*, in: *Die Welt des Islams* 56 (2016), pp. 55–88. For the German-speaking context, see also K. Kren, *Kurdologie, Kurdistan und die Kurden in der deutschsprachigen Literatur: kommentierte Bibliographie*, Münster 2000; and M. Six-Hohenbalken, *Kurdische Studien in Österreich: Pioniere, Kriegswirtschaftler und IndividualistInnen*, in: *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kurdische Studien* 2 (2014), pp. 235–295.

8 Alsancakli, *Early History*, pp. 77–78. Pertinent examples of scholars based in Russia included Alexandre Chodzko and Vladimir Minorsky, both writing in French, and Peter Lerch, who published in German.

9 Alsancakli, *Early History*, pp. 61–65.

10 For example T. Benfey, *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft und der orientalischen Philologie in Deutschland seit dem Anfange des 19. Jahrhunderts mit einem Rückblick auf die früheren Zeiten*, München 1869, p. 629.

Islamic history¹¹ or pre-Islamic Iranian languages and historical records¹² through the study of Kurdish source material. One early contributor to the emerging field of Kurdish studies operating from St. Petersburg was Peter Lerch (1827–1894),¹³ who spent several weeks with Ottoman-Kurdish soldiers in a Russian prisoner-of-war camp in Smolensk in the aftermath of the Crimean War (1853–1856), collecting samples of different Kurdish dialects there.¹⁴ Lerch also urged Russian diplomats based in the Kurdish-speaking regions of the Ottoman Empire (and also Iran) to provide him with more material.¹⁵ Many of Lerch's contemporaries, among them Theodor Nöldeke in Germany, however, based their occasional forays into Kurdish linguistics on written material only and were therefore able to conduct their research from the comfort of their libraries.¹⁶ Lerch, in contrast, was among the first to put spoken, contemporary Kurdish on the agenda – thereby introducing an important paradigm shift that in turn would make local informants more visible in the research documentation.

Lerch's attempts to give greater priority to the study of spoken Kurdish were soon followed up by others in German-speaking academia: Eager to make a name for themselves by filling in the few remaining gaps in the study of dialects in the Middle East, the Swiss Orientalist Albert Socin (1844–1899)¹⁷ and his colleague Eugen Prym (1843–1913)¹⁸ set out on a joint expedition across the Ottoman Empire between 1868 and 1870, travelling from Egypt to Ottoman Syria and Anatolia. Later, they separated and Socin continued on to Iraq by himself. Their scope of interest was broad and included colloquial Arabic, Bedouin dialects, poetry and songs, Ottoman Turkish and Aramaic in addition to Kurdish. Excitedly, Prym wrote to his mentor Johann Gildemeister how Kurdish in particular had captured his interest, as many aspects had not been studied extensively before and appeared to him as “noch ganz jungfräuliche Erde”, as a virgin territory.¹⁹ Socin and Prym took inspiration from Lerch in their efforts to systematically document Kurdish dialects they encountered. They travelled with copies of Lerch's edited texts and Kurdish glossary, consulting and correcting these works on the spot. Prym, however, was critical of Lerch's lack of proficiency in Arabic, arguing that Arabic was indispensable as

11 In June 1897, Martin Hartmann wrote enthusiastically to Ignaz Goldziher how Kurdish sources had the potential to unveil previously unknown spheres of the Islamic world: „Es enthüllt sich hier ein Gebiet des Islams, das bisher noch so gut wie unbekannt war“, L. Hanisch, 'Machen Sie mir doch unseren Islam nicht gar zu schlecht'. Der Briefwechsel der Islamwissenschaftler Ignaz Goldziher und Martin Hartmann 1894–1914. Wiesbaden 2000, p. 74.

12 P. Lerch, *Forschungen über die Kurden und die iranischen Nordchaldäer*, St. Petersburg 1857, pp. iii–xii.

13 J. Blau, *Kurdish Language: History of Kurdish Studies*, in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 2009 (<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kurdish-language-ii-history-of-kurdish-studies>, accessed 10 August 2022).

14 P. Lerch, Bericht über eine im Auftrage der historisch-philosophischen Classe der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften unternommene Reise zu den kriegsgefangenen Kurden in Roslawl im Gouvernement Smolensk, in: *Mélanges Asiatiques* II (1856), pp. 621–649.

15 His request was taken up by Alexandre Jaba and Nikolai Chanykow, Russian consuls in Erzurum and Tabriz respectively. Lerch, *Forschungen über die Kurden*, p. vii.

16 Kren, *Kurdologie*, pp. 223–224.

17 E. Kautzsch, A. Socin †, in: *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 22 (1899), pp. 1–17.

18 M. Horten, *Kleine Mitteilungen und Anzeigen*: Eugen Prym, in: *Der Islam* 4 (1913), p. 299.

19 Letter from Eugen Prym to Johann Gildemeister, 23 May 1869. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, Nachlass Prym (S 2929 a-c).

an intermediary language to communicate effectively with Kurdish speakers when recording text samples and translations.²⁰

Researchers interested in Kurdish operated in an international and multilingual field of scholarship that was marked by moments of cooperation as well as by diverging political interests and imperial rivalries.²¹ In terms of competition, British scholars and their exploits stood out to Socin. With a mix of admiration and ridicule, he noted their meticulously planned and campaign-like expeditions which made for efficient travel, but kept them rather isolated from the local population.²² Not without pride, Socin observed that these British travellers often mistook him for a Turkish native in his local attire.²³ Socin noted that even as general public interest in the Middle East and Eastern Anatolia was on the increase across Europe at the time of their expedition, their own field of philological and linguistic research was still being neglected, as many explorers prioritized inquiries into archaeological and geographical matters instead.²⁴ But the increased European presence in the region also affected Socin and Prym's own experiences in the field. Locals had gotten used to the presence of foreign scholars and had come to expect certain preferences – for old manuscripts and allegedly sacred texts or for ruins, inscriptions and ancient monuments – and also financial remunerations in their interactions with them.²⁵ Previous contacts with other European scholars and travellers had also left a mark on potential informants. It was difficult to find native speakers suitable for their purposes, Socin complained: Some he deemed too educated to help him record what he considered to be the *authentic* dialects, and one local authority Socin had hoped to interview even insisted on conversing with him in English only.²⁶ During his travels in Syria and Anatolia in 1880, professor for Semitic and Oriental languages in Berlin Eduard Sachau (1845–1930)²⁷ made similar observations. Notably, the influence of British explorer and diplomat Austen Henry Layard, who was on post as British ambassador in Istanbul at the time and travelled across the empire, and his staff struck Sachau as annoyingly ubiquitous, with British engineers in Layard's retinue surveying and documenting every last corner of the empire.²⁸ For Sachau, imperial expansion and scholarship went hand-in-

20 Letter from Eugen Prym to Johann Gildemeister, Damascus, Nov. 1869. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, Nachlass Prym (S 2929 a-c).

21 Manjapra, *Acts of Entanglement*, pp. 3–4. This is illustrated in the preface by Martin Hartmann to H. Makas, *Kurdische Studien*, Heidelberg 1900, pp. ii–iii, discussed below.

22 A. Alt, *Ein Ritt durch Palästina im Jahre 1869. Reisebriefe von Albert Socin*, in: *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 60 (1937) 1/3, pp. 1–132, here pp. 9–10.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 106. In the surroundings of Damascus, Socin had recruited a local woman to narrate stories for him. He continued to send financial support to her after his return to Germany and was concerned that the prolonged interviews might have overly exhausted her, aggravating a chronic illness she struggled with, Kautzsch, A. Socin †, p. 12.

26 A. Socin, *Aus einem Briefe des Dr. Socin an Prof. Nöldeke*, in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 24 (1870), pp. 461–477.

27 H.-J. Kornrumpf/J. Kornrumpf, *Fremde im Osmanischen Reich 1826–1912/13. Bio-bibliographisches Register*, 2nd edn, Stutensee 1998, p. 305.

28 E. Sachau, *Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien*, Leipzig 1883, pp. 2–16 and *passim*.

hand. In his preface addressed to the German Emperor, he pointed out that it was high time for both German academia and imperial politics to catch up with British efforts.²⁹ Increasing imperial rivalries around the turn of the century fanned this scholarly competition further – and Kurdish studies soon took the centre stage as one of the few still largely unexplored subfields of Oriental studies. In his preface to a survey of Kurdish dialects, German professor for Islamic Studies and former diplomat Martin Hartmann (1851–1918)³⁰ cut to the chase, pointing out that as the Baghdad Railway was to cross Kurdish territories, the Kurds and the Kurdish language were bound to attract increased academic and political interest in Germany.³¹

However, research collaborations in the field of Kurdish studies not only attest to these kinds of imperial concerns and rivalries. Exploring knowledge production in the field of Kurdish studies as a multi-level conversation that involved a variety of European, Ottoman and Kurdish voices mutually reflecting and cross-referencing each other points to additional dimensions that are worth considering.³² Looking at knowledge production and interactions with local informants on the ground illustrates how questions, categories and concepts researchers brought to the field were far from stable during these research encounters. Heteroglossias and overlapping discourses prevailed, and the same informant might provide insights into Aramaic narrative traditions one day and then supply material in colloquial Kurdish the next.³³ Researchers' priorities when it came to local languages were also shifting. Initially, greater attention was given to Arabic and Aramaic – languages of interest also in the context of Christian theology and Bible exegesis³⁴ – over Ottoman Turkish, Arab dialects and Kurdish. However, in tandem with German imperial projects in the Arab-Ottoman world, notably the Baghdad Railway, interest in Kurdish studies in German-speaking academia increased over the second half of the nineteenth century. But knowledge production in the field of Kurdish studies was by no means limited to the Kurdish-speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire. Research opportunities were impacted by the movement of both European scholars and Kurdish speakers. For example, the city of Damascus stands out as a particular hub for encounters and collaborations. In the late nineteenth century, Kurdish speakers from Anatolia migrated to the city in search of seasonal work or to find relief from famine and crop failure in their homelands.³⁵

29 Ibid., pp. v–vi.

30 Hanisch, Briefwechsel, pp. xvi–xx on his biography.

31 „[...] denn in diesen Tagen, da der Bau der Bahn nach Bagdad das Kernland der Kurden und seine Bewohner in das Netz des Weltverkehrs ziehen wird, wird auch das Interesse am Kurmanji in weitere Kreise dringen und die Kenntnis dieser Sprache zu einem Bedürfnis werden.“ Preface by M. Hartmann to H. Makas, *Kurdische Studien*, Heidelberg 1900, pp. ii–iii.

32 Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, p. 6 refers to this as the “realpolitik of the study intellectual history.”

33 This example is taken from the research experience of Eugen Prym and Albert Socin in Ottoman Syria in 1869/70, see below for further detail.

34 U. Wokoeck, *German Orientalism. The Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800 to 1945*, New York 2009, pp. 108–113.

35 See the letters of Eugen Prym from Damascus in 1869/70, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, Nachlass

In the ensuing academic publications in European languages, however, these transregional dimensions – along with the impact of the interventions of Ottoman intellectuals and local encounters which will be explored in greater detail in the following – often got short shrift. That informants and research conditions were addressed at all in some publications was due to a shift concerning the basic parameters of linguistic research that took hold from the mid-nineteenth century onward. By then, a systematic study of a spoken language like Kurdish required verifiable documentation of exactly how, where and under which circumstances data had been procured, urging scholars to be more vocal and transparent about their proceedings. To study Kurdish dialects, it was now seen as essential for researchers to engage not only with printed material and manuscripts, but also with individual speakers. Therefore, in the scholarly community at the time, a new need for competent informants and local brokers able to provide contacts to suitable native speakers emerged. In turn, some researchers described their efforts to select informants and their ways of interacting with them in the academic works they went on to publish,³⁶ and many more reflected on their interactions with native speakers in their correspondence with their colleagues.³⁷ In the following, some examples will be explored to shed further light on some of these interactions.

3. Encounters between European Scholars and Ottoman-Kurdish Intellectuals

The relevance and contents of the emerging field of Kurdish studies were not only negotiated at the desks of a handful of European specialists. Knowledge about Kurdish language also mattered for Ottoman administrators dealing with Kurdish populations, as well as for actors perceived as or perceiving themselves as Kurdish speakers. Ottoman administrators in provinces with a noticeable Kurdish population did reflect on Kurdish language and culture, mostly treating Kurdish inhabitants as a challenge to Ottoman central governance and dealing with them in a framework of deviance and rebellion. Their perceptions stress problems like banditry, desertion from military service or tax evasion.³⁸ Mustafa Nuri Pasha, a late nineteenth-century Ottoman governor (*vali*) of Mosul, combined this need for knowledge as a means of administrative domination with a scholarly interest in the Kurdish-speaking Yezidi community in Ottoman Iraq,

Prym (S 2929 a-c); and L. Paul, Karl Hadank (1882–1945) and the *Kurdisch-Persische Forschungen*: Ambitions, Achievements, and Ideological Entanglements, in: *Diyâr 1* (2020) 2, pp. 289–309.

36 The example of Hugo Makas will be discussed below.

37 Hanisch, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 74 and 201–202; Alt, *Ritt durch Palestina*, pp. 1–132; Correspondence of Eugen Prym 1868–1870, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, Nachlass Prym (S 2929 a-c).

38 On Ottoman tribal politics in regions with Kurdish populations, see G. Çetinsaya, Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890–1908. London 2006, pp. 74–85. For attempts to interpret similar policies through the lens of Ottoman Orientalism, see S. Deringil, They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (2003) 2, pp. 311–342; and U. Makdisi, Ottoman Orientalism, in: *American Historical Review* 107 (2002) 3, pp. 768–796.

publishing a study on the topic in 1905. Because of the insider perspective and the information Mustafa Nuri Pasha was able to obtain as an Ottoman official on previously secret holy texts, rituals and rules of social organization,³⁹ European researchers like Rudolf Frank, Theodor Menzel and others did take immediate note of this publication. Initially, however, the book had been written in Ottoman Turkish and seen only a small print run – indicating that Mustafa Nuri Pasha was first and foremost reaching out to an audience of fellow Ottoman administrators. A number of near-contemporary publications on Kurdish language and history in Ottoman Turkish hint at an entire discursive field of Ottoman Kurdish studies yet to be explored.⁴⁰

Ottoman-Kurdish intellectuals also volunteered their services to European scholars, connecting them to local communities and commenting on their research findings. In turn, some of them made brief appearances in published works on Kurdish studies, when thanks are expressed for their help in translating a challenging passage or when their alleged first-hand knowledge is quoted as proof for certain statements and assumptions. A well-explored working relationship that followed this pattern existed in post-Ottoman times, during the 1930s, between the German Orientalist Karl Hadank (1882–1945) and Celadet Bedirhan (1893–1951) in Damascus.⁴¹ A linguist himself who was involved in the development of a standardized Kurdish written in Latin script after the First World War, Celadet Bedirhan wrote an autobiography⁴² and also published on his scholarly findings in the field of Kurdish linguistics. As a result, his voice and contributions to the emergence of Kurdish studies are hard to miss.⁴³ His situation and course of action as an intermediary figure between foreign scholarly interests and local communities, however, were neither exceptional nor entirely new. He operated within existing structures and could build on lesser-known precursors and their networks – from within his own family and beyond. Already at the turn of the twentieth century, two of Celadet Bedirhan's close relatives, his paternal uncles Emin Ali Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan, had – independently from each other – established contacts into the European community of Orientalists. The Ottoman bureaucrat Emin Ali approached the retired

39 Giritli Mustafa Nuri Pasha, *Abede-yi İblis ya'bud tayfe-yi bağiye-yi Yezidiye'ye bir nazar* [The Worshippers of Iblis or a Glance at the Sect of the Yezidis], Istanbul 1323 H [1905] is mentioned by R. Frank, *Scheich 'Adi, der große Heilige der Jezidis*, Erlangen 1911, pp. 2–3 and p. 99. A commented translation into German was published by T. Menzel, *Die Teufelsanbeter oder ein Blick auf die widerspenstige Sekte der Jeziden: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Jeziden von Mustafa Nuri Pascha, dem Kreter*, Leipzig 1911; on the significance of the work, cf. the review of Menzel's translation by E. Graefe in *Der Islam* 3 (1912), pp. 192–194.

40 For instance, an Ottoman-Kurdish dictionary compiled by Yusuf Ziyaeddin Pasha with the title *El-Hediyye't'ül-Hamidiyye fi'l-luğat'ül Kurdiyye* which was dedicated to Sultan Abdülhamid II. However, the work was banned by the Ottoman authorities in 1906, underscoring how publications of this kind had effects beyond epistemic and of administrative penetration, also informing newly-emerging discourses about ethnic identity in the late-Ottoman context, see D. Ekici, *Kurdish Identity, Islamism, and Ottomanism. The Making of a Nation in Kurdish Journalistic Discourse (1898–1914)*, London 2021, pp. 52–53.

41 See Paul, Karl Hadank, pp. 289–309, and B. Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts*, Bamberg 2018, pp. 553–561.

42 C. Bedirhan, *Günlük Notlar 1922–1925*, Istanbul 1997.

43 See his contributions to the journals *Hawar* (1932–1943) and *Ronahi* (1942–1945), as well as D. Bedir Khan/R. Lescot, *Grammaire Kurde (Dialecte kurmandji)*, Paris 1970.

German field marshal Helmuth von Moltke with questions about recent events in Ottoman and Kurdish history that Moltke himself, who had served as an advisor to the Ottoman military between 1836 and 1838, had been an eye-witness to.⁴⁴ Emin Ali's brother Abdurrahman Bedirhan, on the other hand, had been driven into political exile because of his opposition to the regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II., spending the years between 1898 and 1905 in Geneva, Switzerland and publishing the journal *Kurdistan* in Kurdish (in Arabic script) and French from there.⁴⁵ His activities did not go unnoticed in the circles of European Orientalists and policy makers: Due to his interest in Kurdish literary traditions, the already-mentioned Martin Hartmann followed the output of the contemporary Ottoman-Kurdish press closely.⁴⁶ He was therefore familiar with the work of Abdurrahman Bedirhan and put him in touch with his colleague Hugo Makas (1857–1901) in Vienna.⁴⁷ Makas then turned to Abdurrahman for advice when translating a Kurdish poem from the region of Hakkari into French. In his published study, Makas introduced Abdurrahman as a literate and educated Ottoman Kurd and also provided some (partly inaccurate) details on his biography. The two scholars conversed in French, and Abdurrahman's opinion and contribution to the translation, along with the reservations he expressed about the quality of the text, were reproduced extensively by Makas. Abdurrahman thus became visible as an active participant in the field of Kurdish studies, and the practicalities of this particular collaboration were sketched out as well: In his preface, Makas explained how he had prepared a draft translation that he then sent to Abdurrahman for further commentary, along with the original text and a list of specific questions about terminology.⁴⁸ Abdurrahman duly provided a translation, but was also opinionated about the selected text, pointing out to Makas that poetry of this kind was of no use to scholars. Instead, he suggested that Ahmad-e Khani, the author of the seventeenth-century Kurdish epic poem *Mem û Zîn*, would be a much more worthwhile object of study.⁴⁹ Abdurrahman, who was doing research on *Mem û Zîn* at the time himself, not coincidentally claimed this story to be part of the literary heritage of his family's

44 H. von Moltke, Briefe über Zustände und Begebenheiten in der Türkei aus den Jahren 1835 bis 1839, Berlin 1876; F. Niewöhner, War der Kurdenfürst Bedir-Khan-Bey an der Schlacht von Nisib beteiligt? Ein unveröffentlichter Brief des Generalfeldmarschalls Helmuth von Moltke, in: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 133 (1983), pp. 134–144. Moltke did answer the request but was unable to provide any details.

45 Malmîsanîj, İlk Kürt Gazetesi Kurdistanî Yayimlayan Abdurrahman Bedirhan (1868–1936) [Abdurrahman Bedirhan (1868–1936), who published the first Kurdish Newspaper 'Kurdistan'], Istanbul 2009, pp. 13–20.

46 M. Hartmann, Zur Kurdischen Literatur, in: Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 12 (1898), pp. 102–112, here p. 112 for the earlier efforts of Abdurrahman's brother Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan to publish an Ottoman-Kurdish journal from Cairo.

47 M. Six-Hohenbalken, Kurdische Studien in Österreich: Pioniere, Kriegswirtschaftler und IndividualistInnen, in: Wiener Jahrbuch für Kurdische Studien 2 (2014), pp. 244–245.

48 Makas, Kurdische Studien, pp. 18–20.

49 Ibid., pp. 19–20 quotes verbatim from Abdurrahman's letter which stated: "Je dois vous dire que toutes ces poésies ne sont pas bien fameuses. Je trouve inutile, peut-être même nuisible pour vous de vous occuper de telles poésies, parce que ça pourrait vous mettre dans des grandes erreurs. Il vaut mieux s'occuper des poésies de bons poètes; par exemple de [Ahmed-e Khani], l'auteur de [Mem û Zîn] etc., etc."

region of origin in the surroundings of Cizre.⁵⁰ Makas's text also illustrates the limits and inherent power imbalance of this particular German-Kurdish scholarly encounter: Having reproduced Abdurrahman's intervention at length, Makas then paid no further heed and went on to discuss the poem from Hakkari in detail.

More indirectly, Abdurrahman's own concerns and his position within competing networks of Ottoman-Kurdish scholarly and political interests shine through in a subsequent part of Makas's study as well: Martin Hartmann had introduced Makas not only to Abdurrahman Bedirhan, but at around the same time also to Ferid Bey, another Ottoman-Kurdish intellectual who was based in Paris around the turn of the century. Makas recruited him to narrate stories in Kurdish, thereby producing texts for linguistic analyses. Ferid Bey's family was part of the local elite of Diyarbekir and Makas notes that one of his uncles held a high-ranking post in the *Hamidiyye* cavalry. Ferid Bey himself, Makas continued, had graduated from the *Aşiret Mektebi*, a school established by Sultan Abdülhamid II. in Istanbul with the purpose of integrating sons of leading Arab and Kurdish tribal families into the imperial elite by means of education and career opportunities.⁵¹ Judging from his biographical trajectory and family background, Ferid Bey seems to have been a supporter of the sultan and his politics. When other Ottoman-Kurdish intellectuals approached Makas and tried to discredit Ferid Bey as an informant, the tensions and fault lines of Ottoman domestic politics made themselves felt. The interventions can be traced back to the circle of Abdurrahman Bedirhan and his journal *Kurdistan*, a group that saw themselves in opposition to the Hamidian regime – not as Kurdish nationalists in the twentieth-century sense of the term, but rather as part of the opposition to the authoritarian and centralized rule of the sultan. They challenged Ferid Bey's competence in Kurdish linguistics and literature by claiming he was hardly able to read and understand the Kurdish contributions in their journal *Kurdistan*.⁵² Judging from Makas's account of what went down, their strategy seems to have been not only to exclude a political opponent from the conversation by shedding doubt on his competence, but to claim a monopoly on delineating what counts as real, authentic Kurdishness worthy of scholarly attention – not coincidentally again zooming in on the dialect, literature, and cultural specifics of the region of Cizre, the homeland of the Bedirhani family.⁵³

In these examples, Ottoman-Kurdish intellectuals like Abdurrahman Bedirhan can be found talking back to Orientalist scholarship, suggesting their own interpretations and giving their opinion on the topics at hand, and thus also pushing their own scholarly and political agenda.⁵⁴ Makas's prefatory remarks have allowed a rare glimpse into these

50 Malmîsanij, Abdurrahman Bedirhan, p. 124.

51 E. L. Rogan, *Aşiret Mektebi: Abdülhamid II's School for Tribes (1892–1907)*, in: *International Journal for Middle East Studies* 28 (1996), pp. 83–107, here p. 83.

52 Makas, *Kurdische Studien*, p. 2.

53 This has been a recurring concern for members of the Bedirhani family in the twentieth century as well, see Henning, *Narratives*, pp. 578–580 for an example from interwar Paris.

54 Manjapra's understanding of entanglement as 'occur[ing] when groups, alien from each other in many other ways, begin to need each other like crowbars or like shovels to break apart or dig up problems of the most

entanglements. But these scholarly encounters are only one layer of interactions in the emergence of Kurdish studies, there is more to be explored.

4. Encounters with Kurdish Speakers in the Field

The majority of Kurdish-speaking individuals who interacted with European scholars were not erudite and polyglot figures like Abdurrahman Bedirhan or Ferid Bey but were approached in the field and had little to no previous exposure to academic interests or scholarly procedures. This was deliberate on the part of Orientalist scholars, who wanted to record local dialects in the most ancient, unadulterated form possible. Albert Socin and Eugen Prym stand out as being particularly explicit about their encounters with local informants. They entered the field of Kurdish studies in the late 1860s, at a moment in time when Kurdish linguistics underwent greater systematization and professionalization.⁵⁵ Meticulously documenting their research process, they adhered to the newly-established scholarly conventions and made the guiding principles of selecting their informants and methods of recruiting them transparent in their writings, along with the parameters of their subsequent interactions with them.⁵⁶ Professionally, a lot was stake for Socin and Prym: Their expedition was self-financed and meant to lay the foundation for their academic careers. Both would work on and publish the extensive materials they had gathered during the trip for decades to come. The activities of the two recent graduates were followed closely by their fellow academics back in the German-speaking academic sphere, as they sent detailed reports about their fieldwork and preliminary findings to the journal *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (ZDMG) at regular intervals and also corresponded with senior colleagues one-on-one. Some of their correspondents, in turn, also forwarded their letters to the ZDMG for publication so that readers could get regular updates on their research trip.⁵⁷ The duo had explicitly asked for assignments and tasks, and some senior colleagues took them up on their offer, requesting rare manuscripts and prints to be hunted down or detours to be made for the investigation of particular subjects. Throughout the entire trip, Socin and Prym were eager to engage with locals and converse in local languages. In their letters, both frequently mentioned lessons they arranged with teachers for Arabic and also Persian and reported how they mingled with local scholars and booksellers. The collection of Kurdish texts

pressing concern to themselves" offers an interesting lens to interpret this particular encounter; *Age of Entanglement*, p. 6.

55 Alsancaklı, *Early History*, pp. 78–86.

56 A. Socin, *Zur Geographie des Tur Abdin*, in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 35 (1881) 3, pp. 237–269, here p. 253.

57 Letters from Socin to ZDMG 63 (1869), pp. 316–319, letters from Socin to Theodor Nöldeke as well as to Heinrich L. Fleischer and Johannes Rödiger published in ZDMG 24 (1870), pp. 229–230, pp. 233–36, pp. 461–477 and pp. 708–710; letter from Prym to Fleischer in ZDMG 25 (1871). In addition, Socin was in regular correspondence with his father in Basel and his brother-in-law, the botanist Hermann Christ-Socin. See Alt, *Ritt durch Palästina*, p. 2.

and the contact to Kurdish native speakers became a recurring preoccupation after they arrived from Egypt to Ottoman Syria.

Socin and Prym's approach in recruiting and engaging with local informants differed from the methods of many of their contemporaries. Travelling in Ottoman Syria and Anatolia in 1879–1880, Eduard Sachau, for instance, was also interested in recording linguistic details. Since he had no proficiency in Kurdish, he relied on the services of his polyglot local guide to get by.⁵⁸ However, Sachau soon became exasperated trying to interview local Kurdish informants, lamenting how they were “amazingly ignorant” about their own language, literature and history.⁵⁹ Clearly, the failure to understand each other was in this case not only due to the language barrier, but also to a lack of shared conceptual frameworks. Socin and Prym tried a different *modus operandi*: With a declared interest in spoken Kurdish, they had gathered relevant information already prior to their departure. *Herr Solikian*,⁶⁰ a friend and classmate of Prym's at the University of Tübingen and an Armenian from Harput, was among the first to provide guidance about the Kurdish-speaking regions of the Ottoman lands.⁶¹ Upon their arrival in Damascus, Socin and Prym then sought out other intermediaries. By word of mouth, they eventually came in contact with a man they subsequently called Dschano in their field notes, a recent immigrant from Midyat. Fluent in Arabic, Aramaic, and Kurdish, Dschano had left his hometown after several years of famine in search of work and new opportunities.⁶² He was an illiterate laborer who earned his living as a builder at construction sites, but Socin soon discovered his knack for storytelling and found him a clever interlocutor and a rather fast learner. Conversing in Arabic, Socin and Prym asked Dschano to translate vocabulary and tell simple stories in his native languages that the two researchers then transcribed and translated with his help, gradually establishing a close working relationship. Socin and Prym had experienced some frustration earlier when they tried to interview a group of Bedouin Arabs about their traditional songs and had quickly found themselves surrounded by an animated and noisy crowd of locals who all wanted to have

58 With glee, his colleague Martin Hartmann pointed to the grave mistakes in the translations from Kurdish texts that were committed by Sachau's local assistants and made it into his ensuing publications undetected because of Sachau's ignorance of Kurdish, see Hartmann, *Zur Kurdischen Literatur*, pp. 108–109. Sachau was Hartmann's superior at the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen in Berlin and the two apparently did not get along well, Hanisch, *Briefwechsel*, p. xix.

59 Sachau, *Reise in Syrien*, p. 360, „[...] von einer staunenswerten Unwissenheit in allem, was das Schicksal ihrer Nation, ihrer Sprache und Literatur betrifft.”

60 E. Prym and A. Socin, *Der Neu-Aramäische Dialekt des Tûr Abdîn*, Göttingen 1881, p. viii. This was most probably Sarkis Solikian, who later studied in Jena with the linguist Eduard Sievers and then returned to the Ottoman Empire, working as a professor at the Sanassarian school in Erzurum and being in close contact with the German consulate there. In 1915, he was in danger of deportation in the context of the Armenian genocide. See H. Hübschmann, *Über die Aussprache und Umschreibung des Altarmenischen*, in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 30 (1876), pp. 53–73, here p. 55; and W. Gust (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915–1916*, New York 2014, pp. 235–238.

61 Prym/Socin, *Tûr Abdîn*, p. x.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. xi–xii.

their say in the matter.⁶³ They now opted for calmer and more structured one-on-one interviews instead – thereby also shifting both the numerical proportions and the power balance in their favour and limiting the possibility for backtalk. Dschano remained their only informant in Damascus at the time and joined Socin and Prym every weekday in the early mornings, conversing with them until noon. He was paid a day's wage and also received tobacco and coffee in return for his efforts. While Socin's published report portrayed the encounters as friendly and good-natured, Prym provided further details about the German researchers' views on their informant in his letters to Johann Gildemeister. In these recollections, which were not meant for publication or wider distribution, Prym referred to Dschano rather possessively as "our Syrian" [unser Syrer],⁶⁴ who was a "veritable treasure trove" [eine wahre Fundgrube] of information that the two researchers "exploited by all means possible" [nach Kräften ausbeuteten].⁶⁵ Prym talked about Dschano much like he would have about a rare manuscript, characterizing him as "our specimen" [unser Exemplar] – using a German term that can also be applied to a copy of printed or hand-written text. Dschano was imagined by Prym not so much as an active interlocutor with his own voice and individual perspective, but similar to a book or manuscript as carrier of a static and supra-individual body of knowledge that could be extracted from him by means of scientific methods. The language and imagery Prym made use of recalls the imperialist setting he and Socin were operating in and also hints at the rivalry they perceived with explorers from Britain and elsewhere: Like archaeologists, he described their task as hunting for treasures or safeguarding knowledge in danger of extinction.⁶⁶ The informant is mined for information – but is otherwise not expected to interfere with the research process.

Comparing Prym's account with Socin's depictions of what actually happened in their sessions with Dschano underscores, however, that their interactions did not take place in a laboratory environment where European researchers controlled all the conditions. Working with Dschano came with a number of practical challenges. Dschano needed prompting to translate his working knowledge about the languages he spoke into the abstract and unfamiliar linguistic taxonomies that Socin and Prym were using. Initial glitches – like Socin inquiring about the rules of conjugation and asking Dschano to render the morpheme "you write" in his native language and a confused Dschano pro-

63 Letter from Eugen Prym to Johann Gildemeister, Damascus, November 1869. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, Nachlass Prym (S 2929 a-c).

64 An interesting choice of terminology, since Dschano was a native of Midyat with a Jacobite-Kurdish background who, according to Socin, who had quizzed him about his biography and plans for the future, did not see himself permanently in Damascus but was merely having a stopover on his way to Jerusalem. Visiting Dschano's relatives in Midyat at a later stage of his trip, Socin found out that he had indeed made it to Jerusalem. Prym/Socin, *Tûr Abdîn*, p. xi.

65 Letter from Eugen Prym to Johann Gildemeister, Damascus, November 1869. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, Nachlass Prym (S 2929 a-c).

66 Parallels to this way of thinking about Kurdish material can be found in the letters of Martin Hartmann, who wrote to Goldziher in 1903 how he had "at least saved" [nun wenigstens gerettet] the contents of a manuscript with Kurdish poetry from an uncertain fate in Istanbul, see Hanisch, *Briefwechsel*, p. 201.

testing that he, for sure, could not write – could be overcome. But it soon became clear that the interviews were not taking place in a vacuum. Other local stakeholders had been watching closely – and not everyone was happy with the way the working relationship between Dschano and the two foreign researchers unfolded. Some saw cultural conventions, social hierarchies and even propriety violated: A local cleric feared that the wrong kind of knowledge was about to be passed on during these encounters. He urged Dschano to stop his mindless storytelling and to send the foreign researchers his way instead, where they should learn about the real, ancient Aramaic under his auspices, studying Biblical texts instead of entertaining stories in spoken Kurdish. That the research set-up devised by Prym and Socin was at odds with local rules of social interaction became clear when subsequently, the same cleric came forward again, now complaining about the fact that Dschano was allegedly singing to the foreign researchers for money – a type of behaviour deemed highly disreputable by concerned locals. The claimant could be placated once more, this time with a donation for his church and the assurance that absolutely no singing was involved.⁶⁷

5. Conclusion

The emergence of Kurdish studies during the second half of the nineteenth century was a result of ongoing entanglements and co-productions. It was often messy and complex, even though the published scholarly accounts tried to mask or silence this aspect. This brief exploration into the history of Kurdish studies has juxtaposed various published research accounts with unpublished documentation and correspondence from nineteenth-century German-speaking scholars to shed light on the “realpolitik” of knowledge production. It could be demonstrated how the emergence of Kurdish studies played out transregionally, cross-cut imperial boundaries and, notably, included Ottoman-Kurdish interlocutors on different levels as active and opinionated participants. Research encounters and networks of knowledge production did not follow clear-cut binaries. Instead, multi-layered and mutually entangled conversations marked by imbalances of power, but nonetheless also shaped by the interventions and concerns of Kurdish-speaking actors came into focus. On the one hand, we saw German-speaking scholars intending to learn and listen, but also to mine, exploit, and control sources of information. On the other hand, their local counterparts were pursuing their own agendas. The encounters had an impact on all parties involved, shaping Orientalist as well as Ottoman-Kurdish imperial and local discourses and notions about language, history, and cultural heritage.