

KONFERENCJE

First World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES), University of Mainz, September 8-13, 2002

The convening of the Congress was the result of a two-years effort on the part of the European Society of Middle Eastern Studies (EURAMES), and above all the host institution Centre for Research on the Arab World (CERAW), Institute of Geography, University of Mainz, headed by Prof. Dr Gunter Meyer—being the President of EURAMES and President of the WOCMES Organising Committee. The World Congress was held as a joint congress of Middle Eastern studies associations in 18 European countries including AFEMAM, BRISMES, DAVO and SeSaMo. It was also supported by 135 universities and other institutions from all over the world. WOCMES brought together about two thousand experts from all branches of humanities, social sciences and other disciplines related to knowledge on the Middle East and North Africa. More than 1100 individual contributions were delivered within about 300 panels, symposia, workshops and conferences. On the first anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks in USA, the Congress assessed their impact on the future development of the Middle East. Of major events: Edward W. Said received “The WOCMES Award for Outstanding Contributions to Middle Eastern Studies”. The Congress programme included also 22 exhibitions (including exhibition on the history of printing and publishing in the languages of the Middle East at Gutenberg’s Museum in Mainz), a film festival, concerts, a dinner cruise on the Rhine river as well as excursions to fascinating parts of Germany. It should be emphasised that tens of Mainz University students worked hard all the day as volunteers in organising the meetings and assisting participants. The town inhabitants were receiving delegates from Third World countries, granting them free accommodation and meals, while Land authorities hosted delegates-members of the International Advisory and Programme Committee in an official reception, while Johannes Rau, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, sent a message of greeting to the Congress participants.

Among the numerous World Congress panels, plenary lectures, keynote addresses and academic activities, I could for obvious reasons mention and comment only some of them. The Congress dealt with such multiple and diverse themes such as (to mention only a selected number of them!): Global fusion: visions for future Middle East; Foreign policy, inter-regional relations and the process of globalisation; Problematic encounters: East-West relationships in historical perspective; voyage et re-fondation du monde: voyageurs orientaux en Orient; mutual perceptions; state and society: law versus politics; the inter-relatedness of intellectual trends in the modern Mediterranean; la Libye et la colonisation italienne; Great Britain and Palestine: new approaches in the history of the British mandate; political changes in the oil monarchies of the Gulf; Israeli foreign policy after the Al-Aksa Intifada; poverty in Palestine and Palestinian diaspora; the Iraqi question in world politics; Turkish politics and foreign policy after the cold war: new challenges and opportunities; the future of Arab political opposition: loyal, co-opted or illegal?; women or something like that? gender and transnationalism; women or something like that? roundtable; women in Arab societies; savoirs historiques au Maghreb: construction et usages; nationalism: the Middle East and its role in the world; Islamic response to modernity; early Islamic texts, their analysis and interpretation in the 21st century; philosophical and theological reflections; language and linguistics; results of contemporary research on Qur'an: the question of a historico-critical text of the Qur'an; the Avicenna Study Group Colloquium: Avicenna on metaphysics and theology; the Avicenna Study Group Colloquium: The heritage of Avicenna.

An important point in the agenda of the World Congress of Middle Eastern Studies was the special session: the impact of September 11 on the Middle East chaired by Prof. Friedmann Bittner from the Free University of Berlin. The main speakers were Prof. Roger Owen (Harvard University), Prof. Tim Niblock (Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter) and Kamel S. Abu Jaber (Jordan Institute for Middle Eastern Studies, Amman, and former Jordanian foreign minister). It was planned that one of the key speakers will be Uri Anverly (Gush Shalom, Israel, Nobel Prize co-winner for 2001), but he was deprived of the passport by Israeli judicial authorities, which treated some of his critical declarations on the conduct of Israel's army in the occupied territories as a basis for treason accusation. As to the statements declared at the meeting, Prof. Roger Owen expressed his pessimism about future developments in the aftermath of September 11 events. According to him, the general policy of the American Administration as reflected by mass media is superficial, over-simplistic and

ignoring the deeper roots of events and processes. He stated that he was stunned by such an attitude. He felt personally touched by the consideration that decades of his own and others academic efforts to rationalise perceptions on the Middle East appeared to be useless. He pointed out further that no evidence was brought forward to prove the Administration's case against Al-Qā'ida or allegations on Iraqi involvement in that terrorist act. Prof. Niblock, on his part, expressed—as he said—a greater degree of pessimism in that the observed over-simplification of matters related to the September 11 events was not accidental, but the result of deeper processes taking place for some in USA - i.e. the integration of radical protestant-Christian and radical Zionism outlooks and practices. From the first moments of the terrorist attacks on USA, the Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon took the opportunity to present Israel as the object of long-time terrorism and the Palestinian leader Yāsir 'Arafāt as Usāma Ibn Lādin. For him too the case against Iraq was amazingly not well justified. So, the explanation could perhaps be psychological, a personal revenge, in the sense that Ṣaddām Ḥusayn in 1993 organised in Kuwait city an assassination attempt on his father. The war against militarily weak Iraq would be easily won. However in the aftermath the victory might prove to be a curse; the US could become forced to occupy the country for years, perhaps decades.

The Iraqi question was the subject-matter of two other sessions. Here, the lecture of Prof. Stephen Zunes (University of San Francisco, and Middle East editor of "Foreign Policy in Focus", entitled "The failure of US policy towards Iraq" was most lively and widely attended. This moot at this meeting and generally at the Congress was sceptic and negative towards the American-sponsored war plan against Iraq. In his paper S. Zunes elaborated "seven fallacies of US plans to invade Iraq: Firstly—A war against Iraq would be illegal. Secondly—Regional allies widely oppose a US attack. Thirdly—There is no evidence of Iraqi links to Al-Qā'ida or other anti-American terrorists. Fourthly—There is no proof that Iraq is developing weapons of mass destruction. Fifthly—Iraq is no longer a significant military threat to its neighbours. Sixthly—There are still non-military options available. Seventhly—Defeating Iraq would be militarily difficult.

The author of these words presided upon two sessions, and participated there with a paper. The sessions were entitled: Religious Elite, Reformism and Modernism, 18th-19th Century. It is possible and worthwhile to bring the Reader with an insight about these sessions. So, Prof. Svetlana Kirillina (Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia) delivered a paper on the "Religious Elite of the Ottoman Egypt (the Eighteenth—Beginning of the Nineteenth Century)". The paper sought to

examine the mechanism of formation of the religious “hierarchy”, which embraced ulama of Egypt in the mentioned period; as bearers of the values of official Islam and “true Islamic tradition”. In the Ottoman Empire’s largest province, Egypt, the “religious establishment” was split between a native religious elite and Ottoman ‘ulamā’ sent from the imperial centre. Ottomans monopolised the post of the chief qāḍī, who was annually appointed from Istanbul, and other judicial highest positions. During the period under review, this religious “hierarchy” had not yet reached its fixed forms and its final crystallisation that occurred in the nineteenth century. Anyhow, the cluster of its key figures, including šayḥ al-Azhar and naqīb al-ašrāf, the head of the Egyptian descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, arose in the course of the eighteenth century. Through the investigation of the Ottoman-Egyptian chronicles, it has been made clear that intensive social mobility is one of the striking characteristics of the Egyptian religious elite of that time. Equally important is the problem of interaction of the native religious dignitaries with particular corporate communities and religious institutions; Sufi brotherhoods, maḏhabs and the board of Al-Azhar ‘ulamā’. Each structure of this kind stipulated inner system of subordination and provided for consolidation of members of the native religious elite. Analysing common features of the Egyptian religious elite, it could be suggested that, during at least the eighteenth century, a factor of “irresistible charm” of the higher religious rank was not entirely “routinised”. Building of a successful career within Islamic institutional framework was still dependent a lot on creative potentials and abilities of a concrete personality. Such issues as complexity and diversity of historical dynamics of native elite’s development and its transformation must be explained in the context of the social and political history of the Ottoman Egyptian history of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The presentation was in general terms an endeavour to analyse the socio-political co-operation of the native corps of ‘ulamā’ with the Ottoman-Mamluk rulers in the eighteenth century. As far as the beginning of the nineteenth century is concerned, an attempt was made to understand how the powerful Egyptian leader Muḥammad ‘Alī promoted his religious policy and how he sought to utilise his control over religious circles to his own benefit and the benefit of the country.

In turn, Dr Vladimir Orlov (also from the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia) presented the theme of the “Moroccan ‘Ulamā’ (mid-XVIII—Early XIX Century) as Intellectual Milieu: an Attempt of Reconsideration”. He stated that the Moroccan intellectual tradition of last pre-colonial centuries had been for decades an object of scholarly attention. However, some conclusions on this problem seem to

be based on stereotyped image of Moroccan society, characterised by intellectual stagnation, backwardness and monotony in educational process, that could only produce narrow-minded scribes heavily affected by xenophobe. So, evolution of traditional Muslim learning in Morocco was perceived as one-way regressive movement. These estimations, neatly defined by Edmund Burke as “Moroccan Vulgate”, may be corrected to a considerable extent by research based on Arab and European sources. On the one hand, analysis of the biographical data on 158 traditional intellectuals of the epoch, found in Moroccan chronicles (*At-Tarğumān al-mu‘arrib* by Abū al-Qāsim az-Zayyānī, *Al-Ġayš al-‘aramam* by Muḥammad Akansūs al-Marrakušī, *Tā’riḥ ad-dawla al-‘alawiyya* by Muḥammad ad-Du‘ayf ar-Rabaṭī, *Kitāb al-istiḡṣā’* by Aḥmad an-Nāširī, etc.) and hagiographical/biobibliographical reference lists (*Salwat al-anfās* by Muḥammad al-Kittānī, *Al-Yawāqīt at-tamīna* by Muḥammad al-Azharī, *Šağarat an-nūr az-zakiyya* by Muḥammad Maḥlūf) gives clear evidence concerning the diversity of Moroccan religious elite’s professional interests. From 110 Moroccan ‘ulamā’, whose specialisation in fields of traditional knowledge might be established, only 42 perfected their skills in one field, but 34 enjoyed two specialisations, 15—three, 15—four, one is reported to be expert in five ‘ulūm and three were known as specialists in six fields. On the other hand, memoirs of the European travellers and diplomats contain descriptions of private scholarly soirées, typical for intellectual life of Moroccan cities in the XVIII and XIX centuries. Europeans felt free to join these meetings, if were introduced by someone of local people. Quite often they found good audience to talk about achievements of the European science (physical and chemical experiments, notions of gravitation, electricity, discoveries in medicine, etc.), and culture (progress of book-printing, fine arts, and poetry in particular), together with landmarks of European history and even political news and travel impressions. Research in source materials allows us to accentuate popularity of traditional education, diversity of scholarly interests of Moroccan ‘ulamā’ as well as successful development of various forms of intellectual life in local intellectual milieu. It makes possible to estimate the intellectual process in pre-colonial Sherifian Empire not as “stagnation”, but rather as stable evolution according to medieval patterns, which allowed traditional Moroccan elites to preserve their cultural individuality under the French protectorate.

As to Dr Sulaiman Al-Jarallah (Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabi), his paper dealt with “The revivalist call of Saykh Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: A study to its origins”. In recent times—as he stated—a number of writings have appeared which portray the call that Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb carried out in the Arabian

Peninsula, during the twelfth century according to the Hiġra calendar, and the eighteenth century (according to the Gregorian calendar), as one of a school of thoughts particular to him, and as an understanding of Islam different from the one believed by the rest of the Muslims, and different from what their scholars were upon prior to his revivalist call. What is the truth of this claim? How correct is the usage of the term “Wahhabism” for this call? The paper presented a brief biography of Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, along with an account of his intellectual background, the environment in which he grew up, and the time in which he lived in its different aspects. Besides, the presentation covered a study of his revivalist call, i. e. the Islamic teachings which he came with to remind the people and to return them to the original teachings of Islam, taken from its sources—the Qur’an and Sunna. In relation to this, fundamental writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb were reminded and a comparison was made of the issues and teachings he stressed upon with those of the religious leaders and jurists before him. It was intended through this to prove that the mentioned teaching and call did not introduce anything new that were the practice of early generations of the Muslim community or found in recognised sources. In fact what has been said of the ṣayḥ, allegedly being a new methodology, is the result of not having studied the ṣayḥ books and academic works. It is through these works that it becomes clear that ṣayḥ Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was one of the most staunch Muslim scholars and leaders in following the early ancestors of the Muslim nation, and its recognised scholars. The paper investigated the term “Wahhabism”; it was not something that came into existence today, but from the beginning of the spread of the Sheikh’s, call which rectified the situation of the people in the Arabian Peninsula. Most of the responsibility of applying this term to this call belongs to its enemies who saw it as a danger, threatening their interests, desires, and extent of influence—whatever type of influence it may have been. This term was introduced to cause confusion about this call and its methodology, and to portray it in a way different to reality.

The contribution of doctoral research worker Konrad Hirschler, (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) was entitled: “Revivalist Traditions in pre-Eighteenth Century Egypt and Syria”. He mentioned that the existence of a number of parallel reformist/ revivalist movements in the Eighteenth/ Nineteenth Century Islamic world has been subject to intensive research in the last decades. In these movements two crucial subjects reoccurred repeatedly: the Sufi framework in which they developed (exception Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb) and their claim for iġtihād. The claim for iġtihād was linked to other characteristic patterns of this period, such as the focus on hadith studies. The intellectual background of these movements in

historical terms is largely still unknown. With regard to the Sufi background the situation is somehow better as some individuals and their thought have been examined more thoroughly, such as Ibrāhīm al-Kuranī (d. 1101 A.H./1690 A.D.). The claim for iğtihād, however, seems to have emerged out of a void. While it has been shown in the last decades that the idea of “the closure of the gate of iğtihād” is not tenable in its absolutist tone, our knowledge of how the continuous iğtihād tradition was linked to the Eighteenth/Nineteenth Century reform movements is still patchy. The paper examined a group of mujtahids in 7th/13th century Egypt and Syria centred on Ibn ‘Abd as-Salām (d. 660/1262). It appeared that iğtihād continued in a moderated form within a context of scholars holding high positions, such as judgeships. At the same time the claim for iğtihād was occasionally accompanied by a stance, which can be tentatively described as revivalist. Abū Šāma (d. 665/1267), for example, advocated a direct return to the Qur’ān and the Sunna by disregarding later authorities such as the school founders. This position was accompanied by a sharp critique of his contemporary world. With regard to issues such as “extreme” mystical practices and the dependency of scholars to worldly rulers he perceived an urgent need for change. This continuous iğtihād tradition was referred to in the writings of the Eighteenth/Nineteenth Century revivalists, such as As-Sanūsī (d. 1276/1859). It therefore might offer a first step towards a better understanding of the intellectual background of a crucial component in the thought of these individuals. At the same time it might allow us to define in more concrete terms continuous traditions of revivalism in Islamic history.

Finally as to this session, the author of this report presented his paper: “Arab/Islamic Revival (Nahḍa) in ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī’s Socio-political Thought”. The XIX century—a period initiated by the Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798—it was stated, is called by research workers and intellectuals of the Arab-Islamic world and elsewhere as the Age of Revival or Renaissance (‘aṣr an-nahḍa). The major characteristics of the period was the dissemination of modern education, the development of the press and publishing houses, the foundation of indigenous cultural societies and political movements, as well as the expansion of the dimensions of cultural contacts with the outside world, and above all with Western Europe. The representatives of Arab resurgence movements strenuously sought answers for a number of basic questions, which included the following: What were the causes of the then-actual weakness of the Arab-Islamic East, which enabled the European west to penetrate and conquer it? How to arrange the relationship with the West, and what character should they possess? Should we—asked some Arab thinkers—adopt the Western culture, and—if so—have we

to do that partially or entirely? What ways lead out of the existing state of stagnation, backwardness and ignorance towards progress, knowledge and power? Should the historically established political system be reformed or replaced by another? In the search for answers to theses and other questions, many orientations of social and political thought emerged during the XIX century in the investigated parts of the world. Among the outstanding representatives of the revivalist thought of the time was Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (1854-1902). Al-Kawākibī became an active public figure and journalist in his home town Aleppo, where he also occupied a number of posts, but time and again he was the object of persecution. In order to avoid this situation and be able to freely to disseminate his ideas, he decided upon emigration to Egypt, where he published his two famous works: *Ṭabā'ī' al-istiḥdād wa-maṣāri' al-isti'bād* (Nature of Despotism and Struggle against Servitude) and *Umm al-Qurā* (The Mother of Towns—i.e. Mecca). At these times Cairo became a safe haven for many Arab thinkers from Syria and Lebanon. In Egypt, they were free to write things that were unpleasant to the Ottoman rulers. The paper was an attempt to reconstruct and analyse al-Kawakibi's socio-political thought on the basis of his original writings and academic literature on the subject. At the core of his thought there were the questions of despotism, as the major obstacle to progress, as well as forms and instruments of Arab/Islamic revival.

It is extremely difficult to present even briefly this important occasion and the hundreds of events that took place within the Congress week. In conclusion, it is worthwhile to know that our Polish delegation, although small, was active. Prof. Barbara Michalak-Pikulska from the Jagiellonian University (Institute of Oriental Philology) was actively contacting Arabists from all over the world and organising next conferences. She delivered an interesting paper on "Social and Cultural Subjects in the Literary Output of Omani Women". Prof. Andrzej Kapiszewski, also from the Jagiellonian University (but from the Faculty of Middle Eastern Studies of the Institute of Political Sciences) presided over three sessions on Political Changes in the Oil Monarchies of the Gulf, where he delivered a paper entitled "Political Reforms in the Gulf Co-operation Council Countries in the Last Decade. An Overview". An interesting initiative on the part of Prof. Kapiszewski was to attract a number of his students to participate in the Congress. Something, which all of us should try to adopt.

Hassan Jamsheer