

The life and times of Andreas David Mordtmann in transcultural perspective. From German Orientalist and diplomat to Ottoman intellectual and civil servant

Abstract

The life story of Andreas David Mordtmann (1811-1879) touches upon many topics that have been subject of intense research in the recent years: Istanbul as a diplomatic venue, Oriental travellers, German Orientalism, the introduction of European concepts of science in the Ottoman Empire, the political history of the Tanzimat period, Europeans in Ottoman service, to name just a few. Mordtmann was an Oriental scholar who in 1846 was sent to Istanbul in 1846 to head the diplomatic representation of the Hanseatic Cities. In 1860, he “turned Turk” and became an Ottoman civil servant, participating in several high-profile reform commissions as a “Western expert” while also joining several Ottoman scientific societies and later teaching at the school for the civil service (mekteb-i mülkiye).

The talk will present my PhD project on Mordtmann as eye witness and commentator of the Tanzimat, asking for his particular cultural, professional and academic in-between position and his role in the production of knowledge about the “Orient”. As many in the audience will be students who might have questions on how to find and develop their own research endeavours, I will devote some time on the practical and theoretical implications of my project. Transculturality has become a popular buzz word in the humanities, but how can the concept be applied to archive based historical research, and what theoretical considerations do arise when analysing the findings in the context of recent research on the history of Oriental Studies that to a large extent has been guided by a post-colonial framework?

Bio

Tobias Völker is currently in the process of finalizing his doctorate at the Department of Oriental Studies at Vienna University. In his research, he studies the interplay of politics, ideology, and culture in the late Ottoman empire. He is especially interested in the practise and the effects of inter- and transcultural encounters in the context of 19th century Istanbul. His publications include “Two Generations of Mordtmanns in Istanbul: Diplomatic and Scholarly Lives in Times of Ottoman and German Transformations”, in *Comparativ* 32 # 3 / 4

(2023), pp. 333-348; „Holding High the Hanseatic Cross in the Levant: Andreas David Mordtmann and the Diplomatic Milieu in Istanbul“, in *International History Review* 43 # 5 (2021), pp. 1122-1141; „Vom Johanneum an die Hohe Pforte – das Leben und Wirken des Hamburger Orientalisten und Diplomaten Andreas David Mordtmann d. Ä.“, in: Yavuz Köse (Ed.), *Osmanen in Hamburg – eine Beziehungsgeschichte zur Zeit des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2015), pp. 25-44.

Suggested Reading

Tobias Völker, „Holding High the Hanseatic Cross in the Levant: Andreas David Mordtmann and the Diplomatic Milieu in Istanbul“, in *International History Review* 43 # 5 (2021), pp. 1122-1141.