

# Arab and Islamic Worlds in Germany

## Orient and Occident are inseparable today

Mainz-Johannes Bardong



The presence of Islam in both the German language and culture is probably best exemplified by referring to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, still considered the most important figure in German literature.

It was he who introduced many Germans and other Europeans to Islam through his "Der West-Ostliche Divan (West East Divan.)."

One of the most easily recognized verses from the volume of poetry published in 1819 is:

Wer sich selbst und and're kennt  
Wird auch hier erkennen:  
Orient und Okzident  
Sind nicht mehr zu trennen.

which can be loosely translated as: "He who knows himself and others cannot ignore the fact that Orient and Occident are inseparable." It was inspired by the translation of the Divan by Mohammed Schemsedding, the so-called Hafiz, of the 14th century, one of the most important poets of Persian literature.

Without delving further into the meaning of fairytale-like stories of Thousand and One Nights and adventure stories by the German author Karl May or detailing historical relations over time, we see today that numerous research and media institutes, museums and organizations are instrumental in linking Germany and Islam. It should also be mentioned that presently approximately three million Muslims reside in Germany. ➔

One of Germany's famous sites - Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt واحد من أشهر المواقع الألمانية-ماتلدينهوه في دارمستات



Part of the Ummayyad Mschatta palace shown in the Pergamon Museum

جزء من قصر المشتى الأموي في متحف برغامون



The Palace of Heidelberg is one of the most famous sites in Germany (Foto Kongress und Tourismus GmbH Heidelberg)

قصر هايدلبورغ الذي هو واحد من أهم المواقع الألمانية

## The Cradle of Modern Sciences

Regarding research establishments and institutes, a look at historical development is necessary, as Muslim scientists and their discoveries laid the foundations of Western studies since the late Middle Ages. Here we are not talking only about singular remarkable discoveries and revolutionary theories. Modern sciences - natural sciences

and humanities as well as astronomy, mathematics, medicine and philosophy- owe their existence to Arab influence. Many Europeans are aware that Muslims invented Algebra, the Arab numerals and the concept of "zero". But it is not common knowledge, that these were products of a flowering medieval culture, widely surpassing European cultures of the time. Up to the beginning of the late Middle Ages,

the Islamic Orient was head and shoulders above Christian civilization. Its cities had better libraries and universities, its philosophers and scientists were progressing at a faster rate, art and architecture was richer, and the population was generally better educated and enjoyed a higher standard of living. The Europe of the time could not keep pace with the highly developed Islamic civil culture but profited from its example. It was only through the Orient that Europeans were able to access the treasures of Greek antiquity.

## German Centers for Study of the Arab-Islamic World

In today's Germany, there are many centers focused on Islam, the Arab World, art, history and current developments.

The most important institutes are the German Oriental Institute in Hamburg, the Center of the Modern Orient and the Oriental Society in Berlin, as well as the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (German Society of Oriental Studies) and the DAVO (German Middle East Studies Association for Contemporary Research and Documentation), both in Mainz.

The German Oriental Institute in Hamburg is the largest research and documentation institution in this country. It is concerned with current events and politics, economics and society in North Africa, and the Near and Middle East. Whereas the Orient Society is exclusively focused on archaeology, the Centre of the Modern Orient investigates the Near East from a historical-comparative perspective. The German Society of Oriental Studies maintains research establishments in Beirut and Istanbul and the International Nepal Research Centre in Kathmandu with emphasis on the language and culture of the Orient while DAVO's field is research and documentation of contemporary society in the Near and Middle East.

Some of the most prominent Islam and Orient scientists include: Professor Günter Meyer, of the Geographical Institute of Mainz University; Professor Josef van Ess, Oriental Seminar, Tübingen University; Professor Annemarie Schimmel, (deceased 26 Jan ➤



The central place Römer in Frankfurt

وسط رومير في فرانكفورت

2003), Oriental Seminar, Bonn University; Professor Friedemann Büttner, Otto-Suhr-Institute of Political Sciences; Professor Gudrun Krämer, Institute of Islamic Sciences and Professor Angelika Neuwirth, Seminar of Semitic and Arabic, Free University, Berlin.

### Prominent Museums

In addition to the research institutes, numerous museums display Arab and Islamic culture. Of the most impressive items

on display in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin are the Ishtar Gate from Babylon and the Mschatta Palace of Omayyaden from the desert of Jordan. There are also a number of Egyptian museums – in Berlin, Leipzig, Bonn and Munich, with a wide variety of exhibits. Probably the most important is a bust of Queen Nofretete in the Egyptian Museum of Berlin.

### Deutsche Welle - Germany's Voice Abroad

The German equivalent of the BCC,

"Deutsche Welle" with headquarters in Bonn and Berlin views itself as "the calling card of Germany and the German Media".

Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive picture of Germany, both from the German viewpoint and from other points of view on important issues. It aims at promoting dialogue between cultures. German Welle has been broadcasting television and radio programs worldwide in over 30 languages for more than 50 years and has recently added internet content to its offerings.

As early as 1959, radio programs were broadcast in Arabic and since 1962 in Persian as well. Recently television programs and internet contents have been available in Arabic in Arab-speaking countries. The latest development is a daily three-hour program in Arabic with news presented by an anchor man via the satellite Nilesat. The program is directed to more than ten million households in over 20 countries from Morocco to Saudi Arabia and includes large parts of Mali, Niger, Chad, and Sudan.

Erik Bettermann, Director of Deutsche Welle, said that he sees the programmes as an attempt to position a European alternative more prominently and thus contribute to improving dialogue with the Islamic world. Another Deutsche Welle project is Afghan TV. World news are recorded by Afghan newscasters in Berlin in both Dari and Paschtu and broadcast in Kabul during prime time.

In addition, Deutsche Welle together with the Goethe Institute, the Federal Institute for Foreign Relations and the Federal Centre for Political Education, is one of the initiators of the website Qantara.de. Qantara (Arabic for "bridge"). It is campaigning for a dialogue with the Islamic world in three languages.

### Islamic Tourism in German

This is only a brief overview of the multitude of connections between Germany and the Arab world. Especially today, it is necessary not only to make people aware of historical connections but to build bridges between our two cultures. This is why it is appropriate and timely that the German version of Islamic Tourism magazine is launched. ■