

International Symposium

„Crimea, Caucasus and the Volga-Ural Region: Islamic Art and Architecture in the European Periphery“

(Berlin, 17–21 Sept. 2004)

– Report –

BARBARA KELLNER-HEINKELE AND JOACHIM GIERLICH, BERLIN

Introductory remarks

The central areas of the Islamic world in history – North Africa, the Near East (with Asia Minor), Iran, India and Central Asia – possess a unique heritage of art and architecture from the spread of Islam to our times. Since the late nineteenth century, research on Islamic architecture and fine arts in these regions has constituted a branch in its own right within the wider discipline of art history. An impressive amount of publications, exhibitions and conferences has made this field known to an international public. Much less attention has been given to the Islamic heritage on the periphery of Europe (with the exception of south-eastern Europe), i.e. the Black Sea region, the Caucasus and the Volga-Ural region, and no conference had hitherto been devoted to the particular character of its Islamic art treasures and architectural monuments.

Therefore, the aim of the symposium was to take a closer look at these regions by offering specialists of Islamic art and architecture from the post-Soviet republics of Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation (including Russia, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Dagestan) an opportunity to present current research and major sites as well as collections in their respective countries, and to discuss methods and problems specific to their material with colleagues from western European countries.

Preparations

With the assistance of Western and Eastern colleagues, the organizers of the symposium, Prof. Dr. Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Dr. Joachim Gierlich of the Institute of Turkish Studies (Institut für Turkologie), Freie Universität Berlin, contacted more than 30 art historians, archaeologists and curators of

museum collections in order to gather a representative number of scholars working in different fields and concerned with different periods of Islamic art and architecture in the relevant regions. The response was very encouraging, although not all specialists invited were able to accept. On the basis of their cooperation with scholars from Ukraine and Georgia, four Turkish scholars were also invited. It must be pointed out that the number of researchers in the West focussing on Islamic art and architecture in the Crimea, the northern shore of the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Volga-Ural region is minimal. Three specialists of Islamic art (London, Paris, New York) accepted the invitation to an encounter with colleagues working in an unfamiliar field. Unfortunately, several other colleagues were unable to attend the symposium, because a conference on Islamic manuscripts was to take place in London at the same time.

The organizers as well as the participants gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Academia Europaea, Volkswagen Foundation and Freie Universität Berlin.

In the months preceding the symposium the organizing team (including Ms. Brigitte Heuer, a specialist on Central Asia, Freie Universität Berlin) met with a number of obstacles usually not encountered during the preparation of a conference, such as bureaucratic problems in the home countries of participants, problems to obtain a visa for Germany, difficulties in contacting participants (telephone, fax and e-mail connections were sometimes difficult to establish, or participants were unavailable, because they were away on field trips). In some cases the organizers had to accept that superiors did not wish their collaborators to travel.

In order to facilitate the dialogue during the symposium, the organizers put together a booklet of paper

abstracts in Russian and English complete with a CV and résumé of the main publications and research interests of the respective participants (copies are available under the following e-mail address: turkinst@zedat.fu-berlin.de). Simultaneous translation of papers from Russian into English and English into Russian was also provided during the symposium to secure an intensive working atmosphere. Several speakers of Russian and students from the Institute of Turkic Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, lent indispensable support towards the realization of the symposium.

Since the programme was rather dense, 15 to 20 minutes were given to each paper. Most of them were accompanied by power-point or slide presentations. Lively, sometimes heated discussions followed. The contributions were not all of the same high quality, but given the enormous financial, technical and bureaucratic difficulties most participants face in their professional routine, the results and interpretations presented add up to an invaluable improvement of our knowledge of these almost unnoticed – at least in the West – research areas. This opinion was also voiced by the Western colleagues (Doris Behrens-Abouseif/London, Marthe Bernus-Taylor/Paris, Ernst J. Grube/London, Eleanor Sims/New York-London) who participated dedicatedly in exchanges on method and interpretation. Up to 20 colleagues and guests from academic institutions, museums and government offices in Berlin, Dresden and Halle attended the sessions.

Evaluation

The symposium was a great success in every respect. The active participants were delighted with the possibility of discussing their work and of presenting their findings or collections. To mention only a few examples: The excavations that have been carried out for years in Ottoman settlements on the northern and north-western shores of the Black Sea are the direct result of successful collaboration between Ukrainian and Turkish colleagues (Svitlana Bilyayeva, Ninel Boki, Yuriy Boltryk, Inci Kuyulu-Ersoy, Bozkurt Ersoy). In the Crimean peninsula, Mark Kramarovskiy (St. Peterburg) has unearthed spectacular objects from the Golden Horde period, while since the 1990s, the study of Crimean Tatar sites by Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian scholars (Ibrahim A. Abdullaev, Elena Ayb-abina, Oleksa Haiworonski, Valeriy Sidorenko, Valeriy Vozgrin) as well as by a Swiss researcher working in Turkey (Nicole Kancal-Ferrari) has rendered

impressive results, although major works have been lost or destroyed over the decades of Russian and Soviet rule. Recent work on folk art and fine arts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Crimea (Viktor Gankievich, Ismet Zaatov) and the Caucasus (Svetlana Chervonnaya, Leyla Geybatova, Ramazan Kereytov, Fuad Pepinov) shows a vitality of creative impetus that is surprising, considering the fact that the suppression of Islam has lasted for generations. In Azerbaijan (Kyubra Alieva, Nailya Velikhanli) and Georgia (Irina Khoshoridse), first-class collections of Islamic art do exist, but are more or less unknown to most Western specialists, while in the north-eastern part of Turkey Georgian architectural monuments influenced by Islamic architectural traditions (Mine Kadiroglu-Leube) suffer from a lack of attention and financial means. The Volga-Ural region was underrepresented, because some researchers invited were unable to come. Anife Ahmetshina and Zilya Imamutdinova, however, presented surveys of Tatar and Bashkir religious art.

Outlook

The organizers of the symposium intend to publish the abstracts and accompanying illustrations, plans and maps on the homepage of the Institute of Turkic Studies in order to draw attention to the unusual and valuable material presented during the symposium. They also plan to publish the papers together with some of the picture material in a collective volume. A follow-up symposium focussing on one of the regions dealt with is also being considered.

More information on participants and presentations is available via:

<http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~turkinst/>

Prof. Dr. Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, *Turkologin, leitet das Institut für Turkologie der Freien Universität Berlin. Forschungsschwerpunkte: Kulturgeschichte der peripheren Provinzen des Osmanischen Reiches; Geschichte der Krimtataren; Türkmene im Vorderen Orient.*

Dr. Joachim Gierlichs, *ist Kunsthistoriker (Islam) und Lehrbeauftragter am Institut für Turkologie; z.Zt. Abschluß der Habilitationsschrift „Holzarbeiten der Timuridenzeit in Iran und Mittelasien“. Gemeinsam mit Annette Hagedorn Hrsg. des Sammelbandes „Islamic Art in Germany“, Mainz 2004.*