**International Symposium**

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

*(Berlin, 17–21 Sept. 2004)*

– Report –

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**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, Daghestan) 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 Gierlichs 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 inter-
ests 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 bureau-
cratic 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 voi-
ced 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 possi-
bility of discussing their work and of presenting their
findings or collections. To mention only a few exam-
pies: 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
Bokiy, Yuriy Boltryk, Inci Kuyulu-Ersoy, Bozkurt
Ersoy). In the Crimean peninsula, Mark Kramarovskiy
(St. Petersburg) 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 (Ibraim A. Abdullaev, Elena Ayb-
abina, Oleksa Haiworonski, Valeriy Sidorenko,
Valeriy Vozgrin) as well as by a Swiss researcher wor-
ing 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 Zaatao) 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, Nailiya 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
Kadioglu-Leube) suffer from a lack of a attention and
financial means. The Volga-Ural region was underre-
presented, because some researchers invited were
unable to come. Anife Ahmetshina and Zilya Ima-
mudinova, 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 presenta-
tions is available via:
http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~turkinst/

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Dr. Joachim Gierlichs, ist Kunsthistoriker (Islam)
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Abschluß der Habilitationsschrift „Holzarbeiten der Timu-
ridenzeit in Iran und Mittelasien“. Gemeinsam mit Annet-
te Hagedorn Hrsg. des Sammelbandes „Islamic Art in Ger-
many“, Mainz 2004.