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## A Liminal Orientalism: Turkish Studies by Franz Babinger

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# A Liminal Orientalism: Turkish Studies by Franz Babinger

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- 1 In August 1951, Professor Franz Babinger, chair of History and Culture of the Near East along with Turcology at Munich University,\* filed an official complaint with the Munich police. A photographer had offered pictures, also suitable as passport-size photos, for 1.50 DM in his shop-windows but inside the shop, attendants asked for 3.50 DM. In his rather idiosyncratic German whose flavour is not easily translatable into English (at least for me), Babinger wrote:

This constitutes a gross deception of the public which appears the more shameful as the business, which apparently maintains two other branch agencies, is located close to the main station, and therefore bound to necessarily leave the foulest impression upon all foreigners. For a Bavarian like me the issue does not become more palatable by the circumstance that the tradesmen in question are obviously no locals so that the fault does not fall onto Bavaria.

I ask you to intervene immediately by employing the strictest measures and oblige the shop to clearly advertise the different prices of the photographs...<sup>1</sup>

- 2 This minor incident does not show the professor in a very favourable light: pettifogging, choleric, full of resentment, even authoritarian and apparently obsessed with foreigners, both Germans and those from abroad, be they victims of avaricious tradesmen or avaricious tradesmen themselves.
- 3 I have chosen to begin this article with such an utterly irrelevant incident because I think that it is indicative of what is at hand if we talk about the history of Turkish studies. After all, Babinger's complaint to the Munich police is not found among his personal correspondence but among that of his department; and the original has apparently been typed on the university's letterhead.<sup>2</sup> In Turkish studies, one deals with a very small world, inhabited by all too few people; and therefore, personal character occupies a very prominent place. Had there been a few hundred people active in Turkish studies half a

century ago, one might be meaningfully interested in something like a common mentality, or in different intellectual currents. Indeed, while working on history one might more or less disregard the individual traits of each and every participant in the field. Franz Babinger's pugnacity, irascibility and even his political stance might have been swallowed by the grand average of his many colleagues. Today, this would be the case.

- 4 No such luck! With very few people around in Turkish studies at the time, individual character, psychic idiosyncrasy and personal outlook are necessarily magnified. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the history of Turkish studies needs to be studied as a history of individuals and their networks, not as one of institutions and intellectual schools.<sup>3</sup> This is not to claim that there was no broader intellectual frame to Oriental studies from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the time of the Cold War. However, within Oriental and Islamic studies, Turkish studies were (at that time rather than, was) the preoccupation of a dwindling, marginal number of men (very few women being involved). As mentioned above, their small number amplified the phenomenon in question here. In this sense, and in addition to the points raised below, any scholar interested in matters Turkish, Turkic or Ottoman necessarily occupied a liminal position in Oriental studies.
- 5 This contribution therefore aims to demonstrate that scholars operated not so much as parts of academic movements or in the framework of academic markets producing fashions but rather as students, friends or foes of a very limited number of colleagues. Personality, networks and individual research interests preceded and dominated intellectual currents and institutional affiliations. I wish to use Babinger's example to show that in his time, scholars in Turkish studies generally took the better part of their intellectual inspiration not from within the corpus of research to which they contributed but from without. Teachers, the immediate personal environment and political contexts very often figured prominently, even dominantly.<sup>4</sup> Talking about Franz Babinger's work entails the rather disagreeable task to dwell upon his personality and upon his place within the political contexts of his lifetime.<sup>5</sup> Only then may a look at his work be adequate.
- 6 All this, I feel, is compounded by the fact that the present author occupies the chair of Turkish Studies at Munich University that goes directly back to Babinger. Moreover, I have studied at the institute, which he has founded. When I enrolled as a freshman in 1980, Babinger's spirit was still much in place. He had died in 1967 but still, his memory was vivid and present. In the years that followed, Hans Georg Majer and Suraiya Faroqi slowly but steadily dissipated this atmosphere. Hierarchies were flattened, discussions *ad personam* were replaced by discourse centred on academic problems, current methodologies in research encouraged, and an overall inclusive approach welcomed a diverse audience at the institute. Still, my interest in Babinger uses the preoccupation with disciplinary history as an occasion for a broader methodological introspection, something quite mandatory to any historian. It also concerns the tradition in which for better or worse I have to assume a place. Neutrality is impossible, reverence undue, rejection infantile. I hope this article offers itself to a reading as a critical investigation in sustained ambivalence.
- 7 In my view, despite Babinger's embarrassing character and his appalling world-view, a critical engagement with the intellectual content of his academic output is worth one's while. In the following, I shall attempt to develop a number of arguments that may help me to defend the choice of the term "liminal" in my title – if there is, as argued above, no

mainstream but only rather scattered and few individuals, what would be a meaningful use of this word “liminal”?

- 8 Firstly, I shall try to show that Babinger was liminal with respect to two intellectual currents that were pervasive in the intellectual atmosphere of his time and generally appropriated by scholars in Turkish studies: These two are philology and Orientalism. In a second step, I hope that my use of a single example is sufficient to illustrate how Babinger isolated himself and his work from Turkish academia which only after the Second World War began to gain importance in international Ottoman studies.

## I. Philology of facts and Oriental realities

- 9 If one looks at Babinger’s and many of his German contemporaries’ texts, one may be surprised by the – almost total – absence of references to the currents of thought salient in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and regarded important today. Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, phenomenology, sociology in a Weberian or Durkheimian wake, the *Annales* or the Frankfurt school: none of these managed to impress this scholarly community. For some, Friedrich Nietzsche or some late Romantic intellectuals served as a source for inspiration: the fascination Stephan George exerted on Paul Wittek has been intensively studied (Heywood 1998). In this respect, Franz Babinger’s case can be regarded as typical: from high school education, where he had studied classical languages and already developed an interest in the ancient Orient, to university his formation was deeply steeped in philology, with classical philology the key discipline that provided the methods (Marchand 2009: 78-84, 120-2). This formation appears to have been achieved without much engagement in theoretical problems.
- 10 It would require a close look at the school-teachers in Würzburg and the professors instructing Babinger at Munich University to find out where exactly he picked up the specific breed of philology that became characteristic for him. Babinger himself had difficulties with the term “Turcology”. He wanted to make clear that he did something else, something that he called “Realienkunde” – the knowledge of real things – perhaps even better: of facts.
- 11 In Babinger’s usage, the word “Realienkunde” does not mean the auxiliary historical discipline of analysing material sources such as inscriptions and artefacts or the knowledge of material culture but something wider – comparable to the “Real” in “Realencyclopädie”, which in German signifies an encyclopædia concerned not primarily with a language or abstract thought but with everything that is open to cognition. It is not entirely by chance that Babinger’s life-span (1891-1967) coincides with the time when the most comprehensive *Realencyclopädie* of its kind was edited: The first volume of *Pauly[-Wissowas] Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, or shortly *RE*, was initiated in 1890 and completed with a guide to the supplementary volumes in 1980; the last substantial volume was printed more than a decade after Babinger’s death, in 1978.<sup>6</sup> *Realien* include anything but grammar, rhetoric, epistemology, ontology and theological speculation. Nevertheless “Realienkunde” has to be regarded as a branch of philology, not as its opposite. It is based mainly on texts which are, however, regarded as representative of a reality and can therefore easily be connected to the evidence of material remnants of the past.

- 12 In his remarks on Georg Jacob (1862-1937), another German late Romantic orientalist also active in Turkish studies, Henning Trüper draws attention to the intellectual heritage of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century debate between the *Wortphilologie*, the classical and classicist direction in ancient studies aiming exclusively at the understanding of a Greek and Latin canon by way of studying the language, and the universalist *Sachphilologie*, which I translate as “factual philology” that aimed for an understanding of antiquity as a cultural whole and was also open to research on the ancient Near East. According to Trüper, Jacob has to be understood as a factual philologist much in the wake of August Böckh (1785-1867), the protagonist of factual philology who defined philology as “das Erkennen des vom menschlichen Geist Producierten, d.h. Erkannten” - “the cognition of that what human spirit has produced, i.e. that what has been realised” (Ungefehr-Kortus 2005-).<sup>7</sup>
- 13 This has nothing to do with the linguistic turn. To the contrary, “Realienkunde” is based on what I call the optimism of philology, namely the assumption that language and texts in language are, if correctly analysed, carriers of outer-textual truth and connected to a unified, coherent reality. In this sense, Babinger’s *Realienkunde* is based on the direct opposite of the nominalism evoked by modern linguistics, namely by a radical, if implicit, realism. This realism stays implicit for two reasons: on the one hand, it is hostile to any kind of theoretical interrogation because it trusts completely in what is obvious in its eyes. On the other hand, the controversy about factual philology had already taken place shortly after 1815; Babinger would regard it a settled matter.
- 14 Accordingly, Babinger has written very little on methods, let alone theory. In 1919, he published an article on the future of Near Eastern studies in Germany, in which he advocated for a more practical, modern (meaning “Islamic” rather than “ancient”) direction of Oriental studies in Germany. Babinger expressed both his hope that the Berlin *Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen* would become a college of foreign studies (“Auslands-Hochschule”) and his enthusiasm about Carl Heinrich Becker’s university politics (Babinger 1920a).<sup>8</sup> In the context of this article it is important to note that, at that particular time, Babinger refrained from articulating open criticism of the “Fleischer school” in Semitic philology that was active in Leipzig. However, he claimed that the textual philology of the Leipzig ilk could and should be put to service for practical (and at the same time, national) purposes.
- 15 Toward the end of his career, Babinger adopted a more radical stance. In a 22-page-long statement that he read to the LMU Faculty of Philosophy - “hopefully for the last time” - on the selection of the successor to his chair, he argued:

I do not hesitate, however, to assure you that one day of, say, Ottoman history is a thousand times more important than all *ayyām al-'arab* taken together; and that it is much more fruitful to be preoccupied with the Islam in the times after Ġazzālī and especially with the living Islam that emerged outside the orthodox doctrinal structure than to rehash countless orthodox commentaries and super-commentaries.<sup>9</sup>

- 16 Babinger understood his *Realienkunde* as opposite not to philology but to linguistics (Al-Qadi 1999: 3). He regarded himself as in continuity with Georg Jacob - plus the experience of travel and familiarity with the region (Babinger 1920a: 406 sq). For Babinger, the “Orient” was something that could and needed to be visited both in its texts and its cities and landscapes. His remark in Babinger (1952) that the end of colonialism was causing the decline of knowledge on the Orient is characteristic of a position that insisted on

opposition between the scholar and the object of his knowledge - an opposition typical of the colonial situation but certainly not restricted to it. It would be worth a separate study to look at Orientalists (along with geographers and archaeologists) who were, like Babinger, interested in the “reality” of the Near East, read landscapes and cityscapes. My preliminary assumption would be that the textual and evidential reading conformed to each other and that they were based on two presuppositions: the Orientalist imagination that the “Orient” did never really change (Said 1994: 259-63) and that both texts and the outer world preserved readable traces of past reality.

- 17 Compared to Jacob, Babinger was less active in the philological edition and analysis of Turkish texts. Larger editions of longer texts that he published occasionally consisted of a first volume with an introduction and the facsimile of the text. A second volume containing edition, translation or analysis, while announced, would never see the light of publication.<sup>10</sup> However, the punctual and meticulous analyses of inscriptions or the wording of a document was one of Babinger’s main preoccupations; and he published numerous articles that presented and explained single shorter texts.<sup>11</sup>

## II. A straying Orientalism

- 18 Due to this kind of work on “realities”, Babinger occupied a liminal place in the Orientalist main-stream philology. Babinger conducted his investigations of *Realien* through texts and artefacts, very much along the lines of what Oriental philologists would do. However, he was simultaneously quite disinterested in the spiritual essence of anything. His position put him apart while it still allowed him to make himself understandable to the European scholarship of his time.
- 19 His disinterest in theological or spiritual matters explains why from the very beginning, even before his dissertation of 1914, Babinger was interested in scholars, humanists and travellers active in the Near East of a somehow similar inclination. In 1911, aged 20, he published two newspaper articles; one on the occasion of Andreas David Mordtmann’s hundredth birthday (Babinger 1911a), and another on that of the fiftieth anniversary of Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer’s death (Babinger 1911b). Outsiders such as Mordtmann and Fallmerayer<sup>12</sup> belonged to an academic ancestry that Babinger created for himself and that included, among others, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Bavarian traveller Hans Dernschwam, the blind polyhistor Ulrich Schönberger (17<sup>th</sup> century), the diplomat and book collector Heinrich Friedrich von Diez, the then much ridiculed Austrian Ottomanist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, but also the Venetian private chronicler Mario Sanuto.<sup>13</sup> Among his contemporaries, and especially among German scholars, the few people Babinger did not see as foes, rivals or incompetent were likewise outsiders: the diplomat Johann Heinrich Mordtmann, Andreas David Mordtmann’s son and Babinger’s life-long friend,<sup>14</sup> and Alfons Maria Schneider, a Jesuit and specialist in Byzantine art (Babinger 1953).
- 20 All these men (and among his contemporaries also one single woman, namely the traveller and photographer Gertrude Bell, about whom he wrote an obituary – Babinger 1926) have one thing in common: they entertained a close personal relation to countries of the Near East, something that Babinger, in his obituary of Johannes Hendrik Kramers, called “a living knowledge, drawn from thorough experiential perception of the Near East” (Babinger 1952).

- 21 It is nothing especially savoury, but also not at all surprising or intellectually interesting that a German professor of Babinger's generation was not much of a democrat, entertained racist inclinations and a thoroughly nationalist, gendered world-view. To Babinger's credit, one has to admit that he apparently never indulged in anti-Semitism. After the First World War, he had been part of Franz Ritter von Epp's military organisation that took part in the defeating of the Munich republic of councils and the putting down of the Bavarian Social Democrat government Hofmann. Babinger remained part of this network and – to no avail – contacted von Epp after his dismissal from office in 1934.<sup>15</sup> His German nationalism was bridled mainly by his Bavarian patriotism; and he seems to have been convinced of (Latin) European superiority as a matter of course. “East” and “West”, “Orient” and “Occident” remained notionally distinct and separate; and he quoted Rudyard Kipling's “and they shall never meet” approvingly (Babinger 1963: 298). On the other hand, when the Turkish newspaper *Cumhuriyet* published a slanderous article about him in 1933, Babinger wrote a counterstatement which the editor, Yunus Nadi published with apologies. In this letter, Babinger stressed his love of Turkey and the Turks and reminded the reader that he had fought as an officer in the Turkish army during the war.<sup>16</sup>
- 22 Reading through Babinger's texts, it is not difficult to find Orientalist motives, notions of Near Eastern decline, religious fanaticism and so on. Still, these texts deviate considerably from mainstream Orientalism if one defines it, in close accordance with Edward Said, as a discourse of domination that was text-based, homogenising and essentialist. As mentioned above, Babinger had travelled extensively through South-Eastern Europe and parts of Anatolia; in his view, besides texts, the landscapes and townscapes were essential for an understanding of “the Orient”.
- 23 In Babinger's time the overall destruction of ancient remnants that late 20<sup>th</sup>-century growth and transformation have globally meted out to the remnants of former times had not yet progressed very far; he saw and utilised the environment he encountered as a vessel that contained ample traces and ruins which were indicative of its history and the genesis of today. In this, there was no difference between East and West. In a similar vein, Babinger approached written sources. Only in 2004 did the *Tarih Vakfı* issue the first Turkish translation of Babinger's booklet on the book-market in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Istanbul, a study that combined information on so-to-say Western authors and texts with those of Ottoman origin (Babinger 1919; Babinger *et al.* 2004). Babinger was famous for his book collecting activities and his own library, and his *GOW – Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* – of 1927 while often criticised for its lacunæ and mistakes is only now being replaced by a collective project which progresses rather slowly (Fleischer *et al.* 2003-).
- 24 Babinger thus entertained a notion of history that paralleled his understanding of knowledge, which he rather interchangeably called “Wissenschaft”, “Kunde” or “Kenntnis” – the three terms to be differentiated by a decreasing degree of systematisation and formalisation. Both history and knowledge grew by aggregation that could perhaps also be described as sedimentation. Babinger did not make an ontological distinction between scientific and other forms of knowledge; the former appears not to be categorically privileged. Likewise, knowledge about the “Orient” was not distinct from any other.
- 25 All these traits undermine the everyday Orientalism that was part and parcel of Babinger's intellectual frame of mind. Today, those among his texts that still retain a

considerable interest for the Ottoman historians are neither his famous, but also notorious, biography of Meḥmed the Conqueror (Heywood 2008) nor his editions of Ottoman texts in facsimile and of German travelogues. However, his articles on Ottoman culture, often based on Italian, mostly Venetian, sources but frequently also on singular Ottoman documents combine the eye for microscopic detail and an understanding of transcultural contacts and practices that are still – or again – of value.<sup>17</sup>

- 26 Singlehandedly, Babinger arrived at an understanding of the Ottoman Empire not only as an Islamic “state” and a Near Eastern phenomenon, but also as a Mediterranean one. Perhaps he was aware of the work of the mid-nineteenth-century Africanist Heinrich Barth; he certainly knew Wilhelm Heyd’s *Geschichte des Levantehandels im Mittelalter* of 1879 well enough to integrate long passages from it into his biography of Meḥmed without proper acknowledgment,<sup>18</sup> but there is not the slightest evidence that he ever took notice of Fernand Braudel. To my mind, the understanding of the Ottomans as a Mediterranean phenomenon (Babinger did not use and would not have used the word “society”) is a major achievement and one that singles him out.

### III. Babinger and İncalcık

- 27 Why did he stay quite isolated in assuming this view? Babinger had few doctoral students and treated some of them badly. Irène Beldiceanu-Steinherr, one of the best scholars of early Ottoman society, wrote her dissertation with Babinger (Beldiceanu-Steinherr 1956) but was apparently never considered by him as somebody to be supported in German academia. Since he was at odds with many of his German colleagues (already in the course of his appointment in 1946, Babinger had great difficulties securing any reference from a German scholar in Islamic studies),<sup>19</sup> his students may have encountered problems not necessarily connected to their own record. Babinger gave, instead, support to his assistant Kissling, a student of Friedrich Giese’s, and ensured, after an epic struggle, that Kissling succeed him as chair in Munich.<sup>20</sup> The polyglot Kissling was to produce some serious contributions to the history of Ottoman Sufi orders and a Turkish grammar but lacked Babinger’s interest in transcultural relations and the rather daring curiosity that was a mark of Babinger’s work (Majer 1988).
- 28 In my view, what hindered the reception of Babinger’s work most dramatically was his failure to link up with Turkish academia – though Babinger claimed that academic co-operation with Turkey was one of the central features of the institute he had founded in Munich.<sup>21</sup> In the 1950s, after the demise of high Kemalism and its active disinterest in Ottoman studies, scholars such as Ömer Lütfi Barkan, Halil İncalcık, Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, Tayyib Gökbilgin and Lütfi Güçer produced significant books and articles. Istanbul and Ankara immediately turned into centres of a discipline that had hitherto lingered at the fringes of European and US-American Islamic studies. Why did these then young and productive Turkish historians not engage in an exchange with Babinger?
- 29 The key to the answer of such questions lies in Babinger’s papers, which in my view constitute one of the most important sources for Ottoman studies not only in Germany, but in the entirety of Europe. They are stored in the Bavarian State Library and have been sorted but not yet systematically catalogued. While only a few letters of his own hand are extant in his estate (apparently he rarely wrote drafts and did not use carbon copies, either) thousands of letters addressed to him are preserved. Babinger kept correspondence in twelve languages.<sup>22</sup>

- 30 Among these papers are also nine pieces written by Halil İnalçık.<sup>23</sup> The documentation is probably not complete and extends from the summer 1951 to May 1956; it therefore includes Babinger's journey to Turkey in 1952 and İnalçık's first sojourn in the United States, at Columbia in 1953 and 1954. Apparently the two of them met in 1952 during Babinger's voyage, even if a visit to İnalçık's home did not materialise since the host's wife was travelling abroad – it seems that without her, to offer hospitality on a more refined level was too difficult a task for the young professor in Ankara. In his letters and postcards, İnalçık assumed an extremely respectful tone and was the one who emphasised his wish to pursue sustained correspondence. Initially, the communication between the two centred on the exchange of pleasantries and offprints and on questions of historical detail: the reading of an inscription here, an entry in an Ottoman register there.
- 31 After Babinger's time in Turkey, the letters he received from İnalçık turned to more substantial issues: the *Türk Tarih Kurumu* showed interest in publishing a Turkish translation of Babinger's articles, a project that later failed to materialise as no translator equal to the task could be found – not too astonishing given Babinger's style. Babinger attempted to place the Byzantine philologist Hans-Georg Beck at the Faculty of Languages and History-Geography in Ankara, a position later granted to the Swedish-German Turcologist Walter Björkman. Collaborations thus did not bear immediate fruit. Still, the relation between the two scholars developed from the formal to the cautiously cordial.
- 32 The turning-point was the publication of Babinger's Mehmed-biography. İnalçık had long waited for the book and even written:

It seems that I will learn German by trying to decipher your works first. Does the possibility and felicity to read them not rest on the acquisition of a quite solid knowledge in German?<sup>24</sup>

- 33 However, when the book was published in 1953, İnalçık was apparently neither able nor ready to read it – not astonishing given the very idiosyncratic German written by Babinger who rather consequently avoided words of non-Germanic origin and built long sentences with delicately crafted accentuations and rhythm. İnalçık's failure to read the biography of the Conqueror gave a life-line of a few years to the relationship between the two scholars. In 1954 the French translation appeared; and apparently late in 1955 or perhaps 1956 İnalçık reacted to it. I have found no public or published statement by İnalçık on the book in these years and therefore assume that he had criticised the work in a personal missive to Babinger, which we have as yet not found. In a letter, dated May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1956, İnalçık writes:

I wish with all sincerity that our personal friendship will not suffer from the efforts that I have taken with the single aim of letting truth come to light. ... First of all I want to assure you that as much as I do not approve of idealising Ottoman history, I do not endorse its appeal to certain interpretations and feelings. In writing history, we are neither Oriental nor Western, neither Ottoman nor European, we are just historians. Nobody can ignore the new observations and thoughts that you have put forward with regard to quite a lot of problems. I have considered it as my duty to identify the faults that I have been humbly able to spot in the book that you have written on an issue as comprehensive as the time of the Conqueror. I hope that you wish me to put them to the test of your criticism by publishing them.<sup>25</sup>

34 Apparently, Babinger took this as a threat. After that, correspondence must have ceased.

<sup>26</sup> At some point there must have been a public statement by İncalcık on Babinger's book (it appears not to be probable that Babinger told colleagues about İncalcık's criticism), as Berthold Spuler, professor at Hamburg University, wrote to Babinger on July 24th, 1957:

I do understand that you do not want to answer Mr. İncalcık, of course: Ultimately there will come nothing out of it: for mere reasons of linguistic proficiency, the Turks do not possess your knowledge of sources, so they certainly cannot have their say. If I did differently in the case of O.[rhan] Köprülü and also İ.[brahim] Kafesoğlu, it is because I had noticed during my activities in Ankara and Constantinople that in such cases the Turks follow the principle "qui tacet, constire videtur", meaning here: he gives in. However, there is no need to observe Turkish principles: you are totally right in this.<sup>27</sup>

35 Babinger did not maintain the posture of the untouchable scholar unaffected by criticism due to his superior knowledge. Instead, he turned nasty. He must have been well aware that İncalcık was preparing an edition of the famous *Ḳānūn-nāme-i Sulṭānī*, a project undertaken together with Robert Anhegger who at some point a few years earlier had contemplated to write a *Habilitation* in Munich. In all haste and just prior to the publication by İncalcık and Anhegger, Babinger dumped a facsimile of the text on the market with the usual announcement that a second volume with a translation (this time by Kissling) would follow – it never did (Babinger 1956).

36 Taking his turn, İncalcık published a twenty-page long review article on Babinger's book on the Conqueror in the international mediævalist journal *Speculum* in which he listed all the facts and places Babinger may have known better if he had made good use of Ottoman chronicles such as Ṭursun Beg's, Rūḥī's, Enverī's, Kemālpaşazāde's and İdrīs-i Bitlīsī's (İncalcık 1960: 410).

37 In 1963, Babinger reacted. By now a retired professor, he published an article entitled "Mehmed der Eroberer in östlicher und westlicher Beleuchtung" ("Mehmed the Conqueror in Eastern and Western Light") presumably an answer to reactions on the biography he had published ten years before. The text appeared in *Südost-Forschungen*, a German journal on South-Eastern Europe that, to the best of my knowledge, is not available in any Istanbul library (Babinger 1963).

38 In this article Babinger does not take any criticism or answers to it. He begins with dismissing all critics from Turkey in a very general way as overtly sensitive in their national feelings. In doing so, he mocks İncalcık, without mentioning his name, by writing that such sensitivity was especially strange in the case of Turks coming from Crimea who had no reason to identify with the Ottomans. In the following, Babinger, the editor of a rather large number of Ottoman texts, claims that non-Ottoman and especially Italian sources are much superior to Ottoman ones when it comes to writing Ottoman history. Ottoman chroniclers offered little more than empty verbal juggling, copied from each other and, as "whores of the word" represented the views expected from them.<sup>28</sup> To support his argument he quotes from a volume of Ottoman documents that he claims to have published but cannot be located.

## IV. Conclusion: Liminality, grandiose rather than splendid

- 39 This rather odd piece of academic prose may or may not have reached İnalçık's eye. For Babinger, it has probably sealed his attempts to find some resonance in Turkish academia. Indeed, his influence has been rather limited.<sup>29</sup> Years after his death, İnalçık wrote finally a short and rather condescending review of the English translation of Babinger's book on the Conqueror, without taking pains to point out the many flaws other people have identified in the text before or since. Later on, in a book-long biographical interview, he discussed at length his relation to Babinger and narrated how his German colleague, being unable to take criticism, turned into a foe who later became physically aggressive during a conference (İnalçık; Çaykara 2005: 142-46). How much İnalçık had been hurt by Babinger's behaviour became clear when he described his attempts to move from Ankara University to the USA. He narrated how, in 1971, Harvard University had become interested in hiring him, and that nothing came out of it when the University asked Babinger for a reference. Babinger, so İnalçık claimed, had written them a very spiteful letter: "As I could not beat him up, let me at least ruin his career..." (İnalçık; Çaykara 2005: 301).<sup>30</sup> So far so bad. However, in all probability Babinger did not play any part in İnalçık's rejection at Harvard: he had already died in 1967.
- 40 Franz Babinger's liminality was not only a scholarly one. Intellectually obscure but curious, he positioned himself outside the mainstream of both Oriental studies and Orientalism. What I have tried to demonstrate in this article, is that he nevertheless might have found partners to his discourse both among some late Romantic factual philologists and a younger generation of historians. His encounters with İnalçık show why he failed to do so: Babinger just behaved in the most high-handed, reckless way. His personality proved to be a more serious obstacle than intellectual or political differences. The scholarly world in Turkish studies at his time was a very small one; institutional constraints were apparently less important than today; and everybody knew everybody else personally or by word of mouth. As his correspondence shows, Babinger was in contact with most other scholars in the field at one time or another. This also included Turkish colleagues who worked as historians and were able to communicate with the German scholar on a level playing field. Babinger accepted them on a (relatively) equal standing. However, he did not leave a deep mark on Turkish studies in Turkey as he did not establish close bonds with colleagues in Turkish academia. As a result, Babinger's – in my view, very valuable – work on cultural contact and transfer in the Mediterranean remained in the shadows thrown by its socially awkward author and his language so difficult to access.
- 41 For me as a late successor to Franz Babinger, "man and work" functions as a crucible: While it appears to be relatively easy to reject the essentialist notions that were the intellectual backbone of his every-day Orientalism, nationalism and patriarchy, it is not equally simple to find ways that may stand the test of time significantly better. Every hour that I use for critical reflection, methodology and conceptual deliberation might have been spent on language acquisition and source reading. I do not correspond in twelve languages, after all, and I am not equally familiar with early modern Italian sources as I am with Turkish ones. In humanities today, practised in much more tightly defined institutional and social boundaries, behaviour as that shown by Babinger might

(one would hope) prove to be an obstacle to a career. However, there are, I am afraid, reasons to doubt that the setting in which Turkish studies operate today boosts the productivity, curiosity and creativity that were also a mark of the man.

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## NOTES

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1. "Es handelt sich um ein gröbliche Irreführung des Publikums, die umso peinlicher wirkt, als sich dieses Geschäft, das übrigens zwei Zweigstellen unterhalten soll, in nächster Nähe des Hauptbahnhofes befindet und bei jedem Fremden den übelsten Eindruck hinterlassen muss. Für einen Bayern wie mich wird die Sache nicht dadurch schmackhafter gemacht, dass [es sich bei] den betreffenden Geschäftsleuten offensichtlich nicht um Einheimische handelt, so dass der Makel nicht Bayern zur Last fällt.

Ich bitte, unverzüglich gegen diesen Unfug mit den schärfsten Mitteln einzuschreiten und das Geschäft zu verhalten, sofort die verschiedenen Preislagen der Photos kenntlich zu machen..."

LMU Munich, Institute of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, Allgemeine Korrespondenz des Instituts für Kultur und Geschichte des Nahen Orients sowie Turkologie, 1948-1955.

2. While the preserved sheet is a carbon copy on reddish-yellowish manifold paper, the date reads "25. August 1". The lacking "195" was part of the letterhead then used.

3. Oriental studies have been better investigated for the 19<sup>th</sup> century than for later times (Mangold 2004, Marchand 2009). Wokoek (2009) is a study more of professional organisation than intellectual history. For the background of Babinger's geographical interests see Débarre (2016).

4. As exemplified in Trüper (2014). This study does not mention Babinger.

5. The standard account on Babinger's life is Grimm (1998). Grimm not only uses necrologies and some personal testimonies but was the first to look at Babinger's correspondence. Tone and stance of the essay can perhaps best be called reverential. Additional information can be culled from the necrologies published upon Babinger's death, namely Beck (1970), Duda (1968), Guboglu (1968), Kissling (1967). Moreover, Feneşan (1994) und Prodan (2003) are two publications shedding some light on Babinger's time and work in Romania. This article is not motivated by biographical interests. For the orientation of those not familiar with Babinger's life, the rest of this footnote gives a short chronological summary of Babinger's biography.

Franz Babinger was born January 15th, 1891 in Weiden (Kingdom of Bavaria, German Reich) as the eldest of four children into a middle-class family. The father pursued a successful career as a civil servant in the railway administration; his mother was daughter of a brewer. The family was remarkably multi-confessional for the age: the father was a Roman Catholic, the mother, who survived into the 1950s a Protestant, the maternal grand-mother a Jew who had been converted at a very early age. Franz Babinger graduated from the *Neues Gymnasium* in Würzburg in 1911, with mostly unimpressive marks but had already learned Persian and Hebrew, engaged in correspondence with the Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher and published articles on scholars in serious venues. Babinger went to Munich to study Oriental philology at the university. After less than three years, he graduated in July 1914 as Dr. phil. with a dissertation on the scholar Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer (1694-1738). His advisor was Ernst Kuhn, an Indologist. Immediately afterwards

Babinger volunteered for the army and served as an officer throughout the First World War, mostly in Ottoman uniform and because of his language proficiency often as liaison-officer. He was stationed at different fronts, among them Gallipoli, Galicia and Mesopotamia. During the war he used opportunities to research and report, among other things as contributor to the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Work done during the war must have contributed to his study on *Stambuler Buchwesen im 18. Jahrhundert* (“Eighteenth-Century Bookproduction in Constantinople”), published in 1919. In late summer 1918 he had returned to Germany. The next thing known is his active participation in the militia (*Freicorps*) of Ritter von Epp, a band of dismissed nationalist and conservative officers and servicemen fighting against the revolutionary *Räterepublik* of Munich. Babinger, who had been discharged from the Bavarian army in spring, 1919, became liaison officer of the militia to the Reich’s Defence Minister Noske in Berlin. After an attempt to finish a *Habilitation* and thus to qualify for a professorship had failed in Marburg, he was accepted by the faculty of Berlin University in 1921. In this, he was supported by the politically influential Carl Heinrich Becker; and it was in *Der Islam*, the journal founded and edited by Becker, that his habilitation thesis on şeyḫ Bedr ed-Dīn was published in the same year. During the 1920s, he was very productive in terms of publications both popular and academic, amongst which the bi-bibliographical *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* (“Ottoman Historians and their Works”) is most famous. Babinger found regular employment only in 1925 at the *Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen (SOS)*, an institution affiliated with Berlin University but not quite regarded part of it. Attempts of Babinger to gain the chair of Oriental studies in Munich failed twice, in 1925 and, again, in 1933. At the second time the National-Socialists were already in power, and Babinger had been suspended from office in summer 1933. An intervention by Ritter von Epp, by now the Reich’s commissar in Bavaria, was of no avail. In 1934, having been removed from state service by enforced retirement, Babinger followed the invitation of Nicolae Iorga after some hesitations and became first visiting professor in Bucarest, then chair of a new institute at the University of Iași. From Romania he travelled repeatedly to Turkey. Beginning in 1941, he was simultaneously employed by German military intelligence. The German military ordered him back to Germany where he stayed since mid-1943 with his mother in Würzburg (a marriage concluded in 1924 had ended in a hostile divorce in 1939). In 1945, Babinger’s papers, manuscripts collected by him and a part of his library were destroyed in an US-American air-raid. As his mother’s house had been destroyed Babinger moved to Ochsenfurt, from where, in 1946, he was appointed to become professor in Munich. In the years to follow, Babinger established a miniscule institute (one professor, one assistant) with the baroque name *Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des Nahen Orients sowie Turkologie*. After he had finally found a flat to rent, Babinger married again in 1948. He spent his Munich years with intensive research and publication. His biography of Mehmed the Conqueror is the product of this era. Babinger continued to travel, write, and correspond widely also after he was granted emeritus status in 1958. His life ended on a beach in Durrës, Albania, on June 23rd, 1967.

6. The last register volume was published only in 2000, already as CD-ROM. See also Irscher (1985).

7. The English version of this successor to the *RE* translates *Real- oder Sachphilologie* with “philology of objects, or reality-oriented philology” and *Wortphilologie* as “grammatical-critical text philology”.

8. Becker had become Prussian state secretary at the Ministry of Cults, Culture and Education in 1919 (Babinger claims that this had happened shortly before the 1918 armistice; apparently a timing that legitimized Becker in his or his reader’s eyes) and was to serve as minister in 1921 and from 1925 to 1930. He played a pivotal role in the university reforms of the Weimar Republic. On Becker’s ideas at that time see Becker 1919.

9. “Stellungnahme zur Frage der Nachfolge auf dem Lehrstuhl für Geschichte und Kultur des Nahen Orients sowie für Turkologie (Verlesen in der Fakultätssitzung vom 16.I.1959)”

Universitätsarchiv der LMU, O XV 14ze, Bd. 2. The quotes on pp. 1, 2: “hoffentlich zum letzten Male” - “Ich stehe indessen nicht an, Ihnen zu versichern, dass ein Tag etwa der osmanischen Geschichte tausendmal wichtiger ist als sämtliche *ajjām al-'arab* zusammengenommen und dass die Beschäftigung mit dem Islam nach Ghazzâlî, insbesondere dem ausserhalb des orthodoxen Lehrgebäudes sich herausbildenden lebendigen Islam erheblich fruchtbarer ist als das Wiederkäuen noch so vieler orthodoxer Kommentare und Superkommentare.” Since then, the literary nature of the legendary *ayyām al-'arab* is more seriously taken into account than it was in 1959 (Al-Qadi 1999).

10. Babinger (1931) contains only facsimiles and summaries of the documents. The rare Babinger (1943) represents only the text as copied by İbrahim Hakki Konyalı; Babinger’s notes are said to have been burned in an allied air-raid on Würzburg (Babinger 1962-76: 1: 32). On his edition of the *ḵānūnnāme* see below. A similar case is an edition of the chronicle by Kıvamî, which was published by Babinger (1955 [1956]) but is closely connected to a thesis supervised by him (Gökçe 1955).

11. The list of these studies would be long (and many have been included in the three volumes of *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen*); it reaches from his Babinger (1920b) to Babinger (1967).

12. Kreiser (2013: 107-10) argues that Fallmerayer was qualified as an expert in applied Oriental/ Islamic studies with relevance to the present time in a threefold way: He had - in varying degrees - expertise in the *elsine-i selāse* (Turkish, Persian, Arabic); during his long travels, he had acquired extended knowledge of the region; and he had published, both as a scholar and journalist, both on contemporary and historical issues. These traits make the type of scholar Babinger had in mind.

13. Some of these, among them Fallmerayer and Hans Dernschwam, pre-occupied Babinger repeatedly and more or less all his life. For a bibliography of his works see Babinger (1962-76: 1: 1-51; 3: IX-XVII).

14. His papers are preserved among Babinger’s at the Bavarian State Library. Babinger wrote a number of obituaries for his friend. The most important one he published both as a contribution to a journal and independently (Babinger 1932, 1933). Hans Heinrich Schaefer in a slanderous expert opinion of 1933 (see n. 16) claimed that Mordtmann was responsible for everything good in Babinger’s work on Turkish texts (pp. 3sq: “Damit verbindet sich eine ganz ausserordentliche Fähigkeit, sich bei anderen Informationen zu verschaffen und daraus eigene Arbeit zu machen”).

15. Universitätsarchiv LMU München O XV 4ze, vol. 1, copy of a letter by Prof. Dr. F.H. Freiherr von Bissing to Reichsstatthalter Ritter von Epp, dated 29.VII.1933. The exact circumstances of Babinger’s administrative leave in 1933 and then forced retirement a year later are still not entirely clear. Conflict with and slander by colleagues at his place of work, the Berlin Seminar of Oriental Languages, seem to have played as much a role as his Jewish born grandmother. However, Babinger was able to apply for a professorship in Munich in 1934. That the faculty choose not him but Otto Pretzl was probably partly due to an expert opinion by Hans-Heinrich Schaefer (also contained in O XV 4ze, vol. 1) that combined the hateful slander of a Berlin colleague belittling Babinger’s expertise with the indication of Jewish descent. See also Grimm (1998: p. 317-20), Kreiser (2014: 102-3).

16. “Türk Düşmanı bir Alman Profesörü Berlin Üniversitesindeki Vazifesinden Çıkarıldı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 2.VIII.1933, p.3; “Profesör Babingerin Mektubu” *Cumhuriyet*, 27.VIII.1933, p. 4. Thanks go to Klaus Kreiser for making me aware of these articles.

17. See above n. 12.

18. Heywood (2008: 326), quoting a review by Kenneth Setton. A fuller analysis of some of the plagiarism can be found in Trapp (1984).

19. O-XV-4ze, Bd. 1 of the archives of LMU Munich (UAM).

20. Documented in the voluminous collection O-XV-4ze, Bd. 2, and 587-F12-11a (07-587/2) of UAM.

21. Babinger, "Stellungnahme", p. 2. According to van Ess (2013: 49), Babinger had proposed to found an institute of turcology in Istanbul as early as 1925.

22. These were German, Italian, French, Turkish, English, Greek, Latin, Rumanian, Dutch, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, and Spanish. The Bavarian State Library in Munich (BSB) holds about 7,500 letters and postcards from correspondence with about 900 persons and 1,200 pieces with a bit under 400 institutions. Apart from the correspondence, photographs, manuscripts and personal documents are part of these papers. A smaller quantity of the estate is still at the Institute of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, LMU Munich. The material pertains mainly to the time after World War II. More material is among the holdings of the archives of LMU and the chair of Turkish studies at the Institute of Near and Middle Eastern Studies (INMO), LMU Munich. Additionally, the archives of institutions such as the *Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft* (now at the Bavarian State Archives, Munich) can be expected to yield material. INMO and BSB plan to cooperate with international scholars in launching a project that will – hopefully – make it possible to reconstruct a network of knowledge at the very end of the time when academic research was still a phenomenon of small scholarly circles.

23. The following according to the Babinger papers in the BSB, Manuscript Section, Ana 684.

24. "Galiba almancayı [sic] evvela sizin eserlerinizi sökmeğe çalışarak öğreneceğim. Onları okumak imkân ve saadeti ancak almancayı eyice öğrenmeğe bağlı değil midir?"

25. "şahsi dostluğumuzun, yalnız ve yalnız hakikatlerin meydana çıkması için yaptığım gayretlerden müteessir olmamasını bütün samimiyetimle temenni etmekteyim. ... Herşeyden evvel sizi temin etmek isterim ki, Osmanlı tarihinin idealize etmesini tasvib etmediğim kadar onun muayyen telakki ve hislere hitab etmesini de kabul edemem. Tarih yazarken ne şarklı ne garplı [sic], ne Osmanlı ne Avrupalıyız, sadece tarihçiyiz. Sizin bir çok meselelerde getirdiğiniz yeni tedkikleri ve fikirleri kimse inkâr edemez. Fatih devri gibi geniş bir mevzuda yazdığınız kitapta, nâçizane görebildiğim noksanları bildirmeği bir hizmet ve vazife saydım. Bunları neşrederek sizin tenkit nazarınıza sunmamı arzu edeceğinizi umuyorum."

26. The last item, a post-card dated 1956/5/3 and expressing İnalçık's gratitude for a copy of the edition of *Ḳıvâmî's* chronicle that Babinger's student Sait Gökçe had sent him, clearly was no answer to another letter by Babinger.

27. "Natürlich verstehe ich durchaus, dass Sie Herrn İnalçık nicht antworten wollen: letztlich kommt dabei nichts heraus, da die Türken ja schon rein sprachlich nicht Ihre Quellenkenntnis besitzen, um überhaupt richtig mitreden zu können. Wenn ich's im Falle O. Köprülü und auch İ. Kafesoğlu doch tat, so deshalb, weil ich während meiner Tätigkeit in Ankara und Kpl. merkte, dass die Türken in solchen Fällen dem Prinzip huldigen „qui tacet, constire videtur“, d.h. hier: er gibt sich geschlagen. Aber man braucht ja nicht auf türkische Grundsätze einzugehen: da haben Sie völlig recht." Spuler had delivered a series of seven lectures in Istanbul in late 1954 and early 1955 which had met with fierce criticism (Kafesoğlu 1955). He apparently alludes to this debate.

28. "...das Geschwätz der waqâ'î nüwîsân des Osmanenhofes, die einander ausschrieben und sich des gleichen, ebenso hochtrabenden und gehaltlosen Wortgeklingels befleißigten und als »Huren des Wortes« ihre persönlichen Ansichten und Eindrücke zwangsläufig ihren launischen Brotgebern opferten." *Op.cit.*, p. 9.

29. The book on Mehmed II was translated into Turkish (from the English edition and enriched by a translations of İnalçık's review of 1960) only in 2002, nearly fifty years after its initial publication (Babinger 2002). GOW has been translated and, to a degree, supplemented by Coşkun Üçok and was published fifty-five years after the first publication (Babinger 1982). Reprints have been available since then; occasionally authors and libraries ascribe the work to Üçok rather than Babinger: [http://www.toplukatalog.gov.tr/index.php?\\_f=1&cwid=3&keyword=Osmanl%C4%B1+Tarih+Yazarlar%C4%B1+ve+Eserleri&tokat\\_search\\_field=2&keyword2=&tokat\\_search\\_field2=1&keyword3=&tokat\\_search\\_field3=1&pub\\_date1=&pub\\_date2=&orde](http://www.toplukatalog.gov.tr/index.php?_f=1&cwid=3&keyword=Osmanl%C4%B1+Tarih+Yazarlar%C4%B1+ve+Eserleri&tokat_search_field=2&keyword2=&tokat_search_field2=1&keyword3=&tokat_search_field3=1&pub_date1=&pub_date2=&orde)

[accessed 26.III.2017]. The translation of selected articles, envisaged by İncalcık and Babinger in their correspondence, never materialised after the two fell out with each other.

30. “dövemedim, hiç olmazsa kariyerini mahvedeyim diye.”

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## ABSTRACTS

Franz Babinger (1891-1967), a German scholar publishing on Ottoman history, worked outside the mainstream of Oriental philology of his time. While he shared many of the nationalist, patriarchal and gendered views of his generation (he was, however, not anti-Semitic), his interest in the “realities” of history bridled the scope of Orientalist assumptions and the reliance on canonical texts singled out as key to understanding “Islam” or the “Middle East”. Extensive travels and an eye for material conditions made him understand the Ottoman Empire as a Mediterranean phenomenon. Rather than intellectual or political differences his brusque and irascible character (along with his idiosyncratic use of German that makes his works difficult to understand for second-language readers) prevented his research from resonating with contemporary historians. His correspondence shows how Babinger established and then destroyed a working relationship with Halil İncalcık that might have won him a Turkish audience.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Franz Babinger (1891-1967), Academic Networks, Turkish Studies (20th c.), Philology of Facts (Sachphilologie), Halil İncalcık (1916-2016)

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