

Vortrag

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“Mission: Impossible for the French School of Turkish Studies ? A National Turcology as a Self Destructing Category”

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Abstract

French Turcology was initially conceived at the end of the 18th century in the frame of the “Eastern Question” as a tool for the many civilian and military French interests in the Ottoman Empire. This remained a lasting feature until the Ottoman decline and shaped French Orientalism on the Ottoman lands; the shift from a multi confessional and multiethnic Empire to a Nation State apparently reinforced it. Based on the improvement of bilateral relations with the newly found Republic of Turkey ruled by French-speaking elites, it paved the way for a new field, resting on some academic institutions and niches, organized around tutelary figures such as Professors Jean Deny or Louis Bazin, and specialized on some subfields. However, with the French Empire maintaining its domination and the setting of a French Mandate in some former Arab Ottoman provinces (Syria and Lebanon) that would last until the aftermath of WWII, the French School of Turkish Studies remained isolated and weak in the face of Arabic Studies. With a genuine interest in the entire Turkic world, the French Turcology was contrariwise poorly connected to the main historiographical debates in France. Furthermore, it chose to focus on the tiny republic of Turkey whose relation with Ottoman legacy was rather problematic. Then, from the 90s on it faced two major challenges: the development of political and social sciences (besides anthropology) based research on Turkey and the emergence of a Turkish diaspora in France that became steadily the main provider of students for Turcology. These trends were not proper to the French context, but together with other above-mentioned ones, they explained that French Turcology, thought out as a national category, was doomed to self-destruction.

Bio

Alexandre Toumarkine is Professor for Contemporary Turkish History and Society at INALCO (National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilisations) in Paris and Vice-Director of the Department of Eurasian Studies that includes the section on Turkish Studies.

He is a member of the CERMOM Research Center (Centre de Recherches Moyen-Orient Méditerranée) and associated researcher at the CETOBAC – EHESS/ Paris. He is also one of the founders of the European Journal of Turkish Studies (EJTS).

Based in Istanbul from 1993 to 2017, he taught in three universities (Galatasaray, Marmara, Yıldız) and worked in two foreign research institutes: firstly at the French Institute for Anatolian Studies (IFEA), as researcher and, from 2005 to 2010, as Scientific Director. From 2011 to 2017, he was employed at the Orient-Institute Istanbul (Max Weber Stiftung) as Mitarbeiter, in charge of the section for religious studies. There, he co-headed a four-year DFG-ANR Cooperative Research Program entitled Neoreligitur - “New Religiosities in Turkey: Reenchantment in a Secularized Muslim Country?”