

STUDIA ORIENTALIA TARTUENSIA

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CULTURAL CROSSROADS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THE HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL
LEGACY OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND
CONFLICT FROM THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST TO
THE PRESENT DAY

Second revised and expanded edition

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Introduction

HOLGER MÖLDER, VLADIMIR SAZONOV

The region of the Middle East has been called the cradle of mankind where the first human civilizations were born (Ancient Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Egypt, the Levant). It became home to numerous cultures, religions and ethnicities with long experience of living together in a multicultural environment. At the same time, we are currently living in the midst of turmoil with crises full of enmity and rivalry the roots of which extend back to Ancient times. Historical, cultural, religious, social and political legacies often play a central role in obstructing intercultural dialogue in the Middle East. A comprehensive and multifaceted approach is therefore immediately required to solve the numerous problems in the region. The initial idea for the publication “Cultural Crossroads in the Middle East – The Historical, Cultural and Political Legacy of Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict from the Ancient Near East to the Present Day” came in April 2016 and some chapters are based on presentations given at the Baltic Alliance for Asian Studies (BAAS) conference in Tartu, with several scholars from various European and Middle Eastern countries also agreeing to contribute to this volume. This is an intermittent and interdisciplinary publication that focuses on multiple topics related to the Middle East and the areas of study included in this particular volume encompass ancient history, the religion and mythology of the Ancient Near Eastern regions (Sumer, Akkad, Iran, etc.), Arabic and Islamic studies, Persian, Turkish and Arab literature, among others, as well as modern Middle Eastern issues related to politics, security, society and the economy. Its authors hail from the Baltic Sea countries of Estonia, Latvia and Poland, and from the farther-flung lands of Israel and Azerbaijan.

This interdisciplinary volume begins with an introductory chapter by **Holger Mölder** and **Vladimir Sazonov** which analyzes the perspective of intercultural dialogue in the region throughout history. The Sumerian civilization has been widely accepted as the earliest in human history, dated between 4500/4000 and 2000/1900 B.C., and in his chapter

Peeter Espak examines the origins of the Sumerian myths, concluding that mythological motives, textual parallels and ideological aspects all indicate that the myths of Enki and the World Order, Enki's Journey to Nippur, and Enki and Inanna most probably belong to the period of the Isin Dynasty which reigned from 1953 B.C.

Krzysztof Ulanowski focuses on the role of divination in the Mesopotamian civilization which was in many ways a natural and common phenomenon in the Ancient world. The mutual interreligious influence of the god Mithra in Zoroastrianism and of Mihryazd in the Manichaean religion is analyzed by **Jaana Lahe**, followed by his chapter in collaboration with **Vladimir Sazonov** (this article is published in German) in which they link the role of god (Mithra) with the important treaty between the Hittite king Šuppiluliuma I (1380–1340 BC) and the Mitanni king Šatiwaza from 14th century B.C.

In the next chapter **Amar Annus** provides an overview of the academic heritage of well-known Estonian-American Orientalist and Syriologist Arthur Vööbus (1909–1988). **Lidia Leontjeva** introduces us to the early Persian manuscripts held in the University of Tartu Library, most of which were donated in the 19th century. **Aynura Mahmudova** studies the texts of Turkish-Azerbaijani poet and thinker Fuzuli (1483–1556) and his literary school. The Lebanese American (Maronite) writer Ameen Rihani (1876–1940) was also an early theorist of Arab nationalism and in the next chapter **Ingrida Kleinhofa** analyzes his literary heritage along with Western and Arab influences on his works. There exist approximately three million Alawites in Syria and one million in Turkey. The Alawite identity has received a lot of attention in the recent Syrian civil war, which started in 2011, due to their support of President Assad against Sunni-led opposition. Alawites identify themselves as a separate ethnoreligious group which is distinctive from mainstream Islam while remaining related to its Shia branch. In his chapter **Üllar Peterson** focuses on Alawite positions on Islam. Next, **Tanja Dibou** examines how the Alawite youth in modern Syria distinguish themselves from other young Muslims during the ongoing civil war in Syria. **Kobi Michael** and **Yoel Guzansky** in their chapter examine the phenomenon of the failed state in the Middle East and its impact upon Arab statehood. Saudi Arabia is another regional power which characterizes

emerging rivalry in the Middle East and its power relies on vast oil resources.

Yossi Mann therefore focuses on Saudi Arabia's fluctuating impact on the world oil market in his contribution. The appearance of the State of Israel on the Middle Eastern political landscape covers a significant part of the recent history of Middle Eastern conflicts. **Itamar Rickover** takes a look at Israeli strategic culture based on three indicators: symbols and images; militarism; and a system of norms, traditions and procedures that regulate the rules of conduct between the military and political echelons. **Limor Nobel-Konig** in her chapter analyzes the success and failure of terrorist organizations that recently became part of the Middle Eastern image by emphasizing five key strategic components: recruiting activists/supporters; creating provocation; eliminating opponents; instilling fear; and media activity. **Holger Mölder** is studying the influence of new types of actors such as the Islamic State on the contemporary security environment. **Sandra Peets** focuses on the strategic narratives adopted by Āyatollā Ḥomeynī (leader of Iran 1979–1989) and Ṣaddām Ḥusayn (leader of Iraq 1979–2003) in the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988).

Viljar Veebel, Yurii Punda and Vitalii Shevchuk examine the roots of large-scale immigration flows into the European Union over the last decade and investigate the potential link between immigration and the Kremlin's hybrid warfare operations in Syria and Ukraine. Finally, **Ilmar Ploom, Vladimir Sazonov and Viljar Veebel** discuss Russia's growing ambitions in the Middle East, and its strategies and methods. This study explores the background, strategies and methods of Russia's pursuits in the region.