

Orientalisms and Central European Approaches

A Nuanced Critique without Colonial Bias: Introduction to a Future Anthology

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Abstract. Instead of paving the way for political, military, and mercantilist expansion, since the late modern period, Central European¹ Orientalists (predominantly of a Hungarian, Czech, and Polish background²) have dedicated increased attention to the ‘East’ on unbiased scientific grounds. Lessons drawn from a frame of reference of corresponding, complex, and comprehensive oeuvres outside of and uncompromised by political agendas allow for rereading Said’s thesis and differentiating geocultural nuances accordingly.

Keywords: Orientalism, Central Europe, cultural theory, critique, imperialism ideology

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- 1 Obviously, any concept of Central Europe may seem Procrustean in terms of the chance of giving room for arbitrary political, geographical, or geocultural categorizations. This paper predominantly focuses on a frame of reference of scholars from Polish, Czech, Slovenian, and Hungarian background. However, authors from other nations and/or other periods, such as Aloys Sprenger or Dimitrie Cantemir may well be included from other broader perspectives. Already in the early eighteenth century, not only Kelemen Mikes of Hungary, but also Moldavian prince Dimitrie Cantemir delved into research on the Ottoman Empire. In addition, in the nineteenth century, scholars of Austrian background, such as Aloys Sprenger, beside their “fellow” Habsburg subjects, were also engaged in research on the Orient. It is Sprenger who, for example, stated that the Arab of the Muslim Orient was “not the tool of dreams and hopes; his object is to enjoy the moment, and to be—to be good, to be wise, to be free, to be happy” (Sprenger, *El-Mas’ūdi’s*, li).
 - 2 Other scholars of such national backgrounds with outstanding achievements as Slovak Rudolph Macúch noted in the field of Mandaic, Samaritan, and New Syriac studies, August Kościeszka-Żaba and Józef Białowski, famous for their gap-filling and cutting-edge research on the habits, literature and language of Kurdish people, or the Prague-born Arabist Paul Kraus etc. will hopefully be covered in later publications.

Introduction

In the words of Czech Orientalist Bedřich Hrozný (1879–1952), “the story of the Ancient Orient and especially that of ancient Western Asia is of particular interest and charm to the modern European.”³

In the 1970s, Palestinian-American intellectual Edward Said claimed to identify political realities behind such epistemological interest and “charm” attracting scholars of various disciplines: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”⁴

Accordingly, Said critically defined Orientalism as a mode of thought and writing by which Western discourses exercise a form of ideological power over the cultures and societies of the Orient, reducing them through “pervasive patterns of representation”⁵ to “symbols, narratives and repertoires”⁶ as “exotic, degenerate, passive, fanatical, mysterious, civilized, and uncivilized by degree.”⁷

Born in Lemberg, Galicia, then part of the Austro–Hungarian Empire, Muhammad Asad, né Leopold Weiss (1900–1992) deliberately gave the title “Unromantisches Morgenland” [Unromantic East] to his book covering his first travel to the Middle East in 1922, by which he “meant to convey that it was not a book about the romantic, exotic outward picture of the Muslim East but rather an endeavor to penetrate to its day-by-day realities.”⁸ Such authorial motivation sharply differs from the Saidian frameworks in terms of being fully aware of and distinguishing from earlier tendencies of Western intellectual streams of thought.

Hungarian Orientalist Gyula Germanus (1884–1979), decades before Said, acknowledges both the intellectual tendencies of European interest in the Muslim Orient⁹ with its innumerable facets, and the corresponding epistemological compromises as follows:

A brilliant series of Orientalists have shed light on Muhammad and all the mysteries of his religion [...] countless scholars and writers with brilliant pens have constructed a history of the Orient [...] They have dissected, analyzed,

3 Hrozný, *Ancient History of Western Asia*, vii.

4 Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

5 Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, “Orientalist Variations,” 1–15.

6 Gingrich, “Frontier Myths of Orientalism,” 123–24; Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*, 164.

7 Hodkinson and Walker, eds, *Deploying Orientalism in Culture and History*; App, *The Birth of Orientalism*.

8 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 185.

9 Said, *Orientalism*, 17. In Said’s words, we can grasp that the overlap between the categories of the Arabs and Islam for almost a thousand years stood together for the Orient.

reconciled and edited every sentence of the Eastern and Western sources, and each scholar has projected his own individual feeling and the mood and point of view of his time on the conditions of the old times. Interestingly, Germanus does not only explicitly refer to the subjectivity of scholars, but goes on to describe the potential direct influences of certain political strategies: “Voltaire, towards the end of his life, became interested in the history of the Orient once again, perhaps driven by the fervor of French imperialism.”¹⁰

Regardless of Said’s paradigm and its scientific and political stakes, Polish Tadeusz Kowalski (1889–1948), a year before Germanus, bona fide taking the irreproachability of mainstream Orientalism’s intellectual values for granted, reports on Central European regional contributions to the former:

“We [Polish scholars] can boast of a perhaps modest but nonetheless lasting contribution to the treasury of international scientific output.”¹¹

Questions, such as what Orientalism is, where it comes from, and where it leads to, may be answered by paraphrasing Transylvanian-born Hungarian poet Péter Zirkuli’s words: diverse works of various scholars became known as Orientalism, which branched out in many directions. Thus, the “works of writers and artists have given rise to Orientalism in many forms, or to put it more precisely, to Orientalisms.”¹²

10 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 331–32. In the Hungarian original: „Az orientalisták ragyogó sorozata világosságot derített Mohamedre és vallása minden titkára [...] számtalan kutató és ragyogó tollú író olyan tudományos készültséggel építették fel a Kelet történelmét, hogy [...] elemezték, egybevetették és megszerkesztették a keleti és nyugati források minden mondatát, és minden tudós a maga egyéni érzését és korának hangulatát és nézőpontját vetítette vissza a régmúlt idők viszonyaira [...] Voltaire, akit élete vége felé, talán éppen a francia imperializmus tüzetől hevítve, ismét a Kelet történelme kezdett érdekelni...”

11 Kowalski, *Na szlakachislamu*, vii. In the Polish original: “Możemy się pochlubić skromnym może, ale bądź co bądź trwałym wkładem do skarbnicy międzynarodowego dorobku naukowego.”

12 Zirkuli, “Orientalizmusok,” 92. Interestingly, Transylvania itself, as Czech Anglicist Alice Sukdolová points out with regard to the fictional character Dracula, was portrayed as a romanticized metaphysical space in Victorian Britain in the very same era when, as Said argues (*Orientalism*, 4).” Dracula has been associated, as Sukdolová argues, “with the transgression of any rational explanation of the Victorian world, the functioning of Victorian society and its moral and social rules and thus becomes an essential part of the Romantic Sublime. Simultaneously, he functions as the violent and ruthless Other, as an entity which invades England and attempts to extend his power to manipulate his victims and spread contagion through the blood of his prey. Such features of the novel point to the literary tradition of decadence. Nevertheless, Dracula as a character and especially the space he occupies constitute the essence of the Romantic Sublime in Bram Stoker’s novel” (2016: 46). Thus, it appears that the Transylvania of Dracula both enshrines and accelerates the Victorian dichotomy of civilization on the one hand, and the wilderness on the other.

All in all, Orientalism, i.e., an intellectual cultural current in Europe focused on the East, manifesting itself, among other fields, in social sciences, inspired first and foremost by the cultures of the Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa, had its zenith in the nineteenth century. This is also the timeframe when the mainstream of outstanding Central European scholars started to dedicate their lives to sophisticated scrutiny outside any direct¹³ colonial power relations,¹⁴ conducting studies “capable of understanding oriental languages and handling primary-source material.”¹⁵

In contrast to Edward Said’s classical model, modes of so-called Orientalist thinking and writing in our region provide a more differentiated idea of the Orient.¹⁶ Hypothetically, their points of views and the layers of the critique presented by them might well differ in terms of their locations on the scale of the “position of strength.”¹⁷

The following is a non-exhaustive overview of some of the critical aspects of works of nine Central European scholars from the nineteenth–twentieth centuries, when mainstream Western Orientalism reached its peak, demonstrating that it seems to have been possible to formulate criticism without necessarily serving colonial objectives. Accordingly, I will conduct a study in the semantic and intellectual history of the meanings and the Central European readings of the Orient in the corresponding time frame.

13 This obviously does not mean that Central European intellectual discourses are not attached to the political sphere at all. From the scientific arena, just to give a few names, Ármin Vámbéry, Jan Prosper Witkiewicz, Moses Schorr, and Józef Pomiankowski conducted explicit political engagements during their careers. An epigone of such political trajectories outside the field of Oriental Studies is Count Fedor Karacsay, sent to the Ottoman Empire by the Hungarian government as a diplomatic attaché on 15 July 1849, in the final phase of the Hungarian War of Independence against the Habsburgs. Later anecdotes attribute to him the intent to research and collect material concerning “the origins and ancient representatives” of Hungarians. Later, he sent his first report from Tehran, mentioning that he would soon be sent to Herat, Balkh, and Bokhara, and that he hoped to reach Samarkand, which had been the seat of the Uighurs, the people he considered the Hungarians’ ancestors. We do not know much about his mission, possibly because he died in Tehran as a General of the Iranian Army only shortly afterwards, in 1859.

14 Lemmen, “Noncolonial Orientalism,” 209–27.

15 App, *The Birth of Orientalism*, 11.

16 Heiss and Feichtinger, “Distant Neighbors,” 148–65. Cf. Gingrich, *Frontier Myths of Orientalism*; Lemmen, “Noncolonial Orientalism”; Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*.

17 Said, *Orientalism*, 40; Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*, xix.

Methodology

This paper deploys critical discourse analytic¹⁸ viewpoints based on the works of three Hungarian (Ármin Vámbéry, Ignác Goldziher, and Gyula Germanus), three Polish (Aleksander Chodźko, Tadeusz Kowalski, and the part-Slovenian Marijan Molé), two Czech (Alois Musil and Bedřich Hrozný) and a Galicia-born Orientalist (Muhammad Asad), with the intention to juxtapose Central European authors with the Saidian paradigm.¹⁹

Aleksander Chodźko (1804–1891)

At the beginning of his earliest publication on Persian traditions and folk literature, entitled *Specimens of the Popular Poetry of Persia, as Found in the Adventures and Improvisations of Kurroglou*, Aleksander Chodźko insists that exaggeration is the “sine qua non of all Asiatic poetry.”²⁰

It is important to note here that the trope of exaggeration, as a characteristic attributed to the “Oriental man” tends to recur in Orientalist literature, while obviously, this could partly also hold true for Orientalist scholars from various backgrounds themselves. Although, while their accounts strive for objectivity, their “personal testimonies” or “subjective impressionism”²¹ may also pave the way for exaggerated descriptions. Mythization, as a form of the modern *Zeitgeist*²² was obviously characteristic of the corresponding Central European nations and especially of the period of nineteenth-century Romanticism²³. Central Europe, in fact, also carried out some forms of symbolic exploitation of the Orient when it used its cultural artifacts for entertainment purposes. A relevant example was the advertisements of Oriental products with comic figures wearing turbans on the building of Little Istanbul in Budapest at the time of the Hungarian Millennial festivities. Such tendencies are also attested by contemporary Prague: “Kalmar’s analysis (which

18 The concept of discourse analysis brings us again to the post-Foucauldian methodology of Said: “My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said, *Orientalism*, 3).

19 In fact the manuscript at hand subsequently arranges these scholars in chronological order as follows: Aleksander Chodźko, Ármin Vámbéry, Ignác Goldziher, Alois Musil, Gyula Germanus, Tadeusz Kowalski, Marijan Molé, Muhammad Asad and Bedřich Hrozný,

20 Chodźko, *Specimens of the Popular Poetry of Persia*, 7.

21 Said, *Orientalism*, 191; Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 331–32.

22 Said, *Orientalism*, 171.

23 Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*, 163.

discusses the images of Turks in Prague's cityscape, including two of its top tourist destinations, the Old Town Hall and the Charles Bridge) expresses an overt nostalgia for a 'romantic' approach."²⁴

By portraying the emblematic figure of Kurroglou, the bandit minstrel of Khorrasan in northern Persia, Polish Iranologist Aleksander Chodźko introduces the Oriental (Turco-Persian) society as one of primitive violence and abuses:

It is in this mode of thinking, identical with that of his countrymen, that lies the secret talisman of the sympathy the name of Kurroglou excites, and the popularity it enjoys among the Turkish tribes of Northern Persia. According to their opinions, nothing is more natural than for the strong to oppress and plunder the weak: otherwise, say they, the former could not be powerful; nor would the latter acknowledge his master's rights and superiority [...] Everything is allowed to a potentate favored by fortune, provided he does not transgress certain rules of chivalrous nomadic morality.²⁵

Later, Chodźko continues the critique of Oriental society in the context of a footnote added to the story of the legendary heroic outlaw Kurroglu, full of novelistic-fictional elements, when one of the harem guards addresses the title character: "Do not forget to tell the [Ottoman] Sultan [Murad], that since his departure we have not received one farthing's pay from the Princess Nighara" Chodźko's comment is more important for us than the specific context:

"This is quite in the Oriental spirit. The princes of the blood and the grand dignitaries of the court, whenever they can, never hesitate to increase their income, by converting to their own use the pay of magistrates, troops, servants, etc., entrusted to their care."²⁶

In his *Grammaire persane, ou Principes de l'iranien modern*, published a decade later, he attributes violent tactics to the Second Shah of Qajar Iran (1769–1834):

"Nowadays, King Feth Ali Shah, who was a good prose writer and had some talent for poetry, did not disdain to use all sorts of tricks and even resorted to violence in order to obtain from the famous poet Feth Ali Khan, *melikushchera*, »king of poets«, advice and corrections with the help of which he could obtain the glorious title of »classic« for his Diwan (complete works of His Majesty)."²⁷

24 Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*, xix; 102–4.

25 Chodźko, *Specimens of the Popular Poetry of Persia*, 7–8.

26 Chodźko, *Specimens of the Popular Poetry of Persia*, 130.

27 Chodźko, *Grammaire Persane*, iii. Translations throughout this paper are by the author. In the French original, the passage is the following: De nos jours, le roi Feth Ali Chah, bon prosateur, et qui avait quelque talent pour la poésie, ne dédaigna pas d'em- ployer toutes sortes de ruses et

Ármin Vámbéry (1832–1913)

“Asia, it would seem, will soon be the part of the world on which an eager Europe is preparing to solve far-reaching political, cultural and social problems, and it is all the more necessary that the veil of fog should be lifted higher and higher, and that the life and customs of the Eastern world should become more familiar,”²⁸ writes in his 1876 *Oriental Images of Life* [Hungarian: *Keleti életképek*] Hungarian Turkologist Ármin Vámbéry, who also frequently travelled to the East.

Although such facets of his oeuvre may well give rise to critical speculations, especially when allowing for occasional assumptions about his alleged activities as an agent in the service of the British Empire, more thorough knowledge of Vámbéry’s scholarly focus might shed a different light on his indeed complex career and motivations.

Based on the premise of close Turkic–Hungarian linguistic and ethnic relationship, his work contributed to the flourishing of “Turánism”, a variety of Orientalism with a specifically Hungarian focus, which studied the Orient, its peoples, history and culture in relation to the history of Hungarian ethnogenesis and culture. In the *Oriental Images of Life*, he thus also recalls his motivations driving his interests in the Orient: “my main occupation for a long time: »Turkish–Tatar languages root vocabulary«, made it necessary to make a small excursion from the realm of theoretical studies to the field of practical life.”²⁹ This field may well be considered the central element within his oeuvre.

Nevertheless, regarding the Orient, Vámbéry makes critical judgements from various social perspectives. He portrays Ottoman society as one “whose basic tone is crawl-crawl and humility”,³⁰ and as a hotbed for corruption through the following allegory:

“You let the fly, which has saturated itself with your blood, continue to feed, as if by driving it away or killing it you were giving place to another, hungrier one, this is the state of affairs in public life.”³¹

eut même recours à la violence pour obtenir du célèbre poète Feth Ali Khan, mélik-ouchchuéra «roi des poètes», des conseils et des corrections à l’aide desquelles il pût obtenir, pour son *Divan* (œuvres complètes de Sa Majesté), le titre glorieux de classique.

- 28 “Ázsia, úgy látszik, nem sokára azon világrész fog lenni, melyen a tettszomjas Európa nagy horderejű politikai, művelődési és társadalmi problémákat megfejteni készül, annál szükségesebb tehát, hogy a ködfátyol mind jobban és jobban emelkedjék, és hogy a keleti világ élete és szokásai annál ismeretesebbé váljanak.”
- 29 “A huzamosabb idő óta főfoglalkozásom levő – »Török–tatár nyelvek gyökszótára« – mintegy szükségessé tette az elméleti tanulmányok birodalmából való kis kirándulást a gyakorlati élet mezejére.”
- 30 “Oly társadalomban, melynek alaphangja a csúszás-mászás s alázatosság.”
- 31 “Ha a legyet, mely vérével teleszította magát tovább engedi színi, ennek elűzése, vagy agyonütése által egy másik, éhesebbnek helyet ad! Az állami életben éppen ilyen állapot uralkodik.”

His social critique expands beyond the Ottoman Empire and is increasingly centered on the status of women:

As we move away from Turkey towards the interior of Asia [...] where, out of exaggerated and misconceived morality, the female sex is fearfully shut out from the foreign eye, and where wealth and prosperity are the chief objects of tyrannical oppression [...] I refer to the separation, strictly maintained and enforced throughout the East, but especially in the Muslim world, which exists between the two sexes, and the natural consequence of which is the division of the house and family into two. The harem and the *selamlık* (i.e., the forbidden, isolated place and the reception room) [...] their significance penetrates deeply, but very deeply, into the very essence of Eastern life, for they form such a stumbling block in the house itself, as well as in the outer and inner life, that we are always bumping into them [...]. The forced and enforced modesty, the treatment of women, which is so diametrically opposed to European thinking, can therefore be considered a black spot whose dangerous shadow penetrates all strata of society, even the most intimate relations of family life [...]. What most distinguishes the Oriental woman from her Western counterparts is the total neglect of wit and heart, to the extent that it did not occur in the Christian West, not even in the harsh Middle Ages.³²

Here, if we look carefully, an intersection of the quintessence of the Oriental Images, i.e., the harem³³ and Vámbéry's ranking the Orient second to the West becomes manifest.

However, Vámbéry also states that “to our Western intellect, the woman in the East appears only as a pitiable being, quite without will, and given over to the whims of her master. This is definitely a mistaken belief”, which he goes on to explain with

32 “Amint Törökországtól el, Ázsia belseje felé haladunk [...] ott, hol túlzott s hamisan értelmezett erkölcsiségből a nőnemet féltve elzárják az idegen szem elől, s hol gazdagság és jólét a zsarnoki elnyomatás főokát képezik [...] az egész Keleten, de leginkább a moszlim világban szigorúan fenntartott s keresztül vitt elválasztásra célok, mely a két nem közt létezik, s melynek természetes következménye az, hogy a ház s család két részre oszlik. Hárem és szelamlık (t.i. a tiltott, elszigetelt hely és a fogadási terem) [...] jelentőségük “mélyen, de igen mélyen behat a keleti élet velejébe, mert a házban magában, valamint a kül és belső életben is oly botránykövet képeznek, melybe minduntalan beleütközünk [...] A kényszerült s kierőszakolt szemérmesség, a nőekkel való bánásmód s azoknak megítélése, mely az európai felfogástól oly homlokegyenest ellenkezik, tekinthető tehát ama fekete pontnak, melynek veszélyes árnya a társadalom minden rétegébe, sőt a családi élet legtitkosabb viszonyaiba is behat. [...] Mi a keleti nőt leginkább megkülönbözteti nyugati társnőitől, az a szellem és szívműveltség teljes elhanyagolása, még pedig oly mértékben, amint az a keresztény nyugaton, még a durva középkor idejében sem fordult elő.”

33 Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*, 108.

a Western-critical sociological insight, arguing that “in the lowest strata of the population, the status of Asian and European women is exactly the same.”³⁴

Segregation, ironically, becomes leveled, giving room for another social problem, which is Oriental idleness typical of men:

“The Turkish peasant woman looks after the house and the home, while the husband lounges or gambles away everything [...]. We have only to take one glance at an Oriental male, wrapped up to the ankles in his folds, and the idea is immediately clear from his dress: this man was born for inaction and laziness.”³⁵

Not only does Vámbéry draw profound consequences for Oriental society but his interpretation also suggests Eastern civilization’s inferiority:

“The attractive, charming family picture of life in the West, here in the East, is mysteriously veiled, dark and cold to the point of horror [...] as the increasingly revitalized, bustling Western world, with its powerful voice of civilization, its torch of enlightenment, is as far from the sleepy Eastern world falling into ruin, as stark the contrast is between the inner essence of Western family life and that of the Eastern world.”³⁶

Ignác Goldziher (1850–1921)

Goldziher is one of the Central European scholars discussed by Edward Said in his opus magnum: “Ignaz Goldziher’s appreciation of Islam’s tolerance towards other religions was undercut by his dislike of Mohammed’s anthropomorphisms and Islam’s too-exterior theology and jurisprudence.”³⁷ Said might not have been aware that Goldziher, in his 1881 volume of studies entitled *Islam – Studies in the History of the Muslim Religion*, dedicates the entire sixth chapter³⁸ to (Western)

34 “Nyugati értelmünk előtt, a nő Keleten csak egészen akarat nélküli s ura szeszélyeinek átadott, sajnálatraméltó lénynek tűnik fel. Ez határozottan téves hit.”

35 “A török parasztnő a kül- és belháztartásról gondoskodik, míg a férj henyél, vagy mindenét eljártassa [...] csak rá kell pillantanunk egy bokáig redőibe burkolt keletire, s öltözékéből azonnal világosan kitűnik az eszme: hogy ezen ember restségre és tétlenségre született.”

36 “A nyugati életnek vonzó, nyájas családi képe, itt Keleten, titokzatosan el van fátyolozva, sötét s a borzadályig rideg [...] amely mértékben elüt a mindinkább felviruló, civilizátori hatalmas szavával áldást hozó, felvilágosodást terjesztő fáklyájával működő, nyugalmat nem ismerő nyugati világ, az álmos, rombadúló keleti világtól – épp oly merő ellentétben áll a nyugati családi élet benső lényege a keleti világgal.”

37 Said, *Orientalism*, 209.

38 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 413–64.

misconceptions about Islam. What is also certain though is that despite Goldziher's undoubted benevolence or even bias towards the subject of his scrutiny, he does not spare any further criticism, especially when discussing the characteristics of the non pre-Islamic (Jahiliya) Bedouin society and way of life.

To this end, Goldziher discusses at length the social achievements of Islam vis-a-vis the *Jahiliya*, for example, in the fields of marriage and the regulation of female infanticide, stating: "Islam, compared with pagan Arabism, marks moral advance", also in relation to the 'barbaric custom' of *tu'ada*, i.e. female infanticide.³⁹

Goldziher also points out further nuances in defending (Oriental) Islam's social effects as opposed to certain cultural traits of Pre-Islam Arabs: "The Islamic doctrine had a great influence on taming the Arabs' minds, refining their feelings [...]. Revenge is their [Bedouin pre-Islamic] ideal."⁴⁰

Goldziher describes the Bedouin's lack of openness to social progress:

This social life [in the desert] has so far undergone little change. The desert is the home of the conservative spirit; there is no social progress there [...]. They have mastered the firearms and other minor formal comforts of the Europeans, but the spirit which prevails in the Arabian desert is the same today as it was in the time of Mohammed. [... The Bedouin] regarded urban life as a despicable condition, a degradation [...]. No sooner had the star of the Wahhabis faded than they fell back into a nihilism more in tune with their nature.⁴¹

He also attributes violent behavior to Bedouins:

"Attacking peaceful caravans, driving off their flocks, violently exterminating their defenders, and stealing their property—all this is compatible with Bedouin morality, and even considered virtues if the victim does not belong to their tribe."⁴²

39 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*. 31–32. "Az iszlám a pogány arabsággal összehasonlítva erkölcsi haladást jelez."

40 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 36–38. "Nagy befolyással volt az iszlám tana az arabok lelkületének szelidítésére, érzésök finomítására [...] Visszatorlás, bosszú: ez az ő [beduin preiszlám] eszményképök."

41 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 44–46. "Ez a [sivatagi] társadalmi élet mindmáig csekély változáson ment keresztül. A sivatag a konzervatív szellem hazája, ott nincsen társadalmi haladás [...] Elsajátították az európaiak lövő fegyvereit és egyéb csekély formai kényelmet, de a szellem, mely az arab sivatagban uralkodik, ma is ugyanaz, amely Mohamed korában volt [... A beduin] megvetendő állapotnak, süllyedésnek tekinté a városi életet [...] Alighogy letűnt a vahhábiták csillaga, megint visszaestek a természetöknek jobban megfelelő nihilizmusba."

42 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 319–20. "Békés karavánokat megrohanni, nyájaikat elhajtani, védőiket erőszakosan kiirtani és vagyonukat elrabolni – mindez összefér a beduin erkölccsel, sőt beduin erénynek tekintik abban az esetben, ha az áldozat nem törzsbéli."

He goes as far as to state that “religious fanaticism” is characteristic of, or literally, “is in the nature of Eastern peoples.”⁴³

Similarly to Vámbéry, Goldziher also lambasts the social oppression of “Eastern despotic slavery,”⁴⁴ which rather than coming to an end, lasted well into Medieval and Modern historical times. He argues that this tendency coincided with other processes: “Major historical forces have extinguished the instinct of vital intellectual fertility in the peoples of Islam, condemning them to live on the memories of their glorious past and slowly fall prey to the relentless pressure from the West.”⁴⁵

These words suggest that it is possible, far from internalizing the “high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth century and early twentieth century European colonialism,”⁴⁶ to recognize the political realities of Western colonialism and to criticize the Orient for its alleged socio-political decline. The latter here does not appear as something inherent, but rather as the result of historical processes.

Later, Goldziher takes account of “the unbridled imagination of the Oriental man.”⁴⁷ He also looks into “the quintessence of Orientalist images,”⁴⁸ i.e., the status of women:

“Islam has such a bad reputation for not respecting women that one would expect that women have no place in such a field of thought and feeling [...]. And indeed, the erroneous view of Islam’s view of women is prevalent when Islam is held responsible for all the abuses that have developed among the people who profess Islam...”⁴⁹

At this point, Goldziher enters into an argument with Algerian-French Orientalist Nicholas Perron, while interpreting the latter’s reasoning about the claimed Oriental “supremacy” of men which, he supposes, takes place everywhere, saying that glory, merit, and prestige are all for men.

43 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 181. “A keleti népek természetében álló vallási fanatizmus.”

44 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 215. “Keleti despoták rabszolgaserege.”

45 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 203–4. “Hatalmas történelmi erők kioltották az iszlám népeiből az eleven szellemi termékenység ösztönét, és arra kárhoztatták őket, hogy dicső múltjuk emlékein élődve lassan-lassan martalékául essenek a nyugat felől reájok nehezedeő kíméletlen nyomásnak.”

46 Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

47 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 229. “A keleti ember fékehangyott fantáziája.”

48 Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*, 108.

49 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 251. “Az iszlámnak oly rossz híre futott a nők tisztületét illetőleg, hogy azt várhatnók, hogy a nőnek a gondolkodás és érzés oly terén [...] semi helye. S valójában, az a hibás ítélet, mely az iszlámnak a nőkre vonatkozó véleményéről általánosan elterjedt, midőn az iszlámot teszik felelőssé mind ama visszaélésekért, melyek az iszlámot valló népek közt kifejlődtek”; “Perron: a férfiaké az elsőség mindenütt; dicsőség, érdem, tekintély - minden a férfiak számára van.”

Despite his negative comments elsewhere, in the same way as a number of later scholars in the region, Goldziher also praises the scientific flourishing typical of the Abbasid era and discusses Muslims of that time period, “who were much superior to Europe,”⁵⁰ also claiming that they paved the way for “European awakening.”

Alois Musil (1868–1944)

Although he evoked some speculations about participating in political missions, Goldziher’s contemporary, Czech Orientalist, explorer and theologian Alois Musil undoubtedly collected huge and valuable scientific material contributing to various disciplines. Nevertheless, in his travel report *Arabia Petraea* he portrays a certain Mahmud who is unable to guide them through the Jordanian terrain from Madaba to Petra, since “his local knowledge only extended to the Kar’a Sihan” and “since he was also involved in blood feuds with a clan from el-Kerak, he had to part us.” Thus, Musil presents the locals’ violence and ignorance. Right after that, similarly to Goldziher earlier experience, he attributes another guide’s claim of knowing the entire country “an oriental meaning” [imorientalischen Sinn] which turns out to be exaggerated, since he loses their way.” Thus, having been misguided by the locals and being vulnerable to their ignorance, they eventually turn back to Madaba for that time being.⁵¹

In a later topographical itinerary entitled *The Northern Hegaz*, he reports that “the transport and accordingly also the Pilgrim Route led east of the oasis of Dajdan [...] disappeared from the historical geographical literature” in accordance with “the rise of Islam.”⁵²

Gyula Germanus (1884–1979)

In his book *Allah akbar!* (1936), Hungarian Orientalist Gyula Germanus, who identified with Islam to the point of converting, despite his own undisguised sympathy, presents critical points about the Muslim East, such as the vehemence and passions of Islamic culture. In this spirit, he refers to the fact that “unbridled outbursts” and massacres are not far from the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent:

“Because the Muslim soul is like the smooth mirror of the sea when it is rippled by the gentle zephyr of pious words, but in the depths it is weighed

50 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 362. “Az Európát igen túlszárnyaló mohamedánok.”

51 Musil, *Arabia Petraea*, 124–25.

52 Musil, *The Northern Hegaz*, 295.

down by the immense water, whipped into a destructive storm by passion. The fury of the angry crowd was like the raging sea.”⁵³

In the context of historical Egypt, he also describes traits of social injustice and oppression typical of the history of the Middle East, in a manner similar to Vámbéry or Goldziher in earlier decades: “With the dissolution of the Caliphate [...] secular princes seized actual power, and the tyranny of the East and the greedy exploitation by officials soon plunged the people back into the material and spiritual misery they had been in.”⁵⁴

In a later chapter covering his discussions with contemporary Egyptian authors, he continues his critique: “In the East, one has always had to serve more masters simultaneously and this polished the Eastern character into becoming smooth and smart. They are born diplomats who, in the guise of apparent naivety, carry a veneer of deliberate cleverness.”⁵⁵

During one such tête-à-tête, his interviewee, Egyptian author Dr. Hejkel claims that “the Arab woman is uneducated and uninterested [...]. The Oriental man”, he continues, “lives a selfish life, and is ignorant of the nobler ambitions of life and love; moreover, the Oriental man lacks sincerity in his external life. His charity is only for selfish ends or vanity [...]. The learned consider studying no more than a means of coercion and do not cultivate themselves.”⁵⁶ At this point, we see both the multidimensional nature of Orientalism and the problematic nature of Said’s ideas unfolding.⁵⁷

53 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 19. “Mert a muszlim lélek olyan, mint a tenger sima tükre, ha ájtatos szavak szelid zefírje fodrozza, de a mélységben nehezedik a víz mérhetetlen súlya, amit a szenvedély romboló viharrá korbácsol fel. A feldühödt tömeg indulata olyan volt, mint a tomboló tenger.”

54 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 135. “A kalifátus felbomlásával azonban világi fejedelmek ragadták magukhoz a tényleges hatalmat, s a keleti zsarnokság és a tisztviselők kizsákmányoló kapzsisága csakhamar visszasüllyesztette a népet abba az anyagi és szellemi nyomorba, ahol azelőtt volt.”

55 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 203. “Keleten mindig több úrnak kellett egyszerre szolgálni, és ez csiszolta a keleti jellemet simulóvá, furfangossá. Született diplomaták, akik a látszólagos külső naivitás köntöse alatt megfontolt okosságot rejtegettek.”

56 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 215–16. “Az arab nő műveletlen és érdeknélküli [...] A keleti férfi – folytatta – önző életet él, és nem ismeri az élet és a szerelem nemesebb becsvágyát; Sőt a keleti ember külső életében is hiányzik az őszinteség. Jótékonyága csak önző célból vagy hiúságból történik [...] A tanultak a tanulást csak kényszerítő eszköznek tekintik, és nem művelődnek.”

57 Oriental societies, in fact, have greatly been criticized by “Oriental” subjects themselves. For instance, Ibn Warraq, an anonymous author claiming to have been born into a Sunni Muslim family, points out that it was merchants of Arab origin from the seventh-century to the 1920s who forced millions of black African slaves across the Saharan desert: Warraq, *Defending the West*, 248.

As Goldziher had noted about the Bedouins, Germanus also reports poor public safety as a feature of the Orient: “On the distant roads of the East, there were not only pious pilgrims, murmuring devotional prayers, but also the servants of Mammon were lurking there, whose steady source of income was the plundering of caravans.”⁵⁸

On his pilgrimage, he also takes account of the premodern way of life of the “Oriental man [who is] still living a semi-nomadic life.”⁵⁹

Again, similarly to Vámbéry, although somewhat more critically, concerning the status of women, he says that “the old segregation has created two worlds in the countries of Islam. The man enjoyed complete freedom, out on the stage of life, while the woman could only work in her house and look after the children.”⁶⁰ In addition to violence, at a certain point, he attributes lechery to the Orient:

“In the lukewarm Egyptian night, the fish market, with its mysterious life, evoked the naughty, adventure-filled, and bloodthirsty tales of One Thousand and One Nights.”⁶¹

Echoing Goldziher and Alois Musil, Germanus describes the Oriental inclination towards exaggeration as follows:

According to the cafeteria statisticians, Mecca is supposed to be the largest city in the world, followed by Medina, but the amount of irregularly collected taxes would suggest that Medina has not had twenty thousand inhabitants, and the whole of Hijaz has no more than three hundred thousand permanent residents. The Oriental man’s excessive imagination is particularly noticeable in tending to give higher than real numbers, if he finds them flattering. This is how the population of a country is overestimated without any census data available.⁶²

58 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 248. “Bizony a Kelet távoli útjain nemcsak jámbor zarándokok lépdelték ájtatos imákat mormolva, hanem azokon ólálkodtak Mammon szolgái is, akiknek a karavánok kirablása állandó keresetforrásuk volt.”

59 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 291. “A keleti ember, aki félig még a nomadizáló életet éli.”

60 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 139. “A régi elkülönülés két világot teremtett az iszlám országaiban. A férfi teljes szabadságot élvezett, kin az élet porondján, az asszony csak a házában szorgoskodhatott és a gyerekek nevelésével törődhetett.”

61 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 139. “A langyos egyiptomi éjszakában a halpiac a maga titokzatos életével az *Ezeregyéjszaka* pajzán, kalandos és vérengző meséit elevenítette fel.”

62 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 35–36. “A kávéházi statisztikusok szerint Mekka a világ legnagyobb városa, utána jön Medina, viszont a rendszertelenül behajtott adózás összegéből arra lehetne következtetni, hogy Medinának nem volt húszezer lakosa, és egész Hidzsában nem lakik állandóan háromszázezer embernél több. A keleti ember képzelő tehetségének túltengése különösen a számok megduzzasztásában tombolja ki magát, ha ez hízeleg neki. Így becsülik magasra az egyes országok lakosságát, anélkül hogy népszámlálási adatok rendelkezésre álltak volna.”

In one of his subsequent books, *In the Crescent's Pale Light* [in Hungarian: *A félhold fakó fényében*], Germanus credits Western education for enlightening the Muslim Orient characterized by despotism: “The Christian French, and later English schools introduced European languages and European ideas, literatures, and institutions to the Muslim East, which had hitherto lived under the feudal order of the Middle Ages.”⁶³

Tadeusz Jan Kowalski (1889–1948)

Polish Orientalist Tadeusz J. Kowalski, expert on Middle Eastern Muslim culture and languages, in the foreword to his *On the Paths of Islam – Sketches from the Cultural History of Muslim Peoples* [Polish: *Na szlakach Islamu – Szkice z Historji Kultury Ludów Muzułmańskich*], reveals that his motivation to discover the “essence of the Muslim culture” rests on the premise that it fundamentally differs “from our Christian culture.”⁶⁴

Kowalski postulates the inherent underdevelopment of the Arabs when encountering other cultures as follows:

“The older, culturally more mature but physically less able peoples succumbed politically to the young barbarians [i.e., the Arabs], full of life force, in order to secretly begin their [those of the latter] cultural conquest.”⁶⁵

Nota bene, here it should be remembered that certain European scholars, such as Kowalski, might well have known or could even have been easily influenced by Western (e.g., the British Victorian era’s) imperialist intellectual premises and depictions of strangeness and exoticism.

Similarly to Ignác Goldziher, Kowalski also takes account of the alleged architectural backwardness of the Arabs:

“One who is aware of the modest architectural traditions the Arabs have brought with them from their homeland, and one who considers that even the most talented people do not create their monumental architecture

63 Germanus, *A félhold fakó fényében*, 108. “A keresztény francia és később az angol iskolák azonban európai nyelvek és európai gondolatok, irodalmak és intézmények ismeretét vezették be a moszlim Keleten, amely addig a középkor feudális rendjében tengette életét.”

64 Kowalski, *Na szlakach islamu*, x. ”Wynik nieustannego obcowania z kulturą muzułmańską i wciąż ponawianych wysiłków celem zdania sobie sprawy, na czempolega jej istota i czem różni się od naszej kultury chrześcijańskiej.”

65 Kowalski, *Na szlakach islamu*, 68. “Starsze, pod względem kultury dojralsze, ale fizycznie mniej sprawne ludy uległy polityczniem łodym barbarzyńcom, pełnym sił życiowych, by w skrytości rozpocząć tern skuteczniej ich kulturalny podbój.”

from one day to another, will never call Muslim architecture Arabic, either in its oldest period during the Omayyads or later.”⁶⁶

At the same time, Kowalski repeatedly praises certain values of the Arabs, inter alia their tolerance demonstrated during the conquest of new peoples and lands, appreciating the “great cultural deed that they did not destroy the culture they found. Endowed with great intelligence and an ability to assimilate foreign achievements in civilization, they began to model themselves on the devices of the peoples they had conquered.”⁶⁷

However, Kowalski stresses their lack of creative imagination:

“The Arabian desert-steppe nature has left an indelible mark on [...] the character of a tough, battle-hardened, sober people, endowed with great intelligence and improbably sharp senses, but devoid of creative imagination.”⁶⁸

Kowalski also attributes dark historical pages to Islam:

“Persia’s internal history during the Omayyad period is one of the darkest pages in Muslim history. We only know that this is a period of the country’s Islamization and the displacement of the old religion; the fiercest turned out to be its former adherents, newly converted to Islam.”⁶⁹

Later, at a certain point, the author holds account of Islam’s potential role in the maintenance of the institution of slavery:

“While recognizing slavery in principle, regulated by detailed provisions of the law on slaves, Islam does not force the peoples with whom the institution of slavery exists to rebuild their social structure.”⁷⁰

66 Kowalski, *Na szlakach islamu*, 70. “Kto zdaje sobie sprawę, jak skromne tradycje architektoniczne wynieśli Arabowie ze swej ojczyzny i zważy, że żaden, nawet najzdolniejszy lud nie stwara swego budownictwa monumentalnego z dziś na jutro, ten nigdy nie nazwie architektury muzułmańskiej arabską, ani w jej najstarszym okresie Omajjadów, ani też później.”

67 Kowalski, *Na szlakach islamu*, 90. “Wielki czyn kulturalny, że kultury, którą zastali, nie zniszczyli. Obdarzeni dużą inteligencją i zdolnością przyswajania sobie obcych zdobyczy cywilizacyjnych, zaczęli się sami wzorować na urządzeniach podbitej przez siebie ludności.”

68 Kowalski, *Na szlakach islamu*, 2. “Toteż arabska pustynno-stepowa przyroda wycisnęła [...] “charakter ludu twardego, zahartowanego w walce o byt, trzeźwego, obdarzonego wielką inteligencją i nieprawdopodobnie bystreimi zmysłami, ale pozbawionego twórczej fantazji.”

69 Kowalski, *Na szlakach islamu*, 73. “Wewnątrz Persji w okresie Omajjadów stanowią jedną z najciemniejszych kart w historii muzułmańskiej. Wiemy tylko, że jest to okres islamizowania kraju i wypierania dawnej religii, której najzartniejszymi tępicielami okazali się dawni jej zwolennicy, świeżona wróceni na islam.”

70 Kowalski, *Na szlakach islamu*, 100. “Uznając w zasadzie niewolnictwo, regulowane dro-

Kowalski's pupil, Ljubljana-born Slovenian–Polish Marijan Molé (1924–1963), an outstanding scholar of Sufi, Middle, and Modern Iranian studies, presents another dimension of Orientalism, when he refers to the criticism on the Muslim East's sociopolitical structures laid out by Oriental intellectuals themselves (cf. the example of Dr. Hejkel mentioned earlier). Accordingly, Iqbal-I Sijistani, a disciple of the Persian Sufi scholar Simnani, quotes the latter assaying “there is much evil in madhhab fanaticism, and excess is not welcome. I thus heard that in the city of Ray there were two groups, Hanafites and Shafites. Because of denominational fanaticism, a war broke out between them, and nearly sixty thousand men were killed there.”⁷¹

Muhammad Asad (1900–1992)

In his autobiography *Road to Mecca*, covering his life from 1900 to 1932, Muhammad Asad expresses his sincere but modest interest in and motivation for travelling:

“If you had asked me what I was thinking then, or what expectations I was carrying with me into this first venture to the East, I could hardly have been able to give a clear answer. Curiosity—perhaps: but it was curiosity which did not take itself very seriously.”⁷²

Just like Goldziher, Asad is also aware of and describes “Occidental” misunderstandings concerning the (Arab) Muslim East:

What did the average European know of the Arabs in those days? Practically nothing. When he came to the Near East he brought with him some romantic and erroneous notions; and if he was well-intentioned and intellectually honest, he had to admit that he had no idea at all about the Arabs. I, too, before I came to Palestine, had never thought of it as an Arab land. I had, of course, vaguely known that ‘some’ Arabs lived there, but I imagined them to be only nomads in desert tents and idyllic oasis dwellers.⁷³ Asad endeavors to grasp the anthropological essence of the Orient, again with a benevolent attitude: “this grace which is nothing but

biazgowemi przepisami prawa o niewolnikach, nie zmusza islam ludów, u których instytucja niewolnictwa istnieje, do przebudowy ich struktury społecznej.”

71 Molé, *Les Kubrawiyya*, 96. “Il y a beaucoup de mal dans le fanatisme des madhhab, et l’excès n’y est pas bienvenu. J’ai entendu ainsi que dans la ville de Ray il y eut deux groupes, des hanafites et des shâfi’ites. A cause du fanatisme confessionnel, une guerre éclata entre eux, et près de soixante mille hommes y furent tués.”

72 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 68–69.

73 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 92.

an expression of the magic consonance between a human being's Self and the world that surrounds him.⁷⁴

In fact, Asad even sees this hypothetical character in jeopardy of Western colonialism and/or modernity:

“We are living in time in which the East can no longer remain passive in the face of the advancing West. A thousand forces—political, social and economic—are hammering at the doors of the Muslim world. Will this world succumb to the pressure of the Western twentieth century and in the process lose not only its own traditional forms but its spiritual roots as well?”⁷⁵

He displays a similar attitude elsewhere:

“I revisited Transjordan and spent some days with Amir Abdullah, reveling in the warm virility of that Beduin land which had not yet been forced to adapt its character to the stream of Western influences.”⁷⁶

On numerous occasions, he discloses his unconcealed attraction to the Orient:

“I was able to see Syria again. Damascus came and went. The Levantine liveliness of Beirut embraced me for a short while soon to be forgotten in the out-of-the-way sleepiness of Syrian Tripoli with its air of silent happiness [...] Everywhere peace and contentment...”⁷⁷

Nevertheless, such “well-intentioned”⁷⁸ but also prudent narrative and awareness of the challenges of colonialism does not stop him from recognizing certain socio-political factors. His Iranian images reflect a corresponding receptiveness:

“No doubt, in every Eastern city poverty lies close to the surface, much more visible than in any European city [...]. As in all Eastern cities, the life of the town was concentrated in the bazaar [...]. If you looked more carefully, you could discover in this bazaar all the colours of the world—but none of these variegated colours could ever quite assert itself in the unifying shadows of the vaults that covered the bazaar and drew everything together into sleepy duskiness.”⁷⁹

When recounting his séjour at a Damascus *liwan*, Asad, just like numerous

74 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 186.

75 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 103–4.

76 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 198.

77 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 198–99.

78 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 92.

79 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 272–73.

authors (for example, Germanus, as we have seen) before him for centuries, attributes lustful behavior to the entire East, projecting a single situation onto the general scene: “She danced, to the accompaniment of a hand drum wielded by the middle-aged man who had entered the *liwan* immediately behind her, one of those traditional, lascivious dances so beloved in the East—dances meant to evoke slumbering desires and to give promise of a breathless fulfillment.”⁸⁰

At another point, he also calls Meccan women to account for a stereotypical feature, as they “did not raise a lament as they so often do in Eastern countries.”⁸¹

Naturally, such “comfortable” generalizations do not mean in any way that Asad is directly, or even indirectly, an agent of Western colonialism in the academic-intellectual space. Rather, he explicitly opposes it, whether in relation to Palestine, British foreign policy in Iraq, or in fear of the social and cultural influence of the West, in a manner similar to Goldziher before him.⁸²

Bedřich Hrozný (1879–1952)

In his posthumous thesis centered on the *Ancient History of Western Asia, India and Crete* (1953), Czech Bedřich Hrozný praises “the oldest known human cultures” on civilizational grounds and for “leading on to the subsequent development of civilized life in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world. We can hardly imagine modern mankind without a knowledge of writing and Christianity, both of which originated in the Orient, that is, Western Asia. But many other links connect our modern civilization with the ancient Oriental cultures, viz. the European arts, science (astronomy), and law which developed from Roman Law; and even in technical and cultural life we meet many elements which are of Oriental origin.”⁸³

Although without explicitly juxtaposing the Orient with Arabo-Islamic features, Hrozný here does in fact acknowledge the “clearness and logical firmness which characterized the later Jewry, Christianity and Islam”⁸⁴ with regard to cosmological concepts.

Thus, in the case of Hrozný, once again, erudition and professionalism are paired with an unbiased attitude.

80 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 131.

81 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 364.

82 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 203–4.

83 Hrozný, *Ancient History*, vii.

84 Hrozný, *Ancient History*, 95.

Discussion

Through a far from exhaustive overview of the work of three Hungarian, three Polish, two Czech and a Galicia-born Orientalist, this paper intends to juxtapose Central European authors with the Saidian paradigm.

It has been widely argued that Said's (monothematic) definition of Orientalism is unable to encompass the variety of Orientalist discourses that have been developed worldwide. The *differentia specifica* of the hegemonic Western variant, arguably, lies in the historical experiences of colonialism, although the corresponding Saidian thesis (1979) has been challenged and provoked remarkable criticism ever since, resulting in a complex array of perspectives.⁸⁵

Even when we use the Saidian framework as a basis for the critique of the Franco-British epistemology, the discourses used by Eastern European Orientalists, in the words of Mihaela Mudure, “demonstrate that their relationship with the Orient has not always been adversarial but has been fluid, varied, and frequently accommodationist.”⁸⁶

As for Central European writers, according to Charles D. Sabatos, they “occupy a middle ground between Western and Eastern European representations of the Turks, since their national identities were developed not only in opposition to Ottoman conquests, but under the direct oppression of the Habsburgs.”⁸⁷ Consequently, apart from subjective motivations, so a rereading of the Saidian argument would go, the lack of national economic and/or military power may also have hindered Central European scholars to harbor dreams of civilizing the Orient for centuries to come and to divert their attention in other directions. However, whether a corresponding geopolitical awareness has been the main factor in allowing them to tendentiously present a fairly unbiased account of the customs and social practices of the Orient, remains a matter of debate.

Obviously, there are significant differences between the historical trajectories of Central European nations.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, we can agree with Charles D. Sabatos

85 For example, Warraq, *Defending the West*; Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*.

86 Mudure, “Eastern European Orientalisms,” 342–43.

87 Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*, xiii.

88 It is true that the experience of these “small nations along the borderlines of Ottoman expansionism gives them a unique perspective on the question of European and Islamic cultural relations”, as “for centuries, with their military strength and Islamic faith, the Ottoman Turks represented the greatest threat to European Christian identity” (Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*, xiii, xix). The author of this argument, Charles D. Sabatos, however, goes on to state that “despite their shared experiences of captivity and conquest, the relationships of these Central European nations to the Ottoman Empire (i.e., a direct political representative of the Orient) differ significantly. The Hungarian perception”, so the argument goes, “is one of direct struggle and oppression, and the Czech image of the Turks is that of the Oriental ‘Other,’ while the Slovaks,

that the perspective of Central European nations was marginalized in relation to larger European societies.⁸⁹ In addition, even without claiming ‘a’ Central European trend, one recognizes similar traits spanning across the region, such as devotion, professionalism in the sense of a claim for objectivity, attested by narration, and last but not least, a lack of direct political attachment to imperialist agendas.⁹⁰ According to Sarah Lemmen,⁹¹ patterns arise of specific modes of “orientalizing” the Orient, which occurred outside of any direct colonial power relations.

This does not mean that there is ‘a’ Central European perspective on the multifaceted Orient *per se*, or that these authors’ goodwill, undisguised sympathy or sometimes even positive bias towards the Muslim East hindered them to formulate strong criticisms.

Central European Orientalist authors, all of them dedicating their entire life to studying various aspects of languages, cultures, societies etc. of the Muslim East (some, such as Asad and Germanus, even converted to Islam) however, at some points of their scrutiny do occasionally report patterns of violence, abuses of power and despotism, servility, gender discrimination, social backwardness (not necessarily typical of Muslim, but rather of Bedouin Arab societies), religious fanaticism,

dominated politically and culturally by Ottomans, Austrians, Hungarians, and Czechs, are the furthest removed from the ‘position of strength’” (Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*,: xix; 24). As Heiss and Feuchtinger point out, in the course of history, Hungary became able to understand both East and West and to be understood by both. According to [Benjamin von] Kállay, Hungary’s “in-between” position qualified it to head the mediatory (or civilizing) mission to the Orient “close to home.” (Heiss and Feuchtinger, *Distant Neighbors*, 158).

It is also true and noteworthy, that “many authors have pointed out that the imperialist or colonialist ambitions of Eastern or East Central Europe seem to go against the grain, because countries in this region are regarded as having been often “colonized” whilst they rarely or never held any colonies” (Ginelli, *Global Colonialism*, 1).

Nevertheless, later historical developments, such as the Austro–Hungarian *Ausgleich*, resulted in a new and more differentiated geopolitical landscape (Ginelli, *Global Colonialism*, 2) points out that “the Austro–Hungarian Empire has been repeatedly seen as not fitting the dominant narrative of global colonial history: its colonial trajectories have been conceptualized as a type of [...] ‘informal’ imperialism in general”. For the ontological limits of such premises, see: Ginelli: *Global Colonialism*.

Identification of further ‘external’ nuances (i.e., differentiation between Central and Eastern European frames of references and internal ones) can be grasped in detail on the basis of contributions by Charles D. Sabatos or Mihaela Mudure. *Vis-a-vis* the political realities of later time periods, Sabatos states that “the Slovaks, Czechs, Hungarians, and other nations moved from the ethnic conflicts of the late Habsburg Empire through the nationalist development of the interwar period, and into an ideologically different form of ‘imperial’ domination under Communist rule.”

89 Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism*, xix.

90 Obviously, Vámbéry’s case (see Chapter No. 2) remains open for further discussion.

91 Lemmen, “Noncolonial Orientalism,” 209–27.

excessive imagination, ignorance, unreliability, lechery, a lack of architectural skills, and tolerance of slavery.

On the one hand, based on the discourse analysis presented, we may venture to argue that if Said's thesis is taken for granted, it is still possible to exonerate Central European scholars from accusations of serving (Western) colonialism. On the same grounds, it is also possible to criticize Said's premises as such altogether, or to introduce a *via media*, presenting a nuanced case vis-a-vis Orientalism and its regional particularities.

This study applies theoretical approaches to literary history to a range of texts from the early modern period uncompromised by the historical experience of modern colonialism, ranging from the nineteenth century of national revivals, the interbellum period onto the early communist and post-socialist regime. By tracking these depictions across national literature and over an extensive historical period, this study illustrates how a multifaceted critique with scientific pretensions rose to the "Orient" in Central European literature.

Conclusion

Muhammad Asad (né: Leopold Weiss) recalls one of his early travels in the interbellum period, reflecting a sincere and benevolent attitude towards the Orient as follows: "For almost two years I trekked through countries old in the wisdom of their traditions but eternally fresh in their effect on my mind."⁹²

Polish Tadeusz Kowalski expresses his wish that once the social and scientific environment allows, "we can hope to catch up with the nations where Eastern studies have long been developing successfully, and perhaps even to rise to prominence in certain fields."⁹³

Hungarian Ignác Goldziher reports on exaggeration as a characteristic of the Orient: "The people [...] in the East often indulge in excesses."⁹⁴

The first of these quotations reflects a sincere and benevolent attitude towards the Orient, the second demonstrates a high level of scientific rigor, while the third critically acknowledges an either alleged or real, but stereotypical feature of Oriental societies.⁹⁵

92 Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 198.

93 Kowalski, *Na szlakach islamu*, 98. "Można mieć nadzieję, że szybkimi krokami zdołamy nadążyć za narodami, u których wschodoznawstwo rozwijało się oddawna w pomyślnych warunkach, a może nawet wybić się w pewnych działach na naczelne miejsce."

94 Goldziher, *Az iszlám*, 387. "A nép [mely] keleten gyakorta tetszeleg túlzásokban."

95 Germanus, *Allah akbar*, 331–32; Said, *Orientalism*, 191. One may add that such subjectivity

It appears that the scholarly achievements of Central European authors are anchored between these qualities. This paper intended to shed light on modern Central European scholars' interactions with the East, arguing that such focal points may differ from the Western Orientalist approach critiqued from several points of view by Said (1979). One of them is that critique is possible without being attached to colonial agendas.

In summary, it appears that either Said's thesis does not fully stand, or it does only in the context of (certain) Western European authors. In either case, we encounter the realities of Orientalisms, rather than a singular Orientalism.

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may also hold for the entire Orientalist corpus, regardless of geocultural factors, altogether, as Hungarian Gyula Germanus claims regarding earlier discursive currents, and also to Said himself.

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