

Response to Margaret Olin's review of *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*

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First of all it is an honor to have received such a careful and on the whole favorable review of my *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race and Scholarship* (2009) in this journal, and from the keyboard of Margaret Olin. I read Peg Olin's dissertation on Riegl (later published *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (1992) as a grad student at the University of Chicago; it was what sparked my interest in the Austrian School of art history; together with her book on the image of Jewish art (*The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses about 'Jewish Art'* [2001]), her work continues to set the gold standard for studies in art historiography. I am also very pleased that Olin thinks my book has utility for others involved in this field and that I have a little space in this review to offer a little more food for thought on the subject of the study of oriental art in the German-speaking world. I also want to issue a couple of mea culpas and ask some more questions about where we are now in the orientalism debate, questions directed at least as much to myself as to Olin and our readers.

First the mea culpas. I did not know that Riegl had actually gone to Egypt and I am interested to know that he did, and that he missed going to Jordan, too, because of ill-health. One wonders what he might have seen and written had he not died at the young age of 47; his nemesis, Josef Strzygowski, lived to be 79, dying only in 1941 and having produced many more books that Riegl might have corrected or refuted with his expertise and his generally much more liberal outlook (though I concede that he, like his contemporaries, surely did have his prejudices against 'orientals'). Riegl might have helped develop a non-racist study of oriental art, something Strzygowski certainly did not do. But, as abhorrent as Strzygowski's racial theories are, we should not dismiss the enormous influence he exerted on scholars in western Europe and in the non-western world. It turns out that he had quite a following in Turkey and in India, as well as in Central Europe and Scandinavia. I have written two essays on this subject which I hope will appear sometime in the near future and may provide those interested in 'orientalist' art historiography a bit more detail than the book was able to offer.

Another sin of omission I willingly own up to is my failure to deal with visual aspects of German orientalism. To be truthful, I was not at all sure that I could do this subject—another large and diverse one, with a long and complicated history as well as diverse sub-components—justice. New and interesting work is

being done here,¹ but there remains a great deal of legwork to be done on the subjects of oriental design, museum exhibitions, orientalizing painting, book illustrations, travelogues, advertisements, and consumer goods. I wrote one essay a few years ago in which I did a little of this analysis, and I am currently writing a paper about Georg Ebers's fascinating illustrated travelogue, *Ägypten in Bild und Wort* (1889-90), but there is much, much more here to do. I opted not to illustrate *German Orientalism* because I couldn't find interesting enough images to spread through the chapters, most of which deal with visually uninteresting philologists and theologians. Had I done so, I think I could have demonstrated that some of my more general claims about German oriental studies hold here too: scholars and educated readers were chiefly interested in the ancient rather than the modern Orient; religion was central to Germans' conception of the world-historical importance of Asian cultures; the Old Testament continued to shape what the Germans found interesting in the East; the esoteric (and Masonic) interest in 'oriental wisdom' lasted a very long time; some non-westerners, and non-western innovations, were heavily imitated, though credit was not always given for their contributions or inspiration; Germans associated the Orient with luxury goods and rich, colorful design, and some found it a deeper and richer source of inspiration than what came to be called, at the fin de siècle, 'plaster cast classicism.' But others with greater knowledge of the visual record will have to work through these claims and let us know if indeed they hold.

There is one aspect of the visual as well as scholarly record, archaeology, about which I know most. I wrote a great deal about German classical and 'oriental' archaeology in my first book, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970* (1996), so I left much of this out of *German Orientalism*. There have been numerous publications since,² and in Berlin this summer I discovered a grand exhibition of the Tell Halaf finds of Max Freiherr von Oppenheim at the Pergamon Museum.³ There was also a small exhibit (without artifacts) across Unter den Linden in the old Bishops' Palace, about Karl Richard Lepsius's travels in Ethiopia and the Sudan. Though the exhibit was interesting, it might have mentioned that the University of Halle library has put all of Lepsius's *Denkmäler aus*

¹ I will cite here just three new items that didn't make my footnotes: Andrea Bärnreuther and Klaus-Peter Schuster, *Zum Lob der Sammler: Die Staatliche Museen zu Berlin und ihre Sammler* (2009); Andrea Lerner and Avinoam Shalem, *After One Hundred Years: The 1910 Exhibition 'Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst' Reconsidered* (1910), and the excellent book about advertising and exoticism by David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (2011).

² To list just a few: Ann C. Gunter and Stefan R. Hauser, eds., *Ernst Herzfeld and the Development of Near Eastern Studies, 1900-1950* (2005); Charlotte Trümpler, ed., *Das grosse Spiel: Archäologie und Politik zur Zeit des Kolonialismus (1860-1940)* (2010); Olaf Mattes, *James Simon: Mäzen in wilhelminischen Zeitalter* (2000)

³ I must say that the Pergamon Museum vastly underplayed his political activities and also failed to mention how little the curators of that museum cared about Oppenheim's finds when they were originally made, something they could have learned from *German Orientalism*.

Aegypten und Aethiopien online, accessible at: <http://edoc3.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/lepsiuss> . I recommend the site to all interested in the history of archaeology or in orientalist image-making. Many of the colored lithographs in this collection are stunningly beautiful and of both historical and artistic interest. In any event, I think that the history of German archaeology, too, is only just now finding its historians, and that we have more to do here, especially to understand the local politics and culture surrounding the sites.

One site that Lepsius did not visit, but which deserves more intensive study is that of Dura Europos, a fascinating late Hellenistic Jewish site in what is today Syria which, to the amazement of the excavators, did contain representative images. I mentioned the site in *German Orientalism*, and in another essay cited there; but again I feel I could have done a much better job of covering the subject. This brings me to Olin's more general point about my failure to do justice to studies of Jewish art and its historiography. It is true that these subjects don't get extensive coverage in my book. One of the flaws of my method, which is generally speaking to focus on German institutions and the individuals who ran them, is that Jews and especially Jewish amateurs often do not get sufficient coverage; although Jews were able to attend university after the Napoleonic Wars, they were largely barred from higher-level posts in the academy. Thus I did not have much to say about Jewish philological *Orientalistik*, which often went on in private or religious circles. I did, however, write about the various means by which post-biblical Jewish studies was sidelined by the humanist-educated Protestant elite, and I cited the work of scholars such as Ismar Schorsch, Susannah Heschel, and Martin Kramer, who have already written wonderfully about this subject, and are continuing to till this rich and interesting field. Their work will, I hope, make up for some of the deficiencies of my book.

On this subject, too, I want to recontextualize a phrase to which Olin rightly takes exception: "realists adopted the Semites; the dreamers the Aryans" (321). What I was trying to do here was to understand how different sort of what one might call elective affinities drew scholars into the study of either 'Aryan' languages or 'Semitic' ones. I wanted to show how empathetic interest in the ancient Israelites waned in the later nineteenth century as German orientalists moved away from theology and toward a more secularized study of eastern languages. By calling those who gravitated toward Persian or Sanskrit 'dreamers' I wanted to suggest a deep-seated neoromantic tendency in this field, one that often carried with it a racist presumption about the 'purity' of the Aryans and insisted on an affective identification between ancient Aryans and modern Germans. Those (non-Jews) who threw themselves into the study of Semitic cultures after about 1880, on the other hand, tended to be what I called 'realists,' men without much affective interest in their subjects, but instead interested in making themselves relevant in the current political world. I did not mean to say that Jews (or Arabs and Turks) could not be dreamers, or romantics; in fact, I tried to show this was at least partly true of Ignaz

Goldziher, to whom I devoted a half-chapter. Georg Ebers, the Egyptologist to whom I referred above, was certainly a romantic—though he also belonged to an earlier generation (his dates are (1837- 98), in which there were still plenty of Christian Judeophiles. I was trying, clumsily, to say something about wider cultural inclinations here; but I should surely have phrased this differently.

Finally I want to say something about the ever-present elephant, Edward Said. In writing the book I got conflicting advice; some people said, don't even mention him; his work is irrelevant to your project. Others said, you need to go into much more detail here, and offer a grand-scale critique. I opted to err on the side of omission and only have a few sentences about *Orientalism* in my introduction—though these have been the most quoted sentences in book reviews so far, and I have recently been accused of having made an 'unfounded' and unfair attack on Said for 'deck-stacking' (though I quoted his own words admitting that many readers would find his omission of German scholarship deeply problematical). My reason for not taking on Said more fully was first of all, my sense of indebtedness; Said opened this field to a whole generation, or two by now, of scholarship, including my own. Secondly, I think some of his analysis still useful for understanding why so many nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europeans and Americans wanted to draw a line between 'the Orient' and 'us' (though of course different Europeans drew that line through different territories). His ideas are especially useful if we do away with his blanket generalizations about binary discourses and recognize that there always have been and hopefully always will be, iconoclasts within and beyond Europe, who can think beyond their birthplaces and ethnic makeups. I suppose the question is, can we still get critical purchase on imperialism and on cultural prejudices if we do away with the blanket generalizations and with the presumption that we are structured at some deep level by discursive binaries? I would hope so, but I am a bit worried that so few reviews of my book to date have even mentioned by long chapter on orientalism and imperialism, before and during the Great War. I wonder if by emphasizing iconoclasts and the diverse political and religious pursuits of my subjects I have somehow undermined the force of this critique? Can we restore the forest, without losing sight of the trees?

Another thing that I hoped would come through more clearly in my book is indeed an anti-Saidian point, and that is the agency of non-Europeans, who seem to me to have steered European scholarship at some points in interesting and important ways (as in the case of the Sinologist Richard Wilhelm, profiled in my chapter 10). This is not to say that European prejudice is any less a serious subject, but simply to break up Saidian binaries and to make the story, again, a more global one. Here I felt I could only do so much, as I do not read Turkish, Chinese or Bengali, but I would very much welcome more work on this aspect of German

orientalism.⁴ In writing this book I have to say that I often felt as if I were trying to map an archipelago of differently-sized islands, some of them already deforested and well-tilled, and others boasting vegetation I couldn't identify and peoples whose language I failed to understand. If visitors before me had surveyed some of the routes between the islands, there also seemed to be numerous uncharted waters full of rich life, the variety and quantity of which I had no idea. I am quite sure that my angles of vision did not allow me to see all of the islands, much less understand all of the indigenous inhabitants, but I tried to link each 'island' (whether a person or a discipline or an institution) to the others in the neighboring regions in ways that made sense to me, and that avoided doing violence to the particularities of each entity. (Perhaps this is the wrong metaphor entirely; some of these 'islands' are rather more like interlocking communities.) In any event, German orientalism, it seems to me, remains best studied in this way, without the pretense that it is reducible to a single discourse or perhaps even plotable on a single map. I hope that my book will provoke others to test these waters, on the visual and the non-visual components of German orientalism we surely have much more surveying to do.

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⁴ Again, there is highly interesting work underway here, of which I will cite only Kris Manjappa's just published "From Imperial to International Horizons: A Hermeneutic Study of Bengali Modernism" in *Modern Intellectual History* 8; 2, 2011, 327-59.