

Ernst Cohn-Wiener (1882-1941) and his contribution on Islamic Art and Architecture in Central Asia¹

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The art historian Ernst Cohn-Wiener (also Ernst Cohn) is known by several scholarly contributions, not only on the history of Islamic art and architecture, but also on Jewish art², and the arts of Europe and Asia in general.³ His life, however, still has a lot of blind spots, and only one portrait of him has been published so far.⁴ Most of the information comes from his unpublished curriculum vitae kept in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, written in 1939 or 1940, i.e. shortly before his death in 1941.⁵

Born as a German citizen of Jewish religion in the city of Tilsit in 1882, a city belonging to (East) Prussia in those days (nowadays in Russian Kaliningrad, not far from the border to Latvia), he studied history of art, archaeology and philosophy at the universities of Berlin and Heidelberg from 1902 to 1906, attending lectures and seminars of the some of the most famous professors in those disciplines such as Adolph Goldschmidt (1863-1944), Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945), Arthur Haseloff (1872-1955), Reinhard Kekule von Stradonitz (1839-1911), Ulrich von Willamowitz-Moellendorf (1848-1931), and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) to mention a few only. In 1907 he obtained his PhD (DPhil) at Heidelberg University, where he had submitted

¹ While residing in Abu Dhabi and being cut off from libraries and archives (including my own material) in Berlin, to write this article would have been not possible without Dr. Jens Kröger (former chief curator and deputy director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin), who commented extensively on an earlier version of this paper, and (long time ago) made available the unpublished curriculum vitae of Ernst Cohn-Wiener kept in the archives of the Museum of Islamic Art. My warm thanks go to my wife Patricia Hübner-Gierlichs for her support checking publications and 'reading with my eyes' documents kept at the Politische Archiv (PA) of the Auswärtige Amt (Political Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

² See the new edition (1996) by Hannelore Künzl of Ernst Cohn-Wiener, *Die Jüdische Kunst: ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Neuauflage der Ausg. Berlin 1929, Frankfurt am Main.

³ See

<https://portal.dnb.de/opac.htm?method=simpleSearch&cqlMode=true&query=nid%3D123242231> (accessed 4 February 2023)

⁴ See the article on the website *Das Bild des Orients*, online <https://das-bild-des-orientis.info/8-forschungsthemen/islamische-kunsthistoriker/31-cohn-wiener> (accessed 24 July 2022).

⁵ See now also Ulrike Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch deutschsprachiger Kunsthistoriker im Exil: Leben und Werk der unter dem Nationalsozialismus verfolgten und vertriebenen Wissenschaftler*, Teil 1: A-K, Berlin-Boston: K.G. Saur, 2011, 101-104 (Ernst Cohn-Wiener) who might have used the same source.

his dissertation on the medieval Bruchsal Codex the year before (written under the direction of Heinrich Thode).⁶

For more than ten years his studies focused on European medieval art, mainly topics related to Germany and France, and reflected in his writings during this period. His interest changed however in the early 1920s, when he turned to 'Oriental Art', and, as a result, he published an overview on *Arts and Crafts of the East* in 1923.⁷ 'In 1924 and 1925, I went on two research expeditions through Western Turkestan accompanied by my wife. As I had expected, they resulted in the discovery of a great number of so far unknown monuments and art works of the greatest importance for the History of Islamic Art.'⁸ In 1930 and 1932 he travelled the Palestine, Syria and Egypt; about these research trips unfortunately no further details are known.⁹

By the early 1930s, the political situation in Germany had changed dramatically. The rise of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) and the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor in 1933 exposed in the coming years increasing numbers of people, especially Jews to intimidation, persecution and/or imprisonment.

In June 1933, as a result of the new laws (so-called 'Rassegesetze' [Racist Laws]) imposed by the then ruling NSDAP, Ernst Cohn-Wiener (being Jewish) lost immediately his position as lecturer (Dozent) he held since 1908 at the Humboldt University in Berlin¹⁰, and was subsequently not allowed to lecture or to publish in Germany any longer. Friedrich Sarre (1865-1945), director of the Islamische Abteilung of the Royal later Prussian Museums in Berlin from 1905 to 1931, when Ernst Kühnel (1882-1964) took over, wrote a reference in August 1933 in which he praised Ernst Cohn-Wiener's merits in the fields of Islamic art and architecture, especially through his publications, lectures and guided tours through the museum in order to support him: 'As far as my field of work, the Art of the Near East, is

⁶ *Über den Codex Bruchsal I der Karlsruher Hof- u. Landesbibliothek und eine ihm verwandte Handschrift*. Heidelberg, 1906, [published] Karlsruhe: Lang, 1907. This title is surprisingly not mentioned under his publications listed at the Deutsche National Bibliothek (DNB). See 'Cohn-Wiener, Ernst' in *Dictionary of Art Historians*, online at <https://arthistorians.info/cohnwiener> (accessed 19.2.2023).

⁷ Ernst Cohn-Wiener, *Das Kunstgewerbe des Ostens. Ägypten, Vorderasien, Islam, China und Japan Geschichte, Stile, Technik*. Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1923.

⁸ Quoted after his (unpublished) curriculum vitae, kept in the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin.

⁹ This information has been taken from the article in the *Dictionary of Art Historians*. As far as I can see no publication (article etc.) grew out of these trips.

¹⁰ According to the article in the *Dictionary of Art Historians* (see reference above), he taught art history at the Humboldt University, and 'in 1919 he advanced to head of the art history department, eventually, 1926, becoming chair of the faculty', while Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 101-102 mentions a 'Hochschule' (a major 'Volkshochschule'); and with reference to Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch* '... worked as an art historian at the *Jüdische Volkshochschule* and the Humboldt Academy in Berlin.', see <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/cohn-wiener-ernst>.

concerned, his publications and above all his excellent lectures and museum tours have contributed to conveying this art field to wider circles.¹¹

In the same year Ernst Cohn-Wiener decided to emigrate with his wife to England, where they could stay as guests of (Sir) Herbert Louis Samuel, 1st Viscount Samuel (1870-1963).¹² With his help the Cohn-Wieners left England in 1934 for India¹³, where the Maharaja of Baroda had offered Ernst Cohn-Wiener a post as curator of the State Picture Gallery.¹⁴ During the next five years he travelled extensively through India and got acquainted with Indian art and civilisation. At least three publications grew out of this period.¹⁵ After his position had been cancelled in 1939 and due to health problems, he left India with his wife, this time for New York, USA. There, he could lecture at the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology recently set up by Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1969).¹⁶

Only two years later Ernst Cohn-Wiener died in New York in 1941, aged just fifty-nine. Richard Ettinghausen (1906-1979), a major, influential figure in Islamic art and architecture, who left Berlin in 1934 as well¹⁷, wrote an obituary on Ernst Cohn-Wiener, emphasising that '...he tried to branch out into new fields even in the most difficult times [...] and [he] died as a victim, even martyr, of a sad era.'¹⁸

¹¹ Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 101-103. Quote: 'Was mein Arbeitsgebiet, die Kunst des Vorderen Orients betrifft, so haben seine Veröffentlichungen und vor allem auch seine ausgezeichneten Vorträge und Museums-Führungen dazu beigetragen, dieses Kunstgebiet weiteren Kreisen zu vermitteln.'

¹² British liberal politician, 'the first nominally-practicing Jew to serve as a Cabinet minister', promoting Zionism within the British Cabinet. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Samuel,_1st_Viscount_Samuel (accessed 18.3.2023).

¹³ Whether Ernst Cohn-Wiener considered to emigrate to Palestine (and if, why he decided against this option) given his background and the connection to Herbert Samuel who had been appointed the first High Commissioner for Palestine in 1920, are interesting questions which cannot be answered so far.

¹⁴ Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 101-103.

¹⁵ See Ernst Cohn-Wiener, 'The Origin of Persian Carpet Patterns, *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, 11, 1937, see also Cohn-Wiener, 'Persian Architecture in Central Asia, in Arthur Upham Pope, ed., *Survey of Persian Art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938, see also Ernst Cohn-Wiener, 'The Lady under the Tree', *Parnassus*, 11:6, 1939, 24-49.

¹⁶ For A.U. Pope see Yuka Kadoi, ed., *Arthur Upham Pope and a New Survey of Persian Art*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016, with different contributions by numerous authors.

¹⁷ For R. Ettinghausen, see the entry in the 'Dictionary of Art Historians' <https://arthistorians.info/ettinghausen> (accessed 19.2.2023).

¹⁸ Richard Ettinghausen, 'Ernst Cohn-Wiener, 1882-1941', *Ars Islamica*, 9, 1942, 239.

Expeditions in Central Asia

Together with his wife Gemma¹⁹ Ernst Cohn-Wiener undertook two surveys in West Turkestan (a part of what is known as Central Asia nowadays)²⁰, from April to September in 1924 and from June to October in 1925. The 'Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft' (today DFG = Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [German Research Foundation]) and the German Ministry of Culture and Sciences funded these expeditions as well as the cultural department of the German foreign office. In the RSFSR (Soviet Union) he was supported by different institutions such as the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad, offices of Narkompros in Moscow and by the Turkomstaris (Turkestan commission of ancient art, later called Sredaskomstaris).



Photograph of Ernst Cohn-Wiener and his wife (sitting in front at right), taken in Central Asia during his expeditions in 1924 or 1925. Courtesy of Ruslan Muradov, Ashgabat, who discovered it with descendants of a Russian researcher who worked together with Cohn-Wiener in Central Asia.

¹⁹ His wife, Gemma (living dates not known), was a (film) actress in the 1910s and 1920s), see Deutsche National Bibliothek (DNB). It is not known when they married. In the Wikipedia entry on Ernst Cohn-Wiener it is mentioned that he married Eva-Margarete Brasch (*1891) in 1921, but the link to a private family website doesn't provide any further information or proof for this claim. See https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Cohn-Wiener

²⁰ He travelled through parts of the modern states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan.

Ernst Cohn-Wiener was in direct contact with Russian colleagues²¹, especially with Professor B.P. (Boris Petrovich) Denike (1885-1941)²² in Moscow, but he worked also together with Vladimir L. Viatkin (also Vyatkin, 1869-1932)²³ and M.B.N. Kastalski²⁴ in Samarkand and Netschin, Umjakow and Semenow (A.A. Semenov)²⁵ in Tashkent. Unfortunately, no letters, notes or diaries from his expeditions, which most likely must have existed, have come to light so far.

I explored and photographed not only the old buildings at Bokhara and Samarkand, but also those in lesser-known places of historical importance, such as Shahrishabs [sic] (Tamerlan's native place), Merv, Anau, Uskend, Kassan etc., which flourished in the middle-ages. My publication Turan. *Islamische Baukunst in Mittelasien* published in Berlin 1930 is recognized as a fundamental work. It is the only publication in existence dealing with the monuments of that Islamic country.²⁶

After returning from his first expedition in 1924, which led him to the site of Merv in today Turkmenistan, he wrote *The Ruins of the Seljuk City of Merv and the Mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar (Die Ruinen der Seldschukenstadt von Merw und das Mausoleum Sultan Sandschars)*, published in the second volume of the *Jahrbuch für Asiatische Kunst*, a special volume (*Festschrift*) devoted to Friedrich Sarre on occasion of his 65th birthday in 1925.²⁷ In this article he provided a detailed insight into the mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar with a very thoroughly description of the whole building, paying special attention to the decoration and stylistic questions. Even at this (early) time he was fully aware of the importance of 'historical' photographic material using an earlier photograph provided to him by Friedrich Sarre²⁸ which

²¹ The following names were mentioned by Cohn-Wiener in his publication *Turan*, 5. Some are well known, for others even pre-names or living dates were not easy to find.

²² See <https://www.nli.org.il/en/a-topic/987007306676205171> and <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-nr00007660/>.

²³ Information about some of his activities can be found here <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/excavations-iii>. See also Svetlana Gorshenina, *The Private Collections of Russian Turkestan in the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Century*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004, passim.

²⁴ B.N. Kastalski or Kastalsky, an *ingenieur oberst*, who discovered the Mihrab at Misriyan, see Samuel Flury, 'Le Décor épigraphique des monuments fatimides du Caire', in *Syria*, 17, 365–376, is apart from being an explorer ('archaeologist'), an important collector, whose collection became part of major museums in Samarkand, St. Petersburg and Moscow. Further information on him can be found in Gorshenina, *The Private Collections of Russian Turkestan*, 2004, passim.

²⁵ Of the three only Semenow is mentioned in Gorshenina, *The Private Collections of Russian Turkestan*, 2004, passim.

²⁶ Quoted after his (unpublished) curriculum vitae, kept in the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin.

²⁷ Ernst Cohn-Wiener, 'Die Ruinen der Seldschukenstadt von Merw und das Mausoleum Sultan Sandschars', *Jahrbuch der asiatischen Kunst*, 2, 1925, 114–122.

²⁸ See Cohn-Wiener, 'Mausoleum Sultan Sandschar', pl. 81, fig. 3.

had not been published in his *Denkmäler Persischer Baukunst* (1901-10).²⁹ If compared with the photographs taken by Cohn-Wiener in 1924 we recognise the extensive restoration work, which has been carried out in the meantime. The earlier photograph is not dated, and the caption says only 'in the possession of Prof. Sarre', not 'photograph by F. Sarre', so it has not been taken by himself. While Friedrich Sarre included a visit to Merv during his fourth large expedition (of Persia and Central Asia) undertaken in 1899, he did not publish any photographic material from the site of Merv in his *Denkmäler Persischer Baukunst*. Friedrich Sarre might have acquired this photo (as he eventually did for his scholarly publications) or might have obtained it from befriended colleagues. Here at first photographer, traveller and 'Privatgelehrte' Hermann Burchardt (1857–1909)³⁰ comes to mind, who not only travelled to Central Asia and visited Merv at an early period, but is also well known for generously allowing other scholars to use his photographs in their publications. At least two photographs from his large collection of glass negatives³¹ – a view on the buildings in the citadel of Merv³² and a general view of the Sultan Sanjar mausoleum – document buildings at the site of Merv, and were presumably taken around 1905. But if the image had been taken by Hermann Burchardt, Friedrich Sarre would have credited him for sure. In fact, it turned out that this photograph has been taken by the Russian V.Z. Zhukhovsky in 1894 and was published in the same year.³³

Ernst Cohn-Wiener made an important remark regarding the mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar, shedding some light on the (modern) history of that unique building. In his publication *Turan* he shortly mentioned that the dome of the mausoleum had been restored by W.R. Tripolski³⁴; and in the caption of the plate it is mentioned precisely: 'The building has been restored by W.R. Tripolski in 1911.'³⁵ The

²⁹ See Friedrich Sarre, *Denkmäler Persischer Baukunst*, Berlin: Wasmuth, 1901-10. On Friedrich Sarre's travels in Persia and Central Asia see Joachim Gierlichs, 'Philipp Walter Schulz and Friedrich Sarre: Two German Pioneers in the Development of Persian Art Studies', in Yuka Kadoi and Ivan Szanto, eds, *The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, 213-226.

³⁰ For H. Burchardt, who travelled extensively in the Near and Middle East from 1893 onwards until he was murdered in Yemen in 1909 during his expedition there, see Annegret Nippa, *Lesen in alten Photographien aus Baalbek [Photographien von Hermann Burchardt]*, Zürich: Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich, 1994.

³¹ The collection is kept in the department Western Asia and North Africa of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin.

³² This view shows most probably a ruined building of the post Medieval citadel similar to one photo taken by Zukhovsky in 1890; see Georgina Hermann, *Monuments of Merv*, London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1999, fig. 23.

³³ Zhukhovsky 1894, 122, fig.4. (used in Georgina Hermann, Helen Coffey, Stuart Laidlaw, Kakamurad Kurbansakhatov, *The Monuments of Merv: A Scanned Archive of Photographs and Plans*, Barnsley: Oxbow Books, 2002, 20). This information has been thankfully made available by J. Kröger.

³⁴ See Ernst Cohn-Wiener, *Turan: Islamische Baukunst in Mittelasien*, Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 1930, 15.

³⁵ See Cohn-Wiener, *Turan*, 34.

references listed by E. Cohn-Wiener do not mention W.R. Tripolski, meaning he may not have published his work but may have left a documentation or an 'internal report' that would be of great interest to scholars as well as those involved in the building's restoration. W.R. Tripolski is also not mentioned in Georgina Hermann's publication on the monuments of Merv in 1998³⁶ neither in the chapter *Travellers and scholars* nor in the 'Bibliography', in which the important article of Ernst Cohn-Wiener on the Sultan Sanjar mausoleum of 1925 is missing, too. In her short account of the early research on Merv she only mentions that the Imperial Murghab Estate undertook repairs on the southern wall of Sanjar's mausoleum in 1914, without any reference to the rebuilding of the upper part of the dome of the mausoleum in 1911. In a second publication by Hermann and others on Merv in 2002 some or all of this information might have been included.³⁷

The images published by Cohn-Wiener on one of the plates³⁸ are of great importance: the historical photograph (by V.Z. Zhukhovsky in 1894) from Sarre's collection³⁹ documents the building and the dome before the restoration work carried out in 1911, while the photos taken by Cohn-Wiener himself in 1924⁴⁰ show the huge dome – the largest dome (c. 18 m wide) of an Islamic medieval building before surpassed by the dome of the Ahmed Yasavi complex in Yasi (now Turkestan, Kazakhstan) at the end of the fourteenth century – already rebuilt, and the large gaps in the walls had been filled, especially the south wall had been repaired.

The final scholarly outcome of his extensive surveys in Central Asia was the aforementioned volume *Turan* published in 1930, in which he offered the first systematic overview on the Islamic architecture in Turkestan during the mediaeval period. The work was well illustrated with more than eighty-five black and white plates of very good quality introducing in addition to the better-known buildings in Bukhara and Samarkand also many less known ones in more remote places such as Anau and Merv in Turkmenistan, Kassan (Kasan) in the Ferghana Valley (Uzbekistan), or Uzgent and Osh in Kyrgyzstan. The publication was well received by the scholarly community at the time as several positive reviews by Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell, Heinrich Schmidt and Friedrich Sarre clearly demonstrate.⁴¹

Even after many decades, Ernst Cohn-Wiener's ground-breaking contributions to Central Asian medieval buildings remain often the main historical visual source and are therefore of eminent importance. A good example is the

³⁶ Hermann, *Monuments of Merv*, passim.

³⁷ Hermann, Coffey, Laidlaw, Kurbansakhatov, *The Monuments of Merv*, passim. This publication has not been accessible to the author.

³⁸ Cohn-Wiener 'Mausoleum Sultan Sandschar', pl. 81, fig. 3-5.

³⁹ Cohn-Wiener 'Mausoleum Sultan Sandschar', pl. 81, fig. 3.

⁴⁰ Cohn-Wiener 'Mausoleum Sultan Sandschar', pl. 81, fig. 4-5.

⁴¹ See Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell, 'Review of 'Turan' (1930)', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 3:39, 1930, 319-320; Heinrich Schmidt, 'Review of 'Turan' (1930)', *Deutsche Literaturzeitschrift*, 1931, Sp. 1560-1667; Friedrich Sarre, 'Review of 'Turan' (1930)', *Zeitschrift der Deutsch Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 86, 1933, 214-218.

mausoleum of Buland Fazl in Kyrgyzstan, whose extraordinary Qarakhanid stucco decoration is the topic of a recent research project.⁴² The project depends heavily on the above mentioned publication as well as on Cohn-Wiener's short, but important article *A Turanic Monument of the Twelfth Century AD* which deals exclusively with this monument.⁴³ Another example are the monumental wooden doors at the entrance of the Ahmet Yasavi Complex (1394-95) in Turkestan (former Yasi, Kazakhstan), documented by Ernst Cohn-Wiener in 1924 when still in situ.⁴⁴

Ernst Cohn-Wiener was not only interested in the medieval architecture of Turkestan, but he was also a very precise observer of the political conditions 'in the region'. They were subject to permanent change since the Russian October Revolution of 1917, when in the following years a gradual transformation of the former khanates into the new Soviet republics took place.

He reported from Central Asia for the *Berliner Tageblatt* ('Sonderkorrespondent'), and one of his 'reports' (published 12.1.1925) had the title *Im Zuge zwischen Stadt Turkestan und dem Aralsee*.⁴⁵

When back in Berlin, Ernst Cohn-Wiener sent typewritten reports to Geheimrat [privy councillor] A. von Dirksen, counsellor at the Foreign Office in Berlin, who had supported E. Cohn-Wiener's expeditions to Central Asia.⁴⁶ They shed more light on how the two surveys were planned and carried out, and provide the travel route (itinerary) and the dates on how long the couple stayed in the different places, and, last but not least, they also tell about the difficulties Ernst Cohn-Wiener and his wife faced while travelling these vast and still underdeveloped areas.

In the first report, dated 26 February 1926, he precisely analysed the political, social and economic situation in Turkestan based on his observations made in 1924 and 1925, describing the changes and new developments initiated by the Soviet government. It also assessed the strength of the 'Basmachi' movement (local Islamic resistance), which were a huge threat to the Bolsheviki from 1918-1922, but lost most

⁴² Presented by Richard McClary and Ahmad Yengimolki at the conference on *Stucco in the Architecture of Iranian and the Neighbouring Lands: New Research - New Horizons*, held at Bamberg University in May 2022.

⁴³ Ernst Cohn-Wiener, 'A Turanic Monument of the Twelfth Century AD', *Ars Islamica*, 6, 1939, 88-91.

⁴⁴ See Cohn-Wiener, *Turan*, 43, pl. LX; for detailed information of the doors see the entry in 'Woodwork of the Timurid Period', online database https://omeka.ulb.uni-bonn.de/s/woodwork_of_timurid_period/item-set/2609#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-39%2C-82%2C776%2C1187 (accessed 18 March 2023).

⁴⁵ A copy is kept in the file RZ 208/86392 of the Political Archives of the Foreign Ministry.

⁴⁶ This material is kept in the Political Archives at the Foreign Ministry (File RZ 208/86392). My thanks go to Annegret Wilke of the Political Archives for her support to identify and to pre-order the relevant file in order to be consulted in the reading room of the archive by my wife. The article in the *Berliner Tagblatt* and the file (old number quoted) in the Political Archives had been mentioned in Franziska Torma, *Turkestan-Expeditionen. Zur Kulturgeschichte deutscher Forschungsreisen nach Mittelasien (1890-1930)*. Transcript-Verlag, Bielefeld, 2011, 177.

of its power afterwards, and turned more or less into criminal gangs ('Banden'), a term used by Cohn-Wiener. Reading the report, it becomes very clear that Ernst Cohn-Wiener was in favour of the new government and foresaw quite a positive development for the region of Turkestan. In addition to this, Ernst Cohn-Wiener took a clear stand against various claims made in a recently published newspaper article without mentioning the author's or the newspaper's name (a copy of which he returned by mail to v. Dircksen).

That Cohn-Wiener's information and assessment was considered important to the German Foreign Office becomes clear by the fact that the German embassy in Moscow (Hauschild, pre-name not readable) prepared a detailed summary of a verbal report given by Ernst Cohn-Wiener in Moscow in October 1924⁴⁷ (on the way back to Berlin) which then was also sent to Geheimrat [privy councillor] von Blücher at the German embassy in Stockholm.⁴⁸

While his first report dealt with political issues, his second report, dated 27 July 1926, focused on the scholarly results of his travels, giving a detailed itinerary and mentioning the buildings visited during the expedition, often with initial information about the name, date and some distinctive features of the monument. When in 1924 some areas of Turkestan could not be visited due to the lack of safety (areas controlled by Basmatchi troops) and bad weather conditions (heavy rain), the political and safety situation had largely improved in the next year. The nine-page report closed with a summarised list of 554 black and white negatives taken at the different sites, or buildings, respectively in 1925. During the shorter first expedition (in 1924) 277 black and white negatives were taken (not listed here), so in total Ernst Cohn-Wiener and his wife managed to take 831 images during their two expeditions in West Turkestan (see also photo collection).

Cohn-Wiener's photo collection

Ernst Cohn-Wiener left behind a substantial collection of photographs taken on his two expeditions in West Turkestan in 1924 and 1925 (see above). 'The British Museum acquired the Ernst Cohns-Wiener Photographic Archive from the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London in 1998 where it had been kept as part of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*. The archive consists of 324 film negatives and 567 glass negatives. The photographs are essential for the study of architecture in the historic cities of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as some of the buildings photographed are no longer extant, while

⁴⁷ Provably to Ulrich Graf von Brockdorff-Rantzau (1869-1928), former first foreign minister of the Weimar Republic in 1918-1919, who served as German ambassador in Moscow since 1922.

⁴⁸ Wipert von Blücher (1883-1963) who served as 'Gesandtschaftsrat' at the German embassy in Stockholm since 1922, see [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wipert_von_Bl%C3%BCcher_\(Diplomat\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wipert_von_Bl%C3%BCcher_(Diplomat)). Von Blücher had been very interested in the Turkestan development in the past (due to a remark by the sender of the report).

others were over-restored during the Soviet era. Nearly 700 of these photographs are available on Archnet.⁴⁹

In a recently discovered report (see above) written by himself he listed in total 831 black and white negatives taken during their travels in Turkestan.⁵⁰ In addition to these negatives from Central Asia he documented and photographed Islamic buildings in India during his stay in Baroda from 1934 to 1939; the whereabouts of those negatives or prints are not known nowadays.⁵¹

Another convolute of photographs are kept in the photo collection of the Berlin Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin-West. They were donated by Ernst Cohn-Wiener's widow Gemma after World War II when Johanna Zick-Nissen (1919-2001) was the curator of the museum.⁵²

The ceramic collection from Central Asia in the Museum of Islamic Art

Ernst Cohn-Wiener collected some dozen Islamic ceramic objects during his surveys in Central Asia in 1924 and 1925. 'The objects collected during those travels are kept in the Islamic Department of the Berlin State Museum. They are so numerous that they fill one cupboard and four shoe cases.'⁵³

In 1925 they were inventoried in the Islamic Department under the numbers I. 4672 - I. 4821.⁵⁴ The handwritten inventory mentions: 'Durch die Vermittlung von Dr. E. Cohn-Wiener in Westturkestan erworben' [Through the mediation of Dr. E. Cohn-Wiener acquired in West Turkestan].

The collection contains of ceramics plates, jugs and bowls from the Samanid period (c. tenth century) produced most probably in Afrasiab/ Samarkand in today's Uzbekistan. They were already in 1925 very briefly mentioned by Friedrich Sarre in an annual overview regarding new acquisitions of the Islamic Department⁵⁵ as well as by Ernst Kühnel (1882-1964) in his *Islamische Kleinkunst* published in the same year.⁵⁶ A much more detailed description and analysis of some of these objects has

⁴⁹ See <https://archnet.org/collections/9/details> (accessed 24 July 2022)

⁵⁰ Mentioned at the end of the second report (27 July 1926) sent to Geheimrat [privy councillor] A. Dirksen at the Foreign Office in Berlin, who had supported Ernst Cohn-Wiener's travel to Turkestan. File RZ 208/86392 (Political Archives, Foreign Ministry).

⁵¹ In 'Cohn-Wiener, Ernst' in *Dictionary of Art Historians*, online at <https://arthistorians.info/cohnwiener> (accessed 19.2.2023) a total number of 3500 photographs ('Central Asia and other countries') is mentioned, but no further information is provided.

⁵² The exact year is not known, information kindly provided by Jens Kröger.

⁵³ Quoted after his (unpublished) curriculum vitae, kept in the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin.

⁵⁴ In contrast to the practice in other museums, where the names of donors or other people involved often appear in the inventory number, this is not the case in the Islamic Department in Berlin.

⁵⁵ Friedrich Sarre, 'Keramische Neuerwerbungen der Islamischen Abteilung', *Berliner Museen: Berichte aus den preußischen Kunstsammlungen*, 46, H.1, Berlin: G. Grottesche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1925, 5.

⁵⁶ Ernst Kühnel, *Islamische Kleinkunst*, Berlin: R.C. Schmidt & Co. 1925, 87.

been provided by Kurt Erdmann (1901-1964) in his article *Die Keramik von Afrasiab*, published in 1942.⁵⁷ He wrote without giving any credits to Ernst Cohn-Wiener: '1925 gelang es, in Samarkand eine Gruppe von sechzehn Gefäßen zu erwerben, die, wie ein Zufall einige Jahre später ergab, dort vor der bolschewistischen Revolution größtenteils in der Sammlung des Arztes Dr. A. Wassilief waren, der die Stücke von einheimischen Händlern in Scherben erworben und später selber zusammengesetzt hat. Nur eines dieser Gefäße ist bisher veröffentlicht (Pantheon 3, 1929, 282-87 Abb.3)' [In 1925 it was possible to acquire a group of sixteen vessels in Samarkand, which, as coincidence revealed a few years later, were mostly in the collection of the physician Dr. A. Wassilief, who bought the fragments from local dealers and later put them together himself. Only one of these vessels has been published so far (Pantheon 3, 1929, 282-87 Fig.3)].⁵⁸

The reasons for not mentioning Ernst Cohn-Wiener's name in connection with the acquisition cannot be determined with certainty. Kurt Erdmann may not have been aware that this collection of ceramics from Central Asia (Samanid period) had been acquired through the intermediary of E. Cohn-Wiener.⁵⁹ This is not a convincing explanation, given Kurt Erdmann's very precise way of working, as he had easy access to the handwritten inventory books of the Islamic Department in Berlin. All the more so, since the Samanid ceramic collection in Berlin served as the starting point for his considerations, paying otherwise much attention to the way, how, and from, whom the objects were acquired in Turkestan and came into the Berlin collection. The (only) person who is largely to be thanked for 'bringing' this collection to the museum, Ernst Cohn-Wiener on his travels in Turkestan, is not mentioned. It seems to me that the non-naming in 1942 (at the peak of the Nazi power in Germany and one year after Ernst Cohn-Wiener had died in exile in New York) was not accidental but rather intentional, presumably because of his Jewish origins and the fact that he had to leave Germany, when the so-called 'Rassegesetze' were introduced in 1933.

After World War II and the split of the collection of the Islamic Department into 'Museum of Islamic Art' in Berlin-West (Dahlem) and 'Islamisches Museum' in Berlin-East (Pergamon-Museum) three pieces of the collection (I.4681, I.4691, I.4674) were included in the descriptive catalogue of the new permanent exhibition in Berlin-Dahlem,⁶⁰ again with no reference to Ernst Cohn-Wiener, instead only the general term 'Kunsthandel 1925/26' [art market 1925/26] was used. The same was the case a decade later, when on occasion of a temporary exhibition showing objects from the Museum of Islamic Art at Schloss Cappenberg in West Germany one

⁵⁷ Kurt Erdmann, 'Die Keramik von Afrasiab', *Berliner Museen: Berichte aus den preußischen Kunstsammlungen*, 63, Berlin: G. Grottesche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1942, 18-28.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4238054>

⁵⁸ I owe this information to Jens Kröger. The publication was not available to the author, but the article is probably by Kurt Erdmann, too.

⁵⁹ This has been suggested by Jens Kröger, when commenting on the text.

⁶⁰ See Klaus Brisch et. al, *Museum für Islamische Kunst*, Berlin: Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 1979, cat. nos. 231, 248, 249.

Samanid bowl (I. 4677) was displayed and included in the catalogue.⁶¹ Again, the reasons for this are not clear, but at that time of the publications in 1979 and in 1986 the information that these Samanid ceramics was closely associated with Ernst Cohn-Wiener was possibly forgotten - F. Sarre, E. Kühnel and K. Erdmann had passed away - and was no longer available, because the handwritten inventory books remained after 1945 in the Islamisches Museum in East-Berlin, to which - at least officially - no relationship to the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin Dahlem existed.

Ernst Cohn-Wiener's collecting activities

While the exact circumstances under which Ernst Cohn-Wiener found and acquired the Samanid ceramics in Central Asia (for the Islamic department) are not known, the situation is not better with regard to his private collecting activities, about which we have only sparse, scattered references.

At least a couple of objects have been donated by Ernst Cohn-Wiener and his wife Gemma to the Islamic Department which indicates that they had most probably a collection, about whose size and scope we know nothing more precise.

On occasion of Friedrich Sarre's sixtieth birthday in 1925, E. Cohn-Wiener presented to him a seventeenth-century Persian cup with silver and gold inlays from Turkestan, which most probably belonged to his collection, and might have been collected during his first Turkestan trip in 1924.⁶² Transferred by Friedrich Sarre to the museum, it entered the collection of the Islamic Department under the inv. no. I 4662.⁶³ Whether other objects were donated by Ernst Cohn-Wiener (and his wife) before they had to leave Germany in 1933 is unknown.

Another indication that a collection could have existed comes from a remark in the *Berliner Museen* in 1959, in which the following items were briefly mentioned as donated by Ernst and Gemma Cohn-Wiener: A carpet fragment [Teppichfragment], a bowl with a special spout [Träufelschale], a bronze oil lamp [Bronzeöllampe] and two mirrors [zwei Spiegel].⁶⁴ None of the objects were illustrated, and no further description, provenance or date was given. By combing through the handwritten inventory books, it might be possible or even likely to identify these and perhaps even other objects, a task to be done in the future.

⁶¹ Almut von Gladiss, *Islamische Kunst - Verborgene Schätze*, Berlin: Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 1986, cat. no. 37.

⁶² 'Der Sarre seit Jahren verbundene Kunsthistoriker Dr. Ernst Cohn-Wiener schenkte ihm einen kleinen persischen Becher ... aus Westturkestan aus dem 17. Jh.' [The art historian Dr. Ernst Cohn-Wiener who has been associated with Sarre for years, gave him a small Persian cup ... from West Turkestan from the seventeenth century] translation by the author, see footnote 646 in Cella-Margaretha Girardet, *Jüdische Mäzene für die Preußischen Museen zu Berlin*, Egelsbach [u.a.]: Hänsel-Hohenhausen, 2000, 127.

⁶³ Information provided by Jens Kröger.

⁶⁴ Neuerwerbungen, in *Berliner Museen: Berichte aus den preußischen Kunstsammlungen, Neue Folge*, Berlin 9, 1959, 27.

Epilogue

There is no question that the National Socialist restrictions, exclusions and persecutions that caused Ernst Cohn-Wiener and his wife to leave Germany in 1933 first for England, from there to India and finally to the USA, led to an uprooting that he ultimately could not overcome. He had not only to leave his homeland behind, but also had to write in English, a language he did not like and which he probably did not speak and write well either.⁶⁵ So, Ernst Cohn-Wiener stands as an example for a fate so many German scholars and scientists had to cope with in the period from 1933 to 1945, and partly even beyond.

Publications by Ernst Cohn-Wiener (selected, and with a focus on Islamic art and architecture)

[dissertation:] *Über den Codex Bruchsal I der Karlsruher Hof- u. Landesbibliothek und eine ihm verwandte Handschrift*. Heidelberg, 1906, [published] Karlsruhe: Lang, 1907

Cohn-Wiener, E., 1925 *Das Kunstgewerbe des Ostens: Ägypten, Vorderasien, Islam, China u. Japan. Geschichte, Stile, Technik* (1923)

Cohn-Wiener, E., 1925. 'Die Ruinen der Seldschukenstadt von Merw und das Mausoleum Sultan Sandschars', *Jahrbuch der asiatischen Kunst* 2, 114–122.

Cohn-Wiener, E., 1929a. *Asia. Einführung in die Kunstwelt des Ostens. Indien - China - Japan - Islam*. Mit 120 Abbildungen. Rudolf Mosse, Berlin.

Cohn-Wiener, E., 1929b. *Die Jüdische Kunst. Ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart.*, 1st ed. Wasservogel, Berlin

Cohn-Wiener, E., 1930. *Turan: Islamische Baukunst in Mittelasien*. Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, Berlin.

Cohn-Wiener, E., 1937. *Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery*. Travelling report for the time of February - April 1936 with an introduction by Sir V. T. Krishnamachari, Kt., C. I. E., Dewan of Baroda State. Baroda: Baroda State Press.

<https://doi.org/10.11588/DIGLIT.53064>

Cohn-Wiener, E., 1938. 'Miniatures of a Razm Nameh from Akbar's Time', *Indian Art and Letters* 12, 90-92.

Cohn-Wiener, E., 1939a. 'A Turanic Monument of the twelfth century A.D.', *Ars Islamica* 6, 88–91.

Cohn-Wiener, E., 1939b. 'The Lady under the Tree', *Parnassus* 2, 24-49?

⁶⁵ See the remark by Walter W. S. Cook "Cohn's book, *Turan*, was for a long time the only work on Islamic architecture in Central Asia. However, he spoke poor English and his scholarship fell, like that of his mentor, Thode, more in the category of a popular lecturer. He [was] not an outstanding authority in the field of Oriental art..." quoted in the article 'Cohn-Wiener, Ernst' in the Dictionary of Art Historians, on-line <https://arthistorians.info/cohnwiener> (accessed 16 March 2023).

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His research interests range from the architectural decoration of the Anatolian Seljuks to woodwork from the Timurid period in Iran and Central Asia to Islamic art historiography.

In spring 2021, the research project "Timurid woodwork" resulted in an extensive online publication (database), which is supported and hosted by the ULB Bonn https://omeka.ulb.uni-bonn.de/s/woodwork_of_Timurid_period/page/welcome

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