

FELIX KÖRNER*

ISLAMIC THEOLOGIANS STUDYING OTHER RELIGIONS TEST CASE TURKEY

SUMMARY: The article examines Religious Studies on non-Islamic traditions, conducted by Muslim theologians in Turkey. Which factors led to such a field of research within the Theological Faculties? According to the discipline's foundational events and documents, the launch of such studies had no apologetic agenda. The intention was, rather, to bring Islamic theology to a level comparable to Christian theology "in the West". The study also introduces both the field's founding figures and some of its remarkable proponents and problems today.

Turkey has a lively scene of Islamic theology¹. Of course, such an affirmation is problematic; after all, what counts as theology? Here is a proposal. An academic endeavor should be called 'Islamic theology', if its proponents are to some degree identified with Islam and at the same time involved in critical dialogue with other disciplines such as philology, philosophy, and history². Is such an understanding of theology a western framing? No, or at least not only. Two glimpses into times passed may be illuminating here. For one, the lands of Islam have been an area of intense exchange, including scholarly discourses. No western impulse was needed to make ideas and people cross the boarders of academic disciplines, and of geographical distances³. Secondly, when looking at modern Turkey, the call to adopt a western (sic!)

* Felix Körner, SJ (* 1963 in Offenbach, Germany) holds the Nicolaus-Cusanus-Chair for Theology of Religions at Berlin's Humboldt-Universität. He is a scholar of Islam with a focus on Contemporary Turkish University Theology (www.felixkoerner.de).

¹ F. Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology. Rethinking Islam*, Ergon, Würzburg 2005, 48-62.

² Cfr. also, F. Körner, "Islamic University Theology. A Critical Interlocutor in the German-Speaking World", in S. Laurs, I. Proft und M. Schulze (ed.), *Gott für die Welt. Festschrift für George Augustin*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2021, 585-601.

³ Cfr., H. Gätje (ed.), *Grundriß der Arabischen Philologie*. Vol. 2, *Literaturwissenschaft*, Reichert, Wiesbaden 1987; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*. 6 vols., de Gruyter, Berlin 1991-1997; S. Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016.

understanding of theology was no colonial imposition – at least, not directly. It came from inside. Let us hear that call first and then see what prepared it⁴.

The Ankara Agenda

In 1949, Ankara saw the birth of a Theological Faculty⁵. The Faculty encountered immediate resistance in Turkey. Traditionalists lamented subordination to the government, while secularists wanted to see religion confined to the private realm.

Even the Faculty's name reflects this: İlahiyat Fakültesi. The designation *ilâhiyyât* appears in many classical works of Islamic religious reflection; it may refer to theological treatises: 'metaphysics', 'doctrine of God', or 'speculative theology'. But Arabic does not use the word as an umbrella term for the whole discipline of 'theology', covering Tafsîr, Hādîth, Fiqh etc. When the concept was used to designate the whole of theology in Turkish, it marked a new agenda. The foundation, in 1949, explicitly wanted to avoid extremes. Neither did the founders have in mind another school of sharia (*kulliyat al-şarī'a*) in a closed-in *madrassa* atmosphere, nor a mere philosophical, let alone exclusively sociological reflection on religion. Their intention was, rather, explicitly "Garptaki [!] örneklerine benzer bir ilâhiyat fakültesinin kurulmasını – to establish a Theological Faculty similar to models in the West [!]"⁶; a Divinity School just like a "Katolik Fakültesi, Protestan Fakültesi". That meant, it needed to be "ilmî": scholarly, scientific; and what is "scientific" theology? The pedagogue and writer İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu (d. 1978) explicated in parliament: "Faculties, because they are houses of science, strive for comparison, empirical knowledge, and eventually, if possible, for explanation. So, as much as the first is subjective, the second is objective. This is the government's notable will: to create a faculty of – in the full sense of the word – scientific dignity, of scientific character"⁷.

⁴ In the following two sections, I am re-using material about to appear in my "Modern Qur'ānic Hermeneutics in Turkey", in G. Tamer (ed.), *Handbook of Qur'ānic Hermeneutics*, de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, forthcoming.

⁵ I am here using 'Faculty' not in the (U.S.) sense of "academic staff" but in the (Turkish etc.) sense of 'semi-autonomous division of a university, run by a dean and entitled to convey academic degrees', *kulliyat* in Arabic. So, 'Theological Faculty' would be, in many English-speaking academic traditions, 'a university's divinity college or school'.

⁶ İsmail (İsmayıl) Hakkı Baltacıoğlu in Turkish Parliament on June 4, 1949: *T.B.M.M. Tutanak Dergisi*, Dönem: VIII, Cilt: 20, Toplantı: 3, 101. Birleşim (4. VI. 1949), 279: <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d08/c020/tbmm08020101.pdf> (last accessed 26 February, 2022). Baltacıoğlu was in this very sentence quoting the justification (gerekeçe) of the bill that proposed the foundation of an "İslâm İlahiyatı Fakültesi", as he called it (p. 278). Baltacıoğlu himself published several titles in the field of religion; most notably, an article "Towards Religion", in which he argues that religion is not only the source of social institutions but also lives within these institutions, and life is therefore as impossible without religion as it is without blood: "Dine Doğru", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 6 (1957) 44-59.

⁷ "Fakülteler, ilim evleri olduğundan, bunlar mukayeseye, müşahadeye ve en sonunda da, mümkün olursa, izaha çalışmaktadırlar. Yani birinci sübjektif olduğu kadar, ikincisi objektiftir. O halde Hükümetin

The project sounds impressive; but before asking what has become of it, we need to see what lead up to it.

Fashioning a Faculty

In 1847, the Ottoman Ministry of Education was established. It immediately launched an immense reform project: a European type of educational system was meant to replace the traditional Islamic medrese. In 1900, a Department of Theology (*'ulūm-i 'ālīye-i dīnīye šu'besi*) was created at the University (*Dār ül-fünun*, Istanbul). In 1910, a twelve-year pre-university course of theology was established. It included only traditional subjects and text books; but there was one exception: in the seventh grade, “modern physics” (*hikmet-i cedīde*) was to be studied. In 1914, the university department was replaced with a specialists' school at Istanbul's Süleymāniyye Mosque. The school consisted of the three traditional departments: Tefsīr and Ḥadīṭ; Fiqh; Kelām and Ḥikmet. The latter department covered the classically philosophical disciplines from cosmology to ethics. A law from 1917 added a fourth department, namely, Literature.

In 1923, the Republic of Turkey was founded. Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) was the key figure in the process, a process aptly called a cultural revolution⁸. He epitomized his project programmatically in the claim, “We will turn ourselves into the most modern nation”. Consequently, all medreses were subordinated to the Ministry of Education. The effect was: they were closed down.

A few months after the foundation of the Republic, in 1924, the Great National Assembly (in Ankara) made three decisions relevant to our topic. (1) The caliphate was abolished. (2) The foundation of İmām Ḥatīb Mektepleri was decreed: schools for prayer leaders and Friday preachers. Soon, Turkey saw twenty-nine such schools. The Istanbul school's director had an “enthusiastic belief in the possibilities of reforming Islam to become a vital and inspiring force in the life of new Turkey”. But with a continuous decline in attendance, by 1932 all İmām Ḥatīb (from 1928 on, spelled “İmam Hatip”) schools were closed. The only surviving, indeed thriving, type of junior theological education was the *dār ül-qurrā'* (school for Koran recitation). (3) The establishment of a Faculty of Theology at the University (of Istanbul) was decided upon. It was to be structured according to “modern scientific principles”. But its students' numbers were decreasing rapidly, together with those of the İmam Hatip schools.

In 1929, a decree by the Ministry of Education abolished Arabic and Persian classes from the high school curriculum. Subsequently, knowledge of these languages was no longer a prerequisite for admission to the Faculty of Theology. In 1933 and 1934, laws regulated a reform of the University. The Faculty of Theology was turned

şayanı dikkat olan isteği şudur; bütün mânasiyle ilim haysiyeti ve ilim karakteri taşıyan bir fakülte meydana getirmekdir”.

⁸ M. Reinkowski, *Geschichte der Türkei. Von Atatürk bis zur Gegenwart*, C.H. Beck, München 2021, 136-141.

into the “Institute of Islam Researches” (Islâm Tedkikleri Enstitüsü) and was now considered a department of the Literature Faculty’s Oriental Institute.

In 1938, Atatürk died. In 1947, Turkey became a multi-party democracy; and the wind changed. The weather became more favourable to theology. Now, concerns could be mentioned that would have been considered reactionary under Atatürk⁹. The demand for better training of Islamic religious staff was voiced. Private seminaries were opened, but students had to graduate from a secular school before being admitted to them. Less than a year later, however, parliamentarians demanded a re-opening of state-run preachers schools. The atmosphere was heated. Two contemporary voices illustrate the argument and the tensions: “We have to save from extinction, or rather, to train anew, a generation of religious staff, both knowledgeable and patriotic” (M. Tuncer); and: “Not in the least shall we verge from the principle of laicism. Religion however is not only the bond between the individual and God. It is also a social fact, a matter of the community. In the countryside, there are often no more religious representatives (*hocalar*) to bury the dead. If we do not educate religious staff, superstition will prevail. Already, we hear about heavenly letters passing from hand to hand. Religious fanaticism is bad. But fanatic irreligion does not match with our tolerant society, either. It was not in order to ban Islam from Turkey that we accepted the principle of laicism. Against the Soviet advance, we have to utilize the force of the Islamic Belt, stretching from Java to the Atlantic Ocean” (Cihat Baban).

Subsequently, in 1948, the People’s Party decided to establish a Faculty of Islamic Theology in Ankara; and in 1949, the Great National Assembly issued the relevant law. The Minister of Education, Hasan Tahsin Banguoğlu (a famous philologist, d. 1989), seemed to have felt that Kemalist ideologists might denounce such a move as falling back behind enlightenment. That must have been why Banguoğlu demanded that the Faculty should counter reactionary movements: “It is a torch which the fabulists flee like bats”. Already during those foundational discussions, Banguoğlu suggested three courageous modernizations: alongside teachers from the former Istanbul Faculty, lecturers from other Islamic countries should be employed, e.g., from Pakistan – in addition to Arabic and Persian, European languages should be taught – and on top of the classical canon of disciplines, the Faculty should offer courses in psychology, sociology, and: in general and comparative religious studies!

A Discipline in Development

The Ankara Theology became a model for other Faculties to be founded throughout the country. By 2005, two dozens such institutions were established. Since then, things have changed in many ways. Until the early years of the Third Millennium,

⁹ Cfr., G. Jäschke, “Der Islam in der neuen Türkei. Eine rechtsgeschichtliche Untersuchung”, *Die Welt des Islams* N.S. 1 (1951) 1-174; corrections and additions: *ibid.*, 2 (1953) 278-287; H.A. Reed, “The Faculty of Divinity at Ankara. Part I”, *The Muslim World* 46 (1956) 295-312; Idem, “The Faculty of Divinity at Ankara. Part II”, *The Muslim World* 47 (1957) 22-35.

there was fear in the secular camps that Islam might grow beyond state control into radical, or at least anti-Kemalist, movements. Under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, perspectives shifted. One might present the shift as a double transposition of fear. The fear now dictating the state's action was, first, that secularist views might hinder the thriving of the country's religious life. So, also "private" universities were allowed to open their Theological Faculties. İlahiyat Fakülteleri started mushrooming. To this day, one can count exactly 120 universities with institutes of Divinity, be they called "Theological" or "Islamic Studies" Faculties¹⁰. Such a multiplication might have been welcomed; but the enormous number was bound to reduce academic research. Why? Because much more time went into teaching and administration now; and well-trained staff is scarce. The number of quality publications in many areas of theology dropped. Later, the fear shifted again. The conservative regime almost paranoically started sensing enemies within the Turkish society. Conversely, the population – and especially academics – began to feel – and sometimes even to fulfil – the authorities' expectation of a political correctness *à la* Erdoğan. Presently, Turkish academic life is lacking one of its key pre-conditions, viz., freedom of thought; anyway, university activities are going on.

The aim of the present study is to evaluate Religious Studies on non-Islamic traditions, conducted by Muslim theologians in Turkey¹¹. For that, it may be helpful to first see where the subject is allocated within the academic setup of the country's Theological Faculties. The subjects of theology are divided into three large sections: Basic Islamic Studies (*Qur'ân, Hadît, and Kalâm*) – Philosophy and Religious Studies – Islamic History and Arts. Research on other religious traditions is called "History of Religions (Dinler Tarihi)" and is situated within the section "Philosophy and Religious Studies (Felsefe ve Din Bilimleri)".

Since the Turkish capital hosts the oldest Theology in the modern setup, a focus on Ankara Üniversitesi may be helpful. Where does the History of Religions department of Ankara İlahiyat contextualize itself¹²? In its self-description, the Department traces its

¹⁰ <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr> (last accessed March 1, 2022).

¹¹ G. Atasağun, "Türkiye'de dinler tarihi çalışmaları", *Selçuk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 20 (2005) 203-248 ["Studies in history of religions in Turkey", *Journal of Selçuk University's Theological Faculty*]. C. Batuk, "Türkiye'de dinler tarihi çalışmalarının tarihsel seyri", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 9 (2009) 71-97 ["The historic(al) path of studies in history of religions in Turkey", *Journal of academic research in religious studies*]. Cfr. the three articles in *Türkiye'de dinler tarihi. Dünü, Bugünü ve Geleceği [History of religions in Turkey. Yesterday, today, tomorrow]* (Dinler tarihi araştırmaları, vol. 7), Ankara (Türkiye Dinler Tarihi Derneği Yayınları) 2010: Ö.F. Harman, "Bir disiplin olarak dinler tarihinin ortaya çıkışı (doğu-batı)", 23-48. ["The origin of history of religions as a discipline"]; M.A. Küçük, "Türkiye'de dinler tarihi'nin kurumsallaşması ve Prof. Dr. Abdurrahman Küçük", 478-496. ["The institutionalisation of history of religions in Turkey and Abdurrahman Küçük"]; A. Küçük, "Tanzimattan günümüze Türkiye'de >dinler tarihi<", 333-364. [">History of religions< in Turkey from the Tanzimat era (i.e., mid 19th century) till today"].

¹² Cfr. <http://www.divinity.ankara.edu.tr/dinler-tarihi/> (last accessed 26 February, 2022). The section's other departments are: Logic, History of Philosophy, Islamic Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Sociology

origins from the 1847 educational reforms mentioned above. Within Istanbul's *Dār ülfünun* literature programme, non-Islamic religions were in fact studied, but under two surprising headings. In "universal history", and under the title of *Din-i Esatir'il-Evvelin*. Universal history might be too generic to give sufficient space to religious dynamics; and the second title means, "the religion of *asāṭir al-awwālīn*". In the Qur'an, these Arabic words refer to the "forefathers' myths" (83:13 etc.): some critical interlocutors of Muḥammad refer to such narratives in order to discredit his proclamation: it is, they say, nothing more than unoriginal and unconvincing tales. So, that designation reflected a markedly Qur'anic and indeed derogatory perspective.

By contrast, that is not the Ankara approach, and has not thus been from the start. One may verify this in light of six former historians of religion there. Already the Department's first professor, Hilmi Ömer Budda (d. 1952), studied phenomena that had not even come into the Qur'an's perspective, especially, religiosity in China¹³. The second lecturer there was Mehmet Karasan (d. 1974), whose expertise was in classical European philosophy¹⁴. In 1954, an internationally renowned scholar of Islam and phenomenology of religion, came from Germany to teach history of religions (in Turkish!), namely Annemarie Schimmel (d. 2003)¹⁵. She stayed in Ankara till 1959. Hikmet Tanyu (d. 1992) specialized in the history of religion in (what is today) Turkey focussing on pre-Qur'anic and Jewish religiosity¹⁶. Günay Tümer (d. 1995) studied Jehova's Witnesses¹⁷, and Mehmet Aydın (* 1942) published a book on "Christianity according to Christian Sources"¹⁸.

Perceptions and Perspectives

The tradition of studying other religions in light of their own texts is standard among the historians of religions at Turkish Divinity Faculties. In order to show some

of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Religious Education. Before the 1982 Faculty reform, "History of Religions" was part of an academic division called "Group of Complementary Sciences".

¹³ C. Kutlutürk, "Hilmi Ömer Budda'nın dinler tarihi disiplinine katkısı", *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 19/36 (2017) 139-167 ["Hilmi Ömer Budda's contribution to the discipline of History of Religions"].

¹⁴ M. Karasan, *Eflatun'un Devlet Görüşü*, İstanbul (Millî Eğitim Basımevi) ²1964 (¹1947) ["Plato's vision of the State"].

¹⁵ Schimmel's *Dinler Tarihine Giriş* ["Introduction to the History of Religions"] of 1955 was reprinted in 2016! Cfr. also, K. Albayrak, "Dinler Tarihiçisi Annemarie Schimmel'in Anısına", *Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 2/1 (2002) 81-90 ["In memory of the Historian of Religions Annemarie Schimmel"].

¹⁶ H. Tanyu, *İslâmlıktan Önce Türkler'de Tek Tanrı İnancı*, Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi, Ankara 1980. ["Monotheism among pre-Islamic Turks"]; Idem, *Tarih Boyunca Yahudiler ve Türkler*, 2 vol.s, Berikan, Ankara 2005 ["The Jews and the Turks throughout history"].

¹⁷ *Yeni Dokümanlar Işığında Yehova Şahitleri*, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, Ankara 1987 [Jehova's Witnesses in the light of new documents]. S. Sayar, "Prof. Dr. Günay'ın Hayatı ve Çalışmaları", *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 7/1 (1998) 391-398.

¹⁸ *Hristiyan Kaynaklarına Göre Hristiyanlık*, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, Ankara 1995.

of the challenges and responses of Turkish theological studies on other religions, it may be insightful to introduce five presently active persons and how they handle some of the current challenges.

There are alarmist voices that warn of Christian presences in Turkey. The alarmists do look at original sources, but without a solid grasp of the original languages and without profound understanding of the theological context. The result is that some authors fabricate facts that create a fear of Christians in Turkey. Huge numbers of missionaries are being fabricated, all ready to change the religion of credulous Muslims by bribing them to be baptized. The official paradigm shift of *Nostra Aetate* from refutation to dialogue is, in the eyes of those warners, a mere trick¹⁹. A serious danger for the country is being painted to the wall. The effect of such alarms, however, is that Christians, especially foreigners, working in Turkey run into danger. Fear created by alarmist publications can turn into hatred, and hatred can become murderous²⁰.

Studying contemporary Christianity seems dangerous, then. One has to say, however, that it is precisely the study of theologians without specialist formation in history of religions who may tend towards the aforementioned alarmism. By contrast, themes studied by historians of religions working on Christianity seem to have a focus on phenomena of times past. That may be helpful for listeners and readers who want to get beyond the Qur'anic view that there is only one "gospel", for example, but research may become a bit monotonous through that focus. There are, however, scholars who study contemporary Christianity, discover other aspects of the Church and write about it without alarmism. An example is Ali İsrâ Güngör (* 1966), professor at Ankara İlahiyat. When conducting his doctoral researches on Christianity, he was in contact with several Jesuit scholars of Islam who were visiting Ankara (Thomas Michel, Christian W. Troll, Daniel A. Madigan). This led him to study several subjects that go beyond, e.g., governmental security concerns with Christians but shed a realistic light on today's Catholicism. So, Güngör worked on the Second Vatican Council, on a former Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Pedro Arrupe (d. 1991), and on the history and presence of the Jesuits. A result of his work on that last topic was "The Jesuits. God's knights"²¹: a book that sells well in Turkey and can be seen as a fair presentation of the order.

So, one should not only see what is done at the Faculties but also what is being produced for the book market. The most impressive work also relating to our subject is the 44-volume *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, which appeared between 1988 and 2013 and discusses some 17,000 religiously relevant topics²². Though called "Encyclopaedia of

¹⁹ Ş. Gündüz and M. Aydın, *Misyonerlik. Hıristiyan Misyonerler, Yöntemleri ve Türkiye'ye Yönelik Faaliyetleri*, Kaknüs, İstanbul 2002 [Mission. Christian Missionaries, their methods and activities directed to Turkey].

²⁰ Cfr. the killing of three missionaries in Malatya in 2007.

²¹ A.İ. Güngör, *Tanrı'nın Şövalyeleri Cizvitler, Çağlar*, Ankara 2004.

²² İ.A. Merkezi (ed.), *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 44 vol.s, İstanbul 1988-2013, 2 supplements, 2016. All entries also online: <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr> (last accessed 1 March, 2022).

Islam”, it in fact contains also various entries on Christianity. Those articles are systematically based on non-Islamic sources. The texts were written by renowned Turkish scholars who often invested much research when producing their contributions. There are, however, also problematic sides of that immense project. A doctoral thesis attempted to detect them. It is by Betül Avcı, an academic working in Comparative Theology (mukayeseli teoloji) at Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, where she also directs the social studies department²³. Her discussion of the *Ansiklopedi* criticized that the entries follow Muslim terminological traditions rather than presenting the subjects in a way common among Christians; and that Christianity features in that huge work almost exclusively as a historical phenomenon; what she missed was information on present Christianity, present indeed in Turkey today.

An Ankara historian of religions tackling this problem constructively is Durmuş Arık (* 1969). While he does study the various historical aspects of Christianity in light of Christian texts, he does not limit himself to texts and other testimonies of the past. Rather, he visits – with his students – a Christian Church regularly and invites one of the (Roman Catholic) priests there to explain the building, the sacraments and the Church’s present problems.

The research literature produced in the context of Turkish Religious Studies departments is respected by the country’s academic scene; but due to their strictly scholarly approach, researchers tend to disregard practical concerns. Therefore, a teaching project was launched where the courses also intend to form people for public institutions and other contexts, to foster better relations among the religions and cultures: the “World Religions Master Programme”²⁴, founded at Ankara’s Divinity by Mualla Selçuk (* 1956), professor of religious education and a former dean of the Faculty.

This short survey may be concluded with a critical question: which *limitations* of Turkish theologians’ religious studies might be detected? Three aspects come to mind.

For one, as already mentioned, academic freedom is challenged by the country’s political situation. The government sees the Gülen movement as primary actor of the 2016 coup d’état attempt. Therefore, not only academics considered to be close to Gülen’s Hizmet movement are in trouble; some of the favorite *words* of Gülen’s

²³ B. Avcı, *Contemporary Turkish Research on Christianity. A Critical Study of TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi Articles, and Dissertations conducted between 1988 and 2010 at the Faculties of Theology at Marmara and Ankara Universities*. Pontifical Gregorian University, manuscript, Rome 2011.

²⁴ <http://www.divinity.ankara.edu.tr/dunya-dinleri-2/> (last accessed 28 February, 2022). Cfr. also, on a previous project, namely on a Bachelor programme in the field: M. Selçuk, “Interreligiöse Bildung: Sich und den anderen (er-)kennen am Beispiel des Studiengangs Weltreligionen der Islamisch-Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Ankara”, German translation of: “Dinler arası Eğitim: Kendini ve ötekini tanımak. Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dünya Dinleri programı örneği” both in: German Embassy in Turkey (ed.), *Theologie an der Universität* (Islam und Europa als Thema der deutsch-türkischen Zusammenarbeit, vol. 12), Ankara 2014, 154-166 and 167-179 [“Interreligious education. To know oneself and the other. The model of the World Religions programme at Ankara University’s Theological Faculty”].

doctrine are presently in trouble, too. That holds true of a concept relevant to the whole area of religious studies, namely “interreligious dialogue”. Proponents, also among strictly scholarly academics, avoid such terminology lest they be associated with a tendency marked out by the Turkish state as “terrorist”.

Secondly, historians of religions in Turkey show profound respect for the non-Islamic traditions they study and for the scholarly reputation of their discipline. That is, however, also the reason why they seem to avoid apologetics and interreligious debate: understandably and commendably so. On the other hand, their methodological self-restriction does not allow them to ask – possibly exciting – questions for example on the truth value of non-Islamic doctrines and how other traditions might inspire Islamic theology.

Turkish scholars who specialize in other religions want to inform students of Islamic theology and a wider public in a balanced manner; but they seem to only address a *Turkish* readership. Even when they do research on one of their great forerunners, they only study the effect the person had for *Turkish* religious studies²⁵. This focus may be one reason why the scholars here studied find little resonance on the international history of religions market. So far in Turkey, historians of religions are not trying to prepare contributions of interest to their colleagues abroad nor do they provide academic *tools* of global usefulness; for example, no critical edition of a text by a Cappadocian Father has been produced in the country, although Cappadocia is now in Turkey.

RÉSUMÉ

L'article examine les recherches sur l'histoire des religions à propos des traditions non-islamiques, menées par des théologien(ne)s musulman(e)s en Turquie. Quels facteurs ont conduit à la création d'un tel champ de recherche au sein des facultés de théologie ? Selon les événements et les documents fondateurs de la discipline, le lancement de telles études n'avait aucun objectif apologétique. L'intention était plutôt d'amener la théologie islamique à un niveau comparable à la théologie chrétienne “en Occident”. L'étude présente les figures fondatrices de la discipline ainsi que certains de ses remarquables partisans et des problèmes actuels.

²⁵ B. Adam, “Annemarie Schimmel'den Prof. Dr. Abdurrahman Küçük'e Ankara İlahiyat'ın Türkiye'deki dinler tarihi çalışmalarına katkısı”, in A.H. Eroğlu (ed.), *Türkiye'de dinler tarihi'nin kurumsallaşması sürecinde Prof. Dr. Abdurrahman Küçük* (Dinler tarihi araştırmaları armağan serisi, vol. 1), Berikan, Ankara 2016, 135-154 [“The contribution of the Ankara Theological Faculty to studies in history of religions in Turkey from Abdurrahman Küçük to Annemarie Schimmel” in *Abdurrahman Küçük during the institutionalisation of history of religions in Turkey*]. – A. Ünal, “Kuruluşundan Günümüze Türkiye Dinler Tarihi Derneği ve Dinler Tarihi Bilimine Katkıları”, *Dini Araştırmaları* 14 (2011) 135-160 [“The Turkish Journal for the History of Religions from its foundation till today, and its contributions to the historical study of religions”].