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SYRIAC STUDIES FOR THE KAISER

EDUARD SACHAU'S SCIENTIFIC MISSION TO MESOPOTAMIA

Eduard Sachau (1845-1930), still a famous name among Semitists but a neglected figure in the broader field of cultural studies on nineteenth-century German orientalism, was professor of Semitic philology in Berlin for forty-five years (1875-1920). From the vantage point of the capital's university, he was a direct witness to the heyday of the Wilhelmine Reich and of its colonial pretensions, to which he actively collaborated, especially in his quality of director of the Berlin-based *Seminar für orientalische Sprachen*, a university-level school for the formation of state officials and diplomats in Asia and Africa. The present paper briefly investigates a crucial episode of Sachau's involvement in Germany's colonial endeavor: his explorations of Ottoman Syria and Mesopotamia (1879-1880 and 1897-1898), described in two rich books that have been completely forgotten. Yet the two accounts, and especially the first one, that describes the first travel in around 500 pages, are sources of first rank to deepen our comprehension of German orientalism. To this purpose, I engage in a close reading of a punctual but highly significant feature of Sachau's first travel account: the description of his encounters with Christians of the Ottoman Empire, and especially with Syriac Christians. Sachau's attention for their communities, which was quite unusual for an academic of his time, must be read as the most revealing symptom of the complex interaction of personal, scientific, and political conditions that underlay his explorations and his peculiar orientalism.

A PROFESSOR AND A STATE OFFICIAL

Eduard Sachau, first and foremost an Arabist but also an eminent Syriacist, was one of the main representatives of the great era of German orientalism, although he is seldom mentioned in

the recent wave of research on oriental studies in Wilhelmine Germany.¹ However, he was the first director (*Leiter*) of the *Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen* at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (today's Humboldt-Universität, Berlin) for over three decades, from 1887 until 1920. As such, he was the closest German orientalist scholar to the kaiser: thus, in merely political terms, he can be considered as the most powerful German orientalist of this crucial age. Indeed, the task of *Leiter* of the Seminar was politically loaded, since the institution had been founded in 1887 with the explicit aim of developing state functionaries with a mastery of both middle- and far-eastern languages, who would serve as diplomats and officials in the colonies and embassies of the newly founded Reich.² The main goal of the institution was the formation of students in Asian and African languages – like Chinese and Japanese, Arabic, Persian and Turkish, Swahili and Hausa, and others – taught by German academics and native speakers. The aim was eminently practical: students were not expected to apply their linguistic knowledge to philology or literary studies, but to the various fields of colonial administration. Indeed, parallel to languages, colonial law, hygiene, and economy were also taught. The *raison d'être* of this institution was twofold. On the one hand, it aimed to introduce in Germany a set of skills that had been lacking until the end of the nineteenth century and were felt as indispensable in the age of European imperialism, especially after the Congress of Berlin in 1878. On the other hand, as far as the Middle East was concerned, it more specifically intended to provide the necessary expertise to manage the relationship with the Ottoman

¹ I would like to thank Alessandro Mengozzi and the anonymous reviewers for their attentive reading of this paper and their many suggestions. Eduard Sachau was born in Neumünster (Schleswig-Holstein) in 1845. His academic career was lightning quick: already between 1869-1872 he was appointed extraordinary, then ordinary professor at the University of Vienna; at 30, in 1875, he became ordinary professor of Semitic philology in the capital of the new Reich, at the Friedrich-Wilhelms University in Berlin. In the winter of 1879-1880, he undertook his first travel to Syria and Mesopotamia; in 1887 he was appointed director of the newly founded *Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen*. In 1897-1898 he made a second journey to Syria and Mesopotamia. After retiring in 1920, Sachau died in Berlin in 1930.

² On the Seminar, see especially Sachau 1888, 1910, and 1912; Serauky 1990 and Morgenroth 1990; Mangold 2004, p. 226-250; Marchand 2009, p. 350-356. For a suggestive literary evocation of the Seminar in the 1920s, see Said 1938 and Januszewski 2017, p. 9-12. Surprisingly enough, no comprehensive monograph has ever been devoted to this institution.

Empire, which Wilhelm II intensely cultivated and was key to his imperial propaganda.³

Despite the political value of his role, Sachau left little published output of a political or ideological character, devoting the greater part of his efforts to scientific production in the driest positivistic style.⁴ Some of his works are still reference material for scholars in the field to this day, such as his masterpiece, the *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the Royal Library of Berlin*, published in 1899.⁵ This lack of explicit political engagement may be one reason why Sachau has not been the object of sustained attention by students of German orientalism. He may also have been the object of a partial *damnatio memoriae* on the part of his colleagues and successors: the few witnesses we have to his academic relations depict a supercilious man and a tyrannical leader.⁶ In his unpublished letters to Friedrich Althoff, however,⁷ Sachau rarely let any personal animosities emerge. His official or confidential communications to the omnipotent Althoff reflect instead the personality of a highly zealous and relentlessly pragmatic state official. This lack of animosity may of course be partially due to the hierarchical relationship with Althoff, but through a cursory reading of Sachau's unpublished correspondence one can spot many traces of this inflexible zeal as a major, if not the prominent feature of his personality. The faculty staff of the Seminar was composed of lecturers as well as professors who did not stem from the university establishment but mainly from diplomatic backgrounds and were thus often considered and treated as second-rank professors.⁸

³ Gencer 2002.

⁴ The *Geheimes Staatsarchiv* in Berlin, however, preserves a wealth of material that needs investigation, especially Sachau's letters to the powerful 'Ministerialdirektor' Friedrich Theodor Althoff (1839-1908): see GStA PK VI. NL Althoff, F.T., Nr. 912). The letters vividly discuss many points of academic policy in the field of oriental studies between 1885 and 1900. On Althoff see Lischke 1990 and Domaschke 2001.

⁵ Sachau 1899. For a bibliography of Sachau's writings until 1914, see Weil 1915.

⁶ Sachau's starkest opposer was the Arabist Martin Hartmann (1851-1918), a professor at the *Seminar für orientalische Sprachen* at the time when Sachau was director. His hate for Sachau emerges from his correspondence with other eminent Arabists of the time: with Ignác Goldziher (1850-1921), see Hanisch 2000, p. 82, 183, 206, 255; and with Carl Heinrich Becker (1876-1933), see Hanisch 1992, p. 49-50, 59-60, 69, 75-76, 89. On the feelings of general disappointment dominating among Sachau's colleagues at the Seminar, also expressed in a written complaint addressed to Althoff, see especially Mangold 2004, p. 240-241.

⁷ See footnote 4.

⁸ Mangold 2004, p. 241.

As scholars, however, they continually expressed their wish to do scientific research and to upgrade the Seminar to a scientific institution – this was especially true of Sachau's greatest hater, Martin Hartmann.⁹ However, since the Seminar had been conceived from the outset by the kaiser and the minister of education as a practice-oriented institution that had to form colonial officials, no space whatsoever could be admitted for pure scientific research, and Sachau always remained intransigent on this point.¹⁰ When a group of professors complained about the atmosphere of “scientific repression” at the Seminar in a letter addressed to Althoff,¹¹ Sachau insisted on the principles that guided the institution.

Given the dearth of scholarship on his work and particularly its foundations in his life and personality, it is particularly regrettable that hardly any attention¹² has ever been paid to two books Sachau wrote on his travels in the Ottoman East, the first at a relatively young age, a few years before his appointment as *Leiter* of the Seminar for Oriental Languages.

This first travelogue relates a journey made in the winter of 1879-1880, when he was only thirty-four years old, and was published in 1883 as *Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien*. The expedition was made possible through a donation, of the kaiser himself, and undertaken under the auspices, as Sachau himself declares in

⁹ Martin Hartmann (1851-1918), professor of Arabic at the *Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen*, stood out among the fellow Arabists of his time because of his deep knowledge of the contemporary social conditions of Arabic-speaking peoples and for his mastery of spoken dialects. Thanks to these qualities, he was appointed dragoman at the German General Consulate in Beirut. His interests, rather unusual in his day, are reflected in his scientific production (see the telling title of Kramer 1989: “Arabistik and Arabism – The Passions of Martin Hartmann,” where the first German term refers to the academic discipline, while the second hint at Hartmann's interest in the contemporary political and cultural awakening of the Arab peoples).

¹⁰ This has already been pointed out by Mangold 2004, p. 242: “Während der Professor Sachau vehement an der von Althoff festgeschriebenen Direktorialverfassung festhielt und immer wieder auf den praktischen Aspekt der Lehraufgabe des SOS [...] hinwies, strebten die Kräfte um seinen schärfsten Kritiker Martin Hartmann den Ausbau des Seminars zu einer akademischen Lehr- und Forschungsanstalt an”.

This is abundantly confirmed by Sachau's unpublished letters to Althoff.

¹¹ See Mangold 2004, p. 240, n. 1276.

¹² Wilmschurst 2000, interested as he is in reconstructing the social composition of the Church of the East in modern times, does pay some attention to the information provided by Sachau in his first travelogue: see p. 112; 115; 206; 207; 223 and n. 116; 237 and n. 206. Wilmschurst focuses on Sachau's acquisitions or commissions of manuscripts during his travels in the Middle East.

his dedication to Wilhelm II.¹³ Sachau, who, despite his young age, was emerging as the rising star of German orientalism and had recently been appointed as professor of Semitic philology at the university of the imperial capital, was chosen as the ideal leader of the expedition. The aim of this journey remains undeclared but is fairly evident: only few years before the foundation of the Seminar, it had to provide Germany's political leadership with a precise picture of the Ottoman ally, in every respect: geography and ethnography, religions and social conflicts, linguistic diversities, but most of all a mapping of local powers and of their relationships with each other and with the central government. All this information is lavishly displayed in Sachau's painstakingly detailed reportage.¹⁴ It was, thus, a scientific mission with a political aim. In the present article, I primarily focus on this book.

The second, the much more synthetic *Am Euphrat und Tigris*, of 1900, merely consists of "Reisenotizen," travel notes of an almost exclusively geographical character, from a trip to Mesopotamia he undertook in 1897-98. Both books have been completely forgotten but would deserve to be counted among the most remarkable (if not the most entertaining, given the meticulousness of the descriptions) geographical and ethnological exploration accounts of the nineteenth century.

SACHAU'S ORIENTALIST ATTITUDE

Sachau's trip followed an extremely precise plan. He tried to reach as many villages and cities as possible, in order to communicate to the kaiser a comprehensively detailed picture of Ottoman northern Syria and Mesopotamia. The main sites that yielded significant observations on Eastern Christians were Urfa (p. 189-210), Mosul (p. 341-357), Tell Kepe (p. 359-360), the monastery of Our Lady of the Seeds in Alqosh (p. 363-365), the monastery of Rabban Hormizd (p. 365-367), Zakho (p. 373-375), Mardin with the monastery of Deyr al-Za'faran (p. 404-407), and Midyat (p. 410-413).

Sachau's overall attitude toward the human landscape of the Middle East differs little from the common perception of the East that Germans and Westerners, even the most learned and specialized, normally had at the end of the nineteenth century, as Edward

¹³ Sachau 1883, opening dedication.

¹⁴ Especially remarkable, in the 1883 volume, are the accurate annotations of hours and minutes for every recorded event.

Said has notoriously described. Sachau's observations of people are rather superficial and in general do not show any particular interest in understanding Arabs, Turks, and Kurds in their own right. Although he was an accomplished Arabic philologist and linguist, with a genuine passion for the beauties of the language, he had a complete incomprehension of Islam, on which he writes nothing more than a few commonplaces (e.g. Sufism is a pantheism; all Muslims are nothing more than a bunch of cowardly fanatics).¹⁵ A common feature of Sachau's orientalism throughout both books is his constant depiction of the Middle Easterner as a lazy, fatalist creature. This is explicitly contrasted with the healthily pro-active Westerner that he portrays himself as. In the opening lines of *Am Euphrat und Tigris*, for instance, he claims that: "having to wait for fourteen days in torrid Aden is a heavy penitence for anyone, but in particular for the European, addicted to activity (thatensüchtigen!) and always wanting to proceed further".¹⁶ In the earlier *Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien*, references to this stereotype are countless. In describing how the populace of Mosul patiently bore a terrible famine, Sachau stresses what he perceives as the "Lammesgeduld," the lamb-like patience, of all Easterners, and defines it as "defying any description;" elderly people, in particular, died on the streets with the "resignation to the unavoidable

¹⁵ Sachau 1883, p. 15-16. A particularly representative example of this mixture of admiration and contempt for Islamic culture is his encounter with a Sufi in Urfa (recounted with romantic and fabulous, properly "orientalist" features): "Ein in Lumpen gehülltes, eine spitz zulaufende Filzmütze tragendes Individuum, schmutzig über alle Beschreibung, aber mit einem intelligenten Gesicht, stand plötzlich in meinem Zelt, ohne dass ich sein Eintreten bemerkt hatte, und kauerte auf dem bescheidensten Platz an der Thür nieder. Ich wusste mir diesen wunderlichen Gast nicht zu deuten und fürchtete mich vor seinem Ungeziefer, bot ihm aber meinen Gruss und liess ihm Kaffee reichen. Es war ein Derwisch, ein Süfi (Pantheist), ein heimathloser, unstät umherziehender Wandersmann ohne Haus, ohne Besitz, ohne Freunde und Bekannte, von den Gaben des Zufalls sich nährend, zweck- und ziellos im Leben einhertreibend wie ein Wrack auf dem Ocean. Bald war ein Gespräch angeknüpft und mit steigendem Erstaunen hörte ich seiner Rede zu. Er erzählte mir von seinen Reisen in fernen Ländern und zwar in reinem, tadellosem Arabisch der classischen Literatur [...] Mit Entzücken lauschte ich den Worten dieses zerlumpten Gesellen, denn was er sprach war die kunstvollste und vollendetste Form menschlicher Rede. Und nicht allein die Form war es, die mich entzückte, sondern auch die Klarheit, die Schönheit und die Humanität seiner Gedanken", *ibid.*, p. 190-191.

¹⁶ Sachau 1900, p. 1: "Auf dem glutheissen Aden vierzehn Tage warten zu müssen ist eine schwere Pönitz für jeden, ganz besonders aber, für den thatensüchtigen, immer vorwärts wollenden [...] Europäe."

which is typical of the Easterners".¹⁷ Very much in line with these remarks is a deeply scornful characterization of the Easterners as "notoriously cowardly as regards bad weather," for they are usually spoiled by a blissful climate. If the weather is bad, they just lazily sit at home, eat, drink, and sleep.¹⁸ This description is so stereotyped that it ends up projecting back on Sachau the similarly stereotyped image of the relentless Prussian officer.

SACHAU'S UNUSUAL INTEREST FOR CONTEMPORARY
EASTERN CHRISTIANITY

The prominent and remarkable exception to this attitude, which makes Sachau stand out among his colleagues in the field, is his keen interest in the situation and condition of contemporary Eastern Christians. Suffice it to think of William Wright's¹⁹ repulsion for Syriac Christianity: considering that Wright wrote the most important catalogue of Syriac manuscripts of all time, the *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Library Acquired since the Year 1838*,²⁰ a vast endeavor that cost him years of hard work and included a great deal of religious literature, his repeated declarations of hatred for such literature are all the more striking (his most profound scholarly passion was for the elegance of Arabic poetry, as his letters to friends and colleagues reveal²¹). Theodor

¹⁷ Sachau 1883, p. 345-346: "Die Lammesgeduld aller Orientalen [...] spöttet jede Beschreibung. Ferner glaube ich wohl, dass in vereinzeltten Fällen ältere Leute [...] gänzlich unbekannt, mit der den Orientalen eigenthümlichen Ergebung in das Unvermeidliche still verhungerte."

¹⁸ Sachau 1883, p. 162: "Orientalen, zu sehr durch die Beständigkeit und Gleichmässigkeit ihres Klimas verwöhnt, sind bekanntlich grosse Feiglinge gegenüber schlechtem Wetter. Ein schlechter Tag wird damit verthan, dass man sich zum Feuer setzt, Geschichten erzählt, isst und trinkt und schläp."

¹⁹ William Wright (1830-1889) was an English Semitist who served as a professor of Arabic at University College London, at Trinity College Dublin, and at Cambridge University. He is especially famous for his catalogue of the Syriac manuscripts in the British Library (see next note) and in the Cambridge University Library. See Maier 2011, for an exhaustive and entertaining picture of his personality and idiosyncrasies.

²⁰ Wright 1870-1872.

²¹ Wright 1894, p. 1-2: "We must own [...] that the literature of Syria is, on the whole, not an attractive one. As Renan said long ago, the characteristic of the Syrians is a certain mediocrity. They shone neither in war, nor in the arts, nor in science."

Nöldeke,²² also a great lover of Arabic poetry, was no less hostile to Syriac culture, and yet he wrote arguably the most important grammar of classical Syriac²³. In Nöldeke's own words to the Dutch Arabist De Goeje:²⁴ [Syriac] literature is of very little interest to me, in part it even disgusts me; however, I study these languages not for the literature's sake, but for the language's."²⁵ 'Literature', needless to say, here means theological literature. In the generation prior to that of Nöldeke, another controversial scholar who produced pioneering scholarship in Syriac and Arabic studies (and was for some years a colleague of Nöldeke at Göttingen), Paul de Lagarde, was notoriously anti-Semitic in the broadest sense, as he disregarded all those cultures that expressed themselves in Semitic languages. Despite this he studied them but did not take pains to travel in the East to observe them on the spot.

Compared to these fellow German orientalists, who saw the Orient exclusively from their desks, Sachau's career is quite exceptional on account of its greater closeness to political affairs, which brought him into contact with the daily life of Syriac Christians in their homeland. Indeed, Sachau is a major personality in the historical-scientific phenomenon that recent studies of German orientalism call "practical orientalism," as opposed to "academic orientalism."²⁶ In the 1880s, when Germany acquired colonies and developed close diplomatic links with the Ottoman Empire at the behest of Wilhelm II, German scholars started leaving their desks and setting off on actual travels to the East.

A new practical orientalism progressively emerged and established itself alongside nineteenth-century academic orientalism. This was the political ground that led to the establishment of the

²² Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) was one of the most prominent Semitists of his generation and taught for many decades at the University of Strasbourg. His studies on the Qur'an and on classical Arabic literature were epoch-making. For a wide selection from his scientific correspondence and a portrait of the man and the scholar, see Maier 2013.

²³ Nöldeke 1880.

²⁴ Michael Jan De Goeje (1836-1909) was professor of Arabic at the University of Leiden and is particularly renowned for his editions of *Arabic historiographical and geographical sources*, in particular of *Al-Tabari's Annals*.

²⁵ Nöldeke to de Goeje, November 4, 1865, quoted in Maier 2013, p. 52: "Freilich die Litteratur hat für mich hier sehr wenig Interesse, zum Theil ist sie mir in hohem Grade widerwärtig, aber ich treibe diese Sprachen ja gar nicht der Litteratur wegen, sondern beschäftige mich mit diesen Litteraturen allein der Sprache wegen." As well as Sachau, Nöldeke despised Islam as a religious culture, as Edward Said has duly stressed: Said 1978, p. 209: "Bare, sweeping statements that almost totally denigrate their chosen subject matter."

²⁶ Marchand 2009, p. 333-386.

Seminar für orientalische Sprachen, that “quickly developed from a school for interpreters to a colonial academy.”²⁷ Eduard Sachau was thus the first to combine academic and practical orientalism, as he brilliantly shows in *Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien*. Here, the scholar who had already published extensively in the field of Arabic and Syriac philology also proves to be a good explorer. His family connections also contributed to the active side of his profession, as he was the son-in-law of a prominent Berliner banker, Adolf von Hansemann, who had strong interests in the colonial policy of the Reich. All things considered, he became the obvious choice for the director of the Seminar. In the same way, he was later involved as a consultant in the Baghdadbahn, a train line connecting Konya in modern Turkey and Baghdad that was being built before the First World War with a financial contribution from the German Reich.²⁸

Before Sachau, this kind of close encounter with Eastern Christians, as far as nineteenth-century Germany is concerned, was usually the prerogative of curious aristocrats or military officials, not academics. This type of observers, however, were not interested in deepening their knowledge of the local Christian communities: we do have an eminent example in an interesting account of a journey to the Ottoman east by Field Marshal Helmuth Graf von Moltke, published in 1841 and relating events of the 1830s.²⁹ Unlike France, Great Britain, the United States, and the papacy, Germans did not have religious missions in Mesopotamia or Persia, except for those East Syrians that had a connection with the German Lutheran missionary centre of Hermannsburg.³⁰ It was a *scientific* mission, then, that brought the German intelligentsia, in the person of Eduard Sachau, into a direct encounter with Mesopotamian Christianity. It may certainly be argued that it was thanks to the peculiar circumstances of his career that Sachau developed an interest in the difficult situation of contemporary Eastern Christians

²⁷ Morgenroth 1990, p. 13.

²⁸ Serauky 1990, p. 58; Sachau 1915.

²⁹ Helmuth von Moltke (1800-1891) was the chief of staff of the Prussian army for thirty years. As a field marshal, in 1835 he was requested by Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II to collaborate on the reorganization and modernization of the Ottoman army. Moltke sojourned in the Ottoman Empire from 1835 to 1839 and traveled extensively throughout the sultan's territories. In 1838 he was in Anatolia and in northern Mesopotamia and had the opportunity to take note of the existence of Syriac communities: however, although he mentions the “Nestorians” and “Jacobites” of Mosul (Moltke 1841, p. 241) and their rivalries, he does it only en passant.

³⁰ This center has been the object of many studies by Martin Tamcke over the last twenty years: see e.g. Tamcke 1996 and Tamcke 2000.

under Ottoman rule at the end of the nineteenth century. And yet, in his first travel book, in which he devotes numerous annotations to this topic, we often sense a genuine human concern, especially when Sachau indulges in vivid descriptions of scenes of violence against Christians he had personally witnessed or heard about from reliable informants. Indeed, Sachau himself had many opportunities to observe in the first person the miseries Eastern Christians had to endure, since he happened to cross the Ottoman territories just in 1879-1880, when a major famine was ravaging the empire. The house of a Christian widow in Mosul, he relates, was assaulted and demolished by Muslims in January 1880 after they had heard that some bags of wheat were still stored there, which was indeed true.³¹ In general the little wheat to be found on the market was reserved for Muslims, so that Christians petitioned Sachau, asking for his intercession with the Turkish authorities.³²

Whenever he visits a city or a town inhabited by Eastern Christians, Sachau does not fail to remark how oppressed they are by the local Turkish authorities and/or by Arabs and Kurds, a type of observation Sachau shares on the one hand with missionaries, such as (to mention just a few) the Anglican bishop Arthur MacLean,³³ a slightly younger contemporary of Sachau or, more than a century earlier, the Dominican father Domenico Lanza,³⁴ and on the other hand with German theologians, geographers, and historians who travelled to the East after him, like his contemporary Georg Haccius (1847-1926) and the younger Ewald Banse (1883-1953).³⁵

³¹ Sachau 1883, p. 346.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 345-346: "An einigen wenigen Tagen wurden einige Säcke Weizen [...] in einem bestimmten Hause des Bazars unter Aufsicht eines Commissars verkauft. Hiervon haben aber nur Muhammedaner bekommen, nicht die Christen, denn sobald sie sich in der Nähe blicken liessen, wurden sie fortgestossen. Eine alte christliche Frau [...] wurde mit solcher Brutalität gepackt und fortgeschleudert, dass sie der Länge nach auf die Erde stürzte und liegen blieb."

³³ In his famous book, MacLean 1892, see e.g. p. 23-28.

³⁴ Quoted in Galletti 2003, p. 109. This is not to say that communitarian violence was the same in the eighteenth as at the end of nineteenth century. It certainly was a recurring phenomenon, which, however, took up different connotations in different ages and places. Starting from the Hamidian period (1876-1909), in particular, violence at times burst out in state-related forms, the most notorious example being the so-called Hamidian massacres of the Armenians – though Syriac Christians fell victim as well – between 1894 and 1896, and in many respects anticipated the genocides of the First World War. The bibliography on the topic is vast; see for example the two thematic issues of the journal *Études arméniennes contemporaines*, 10 and 11, online at <https://journals.openedition.org/eac/1300> and <https://journals.openedition.org/eac/1678> respectively (last access on October 20, 2020).

³⁵ Tamcke 2008, p. 123-124.

In Urfa, the ancient Edessa, Sachau notes that Christians (he does not specify of which confession, as such a distinction was probably not made by the authorities) had a representative in the city council, but that did not prevent them from being arbitrarily exposed to periodic anti-Christian riots by the Islamic population.³⁶ He also recounts a revealing anecdote: during his stay in Urfa, he heard, to his great astonishment, church bells ring. It was the Armenian bishop who had taken advantage of the presence of a distinguished European guest to let the bells ring for the first time ever, as without such an occasion it would have been imprudent to play them.³⁷

In Mosul, so tortured a city today, whose “joyous” (*herzerquickend*) beauty he would contemplate from the banks of the Tigris,³⁸ Sachau rented the house of the Syro-orthodox patriarch, who was in Constantinople at the time.³⁹ There, he took pains to record the exact number of Christian households, and to subdivide them by confession: “Nestorians,” “Jacobites,” Syro-Catholics, Armenians, and Protestants (there were allegedly 16 Protestants households at the time).⁴⁰ Of the “Nestorians” and “Jacobites,” he informs the reader that among both confessions a distinction must be made between those who joined and did not join the Catholic Church. He also adds a curious piece of oral history when he notes that the local population called those who joined Rome “wet” Christians, since they were allegedly flooded by Roman money, while the others were termed “dry” Christians. He also lists all the church buildings of the city according to the confessions.⁴¹

I would like to insist on the fact that such attention to the contemporary structure and condition of the Eastern churches, especially Syriac churches, was exceptional for an academic scholar in the 1880s. It is certainly not the first such description we have by a Westerner, but definitely the first by a university professor in any language.

³⁶ Sachau 1883, p. 193.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 193-194.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34: “Wir [...] genassen den herzerquickenden Anblick der Mauern und Thürme von Moşul und des Grüns der südwestlich von Moşul gelegenen Garten. [...] ich stand sinnend am Ufer des Tigris, entzückt von der Schönheit der Landschaft und bewegt von Gefühlen der Freude und Dankbarkeit.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 349 (“2328 Christen-Häuser”).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

AN AMBIVALENT GAZE

Despite these positive features, however, it cannot be passed over that Sachau's sensitivity to the cause of Mesopotamian Christians remained ambivalent, as it was inevitably conditioned by the political agenda that underlay his travels, as well as the prejudices of his day. Both these factors come to light in his description of the Syro-Catholic or Chaldean Christians of Mosul, and, not much later, of the "Nestorians" of Tell Kepe and two Iraqi monasteries. Indeed, when touching upon Syriac Christians who joined the Catholic Church, Sachau clearly sends a flattering message, as it were, to the kaiser and his Chancellor Bismarck, who in the same years were fighting the acutest phase of the *Kulturkampf* and had recently defeated France: "all French government" Sachau writes:

Kingdom, empire and republic, are alike in their will to be regarded as the legitimate protectors of all Eastern Christians and to represent and support the Roman Catholic mission as if this were France's special business.⁴²

This identification between France and the Catholic Church is based on the fact that in Sachau's time the Catholic presence in Mosul consisted of French Dominican missionaries – an identification that remained frequent in the popular view even after the loss of French monopoly over Latin institutions after 1898. He goes on to give an example of "how the Roman mission in Mosul is run" by transcribing a letter the Syro-orthodox patriarch had sent him to complain about the behavior of the Catholics in Mosul. In 1879, the patriarch writes:

The Papists snatched our two churches from us with the support of France and through the use of violence, as they led Turkish soldiers against the churches and caused them to break the doors.⁴³

It was to present an official complaint about these facts that the Syro-Orthodox patriarch was in Constantinople when Sachau halted in Mosul; note how Sachau's description of communal violence is related to a precise political message against France.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 350-351: "Alle Regierungen Frankreichs, Königthum, Kaiserreich und Republik, sind sich darin gleich, dass sie als die rechtmässigen Protectoren alles Orientalischen Christenthums gelten wollen und die Römisch-katholische Mission, als wäre sie eine specielle Angelegenheit Frankreichs, vertreten und beschützen."

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 351: "In diesem Jahr haben die Papisten sie uns entrissen mit Unterstützung von Frankreich durch Anwendung von Gewalt, indem sie Türkische Soldaten gegen die Kirchen führten und die Thüren einbrechen liessen."

Sachau makes similar remarks on the occasion of his visit to Mardin, where he dwells again on the unfavorable living conditions of the Syro-Orthodox Christians. Unlike Armenians, he writes, Jacobites were not officially represented at Constantinople and were extremely poor. According to Sachau, the only way they could have obtained an audience from the Ottoman government would have been to convert to Catholicism, which would have granted them the support of France.⁴⁴ Leaving aside the reliability of such information, Sachau's wording is noteworthy insofar as he does nothing to conceal his contempt. Had the Jacobites adhered to Catholicism, he writes, "the papacy would have hundreds of thousands of new followers, who would immediately become France's clients." The brave Syro-Orthodox flock, however, resists the demonic temptation. Even without expending too many comments on this point, then, Sachau lets the facts speak for themselves in order to attack Germany's archenemies. A constant counterpoint to these contemptuous caricatures of Catholic activities in Iraq and Turkey are the admiring descriptions of the Anglophone Protestant missions. The Syro-Orthodox Christians in Mardin, for example, whom, as we have just seen, Sachau portrays as being almost blackmailed by the Catholics, are providentially saved by the English, whose mediation is presented as crucial for the recognition of millet status for the Jacobites.⁴⁵ Describing Mardin, Sachau also has emotional words for the American mission that welcomed him. He recalls the missionaries by name and stresses their friendliness and generosity in providing him with information and material support.

In Midyat, Sachau's admiration turns once again to the American missionaries, who "do extraordinarily much for the Syriac Christians' sake: they provide them with schools and physicians, they educate them, and also try sometimes to protect them

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 406: "Sofort hätte das Papstthum Hunderttausende Anhänger mehr und sofort würden die Syrer unter die Clienten Frankreichs aufgenommen." A similar attitude toward Catholic missions is attested by the sources analyzed in Murre-van den Berg 2006: the missionary action of the enemy is trivialized and even ridiculed, as if Catholics were only aiming at acquiring clients through the easy satisfaction of basic needs ("only by giving to them macaroni", as referred to in the title of the article).

⁴⁵ At the time of Sachau's travel, the Syriac Orthodox Church had recently been recognized as a millet, i.e. as a legally acknowledged, and as such relatively protected, autonomous ethnic and linguistic group (from Arabic *milla*, "nation", "religious confession", "religious community". The use of the term is slightly controversial in modern scholarship: see especially Van den Boogert 2012). Their position in those days, however, was particularly weak. For the history of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the late Ottoman Empire, see Dinno 2017.

from vulgar abuses". Here, however, Sachau concludes with a general and more unbiased remark which strikingly reminds us of the situation Syriac and other Eastern Christians are still experiencing nowadays: "their [the missionaries'] power is limited: they are not supported by their ambassadors and the omnipotent Christian Europe does not care for the Christians in the Middle East." The description of the Christian communities of Midyat also leads him to an overall reflection on the conflicts between Christian and Kurds. These conflicts are the object of brief but frequent notes throughout the book, but the problem is particularly serious in Midyat: here as elsewhere, but more gravely, Christians are constantly exposed to "armed and shameless" Kurdish aggressions and notorious Kurdish bandits overrun the area. Sachau insists that although Christians denounce the acts of violence and looting, the Ottoman government ignores them and favors the Kurds in every respect. He even insinuates – "I have the impression," he writes; in another passage on Iraqi Kurdistan he even affirms that "Kurds, overtly and secretly supported by the Turks," despoil Christian properties with brutal violence – that the Turks might have had a precise political plan to eradicate the Christians through Kurdish action.⁴⁶ Although not only through the Kurds and some decades later, history sadly proved Sachau's impression right: Midyat itself would be the stage of one of the worse massacres of the Sayfo with around 25,000 victims.⁴⁷

As mentioned above, despite his human involvement in their cause, Sachau cannot avoid looking at Syriac Christians through the lens of the most trivial orientalist prejudices of his time. If on the one hand these people are not at all an exotic curiosity to his eyes and do interest him in their own right, on the other he also views them as ignorant, coarse, and urgently in need of the civilizing action of the West. Not by chance, when speaking of the American missions, as we have already seen, Sachau does not miss any opportunity to highlight their "civilizing activity" (*civilisatorische Thätigkeit*) in the shape of schools, which he observes in the whole area of Ṭur 'Abdin,⁴⁸ not only in Mardin and Midyat but also in the smallest villages. This position is also based on humanitarian grounds: with proper education, Sachau argues, Eastern Christians will be able to claim and defend their rights. Indeed, and this is a truly remarkable feature in a scholar of the Wilhelmine

⁴⁶ Sachau 1883, p. 410.

⁴⁷ For this figure see Gorgis 2004.

⁴⁸ Sachau 1883, p. 410, 420, and 422.

age, Sachau would like Eastern Christians to be educated by Westerners, not to become Westerners themselves, but to become aware of their cultural heritage.⁴⁹ On the other hand, his attitude remains ambiguous, as a portrait of the Christians of Tell Kepe and other places reveals. The village churches possess important manuscripts, but all church leaders, busy as they are with protecting their people from the Turks and Kurds, are “strikingly ignorant” about anything linguistic and literary. The most educated among them can merely read and repeat liturgical formulas and prayers “like parrots”.⁵⁰ In monasteries crucial for their manuscript collections, like Rabban Hormizd⁵¹ and Deyr al-Za’faran,⁵² Sachau contrasts the utmost ignorance of the monks and the importance of the holdings. In this case, Sachau’s scorn for the lazy, non-proactive Easterners surfaces again, when he describes with overt irritation the exhausting exchanges of formalities he has to go through before being allowed to access the collections for a very short time.⁵³ He always underlines how friendly and welcoming they are, and understands the reasons for their low educational level, namely the pressure of everyday emergencies.

However, any positive attitude is inextricably intertwined with the genuine horror of the Prussian scholar and official for their ignorance, inactivity, and careless mistreatment of their cultural heritage. If this kind of dismissal of current holders is typical of

⁴⁹ Sachau 1899, p. 353: “Samuel Ğemil [...] hat in diesem gelehrten Werke seinen Landsleuten eine vortreffliche Anleitung zum Studium der Sprache ihrer Väter, ihrer Kirche und ihrer Litteratur gegeben.” It cannot be sufficiently stressed how this kind of appreciation is unique for Western Syriac studies at the end of the nineteenth century; not only is contemporary erudition in Syriac given a value in its own right, but it is also appreciated for the educational importance it may have for contemporary Syriac Christians. Such a judgment would have been unthinkable in Wright or Nöldeke, let alone De Lagarde.

⁵⁰ Sachau 1883, p. 360: “Die Geistlichen als Hüter und Beschützer ihrer Gemeinden gegen Türken, Kurden und Beduinen sind ausschliesslich mit praktischen Dingen beschäftigt und daher von einer staunenswerthen Unwissenheit in allem, was das Schicksal ihrer Nation, ihre Sprache und Literatur betrifft; die gebildetsten von ihnen sind diejenigen, welche lesen können, manche aber können sich wohl keiner anderen Bildung rühmen, als dass sie die Messe und einige Gebete papageienartig auswendig gelernt haben.”

⁵¹ Of the Rabban Hormizd library, however, Sachau notes that it was plundered by Kurds so that not much remained to be seen: *ibid.*, p. 365-366.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 405-406: also in Deyr al-Za’faran, Sachau could not see more than twelve manuscripts. He states that he was not even able to write a synthetic catalogue of the holdings, adding that most of the library had been transferred to Diyarbakir.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 366: “Nachdem mit Redensarten und Kaffeetrinken viel kostbare Zeit verloren gegangen, traten die Mönche mit mir einen Rundgang” (at the monastery of Rabban Hormizd).

Western scholars as a justification of their desire to appropriate Eastern collections, Sachau did not despoil the Christian libraries of Mesopotamia and Anatolia. He does not mention any removal or acquisition of books from the libraries he visited, which may be seen as a strategic silence, but in fact we have no reason to disbelieve his frustration when he notes that only few manuscripts had remained in the libraries he had the opportunity to visit, and that even those he could hardly see. No specific study has been devoted to the formation of his collection of Syriac manuscript in Berlin's *Staatsbibliothek*, so that for the time being we cannot draw any precise conclusion on this subject. However, many manuscripts in the Sachau collection of Berlin are not originals carried away from Eastern libraries, but copies of older witnesses he had seen on the spot.⁵⁴ These copies were commissioned to local scribes, often through the intermediation of people he had known during his travels, especially of Jeremy Shamir (see below). While Sachau's sense of superiority is manifest in his description of the ignorance of the monks and clerics, it seems that he did not perceive Eastern library holdings as something that should legitimately belong to European libraries. To the contrary, his words on Samuel Jamil (see below) would rather suggest that he wished Eastern communities would reappropriate their cultural patrimony. Typically, enough, it is both for this reason and for his depreciation of clerical ignorance that one can almost feel Sachau's relief through the page when he happens to meet in Mosul two highly cultivated Eastern Christians, Micha and the above-mentioned Jeremy. Their cultural level struck him to such an extent that he would keep in touch with the latter, who is the Jeremy Shamir often mentioned in his catalogue of the Berlin collection of Syriac manuscripts as a mediator or even as a scribe for much copy work which nurtured the Sachau collection (see appendix).⁵⁵ Needless to say, Micha and

⁵⁴ Especially at Deyr al-Za'faran, where he affirms that he had seen up to twelve parchment manuscripts, to be likely dated to the ninth century.

⁵⁵ According to Wilmshurst 2000, p. 172 and 212 "the priest Jeremy Shamir of 'Ainqawa copied at least fourteen manuscripts at Mosul and 'Ainqawa between 1880 and 1883 for Eduard Sachau." Jeremy was not a priest but a deacon (*shammās*), as Sachau repeatedly writes throughout his catalogue. Indeed, Jeremy copied more than fourteen manuscripts (seventeen, with Syr 104/Sachau 139, 126/Sachau 231, 127/Sachau 164, and 136/Sachau 25 to be added; Syr 121/Sachau 232 is not by Jeremy). In many cases Jeremy completed old manuscripts lacking some folios; he also provided Sachau with further material. See appendix for the manuscripts that were provided through the mediation of Jeremy. Letters in Syriac and Arabic (plus one in English) addressed to Sachau by Jeremy from 1880 to 1897, and preserved

Jeremy, who are fluent in classical Syriac and can sing in verses,⁵⁶ are Syriac Protestants. In Alqosh, at the monastery of Our Lady of the Seeds, Sachau finds two monks, with whom he “was pleased to speak in European languages,” namely English and Italian, one of them having studied in Rome at *Propaganda fide*.⁵⁷ Also, the Italian-speaking monk, who remains unnamed in the travelogue, is mentioned in greater detail in Sachau’s catalogue of Syriac manuscripts, in the description of a grammar of classical Syriac authored and personally copied by him:⁵⁸ his name was Samuel Jamil, also a friend of Henri Hyvernât,⁵⁹ and he was general abbot of the monastery at the time of the catalogue’s redaction.

At the end of his journey, in Aleppo, Sachau bids farewell to the Eastern Christian companions who had accompanied him through the whole adventure, concluding on a note of warm humanity. Of one of them he even states: “he had taken care of me not as a servant, but as a friend.”⁶⁰ Here the strict Prussian official breaks down in tears and describes his relationship with his companions in highly egalitarian terms, genuinely relativizing his personal point of view:

For more than half a year we had shared joy and suffering, often in very hard conditions. During the first part of my journey, I sometimes was unsatisfied with them, but later they became accustomed to my character and I became accustomed to theirs.⁶¹

in MS BL Or. 9236 have been published in Ebied 2009, p. 83-105, and in Ebied and Al-Jeloo 2010, p. 7-45.

⁵⁶ Sachau 1883, p. 355. Micha left an autographed collection of manuscript poems in *Classical Syriac*, consisting among other things of an apology of his Protestant faith (preserved in the MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Sachau 96, dated ca. 1880; description in Sachau 1899, p. 902-903). I am currently preparing an edition and English translation of these texts.

⁵⁷ Sachau 1883, p. 363.

⁵⁸ Sachau 1899, p. 353, describing MS Sachau 328 (see note 38).

⁵⁹ On Hyvernât, see Griffith – Blanchard 1993, in particular p. 189 on his friendship with Samuel Jamil and on the latter as provider of manuscripts for Hyvernât. Also on Sachau, Hyvernât, and Samuel Jamil in regard to an important Neo-Aramaic and Arabic manuscript of the British Library, Or. 9321, see Bellino – Mengozzi 2016. BL Or. 9321 belongs to the London Sachau collection, i.e., a group of eight manuscripts, BL Or. 9321 through 9328, which the British Museum acquired from Sachau in 1923. See Mengozzi 1999, esp. p. 481-485.

⁶⁰ Sachau 1883, p. 458: “Hatte nicht wie ein Diener, sondern wie ein Freund für mich gesorgt [...] seine Treue und Hingebung ist über jedes Lob erhaben.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 457: “Über ein halbes Jahr hatten wir Freud und Leid oft unter recht harten Verhältnissen mit einander getheilt. Während des ersten Abschnitts meiner Reise war ich zuweilen unzufrieden mit ihnen, später aber gewöhnten sie sich an meine Art und ich mich an die ihrige und wir schieden als gute Freunde von einander.”

CONCLUSIONS

The detailed analysis of Sachau's mixed attitude toward these communities has revealed a double movement in his approach. Indeed, through his travel descriptions Sachau shows a strong propensity to what has been defined as "practical orientalism". This, however, did not replace his "academic" or "desk" orientalism, of which he remained an important representative. The second movement is from his affective and intellectual, scholarly distance vis-à-vis contemporary Syriac culture to his empathy with the Syriac Christians submitted to the growing communitarian violence of the Hamidian era. The latter characteristic is rather unique in German Semitic scholarship of Sachau's times and is a rather surprising advancement vis-à-vis contemporary academic orientalism overall. Also in this case, however, the movement does not mean a suppression of the starting point. Sachau remains first and foremost a German professor and a European scholar, nurtured by German imperial ideology and by the solid persuasion that late nineteenth-century Europe, and Germany in particular, were the center and the peak of civilization. His empathy with Syriac Christians does not efface the repeated manifestations of contempt for "Oriental" laziness, fatalism, and ignorance – in a word, of his deep orientalism. Moreover, since his account was mainly addressed to the kaiser, Sachau's diplomatic conditioning and his political connections with Wilhelmine power were an integral part of his special attention for local Christians, and especially for Protestant against Catholic missions. While there were a number of German witnesses to Ottoman violence, especially during the First World War, whose commitments to abused minorities ran against their loyalty to their state and thus to its Ottoman ally, Sachau's case in 1879-1880 is different: his commitment rather seems to be intended as an ideological support to the *Kulturkampf* of that day. In conclusion, Sachau's "mission" was a scientific mission with numerous political and ideological implications, which led it to take up and share the tones of proper religious missions when it came to Syriac Christian communities: a civilizing action was needed, which only Western states, to be precise Protestant states, could implement. And again, this does not mean that his empathy was not sincere. Many passages cited in this paper are telling in this regard. Sachau's attitude, then, cannot be understood outside of this double helix: "detached" positivistic scholarship and political conditioning, personal empathy and orientalist loathing. However, despite this complex and tightly entangled mix of reasons, and even if Sachau's approach remains unique in the academic panorama of

his day, his witnessing of communal violence did not dramatically change his intellectual itinerary. For all its uniqueness, his experience remains a typical and representative, not an extraordinary case in nineteenth-century orientalism.

APPENDIX

The activity of Jeremy Shamir as a scribe and provider of manuscripts for Eduard Sachau according to the Berlin catalogue

The following manuscripts were written, authored, bought, revised, or completed by Jeremy Shamir according to Sachau's own records.⁶² Jeremy was then the likely provider of the manuscripts themselves (page numbers refer to Sachau 1899). Even a cursory reading through the following list shows that Shamir provided Sachau with especially rich Neo-Aramaic, Kurdish, and Arabic material, whose presence characterizes Sachau's Berlin and London collections.

- Petermann Syr 13, p. 688 (*Liber Sermonis sapientiae* of Bar Hebraeus, Syriac and Arabic): Jeremy has bought the book.
- Sachau 64, p. 150-153 (liturgical texts and hymns in Syriac): Jeremy completed the ms. in some points in 1881.
- Sachau 80, p. 273 (*Paradise of Eden* of 'Abdisho bar Brika, Syriac): Jeremy completed the ms. in some points.
- Sachau 72, p. 265-273 (grammar, tales, poems, law; in Syriac): Jeremy is mentioned p. 269 as having added f. 45.
- Sachau 130, p. 346-351 (morphological and lexicographical work, Syriac): Jeremy added the first leaf.
- Sachau 133, p. 415-416 (Psalms 1-20, translated from the Peshiṭta into the Aramaic dialect of Mosul): author and scribe.
- Sachau 136, p. 434 (Arabic translation of Sachau 145): author and scribe.
- Sachau 139, p. 364-365 (*Kalila and Dimna*, Syriac): scribe.
- Sachau 142, p. 417 (Acts of the Apostles 1-10, translated from the Peshiṭta into the Aramaic dialect of Alqosh – Sachau, however, is uncertain about the provenance of the dialect): author and scribe.
- Sachau 143, p. 415 (Genesis 1-10, translated from the Peshiṭta into the Aramaic dialect of Mosul): author and scribe.

⁶² In some cases, it is more difficult to understand, and would need further research, how many of the books Jeremy mentions in his letters to Sachau (as published in Ebied 2009 and Ebied and Al-Jeloo 2010) were actually purchased by Sachau for the Berlin collection.

- Sachau 144, p. 416 (Esther, translated from the Peshiṭta into the Aramaic dialect of Mosul): author and scribe.
- Sachau 145, p. 432-434 (58 popular tales in the Aramaic dialect of Mosul): scribe.
- Sachau 147, p. 431-432 (17 tales in the Aramaic dialect of Mosul with Arabic translation): author of the translation and scribe.
- Sachau 150, p. 365-366 (*Kalila and Dimna*, Syriac): scribe.
- Sachau 164, p. 429-430 (Arabic translation of the tale of the ten viziers; various poems, in Syriac): author of the translation and scribe.
- Sachau 180, p. 608-609 (*Cause of causes*, Syriac): intermediary for the copy.
- Sachau 200, p. 434-437 (instruments for the study of the Aramaic dialect of Mosul and Kurdish; tales and ethnological notes on Yezidis and Assyrians ["Nestorians"]): scribe.
- Sachau 224, p. 426-427 (Arabic translation of durikyatha poems, originally written in the dialect of Alqosh): author (and scribe?).
- Sachau 230, p. 427-428 (tale of the ten viziers, in the Aramaic dialect of Mosul): scribe.
- Sachau 231, p. 429 (Arabic translation of the tale of the ten viziers): author and scribe.
- Sachau 233, p. 421-423 (Arabic translation of durikyatha poems, originally written in the dialect of Alqosh): author and scribe.
- Sachau 250, p. 444 (dictionary, Kurdish, English, and Aramaic dialect of Mosul): scribe.
- Sachau 310+309, p. 217 (*Hexaameron* of Emmanuel bar Shahhare): Jeremy completed the ms. in some points.
- Sachau 312, p. 311-312 (*Liber Margaritae* of 'Abdisho bar Brika, written in 1680): Jeremy added a note indicating the former owner.
- Sachau 336, p. 437-442 (poetry in Kurdish, in the Aramaic dialect of Mosul, in Syriac, and in Arabic; among other things, Aesopic fables and the story of Aḥiqar in Syriac): Jeremy added one marginal note.
- Sachau 337, p. 445-448 (18 tales, in the dialect of Tidjri with Arabic translation): Samuel Ġemil was the intermediary for the copy; Jeremy, mentioned p. 446 as the sender, introduced a note into the ms., criticizing Samuel's competence in the Aramaic dialect of Mosul.
- Sachau 343, p. 442-444 (popular poetry in the Aramaic dialect of Mosul, Arabic, and Kurdish): scribe.

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