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## RESEARCH IN NO-MAN'S-LAND

*The Translation of Muhammad Iqbal's "Reconstruction  
of Religious Thought in Islam" in the Context  
of Iqbal Studies in Germany*

The traditionally close tie between Muhammad Iqbal and Germany is thoroughly known. The great German writer Hermann Hesse, who was born in the same year as Iqbal, coined the well known phrase: „Muhammad Iqbal belongs to three realms of the spirit, three realms of spirit are the sources of his prodigious work- the world of India, the world of Islam and the world of European thought”, Iqbal has rightly been described as “the cultural bridge” between Pakistan and Germany. But a researcher in the work of Muhammad Iqbal in German is bound to be very disappointed. Although Iqbal was a great admirer of German philosophers (i.e. Nietzsche, Kant, etc.) or poets ( first and foremost Johann Wolfgang von Goethe), the German research has practically come to a standstill. Yes, there have been the important efforts of the eminent scholar Annemarie Schimmel. We have to thank her for translations and articles as well as for biographical studies. Yet all of her books concerning Iqbal are currently out of print. Surprisingly enough, the main philosophical work. The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam” has never been translated. It had been announced in the past but never fully realized.

We tried to fill this gap. By spring 2003 our translation of this important book will be published ("Die Wiederbelebung des religiösen Denkens im Islam"). This philosophical effort by Iqbal basically consists of a bridge between East and West. In our times this is more than necessary!

So the most of the Iqbal reception has happened from the 1950s to the 1980s, coming to an abrupt end with an excellent biography of Muhammad Iqbal by Annemarie Schimmel "*Muhammad Iqbal. Prophetischer Poet und Philosoph*" (1989). Annemarie Schimmel passed away in 2003 leaving a gap that might not be filled for decades.

Since 1989 there had been not a single major publication on Iqbal in German Language, and except our translation of the "Reconstruction" all previous publications are out of print. Today there is no University Department in Germany where research on Iqbal is being done- and as far we could see this is also true for Austria and Switzerland. And the German-Pakistan Forum ("*Deutsch-Pakistanisches Forum*") also seems to have stopped all their activities. Consequently we received the most profound support for our translation project not from any German institution but from *Suheyl Umar* and the *Iqbal Academy* in Lahore.

There is an *Iqbal fellowship* at the University of Heidelberg but this is not explicitly an Iqbal research centre and the chair is presently vacant. The river Neckar is blessed to have an "*Iqbal Ufer*" and in Munich, at *Habsburger Platz*, a commemoration of Iqbal can be found in the form of a stone statue.

So it is within this context that the translation of Iqbal's major philosophical work into German is published. A chance to be grasped or a lonely effort?

Only time can tell.

That there is a vital interest in Iqbal one can see from the remark Prof. Udo Steinbach, Director of Orient Institute in

Hamburg and one of the most prominent Orientalists in Germany, made in a letter to the authors of this article: "I am happy to hear that such an important work for modern Islam like the 'Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam' is going to be translated into German now (...) I am deeply interested that Iqbal will find a forum from where he will reach as many interested people as possible, also beyond the small circle of experts."

The rather traditional approach of Iqbal studies tended to focus on his relations to Goethe or Nietzsche etc ... (See for example: Ingeborg H. Solbrig, *Die Rezeption des Gedichts "Mahomets-Gesang" bei Goethes Zeitgenossen und in der modernen persischen Adaption Muhammad Iqbals (1923)*. In: Goethe Jahrbuch, Bd. 100, 1983, S. 111-126.) But this approach will and have to change since during the last decade (*with no Iqbal studies anyway*) situation and circumstances changed drastically. Today there is due to migration a large Muslim minority in Europe and Germany, and Western society is forced into a discourse about the social implications of this fact. This was evident in the discussions following September 11<sup>th</sup> and also in connection with the planned accession of Turkey to the European Union. In this discourse one cannot ignore Iqbal and what he is able to contribute to it. And of course there must be a greater emphasis on Iqbal's universal and spiritual ideas. But first of all we must make the scholars and all interested people conscious of Iqbal again.

It is to be hoped that a renewed research on Iqbal in Germany will be connected to the personality of our best Iqbal scholar, Annemarie Schimmel. For example, probably her best book on Iqbal ("Gabriel's Wing") was written in English and has never been translated in Mrs. Schimmel's own native language! This might constitute an excellent starting point for a fresh impulse!

Details about works of/on Iqbal in the German language can be seen in the bibliography included in this paper.

The situation resembles spring. The good seed is there and it is the *homework* of scholars in the present as well as

in the future to bring it to a blossom in a "spiritual summer". We hope to present here a starting point. And in a way we somewhat start out "at the top": with the presentation of the German translation of Muhammad Iqbal's most important philosophical work, "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam".

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