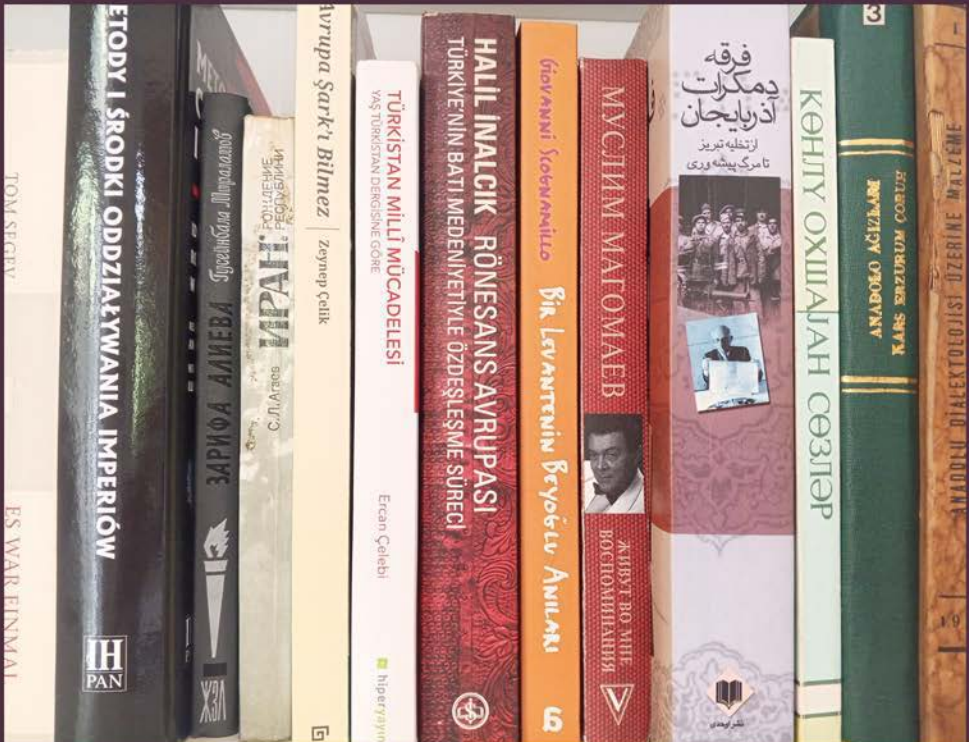


New Area Studies

Transottoman Perspectives



Transottomanica
Osteuropäisch-osmanisch-persische
Mobilitätsdynamiken

Band 11

Herausgegeben von

Stefan Rohdewald, Stephan Conermann und Albrecht Fuess

Stephan Conermann / Zaur Gasimov /
Veruschka Wagner (eds.)

New Area Studies

Transottoman Perspectives

With one figure

V&R unipress

Gedruckt mit freundlicher Unterstützung der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)
im Rahmen des SPP 1981: Transottomanica: Osteuropäisch-osmanisch-persische Mobilitäts-
dynamiken (Projektnummer 313079038), www.transottomanica.de.

ISSN 2626-9449
ISSN 2626-9457 (digital)
ISBN 978-3-8471-1829-9
ISBN 978-3-8470-1829-2 (pdf)
ISBN 978-3-7370-1829-6 (eLibrary)
DOI <https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737018296>

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über
<https://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

© 2026 Brill Deutschland GmbH, Robert-Bosch-Breite 10, 37079 Göttingen, Deutschland

Alle Rechte vorbehalten. Dieses Werk sowie einzelne Teile desselben sind urheberrechtlich
geschützt. Jede Verwertung in anderen als den gesetzlich zugelassenen Fällen ist ohne vorherige
schriftliche Zustimmung des Verlags nicht zulässig. Text- und Datamining zu kommerziellen
Zwecken bedarf der Genehmigung des Verlags.

V&R unipress und Brill Deutschland GmbH sind Teil von De Gruyter Brill.
www.degruyterbrill.com

Fragen zur allgemeinen Produktsicherheit: productsafety@degruyterbrill.com

Einbandabbildung: Collage, Zaur Gasimov
Druck: CPI books GmbH, Leck

Contents

Stephan Conermann / Zaur Gasimov / Veruschka Wagner
Introduction: From Area Studies to New Area Studies 7

Stefan Rohdewald
Meta Area Studies: Transottoman Perspectives on Spatial Condensations by
Overlapping and Rivaling Area Studies 31

Malkhaz Archvadze
Mental Preconditions for Network Analyses (Example of P’arsadan
Gorgijanize and his “Life of Georgia”) 55

Alexander Bauer
Ottoman Chronotopes: Imaginations of Ottoman Foreignness
as a Semiotic-Chronotopic Model (Pavel Levashov and Mikhail
Kutuzov) 73

Andreas Helmedach
An Undead Area. The Venetian Republic, Its Overseas Possessions
(*Stato da Mar*), and a Constructivist Approach to Area Studies 101

Taisiya Leber
“An Orthodox Commonwealth”? Dealing with Transottoman Orthodox
Christian Networks through the Prism of New Area Studies 147

Nana Kharebava
Women’s new spaces: Kato Mikeladze at the Crossroads of Global Ideas
and Local Borders 165

Veruschka Wagner

Transottoman Slavery: Configuring Space beyond Ottoman

Borders 195

Christoph Witzentrath

Slaving, Manumission and Redemption Across the Transottoman Steppe.

Crossroads Studies and Interactions of the Russian and Ottoman

Empires 213

Introduction: From Area Studies to New Area Studies

In this introduction, we would first like to discuss the conceptual background of the DFG Priority Programme “Transottomanica: Eastern European-Ottoman-Persian Mobility Dynamics” (SPP 1981), the funding of which expired in 2025 after a nine-year period. We will subsequently provide a concise overview of the individual contributions and conclude by synthesizing the main findings in relation to the guiding questions pursued throughout the volume.

Conceptual Background

Crossroads Asia. The SPP emerged from a competence network funded by the former Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF; “Crossroads Asia”). From 2011 to 2016, this joint project¹ undertook the task of generating novel perspectives on interdisciplinary area studies research. What was the starting point for the first phase (2011–2014)? The situation of area studies in Germany² was (and is) characterized by enormous discrepancies: On the one hand, regional expertise is highly demanded in politics and business, international cooperation, and due to internationalization efforts in the academic field; on the other hand, area studies has been institutionally marginalized at German universities in the last two decades. The reasons given for this were (a) the lack of systematic-institutional communication among regional experts beyond the boundaries of

1 The following institutions were involved: Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC); Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology; Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich; Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies (IOA) and Center for Development Research (ZEF), both at the University of Bonn; Central Asia Seminar; Humboldt University of Berlin; Center for Developing Country Research (ZELF); Free University of Berlin; Center for the Modern Orient (ZMO). The concepts summarized here were developed collectively for the initial and follow-up applications.

2 Across typical areas such as the Middle East, Central Asia, Western Asia, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, Europe, etc.

their research areas and (b) the lack of networking with systematic disciplines such as social and cultural anthropology, human geography, sociology, and economics. Furthermore, (c) conventional area studies is strongly determined by the concept of container spaces and thus remains almost unaffected by the spatial turn in the systemic disciplines. This would (d) go hand in hand with the fact that certain areas within regions are given focus and are en vogue in regional research, while others are subject to peripherization. Thus, the essentialization of space and culture has given rise to regional entities, centers, and marginal zones in which linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural diversity are territorialized and homogenized. This has resulted in an insufficient theoretical understanding of social science phenomena, which can lead to analytical reductionism.

Area studies is a prominent example of how a certain spatial reality—the division of the earth into territorialized cultural continents—allows other spatial realities to fade out or be forgotten or allows them to be forgotten. Consequently, the establishment of area studies in the late 1940s was linked to the assertion of political interests and the flow of material and immaterial resources. Spatial realities are thus to be understood as an expression of power/knowledge in the Foucauldian sense. This insight from the current debate on the spatial turn deprives classical area studies, which implicitly assumes the isomorphism of territory and space, of its legitimizing basis. In order to strengthen its scientific justification and to be able to carry out analyses of current global transformation processes, it is necessary for area studies to place the reference value of “space” much more strongly in the foreground in a critical and self-reflective way. In this sense, space would no longer appear as a mere “carrier” or a mere “arena” of social processes but represent the object of investigation itself.

The spatial-social interconnectivity, which is constituted by the distance and proximity of the actors, was the focus of the “Crossroads Asia” project. Our basic assumption was that there is an abundance of divergent spatial realities which, depending on the context, are more decisive for the action and identity of local actors, social contexts, and their scientific penetration than the definition of classical areas. Ultimately, the aim of “Crossroads Asia” was to gain knowledge about these “spatial realities” from the cultural and social sciences, which required a consideration of “space” not only as a result of social interaction processes, but also in its historical embedding and unembedding. In this context, spatial realities were distinguished from an externally defined container space by focusing our investigation on multiple local constructions. Accordingly, we defined spatial reality as being constructed and simultaneously constructing. In the classical phenomenological view, space is understood as the “earth-spatial” substratum of human action. In the systematic disciplines, it has become established that space is no longer to be understood as a purely physical-material category, but as a constructed reference value. The spatial turn therefore emphasizes a relational under-

standing of space, i.e., the processual, spatial references of social interaction. In keeping with the tradition of classical social theory, action-theoretical approaches gained importance in the social sciences and supplanted territorial, physical-spatial determinism. Accordingly, culture was no longer understood as a territorially bound living space, as area studies implicitly propagates, but as a process of exchange and appropriation. In particular, “mobility” as a field of study in the social sciences was seen as counteracting the discipline’s conventional territorial fixation, which is traditionally associated with the nation state. In the course of this process, a renunciation of “methodological nationalism” was demanded. Space, as an active arrangement of living beings and goods into relational structures of order, is (re)produced by human perception, cognition, and action (including language, communication). Following this constructivist model, spatial structures of order offer action orientation on the one hand, and are socially constructed on the other through the continuous attribution of meaning by actors. Space is thus produced discursively and is the result of communicative and imagined construction processes. In this sense, space is understood as a space of interaction that is both the result and prerequisite of interpersonal relationships. On the basis of this understanding, knowledge, action, and communication appear as spatial theoretical constituents that must be related to each other in order to be able to grasp spatial realities. Given this context, the aim of the “Crossroads Asia” project was not to construct a new “region.” Instead, we opted to start from concretely and thematically defined causal and functional relationships—figurations—located in this area but whose extension may be less far-reaching or even much farther than what the geographical regions outlined. The “post-scientific” perspective allowed for an orientation towards a concretized space constituted by the experience, imagination, and action of people in thematically defined contexts.

We chose mobility as a connecting perspective. “Crossroads Asia” corresponded to multiple intertwined spaces of action constituted by the spatial, cultural, and social interactions of their inhabitants. Through the lens of mobility, the central topics of “conflict,” “migration,” and “development” were placed in a causal relationship with each other in “Crossroads Asia.” This space of action is created by the people involved not only through physical mobility, but also through social mobility. This is accompanied by a mental mobility through which this space of action is (re)conceived. At the same time, this action constitutes specific scientific questions in (re-)constructive and exchange relationships, which require different (inter)disciplinary approaches.

In our project, conflict was understood as a universal component of human coexistence and not as a deviation from a static-harmonious norm(al) state. The existence of conflicts and the settlement of a specific conflict situation constitute the practice of intersubjective relationships. In principle, a (latent) conflict already exists when actors perceive seemingly irreconcilable differences about

their interests, resources, values, beliefs, and practices. The distinction between narrower political conflict and broader social conflict manifests itself in the fact that political conflicts are situated within frames of reference such as “state” or “security,” while social conflicts foreground the question of their integrative function at the level of society. The fundamental ambivalence of conflicts—as a “glue” that emphasizes their functionality and productive power for social change, as well as a “solvent” in which development processes always harbor conflict potentials by questioning social conditions—points to the dialectical relationship and the mutual conditionality between “conflict” and “development.” With a concept of conflict of the “medium range,” which, against the background of theoretical developments in recent decades, recognizes that conflicts are not fundamentally disintegrating, but also do not automatically promote social change, we focused on process forms of conflict. This had practical consequences for our research: Firstly, it made it possible to distinguish the object of conflict from the causes of conflict and forms of resolution, since the alleged causes, but also the attempts to regulate them, can themselves be the subject of the conflict, depending on the definition of the situation of the actors. Secondly, the moment when a latent conflict became apparent was revealed through the communicative articulation of the object of the conflict by means of language, rituals, or actions. Against this background, the linguistic and ethnological research into the contextualizing and verbalized representations of conflictuality, conflict resolution, negotiation, and tabooing formed an essential working basis for the network. This should, not least, provide information about what was perceived as conflictual from an emic perspective. The processual nature favors the link between conflictuality and mobility.

As an interdisciplinary and cross-theoretical basic concept, “conflict” was decisive for the other two thematic areas of “migration” and “development.” Particularly fraught with conflict is the dividing line between mobility and immobility, which potentially takes on a political dimension when socio-structural inequalities and disparities are addressed.

We understood “development” to mean processual changes in the form of long-term social change, which can be observed in an action- and actor-centered manner as an active negotiation process between participating groups of actors (stakeholders). The human development approach, which emphasizes increasing and securing opportunities for realization, focuses on the importance of social and spatial mobility for long-term socio-cultural, political-institutional, economic, and ecological processes of change, as well as locally perceived changes in life chances. The question of the extent to which the selective mobility of individuals exacerbates or potentially reduces social inequalities, which can thus influence life chances, is constitutive. It is a concept of development brought in from outside, understood as deliberate change that is to be achieved through strategies and

concrete measures. However, it must be taken into account that even emic views on what constitutes legitimate social inequality are subject to change. Development is therefore conceived as a non-linear process of social change that manifests itself not only historically, but also in the discursive, intervening practices of actors. Social ties, the (spatial and social) mobility of actors, and the mobility of ideas and goods link social change occurring in different, often geographically distant places, much like nodes in trade networks. Both aspects, i.e., the emphasis on the actor-centered, emic perspective on the one hand and the relational, camouflage perspective on the other, form a decisive and innovative contribution to the current debate in development research by questioning dominant notions of social change in static or territorial container spaces (states, regions, areas) demarcated by rigid (discursive, political, disciplinary) boundaries.

Since “migration” implies spatial movement, the connection with mobility is most obvious. However, the research objects examined were not limited to phenomena of spatial mobility, but also included the importance of networks and flows for social mobility. The focus was on the processes and effects of networking in interaction with migration. The central objects of analysis formed social networks. These can be defined as networks of relationships that connect people and institutions/organizations with each other in figurative basic structures, forming a “space of flows” in which the “flows” themselves are moveable. The projects focused on the actors along with their perceptions, interpretations, and strategies. Their collection allowed conclusions to be drawn about the interaction, forms of mobilization, and contexts of action in translocal networks, and thus about how network capital was generated and what role it played in the use of flows (especially knowledge and ideas), the distribution of resources, and in social change processes (“development”). In addition, the infrastructure of the networks—i.e., the different quality of the networks—was examined. This was based on the assumption that analyzing density, type, and structures with their nodes and centers, the positioning of individuals within the network, and the extent to which mobile actors are anchored and participate in their host and home regions can contribute to understanding migration dynamics and social mobility. Migration dynamizes not only the migrating but also the non-migrating parts of society and can thus contribute to development spurts. However, migration can also lead to the deepening of social inequality and the breaking out of conflicts. Translocal networks, which are usually closely linked to migration, represent the de-essentializing mobility expressed by the term crossroads. By examining the concrete actions of people in motion (“movers”) and the mobile-immobile and mobilizing-immobilizing figurations in which they are involved, the aim was to obtain information about the flows of people—and with them, goods and ideas.

In the second (shorter) phase of the “Crossroad Asia” project (2015–2016), we broadened our perspectives. The idea of figurations facilitated far-reaching in-

sights into interactive webs of ties between local actors, their socially generated translocal contexts, and the socio-spatial formations, dynamic relationships, and movements that resulted from their actions. The processes of social and geographical mobility and immobility and the interactive negotiations of political, socio-cultural, ethnic, and historical boundaries, and thus also of physically and socio-culturally defined spaces, were all foregrounded. Norbert Elias' conception of figurations was extended to bring in a new facet: the communicative construction of social reality. Social actions and interactions became more significant, particularly against the background of emic perceptions of reality and their role in the communicative construction of space, as our focus shifted to a deeper analysis of (a) the dynamics of different types of mobility and immobility and (b) the negotiation of boundaries and borders in processes of boundary-drawing and -weakening. Socio-cultural borders are created in conflicted processes of exchange and appropriation, which can be determined by focusing on figurative webs of ties that transcend classic territorial and similar boundaries. Borders are not only or not primarily physical demarcations, but chiefly social constructions. Political and socio-cultural (and also disciplinary) borders mark transitional zones in which circumstances dictating patterns of thinking and acting can change. Borders can be drawn out of the need for a sense of belonging, for security, or for the preservation of a certain level of material wealth. And borders do not only have a separating function: They are also frequently described as symbolic representations of a relationship between what is inside and what is outside the territories they delineate. Borders frame socio-cultural spheres or zones strategically; within their confines, states, ethnic and social groups, networks, etc., negotiate their influence over precisely defined territorial space and can act out their sense of being different or of belonging performatively. However, borders do not only mark out spheres of control. They also act as membranes filtering flows of goods, people, and ideas, as well as beliefs and knowledge. Examples from borderland research show that borders also form seams that can unite what is separate. Their significance changes in the course of social, political, and cultural developments, and this, in turn, does not only have a direct impact on forms of social interaction (and vice versa), but also serves as an emphatic reminder that "boundary-making and weakening practices" are process-like social phenomena. By engaging in interdisciplinary collaboration, we hoped (c) to contribute towards a fundamental rethinking of the central premises of area studies and, in particular, (d) to draw attention to the vital importance of researchers in this field by reflecting on their own socio-spatial and disciplinary positionality.

Transottomanica. After the BMBF project expired, we looked for other funding opportunities in order to test whether the "Crossroads Asia" idea could be applied to other areas. Ultimately, the question was whether the "Crossroads" approach could be further developed into a "Crossroads Studies" concept. We

therefore submitted an application to the German Research Foundation (DFG) for the establishment of a Priority Program (SPP), which was fortunately approved. In our SPP, we made two fundamental changes. First, we attempted to apply the theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches developed in the “Crossroads Asia” project, which had been designed for contemporary social orders, to societies in the past. Second, we turned the spotlight on another communication space, which we called “Transottomanica.” We also used a “post-regional” academic approach by addressing the empirically measurable causal and functional connections within Transottomanica—a conceptual space initially established by the actions, ideas, and perceptions of people. By means of these connections, we conceived of “Transottomanicity” as a venue for actions and therefore, for us, as a focus of investigation—as a system of Elias’ figurations. Because of the flexible interconnectivity of the structured whole, small changes in one place can cause shifts and reconfigurations throughout the whole context of reference. Obviously, these shifts are caused by mobility, a category that is also omnipresent in Transottomanica and therefore a suitable lens of observation for the SPP. The methodological approach of Transottomanica was to “follow the actors” in a multi-perspective way. We concentrated on the analysis of the complex interwoven actions of actors and groups of actors in translocal and socially generated contexts. This approach made it possible to identify and describe real and virtual spaces of action created and dynamized by social, economic, political, cultural, and religious interaction.

Area Studies should be understood as a combination of humanities subjects taught at universities or other educational institutions to train specialists with in-depth knowledge of a specific geographical area, viewed as a distinct region. However, the borders of geographical spaces are increasingly blurred. Moreover, in a globalised world, the meaning of all kinds of borders and demarcations has changed significantly. Our proposed approach to ‘New Area Studies’ reflects the changing dynamics of shifting mental maps, as well as the impact of globalisation, mass migration, and the rapid spread of information in the current social media era. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and NATO’s successful eastward expansion in the 1990s and 2000s, the bilateral world order collapsed, giving way to a multipolar world with newly formed alliances around the globe. These new geopolitical developments and the internationalisation of academic humanities in Europe, particularly in Germany, prompt us to reconsider and to rethink the ‘traditional’ regions and advocate an inclusive approach of New Area Studies.

The DFG Priority Programme Transottomanica was the first substantial attempt to reconsider the previous division of the world into ‘regions’. Numerous doctoral and postdoctoral projects studied the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman lands through their entanglement with other empires and

neighbouring regions, such as the Caucasus, the Russian Empire and the Persian Empire. This priority programme encouraged intensive dialogue between Eastern European and Near and Middle Eastern studies. The Transottomanica project, in which all **three** of us were involved, provided a valuable platform for interaction and helped to develop the academic infrastructure required to interpret Russian, Ottoman and other histories, through the simultaneous analysis of archives, documents and scholarly literature produced at international, national and local levels. In this paper, we will attempt to define the concept of New Area Studies. Having been trained in various ‘traditional’ area studies (e.g. Islamic, Middle Eastern and East European studies) within the German academy, we identify as historians. In the following sections, we will shed light on: The history of transnational historical research on the regions and sub-regions of the Near and Middle East, as well as Eastern and Central Europe.

Contributions

In a two-day workshop, which was held in person in Bonn in October 2022, case studies on social, economic, political, cultural, and religious interactions that constituted a relational spatial structure between the respective actors and actants were presented.³ Each project had to try to answer the following questions: 1. Who are the actors? 2. What level of mobility do they exhibit? 3. What space is created by this mobility? 4. Which networks do the actors move in? 5. Which spaces are created by these networks? 6. Can nodes be identified in these networks? 7. What is the relationship of the spaces generated by the mobility of actors (with their networks) on the one hand, and political boundaries on the other? 8. Are there boundaries to mobility? 9. What factors are responsible for restrictions on mobility? 10. What is the relationship between space and immobility/mobility? 11. Would it be useful to develop the concept underlying our Transottomanica project into an analytical tool for Crossroads Studies? How would that help foster understanding?

Our volume starts with **Stefan Rohdewald**’s conceptual considerations: “Meta Area Studies: Transottoman Perspectives on Spatial Condensations by Overlapping and Rivaling Area Studies.” Since the eighteenth century, scholarly understandings of large world regions—whether framed through religion, geography, culture, or civilization—have shaped imperial and national knowledge systems.

3 New Area Studies – Transottoman Perspectives, Bonn, October 21–22, 2022, organized by Stephan Conermann, Zaur Gasimov, and Veruschka Wagner (all University of Bonn). Wagner, Veruschka (2023): Tagungsbericht: New Area Studies – Transottoman Perspectives, in: H-Soz-Kult, www.hsozkult.de/conferencerport/id/fdkn.124044.

These spatial categories would later crystallize into the modern “Area Studies” fields that continue to structure academic institutions today. Yet the boundaries they presuppose were never neutral: They emerged in the context of geopolitical rivalry, imperial competition, and competing scholarly claims to centrality. This contribution examines these dynamics by comparing how “Eastern Europe,” the “Middle East,” “Eurasia,” and the “Indian Ocean World” have been conceptualized, and by highlighting how these concepts have often stabilized imagined, container-like regions rather than capturing historical mobility and entanglement. Across two centuries, disciplines such as Slavic Studies, Balkan Studies, Byzantine Studies, Oriental and Islamic Studies, and later Middle Eastern and Eurasian Studies were built on varying combinations of linguistic, religious, imperial, geopolitical, and civilizational frameworks. Concepts such as the “Byzantine Commonwealth,” the “Islamicate” or “Persianate” worlds, Turanism, Pan-Slavism, and Eurasianism likewise evolved in mutual observation and competition. Many emerged to legitimize imperial ambitions; others sought to decolonize or reframe inherited geopolitical imaginaries. Despite successive critiques—postcolonial, poststructuralist, and transregional—academic and institutional structures have continued to reproduce these spatial configurations, while alternatives (e.g., Black Sea Studies) remain underdeveloped. The contribution therefore argues that we must not only analyze regions transregionally, but also historicize the disciplines under area studies themselves as *interacting and rival* knowledge regimes. From a “Transottoman” perspective, the regions spanning Iran/Persia, the Ottoman Empire/Turkey, Muscovy/Russia, the Caucasus, Poland-Lithuania, and Eastern and Southeastern Europe appear less as discrete areas and more as a dense zone where competing spatial projects intersect. These overlapping scholarly concepts have continually shaped—and been shaped by—political, imperial, and academic rivalries. By placing these traditions on a shared meta-level, the contribution highlights how area studies has produced its own relational spatial order. It proposes that a Transottoman approach—focused on flows, actors, social and material networks, and historically shifting relational spaces—offers a productive framework for overcoming static, essentialized regional containers and for developing a more integrated history of Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Malkhaz Archvadze examines how the *mental preconditions* of historical actors—understood as their culturally shaped codes of perception, values, and self-images—conditioned transregional mobility and the circulation of knowledge. Drawing on cultural semiotic theory and integrating it with the growing field of historical network analysis, the article argues that mobility is not only a physical movement but also a *mentally structured* practice. Openness or resistance to other socio-cultural communities, itself rooted in mentality, decisively shapes the networks that actors can enter and the spaces they create. This combined approach illuminates how new and dynamic cultural spaces emerge beyond the confines of

traditional geography and political borders. The article applies this theoretical framework to Iranian–Georgian relations in the seventeenth century, a period marked by Safavid–Ottoman rivalry and the complex vassalage of the eastern Georgian kingdoms. Within this environment, questions of identity, cultural boundaries, and historical memory became increasingly pressing for Georgian elites. Against the backdrop of Islamization policies, competing historiographic traditions, and shifting geopolitical constellations, Georgian society began to renegotiate its past—most visibly in the renewed interest in historiography and historical poetry. At the center of this analysis is P’arsadan Gorgijaniḡe (Parsadan Gorgijanidze), a Georgian-born official and chronicler who spent decades in Safavid Iran. His life exemplifies dual cultural affiliation and the role of intermediaries in early modern Eurasian networks. His voluntary conversion to Islam and service at the Safavid court expanded the scope of his mobility and connected him to Georgian, Iranian, and even Ottoman-linked social spheres. These cross-regional interactions shaped not only his political career but also his cultural production. P’arsadan’s chronicle, “The Life of Georgia” (Sak’art’velos c’xovreba, 1694), stands as the first major historiographical work of the late medieval Georgian tradition after a long hiatus. It reflects both Georgian and Persian narrative models and expresses a perspective shaped by his mixed identity. Unlike later eighteenth-century chroniclers, who emphasized Christian tradition and distanced themselves from Iran, P’arsadan integrated Persian historiographical structures, thematic chapters, authorial self-presentation, and a syncretic religious vocabulary. He viewed Georgia as culturally distinct yet politically part of Iran—an interpretation deeply connected to his experiential networks and mental framework. By bringing Persian narrative strategies into Georgian historiography, P’arsadan created a hybrid text that embodies the cultural dynamics of his transregional environment. His work demonstrates how narrative choices—genre, structure, and moral framing—are embedded in the mental dimension of culture and shaped through networked mobility. Ultimately, the article argues that P’arsadan’s case offers a compelling example of how network analysis and narrativist cultural studies can be combined. His life and writing reveal how mentalities structure historical networks, how mobility reshapes cultural spaces, and how hybrid identities crystallize in historiographical forms. This approach provides new insights into early modern Georgian–Iranian entanglements and enriches broader discussions on the interaction between mobility, culture, and historical narration.

This contribution of **Alexander Bauer** analyzes how eighteenth-century Russian diplomats imagined *Ottoman foreignness*, proposing a theory-based framework for understanding these imaginings as semiotic-chronotopic models. Focusing on the narratives of Pavel Levašov and Mikhail Kutuzov, it argues that perceptions of the Ottoman Empire emerged where geopolitical spaces, cognitive

and symbolic spaces, and narrative forms intersected. These overlapping layers produced topographical places—symbolically charged sites in which memory, history, and politics were embedded—and together constituted an *imperial topography* of the Ottoman world. The analysis draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of chronotopos and Yuri Lotman's semiosphere to theorize how movement, border-crossing, and narrative representation shaped knowledge about the Ottoman Empire. Travel and diplomatic encounter, whether voluntary or enforced, were simultaneously spatial, temporal, and social experiences. Their narrative processing created divergent cognitive maps of the same geopolitical space, demonstrating how imaginations of foreignness were produced through the interweaving of lived experience, cultural repertoires, and symbolic structures. The chronotopic perspective highlights the role of mobility and borders in structuring perceptions: Whereas naval voyages promised abrupt entry into an exotic world, journeys across contiguous land empires—such as Russia and the Ottoman Empire—generated gradual transitions through layered border zones. Such experiences conditioned not only what travelers saw but also *how* they narrated it. Social position further shaped the observer's perspective; diplomats, soldiers, merchants, prisoners, and forced migrants each moved through distinct spatio-social continua, generating different ways of seeing and representing the Ottoman Other. The semiospheric dimension underscores that knowledge moved across imperial, social, and textual boundaries. Ottoman images circulating in Western Europe entered Russia with a time lag, acquiring new meanings within Russian political culture. Russian representations of the Ottoman Empire thus arose from entangled knowledge spaces, in which inherited European stereotypes, local political contexts, and personal motives interacted. These cognitive spaces were dynamic, fluid, and often contradictory, structured by Lotmanian binary models such as rise/decline or earlier/today—patterns that appear in both Levašov's and Kutuzov's writings despite their divergent experiences. A close reading of the two diplomats' accounts reveals how travel writing became a site of knowledge production. Levašov's forced mobility as a prisoner of war generated a chronotopos of violence and vulnerability, narratively anchored in the camps and itineraries of the Ottoman army. Kutuzov's mission, by contrast, unfolded within the ceremonial sphere of elite diplomacy and produced a markedly different Ottoman image—one shaped by reciprocity at court, symbolic hierarchies, and classical literary references. These contrasting experiences nonetheless fed into a broader, shared Russian political imagination of the Ottoman Empire. The contribution argues that diplomatic networks, with their intersections of local societies, artistic and scholarly circuits, and imperial interests, formed crucial sites of knowledge exchange. Legations and consulates were not isolated enclaves but permeable filters through which information, people, and representations moved. Narrative accounts emerging from these networks reveal how imperial spatial practices, border cross-

ings, and socio-spatial entanglements shaped the production of cognitive maps of the Ottoman world. Ultimately, examining Russian and Ottoman narratives in a reciprocal and entangled perspective opens up a way to overcome the rigid epistemological divide between Orient and Occident. The mutual representations produced by Levašov, Kutuzov, and their Ottoman counterparts such as Mustafa Rasih Efendi and Necati Efendi show that both empires used the image of the Other to position themselves within larger transregional and European frameworks. These intertwined accounts demonstrate that the spaces divided by imagined borders were in fact historically connected, mobile, and semiotically productive—constituting a trans-Ottoman field of knowledge in which foreignness was continuously created, negotiated, and transformed.

In his article **Andreas Helmedach** proposes an experimental application of the modern New Area Studies methodology to the history of the Venetian Republic before 1797. Its dual purpose is, first, to acquaint historians of Venice with the premises and analytical advantages of New Area Studies, and, second, to introduce scholars rooted in area studies to the distinctive features of “Venetian history” when conceived not as a city- or state-bound narrative but as the history of a dynamically constituted area. The author argues that the Republic of Venice—long treated as an integral part of “Western Christian Europe” and thus largely excluded from area studies—can and should be examined as an area shaped by multiple, overlapping, and shifting spaces of power, economy, culture, and mobility. Traditional Venetian historiography, dominated by a city-centric focus on the lagoon metropolis, obscures the complex interplay among the Dogado, the Terraferma, and the Stato da Mar, as well as the networks that linked these zones to the wider Mediterranean, European, and Islamic worlds. Recent scholarship, however, has increasingly adopted polycentric, network-oriented perspectives that illuminate these entanglements. The essay highlights how social, political, and economic mobility across all strata—from nobles and *cittadini* to merchants, sailors, and artisans—generated interconnected spaces within and beyond the Republic’s borders. Venetian actors operated within multiple mobility zones: the territorial state, the maritime Adriatic–Levantine network, and a wider Eurasian sphere extending from Flanders to Persia. Equally significant was the Venetian–Ottoman contact zone, whose dense interactions between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries constitute perhaps the most important “area” of Venetian history, encompassing trade, diplomacy, cultural exchange, and conflict. By tracing micro- and macro-regional formations (e.g., Dalmatia, Istria, Korčula) and the role of hubs, nodes, and “anti-hubs” from Venice to Constantinople and Ragusa, the essay demonstrates how mobility created fluid, overlapping spaces that routinely crossed political, religious, and cultural boundaries. These dynamics challenge container-like conceptions of the Venetian state and

invite methodologies attentive to networks, circulation, and entanglement. The author also reflects on why Venetian history has rarely been approached as an aspect of area studies—pointing to Eurocentrism, Venice’s own city-centrism, and the institutional landscape of historical scholarship, especially in the German-speaking world, where Venetian topics have long been subsumed under “general history” or, indirectly, Eastern and South-Eastern European history. Unlike other regional fields, “Venetian studies” has never emerged as a coherent institutionalized discipline. Ultimately, the contribution contends that an area studies perspective can counteract the persistent mythologies, reductive spatial imaginaries, and tourist-driven narratives that continue to shape perceptions of Venice. By foregrounding mobility, connectivity, and the multiplicity of spaces in which Venetian actors operated, this approach offers a more accurate and capacious framework for understanding the Republic’s history and its place within the broader Mediterranean and Eurasian worlds.

Nana Kharebava traces the emergence of the Georgian women’s movement from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, situating Kato Mikeladze as one of its most significant catalysts. It reconstructs the multilingual, multiethnic, and intellectually vibrant environments of Tbilisi and Kutaisi—cities in which debates on women’s rights flourished across Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian circles. Against the backdrop of imperial realignments, intensified Russification, and expanding print culture, Georgian women gradually entered public discourse through education, literary authorship, and civic activism. The press played a crucial role in this development: Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, male and female intellectuals alike used newspapers and journals to introduce European feminist ideas, advocate for women’s education, and contest patriarchal norms that had been reinforced under Russian rule. The contribution shows how mobility, transnational networks, and transcultural encounters—particularly exchanges with European feminists—were central to the formation of Georgian feminist thought. Figures such as Barbara Eristav-Jorjadze and Anastasia Tumanishvili-Tsereteli built early infrastructures for women’s literary and educational work, while cross-border ties with personalities like Bertha von Suttner and Marjory Scott Wardrop stimulated the circulation of feminist ideas. It is within this dynamic environment that Kato Mikeladze’s significance emerges. Drawing on nearly a decade spent abroad, she returned to Georgia in 1916 with a programmatic vision: to merge global feminist strategies with Georgian historical memory and to build non-partisan, politically active women’s networks. Through the women’s club in Kutaisi and her magazine *Xma k’art’veli k’alisa* (*Voice of the Georgian Woman*), she positioned women’s issues at the center of debates about democracy, national autonomy, and civic renewal. Mikeladze advanced a distinctive conceptual framework in which the past, present, and future of Georgian

womanhood were interlinked. She invoked powerful female figures from Georgia's pre-Russian past to argue that gender equality was not a foreign import but a restoration of an indigenous social order disrupted by imperial domination. Viewing political participation as the "Holy Grail" of emancipation, she urged women of all classes and ethnicities to seize the opportunities opened by the February Revolution, engage in electoral politics, and build coordinated local-to-national networks modeled on European and Russian examples. Despite her work being cut short by Soviet annexation in 1921 and her subsequent erasure from public memory, Mikeladze's legacy reveals the transformative power of mobility, cross-cultural exchange, and collective organization. Her life and writings illuminate how global feminist currents were translated into the Georgian context and how women's activism became intertwined with broader struggles for national and social liberation.

Taisiya Leber's article reconsiders long-standing models used to describe the post-Byzantine Orthodox world—most notably Obolensky's "Byzantine Commonwealth," Kitromilides' "Orthodox Commonwealth," and Iorga's *Byzance après Byzance*. While these concepts emphasize shared Byzantine heritage, ecclesiastical structures, and the unifying role of Orthodoxy, they also obscure tensions, asymmetries, and ruptures within the Orthodox sphere. By shifting attention from institutional continuities to the mobility of people, books, and practices across the Ottoman Empire, its tributary states, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Muscovy, this contribution proposes a more dynamic, network-oriented approach grounded in New Area Studies. Examining early printing and the circulation of Orthodox books highlights the intensity of such Transottoman exchanges. Monasteries—above all Mount Athos and establishments in Wallachia and Moldavia—functioned as hubs where printers, hierarchs, scholars, and patrons interacted. Greek patriarchs sought support for book production in Eastern Europe when printing in the Ottoman Empire proved unfeasible, while Balkan and Ruthenian printers relocated presses to Wallachia and Moldavia to reach safer, better-funded environments and more receptive audiences. These examples underscore the permeability of political borders and the importance of patronage structures, which tied Orthodox actors to rulers in Muscovy, the Romanian principalities, and beyond. Three case studies illustrate the lived experience of these Transottoman Orthodox networks. The fate of Maximos the Greek, an Athonite monk whose decades-long imprisonment in Muscovy reveals both the prestige and vulnerability of mobile Orthodox intellectuals, exposes limits to any imagined pan-Orthodox unity. The life of the Ruthenian monk Jov Knjahynyc'kij shows how Athonite ideals of monasticism circulated and were re-embedded in local settings, while also revealing how mobility was shaped by lay patronage, ecclesiastical politics, and personal spiritual aspirations. Finally, the extensive travels of the Muscovite hieromonk Arsenij Suchanov—documenting Greek rites, negotiating with patri-

archs, and defending Russian liturgical authority—demonstrate how mobility could also serve political agendas and sharpen intra-Orthodox competition. Together, these cases depict an Orthodox world interconnected not by stable imperial legacies alone, but by constant movement, negotiation, and rivalry. They show how monastic networks, practices of alms-seeking, ecclesiastical patronage, and the circulation of books created a Transottoman communication space that transcended linguistic and ethnic boundaries, while also producing hierarchy, dependency, and conflict. Rather than a unified “Orthodox Commonwealth,” the early modern Orthodox sphere emerges as a contested, multi-centered region whose internal dynamics were shaped as much by mobility and mistrust as by shared tradition.

How slavery and slave trading configured mobility, networks, and spatial dynamics across and beyond the Ottoman Empire is presented by **Veruschka Wagner**. Rather than viewing the empire as a bounded territorial unit, her work conceptualizes a Transottoman space shaped by the movements of diverse actors—merchants, intermediaries, state officials, and enslaved individuals themselves. These actors operated within overlapping networks whose nodes ranged from major hubs like Istanbul and Caffa to smaller regional markets. Their interactions produced a multilayered geography that was fluid, dynamic, and constantly re-configured by shifting political, military, and economic conditions. The study begins by situating Ottoman slavery within its broader historical context. Although deeply embedded in Ottoman society, slavery existed within a system distinct from plantation-based slave societies: Manumission was common, upward mobility possible, and enslaved people were incorporated into households, administrative structures, and urban labor markets. Slave supply zones shifted over time—from the Balkans during the sixteenth century to the Black Sea region in the seventeenth—reflecting both imperial expansion and changing relations with external powers. The empire thus functioned not only as a destination for enslaved people but also as a transit zone that linked various regions of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The contribution traces the mobility patterns of slave traders and captives along land and sea routes connecting the Black Sea, Mediterranean, Aegean, Danube basin, and Arabian and North African regions. It highlights how these routes predated Ottoman rule but were appropriated and transformed by Ottoman actors. The resulting network was marked by fluctuating intensities: central nodes like Istanbul retained long-term importance, while others—such as Caffa or specific Danubian or Aegean centers—rose or declined according to military developments, treaties, and shifts in supply. The Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), for example, curtailed Tatar raiding and redirected flows of captives toward the Caucasus and eastern Black Sea coast.

Beyond large-scale interregional movements, the analysis also emphasizes local and intra-urban mobility, particularly through court records from Istanbul. These

reveal a complex ecosystem of official and unofficial traders, guild members, brokers, and intermediaries, as well as the circulation of enslaved individuals within neighborhoods and households. Both mobile and immobile actors participated in sustaining the institution of slavery, and enslaved individuals experienced mobility on multiple scales—from forced long-distance transfer to smaller, repeated movements between owners. The contribution identifies several layers of Transottoman mobility: 1. Spatial – routes and regions of capture, transit, and distribution, whose boundaries were inherently porous and shifting; 2. Functional – the empire as both a receiver and conduit of enslaved people, generating transregional circulations that crossed imperial borders; 3. Social and cultural – the incorporation of diverse enslaved populations, whose languages, practices, and eventual integration profoundly shaped Ottoman urban and household life; former slaves could themselves become slave owners, revealing permeability within status hierarchies; 4. Temporal – continuities in trade centers and practices that predated and outlasted Ottoman rule, alongside evolving legal frameworks, labor uses, and patterns of ownership across the six-century span of Ottoman history. Taken together, these dimensions show that slavery was not merely an institution within the empire but a structuring force that transformed a transregional space created and sustained by the mobility of numerous interconnected actors. The Transottoman slave trade was thus a dynamic, multilayered interaction zone whose contours changed over time yet remained analytically coherent through the networks and practices that bound its participants.

Last but not least, **Christoph Witzernath** explores how systems of enslavement, dependency, and mobility shaped the political and social landscapes of the Black Sea and Inner Eurasian world from the late medieval to the early modern period. Following the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire, the Eurasian steppe became an expansive frontier of insecurity where slave raids intensified and new forms of asymmetric dependency emerged. Neighboring polities—Ottoman, Muscovite, and various steppe powers—responded by creating complex regimes of enslavement, enserfment, manumission, and protection, which forged new transregional interactions and reshaped imperial formations. Central to this inquiry is the analytical distinction between *slaving zones*, *no-slaving zones*, and the newly proposed concept of the *counter dependency zone*. Jeffrey Fynn-Paul's influential framework—originally developed for the Greater Mediterranean and colonial worlds—shows how societies defined who could be enslaved, where slaving was permitted, and how identity, political organization, and religious boundaries structured these practices. Yet Inner Eurasia complicates this model. Muscovy, for example, simultaneously protected its population from external slave raids while relying heavily on internal forms of strong asymmetrical dependency, above all serfdom. Its evolving “counter dependency zone” thus combined external protection with internal coercion, using fortifications, ransoming regimes,

and selective alliances with steppe groups to shield its taxable populations and stabilize vulnerable frontiers. This approach moves beyond national narratives that have traditionally framed Black Sea slavery with isolated, area-specific perspectives. Recent scholarship shows that slaving was bidirectional: While Crimean Tatars and other steppe confederacies captured vast numbers of people for the Ottoman and other markets, Muscovite forces and Cossacks also engaged in raiding and exchange, though on smaller scales. By adopting transregional and transcultural perspectives, scholars increasingly understand Inner Eurasia as a crossroads where slaving, protection, and mobility intersected across imperial boundaries. The concept of the counter dependency zone helps to capture these interwoven dynamics. It highlights how Muscovy's expanding defensive infrastructure—its fortified lines, garrisons, and mobile frontier populations—created a protected space that enabled agricultural expansion, channeled the Northern Silk Road's shifting trade routes, and immobilized previously mobile groups. It also explains Muscovy's pragmatic approach to frontier peoples: selectively protecting or abandoning populations, redirecting slaving pressures, and strategically tolerating or punishing mobility in order to consolidate empire. At stake were not only military and economic imperatives but also moral and ideological claims—most notably the tsar's self-presentation as a protector who ransomed captives and offered stable patronage. Taken together, these dynamics call for a reconceptualization of Inner Eurasia's early modern history. Rather than viewing empire-building solely as the politics of managing internal diversity, this contribution examines how slaving zones and counter-slaving strategies structured social relations, shaped imperial borders, and reordered the region's mobility regimes. In doing so, it aligns with the aims of the Transottomanica project, which treats mobility—forced and voluntary—as a generative lens for Crossroads Studies. By foregrounding transregional networks, nodes, and constraints, this framework reveals how local societies were embedded in the wider circulations of people, goods, and ideas, and how these circulations forged new spaces of power, coercion, and protection across Inner Eurasia.

Main Findings

The contributions to this volume examine diverse historical case studies, yet when approached through a shared set of guiding questions, they reveal a striking conceptual coherence. These questions addressed three interrelated analytical dimensions: **actors**, **degrees and levels of mobility**, and **spaces of interaction**. Taken together, the contributions invite us to understand space not as a given territorial entity but as the product of relational processes. The so-called “transottoman

space” thus emerges not as a new geographical region, but as a heuristic device for rendering historical entanglements visible.

Actors

Obviously, there was no single special group, but rather an array of actors interacting in Transottoman space throughout the centuries. Alongside representatives of professions focused on linguistic and cultural translation and mediation, such as translators, interpreters and diplomats, secret agents, ruling dynasties, the aristocracy, merchants, the military, scholars and the clergy should also be considered as actors literally (inter)acting within Transottoman geography and beyond.

A first key commonality lies in the diversity of the actors under investigation. Across the volume, highly heterogeneous yet functionally comparable groups appear:

- imperial elites (diplomats, officials, clerics),
- intermediary actors (merchants, translators, brokers, consular agents),
- asymmetrically dependent groups (enslaved persons, captives, serfs),
- collective actors (women’s networks, circles of scholars, religious communities),
- institutional actors (courts, monasteries, administrative bodies, judicial institutions, consulates),
- and publics as discursive agents.

In these studies, actors are not primarily defined by territorial belonging but by their relational positioning. They function as carriers of practices, knowledge, norms, and resources that move across political and geographic boundaries. The analytical focus thus shifts from static affiliation to relational embeddedness. Moreover, the contributions consistently demonstrate that actors simultaneously participate in multiple, overlapping networks. These may be economic (trade, slavery), diplomatic, ecclesiastical, military, literary, feminist, or historiographical in nature. Such networks are polycentric, historically changeable, and transimperial. It is precisely this multi-layered embeddedness that generates both opportunities for agency and arenas of tension. The analysis of networks further reveals identifiable nodes: cities such as Istanbul, Venice, Tiflis, and Moscow; institutions such as monasteries and courts; and individual brokers who function as mediators. These nodes represent sites of condensed immobility in which information, practices, and resources are accumulated, transformed, and redistributed. Immobility, therefore, appears not as the antithesis of mobility but as one of its preconditions.

Mobility

Vertical mobility within the imperial setting of urban and provincial spaces played a significant role. Power, the sharing of power, and the acquisition of financial, material, and other assets, as well as knowledge, were essential for the vertical mobility of actors, alongside family, confessional, ethnic, and ideological bonds. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the latter has started to play a more prominent role. Horizontal mobility, crossing borders and spanning intra- and interimperial settings, was of paramount importance, characterising the movements of Orthodox clergy, merchants, slave traders, Ottoman servicemen and other groups. Mobility was shaped by state interaction, economic situations, interstate wars, natural disasters and other factors.

The contributions make clear that mobility is neither homogeneous nor exclusively physical.

Degrees of mobility vary according to actor and context:

- coerced mobility in contexts of slavery or captivity,
- strategic-functional mobility in trade, diplomacy, and missionary activity,
- circular mobility of ideas, texts, and narratives,
- symbolic or ideological mobility in the context of monastic networks, religious norms, or spaces of remembrance,
- temporary or singular long-distance mobility,
- locally bounded everyday mobility.

Importantly, a broader geographical radius does not necessarily imply greater autonomy. An enslaved person transported across vast distances could possess a wider spatial trajectory than a local merchant, yet without corresponding agency.

Mobility is structured and constrained by physical, legal, political, confessional, gendered, financial, and symbolic boundaries. It is enabled, regulated, restricted, and instrumentalized within specific historical constellations.

Beyond degrees of mobility, the contributions distinguish between different levels of mobility:

- physical mobility,
- social mobility,
- cultural and mental mobility,
- political and cognitive mobility,
- ideological mobility,
- circulatory mobility of knowledge and discourse.

These levels are analytically distinct yet empirically intertwined. An actor may be physically immobile but discursively or ideologically highly mobile. Conversely,