

Call for Abstracts

The Near Eastern Saddle Period: The Formation of Modern Concepts in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian

**International Conference,
University of Bern, June 12–14, 2019**

Keynote speaker: Prof. Dr. Margrit Pernau

Conceptual history of Near Eastern languages is currently shaping up as a proper field of research. This conference aims at strengthening the integration of this field by bringing together scholars – of all career stages – already working on conceptual history in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. Equally, we want to advance the state of theoretical and methodological reflections by discussing common hermeneutical and practical issues.

To these ends, the metaphor of the saddle period highlights our interest in key concepts of modernity and serves as a heuristic tool to inquire into both ruptures and continuities in the formation of modern Near Eastern concepts. The Near Eastern saddle period can initially be suspected between 1860 and 1940, a period of great terminological and semantic variety and contestation in vibrant, transnational public spheres with an unprecedented density of communication. Existing research suggests that in this period, earlier semantic transformations came to intersect with hegemonic European concepts (mainly French and English) to produce key concepts of modernity. How far, though, can the meanings and usages of individual concepts be traced back? Through which actors and channels were they established? And what was the role of European but also other languages in this regard? These questions are very much open, and consequently we conceive of the saddle period not as a fixed time-span, but rather as a stretchable space that accounts for both ruptures and continuities in conceptual transformations on different levels. Thus, the saddle period primarily serves as a metaphor to highlight our common interest in the formation of modernity and as a heuristic tool to ask common questions in this regard.

Consequently, we are especially interested in papers combining case studies of modern religious, social and political concepts in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian with theoretical considerations related to the Near Eastern saddle period — whether in an appreciative or in a critical manner. While focussing on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we equally welcome papers on earlier meanings and usages of terms and concepts that came to be key concepts of modernity. Papers on other languages are also considered if strongly relating to the theoretical framework of the conference.

Invited participants will be asked to provide draft versions of their papers by May 31.

We intend to publish selected papers in a special journal issue.

We will cover travel and accommodation costs for all invited participants without institutional funding of their own. Please state in your application whether you require funding.

Please send your extensive abstract of 350–450 words and a short CV by February 15 to:
florian.zemmin@islam.unibe.ch