

# Kalabalik!

*Bulletin of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul*



## Tongues Set Free

*Translating Worlds* was the name of the exhibition that ran at Depo Gallery in Tophane from late November, 2023 to early February, 2024. Curated by Milan Vukašinović from Uppsala as part of the *Retracing Connections* project, it was devoted to stories traveling across physical and semiotic boundaries.

With *Glossolalala*, we got to witness the result of a kindred collaboration, this time under the auspices of the Consulate general and its cultural councillor, Mike Bode. What had begun during the pandemic as an online event in our joint series *Dialogues/Dialoglar* with the visual artists Johanna Gustafsson Fürst and Dilek Winchester, as well as the American Byzantinist Glenn Peers, had been picked up by Selen Ansen at the Arter gallery and curated into a fascinating exhibition that opened on March 7, exploring the boundaries of language and meaning through the medium of Johanna's sculptures and Dilek's installations.



The exhibition titled GLOSSOLALALA presented individual works by Johanna Gustafsson Fürst and Dilek Winchester.

An exhibition that ran at the Pera Museum from November 2023 to January 2024, *Minor Vibrations on Earth*, featured works of the prominent ceramic artist Burçak Bingöl. In late January, we co-hosted a talk with her and our own recurring scholar Gertrud Olsson at the Pera Museum, moderated by the art historian Seda Yörüker. Entitled *Tiles and Tales*, the event established a dialogue around contemporary and historical tradition in Turkish ceramics. Gertrud's book *Den lilla skalan i den stora: om kaklet i osmanska rum* came out in Swedish last year and offers a beautiful introduction to the topic.

The winter otherwise saw the publication of a book that combined international literary, musical and byzantinological scholarship with contemporary Turkish art, poetry, and activism. *Kassia: Words of Encouragement* originated during the 2020-21 pandemic as one in a whole row of digital events about the Byzantine abbess and hymnographer Kassia (fl. 9th century). Edited by Meral Akkent from the Istanbul Gender Museum, the indefatigable Milan Vukašinović from Uppsala, as well as Piril Us-MacLennan and Aylin Vartanyan Dilaver, this bilingual – English and Turkish – volume features scholarly texts on Kassia mingled with contemporary artistic and literary takes on her as a feminist icon and voice of resistance. The SRII, who took part in one of the original events in 2021, now contributed to the publication, and on the launch event at the Women's Library in Balat on March 22 this year, we were proud and honored that our own consul general Johanna Strömquist got to greet a fully packed auditorium of Kassia fans.



Gertrud Olsson's book *Den lilla skalan i den stora: om kaklet i osmanska rum*.



In the early spring, a book of the institute's own making went into print, this time in Swedish. Lars Johansson, *Om min penna ägde kraften ...* is a compilation of essays and articles written over the course of five decades by one of the foremost Swedish Turkologists and influential members of the SRII. Like all other books that we produce or co-produce, it can be purchased at our web shop [srii.bokorder.se](http://srii.bokorder.se), but it will also be available for free as a digital file on our website.

March 3, 2024 marked the centenary of the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate. *The Arabicities* initiative, consisting of staff from the SRII, the French IFEA institute, Koç and Bogaziçi Universities, joined forces to plan a two-day workshop in memory of the historic event. The first day consisted of a city walk that included the Istanbul Research Institute's exhibition *Occupied Istanbul 1919–23* and ended at the Dolmabahçe Palace Art Gallery, where the participants got to admire both the paintings and drawings of Caliph Abdülmecid II and the room where he signed his resignation. On the second day, ten speakers from Turkey and abroad offered different perspectives on the Ottoman Caliphate and its end in 1924 under the title *When the Center Cannot Hold: Modern Statehood, Global Islam, and the End of the Ottoman Caliphate*.

Like last year, the French-Swedish collaborations have proven very fruitful, and we have co-hosted no less than three further workshops with the IFEA during the spring: *Queer Migration* in April, *Post-Disaster Reconstruction* in May, and *Transmission of Astronomical Diagrams* in June. Just like the delegation from the University of Münster that we received in May, and the representatives of the Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l'homme and the university of Basel that visited us in May and June, respectively, they show the ever-important role of transnational scholarly exchange and collaboration.

Nevertheless, our purpose remains to provide Swedish universities with a venue and a platform, not only for established scholars and researchers, but also for students and graduates. A PhD school in Islamology took place at the institute in late February and early March, a collaboration between the universities of Gothenburg, Linnaeus, Lund, Stockholm, Södertörn and Umeå. Apart from student presentations and interactions with senior, international, and local Turkish scholars, it featured study visits and city walks, as well as a meeting of the professors with the consul general.

Given the multidisciplinary nature of the SRII, it is not always that our visiting fellows and scholars happen to work on similar or even related topics. For this reason – and indubitably given the current circumstances – it was a special occasion when we could simultaneously host Paul Levin from the Stockholm University Institute of Turkish Studies, and Marianna Serveta from the Swedish Defence Research Agency, both working on topics related to Turkey, Sweden, and NATO, in late March and early April, and even arrange a seminar with them both.



Lars Johansson, *Om min penna ägde kraften ...* is a compilation of essays and articles written over the course of five decades by one of the foremost Swedish Turkologists. Available for free as a digital file on our website.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**POST-DISASTER RECOVERY AND  
RECONSTRUCTION: CHALLENGES  
AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**20-21 MAY  
2024**

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Aydın Doğan Auditorium,  
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**ORGANISERS:**  
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Poster from the conference *Post-Disaster Reconstruction: Challenges and Opportunities*





Swedish and Turkish students and teachers at the PhD school in Islamology in February.

Later in the spring, Leif Inge Ree Petersen from the University of Trondheim and Badegül Aydınlık from Umeå University came to the institute as fellows: the former to work on borderland loyalties and topographies between Byzantium and the Caliphate, the latter to study concepts of womanhood in educational publications from the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republican era. Together with Leif, we also made a field trip to the old Perso-Byzantino-Islamic borderland between Diyarbakır, Nusaybin, and Dara, and further on to visit the Gaziantep branch of CARE International, one of several organizations working with the Turkish team of the EU-funded migration project GAPs.

Otherwise, two of the most memorable events this spring have been in the form of concerts, led by ethnomusicologists. In February, we co-arranged a concert at the new localities of the German Orient Institut, just down the hill towards the Galata Tower. Here, in the magnificent 19th-century setting of the old *Teutonia Club*, a group of Uyghur exile musicians and performers gave a concert at the end of February, accompanied by a scholarly talk with Prof. Rachel Harris from the SOAS. We thank our own scholar Patrick Hällzon as well as Martin Greven and Cüneyit Ersin Mihi from the OII for making this possible.

Then, in late May, our own scholarship holder Alevtina Parland from the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki gave a concert at the Swedish Palace together with two other professional klezmer musicians, Zoë Aqua on violin and Lou Carrig on accordeon. Alevtina played the trumpet, sang, and performed, in front of an avid and awestruck audience.

Art and scholarship are never far apart, and even less so at the SRII, where we can look back upon decades of fruitful synergies between creative and investigating disciplines. Therefore, it is with regret that we have received the Swedish government's decision not to prolong the position of the cultural counselor in Istanbul.



Roundtable followed by a Concert “Keeping Uyghur Culture Alive in Exile” at the German Orient Institut.

For well over ten years, under first Suzi Erşahin and then Mike Bode, we have had a vital and dynamic partner at the Consulate General for bringing Swedish and Turkish art, culture and research closer together.

There are two reasons for us to remain hopeful about the future of Turkish-Swedish cultural exchange. The first one is that we have established a formal program for artists in residence at the SRII. Together with the Consulate General and Konstnärsmånden, this year we have realized something that Suzi and Mike both worked for during their time here: twice a year, Swedish visual and performative artists will now have the opportunity to spend two weeks in Istanbul and interact with the local art scene.

The second one is that Mike will remain in Istanbul and use the institute as a workplace. Together, we hope – among many other things – to finalize the long ongoing plans for an exhibition on Guillaume Berggren’s photography, and already this autumn our friends and followers will be able to see the result of a fruitful collaboration between him and the SRII: the next issue of *Dragomanen*, under the editorship of Mike Bode, Liana Kuyumcuan, and Murat Tulek from the Postane cultural center, will feature Turkish and Swedish perspectives on architectural Modernities in Turkey and beyond.

It is as current-day dragomans that we consider also our own at the Swedish Research Institute, where we can celebrate 50 years in the Dragoman house this summer – as translators and intermediaries, between Turkey and Sweden, between culture and scholarship, between past and present.

*Heilo*  
Olof Heilo, Director SRII



## Interview: Johanna Strömquist Consul General of Sweden in Istanbul.

You have been stationed in Istanbul as Consul General since August 2023. Could you share some of your initial impressions of the city and your experiences so far? For example, what cultural or historical aspects of Istanbul have you found particularly interesting?

My first encounter with Istanbul was twenty years ago, in 2003. At the time I was part of the Western Balkans team at the Foreign Ministry in Stockholm, and I was overwhelmed by the spectacular beauty and the historic significance of the city as the centre of the Ottoman Empire so clearly having left its mark on more remote parts of the empire in terms of architecture, food, and other cultural expressions. The extraordinary history of this modern mega city with approximately 15 million inhabitants, is a mix that I find particularly interesting. Ancient buildings and remnants side by side with the most modern expressions of a city of today, situated at a crossroads between continents, is truly unique. There is always something special with cities on water, and Istanbul in addition has a magical light making the city look like a fairytale.



What are your priorities and main aims as Consul General in Istanbul? Can you share any specific projects or initiatives that you have started or look forward to starting here in Istanbul?

The burden of history weighs on my shoulders since the Consulate General's premises in Istanbul is the Swedish state's oldest property abroad, acquired in 1757. There has been a significant number of Swedish diplomats trading these floors before me, and I feel a responsibility towards them to carry the torch forward. To keep history alive and highlight Sweden's remarkable connections to the city and the country. We are currently working together with the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul on several projects that will highlight these historic links. They will result in a book and hopefully also an exhibition. An important part of the work is also to make sure to build for the future by further strengthening the ties between Sweden and Türkiye in a number of fields. It involves working with the approximately 140 Swedish companies that are present in the country to promote Swedish sustainable solutions linked to green and digital transition, and energy efficiency amongst other areas.

What unique opportunities and challenges have you encountered, or do you expect to encounter in Istanbul, compared to your previous postings?

Having spent most of my 25 years as a diplomat in different parts of the former Ottoman Empire – in Jerusalem, Sarajevo and Pristina, and other years working for the UN in New York with Peacekeeping in countries like Afghanistan, Lebanon and Somalia, all of them places finding themselves in conflict or post-conflict situations when I was serving there, I am looking forward to working in a country where my focus will be on trade and promotion. Türkiye is a well-placed and exiting market for Swedish companies and I look forward to facilitating links between Swedish and Turkish business contributing to green and digital transition, as well as innovation in other areas of common interest.

This year marks the 100-year anniversary of the friendship agreement between the Kingdom of Sweden and the Republic of Türkiye. How would you describe the current state of relations between Türkiye and Sweden, particularly in the context of the 100-year friendship agreement?

It is a remarkable coincidence that 100 years after the signing of the Friendship Agreement between Sweden and Türkiye we are now closer than in a long time after Sweden becoming a NATO ally this spring. The focus can now be on meeting joint challenges in the wider region together as allies in an even stronger multilateral organisation focusing on political and security issues, while also continue to build on the strong bilateral relation between our two countries.

Could you tell us a bit about the historical context in which this agreement was signed? How have the relations between Sweden and Türkiye evolved over the past century since the signing of the friendship agreement?

The first Friendship Agreement between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire was signed already in 1739. It is allegedly special in the sense that it was one of the first, if not the first, such agreement that the Ottoman Empire signed with a western European country. In a way one could say that this was the product of long diplomatic relations starting hundreds of years earlier with the first Swedish diplomatic approaches in the 1500s culminating with the five-years stay of the Swedish king, Karl XII, in the Ottoman Empire 1709-1714. The agreement from 1739 is written in old ottoman Turkish in the Arabic alphabet beautifully adorned in gold. The Friendship Agreement from 1924 is a product of its time written in the Latin alphabet, however, still in a beautiful flowery language that is not used today in diplomatic agreements. It reconfirmed the friendly relationship between the Kingdom of Sweden and the then newly established Republic of Türkiye. This document is still the foundation of the diplomatic relations between the states of Sweden and Türkiye of today.

How do you view the relationship between the Consulate General and the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul?

It is a privilege to have the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul within our premises. It provides us with opportunities to cooperate in a number of areas and it contributes significantly to the overall work of Sweden in Istanbul and in the whole country. We complement and inspire each other.

Interview by Lovisa Jakobsson, SRII Junior Researcher, spring 2024.



## Pharaohs on the Bosphorus: Ancient Egypt in Istanbul, from Late Antiquity to Ottoman times (Research Stay at SRII, September 2023) Luigi Prada, Uppsala University.

When thinking about Egyptology and collections of ancient Egyptian artifacts the world over, the names of cities like Cairo, followed by those of several European capitals and North American cities, immediately come to mind. That of Istanbul, however, is not a name that typically pops up in this respect. Surely, one could identify a number of historic reasons for this: first and foremost, the fact that a city so jam-packed with its own monumental and archaeological heritage from ancient Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman times hardly needed to go about filling its own museums with artifacts from foreign lands. Similarly, Egyptology never happened to take off as an independent academic subject at the University of Istanbul (or, more generally, in Turkish academia), the way it instead did in other European centers of learning from the 19th century onwards. Nonetheless, Istanbul can—and should—proudly claim its place on the world map of Egyptology. Not only does the city have a remarkable collection of ancient Egyptian artifacts in the collection of the Museum of the Ancient Orient (part of the city's Archaeological Museums), ancient Egypt has also contributed to the historic texture of Late Antique Constantinople, with monuments brought in by the Romans, following what was a century-old trend for Rome itself and other major cities of the Roman Empire.



Museum of the Ancient Orient (Wikimedia Commons, image in the public domain).

And it was precisely to investigate the historic presence of Ancient Egypt in Istanbul that in September 2023 I was granted a residential fellowship by the Swedish Research Institute. The planned work was divided into three main parts, to lay the foundations for a wider, long-term project. First came the study of a discrete part of the ancient Egyptian collection in the Museum of the Ancient Orient, namely, epigraphic artefacts from the New Kingdom to the Roman Period (from the mid-2nd millennium BCE to the first centuries of the Common Era). Due to the extended closure of the Museum on account of major refurbishment plans, the epigraphic study had to be carried out primarily on photographic and archival records, with in-person inspection and the creation of digital models of the artefacts having to wait for a future visit. Even within these limitations, the results confirmed the importance and need of a (re)-investigation of this collection, for the knowledge of which scholars have to rely, to this day, on partial and outdated studies, such as V. Scheil's *Notice sommaire* of the ancient Egyptian collection (1898), or B. Pörtner's miscellaneous study of selected inscribed Egyptian antiquities from the collections of Athens and Istanbul (1908).



Museum of the Ancient Orient, view of part of the Egyptian collection's display (author's photograph from an earlier visit, prior to the museum's closure).

The second part of the project focused on the investigation of the history of the Egyptian collection held at the Museum of the Ancient Orient, and specifically on how it came to be assembled. Recent Egyptological and museological scholarship has extensively investigated the establishment and development of Egyptian collections in the colonial powers of Europe and North America during the 19th and early 20th centuries, as part of a long-overdue revision of the history of Egyptology within a postcolonial framework. These studies, however, typically overlook Istanbul's Egyptian collection, with the consequence that the exact relationship between Ottoman Egypt and the capital of the empire of which it was officially part, Istanbul, still holds huge potential for further investigation, as a unique case study within the landscape of European collections of Egyptian antiquities. In this respect, research in libraries and archives in Istanbul, facilitated by the kind assistance of local colleagues, has allowed me to confirm and shed further light on a complex history, which saw the museum acquire Egyptian antiquities, receive them as diplomatic gifts, but also accession them from local finds on the shores of the Bosphorus, rather than those of the Nile.



For example, one of the original cores of the collection, including some of its most remarkable inscribed artefacts, came to Istanbul as part of a gift to the Sublime Porte ordered in 1885 by the then Ottoman High Commissioner in Egypt (and later Grand Vizier) Ahmed Muhtar Pasha. The items were cherry-picked directly from the magazines of the Boulaq Museum (the first incarnation of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo), with the blessing of its director, Gaston Maspero, and with the selection of the individual objects possibly having been the work of Émile Brugsch (later Brugsch Pasha, by order of Egypt's Khedivé), a famous—or, notorious—keeper at the Cairo Museum. But, as mentioned above, some of the objects that entered the collection were not shipped all the way from Egypt. In fact, they were excavated in Istanbul and the surrounding region, one such example being a couple of sculpted fragments recovered around 1950 on the shores of Pendik, on the Asian side of the city, having undoubtedly been transported from Egypt to Constantinople in Late Antique times.



Ahmed Muhtar Pasha (Wikimedia Commons, image in the public domain).

This, the import of Egyptian antiquities to the Roman Empire's eastern capital during the last centuries of antiquity, constituted the third part of the project of my research stay. Constantinople was established and expanded by Constantine the Great and his successors as a "New Rome". As such, the city had to imitate and rival its western counterpart in all respects, including the import of Egyptian monuments as part of its urban decoration. And no monument shows this better and in more impressive a fashion than the Egyptian obelisk that towers in the Hippodrome, today's Sultanahmet Square. The history of this monument is a particularly complex one, worth summarising here. Originally erected by the Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III in the middle of the 15th century BCE within the temple of Karnak, in southern Egypt, it seems to have already attracted the attention of Constantine the Great, who was plausibly the ruler who ordered its transfer to Alexandria, on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, planning its eventual delivery to his new capital on the Bosphorus. Nothing, however, came of it: the obelisk remained in Alexandria, and even Constantine's successor, Constantius II, failed to remove it from Egypt and erect it in Constantinople, choosing instead to focus his efforts on removing another large obelisk (in fact, the largest ancient Egyptian obelisk currently in existence) and erect it in "old" Rome—the monolith now known as the Lateran obelisk. Imperial interest for the obelisk did not decrease with time though. Thus, emperor Julian, the successor of Constantius II, wrote a letter to the citizens of Alexandria concerning this obelisk, which by then had been lying for decades on their shoreline, trying to infuse new life into the project of its delivery to Constantinople. But more decades had to pass before this finally happened, close to the end of the 4th century, under the auspices of emperor Theodosius, by whose name the Istanbul obelisk is thus typically known. Sometime during these vicissitudes, the obelisk broke, and lost its lower section. This notwithstanding, the obelisk remains one of the most remarkable specimens of its kind outside Egypt—as is its pedestal, which is still the original from the time of Theodosius, who is famously pictured on it alongside his courtiers.



The obelisk of Theodosius (author's photograph).



The obelisk of Theodosius, showing incomplete hieroglyphs where the monolith's shaft broke (author's photograph).

Moreover, the Istanbul obelisk is the only one outside of Egypt to have remained in its original location since antiquity: indeed, none of the several Egyptian obelisks in Rome remained in their original locations, having all been re-erected in new locations by the Popes between the 16th and 19th centuries. Starting with Constantine and again in the last years of the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople / Istanbul turned to the glories of ancient Egypt to emphasise its dignity as an imperial capital and global metropolis, appropriating the glories of the pharaohs of old for, first, its emperors, and then for its sultans. Telling this story in full will contribute not only to Egyptological scholarship, but will also add a new layer in the complex history of this unique city.

I should like to hereby acknowledge my debt of gratitude towards the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, for generously granting me a research stay during September 2023. The intention is for the resulting research work to lead to further collaborations with the Institute and with Turkish colleagues, starting with the holding of a dedicated workshop on Istanbul and ancient Egypt.

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# OM MIN PENNA ÄGDE KRAFTEN ...

En blick tillbaka på turkisk litteratur och kultur



LARS JOHANSON

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## Interview: Mike Bode, Outgoing Counsellor of Cultural Affairs

Could you share some of the projects you have initiated or supported in Istanbul? What were their outcomes?

Over the past five years we have initiated and developed a diverse range of cultural projects everything from electro-acoustic music exchanges to children's literature, to sustainable architecture and contemporary art. In many cases we have acted as matchmakers or go-betweens, connecting cultural practitioner's and institutions from Sweden and Türkiye, encouraging collaborations or helping to find support for different cultural practitioner's visits and engagements in Türkiye. In other cases we have initiated and developed large scale long-term cross-cultural projects together with Swedish and Turkish partners. One of the leitmotiv's of our work has been to create meaningful exchanges between Swedish and Turkish cultural practitioners in order to develop new networks, share knowledge and create opportunities and by doing so promoting Swedish culture in Türkiye in an operative way.

To give a few examples, we initiated a research and exhibition project where we invited six research-based artists based in Sweden and Türkiye to collaborate in pairs over the course of two years and explore the archives of the Women's Library and Information Center Foundation in Istanbul. The archive, which does an incredible job of preserving women's history in Türkiye often does not have the time and capacity to make visible the personal stories of the many women hidden away in the archives. The research resulted in an immersive exhibition called "Reflections from the Women's Archive" which was exhibited at the DEPO art space in Istanbul. The artists Larissa Araz & Petra Bauer explored the many thousands of anonymous images of women in the archive, while Şafak Şule Kemancı and Ays Alayat made a moving tribute to a transgender person from the beginning of the last century who they found in the archive while Özge Açikkol and Elin Strand Ruin engaged with local women living in the vicinity of the archive.<sup>[1]</sup>



Exhibition view "Reflections from the Women's Archive"  
at DEPO, Istanbul. Photo: DEPO

1. "Reflections from the Women's Archive" Artists: Larissa Araz and Petra Bauer, Özge Açikkol and Elin Strand Ruin, Şafak Şule Kemancı and Ays Alayat. A collaboration with Women's Library and Information Center Foundation and the Art Space DEPO. The project was realised with support from the Swedish Institute and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee's International Programme for Visual and Applied Arts.



Another example of a long-term project was the project “Traversing the archive” a tri-lateral project we developed together with my colleagues Helene Pousette Larsson at the embassy in Washington and Maria Lind in Moscow. Together we developed an ambitious knowledge sharing project which brought together mainly small-scale archives from Sweden, Türkiye, Russia and the United States in order to explore the possibilities importance and challenges of archives today. The project stretched over two years first in the form of digital meetings, seminars and discussions and culminated in a three-day seminar in Stockholm which we organized together with IASPIS and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee. One of the areas we focused on was the importance of maintaining counter narratives today and questions of freedom of speech.[2]



“Traversing the archive” symposium, IASPIS, Stockholm. Photos: Aron Pelcman Photography

2. “Traversing the archive” The National Library of Sweden (Stockholm), KvinnSam - National Resource Library for Gender Studies (Gothenburg), SALT (Istanbul), Diyarbakir City Archive (Diyarbakir), bak.ma (Istanbul), International Memorial Archive (Moscow), Garage Museum of Contemporary Art (Moscow), Typography Center for Contemporary Art Archive (Krasnodar), Interference archive (New York), The Georgetown Slavery Archive (Washington, DC), The Skid Row History Museum and Archive (Los Angeles). The project was financed by the Swedish Arts Council, the Embassy of Sweden in Washington and the Embassy of Sweden in Moscow and the Consulate General of Sweden in Istanbul. The symposium in Stockholm is held in collaboration with IASPIS – International Programme for Visual and Applied Arts.”

Another knowledge sharing project we organized was “Wayward Initiatives” which brought together peripheral Arts initiatives from Türkiye and Sweden in order to have a common discussion about methodologies for cultural production and cultural resilience. The project was organized as series of networking meetings and a symposium in Istanbul which included presentations, workshops, site visits and events. The project ran over the course of two years and has resulted in several follow up research visits and ongoing collaborations. For instance, the artist group Kultivator from Öland who have been working on issues of threatened waterways in Sweden and Canada have been traveling in Anatolia meeting with colleagues and local environmentalist organizations with the aim of developing a new project in Türkiye. [3]



Photo: SUB, Canakale

Yet another long-term project has been our ongoing collaboration with the Istanbul based theatre group Galata Perform who have been translating contemporary Swedish and Nordic drama into Turkish together with public readings, workshops and publications. In the case of the Swedish-Iranian poet and playwright Athena Farrokhzad's play “Morality According to Medea”, Galata Perform decided to set up and produce the play which is has been a great success and still touring in cities all over Türkiye.

3. “Wayward Initiatives” The project was originally initiated by the Consulate General of Sweden and the Swedish Embassy in Pretoria (Hedda Kraus Sjögren) and developed in collaboration with the curator Jonatan Habib Engqvist. The “Wayward Initiatives seminar” and subsequent research trips were organized in collaboration with SAHA and Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSİV). The project is supported by the Swedish Arts Council together with IASPIS the Swedish Arts Grants Committee's International Programme for Visual and Applied Arts.





“Wayward Initiatives” symposium, IKSŞ, Istanbul. Photo: Fatih Yılmaz

One of the highlights over the past five years was the 150th anniversary of the Swedish Palace in Istanbul which we celebrated by transforming the whole Swedish Palace into a sound and light installation entitled “Red Dream (for Gunnar Ekelöf)”. The installation was developed by the Swedish visual artist and composer Carl Michael von Hausswolff together with his Turkish counterpart the sonic and visual artist Cevdet Erek. The project, which is a homage to the poet Gunnar Ekelöf who apparently wrote his famous suite “Dīwān on the Prince of Emgion” in Istanbul in a trance, took place during three memorable evenings and was experienced by hundreds of specially invited guests. Not only was this a spectacular way to highlight the history of the Swedish Palace and Sweden’s presence in Türkiye, it was also part of a long term knowledge exchange in electro-acoustic music between Elektronmusikstudion (EMS) in Stockholm and the Center for Advanced Studies in Music (MIAM) at Istanbul technical university.

To summarize, these and many other projects like them over the years, have had a focus on cross-cultural and long-term exchanges which in turn has brought together cultural practitioners and institutions from Sweden and Türkiye with the aim to develop new art works, networks and cooperations. The fruits and outcomes of which we are seeing today in the form of exhibitions, publications, performances and new collaborations.



Poster from Galata Performs performance of “Morality According to Medea” by Athena Farrokhzad





“Red Dream (for Gunnar Ekelöf)” by Carl Michael von Hausswolff and Cevdet Erek on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Swedish Palace in Istanbul.  
Installation view. Photo: Kayhan Kaygusuz.

How do you believe cultural exchange and collaboration projects and initiatives between Sweden and Türkiye influence the relationship between the two countries? What is the (political or other) impact of such initiatives? How have the cultural exchange/collaboration initiatives you've facilitated or implemented been received in both Sweden and Türkiye? Have there been any notable reactions or impacts from these exchanges?

It is always difficult to qualify the effects of cultural projects, especially those which are built on social exchanges, and this is something with we have often discussed together my cultural counsellor colleagues. In our experience creating different types of co-operation between artists and institutions not only produces outcomes in the form of exhibitions, publications and performances etc. it also creates professional relationships and friendships, expands networks and lays the ground for new projects in the future, projects that might never have happened without people and institutions getting to know each other. The effects of these interactions are sometimes first seen many years after the first steps of a project are taken. Our work has focused on helping to cultivate and develop such exchanges, learning from each other and sharing knowledge together.

What are the most significant challenges/opportunities for cultural exchange between Sweden and Türkiye today? / What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in promoting cultural exchange between Sweden and Türkiye? How would you describe the culture scene in Istanbul, and what aspects have stood out to you the most?

In Sweden we are used to generous public financing in the arts, both on local and national and international levels which results in a rich ecosystem where smaller cultural platforms and independent institutions can sustain their activities through support through an array of different types of public funding. In Türkiye the cultural ecosystem is a little more two dimensional, in the sense that there is very little public funding for the arts outside of the larger national institutions, and although the private philanthropic cultural museums and institutions play an important part in the cultural infrastructure in Türkiye they do not always cater for the for the smaller grass roots or more independent cultural scene who tend to be more or dependent on funds from foreign partners and thanks to many volunteers.

How has your perception of the culture scene in Türkiye and/or Sweden changed from when you first arrived to now?

The effects of terrible earthquake last year and the recent economic situation has been a challenge for the cultural sector as well as society as whole. Also many cultural practitioners and academics are taking opportunities to study or teach abroad more than before which has also had an effect, but on the whole the cultural scene is still very vibrant and creative despite all these difficult challenges. This can be seen in the many international film and music festivals and exhibitions which are still attracting large audiences. It is also encouraging to see the many creative ways in which artist initiatives are able maintain their activities despite the difficulties.

One thing which has become apparent to me over the years is that there is a genuine and mutual inquisitiveness and respect between cultural practitioners from the Nordic Countries and Türkiye. I think this is partially because, apart from the contemporaneity of global culture today, we have certain cultural similarities, there is for instance a melancholic trait which permeates both Nordic and Turkish culture and at the same time there are of course many cultural differences in our backgrounds and heritage. I believe it is this particular mixture of both recognition and fascination which creates such a fruitful starting point and conditions for cultural collaborations between Sweden and Türkiye.



Photo: Asli Yurdanur

Mike Bode (b. 1964) is a Swedish visual artist, researcher and organizer, and served as Sweden's Cultural Counselor in Turkey between 2019-2024. Bode's artistic work has been presented and exhibited widely internationally. As an organizer Bode has curated several exhibitions, conferences and talks and was one of the initiators of the Swedish interregional contemporary art project New Småland. Bode was the first visual artist in Sweden to receive a Ph.D. in artistic research from Gothenburg University.

Interview by Lovisa Jakobsson, SRIL Junior Researcher, spring 2024.



# TRANSACTIONS

## Syrian Stylites

Rereadings and Recastings of  
Late Ancient Superheroes

EDITED BY BARBARA CROSTINI  
& CHRISTIAN HØGEL

SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL  
TRANSACTIONS VOL. 26



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## Visiting scholar: Irgil Ezgi

I am a Postdoctoral Research Fellow within the Global Politics and Security Programme at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI). My work lies at the intersection of politics and forced migration, particularly focusing on migration diplomacy and migration management in the Middle East and the European Union and everyday politics of forced migration. I am a member of EuroMeSCo Euro-Mediterranean Research, Dialogue, Advocacy Network and IN2PREV Project's Frontline Practitioners Network. I received my PhD in Political Science from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, my MA in International Affairs from George Washington University, Washington, DC, and my BA in Political Science and International Relations from Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey.



During my one-month stay at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, I had the chance to present the first paper, "All That is International is Also Local: Assessing the Domestic Impacts of Turkey's Coercive Migration Diplomacy" that I am co-authoring with Prof. Kelsey Norman of Rice University, that is part of my postdoctoral project on refugee commodification and domestic politics. The paper focuses on migration diplomacy, or the use of migration to extract political and economic concessions, which has attracted growing scholarly attention in recent years. However, the existing studies tend to focus on its international component, neglecting the domestic political space and how this political extraction impacts domestic political dynamics. Thus, together with Prof. Norman, we focus on the main opposition People's Republican Party (CHP in Turkish acronyms), by assessing, engaging, and manoeuvring through migration diplomacy.

The presentation of the paper occurred within the Research Seminar Series of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul that was held at the Istanbul Political Research Institute (IstanPol) on April 17, 2023. The aim of the seminar was to understand the domestic implications of migration, both at the national or local level. Thus, my presentation, as it focuses on the national level impact of migration, has created a space for discussing the overlooked aspects of migration diplomacy and how it is reflected in the domestic politics through political parties besides the incumbent. While existing studies have predominantly concentrated on the international implications, the focal point of our investigation is not confined to the global stage; rather, it extends into the intricate web of domestic political dynamics. Hence, the presentation not only broadened the discourse but also paved the way for a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between migration diplomacy and the intricacies of domestic political landscapes.

In addition to offering me a scholarly environment, my visit at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul coincided with the pre-election period in Turkey. The elections, both presidential and parliamentary, have had an impact on the refugee issue and have been voices in the discourses of political parties during their campaigns. Therefore, the intersection of academic inquiry and the political pulse illuminated the multifaceted nature of the refugee issue, transcending theoretical discussions to become a lived reality shaping the electoral landscape. This experiential layer added depth to my research, offering a timely and relevant lens through which to examine the evolving dynamics of migration diplomacy.



## Klezmorim in Istanbul

### Research Fellow: Alevtina Parland

The club is smoking hot. Half of the crowd is standing with a drink in their hand, some are chit chatting, others waiting for us to start. The chairs are worn down, the lighting in the room is almost blue. It is ten thirty pm, a Friday evening in Beyoğlu. I turn to the band and count off. To my right I have the fiddle, to my left the trombone. I let my trumpet's bell resonate. We start by playing a bulgar tune, the drummer making heavy rolls on his snare drum, then we proceed to a zhok. Both of these melodies are dance genres from the Eastern European Jewish music repertoire.

The crowd loves it. It gets even hotter inside, and finally we cut the music for a break. Outside the club, on a side street of Istiklal, a young man comes up to me and says "It is so good, I understand these melodies, I know how the music is moving. It moves like our music"

Klezmer, as we call it today, or the repertoire of klezmerim - professional Ashkenazi wedding musicians of Eastern Europe, is landing surprisingly well with the young audience in Istanbul, even in these politically tense times, despite the disaster unfolding since October 7th.

The first guild of klezmerim was formed in Prague in the 1600s. The current territories of Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania were all strongholds of the quickly spreading and developing musical genre. In the beginning of the 20th century there is documentation of Ashkenazic wedding music being performed all the way from Helsinki down to Istanbul.

How exactly this repertoire formed, to its most part distinctly different from the neighboring musical traditions in Europe, remains a thrilling question. According to scholar Zev Feldman, the main building blocks of the repertoire that the musicians drew upon were European renaissance dance repertoire, European baroque music, the Eastern European Jewish nusach prayer, and Ottoman music of different genres. However, all of this remains largely under researched, not the least the effect of the Ottoman musical world on klezmer.

To the most part, this music was transmitted orally. The first attempts to document and classify the repertoire were made as late as in the beginning of the 20th century, and the research was headed by the early Soviet school of ethnomusicology, with scholars like Lipaev and Beregovski. These researchers did an important contribution and without them it would be hard to work with the repertoire at all, yet they did not have access to material outside of the territories of the Soviet Union and were educated in Western music theory, through which they explained the genre. They had neither access to or knowledge of the Ottoman modal music system. Nonetheless, Beregovski in his writing mentions the genre "taxim" (a concept used for a certain type of structured improvisation within the ottoman music system) that his informants talk of, and aims to explain the modal quality of the genre.

On the other hand, outside of the Soviet Union, also in the beginning of the 20th century, in the heat of nationalistic ideologies, headed by Idehlson and his idea that nationhood, ethnicity and musical expression are inseparable, scholarly ideas of trying to tie Ashkenazi music to the Arabic maqam system were popular. Today, these theories seem rather questionable.



Saturday, May 25, 2024, 17:00  
Palais de Suède

## From Transylvania to Istanbul

This Saturday, May 25 at 17:00, Alevtina Parland (trumpet), Lou Carrig (accordion) and Zoe Aqua (violin) will perform popular klezmer repertoires, tunes from old manuscripts and newly composed klezmer pieces. Klezmer is a musical style that was played all the way from Helsinki down to Istanbul for weddings and parties up until a hundred years ago. Today, this music remains ever intriguing and fascinating.

Parland, who is a research fellow at the Swedish Research Institute, will be joined by Aqua and Carrig, both recent Fulbright alumnae in the field of ethnomusicology. The three musicians have all spent recent years in the southern sphere of Europe conducting research, and now come together at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul to offer a warm evening of music with focus on Istanbul and Transylvania.



Poster from the event From Transylvania to Istanbul.



While we cannot either talk much about the effect of Helsinki on the klezmer repertoire, Istanbul was a huge center of culture, and the influence of the capital of the Ottoman empire on its vassal states Moldova and Wallachia has been documented. Also before, but especially after the political failure of Moldavian Prince Cantemir and the start of the Phanariot rule in 1711, there was an influx of Ashkenazi population to these territories. The klezmerim arrived and quickly became the most prominent strata of musicians along with the local lautari, professional musicians of Roma descent who were highly regarded craftsmen but enslaved. These two groups together formed a class of musicians providing the urban population with music. The professional collaboration of these two groups is a subject to be studied completely on its own. We have recordings of marriages being held between Jewish and Lautari musician families, and we know that many lautars learned and spoke Yiddish. Up until today, older generation lautars in Moldova call themselves klezmers. The scholar Garfias writes in his article *Survivals of Turkish Characteristics in Romanian Musica Lautareasca*:

“It is in the playing style of the Lautar that the greatest number of Turkish musical practices survive. A few specific Turkish Theoretical terms survive in practice ... It is in connection with the performance of these epics that the use of the term and concept of taxim survived as a specific Turkish form. In the year 1862, Nicolae Filimon notes that Lautars still referred to the pitches of the violin and cobza strings by Turkish names, Rast for G, Neva for D, Saba for A...”

The period of such direct Ottoman influence on Ashkenazic music lasted for over two hundred years, from the beginning of the 18th century until the early 20th. The connection between Iasi and Istanbul was strong, and we have documentation of the musicians traveling down to the capital of the empire.

In order to get a deeper understanding of the musical spheres of klezmer I traveled to Istanbul to study Ottoman court music theory. I was lucky to be awarded a grant and a fellowship from the Swedish Research Institute where I spent the spring of 2024. My stay at the institute consisted of attending lectures at the Turkish Music State Conservatory as well as reading up on the history of the region and familiarizing myself already written material, guided by my supervisor Dr. Walter Zev Feldman, known both for his in depth contribution to the academic writing on music of the Ottoman court, as well as klezmer. With him as my mentor I was able to spend a month and a half delving into the historical connections of the music in the region, while attending courses in Ottoman court music theory at the Turkish Music State Conservatory under Istanbul Technical University.

Attending lectures, having in depth discussions with other musicologists in the field from the Orient Institute and Anamed as well as actively playing and performing the repertoire in the city granted me a historical, theoretical and practical understanding of the subject.

It is thrilling and fascinating how these cross cultural musical connections formed centuries ago, despite the rise of national states and strongly conflicting ideologies, continue to be relevant and musically absorbable for the audience in the backstreet clubs of Istanbul today.

And not only in the nightclubs. At the end of my stay at the institute I had the joy to perform some of the repertoire with a more analytic, ethnomusicological approach together with fellow researchers Zoe Aqua and Lou Carrig. Aqua and Carrig are both klezmers situated in the region as Fulbright fellows, working on similar topics. The concert-presentation was hosted at the Palace Suedé by Counsel General Johanna Strömqvist. While the flowers in the palace garden bloomed and the honored turtle Coşkun, whom I had gotten to know well during my time at the Institute, made his evening walk around the fountain, we performed old and new repertoire of klezmer music stretching from Transylvania to Istanbul.

The evening was a great success and allowed for meetings between researchers and representatives of cultural institutions in Istanbul, focusing on a transnational musical repertoire which for centuries has been part of the musical landscape of the city.

I want to thank the Swedish Research Institute for the immense support, a calm and scholarly inspiring environment.



Photo credit: Ekrem Çanak





Photo credit: Ekrem Çanak



Photo credit: Ekrem Çanak

Alevtina Parland is currently finishing her masters degree at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland. She is a trumpet player and a promising name in the klezmer music field. Parland is one of few people who grew up playing klezmer and has lately been teaching at the biggest Yiddish music festival Yiddish Summer Weimar as well as conducting research projects in Belarus under the Goethe Institute. She aims to continue researching the repertoire and bring an academic contribution to the field.

## Föreningen Svenska Istanbulinstitutets Vänner

### Program in Sweden (Save the date)

Tisdag 29 oktober kl 18 i Medelhavsmuseets hörsal

Kupolernas huvudstad: Om Istanbuls arkitektur.

Föreläsning av Johan Mårtelius

I detta föredrag kommer Johan Mårtelius att berätta om Istanbuls arkitektur i det långa tidsperspektivet av kontinuitet och sammanhållning, men samtidigt unika verk, med fokus på bland annat kupoler. Föredraget bygger även på den aktuella boken Istanbul – arkitekturstaden, som gavs ut 2024 av Balkong förlag.

**Johan Mårtelius** är arkitekt och professor emeritus i arkitekturhistoria vid KTH. Han har även tjänstgjort som direktör för Svenska Forskningsinstitutet i Istanbul under åren 2015-2017.

Torsdag 7 november kl 18 i Medelhavsmuseets hörsal

Vid vetandets gräns. Historien om hur svensk egyptolog satte världen i gungning 1650-1740

Föreläsning av Joachim Östlund

Fascinationen för det forntida Egypten var stor i det tidigmoderna Sverige. Drottning Kristina var i kontakt med tidens ledande egyptolog Athanasius Kircher och Karl XII lät organisera tre forskningsexpeditioner till Egypten. Tack vare Bibelns berättelser var den egyptiska forntiden välkänd för den bredare befolkningen, om än med en särskild vinkling. I början av 1600-talet inleddes dock en grundläggande omvärdering av den bibliska versionen av Egypten, en omvärdering som satte hela världens historiska grundvalar i gungning. Detta föredrag handlar om det svenska bidraget till denna dramatiska omvärdering.

**Joachim Östlund** är docent i historia och verksam som lektor vid Historiska institutionen vid Lunds universitet. Hans huvudsakliga forskning rör sig inom tidigmodern nordisk historia i en medelhavskontext och inkluderar aspekter som slaveriets historia, diplomathistoria, kulturmöten och vetenskapshistoria.

Fredag 22 november på Etnografiska museet

Uiguriskt musikaliskt kulturarv i diasporan

En kväll i den uiguriska musikens tecken. Under kvällen bjuds på föredrag om uigurererna, deras kultur och rika musiktraditioner samt en avslutande konsert med musikerkollektivet Miras (leds av musiketnologen Rachel Harris verksam vid SOAS, London) och spelmannen Muhtar Adbukerim Janbaz (ordförande i Uyghur European Ensemble).

**Programmet arrangeras** av Miras, Uyghur European Ensemble, Svenska Orientsällskapet, Föreningen Istanbulinstitutets Vänner och SRII.

Lördag 23 november T.B.A.

Pedestrian Modernities - Blind spots in Turkish Cultural Heritage (Release av Dragomanen nr 26/2024)

Samtal mellan redaktör Simon Stjernholm och kulturrådet Mike Bode

Blind Spot är ett tvärvetenskapligt kulturarvsprojekt som samlade akademiker, arkitekter, historiker, konstnärer, stadsplanerare och forskare från Sverige och Turkiet för att utforska tidiga republikanska och modernistiska byggnader i Turkiet som ofta förbises.

Lördag 7 december kl 13-16 i Medelhavsmuseets hörsal

Tulpaner i konsten

En eftermiddag med föredrag om tulpaner avbildade i europeiskt måleri, orientaliska mattor och rara bokband samt den islamiska trädgården. Under temadagen som är en fortsättning på vårens program om Tulpanens historia medverkar några av de främsta experterna inom konstvetenskap, textilhistoria och handskrifter.