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**Shaykhâni (Manna Abba ibn Muhammad at-Tulba, 1908-1986) and the Revival of the Tijaniyya in Mauritania**

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This project contributes to the historiography of Southwestern Mauritania and investigates questions on the relation between descent-based and religious ways of social ordering, i.e., between the *Idaw Ali* tribal group and the Sufi brotherhood, *Tijaniyya*.

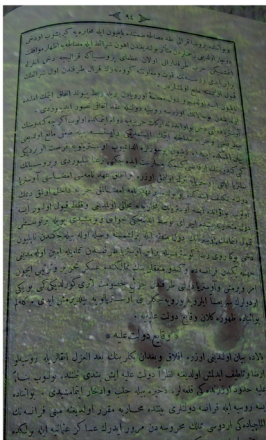
The *Tijaniyya*, introduced in Mauretania around 1805, was primarily led by two families of the *bidan* clan *Idaw Ali* in the southwestern Mauritanian region of *Gebla*. Locally produced texts and French colonial sources on the history of the region both emphasize the major role of the *Idaw Ali*, put forward a unitary *Idaw Ali* identity and claim the *de facto* identity of *Idaw Ali* and *Tijaniyya*. However, the spreading of *Tijaniyya* in Mauritanian society after the 1930s was due to new 'missionary activity' following a revival movement led by the Senegalese Shaykh, Ibrahim Niass.

One of the most renowned proponents of this new branch in Mauritania was Shaykhâni, a grandson of the founder family of the local *Tijaniyya*, who travelled to the different *Idaw Ali* communities in the country and managed to successfully incorporate them into the new branch of the *Tijaniyya*. His life story, his poems and the local oral history of his town *Bareine* all portray the mechanisms of a small desert-side community in adapting to the late colonial and early post-colonial order. With a combination of fieldwork and the analysis of written sources, this project will shed light on the relationship between the *Tijaniyya* and the *Idaw Ali*, contextualizing the historiography of this region with the changing colonial and post-colonial orders of the twentieth century.

**Making Sense of Turkish History: Symbolic and Interpretative Uses of Historiography in Turkey**

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A page from *Tarih-i Cevdet* [Cevdet's history] with tracks of *canis lupus*

Historiography has always been considered one of the preferred symbolic battlefields for dispute on contested socio-political issues and ideologies. Significantly, this also holds true for Turkey. The project deals with the analysis of recent Turkish texts that use history (or rather historiography, since history is accessible in the form of texts only) as a resource for "making sense". The scope of the literary genres used is not confined to academic historiography (which to a very minor degree explicitly uses history to make sense) but includes a range of theoretically stimulating and essayistic literature in the wider sense.

It is planned to identify typical *topoi* and structural patterns that historically inform political discourse in Turkey. These ideologemes are heterogeneous and can be mutually contradictory. They compete with one another for the prerogative of interpretation and dominance in public discourse, for a place in the collective memory of "the nation" or at least of the fragment of the nation they address. Without claiming to map the entire Turkish historical discourse, the project aims to demonstrate the polyphony of and ruptures within that discourse and within the confines of the dominant historiographical paradigm.

**The Production of Historical Knowledge and Politics of Memory in Rural Northern Syria: Histories of the *Welde***

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Discussing tribal history in Syria, March 2003

In post-colonial Syria, history has for a long time been represented in unifying narratives, emphasizing Arabic nationalism and Syrian unity. Potentially divisive aspects such as ethnic or confessional particularities and tribal or local affiliations – although significant in internal political calculations – have been largely written out of these 'official' narratives.

Behind this unifying historical discourse, however, more particularist historical narratives can be discerned. Among the Arab population of the Syrian Euphrates valley, accounts of the past are unfolded from the perspective of the tribal group (*ashira*). In recent years, these oral narratives have been supplemented by written versions of more 'local' or tribal histories. Oral narratives, publications by Syrian authors, and earlier writings of European travellers and Orientalists are now used as references for these histories, while larger narratives of Arab/Syrian nationalism and the anti-imperialist struggle have been appropriated as the structure in which these new narratives are told.

As a continuation of an earlier project within the framework of the collaborative research centre (SFB) 586 'Integration and Difference' at the universities of Leipzig / Halle (2001-2004, dir. Dr. A. Nippa), this project analyses the polyphonic production of historical knowledge (in which the ethnographer's presence constitutes yet another voice) by tracing written and oral narratives on the history of the 'Welde', one of the tribal groups of the Syrian Euphrates valley.