





From the Editor

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Islamic interest in other religions begins with the very Qur'an, which speaks of Jews, Christians, Magians, Sabaeans, and idolaters. The Qur'an might be said to be the holy book that gives the most information about other religions. Besides, one can easily find a lot of information about non-Islamic religions in the books of hadith and hadith commentaries, Qur'an commentaries, fiqh, kalām, geography, and history in Early Islam. Following the spread of Islam out of Arabian peninsula, the Islamic refutations written against Jews, Christians, and Manichaeists also contain information about other religions. However, Shahristānī and Bīrūnī have a privileged place in Early Islamic literature. Bīrūnī is worthy to be commemorated as the founder of the history of religions. After Bīrūnī, in their researches on other religions, Muslims turned to studies that met practical needs such as refutations and polemical writings. On the other hand, until the nineteenth century, it was not possible to see studies similar to those of Bīrūnī in terms of providing impartial, unbiased and accurate information, using primary sources, and conducting fieldwork on the study of other religions.

The effects of the modern studies of the religions in the west reached the Ottoman lands in a short time. At the very beginning of the twentieth century, Ahmed Midhat Efendi, M. Şemseddin Günaltay and Şemseddin Sami wrote books entitled *Tārīh-i Edyân* (History of Religions) which complied with the requirements of the modern discipline of the study of religions. Although George Dumezil and H. Ömer Budda gave lectures on the history of religions in the faculty of theology in the early years of the Republic of Turkey, the faculty was closed between 1936-1949. Faculty of Theology at Ankara University was opened in 1949, and H. Ömer Budda and Mehmet Karasan taught the history of religions there for a while; then, Annemarie Schimmel, a young professor from Germany, took over this task. Her student, Hikmet Tanyu was the first researcher with the title of Ph.D. in the field of history of religions in Turkey. Therefore, Annemarie Schimmel can be considered as

the one who laid the foundations of the history of religions in academic circles of theology faculties in Turkey after 1949.

After 1000 years since Bīrūnī, 110 years since Ahmed Midhat Efendi, and 70 years since the Annemarie Schimmel, a journal entitled *Oksident* is beginning to come out in Turkey today. *Oksident* is a publication of [Garbiyat \(Occidental\) Studies Research and Application Center](#) established in Bursa Uludağ University in April 2019. Garbiyat Studies Center encourages researches in Turkey on the history, theology, religious practices and social aspects of Judaism and Christianity. It also promotes studies in the fields of politics, sociology, theology, history and international relations on European and American countries. It will organize panels, seminars, workshops, congresses, and symposiums. Among the activities of the Center are to study the western publications on Islam and the Islamic world, and to prepare responses that will reveal the right and wrong sides of these studies. The Center also plans to organize courses in classical languages such as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac in order to achieve its goals.

One of the aims of the Center is to publish a peer-reviewed and printed and/or electronic journal to reflect the academical accumulation of Turkish scholars working on Judaism, Christianity and the West. As the embodiment of this purpose, *Oksident* aims to be a specific journal that collects studies on Judaism, Christianity, and the West in Turkey. Our journal's name may evoke Occidentalism as a reaction to Orientalism. However, as Annemarie Schimmel did in her autobiography (*Orient and Occident: My Life in East and West*), we use the word *Oksident* as a geographical description. *Oksident* will be a platform where a number of scholars that follow the footsteps of Bīrūnī try to understand and interpret the 'other', using the methods and methodologies of modern western religious studies. These scholars, many of whom are Muslims, believe in the importance of understanding the West with its religion, history, culture, and sociology: "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another." (Qur'ān 49/13). Therefore, unlike Orientalist studies, which are often accused of Orientalizing the Oriental, *Oksident* adopts the principles of learning, understanding, accurate presentation, and as far as possible, fair and correct interpretation; for it sees no categorical distinction between the East and the West that requires the marginalization of each other:

"Unto Allah belong the Orient and the Occident." (Qur'ān 2/115).