



BRILL

Introduction

Archives are witnesses to the past. They reflect aspects of social life in a specific territory and thus provide evidence, explanation and justification of what went on before, and why. Reasons why archives come into existence range from administrative requirements to save records for later use, to deliberate acts of safeguarding tokens of identity, to the haphazard accumulation of objects their owners are unable to throw away. Within this range, state archives predominantly preserve the testimonies that witness the governance of a political entity, whereas private archives predominantly secure papers, objects, soundtracks and photographs that testify to the life, art, religion, literature and politics of the area's inhabitants. Whatever the case, archives are unique, contemporaneous records. Once they are lost, they cannot be replaced.

With this Special Issue, we want to draw attention to the position of mosque archives in Europe, starting with a study of mosque archives in Germany. The primary aim of the issue is to raise awareness among scholars of mosque archives as a resource for research on Muslim life and Islam. Our second aim is to offer an overview of different kinds of mosque archives in relation to their historical period(s). Our third aim has been to open a window onto the administrators of mosque archives and their approaches to collecting relics of the past.

The term 'mosque archive' refers to the registries that hold the paperwork, photographs and material objects that reflect the work of a mosque, ranging from the supply of building facilities to religious services, to any services needed by migrant communities, to communications with umbrella organisations, authorities and churches, to haphazard stacks of invitations, programmes, announcements and prayer formulas – in short, any records that reflect the direct oral exchange that is the hallmark of any mosque community. Following the German legislation relating to archives, archivists must keep archival materials younger than 15 years locked (Bundesarchivgesetz, 2017), the Special Issue focuses on document collections that are no longer in use, although exceptions have been made.

Mosque archives in European countries have not previously been consulted for research on Muslims in Europe and so we propose to begin at the beginning. In this Special Issue, questions will be raised concerning the places

where mosque administrations safeguard the records of their past, how this is done and with what results, who is responsible for this task, and how that past speaks to the present. When going through the motions of collecting this information, we found that there was still a question that precedes such beginnings and which we tentatively formulated: What happens to a mosque community when researchers pose such questions?

The materiality of the archives – the materials used and the state they are in – has been a focal point for many of the contributions. The photographic inquiry by Raida Chbib and Julius Matuschik included in this volume was designed to demonstrate Muslim life in Germany in the 1950s. Gerdien Jonker and her colleagues ask how local collections reflect the environment – street, neighbourhood, town – in which they came into existence. Gerdien Jonker inquires into how the collection reflects the different historical periods in which services were offered, networks built and authorities dealt with. Concluding marriages and administrating divorces belong to the core services which Arab mosques provide. Mahmoud Jaraba introduces readers to the existence of marriage and divorce records and explains how Arabic imams deal with them. Because most mosque communities in Germany went online during the 2020 lockdown, transferring sermons, congregational prayers and mosque administration onto the web, we include an analysis by Samira Tabti of old and new net activities. Taking the empirical data collected for this volume as their point of departure, Stephanie Müssig assesses factors that shape the subject range of mosque administration in Germany, and Bekim Agai reflects on how mosque archives in Germany could contribute to the collective memory of Muslims.

In this way, the Special Issue opens a window on mosque archives as the object of a variety of research approaches. In that respect, it is very much work in progress. It offers a first glimpse of existing collections, reflects the surprises that accompany their study and identifies ways into including mosque archives in future research. What it does not do is try to answer the question of where those archives could be collected and how they could be made accessible in the future – from holding them in national archives to the creation of a central archive, like those already established by other religious minorities in Germany.¹ That is for the Muslim communities to decide. But this much can be said already: mosque archives are indispensable witnesses to the history of Islam in Europe and as such constitute part of Europe's cultural heritage (Alonso and Medici, 2014: 135–6).

1 See, for example, Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland.

1 Where Are the Archives?

To prepare our readers for the often fragile and/or inaccessible nature of the mosque archives we identified in Germany, a word needs to be said about the nature of private archives as against the situation researchers may expect when paying a visit to a public archive, such as state archives.

A visit to a state archive usually starts with an appointment, nowadays accompanied by a time window and a reserved table in the archival room. In preparation for their visit, readers send in a list with shelf numbers that identify the files they wish to study. When sitting at their table, a library assistant, sometimes with gloved hands, passes them their files, while an employee seated on a platform oversees the proceedings. Documents are packed in acid-free boxes and files, all are strictly numbered, as are the documents inside. While studying them, researchers may find that each state archive maintains its own rules for using pencils, reproducing documents, making photocopies, etc.

When visiting the archive of a private organisation, one looks in vain for a comparable regime. Churches, orchestras and cultural organisations, having realised the historical value of the documents in their possession, may allow access to them. Often, such documents are not numbered, so wardens will keep a keen eye on their visitors lest something goes astray. Whether the documents can be reproduced is also often a matter of negotiation.

Accessing mosque archives proved to have its own pattern. The act of establishing contact, entering the premises and casting a cursory glance over the cupboards holding the files showed many variables from the start. Depending on the degree of interest on the part of the mosque administrators and also on what the boards of directors thought they knew concerning the whereabouts of any archives and what they looked like, researchers experienced situations ranging from

- ferreting around for whole days in the cellar and the imam's office, trying to establish an initial sense of the ordering of the archives
- identifying stacks of documents in the imam's personal home, for which permission to make copies was given without much ado
- being asked to take away boxes full of archival records, with a warden expressing hopes that a suitable storage place could somehow be found
- listening to mosque founders who enthusiastically narrated stories from the archive they held in their head, but judged rummaging around in old papers to be of far less value.

From these different experiences we concluded that, at least within the geographical range of our study, the identification of mosque registries as

witnesses to the history of Muslims and Islam in Europe is still in an early stage. Even more to the point, our request to see them set in motion an initial process for reflection.

2 Historical Points of Departure

The total number of mosques in Germany today is estimated at somewhere between 2,500 and 2,800, ranging from prayer rooms in shops and cellars to monumental mosque buildings in visible places (Nicolai et al., 2022: 293). The research presented here reflects the state of documents in a limited range of mosques and the contributions are arranged on a timeline running from the interwar period to the present, presenting five different historical periods.

Starting in the inter-war period, Gerdien Jonker begins with a view of the oldest mosque in Germany, built in 1924 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, and offering access to almost a hundred years of mosque administration. Addressing the immediate post-war period, the second article, by Raida Chbib and Julius Matuschik, offers glimpses of mosque community life in the 1950s, in Aachen, Schwetzingen, Munich, Nuremberg and Hamburg respectively. The third historical period was identified as the 1970s, when Turkish contract workers erected places for prayer, presenting a picture of unstable beginnings, of makeshift places with attached social centres and frequent relocation (Jonker et al.). The fourth article, by Mahmoud Jaraba, reflects the time from approximately 1990 to the present, addressing marriage practice in Arab mosques, and the last, by Samira Tabti, addresses mosque communities that went online during 2020.

3 Outlook

Finding a new research topic is rare in the academic world. And yet, there are these small moments when something proves to be different: a theory that takes an unprecedented twist, a method that has not previously been applied to a research question, or a source that is considered as data for the first time. The last seems to be the case with the study of mosque archives. A new pool of data is opening up, which may be used to address research questions of various kinds.

The articles in this Special Issue provide unprecedented glimpses into mosque archives in Germany. Each of them is a forerunner in its own way. They are case studies in an emerging research field and singular by nature. We

hope that they may create a spark that ignites many more ideas for studies on mosque archives in Europe.

The single case analyses presented here could be complemented by approaching mosque archives in a more general way. In order to obtain knowledge on mosque archives that has more general application, we need to move beyond case studies and collect and standardise data on a larger scale. This would enable researchers to detect general issues regarding the accumulation and maintenance of archives in mosques. The following questions address some of these general issues:

- Can we observe *general* trends, gaps and features of mosque archives? Or are the archives always specific to a particular mosque?
- What factors systematically influence the condition and scope of mosque archives? Does something on the individual level, such as the personality of the imam, his taste for order, documentation and preservation, play a part? Or is a greater role taken by the context, such as a mosque's institutional affiliation, its financial situation or the number of members/weekly attendees, in driving the composition of the archive?

To answer these questions, we need to collect and standardise information on mosque archives, such as the range of subjects covered and the number of files, and set it in perspective systematically, along with context and structural information.

Individual case studies and large-scale studies on mosque archives both contribute to an enhanced understanding of Muslim life in Germany and other European countries. Whereas case analyses zoom into the life cycle of a single mosque, larger scale studies teach us about the reasons why we may have rich information on one mosque and not another, and eventually how to change this. Both are needed to make Muslim history a *visible* part of European identity.

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