
Amir Theilhaber, *Friedrich Rosen. Orientalist Scholarship and International Politics*, München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020, 627 pp., ISBN 978-3-11-063925-4 (hardback).

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Since the publication of Edward SAID's *Orientalism* in 1978, the role of Orientalist scholarship in international politics has been the subject of constant debate. In his polemic book, SAID accused "Western" Orientalists of constructing a holistic system of knowledge about the Orient that claimed the absolute superiority of the "West over the East." In this way, the academic discipline of Oriental studies, according to SAID, contributed to the execution of and justification for colonial politics. The assertions of this strongly normative debate have often been only poorly substantiated. Amir THEILHABER's study on Friedrich Rosen (1856–1935) is perfectly suited to making up for this fundamental deficit in the debate. A contemporary of Carl-Heinrich Becker (1876–1933), the founder of this journal, in his career Rosen combined Oriental scholarship with diplomatic service in an era of growing German aspirations toward great power politics. However, he definitely did not match the stereotype of the Orientalist philologist whose knowledge was based on the study of classical scriptures alone, having held positions in countries such as Ethiopia, India, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Romania. For a couple of months, he even served as German Foreign Minister under Chancellor Joseph Wirth (1921–1922) in 1921. Examining the life and work of Friedrich Rosen, therefore, is an excellent opportunity to obtain a closer look at the realities of the relationship between "Orientalist scholarship and international politics," as the subtitle of THEILHABER's study suggests.

In his voluminous book, Amir THEILHABER covers this topic on over more than 600 pages based on a host of primary and secondary sources. He describes Friedrich Rosen's career as "the rise from Oriental obscurity to the inner circles of German power" (2). Indeed, though coming from a bourgeois family, Rosen became close to Kaiser Wilhelm II, who, according to THEILHABER, was "Rosen's long-time political protector" (465). Yet despite his access to the higher circles of power of Germany's ruling elite, Rosen never simply succumbed to Wilhelmian ideas of great power politics. For instance, THEILHABER asserts that with his own geopolitical considerations, Rosen did not "improve his standing" vis-à-vis Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow (1900–1909) and the Head of the Foreign Office, Friedrich von Holstein (430). Rather, he remained often critical with regard to Germany's imperial politics and based his judgments on both his scholarly knowledge and the personal experiences he had gathered during his career. THEILHABER's account of Rosen's life as a scholar and diplomat confronts the reader with a complex trajectory. The biography of Rosen certainly does not confirm the deeply entrenched stereotypes on which the still ongoing debate about Orientalism has been based.

Amir THEILHABER describes the aim of his study as an analysis of the "relationship of Orientalist scholarship and international politics at the time of German empire" (9). In this way, he wants to make a contribution "to the wider connected global history of nationalism" with reference to the works of the historians Jürgen Osterhammel and Sebastian Conrad (36). The author argues "power could create openings and guide scholarship in particular directions." In the end, however, state power is not able to control the production of knowledge and the purposes of academic scholarship (10). Rosen's life, therefore, could be read as a critique of the rather simplistic Saidian representation of the relationship between power and knowledge in Orientalism. THEILHABER explores the factually complex mesh of power and knowledge in Rosen's life in eight chapters. Unfortunately, the introduction does not further explain the logic according to which the author's argument is going to unfold. At the end of the 40-pages-long introduction, the actual organization of the book remains opaque. It is the task of the reader to reconstruct the various argumentative steps. The chapters apparently follow both a certain chronology of Rosen's life and some thematic considerations of the author.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the childhood and adolescence of Friedrich Rosen. The son of Georg Rosen grew up in Ottoman Jerusalem, where his father served as Prussian Consul from 1852 until 1867. During his childhood, Arabic was the young Friedrich's everyday language, and he probably lived longer in Palestine than Edward Said. Amir THEILHABER considers the years in Jerusalem as the essential framing of Rosen's "mind and soul" that should guide

our understanding of his later Oriental scholarship and political activities (43). His father, Georg, who studied under Franz Bopp, Friedrich Rückert, and Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer, had already combined Oriental studies with diplomatic service. THEILHABER thus suggests perceiving Rosen's career as a continuation of his father's trajectory as a "scholar-consul" (69). The second chapter revolves around Rosen's 16 months in India and his eventual dissertation on modern Hindustani theater drama. Serving as a teacher at the Indian viceregal court, he gained deeper knowledge not only of the subcontinent but also of British imperial politics. Even more important, in Lord Dufferin, Viceroy and Governor-General of India (1884–1888), Rosen "found common purpose in the pursuit of Persian" (95). Persian, then, became the linguistic cornerstone of his further career. Indian theater, Persian language, and insights into British Indian politics were the major features of this period of Rosen's life. "Returning from India with significantly improved language skills, a recommendation by Dufferin to German secretary of state Herbert von Bismarck opened up a position for Rosen at the newly founded SOS (Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen) as teacher for Hindustani and Persian" (129).

In 1889, Rosen resigned from his position at the SOS due to a conflict with its director, Eduard Sachau, complaining over his treatment of the staff (133). Rosen applied for the foreign service, where he then worked first as a translator and later as a diplomat for the German state. Chapter 3 mainly presents Rosen's time at the German embassy in Tehran. In Iran, Rosen was able to deepen his knowledge of both British imperial politics and Persian culture and language. THEILHABER describes Rosen's engagement with British representatives, Sufi orders, Iranian intellectuals, and politicians that became a major source for his later positions in academia and politics. Chapter 4 puts its focus on three subsequent "diplomatic encounters" of Rosen in the early 20th century. It begins with the visit to Berlin (1902) of Mozaffar ed-Din, the Iranian Shah (1896–1907). Rosen had the task of organizing and accompanying the Shah on his visit. The second encounter was with Ethiopia, whose Emperor Menelik II (1889–1913) offered the German Emperor Wilhelm II (1888–1918) trade relations in 1901 (200). Due to his Orientalist knowledge, it was Rosen who became assigned the Ethiopia portfolio and who was sent to the country in 1905. Finally, the chapter deals with one of Rosen's most difficult missions, his appointment as German envoy to Morocco in 1905 (232). As in the case of Ethiopia, Rosen did not have any real expertise on Morocco, but Berlin chose him based on the perception of "Orient being Orient" (248). Rosen's involvement in the international crisis of Morocco was not very successful. On the contrary, the handling of the affair led "to constant squabbles with France and Britain" without any "clear objectives" on the German side (250). His departure from Morocco in 1910, then, also marked the end of Rosen's direct

participation in Germany's Orient politics. His future appointments brought him to various capitals in Europe.

In Chapter 5, THEILHABER investigates Rosen's role in the two Orientalist Congresses in Hamburg (1902) and Copenhagen (1908). Personally, I like this chapter best, and not only as a reviewer who was educated in Hamburg and has been working for more than two decades in Denmark. In my eyes, these two conferences provide interesting examples of the interlacement of scholarship and politics at national and international levels. At both conferences, Rosen participated as the head of the official German delegation and as a scholar. THEILHABER describes Rosen's role in the context of the processes behind the organization of the congresses and the various economic, political, and scholarly interests at play. Rosen appeared in Hamburg and Copenhagen as a scholar in a political capacity. In Copenhagen, where Carl-Heinrich Becker represented the newly founded Colonial Institute in Hamburg, Rosen gave two lectures. The first followed the welcome speech of Denmark's King Frederick VIII (1906–1912) and was “full of calculated praise of Danish Orientalism and Danish Orientalists” (326). The second was a talk on some of Omar Khayyam's (1048–1131) quatrains, which Rosen interpreted in the context of the supposed worldview of the Persian mathematician, philosopher, and poet. After his first encounter with Omar Khayyam at the court of Lord Dufferin in India, Rosen translated his poems into German. In Copenhagen, he presented him as an intellectual “close to quietist approaches found in Sufi Islam.” In Rosen's interpretation, Omar Khayyam stood above dogmas and specific schools of thought (331). His translations of Khayyam's poems *Die Sinnsprüche Omars des Zeltnachers* have been published in numerous editions and represent the most important achievement in Rosen's Oriental studies. In his scholarly presentations, Rosen was able to spread his romantic ideas of a premodern Oriental enlightenment. For Rosen, the medieval Orient could offer a critique of the modern world at the brink of the First World War.

Chapter 6, then, is dedicated to Rosen as a scholar. The reader goes through a number of excursions on Omar Khayyam's life and scholarship (343–345) and the poetic form and themes of Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat* (345–348). Then THEILHABER puts his focus on Rosen's translation and interpretation of the *Ruba'iyat* (356–369), before moving to the work of Jalal ed-Din Rumi (1207–1273) in the context of his father's translation of parts of Rumi's work (384–391). This chapter about the history and state of the art in Persian poetry may not find the interest of those who read the book with regard to the history of German Orient politics. Moreover, having to jump back and forth in Rosen's biography while following historical and methodological excursions on Oriental poetry, the reader cannot but lose track. Chapter 7 switches back to the field of international politics but suffers from a similar confusion of themes and unexpected excursions. In this chapter,

THEILHABER looks at German politics around the First World War, in particular at the proclamation of the so-called Ottoman–German Jihad of 1914 and the subsequent controversy between the Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) and Carl-Heinrich Becker (410–417). Given the rather marginal role of Rosen in this affair, I am not even sure about the necessity of this chapter in the overall composition of the book. The last chapter, then, presents a thorough account of Rosen’s life after the war, his short time as Foreign Minister, his interaction with the Iranian exile community in Berlin (469–486), and his return to scholarship. The book ends after more than 500 pages with a series of diverse arguments with which THEILHABER wants to underpin his rather unspectacular conclusion: “Orient scholarship and politics worked together, as much as they worked against each other” (515). This conclusion perfectly sums up the problem that I had with the book. The author does not develop a stringent argument. Instead of analytically reducing the cultural, historical, political, and social complexities of Rosen’s life, Amir THEILHABER tries to closely represent and explain them throughout the text. The book simply takes up too many issues to make a coherent read.

Amir THEILHABER has published an important work with respect to the history of Oriental studies. Unfortunately, he has done so without organizing the overwhelming wealth of his data within an analytical frame of reference. There is no doubt about the detailed knowledge of the author regarding his subject. Moreover, the book is a sound documentation of THEILHABER’s dedicated, engaged, and most probably long-lasting work on Rosen and his political and scholarly contexts. However, it seems that he wrote his book without having its readers in mind. Who is supposed to digest this myriad of “facts” scattered throughout the book? Here, the lack of any argumentative organization of the text takes its revenge. In addition, the book suffers from numerous long and often convoluted sentences. Therefore, I am not sure that there are many readers who will have the patience, the perseverance, and the stamina to read through the whole volume. To be sure, this book had the potential to make significant points. Why did the author mention Conrad and Osterhammel in the introduction? These two eminent historians disappear completely along the way. What could the study of Rosen’s life and work contribute to the writing of global history? In which ways does his biography speak against Saidian assumptions? THEILHABER mentions Orientalism without really connecting its theses to his own findings. What was the role of Oriental studies in the design of national politics? The book gives sporadic answers to this question without putting them together in a concise argument. What light does Rosen’s career shed on the general development of modern academic scholarship? The relationship between politics and knowledge production is continuously mentioned without really being analyzed through Rosen’s case.

These are only some cases in point for which the collected material of this book could make significant contributions if only written in a consistent line of argumentation. This lack of organization is at the heart of my disappointment with THEILHABER's book and the reason why it will only represent a kind of source book among the many volumes on my shelves. However, for providing a huge reservoir of albeit scattered ideas and bibliographical references on German Oriental studies, we should be grateful for Amir THEILHABER's book on Friedrich Rosen.