

# PROTESTANT PRAYER ASSOCIATIONS AND TURKISH MOSQUE ASSOCIATIONS – UNEXPECTED PARALLELS

„The prayer associations were of great value. They filled the churches and parish halls until the mid-fifties. Then they met there less. Today we talk about the Turks, how they keep to themselves, but so did the prayer associations. Moreover, those [masurians] wore headscarves and always dressed in black.“ (A female resident made in a public discussion about the quarter’s migration past, Gelsenkirchen- Erle, February, 28th, 2014)

## Research in comparative social history:

Masurians as Protestant, Polish-speaking Prussian migrants have rarely been the focus of research. Since 1885 they have continued to found autonomous prayer associations in the Ruhr District, a phenomenon that only survived in West Germany.

## Hypothesis:

It took Masurians two to three generations to assimilate. However, their psychosocial and religious parameters showed parallels to those of the Turkish migrants who founded local mosques.



Picture: Tyburzy, Masurian women at Bleckkirche, GE ca. 1925

## Methods:

Interviews, ego-documents, questionnaires, literature and archive research

## Results:

### 1. Ethnicity:

Masurians (migration 1875 -1945) and Turkish (1961-1973/82), migrant workers in coal mines of the Ruhr District, both coming from remote rural regions, known as historic shelters for religious refugees (East Prussia/Anatolia). Both groups characterised by chain migration, dialects, endogamous marriages and their own liturgical language (High Polish 1525-1939, ritual Arab/“old Turkish”).

2. Fulfilling Spiritual needs: Religious Associations offer a safe space (Beheimatung) from the „world“/culture clash against sin and secularisation, enable the members to fulfil the religious commandment to perform regular religious services, provide reassurance of group-identity (Wesensgleichheit) and strengthen certainty of salvation (Seelenheil).

3. Communal self-organisation (Vergemeinschaftung): The Five Islamic Columns and prayer associations’ rules give structure to the communities’ everyday life. Intense relationship to Jesus Christ and Muhammad is stressed. The communities exercise strong adherence to their Holy Texts. They were founded and protected by Prussian/German Association Law. Today there are still dozens of PPA (most members also belong to the local Parish Church and hundreds of Turkish Mosques in the Ruhr District.

4. Conflicts: Their own self-understanding and piety (Frömmigkeit) are linked to the Holy Texts, which may not be changed or questioned, to traditional teaching and patriarchal structures.

The innate individual desire for recognition, appreciation, dignity and participation is contradictory to the character of the self-sought separation of both communities.

External political influence continues to lead to less acceptance on the part of the society, they have chosen to live amongst.

## Conclusion:

Religion and its specific culture has always been the transportable identity mark and therefore is of much greater significance to migrant communities than to domestic societies. Protestant and Islamic associations provide members and staff for the local churches (Landeskirchen) and students for Islamic theology. Both religious communities contribute to inculturation by enriching religious culture, music and architecture.

## Comment:

Here association means a certain type of legal group (Verein) under German Law, which applies to both religious and secular groups/societies/associations, granting both autonomy and tax relief to a certain extent.