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The Life of Eva-Maria von Kemnitz

In: [The Hand of Fatima](#)

Author: [Fernando Branco Correia](#)

Professor Eva-Maria von Kemnitz (1 May 1950–1 November 2017) was born in Warsaw, Poland. Between 1967 and 1971, she studied Economic Sciences, specialising in Foreign Trade, at the Higher School of Planning and Statistics in Warsaw. From 1971 to 1976 she studied Oriental Philology at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Warsaw, where she specialized in Arab and Islamic Studies. She defended her Master's thesis entitled "Traditions of Arab-Muslim Culture in Portugal" with which she graduated with the final classification of "Very Good".

She came to Portugal following the award of a two-year scholarship grant by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in August 1976, to pursue her research for a study on the *Consequences of the Discoveries in the Portuguese Society of the 16th Century*. In the summer of 1977, she attended the Portuguese Language and Culture course for foreigners at the University of Coimbra. What was to be a temporary stay in Portugal would soon be prolonged indefinitely. She married in 1979, taking Portuguese citizenship. The following year her son was born.

In July 1981 she attended the Seminar Course on Ibero-Arab History and Civilisation organized at the University of Evora, Portugal. Here she met the organiser, Professor Adel Sidarus, with whom she started a close collaboration that would last throughout her life.

In 1988 she obtained – belatedly – the recognition of the academic qualifications completed in her native Poland. She also proceeded to pursue her second passion: museums. Between 1989 and 1991 she completed the postgraduate course of Museum Curator. She interned at the Maritime Museum and prepared a monographic study entitled *The Arab-Islamic Heritage Centres in Portugal considered in the context of local, regional and national development in the reutilisation of museological heritage and cultural tourism*. She also elaborated a proposal for the exhibition of the Islamic Art Collection of the Casa Museu Dr Anastácio Gonçalves in Lisbon. From 1991 to 1992 she took the Arts Management Course at the National Institute of Administration, where she developed a project entitled *Towards the Enhancement of Knowledge of the Islamic Heritage of Portugal*.

In 2001 she pursued, with a grant from the Foundation for Technology and Science (Portugal), her PhD at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the Nova University in Lisbon. Her research proposal studied Orientalism in Portugal within the scope of Luso-Moroccan relations and was supervised by Professors Adel Sidarus and José Esteves Pereira. She defended her thesis *Orientalism in Portugal, in the European Context and in the Luso-Maghrebian Relations* in 2006, and was awarded the final grade of "Very Good with Distinction and Praise, by unanimity".

Professor von Kemnitz lectured at various institutions. In the academic year 1979–1980 she was guest assistant at the Arab Studies Section of the University Institute of Evora, Portugal, by invitation of Professor Sidarus. In the 1980s and 1990s she lectured at several universities in Lisbon. In 1983 she lectured on the *Issues of the Contemporary Arab world and the Oil Crisis* at the Faculty of Sciences and Technology of the Nova University, within the framework of the module on Introduction to Contemporary Thought. In 1985 she taught a cycle of three lectures on the theme of Arab Influence on Portuguese Language at the Nova University, this time within the framework of a course on Portuguese Regional Cultures. In 1991 she assisted in the delivery of the first Open Course on Islamic Civilisation offered by the Autonomous University of Lisbon, and later in 1994 she collaborated in the delivery of the second edition of this same Open Course.

From 2000 onwards she worked with the Portuguese Catholic University. From 2002 to 2014 she was Coordinator of the postgraduate and master's programmes in Oriental Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies. She lectured in both these programmes and also in the master's programme of Studies on Women in the Arab-Islamic World, also delivered by the Institute of Oriental Studies.

From the early 1980s, Professor von Kemnitz was engaged in several activities which aimed to deepen and disseminate the field of Arab Studies in Portugal, helping to create new institutions and promoting museology as means of conservation and dissemination. In 1982 she was in the founding team of the Institute of Arab Studies of Algarve, actively participating in the organising and installing committees. In 1986 she was elected Second Secretary of the Board of Director of this Institute.

As a museum curator, she began working at the Ajuda National Palace in January 1991. In 1993 she collaborated with the Portuguese Institute of Museums to produce an inventory of the Islamic Heritage in the collections of the museums linked to this body. From this endeavour Professor von Kemnitz then proceeded to study and inventory the Islamic Collection of the National Archaeology Museum. This was the critical step for the publication of the catalogue of that collection which would then open to the public in the exhibition *Islamic Portugal: the last signs of the Mediterranean*. The catalogue of this exhibition featured an article and 34 entries on different pieces by Professor von Kemnitz. She also actively participated in colloquia and guided tours of this exhibition. Following this project, Professor von Kemnitz participated in the editing work for the 100th anniversary edition of the scientific review *O Arqueólogo Português*.

In 1996 she produced the script and supervised the production of two episodes of the television series *Caminhos* – a series produced within the scope of the airtime allocated to ethnic and religious minorities of the national broadcaster – namely *Muslim Lisbon* and *Islamic Santarém*. The following year she was the Scientific Commissioner for the International Seminar on the Contemporary Arab World organised by CULTURGEST in Lisbon. Also in 1997, she was the Commissioner of the exhibition that brought the work of Egyptian contemporary painter Naima El-Shishiny to the Cultural Centre of the Lisbon Central Mosque.

Professor von Kemnitz held career positions within the Civil Service, being appointed in 1999 to the permanent staff of the Portuguese Institute of Archaeological Heritage. In the same year she was transferred to the Office of International Relations of the Ministry of Culture. Amongst other projects, she participated in the final preparatory phase of the exhibition *Splendours of Portugal*, which she then accompanied as a museum curator in its iteration in Japan. In 2007, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, she took active part in the monitoring of the commemorations of the 200th Anniversary of the Arrival of the Portuguese Court to Brazil, as well as in the National Plans for *Inclusion* and *Integration of Immigrants*. She retired from the Civil Service in May 2017.

During this time, she was also active in other endeavours, especially those related to Oriental Studies and the role of women in society. She collaborated with the journal *Faces de Eva* from 2002 until 2017. Between 2012 and 2014 she was Coordinator of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Portuguese Catholic University. From 2014 to 2017 she was Senior Researcher at the Centre for Communication and Culture Studies of the same university. There she coordinated the project for the Dictionary of Portuguese-speaking Orientalists.

Her in-depth knowledge of different areas of the Arab-Islamic world saw her invited to give numerous conferences in this domain, as well as on subjects related to Central and Eastern Europe and related horizontal themes.

In 1977 she gave a lecture at the Casa do Algarve, in Lisbon, on *Islam in Poland – the presence of the Polish Tatars*. She gave numerous conferences on topics related to Al-Andalus and Portugal; the presence of Islam in different regions of the world; on the concept of Jihad; and Turkish culture. These were delivered in places as varied as the Lisbon Geographic Society, Vila Viçosa, the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Portugal, the Free University of Lisbon, and the City Council of Silves, amongst others. Two conferences, both delivered in 1991 at the Casa Museu Dr Anastácio Gonçalves, deserve specific mention: *Specific Aspects of Islamic Art* and *Islamic Art in the Dr Anastácio Gonçalves Collection*.

In the field of jewellery, she delivered two conferences at the National Museum of Costume. The first in 1992, in the framework of the 2nd International Jewellery Symposium, on *Amber in Polish Jewellery* and the second in 1996 on the 4th edition of the same symposium about *Islamic Jewels from Al-Andalus*. This would mark the beginning of her interest in the *khamisa*.

Professor von Kemnitz lectured in Portuguese localities with significant historical links to the Al-Andalus: *The Arab-Islamic Presence in Portugal* and *The Islamic heritage of the Portugal*, at the Grémio Lisbonense in 1993; *Muslim Portugal* at the Associação Voz do Operário in 1994; *Islam in Portugal* delivered on occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Central Mosque of Lisbon in 1995 in a ceremony presided by the President of the Portuguese Republic; and *Islamic Sintra: Historical, Literary and Artistic Reminiscences* at the Municipal Library of Sintra in 2007.

She also lectured on international issues. Amongst them the conference on *Islam in Europe: Particularities and Perspectives* at the XXX Anniversary of the Islamic Community of Lisbon in 1998 and the roundtable on the works of Edward Said organised the bookshop Ler Devagar in 2003 on the occasion of the release of the Portuguese edition of his book *Orientalism*. Her interest in the relations between Portugal and Morocco were evidenced in the conference she delivered at the Maritime Museum on *The Role of the Portuguese Navy in the Relations with North Africa in the XVIII and XIV Centuries*.

Professor von Kemnitz was part of several cultural organisations, especially in Portugal and Poland. She was, as of 1971, a member of the Polish Society of Orientalist Studies. She was a member of the Lisbon based Friendship Association with Arab Countries since 1976; the Portuguese Association of Friends of the Castles since 1984; and she was co-founder of the Institute of Arab Studies in the Algarve, based in the city of Silves, to whose board of Directors she belonged since 1986.

Her interest in museums and the Arab-Islamic World is reflected in her active participation in the Portuguese Museology Association since 1989; the International Council of Museums since 1991; as well as the Luso-Arab Cooperation Institute since 1995, of which she was vice president since 1999; the Portuguese Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, since 1998; and the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamologues since 2002. She was also a member of the International Standing Committee for the Implementation of the Decade of Human Rights Education, the International Association IUS PRIMI VIRI, Rome, since 1994. She also did voluntary work in the field of culture, giving lectures and organising museum visits for the youth of the Islamic Community of Lisbon.

She was decorated by the President of the Republic of Poland in 2012 with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Polish Republic – a medal intended to recognise the merit of foreigners and Poles residing abroad who have distinguished themselves in contributing to international or bilateral cooperation between Poland and other countries.

She passed away, suddenly, and unexpectedly, on 1 November 2017. Amongst the projects she had at hand were the coordination of the Dictionary of Portuguese-speaking Orientalists, for which she also wrote several entries, and this very book.

Fernando Branco Correia

Professor, University of Évora

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