In discussion about the history of Muslims in Europe, the focus is usually on guest-workers since the late 1960s, and rarely is the presence of Muslims in the interwar period a topic. This volume is a contribution to the history of Islam and Muslims in Europe between the two World Wars. It gives a number of insights about engaged actors (individuals and groups) labelled as Muslims in their respective European societies, such as in Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, Switzerland, Poland, Lithuania and Hungary. This publication, consisting of nine chapters by authors from various disciplines, thus contributes to encounter studies, a rising field of interest in social sciences and humanities. It is a study of encounters between Muslims and Christians not in the lands of the Muslim colonies but in the countries of the colonizers. The situation of Muslims in the countries where they lived, their interactions not only with the indigenous population but also with their ‘home’ community abroad, the impact of this impact on the Muslim world, its influence on the European understanding of Islam and Muslims, and the challenges of that time, such as participation by Muslims in the Spanish Civil War, illuminate the processes of culture transfer, border crossings by Muslims and their loyalty to the states they lived in. Consequently, these specific case studies emphasize, among other things the transcultural perspective and so highlight the tension, still ongoing in the 21st century, between those who identify themselves as Muslims and those who are categorized as Muslims. On the other hand, there are also a number of Europeans, often neglected till now, who converted to Islam, joined Muslim networks, published books and translations of Islamic texts, and explained Islam from their personal as well as a modern European perspective. The book sheds light on: intra-Muslim relationships, conversions to Islam, European state authorities’ policies towards Muslims, the integration of Muslims into European societies, and the exchange and adoption of new ideas (anticolonialism, liberation, anti-Communism).

Gerdien Jonker in her chapter describes conversions in interwar Berlin. She analyses the context of that time, which she describes as a ‘spiritual vacuum across Europe’ accompanied by the political and economic post-World War One crisis. This opened the floor for religious experimenting, particularly in Berlin, Europe’s avant-garde centre, where next to artists and intellectuals, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian alternative missions became active. They represented a broad political scene: Western-oriented liberals, Marxists, nationalists and pan-Islamists. The Ahmadiyya mission, however, was
particularly active in missionary work. Jonker gives the reader an insight into
the interesting lives of these converts and their role as cultural interpreters
and guarantors of the continuity of the Muslim community. As the Ahmadiyya
community had never been a fully accepted sect in mainstream Islam, the in-
tra-Muslim religious conflict was transferred to Europe. The tensions between
the Ahmadiyya community and mainstream Islam continue till the present
day and the retrospective on their debate given in this book is very interesting
and valuable.

Umar Ryad in his contribution also elaborates on the competitive rela-
tionship between the Ahmadiyya and Salafi communities, this time from an
Egyptian perspective through the writings of influential Egyptian scholars
but in the European setting. He analyses the influence of the Muslim reform-
ers Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida, as well as the journal
Al-Manar, through their views on conversion and their critique of Ahmadi
doctrine and missionary work. The biographies of Khalid Sheldrake, a British
convert, and Omar Rolf Baron von Ehrenfels, a German convert, are fascinating
life stories.

Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld’s chapter sheds light on the history of conver-
sion in the Netherlands. He discusses three types of conversion: (1) permanent
conversion out of free will and personal conviction, such as that of an Austrian
Jew, Leopold Weiss, who adopted the name Muhammad Asad; (2) forced con-
version during the period of slavery after which the converts reverted to their
original faith; and (3) conversion of convenience performed with certain inter-
ests in mind, such as marriage, access to certain places (e.g. Medina, Mecca)
and espionage. The Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936)
is considered to have been a convert of convenience ‘to its fullest extent’ and
was, as van Koningsveld claims, ‘perhaps the most successful case in colonial
history of the instrumentalization of Islam for the benefit of the Islamic poli-
cies of the rulers and for the development of ethnological field studies’ (pp.
101-102). He visited Mecca several times, stayed in Cairo, obtained access to
Muslim society both at home in the Netherlands and abroad, wrote books
about Islam, married Muslim women, and contributed to a colonial Islam pol-
icy in the Dutch East Indies. Some Muslims became suspicious of his conver-
sion and a polemic arose about the truthfulness of converts.

A further intriguing topic in the study of Muslim history in Europe is the
state authorities’ policies towards Muslim communities, as is shown in the
chapters about France, the Netherlands and Spain. In the French case, Muslim
spaces were created, such as the Hôpital Franco-Musulman and the Mosquée
de Paris, that blended Muslim and French civilizations. Naomi Davidson
stresses the French segregation of immigrants from the Maghrib, the policy of