

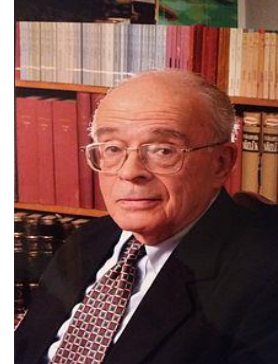


## Jacob M. Landau

### *A Master of Mideastern Studies*

Jacob M. Landau was among five great scholars of Mideastern Studies whom I met at the XVII International Congress of Historical Sciences in Madrid, Spain. The Berlin Wall had just come down and they reacted so welcoming to my inaugural address at this mid-1990 meet in the Complutense University. Since ever we kept in touch, including his Ph.D. [supervisor](#) Bernard Lewis. Keeping up with Jacob was amazing: he enjoyed Nomadic habits to do research all over Asia, Europe and America. No more, my friend Professor Emeritus of the Political Science Department in Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem passed on 12 November.

Photo Inbal5991 Wiki J.M. Landau

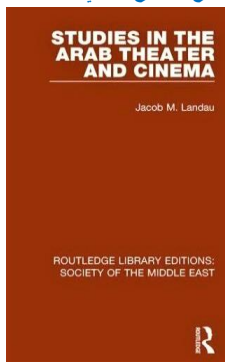


Jacob M. Landau 1924-2020

As I skim through letters and emails of three decades, I see that he was a traditional modern and very productive scholar. I shall explain it by a brief look on his life and three of his outstanding books that swayed my research too. He left two dozen books and many articles in about eight languages (he used a dozen). Luckily, Landau gave us an impressive list of texts online from 1946 to 2019 with [700](#) or [1.000](#) entries (with reviews, translations).

Among them are [1953](#) “Parliaments and Parties in Egypt,” [1993](#) “Jews, Arabs, Turks” and [2001](#) “The Politics of Language in the Ex-Soviet Muslim States.” If you read his 2004 book “Exploring Ottoman and Turkish History,” you will find his core [list](#) of 644 texts mainly in English, Arabic, Hebrew, French, Italian, German, Turkish or Russian. From this [book](#) I now shall forward insights of his life as he focused on teachers and friends.

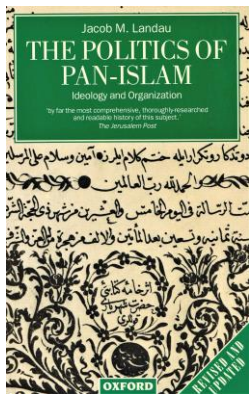
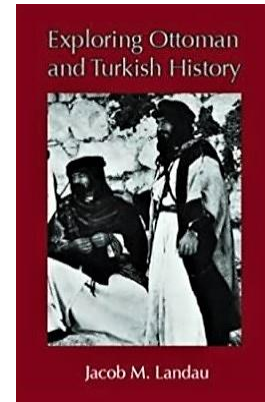
See also [تاريخ المسرح العربي](#)



Jacob M. Landau was born on 20 March 1924 in Kishinev, then the capital of the province Bessarabia, now Chişinău of today’s Moldova. Romanian was his mother tongue. In 1935 his family left for Palestine where he studied Arabic at his high school and moved on to Jerusalem’s Hebrew University. He was guided by immigrated German Jewish professors like Richard Koebner in modern history and Shlomo Dov Goitein in Islamic and Arabic studies. Landau finished his diploma on modern national movements of Egypt. At the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, he did his Ph.D. on Egypt’s parties/parliaments, [الحياة النيابية والاحزاب في مصر](#). At 29, his fresh 1953 [book](#) lifted his career up.

He grew as a traditional and modern Orientalist at a time when “[Orientalist](#)” was a virtue of scholars who study, teach or research multiple tongues, history and culture of Mideastern lands. In 1973 Orientalists gave their name up, keeping more specific ones like “Arabist.” To link history and politics became a trend about 1900, see the Dutch scholar Christiaan S. Hurgronje and his German peer Carl Heinrich Becker. At home in archives and libraries, Landau unfolded his synthesis in methods of history and politics. In [1947](#) Gotthold Eljakim Weil was one of his teachers, an academic of Arabic and Turkish whom the Nazis fired, or persecuted them. In Jerusalem, those men passed high academic standards on to students.

These are to be seen in Ottoman and Turkish history. Landau shows how the historic Greater Mideast grows together again. In his study of identity in six former ex-Soviet republics, he says that 70 Soviet years left deep traces. For him was the question if the people on their path to modernity will generate a moderate Islam like some Persian Gulf states or if extremists win the struggle. Landau assumed the creation of a national-religious symbiosis, and that Islamic nationalism leads to new identities. In a part on Language and Ethnopolitics, Landau offers a country-by-country study. His deep insights into the historical details and vast overviews remind me of Hamilton A.R. Gibb, with whom he got a post-doctoral year at Harvard University.



Landau’s “Politics of **Pan-Islam**” is still a trailblazer. He also stressed John Buchan’s quote on the dry wind blowing through the East, and parched grasses await the spark... Islam is the only thing to knit up such a scattered empire. But the only **power** to blow it up, replied his German rival Max von Oppenheim, with the Kaiser and Caliph behind him. The 1994 paperback edition here is a revised version with all the benefits of additional references and the appendix with 21 key source texts from 1871 to 1985. Although research moved on, it is still relevant. Landau distinguished Islamist and Pan-Islamist **parties**, see Abu al-Ala al-Maududi’s 1941 Jama‘at-i Islami, still in today’s Pakistan.

Landau read in his study, photo, a weekly scholarly bulletin, as he called it. In late 2014 he wrote to me this: It was the Jews, not the Christians (and, as you say, not the Muslims) who started printing in the Ottoman Empire. The first Hebrew book was published in Istanbul in 1494, two years after the exile from Spain (the exiles brought knowledge of printing with them). I have a paper, soon to be issued, about Hebrew printing in Istanbul and shall gladly send you an offprint (this is in his online list #685 – Hebrew Printing in Ottoman Istanbul).



Photo Courtesy Jacob M. Landau

I added this knowledge into one of my books. Then came Landau’s suggestion: take your weeklies and make books thereof. On 7 October 2015, he even wrote a foreword for “Middle East Mosaic 2013,” the first one of what became my book series Middle East Mosaics, now six volumes. Thus, Jacob M. Landau remains with me by his friendship and ideas. One of his last texts, #691, is the bibliographical note on Jews and Dönme’s in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. He offers some basic clarifications for both groups that played their roles in the past. In many Arab memoires are stories and legends on their real or imagined sway at inflection points. On this Landau gathered deep insights.

In 1992, Jacob and I met in a newly united Berlin as he was a visiting fellow at our Academy’s Institute. In a café at the Gendarmenmarkt he displayed his vision of Germany in the future. Although there is now more to worry about, especially the growing tide of anti-Semitism, he seems to be right with his profoundly realistic outlook on basic European prospects. Like him, I just hope for the best.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz