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The Change of Imaging the Ottomans in the Context of the Turkish Wars from the 16th to 18th Century

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Stephan Theilig

- 1 In the 18th century a famous French philosopher described the confrontation with the Ottoman Empire in the following way:
- 2 Les Turcs vivent assez proche de nous, mais nous ne les connaissons cependant pas suffisamment... Presque tout ce qui a été dit sur leur religion et leur législation est faux ; et les conclusions que l'on tire quotidiennement contre eux, sont sans fondement.¹
- 3 Some years before, the same author –it was Voltaire by the way– described in his play *Mahomet* a completely different Orient and a completely different Islam. He only focused on blind religious fanaticism, war-mongering, perfidiousness, sexual excesses, richness, decadence, despotism and brutality. It was a dramatic mixture of common stereotypes and prejudices, based on the vision of the extra-European Islamic world since the late Middle Ages. Through the early Modern Ages this vision was dominated by the Ottoman expansion policy. For centuries Christian monarchs were confronted with a completely different and ominous power, based on an Oriental Islamic culture.
- 4 As a consequence, a multitude of stereotypes and prejudices, combined in the context of propaganda, influenced the common way of thinking about the other. Many references originate from the Holy Roman Empire, namely the topos of the Turks as *Renner und Brenner* (runner and burner) or *Geißel Gottes* (god's flagellum), the image of a diabolic, omnipotent tyrant. The plurality of concepts concerning the Oriental enemy is consigned on various single-leaf woodcuts in leaflets, but also in poems, songs or in informative militaria, especially battle topographies.²
- 5 These standardized characteristics provided a differentiation and legitimation for one's own policy and identity. Illustrations were used to motivate and scare but also to advance

the payment of taxes. Therefore these conceptions of the Turkish enemy had a unique political-functional intent and played an important role in defining a Christian-German identity.³

- 6 The first remarkable change of imaging the other did not begin in the Holy Roman Empire until the 18th century. The increasing number of illustrations and the victories against the Ottoman Empire since the Siege of Vienna in 1683 or the Victory of Belgrade in 1717 advanced into a more differentiated debate after centuries of a *convictio beliciosa*.⁴ The image of the brutal and omnipotent Turk was supplemented by a desire for exotism, better known as Orientalism. The following examples will show this shift in imaging the Turkish other, beginning in the early 16th century.⁵
- 7 Especially in the 16th century the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire had to defend their countries against the Ottoman expansion attempts towards Hungary and Austria. The first *raids* started against Carinthia and Styria during the 15th century. The emperor needed the support of the electors and the other imperial estates for the defence. He had to show and explain the danger for the whole empire and to encourage a propaganda campaign within the German population against the Ottomans to create a continuous situation of fear.⁶
- 8 For this purpose he especially used the new medium of leaflets. In a combination of texts and images they depicted the confrontation between Orient and Occident –namely the German territories– as a clash of divergent cultures, divisive confessions and differently structured societies. The “fear of Turks” became a unifying element of the empire. The characteristic of defining identity can be seen in the following example of a definition *ex negativo*, the self-definition through dissociation and description of the other.⁷
- 9 In 1530 a leaflet titled *Der arme Leute Klag* (The Poor Man’s Sorrow) was published. (fig. 1) It was produced during the Ottoman *raids* in the woods of Vienna by the famous wood-cutter Hans Guldenmundt. The attacks by irregular troops, the *Akinci*, were not as unusual as they were presented in this leaflet. Supporting the troops with robberies and the spread of rumour or fear was an instrument of warfare, as the *Sacco di Roma* shows.⁸
- 10 The leaflet consists of a text and images that dramatically illustrate the content of the text itself. The main theme is the calling for God against these diabolic enemies:
- Oh Lord on the highest throne
See the misery
Caused by the ravage of the Turkish tyrant
In the woods of Vienna
Ruffianly they murdered virgins and women
Splitted the babies into two parts
They bursted and steaked them
Put them on top of sharpened pales
Ih Holy shepherd Jesus Christ
You’re full of mercy
Turn away your anger about us
And rescue us from the Turkish hands
- 11 In the center two orientally-dressed and bearded men with scimitars are shown. They are also armed with bows and arrows. This armor representation is intended to show their underdeveloped barbaric status –a contradiction to the reality, as Ottoman soldiers were the first modern troopers, armed with fire weapons and artillery.
- 12 The two soldiers are murdering children and pregnant women. The viewer could draw parallels between the Ottoman attacks and biblical scenes like the killing of children in

Bethlehem. This topos is always used as a sign for diabolic cruelty and undefined brutality. More examples can be found in almost every epoch, like in the context of the French repressions against the Huguenots in the late 17th century.⁹ (fig. 2)

- 13 This leaflet seemed to be very popular since some years later wood-cutter Hans Weigel the Elder republished a colored version. There are only minor differences in typography. Both leaflets stand in the tradition of the hereditary enemy syndrome –the imaging of Turks as the born enemy of Christianity and personified antichrist.
- 14 During the 16th century the Austrian-Ottoman conflict continued in Hungary. Especially in the Third Turkish War between 1593 and 1606 (“The Long Turkish War”) the stereotypes concerning the brutality and the diabolism of Ottoman soldiers were reinforced and propagated. One example for this is a woodcut in the 1596 edition of the very popular and famous *Warbook* of Leonhardt Fronsperger.¹⁰ (fig. 3) The first edition was published in the name of Emperor Maximilian II in 1573. This warbook is one of the main sources for the campaigns and the development of warfare in the Holy Roman Empire. Fronsperger himself served in the army near the Hungarian border.
- 15 The woodcut shows the propagandistic view on the enemy: Men, women and also children are enslaved, murdered and assaulted. The background shows a burning town and the Ottoman chief exhibits a cut off head as a trophy. Once again the Ottomans are displayed as different from the Germans because of their self-representation, their strange clothes and weapons. Once again they are presented in a dramatic scene of violence. The fact that also Christian monarchs dealt with slaves –what is known from Venetian sources or the tales by the great Miguel de Cervantes– does not affect the image of the Ottoman enemy.¹¹
- 16 At the same time something changed in the discourse between Orient and Occident. The Ottoman Empire had to solve domestic problems, which affected also the power and moral of its troops. Consequently the troops lost more battles than before, especially in Hungary.¹² This loss of military power and the numerous victories of Christian armies were used by the Christian propaganda to show the divine will to strike and to succeed against the Turks and therefore the necessity to continue the war.
- 17 The *Geschichtsblätter* of Franz and Abraham Hogenberg published in 1606 can be understood in this spirit, showing revenge for centuries of Turkish terror.¹³ (fig. 4) These *Geschichtsblätter* were published in different and numerous editions throughout Europe and were very popular. The Hogenberg collection of leaflet woodcuts depicts the battles in western Hungary and above all the battle for the fortress of Papa on August 19, 1597. On this day imperial troops attacked the Ottoman garrison and massacred the defeated enemy. The depicted brutality can only be understood in the context of an age-long confrontation in this region. The leaflet shows the same cruelties by imperial troops on Turkish men, but legitimizes the deeds in context of revenge: Ottoman war prisoners were broken on the wheels, hanged on hooks, split in two, beheaded etc. The background shows the burning fortress of Papa, the foreground shows the imperial camp.
- 18 In contrast to the examples shown, the situation on the Austrian-Ottoman border was relatively peaceful during the 17th century, as the empire fought in the Thirty Years War and the Ottoman Empire was threatened by the Russian expansion. Things changed when Köprülü Mehmet Pascha became grand vizier. He rearranged and reformed the government and reorganized the finances. After these reforms his successor Kara Mustapha had a new and unknown power in his hands. Now it was the time to fulfil the

plans of sultan Süleyman Khanune: the conquest of Vienna.¹⁴ In 1683 he amassed more than 168 000 men and marched directly towards the heart of Austria. The fear of the German and Austrian population was enormous, even the emperor fled. The 7 000 defenders in Vienna were surrounded by the enemy with no hope left. The imperial estates and electors refused the requests for aid. Only the Duke of Lorraine, Charles V, and the Polish king, Jan III Sobieski were able to deploy a rescue force in the name of the emperor. What followed was one of the most widely known spectacles in early modern European history and the end of the Ottoman European expansion policy.

- 19 Both the immense concentration of Ottoman siege troops and the battle itself on September 11 and September 12 is shown on a battle painting *The Battle by the Kahlenberg* by an unknown artist, now presented in the German Historical Museum in Berlin. (fig. 5)
- 20 Like traditional war paintings, this one shows a topographic-analytical presentation of the siege in the background and in the foreground a detailed presentation of the two commanders: Kara Mustapha and Jan Sobieski framed by battle scenes. War paintings like this were not, like leaflets, made for mass consumption or shown in public galleries. In most cases they were meant for the buyer's representation and legitimation. A unique characteristic of paintings concerning the Turkish Wars is the explicit cultural friend-and-enemy distinction in aspects of clothes and utensils: The Turks wear turbans and have scimitars, Christian knights and riders wear armors and helmets. The other central accentuation is the Oriental richness.¹⁵ The painter draws attention to tents and rich clothes, the interior and canons, scimitars, shields, drums, golden and silver dishes, but also to exotic animals and precious horses with expensive pelmets. Incidentally the German word for pelmet is *Schabracke*, a loan word from the Turkish *çaprak*. The painted Ottoman soldiers are fleeing –but not as defeated diabolic warriors but rather as exotic and foreign soldiers. The escape took place partly in order, partly chaotically. But the adverse commander guides his troopers in a marching order. On his head a little black servant can be seen, in German called *Kammermohr*. In this case Kara Mustapha is honoured, presenting him as a capable commander who shows his ability to control his troops in case of defeat.
- 21 This painting is, on the one hand, a typical victory in battle-style paintings. On the other hand, it is a victory against a strange, foreign and exotic enemy, characterized not by his cruelty but by his power and Oriental richness.¹⁶
- 22 My last example illustrates a little more precisely this commencing change in imagination. The painting titled *Prince Eugen von Savoyen* represents the prince Eugene of Savoy as the splendid victor of the battle of Belgrade in 1717. (fig. 6) His white horse storms through the defeated Ottomans. The *levage* and the marshal's baton characterize the prince as a military genius. Fama, Victoria and Clio float above him and interpret the victory as an immutable law of salvific history. In terms of the iconography, this painting by Jacob van Schuppen is considered as a conventional Allegory of Victory. Yet the interesting fact is that the defeated Ottomans and Tatars are not painted as dark figures in order to characterize them as enemies. They are rather painted in detailed, magnificent costumes and weapons. Van Schuppen thereby reflects the longing for foreign cultures *à la mode* of the *Chinoiserie* at the beginning of the 18th century.
- 23 Moreover, the Ottomans are lying at the feet of the prince, begging for mercy. This is a new topos which started at the time around the battle of Vienna. Their weapons –bows, arrows, shields, daggers and scimitars– are allegorized as signs for underdevelopment. This is used for defamation, as seen before.¹⁷

- 24 The stereotypes which were established during the century of Turkish fear were so common and widespread that the later politically impotent Ottoman Empire could ultimately be held responsible for many things in retrospective. From this moment onwards, an ambivalent image of the Ottoman Empire and the Orient prevailed –one of fascination and disgust at the same time, which was created by the victor’s historiography. A development of imaginations started at this point in time, which dominates until today our view on the Orient. It marks the beginning of a new discourse on Orientalism in the 18th and 19th centuries and is the root of today’s Eurocentric debates in the context of globalization.¹⁸
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ANNEXES

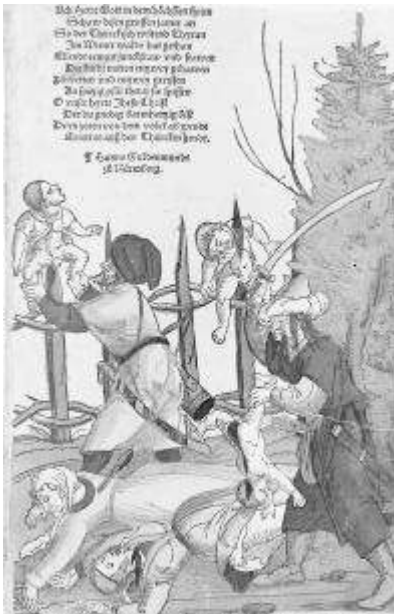


Fig. 1. Hanns Guldemundt, Der Arme Leute Klag, 1530



Fig. 2. Anonym, Spiegel der frantzösischen Tyrannei, 1686



Fig. 3. Leonhardt Fronsperger, Ein Kriegßbuch, 1596

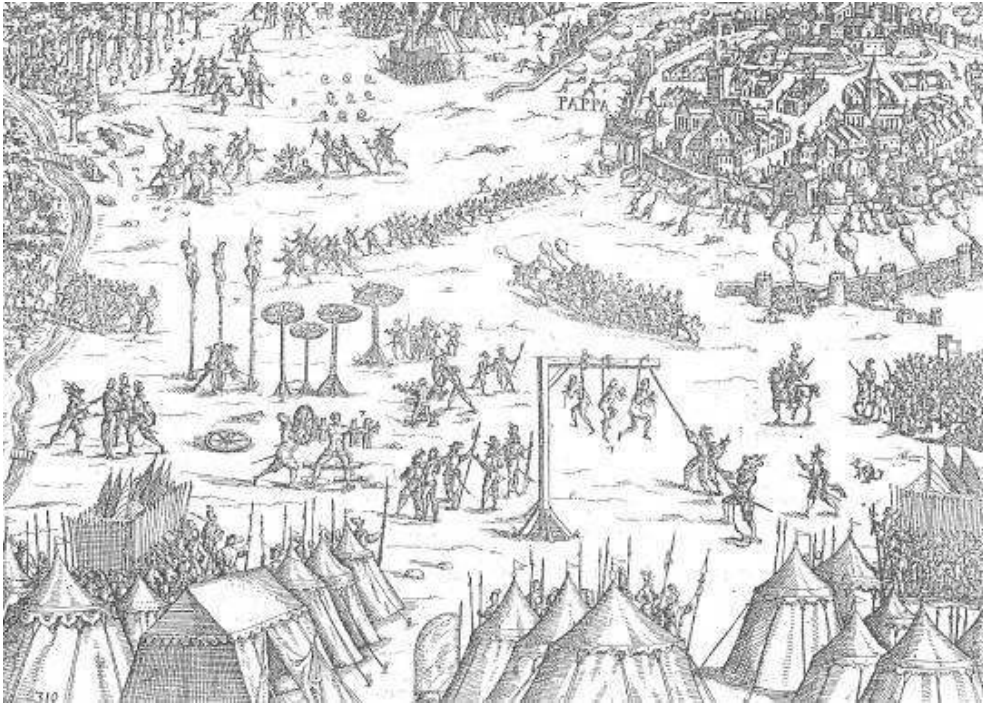


Fig 4. Franz and Abraham Hogenberg, Geschichtsblätter, 1606



Fig. 5. Anonym, Die Schlacht am Kahlenberg, 1683, Deutsches Historisches Museum



Fig. 6. Jacob van Schuppen, Prinz Eugen von Savoyen, 1717, Deutsches Historisches Museum

NOTES

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8. . Peter Burschel, “Verlorene Söhne. Bilder osmanischer Gefangenschaft in der frühen Neuzeit”, in Birgit Emich and Gabriela Signori (dir.), *Kriegs / Bilder in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 2009, p. 157-182.
9. . Anonym, *Spiegel der Frantzoesischen Tyrannei, Das ist: Ausfuerlich=Umstaendliche Erzehlung der unmenschlichen Grausamkeit / Welche die Frantzoesische Nation wider die so genannte Reformirte im Koenigreich Franckreich / sie zur Catholischen Religion zu zwingen / das verwichene 1685te Jahr; Mit Sengen / Brennen / Schmaeuchen / und dergleichen abscheulicher Marter / unerhoerter Weise veruebet; Mit hierzu dienlichen Kupffern zum Druck befoerdert*, 1686, p. 88.
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RÉSUMÉS

Dans l'Europe du début de l'Époque moderne, l'image de l'Empire ottoman était dominée par la « *Türkenfurcht* », la peur des Turcs, et la confrontation entre le Christianisme et l'Islam était l'un des sujets les plus importants dans la peinture et la gravure sur bois (monotypes) du xv^e et xvi^e

siècles. Avec la sécularisation de l'Europe de l'Ouest pendant la guerre de Trente Ans, et particulièrement après le siège de Vienne et la reconquête de la Hongrie, les illustrations de la fin du XVII^e et du début du XVIII^e siècle montrent un changement complet de la perception de l'Orient par le Saint-Empire romain germanique. Le développement de l'Orientalisme et la Turquerie marque un changement profond de la représentation de l'Empire ottoman. L'opinion n'est plus dominée par la peur, mais par l'assurance de la supériorité présumée de l'Europe de l'Ouest.

In early modern Europe, the image of the Ottoman Empire was dominated by the so-called “*Türkenfurcht*” – the “fear of Turks” as the confrontation between Christianity and Islam was one of the main themes in paintings and single-leaf woodcuts in the 15th and 16th centuries. With the secularization of Western Europe during the Thirty Years War and especially after the siege of Vienna and the Reconquest of Hungary, illustrations in the late 17th and early 18th century evoked a completely new reception of the oriental hemisphere in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The combination of the developing Orientalism and *turquerie* shows a remarkable change in imaging the Ottoman Empire. Views are no longer dominated by fear, but by the self-confidence of an assumed Western European superiority.

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