

We and The Other: The Image of Muslims in European Consciousness in The 16th Century

General presentation

Our thesis, *We and The Others: The Image of Muslims in European Consciousness in the 16th Century*, wants to be first and foremost an elaborated research of the way in which these two cultures and civilizations, the Christian – European one, on the one hand, and the Islamic – Ottoman one especially, on the other hand, interacted, rejected one another and influenced each other in the period mentioned above. Thus, the study aims at following the ascension of the Muslims, mainly the Ottomans, on the world scene, but the thesis intends to be more than a simple record of historical events. By the large subject it targets, it wants to be a political, diplomatic, sociological, cultural, linguistic, economic, philosophic study, trying to synthesize the way in which these two worlds interacted, co-existed, attracted and/or rejected each other.

The period is not chosen randomly. The Europe of the 16th century is a new world as well, knowing many transformations that will shape its later development. It is the end of the Middle Ages; we have a growing Renaissance all over the continent, a profound religious rupture of Christianity, a new empire in full ascension and expansion, thus a cluster of very different events that will shape the new Europe. Europe – identified with “We” and the Muslim world – with main reference to the Ottomans, are not homogenous entities, they are rather complex worlds, with different laws, customs and traditions.

Objective and method

Our study will go beyond the strict limitations of history, combining elements of literature, visual arts, history of religion and thus we will use various methods to reach our final target. In order to reach final image, we will have to operate with various methods, such as analysis and synthesis, the transfer of concepts, by using terms belonging to different sciences, we will also use the method of details, our attention trying to catch the details neglected by previous studies. We shall conduct also a discourse analysis which makes reference to historiography, writings by Renaissance authors, literary texts and speeches that can be found in chronicles contemporary to the events or written later, but which exactly for this reason are not so reliable.

Imagology is actually the way in which we define identity through the eyes of the Other, whoever that Other is. The mental collective has attributed the Turks certain traits that have

proven more or less true. In our case, the Other is the Muslim of the 16th century. But we also have to define the concept of “We”. When we talk about Europe, we automatically think of Christianity, Europe implying, beyond its geographical delimitations, a spiritual delimitation as well, strongly connected to Christianity, even though, slowly, the state the Church separate. Europe is seen as being Christian, from here the nowadays’ abrupt breach, a breach brought about by the large waves of Muslim refugees. The Islam, on the other hand, is not just a religion. It is much more than that, it is a way of life, the delimitation between laic and cleric being rather vague or even inexistent even nowadays in some states that still apply the holly law of Sharia.

The focus of the thesis will fall on the way in which the Turks were perceived in Central Europe, more exactly in Hungary and Poland. As far as the Kingdom of Hungary in concerned it consisted of a vast territory which included Transylvania, Bohemia, parts of Croatia and Bosnia. A turning point in its history will be the Battle of Mohács, when the Hungarians are defeated by the Turks. The Ottoman victory led to the partition of Hungary for several centuries between the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg monarchy, and the Principality of Transylvania. Further, the death of Louis II as he fled the battle marked the end of the Jagiellonian dynasty in Hungary and Bohemia, whose dynastic claims passed to the House of Habsburg.

When speaking of Poland, we must mention that the period taken into consideration is the Golden Age of Polish Renaissance, a period of great development in all fields under the Jagiellonian dynasty and towards the end of the century under the House of Vasa. In the case of Poland, we must also mention the creation of the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth formally known as the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, or simply Poland–Lithuania, ruled by a common monarch in real union, who was both King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania. It was one of the largest and most populous countries of 16th- to 17th-century Europe. At its largest territorial extent, in the early 17th century, the Commonwealth covered almost 1,000,000 km² and as of 1618 sustained a multi-ethnic population of almost 12 million.

The image of the Turk in Hungary is analyzed with a special attention given to Transylvania, which became semi-independent province under Turkish suzerainty. If we study deeply, we shall come up with a number of stereotypical views of the Turk: The Barbaric Turk, The converted Turk, The Antichrist, and we shall try to exemplify all these images with sources coming from history, literature or fine arts.

We have in the case of Hungary an aesthetic of guilt, which saw the defeat and its aftermath as a punishment from God for the sins of Hungarian, as the ones to blame are the Catholics for the persecutions against Protestants. This aesthetic can be seen especially in the literature of the time. Another part of sources that will be studied is made up by religious writings. And here it is interesting to remark that there is a shift: it is not the people's sins that brought the oppressor, but the sins of those of another faith. We shall also study Hungarian folklore, sayings, proverbs and children rhymes that survived the period and that are still used in everyday speech in order to create the image of the Turk.

Although there is an open antagonism against the Turks, there were however commercial relations established, and here we must mention the import of silk and tapestry that offer contributed to the later well-established models in Hungarian folk art. For Hungary, the best sources are to be found in literature and sermons, yet we must not neglect other sources such as Ottoman textiles that can be found in various parts of Transylvania and in the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest.

Another part to be researched in order to get the image of the Turk as it comes down to us through visual arts. Although there are not so many sources like in the case of battle of Lepanto which was largely portrayed by various artists or the Italian fine arts that depicted key moments in the Turkish – Western relations, there are a number of paintings that must be analyzed, such as *The Women of Eger*, the various depictions of the battle of Mohacs or miniatures that show the fall of different fortresses such as that of Szigetvár.

With Poland, the situation is different. Poland was not conquered by the Ottomans, yet through diplomacy, commerce and a common border with the Empire, the image of the Turk was crystallised in time. As stated above, the 16th century in a Golden Age for Poland. Early 16th century writings give a description of the destructions caused by the Ottomans and Tatars (for eg. Mikolj Hussocski's *Nova et Miranda de Turcis victoria*) Like in the majority of cases, the Ottoman threat served a religious propagandas Poland did not join the common Christian battles, and Dantyszek writes about this struggle to gain recognition for the Polish attempts to secure peace with the Ottomans in a wider context of negotiations to build an anti-ottoman coalition.

The image of the Turks as barbaric and treacherous comes down to us from a variety of sources such as: Stanislaw Orzechowski's *De bello adversus Turcas suscipiendo* and *Ad Sigismundum Poloniae regem turcica secunda*. The religious matter appears in the works of

Andrzej Lubelczyk, *Bellum theologicum*. Just as in the case of Hungarian chroniclers and writers, the idea of tyranny is seen as a result of heresy.

However, there are also positive aspects to be observed at the Turks, such as the organization of the state, the possibility of social advancement, and respect for justice. Most of the Polish chronicles of the time use the Ottoman threat as a way to criticize home idleness when facing the Ottoman threat.

As far as religion is concerned, the Turk and his conquests are seen as punishment from God for the sins of the people. The Anti-Turkish literature of the 16th century deals in the case of Poland more with military issues rather than religious ones. Religion is still present, but the main focus is on the need to re-invent the Polish identity and open the eyes of homeland nobility.

We will also follow the diplomatic relations between Poland and the Ottoman Empire which was quite peculiar in a Christian Europe. Thus, the rivalry between Ferdinand I of Habsburg and John Zápolya over the Hungarian heritage led to a friendly relationship between the Ottomans and Poland, and even more, made Poland neutral. However, towards the end of the 16th century the relations worsened, but it was only in the 17th century that open war break out between the two parts. In this respect, we rely on letters and travellers' accounts (Jan Ludwigoński, Jakub Wilamowski, Jan Ocieski). From these letters we get an insight into Turkish way of life, but also a picture of the sultan as a dreadful enemy.

The Turkish influence was to be seen in commerce, but also in everyday life. The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was made up of a variety of peoples, who influenced each other, willingly or not. Commerce with the Empire flourished, and a great deal of tents, weapons, carpets, household objects were purchased. The ottoman style of dressing influenced the way Polish started to dress.

In conclusion, the Ottomans influenced Central Europe as well, depending on the status of the regions taken into discussion. The Turkish inheritance cannot be denied, as some of it is still preserved and obvious in some parts. The Ottoman influence affected all levels of society, its threat was used as a means of propaganda, but it also established diplomatic relations with the regions mentioned above which led to a flourishing commerce. The image of the Turk is ambivalent, depending on the period and the extent of influence, devilish or to be admired.

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