

The Early Modern Ottoman Empire as a Contact Zone

Veranstalter: Molly Greene, Princeton University; Thomas Maissen, IAS, Princeton/Heidelberg University; Research project „Dynamic Asymmetries in Transcultural Flows at the Intersection of Asia and Europe: The Case of the Early Modern Ottoman Empire“, Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“, Heidelberg University
Datum, Ort: 10.06.2010-11.06.2010,

Bericht von: Tobias Graf / Pascal Firges / Christian Roth / Gülay Tulasoğlu, Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“, Heidelberg University

On 10 and 11 June 2010 the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, hosted the graduate workshop „The Early Modern Ottoman Empire as a Contact Zone“. The workshop was organized in cooperation between Molly Greene (Princeton University), Thomas Maissen (IAS, Princeton/Heidelberg University) and the research project „Dynamic Asymmetries in Transcultural Flows at the Intersection of Asia and Europe: The Case of the Early Modern Ottoman Empire“ (Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“, Heidelberg University). Conceptual planning and organization were primarily undertaken by Pascal Firges (Heidelberg University) and Thomas Maissen, who also chaired the discussions. With the exception of Linda T. Darling (University of Arizona, Tucson) and Christine Philiou (Columbia University, New York), all speakers were graduate students. Moreover, among the discussants were graduate students from Princeton, Heidelberg and Boğaziçi Universities as well as members and guests of the IAS, including Judith Pfeiffer (IAS/Oxford University). The event was made possible by the generous financial support of Heidelberg University's Cluster of Excellence.

For a long time traditional historical scholarship of the early modern Mediterranean, South Eastern Europe and the Middle East was influenced by the imagery of a bloc distinction between a Christian and European Occident on the one hand and an Islamic and Asian Orient on the other. Building on recent

developments in scholarship, the workshop sought to emphasize a transcultural perspective on the history of the Ottoman Empire and its neighbours. In accordance with the interdisciplinary approaches of Atlantic and Global History the participants explored the extent to which the Ottomans and 'the world around them' were interconnected and mutually dependent.

In her opening lecture, LINDA T. DARLING (University of Arizona, Tucson) gave an overview over the history and development of the concepts of 'borderlands', 'frontiers', and 'contact zones'. She pointed out that dealing with them has its pitfalls: While in her understanding, 'borderland' and 'frontier' conceptually stand in direct contrast to each other, the terms have frequently been used interchangeably. After presenting several examples that have made use of the 'frontier' paradigm, Darling argued for looking at history through the lenses of 'borderland' and 'contact zone'. Instead of accentuating clearly shaped contrasts, as in traditional conceptions of the Ottomans as „others“ from a European point of view, these lenses would allow for more colourful pictures showing the movements and interactions between the Ottoman Empire and its European neighbours.

PETER TRUMMER (Heidelberg University) undertook an investigation of the influences of the skirmishes along the Habsburg-Ottoman military border on the development of military learning from the 17th to the early 19th centuries. Tactics derived from continuous 'small warfare' in this region became, though officially frowned upon, an important element of military education. To a certain extent these tactics, which were adopted and adapted from Ottoman warfare, were then reintroduced by European officers serving in the Ottoman Empire as military advisors from the late 18th century onwards.

EMRAH SAFA GÜRKAN (Georgetown University, Washington) presented an insight into the peculiarities of Early Modern intelligence networks with a special focus on the Spanish Habsburgs' information gathering in the Ottoman dominions. Espionage could in many cases be a border crossing family business. By introducing the concept of the 'frontier man', Gürkan analyzed what kind of

agents were recruited for this endeavour and how these persons managed to cross back and forth the allegedly so hermetic boundaries between the domains of Christendom and Islam.

ABHISHEK KAICKER (Columbia University, New York) introduced Hadjdji Mustafa (d. 1791), a.k.a. Monsieur Raymond, who annotated his English translation of Ghulam Husayn's *Siyar al-Muta'akhhirin* with explanatory comments aiming at European readers. Born in Istanbul, educated in France, and living in Bengal as a British East India Company employee, the case of this „Turk“ – as he considered himself – raises many interesting points about the question of identity in a transcultural context. The discussion also put an emphasis on the question what the author meant to designate with the English term „Turk“.

The paper delivered by PASCAL FIRGES (Heidelberg University) focused on the mission of Marie-Louis Descorches, who was the first diplomatic representative of the French Republic to the Porte (1793-1795). Although considered by other European ambassadors as an extremely dangerous promoter of French revolutionary ideology among both the Ottoman population and elites, Descorches actually pursued very conservative policies along the lines of traditional French diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire. While this was done with the explicit consent of his government, these policies met with some resistance of those French citizens living in the Ottoman Empire who were fierce supporters of the revolution.

GÜLAY TULASOĞLU (Heidelberg University) presented the case of Charles Blunt, British consul in Salonica, focusing on his role in local reforms between 1830 and 1839. Blunt's success in implementing improvements like land based quarantine measures shows how a newly appointed foreign official could become an expert on local conditions. He used this knowledge to participate in local reform processes and thereby to increase his and his government's 'soft power' with regard to the provincial governor, the district administrator, the local *kadı*, the Greek Orthodox bishop, and different local elites.

From the viewpoint of religious studies,

BRUCE BURNSIDE (Columbia University, New York) explored the 'common life' of Muslims, Jews, Orthodox and Catholic Christians in Ottoman Bosnia. Referring to literary as well as official sources, he drew a picture of religious tolerance between good neighbours who often even participated in each other's religious practices and celebrated their respective feasts together. Cautious not to glorify the past, Burnside did not keep quiet about occasional clashes, but nevertheless saw the advent of nationalist ideology in the 19th century as the crucial factor leading to the war in the 1990s. But even then a declaration of the inhabitants of besieged Sarajevo (1992) shows how deeply rooted religious tolerance still was.

Building on his ongoing research into the renegade phenomenon in the period c. 1580–1610, TOBIAS GRAF (Heidelberg University) introduced the attendants to a sample of some 160 individuals who can be classified as renegades in the sense of having been Christians who converted to Islam within the Ottoman realm. While the database still contained significant gaps, results so far confirm conclusions which have formerly been based mainly on anecdotal evidence as well as *a priori* expectations. Among those converting to Islam, the majority had been soldiers and continued in the military-administrative field. Somewhat surprising, though perhaps the result of the patchy database, is the fact that craftsmen, most notably goldsmiths, seem to be overrepresented.

CHRISTIAN ROTH (Heidelberg University) took two *hüccet's* from the Patmos monastery archives as his starting point. Besides demonstrating that it seemed not to be a problem to go to the Islamic court with a claim for 30 per cent interest, he showed the possible usage of the documents after their having been issued. Questions still remain concerning the circumstances of amicable settlements (*_sulh*), the possible effects of these circumstances on the agreements, and the role of local institutions like the monasteries in these arbitrations. Finally, Roth drew attention to the fact that Christian litigants decided to appeal to the Islamic judge even when this exposed them to the dangers of long sea travels in the Aegean winter.

Birgivi Mehmed Efendi's *al-Tariqa al-Muhammadiyya* was the focus of the paper given by KATHARINA A. IVANYI (Princeton University). Raising the question of 'orthodoxy', this paper examined the spread of a sixteenth-century manual of practical ethics within different regions of the Ottoman Empire – Anatolia, the Balkans, the Levant and Egypt – as well as beyond the borders of the well-protected domains eastwards into Russia, Central Asia, and China. With its focus on *piety*, and call for the 'return' to an ideal Islam, Birgivi's *Tariqa* seems to have risen to great popularity in the eighteenth century in particular. While the reasons for this rise cannot yet be fully explained, it is evident in both the large number of extant eighteenth century manuscript copies, as well as in the number of commentaries produced on it at the time.

The concluding discussion started with a review by CHRISTINE PHILLIOU (Columbia University, New York). She noted that besides dealing with interconnections and dependencies, one common aspect of the delivered papers was that each of them dealt with specific agents. The discussion therefore brought up new questions: If applied to persons rather than to geographical spaces, can we talk of contact zones that are mobile? Transferring this thought to the 'borderland' paradigm, where would be the limits (or frontier?) of a borderland?

The workshop benefited immensely from the interdisciplinary approaches of the participants' research, combining the perspectives of historians trained in early modern European history with those of historians with backgrounds in Near and Middle Eastern Studies.

Conference Overview:

Introduction

LINDA DARLING (Arizona), Ottoman Borderlands, Frontiers, and Contact Zones

Panel 1

PETER TRUMMER (Heidelberg), 'Frontiers of Learning' – Trans-Border Military Learning and the Example of Central European Lessons Learned from the Military Border with the Ottoman Empire

EMRAH SAFA GÜRKAN (Georgetown), The

Frontier Man and Espionage in Habsburg Information Gathering in the Ottoman Capital

Panel 2

ABHISHEK KAICKER (Columbia), Ottoman, Mughal, Litterateur and Spy: The Case of Monsieur Raymond or Haji Mustafa, d. 1791

PASCAL FIRGES (Heidelberg), An Agent of Contact: The Mission of Marie-Louis Descorches, Envoyé Extraordinaire to the Sublime Porte 1793-1795

GÜLAY TULASOĞLU (Heidelberg), A European Consul in the Ottoman Empire on the Eve of the Tanzimat

Panel 3

BRUCE BURNSIDE (North Carolina / Columbia), The Common Life: Religious Tolerance in Ottoman Bosnia

TOBIAS GRAF (Heidelberg), Renegades in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1580-1610: Preliminary Reflections

Panel 4

CHRISTIAN ROTH (Heidelberg), Two Christian Creditors at the Ottoman Na'ib Court of Kos

KATHARINA A. IVANYI (Princeton), The Dissemination and Reception of Birgivi Mehmed Efendi's *al-Tariqa al-Muhammadiyya*

Conclusion

CHRISTINE PHILLIOU (Columbia), The Early Modern Ottoman Empire as a Contact Zone – Concluding Remarks

Tagungsbericht *The Early Modern Ottoman Empire as a Contact Zone*. 10.06.2010-11.06.2010, in: H-Soz-Kult 11.08.2010.