

Visualizing revolt and punishment in early modern times: conflict- and contact-zones between different visual cultures and policies

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Since the ‘visual turn’ of the 1980s, more and more attention has been drawn to the visual representation of basic historical categories well beyond classical political iconography. Pictures and images – be they oil-canvas portraits, copperplate, or modern posters – open up a new and broad range of sources for historians, which can be of utter importance where the written word is silent. The approach to visualization as a kind of historical narrative has been adopted in the Volkswagen Fellowship Symposium „Visualizing revolt and punishment in early modern times: conflict- and contact-zones between different visual cultures and policies“, which took place at the Mahindra Humanities Center of Harvard University from April 25 to April 27, 2014. This international and interdisciplinary conference was organized by Malte Griesse, Volkswagen Research Fellow at the Mahindra Humanities Center in 2013/2014, and his research group „Revolts as communicative events“ within the Cluster of Excellence „Cultural foundations of social integration“ at the University of Konstanz, and was sponsored by Volkswagen Foundation. The conference gathered researchers from several European and American universities to discuss visual and theatrical representations of revolt and punishment in early modern Europe.

In his introduction, MALTE GRIESSE (Cambridge, MA/Konstanz) gave an

overview of central research questions: how were early modern revolt and punishment communicated, represented, narrated and commemorated? The researcher pointed out that one can distinguish between horizontal (that is among insurgents) and vertical (that is between rebels and authorities) communication in revolts. Early modern authorities, afraid of the rapid spread of unrest, tried to claim a monopoly of communication suppressing any commemoration of a revolt, its causes, origins and claims (damnatio memoriae). Thus the information, being prohibited in the homeland, often spread across the borders in forms of foreign-language diplomatic observations and newspaper reports. In this cross-cultural context, images were of special importance, because they put different regional, religious or social ideals in a nutshell and frequently provoked annoyance.

The first panel of the conference was dedicated to punishment in the early days of the Muscovite Tsardom and in Byzantium. In their presentations, the speakers especially tried to distinguish symbols of legitimate violence from representations of usurpation and sin. GALINA TIRNANIC (Rochester, MI) touched upon the visualization of punishment and the understanding of the human body as a God-given image in Byzantine society. Although pictorial images were very rare in the Byzantine manuscripts, certain social events had a very strong visual component. According to Tiranica, the mental reimagination of the past, often tied to certain ‘places of memories’ within public city spaces, played an important role in Byzantine political culture. Crippling a political opponent or a criminal could be a way of marking him with a sign of his crime that would always remain visible. On the opposite, the body of the emperor had to be perfect. Thus, in the Byzantine tradition, the human body was seen as a medium of communication, a mirror of one’s merits. VALERIE KIVELSON (Ann Arbor, MI) examined the scenes of war, punishment and justice in the illustrations of 16th- and 17th-century Russian chronicles. She noted that depictions of bloody acts committed by righteous Orthodox Russians and by their defiant infidel Tatar foes are shown in equally graphic terms. It is not in the graphic itself,

but rather in subtle details of the illustrations that we can distinguish between righteous punishment and cruel tyranny. In images of supposedly legitimate violence, the focus is placed on the sovereign's presence. Unauthorized violence, however, is frequently marked by the monarch's absence, and victims are humiliated by exposing their nakedness. In other illustrations, evil rule is also connected to secret council and conspiracy.

In the second panel, dedicated to the comparison and mutual perception of visual orders of the West and the East, GLEB KAZAKOV (Bielefeld) continued the exploration of early modern Russian history. He demonstrated that images of Muscovite tsars in Western media of the 16th to 17th centuries followed a style described as 'oriental' and were therefore similar to the portraits of Ottoman sultans. It was False Dmitry, a ruler of Muscovy in 1604-05, whose image for the first time stood against the tradition and paved the way for the westernization of Russian visual culture. Already in the middle of the 17th century, Tsar Alexis was portrayed more like a Polish nobleman rather than a Turkish sultan. The oriental mode was thereupon transferred into the periphery, so that a leader of a Cossack rebellion, Stenka Razin, had some typical traits of a 'barbarous' ruler in Western media. NANCY KOLLMANN SHIELDS (Stanford, CA) compared practices of picturing punishment and execution in Muscovy and Western Europe in her talk. She examined an account and a picture of Muscovite justice made by German traveler Adam Olearius from Holstein. Whereas in early modern Western Europe the execution of justice was always depicted as a structured event, taking place on a central place where judges and spectators were present, the Russian image by Olearius is chaotic. Here, power is executed arbitrarily and signs of justification are lacking, which perfectly fits into the general picture of Russian despotism drawn by Olearius and other observers. The final talk of the panel by BLEND A. FEMENIAS (Washington, DC) concerned the depiction of violence in Spanish-Incan visual culture and its socio-critical role. The research concentrated on the drawings by indigenous artist de Ayala. His sketches opposed the righteousness of the ex-

tinguished Incan rule to the unjustified violence and wickedness of the Spanish occupation. Using images as cultural mediators, de Ayala tried to appeal to the Spanish King for justice. Most interestingly, though, his dialectical reasoning clearly betrays his Jesuit education and reveals a striking hybridity of communication and cultural identity in early 17th-century Latin America.

The third panel of the conference was focused on the visual cultures of early modern England and France. STEFANIA GARGIONI (Berlin/Canterbury) spoke about cross-cultural perceptions of regicide with a focus on French pamphlets concerning the execution of Ravaillac, King Henry IV's murderer. The researcher argued that English translations of the pamphlets, made in 1610, could be understood as a deterrent against regicide in early Stuart England. They were aimed at a bigger audience with a purpose to pull the community together and reject what the English government defined as a foreign idea. In the following talk, MONIKA BARGET (Konstanz) shifted the attention to 18th-century England. She examined the history of early modern English political caricature after the 1745 Jacobite rebellion and demonstrated how conflicting ideas of ideal governance were constructed in visual satires of „Bonnie Prince Charlie“ and his major opponent, the Duke of Cumberland. Barget pointed out that personal traits of character as well as physical appearance and symbols of national identity were the most important elements of post-1745 caricatures. 18th-century visual satires drew on many cultural sources from heraldry to stage performance and were especially popular among the privileged classes. The closing talk of the panel by JULIUS RUFF (Milwaukee, MI) presented insights into the visual history of banditry in pre-revolutionary France. The media coverage of the many raids undertaken by French brigand Poulaillier and his gang reveals how popular culture created a mythical figure of a 'noble' bandit. Comparing this popular perception to the detailed but demure police accounts, Julius Ruff explained the strong political connotations of printed reports. Similar to Robin Hood, Rob Roy or James Hint in Britain, famous French bandits and their life

stories allowed for reflections on public safety and social justice. The talk raised further discussion about the propensity of pre-modern societies to ascribe typical visual traits to different social groups.

The visual image of 'Turks' in European theatre constituted the topic of the fourth panel. DANIEL VITKUS (San Diego) focused on connections between the representation of torture and execution and the image of the 'cruel Turk' in English Renaissance drama. For many early modern English and European writers, Islamic rulers like the Ottoman sultan embodied the most extreme forms of cruelty and political injustice. At the same time cruel acts committed by English rulers were also described as 'Turkish', which drew allusive comparisons with political tyranny at home. On the one hand, theatrical images of rebellion, torture and martyrdom could work as a means to encourage rebellion against domestic tyrants. On the other hand, however, these representations could exalt the nefariousness of the absolute monarch and openly treat atheism, immorality and sexual excesses in an age of censorship and moral repression. CHRISTIANE ACKERMANN (Cambridge, MA/Tübingen) showed the perception of 'Turkish' rule in pre-modern German drama. She demonstrated an unusually positive image of the Ottoman sultan as presented in a carnival play by Hans Rosenplüt. Pre-modern theatre tried to recreate the distant space of Ottoman world on stage in order to emphasize the difference between the Christian and Muslim cultures. In this respect, the exotic Ottoman world was both used to criticize the decline of Christian empires and to inspire unity. Among these interpretations, there was also an attempt to understand the Turkish threat as a punishment for 'bad Christians'.

The second day of the conference was closed by the fifth panel dedicated to visualization of revolt and punishment in Central Europe. MALTE GRIESSE (Cambridge, MA/Konstanz) spoke about visual representations relating to the Upper Austrian Peasant War of 1626, which were exclusively published outside the confines of Habsburg territory. Even though political agency was normally denied to peasants, the insurgents

and their objectives were taken very seriously as an equal part on the Protestant side in the unfolding Thirty Years War. Malte Griesse especially called the entire attribution of the conflict to peasant initiative into question: the local gentry had been secretly involved in arming the peasants and formulating basic demands. At the same time, Catholic folklore, Protestantism and paganism mingled in the peasants' rituals and self-representation, which invited authorities to try and de-politicize the peasant uprising in later years. DANIEL JUETTE (Cambridge, MA), who took the floor afterwards, sought for divergent cultural connotations and explanations of the ritual of defenestration in early modern Europe. The most famous episode took place in the town hall of Prague at the edge of the Thirty Years' War in 1618. According to Daniel Juette, the Czech rebels, hoping to restrain the Emperor's delegates, could have taken their inspiration from an „Old Bohemian custom“ of duelling among nobles, which was first recorded in 1414. Defenestration, however, also occurred in other European countries, and some cases may have been modelled on a Biblical example.

The final panel was dedicated to the visual tradition of the Low Countries. DAVID DE BOER's (Konstanz) talk contributed to the question of visualization of death and violence in Dutch history painting. He focused on a famous oil-on-canvas painting depicting the death of the De Witt brothers, lynched by an urban mob in 1672. David de Boer stated that scenes of murder, violence and execution were generally not considered suitable for Dutch oil-painting of the 17th century, but constituted an independent genre in engraved newsprints. The famous oil painting of the De Witt murder accordingly transfers this tradition to a new medium, but it also calls the derogatory message of similar newsprints into question. Although being labeled as cruel and gruesome by modern spectators, images of executions and lynching were often perceived as 'triumph of justice' by contemporaries and constituted a warning to possible violators.

In the final discussion that followed all participants agreed that the topic of the conference happened to be a very promising one,

for research of visual cultures opens a new approach to the study of early modern violence. An attempt to draw cross-cultural comparisons was also considered to be worth more attention, for the presentations held at the workshop revealed a lot of interconnections and similarities between different regions and cultures. This shows a need for closer cooperation between disciplines and research fields, which can be achieved through series of workshops on the stated topic. The organizer of the conference Malte Griesse also pointed out that a very important step for future research would be a creation of a digital catalog of images and a combination of efforts of several projects working on the digitalization of early modern visual legacy.

Conference Overview:

Malte Griesse (Harvard University/ University of Konstanz), Welcome and Introduction

Panel I, Byzantium and Muscovy

Chair: Michelle Viise (Harvard University)

Galina Tirnanic (Oakland University), Visualizing Punishment in Byzantium: Disseminating Memories of Quelled Revolts before the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Valerie Kivelson (University of Michigan), Visualizing Violence in Muscovite Imperial Expansion in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Panel II, East and West

Chair: Serhii Plokhii (Harvard University)

Gleb Kazakov (Bielefeld University), Portraying Russian Rebels and Tsars in Western Media

Nancy Kollmann Shields (Stanford University), Truth and Legitimacy in Adam Olearius' „Punishments“

Blenda B. Femenias (Catholic University of America, Washington), Violence against the Body in the Drawings of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala

Panel III, England and France

Chair: Ann Blair (Harvard University)

Stefania Gargioni (Freie Universität Berlin/University of Kent), Punishment and Regicide: Iconographical Accounts

of Ravaillac's Public Execution in early Seventeenth-century England

Monika Barget (University of Konstanz), „The agreeable contrast“: British caricatures of the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion

Julius Ruff (Marquette University), Myth-Making in Eighteenth-Century France: Visual Representations of Banditry

Panel IV, Turks in European Theater

Chair: Daniela Hahn (Harvard University)

Daniel Vitkus (University of California, San Diego), Turkish Torture: Staging Atrocity and Fortitude in English Renaissance Drama

Christiane Ackermann (Harvard University/ Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen), Revolt on stage: The role of 'the Turk' in pre-modern German drama

Panel V, Central Europe

Chair: Katharina Piechocki (Harvard University)

Malte Griesse (Harvard University/University of Konstanz), Image and Text in Propaganda during the Upper Austrian Peasant War 1626

Daniel Juette (Harvard University), Defenestration: A ritual punishment and its visual representations in early modern Europe

Panel VI, The Low Countries

Chair: Malte Griesse (Harvard University/University of Konstanz)

David de Boer (University of Konstanz), Depicting death true to life: The murder of the De Witt brothers in painting and print

Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Visualizing revolt and punishment in early modern times: conflict- and contact-zones between different visual cultures and policies*. 25.04.2014–27.04.2014, Cambridge, in: H-Soz-Kult 16.10.2014.