

**Knowledge Systems and
Ottoman-European Encounters: Spatial
and Social Dynamics**

Veranstalter: Research Group „The Ottoman Europe: Methods and Perspectives of Early Modern Studies on Southeast Europe“; DFG priority program „Transottomanica“

Datum, Ort: 10.06.2021–11.06.2021, digital

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The 13th meeting of the research group „Ottoman Europe“ was organized in close cooperation with the DFG priority program „Transottomanica“ and set out to explore the interplay between knowledge systems and transregional Ottoman-European frameworks of interaction. In a digital setting, the international conference brought together scholars from history and art history, all of them united by a shared interest in Ottoman-European phenomena and transimperial dynamics. Participants entered into a conversation about new questions and approaches that a perspective from the history of knowledge stimulates when applied to an Ottoman-European setting and discussed methodological challenges.

Setting the tone in their introduction, the organizers DANIEL URSPRUNG (Zurich) and STEFAN ROHDEWALD (Leipzig) underlined the potentials the history of knowledge has to offer as the field of Ottoman history recalibrates itself, exploring categories of investigation beyond the ever-persistent paradigm of Ottoman decline and transcending the rigid spatial containers and divisions imposed by a traditional area studies perspective. A focus on knowledge and its patterns of mobility, transmission and translation instead highlights transregional and diachronic connections and allows to empirically ground analytical concepts.

Contributions drew on a wide variety of examples and forms of knowledge, covering a time span from the 16th to the early-20th century – but found ample common ground in a number of overarching questions. A point raised by many contributors was the need to think about definitions

and approaches to knowledge without falling back on preconceived analytical categories. This question was addressed most explicitly by Kenan TEKIN (Cambridge, MA), who inquired about Ottoman classifications and taxonomies of sciences and their genealogies, thereby firmly situating Ottoman cultures of knowledge in a broader transregional and diachronic context.

Several contributors zoomed in on the role of actors as transmitters of knowledge. A particularly interesting dimension in this regard was the question of expertise, exploring functions and complex social roles connected to the acquisition, possession and distribution of knowledge and hinting at patterns of cultural prestige and patronage that profoundly shaped knowledge cultures in an Ottoman-European context. SUNDAR HENNY (Bern) discussed the accounts of pre-Reformation Swiss pilgrims from an actors' perspective. HÜSEYİN YILMAZ (Fairfax, VA) zoomed in on the polymath Kâtip Çelebi and his contributions to the fields of geography, biography, bibliography and history as a starting point to think about the complex relationship between initiators and audiences of knowledge transfer, exploring patterns of distribution and popularization of knowledge. NIKOLAS PISSIS (Berlin) focused on the example of members of the Greek elite as brokers of political and diplomatic knowledge between the Ottoman and Russian empires in the 17th and 18th centuries and also pointed to the highly ambivalent situation of these actors, who found themselves situated at the intersection of different knowledge systems. EVA ASBOTH (Vienna) emphasized the links between individual actors and their wider institutional and discursive networks as she drew on the example of the 19th-century Austrian traveler and ethnographer Felix Kanitz and explored changing images of Serbia and „Oriental Europe“ in the Habsburg context. The trajectory of Kanitz also provided an occasion to consider the intricate links between knowledge production and power relations, reflecting on how analytical categories and, notably, spatial classifications rooted in European-imperial knowledge production have profoundly impacted and channeled research agendas in the fields of Ot-

toman history and area studies and are only now being questioned by transregional approaches.

Other contributions complemented the picture by taking not individual actors but broader networks of communication as a starting point for their deliberations. Exploring the activities of Ibrahim Müteferrika as a prolific and well-connected participant of a transregional and multidirectional early-modern framework of scholarly interactions, ZSUZA BARBARICS-HERMANIK (Graz) shed light on the interconnectedness of Ottoman-European cultures of knowledge. Compiling and cross-reading news accounts and rumors that circulated in the Eastern Mediterranean in the year 1521, shortly after Sultan Süleyman II had come to power, ELA BOZOK (Istanbul) and ZEYNEP NEVIN YELÇE (Florence) presented a fascinating micro study. Building on their meticulous source work, they reconstructed diverse, multi-layered and partly overlapping transregional networks of communication, while also factoring in aspects of environmental history.

Other fields and disciplines that contributors turned to for methodological and theoretical inspiration in their attempts to unlock the dynamics of Ottoman-European knowledge cultures included social history, art history and social anthropology. GIORGIO ENNAS (Florence) explored the intersections between social history and history of knowledge as he investigated how socio-political changes in the Ottoman provinces and transformations of local elite networks in the late 18th and 19th centuries reflected broader transregional epistemic shifts concerning ideas about governance, state-society relations and reform that simultaneous played out in European and Russian contexts as well. In their joint presentation on research strategies to investigate Transottoman cultures of knowledge, BARBARA HENNING (Mainz) and DENNIS DIERKS (Jena) took their cue from the social anthropologist George E. Marcus. Suggesting to „follow the knowledge,” they combined Marcus’ methodological program for a contemporary multi-sited ethnography with approaches from cultural translation studies and conceptual history to adapt the approach to

Ottoman history.

Drawing on examples of European humanist artists like Melchior Lorck, whose visual productions had long-lasting effects on European perceptions and imageries of the Ottoman world, ELKE K. WITTICH (Hannover) made a strong case for considering visual, material and performative dimensions in the study of knowledge cultures, pointing to the close interconnectedness of topoi and to rearrangements across different types of media in moments of knowledge transfer. LARA MEHLING (Zurich) also took artistic production as a starting point for her reflections, entering into a comparison between early-modern French and Ottoman court cultures and imperial decorative styles. Her comparative perspective highlighted how in both the Ottoman and the French case, a seemingly unified imperial culture, artistic style and taste had initially emerged from highly diverse settings – a fact that was subsequently erased from collective memory as political and economic concerns shifted in the 18th century, giving priority to domestic interests.

The overarching question raised by Mehling of how to deal with and conceptualize diversity and entanglements of multidirectional influences in Ottoman-European knowledge cultures was also addressed by other contributors. NIKOS MAGOULIOTIS (Zurich) tested the explanatory potential of theoretical concepts like translation, cultural hybridity and nostrification in his discussion of two markedly different interpretations of the same type of rural housing in Greece, dating from 1911 and the 1820s respectively, as he traced an increasingly nationalized discourse about vernacular architecture in Greece that had emerged as part of a wider Ottoman architectural tradition but was later claimed as authentically and exclusively Greek.

Overall, the conference setting underlined the many benefits and potentials of opting for knowledge as a broad and overarching theme that connects scholars and case studies from different disciplines and offers a joint transregional and Transottoman perspective as a stimulating framework for discussions. Two main concerns in particular structured the exchanges throughout the conference: A

first set of recurring questions centered on methodological issues, asking how to devise empirically productive research designs to capture and trace the dynamics of Ottoman-European knowledge cultures from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Participants also inquired about the possibility of shared definitions and concepts of knowledge and agreed that it was crucial to allow for actors' categories to emerge instead of reproducing preconceived notions and analytical categories stemming from Eurocentric perspectives.

A second emphasis was put on the potentials and challenges inherent in a transregional/Transottoman perspective. It became abundantly clear from the multitude of case studies and examples presented that in an Ottoman-European setting, scopes and scales of knowledge cultures are never exclusively defined or delineated by geographic, religious or linguistic boundaries. Even in settings where only relatively few actors are moving between different contexts, many more are impacted by the epistemic transformations and changes brought about by these patterns of mobility. Transimperial cross-references and transregional configurations urge us to look for overarching dynamics, exchange and movement – an exercise that, geographically and in terms of chronologies, opens up frameworks of investigation well beyond the Ottoman-European realm. However, an analytical approach that gives preference to fluidity and moments of interaction over geographically defined research settings also faces distinct methodological and theoretical challenges. Prominent among these challenges is a question that has been addressed repeatedly during the conference: how to make sense of the inherent hybridity of transimperial knowledge cultures, and how to best capture and explore the tensions and dissimulations which result from historical actors emphasizing moments of mixture and entanglement in one setting while claiming unified origins for certain knowledge cultures in other contexts. A sophisticated theoretical discussion is needed to further clarify these issues without relying on the category of hybridity as a mere opposite to nationally contained cultures, which would run the risk of reiterating paradigms and dichotomies of

nationalist historiography.

Promising perspectives to follow up in future discussions about transimperial Ottoman-European knowledge cultures thus include the theoretical potentials of approaches from cultural history like irony and hybridity, cultural translation and regimes of compatibility. In addition, the role of actors involved in these intricate processes of knowledge mobility might stimulate further reflection: How can it be conceptualized? In terms of „inbetweenness“ making them „cultural brokers“ mediating between different societies based on different knowledge cultures? Or is this approach inadvertently reproducing the logic of cultural boundaries it intends to overcome? Is it instead more adequate to operate with the notion of „transimperial societies“, conceptualizing them as consisting of diverse actors of knowledge being situated in a multitude of different social settings? Another still largely unexplored question concerns the observation that knowledge cultures have a potential to transcend the Ottoman-European realm not only in space, but also in time, referencing and mobilizing previous traditions and knowledge systems.

Conference overview:

Daniel Ursprung (Zurich), Stefan Rohdewald (Leipzig): Introduction

Sundar Henny (Bern): A new Nebuchadnezzar? The Ottoman conquest of the Holy Land as reflected in European pilgrimage accounts

Hüseyin Yilmaz (Fairfax, VA): Early modern intellectual encounters and knowledge production in Istanbul: Katip Çelebi's cosmopolitan circle and synthesis of information

Nikolas Pissis (Berlin): Ottoman Greek elites and the mediation of Russian-Ottoman exchange (17th and early 18th centuries)

Kenan Tekin (Cambridge, MA): Genealogies of early modern Ottoman conception of science

Giorgio Ennas (Florence): „Dualising“ the Ottoman society. Mirroring the east-west contraposition within the Ottoman social structure

Zeynep Nevin Yelçe (Istanbul), Ela Bozok

(Florence): Gossip, rumors, and facts: The year 1521

Dennis Dierks (Jena), Barbara Henning (Mainz): How to track down, capture and map out knowledge on the move in a Transottoman perspective? Recent findings and open questions

Barbara Henning (Mainz): Descendants of the prophet and their privileges as a topic in Ottoman political thought: Legacies and late-Ottoman re-interpretations

Dennis Dierks (Jena): Is there something like Transottoman intellectual history? The example of peripheral Muslim reformism

Elke Katharina Wittich (Hannover): „Pathos-formeln“ of other people: Graphics for the imprinting of pictorial memories in mid-16th century

Lara Mehling (Zurich): The irony of imperial decorative styles: The role of diversity in the production of unified cultural identities

Eva Asboth (Wien): Preparing the „Oriental Europe“ for Habsburg’s expansion. Felix Kanitz and the Viennese scientific circle as spatial knowledge producers on the Balkans in the 19th century

Zsuzsa Barbarics-Hermanik (Graz): The European republic of letters and the Ottoman Empire: Knowledge transfer and networks of knowledge in the age of the enlightenment

Nikos Magouliotis (Zurich): „The authentic Greek village-house of the northern regions“: Nationalization and folklorization of Ottoman residential architecture in Greece

Tagungsbericht *Knowledge Systems and Ottoman-European Encounters: Spatial and Social Dynamics*. 10.06.2021–11.06.2021, digital, in: H-Soz-Kult 17.07.2021.