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Project Description

The Depiction of War in Early Modern Travelogues on the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 not only set the final end of the Byzantine Empire, it also triggered a mental shock among Europe's intellectual elites. The succeeding military conflicts with the Ottoman Empire in Southeast and Central Europe also known as "Turkish Wars" favoured the development of a specific discourse of alterity, which would shape the European "image of the Turks" for centuries to come. The episodes of war were repeatedly interrupted by longer periods of relatively peace and diplomatic exchange. In particular the Austrian Habsburgs attempted to secure their defensive position towards the Ottomans through regularly sent diplomatic legations to Constantinople. A large number of travel reports were written in the context of these diplomatic legations from the mid-16th century onward, containing extensive descriptions of the Ottoman Empire. In their reports, the authors pay much attention to the political and military system of the Ottoman state, as well as to 'war' as a general topic. This PhD project intends to examine in detail the depiction of war and its consequences in these travelogues. Starting with the depiction of warfare, the course and impact of war, via the related legitimization of war and concrete strategies for war, up to the religious interpretation of the Turkish wars.

The analysis is based on reports of travellers who reached Constantinople by land via the Balkan Peninsula. The regional focus of the observation lies therefore on the area between Vienna and Constantinople, a core territory of the former Byzantine Empire. The authors' biographies are diverse in their national, confessional and professional backgrounds, and thus enable different perspectives. It is also important not to ignore the discursive view of the authors and their audience. Travelogues can be read as sources for expressions of (war-) culture as well as sources for European patterns of perception. Therefore, the source findings will be ranged in the broader discourse analysis about the Turks in these times. A special focus of the project will be on the discursive change from the "Turkish threat" to the "Turkish triumph" at the beginning of the 18th century. Previous research has shown that this approach is quite valuable for the genesis of the "Turkish threat" in the 15th century and its influence until the mid-16th century. For the late 16th as well as the 17th century, such approaches to are still missing to a large extent.