

Essay:

“CRUEL AND MENACING LETTER OF DEFIANCE”. A STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE OTTOMANS IN CENTRAL EUROPE (1680S-1830S)¹

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Abstract *This article analyzes the changing perceptions of Ottomans in German-speaking lands by following the publication history of a fictional Letter of Defiance from 1683 attributed to Sultan Mehmed IV and addressed to Emperor Leopold. This Letter was part of a larger subgenre of similar letters, which were categorized under anti-Ottoman propaganda pamphlets and prints of the 16th and 17th centuries. The images of the Ottomans as enemies and God’s punishment served political and social aims that changed after the turn of the 18th century. The reprints of the 1683 Letter in the context of the late 18th and early 19th centuries were indicative of these changes.*

The failed Second Siege of Vienna by the Ottoman armies in 1683 left its mark on Early Modern Ottoman and European histories. The Ottoman defeat at Kahlenberg remains an important event in public discourse to this day.² The year 1683 also indicated the beginning of a change in the Central European perceptions of Ottomans in the late 17th century. Following the periodical divisions that Felix Konrad puts forward in his EGO article, I argue that representations of Turkishness and European perceptions of the Ottomans began to change in the late 17th century from Turkish menace to oriental despotism. By the early 19th century, the discourse on oriental despotism was combined with a view of Ottomans as suppressors of Christian minorities in their domains.³

The pamphlet that is featured in this article, *Letter of Defiance (Absagebrief)*, is representative of this change in perceptions. It was originally published in 1683 as the last example of its kind but was reprinted in 1784, 1789, and 1827, each time at a different turn in Ottoman-German relations. The *Letter* is part of the long history of Turcica and apocryphal writing. It is best understood within discussions about print culture, pamphlets, and public opinion. This article analyzes the *Letter* with a focus on its continuous role in propaganda throughout the long 18th century and lays bare the origins of the stereotypes that are still following us today.

¹ Essay zur Quelle: Anti-Osmanisches Pamphlet: „Schrecklicher und Ganz grausamer Absage-Brief“ (1683), [Faksimile und Transkript], in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2023, URL: <<https://www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-78327>>.

² Judith Pfeifer, 1683 Revisited: Die “Türkenbelagerung” in österreichischen Zeitungen 1955–2010, in: Johannes Feichtinger / Johann Heiss (eds.), *Geschichtspolitik und “Türkenbelagerung”: Kritische Studien zur “Türkenbelagerung”*, vol. 2: *Der erinnerte Feind*, Vienna 2013, p. 211–243, pec. p. 217f.

³ Felix Konrad, Von der “Türkengefahr” zu Exotismus und Orientalismus: Der Islam als Antithese Europas (1453–1914)?, in: *European History Online (EGO)*, published by the Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2010-12-03, URL: <<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/konradf-2010-de>>.

Joad Raymond defines pamphlet as “a short, vernacular work, generally printed in quarto format, costing no more than a few pennies, of topical interest or engaged with social, political or ecclesiastical issues”.⁴ Pamphlets played an important role in shaping public opinion. As Jeffrey Sawyer shows, “pamphlets often targeted well-defined groups for political mobilization. They used specific rhetorical forms in an effort to motivate these groups into action or to placate them into passivity”.⁵ A pamphlet was a call “to do something here and now”.⁶ Concentrating on pamphlet culture in the Holy Roman Empire, Daniel Bellingradt argues that the flyers and pamphlets are a part of the expressions of mentalities of the contemporaries and they select which of the information transmitted in these documents will remain in the individual or the collective memory.⁷ Pamphlets played a crucial role in the formation of the popular opinion. They were cheaply produced and widely distributed. In a society with high illiteracy rates, the pamphlets were not read by everybody.⁸ In fact, most listened to pamphlets being read out loud in inns and taverns or in markets where people would gather for their daily affairs. Some pamphlets were even enacted in front of the book and print shops. These places of daily contact became places of communication and exchange of news where ideas are discussed and reproduced.⁹

The *Letter of Defiance* analyzed in this article was a pamphlet that is categorized under Turcica, a large body of texts that took “Turks” as their theme. Turcica included “fiction and nonfiction and appears in genres such as poetry, song lyrics, drama, novels, religious treatises and sermons, travel narratives, broadsides, and pamphlets, both illustrated and non-illustrated.”¹⁰ They were widely produced and rather popularly consumed. Carl Göllner shows that these publications served public relations function. Ruling elites were aware of the influences of these publications in people’s opinions and their useful effects in informing and convincing people of certain political decisions.¹¹ The publication of Turcica became more frequent around times of wars and major battles against the Ottomans.¹²

⁴ Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*, Cambridge 2003, p. 8.

⁵ Jeffrey K. Sawyer, *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth-Century France*, Berkeley, CA, 1991, p. 9.

⁶ Femke Deen / Michel Reinders / David Onnekink, *Pamphlets and Politics: Introduction*, in: *ibid.* (eds.), *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic. The Handpress World* (7), Leiden 2011, p. 3–30, pec. p. 12.

⁷ Daniel Bellingradt, *Flugpublizistik und Öffentlichkeit um 1700: Dynamiken, Akteure und Strukturen im urbanen Raum des Alten Reiches*, Stuttgart 2011, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹ Kerstin Te Heesen, *Das illustrierte Flugblatt als multimodales Kommunikationssystem der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: Stephanie Geise / Thomas Birkner / Arnold Klaus et al. (eds.), *Historische Perspektiven auf den Iconic Turn: die Entwicklung der öffentlichen visuellen Kommunikation*, Cologne 2006, p. 96–114, pec. p. 80.

¹⁰ Silke R. Falkner, “Having It off” with Fish, Camels, and Lads: Sodomitic Pleasures in German-Language Turcica, in: *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 13 (2004), p. 401–427, pec. p. 403.

¹¹ Carl Göllner, *Turcica III: Die Türkenfrage in der Öffentlichen Meinung Europas im 16. Jahrhundert*, Baden-Baden 1978, p. 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

One of the most reoccurring themes in Turcica was that of the enemy. Ottomans were depicted as the “hereditary enemies” (*Erbfeinde*)¹³ of the Holy Roman Empire. As Noel Malcolm points out, enmity was not the essence of the relationship between the Ottomans and Western Europe, but it was incorporated into the mental world of the Western audiences.¹⁴ Hence, as Franz Bosbach puts forward, “the image of the enemy always equals the self-image, which emerges from the collective values and reproduces them.”¹⁵ An analysis of enemy images offers insights into the values of the society that created and consumed these images. The Christian idea, drawing from biblical origins, that a society can be punished by God for its sins was adapted to include the Ottomans as a part of the punishment, to the level that they are compared with the coming of the apocalypse.¹⁶ Tyranny, persecution of Christians, cruelty, and malice¹⁷ were all recurring words and themes associated with the Ottomans in various publications. Arguably, the most famous example of this trend is Martin Luther’s depiction of Ottomans as the scourge of God.¹⁸

Finally, the *Letter of Defiance* was part of a multilingual genre called apocryphal letters. “The adjective apocryphal, meaning of doubtful authenticity, mythical, fictional, is recorded from the late 16th century.”¹⁹ While commonly associated with biblical texts that are not a part of the established Christian canon, apocryphal writings in this particular genre refer to false or fake letters. One of the best-known works on Early Modern apocrypha is late Edward Keenan’s book “The Kurbskii-Groznyi Apocrypha: The Seventeenth-Century Genesis of the “Correspondence” Attributed to Prince A.M. Kurbskii and Tsar Ivan IV”. Keenan worked on the provenance of this correspondence, looking into the textual evidence to assert that these letters were forgeries from the 17th century and not original correspondences from the 16th. Keenan then concluded that the best way to deal with these writings was to conceptualize them as a way to “understand far more satisfactorily the cultural and intellectual response of seventeenth-century Muscovite society to the growth and strengthening of the absolutist monarchy”.²⁰ These documents, fictional or not, reflected the perceptions of the period that they were produced in. A similar approach can be observed in Dariusz Kołodziejczyk’s article on

¹³ Carina Johnson’s upcoming research on this topic will contribute immensely to this discussion, URL: <https://www.americanacademy.de/person/carina-l-johnson/>.

¹⁴ Noel Malcolm, *Useful Enemies: Islam and The Ottoman Empire in Western Political Thought 1450–1750*, Oxford 2019, p. X–XI.

¹⁵ Franz Bosbach (ed.), *Feindbilder: Die Darstellung des Gegners in der politischen Publizistik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, in: *Bayreuther Historische Kolloquien 6* (1992), p. XI.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Harms / Michael Schilling, *Das illustrierte Flugblatt der frühen Neuzeit: Traditionen – Wirkungen – Kontexte*, Stuttgart 2008, p. 234.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

¹⁸ Malcolm, *Useful Enemies*, p. 77.

¹⁹ Knowles, Elizabeth, “Apocrypha”, in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Oxford University Press, 2005: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198609810.001.0001/acref-9780198609810-e-326>.

²⁰ Edward L. Keenan, *The Kurbskii-Groznyi Apocrypha: The Seventeenth-Century Genesis of the “Correspondence” Attributed to Prince A. M. Kurbskii and Tsar Ivan IV*, Cambridge, MA, 1971, p. 99.

Polish-Lithuanian nobles using two fake letters supposedly written by Sultan Ibrahim and Sultan Mehmed IV in the 17th century. Kołodziejczyk argues that “the ominous image of the sultan and his authoritarian rule played an important role in the internal propaganda of the Commonwealth”.²¹ Moreover, the second letter, attributed to Mehmed IV, was published in 1672 before the Polish-Ottoman war of the same year, with the purpose of reconciling internal conflict and mobilizing for war.²²

In the conjecture of pamphlets, Turcica, and apocrypha, the *Letter of Defiance* also had its own subgenre. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, apocryphal letters of defiance followed a similar literary pattern. Supposedly written by the Ottoman sultan, addressed to a European ruler, primarily the Habsburg emperor or the Polish king, these threatening letters contained references to Ottoman power, destruction of churches, rape, and plunder. The contents and exact threats may vary in details but the overall message was generic.²³ Based on Karl Vocelka’s research, this subgenre of fictitious letters reproduced the language of medieval feudal relations.²⁴ A letter of defiance (*Fehdebrief* or *Absagebrief*), also called *diffidatio*, was a medieval form of declaration of war because it signified the end of feudal relations.²⁵ In the early modern period, they paved the way for the propagandistic subgenre of the apocryphal letters of defiance. Vocelka identifies a total of twelve letters of defiance that were addressed to the Holy Roman emperor, three to the Polish king and one to Venice, published in two versions.²⁶ The dates of these letters corresponded with the major conflicts of the 16th and 17th centuries. One of the earliest examples is dated to 1529, the first Siege of Vienna by Sultan Suleyman I.²⁷ Habsburg emperors were not the only recipients of these fictional letters. In 1570, a letter was directed to Venice, at the eve of the infamous Battle of Lepanto.²⁸ Nor were the Ottoman sultans the only fictional authors. An example from 1663 was supposedly written by the Persian shah to the Ottoman sultan.²⁹ Using a similar literary pattern, the shah boasted of the Habsburg and Venetian defeats against the Ottomans.

²¹ Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, Native Nobilities and Foreign Absolutism: A Polish-Ottoman Case, in: *Studia Caroliensia* 3-4 (2004), p. 303–308, pec. p. 304.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 306.

²³ Daniel Waugh, Pseudo-epigraphic correspondence with the Ottoman sultan, in: David Thomas / John Chesworth (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. 8: Northern and Eastern Europe (1600–1700), Leiden 2016, p. 981–988, pec. p. 981.

²⁴ Karl Vocelka, Fehderechtliche ”Absagen“ als völkerrechtliche Kriegserklärungen in der Propaganda der frühen Neuzeit, in: *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichte* 84 (1976), p. 378–410, pec. p. 405.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 381. An extensive bibliography of printed works can be found in Vocelka, *Absagen*, p. 406–410.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

²⁸ Anonymous, *Erschröcklicher Absagbrieff / Des jetzigen Türckischen Keyzers / diß jetzt lauffenden Jars / den von Venedig vberschickt*, S.I. 1570, URL: <<http://gateway-bayern.de/VD16+T+2218>>.

²⁹ Anonymous, *Des Persianischen Königes so der Christenheit wohl zugethan Absage-Brieff an den jetzigen Türckischen Keyser*, S.I. 1663, URL: <<https://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/df/159129/1>>.

Another common feature of this subgenre was the use of official titles. The same list of titles for the Ottoman sultan that was used in the *Letter* can be found in a collection of titles from 1697.³⁰ Vocolka argues that the authors of these letters might have had access to official communications or at least their translations,³¹ which could have been a source of reference and inspiration for these prints. These letters, embedded within a larger European realm of references, were created using a language that was familiar and thus more believable.

This particular subgenre was not limited to German-speaking lands. Italian, Latin, Dutch, English, and Polish copies were printed and circulated throughout the early modern period.³² Daniel Waugh shows that translations of these letters circulated in manuscript form in Muscovy.³³ They emerged in circles involved with translating news and diplomatic correspondences with Western Europe. Their appearance coincided with Ottoman-Russian conflicts as well as Ottoman-European ones, especially related to the European efforts to pull Muscovy into these conflicts.³⁴

The 1683 *Letter of Defiance* is extant in two copies, in the Deutsches Historisches Museum (DHM) in Berlin³⁵ and in the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus in Vienna.³⁶ The DHM copy which was used in this article was kept as a stand-alone pamphlet. There is no sign of it having ever been bound with other pamphlets, unlike the Viennese copy which was bound with a booklet about the Jesuits. The *Letter* is a 4-page long quarto. The date of publication printed on the first page is 1683. There is no location of publication. The first page is devoted entirely to the title of this pamphlet, where the word *Absage-Brief* is printed in large font in the middle of the page. Two adjectives are printed in smaller font above to define the *Letter*: *Schrecklicher und Gantz grausamer* (awful and very cruel). Below the word *Absage-Brief* in smaller font is the sender, *Der Türckische Kaiser* (the Turkish emperor), and the letter is addressed *an den Römischen Kaiser* (to the Holy Roman emperor). The second page is entirely dedicated to the titles of Sultan Mehmed IV. He is referred to as the ruler of all the inhabitants of the Earth, followed by a list of places that are under his rule. These places range from real ones, important reference

³⁰ Anonymous, *Vollständiges und Neu-eingerichtetes Titular-Buch*, Gotha 1697, p. 15–16. URL: <https://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/search?id=165921734&db=100&View=default>.

³¹ Vocolka, *Absagen*, p. 390.

³² Waugh, *Pseudo-epigraphic correspondence*, p. 982; id., *The Great Turkes Defiance: On the History of the Apocryphal Correspondence of the Ottoman Sultan in its Muscovite and Russian Variants*, Columbus, OH, 1978, p. 26–30.

³³ Waugh, *Great Turkes Defiance*, p. 6–7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7–9.

³⁵ Anonymous, *Schrecklicher und Gantz grausamer Absage-Brief / Welchen Der Türckische Kaiser An den Römischen Kaiser überschicket*, S.L. 1683, DHM Signatur: Do 2003/323. Saskia Bendrich at DHM shared this copy with me in 2015 and walked me through the provenance of the *Letter* to the best of her knowledge.

³⁶ Walter Sturminger, *Bibliographie und Ikonographie der Türkenbelagerungen Wiens 1529 und 1683*, Graz 1955, p. 63. Alesandro Gallo and Sylvia Matti-Wurm from Wienbibliothek im Rathaus provided me with a scan of the document in their collection in 2016, URL: <https://permalink.obvsg.at/wbr/AC14558959>.

points in German mind, such as Hungary and Greece, to fictional ones, like the Jewish Paradise.³⁷

On the third page, Emperor Leopold is addressed directly in second person singular.³⁸ It is followed by the main accusation and the reason behind the upcoming war. Emperor Leopold has shattered the friendship of Mehmed IV by conspiring with other kings and his advisors in order to throw off the Ottoman yoke.³⁹ He brought it upon himself and his people to live in dread, where nothing other than death is awaiting them.⁴⁰ Using I-language, Sultan Mehmed states that he will follow Leopold and his people from the east to the west, expanding his reign to the end of the world.⁴¹ Emperor Leopold should not place his hopes on his cities and fortifications⁴², for Sultan Mehmed will ride over all that is pleasant and valuable to him.⁴³ Threats continue on the fourth and final page. Continuing in the I-language, the sultan is threatening to leave the cruel memory of his sword in the German empire.⁴⁴ He does not fear the rage of Leopold's God, who will not be able to protect or save him.⁴⁵ Sultan Mehmed will publicly introduce his religion in Leopold's empire,⁴⁶ condemn his holy priests to be destroyed by their enemies⁴⁷ and present the breasts of matrons to dogs and wild beasts for suckling.⁴⁸ The sultan finishes his letter by stating that this should be a warning to Leopold and that he is, thus, making his intentions clear.⁴⁹

When interpreting this *Letter*, it is important to focus on the meaning of these threats for the intended audience and their reception of them. Yoke was symbolic of an imbalance of control and power, which shaped this fictional relationship. By throwing off the yoke, Leopold terminated his friendship with Sultan Mehmed IV. The termination of a relationship was central in this genre, due to its fictional origins in medieval *diffidatio*. Hence, a reference to yoke signaled this connection. It also shifted the blame of the war to Leopold. Consulting with others behind the sultan's back, Leopold left him with no alternative to waging a war.

³⁷ "König von Griechenland [...] gehuldigter Printz des Judischen Paradieses [...] Bewahrer der Städte von Hungarn".

³⁸ "Wir begehren zu grüssen dich Käyser LEOPOLD".

³⁹ "durch heimliche Berathschlagungen mit andern Königen und deines Rathsleuten / um unser Joch von Dir abzuwerffen".

⁴⁰ "dahero nun Du und dein Volck in Furcht leben müssen / indem Ihr anders nichts als den Tod zu erwarten habt".

⁴¹ "Euch verfolgen von Osten biß Westen / und meine Majestät ausbreiten biß an das Ende der Erden".

⁴² "deine Hoffnung auff einige Städte und Vestungen stellest".

⁴³ "mit Pferden zu zertreten alles dasjenige / so deinem Augen angenehm und freudig gemesen ist".

⁴⁴ "in deinem Reich ein Gedächtniß meines grausamen Schwerdts zu hinterlassen".

⁴⁵ "continuirlich Deinen gecreutzigten Gott zu verfolgen / dessen Zorn ich nicht fürchte / wird dir auch nicht helfen / dich nicht beschützen / und aus meiner Hand erlösen können".

⁴⁶ "meine Religion daselbst öffentlich einzuführen".

⁴⁷ "Ich will auch Deine geweihte Priester zum Pfluge verdammen".

⁴⁸ "die Brüste der Matronen den Hunden und wilden Bestien / selbige zusäugen/vorstellen".

⁴⁹ "Dieses sey Dir zur Warnung gesagt".

There were two main categories of threats in this letter: those that refer to violence against people and others that refer to Christian religion and religious figures. The statement that Leopold should not rely on his cities and fortifications addressed the city dwellers who believed that their walls would keep them safe. Considering the role fortified city walls played in defense against military sieges in this period, a threat that undermined the sense of security provided by these fortifications was quite influential. The threat to plunder the German kingdom and to conquer from the east to the west could not have been dismissed as mere boasting by the general audiences. Ottoman armies in the 16th century did conquer large territories in Central Europe, most famously in the Battle of Mohács in 1526, when Sultan Suleyman captured central Hungary and established control over Transylvania. There was a historically-informed basis for a fictional threat of Ottoman expansions from the east. Within this rhetoric, “the memory of [the sultan’s] cruel blade” was a source of popular horror that deeply resonated with the audience of this *Letter*.

Religious threats ranged from direct intimidations of forced Islamization to violent visual depictions that centered women’s bodies. Islamization of the Holy Roman Empire was not too difficult to imagine for an early modern subject. After all, the neighboring territories did experience some amount of forced conversions when they came under Ottoman rule, particularly through the devshirme or youth-levy system.⁵⁰ Threats of Islamization played into the fears of forced Ottoman conversions. The visceral nature of the breasts of matrons being offered to beasts for suckling evoked feelings of disgust and fear of bodily mutilation. The threat regarding priests was harder to interpret. The word *Pfluge* in the sentence “*Ich will auch Deine geweihte Priester zum Pfluge verdammen*” can be translated as “plough”, and the sentence interpreted as condemning Catholic priests to work in agriculture: “I will condemn your holy priests to the plough”. While it can be seen as a punishment to be forced into farm labor, Johann Heinrich Zedler’s 18th century dictionary offers another perspective in which plowing fields is interpreted as a Christian act, similar to serving the community as a preacher.⁵¹ Upon further reading, I encountered another word in Zedler, *pflüger* which means “the enemies of Christian churches, through whom the believers are pressured, shamed, angered, and persecuted, just like the earth is tattered and wounded by the plough”.⁵² This threat in the *Letter* can be best interpreted as the sultan condemning the priests to enemies of the Christians to be torn by them like the Earth is torn by the plough.

⁵⁰ Caroline Finkel, *Osman’s Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300–1923*, New York 2007, p. 74 and p. 325.

⁵¹ Johann Heinrich Zedler, Art. “pfluge”, in: Johann Heinrich Zedler (ed.), *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* 27 (1741), p. 1632–1633.

⁵² Johann Heinrich Zedler, Art. “pflüger”, in: Johann Heinrich Zedler (ed.), *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* 27 (1741), p. 1657.

Taken together, these threats were addressing some of the most valuable aspects of people's lives: their sense of security and safety in their cities, their liberty and livelihood, and their religion. Moreover, such threats were relatable to a broader audience, poor and rich, men and women alike. Under the threat of a violation of such magnitude, the audience was expected to feel frightened and alarmed.

One particularity of this *Letter* was its apocryphal reply by Leopold. Waugh identified the Russian and Polish copies of the *Reply* and deduced that there must have been a German original, which he could not locate in 1978.⁵³ Today, the *Reply* is kept in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin.⁵⁴ Analyzed within the same paradigm, the *Reply* was Leopold's response to these threats. His belief in Christian power and trust in his military prowess were meant to reassure the public that the war will not be lost, if they were to unite around the Emperor.

These propaganda images “about the ‘Turks’ invoked the political and spiritual unity of Germany at the face of the outside threat”.⁵⁵ They were designed to be perceived as real threats and to some extent they were realistic. Those who experienced the turmoil of wars were no strangers to pillage and plunder by all sorts of military groups. The exorbitant language amplified the sensation of the enemy at the gates. Both the secular and religious authorities used the idea of an outside threat as an instrument of order and persuasion. On a practical level, the threats legitimized taxes, particularly war taxes levied in periods right before military conflicts. Authorities used these threats to increase obedience and trust among their subjects and to stabilize the political and social order.⁵⁶ In the religious sphere, they encouraged their audience to attend religious services. Depicting Ottoman atrocities as God's punishment for society's sins encouraged believers to amend for them through repenting. The church desired repentance for its practical functions of increased participation, larger congregation, and more financial support.⁵⁷

These letters were carefully designed to invoke a sense of Europe-wide threat. As Almut Höfert points out, the geography of the *Türkengefahr* was not London, Paris or Cologne, but it was the Habsburg territories of the Holy Roman Empire. Ottoman threat was a central and frequent issue in the Empire, as shown in records of the Imperial Diet.⁵⁸ But the idea of Ottomans as threatening the whole of Europe was more often a discursive element than reality.⁵⁹

⁵³ Waugh, *Great Turkes Defiance*, p. 66–68.

⁵⁴ Anonymous, *Gewisses und wahrhaftiges Antwort-Schreiben Des Römischen Käysers An dem Türckischen Käiser*, S.I. 1683, URL: <<http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0000F4A500000000>>.

⁵⁵ Harms / Schilling, *Das illustrierte Flugblatt*, p. 236.

⁵⁶ Winfried Schulze, *Reich und Türkengefahr im späten 16. Jahrhundert: Studien zu den politischen und gesellschaftlichen Auswirkungen einer äußeren Bedrohung*, München 1978, p. 46.

⁵⁷ Meike Hollenbeck, *Die Türkenpublizistik im 17. Jahrhundert: Spiegel der Verhältnisse im Reich?* in: *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 107 (1999), p. 111–130, here p. 116.

⁵⁸ Schulze, *Türkengefahr*, p. 15f.; Hollenbeck, *Türkenpublizistik*, p. 125.

⁵⁹ Almut Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben: „Türkengefahr“ und europäisches Wissen über das Osmanische Reich 1450–1600*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, p. 55.

Hence, the utilization of the Turkish terror trope was crucial in financial and military mobilization for war efforts. Habsburg emperors saw a direct connection between the fears and subsidies from Imperial Estates in furthering the war effort especially in territories outside of the Holy Roman Empire but under Habsburg rule, like Hungary.⁶⁰

The wars between the Ottomans and the Holy League that followed the Siege of Vienna ended with the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. At the turn of the 18th century, the military balance shifted and so did the images of the plundering and spoiling “Turk”.⁶¹ The end of the subgenre of letters of defiance belongs within this larger trend. The story of this *Letter of Defiance*, however, does not end in 1683. A century later in 1784, the *Letter* was reprinted in Leipzig, in Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz’s “Litteratur und Völkerkunde”.⁶² Instead of conceptualizing the *Letter* as a work of propagandistic fiction, Archenholz framed it as a real declaration of war, *Kriegsmanifest*, emblematic of oriental haughtiness and despotism.

Citing Archenholz, two further reprints emerged in December 1827, this time in Bavaria. “Tags-Blatt für München”⁶³ and “Der Bayerische Volksfreund”⁶⁴ published the *Letter* during the decade of the Greek War of Independence. The latter hinted at the purpose of the reprint mentioning the Battle of Navarino, a naval battle fought in October of the same year off the coast of the Peloponnese. The Philhellenism of the 1820s coincided with the Bavarian political investment in the Greek struggle. The first modern king of Greece crowned in 1832 was Otto I, a Bavarian prince and the second son of King Ludwig I. The last appearance of the *Letter* in 1827 was not only part of Bavarian politics but also representative of the changing perceptions of the Ottomans in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Throughout this period, with the national independence movements in the Ottoman domains in southeastern Europe, the Empire came to be perceived as the oppressor of its ancient Christian inhabitants.⁶⁵

This article traced the history of changing perceptions of the Ottomans in Central Europe, following the publication journey of a pamphlet. Turning up in crucial moments of history, the *Letter of Defiance* offered insights into German ideas of the “Turk”. Studying the Central European perceptions and images of the Ottomans is a valuable historiographical intervention because it lays bare the historical origins and cultural contexts of this particular stereotype. As such, it becomes much harder to mistake a propaganda story with history. Even in the 21st

⁶⁰ Malcolm, *Useful Enemies*, p. 59.

⁶¹ Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2004, p. 18f.

⁶² Anonymous, *Kriegsmanifest des Sultans Mahomet gegen den Kayser Leopold*, in: Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz (ed.), *Litteratur und Völkerkunde: Ein periodisches Werk*, vol. 5, Leipzig 1784, p. 417–419.

⁶³ Anonymous, *Mancherlei, Tags-blatt für München* 164, 11.12.1827, p. 659f., URL: <<https://books.google.com/books?id=Jt1FAAAAcAAJ>>.

⁶⁴ Anonymous, [no title], *Der Bayerische Volksfreund* 161, 15.12.1827, p. 750f., URL: <<https://books.google.com/books?id=87NDAAAACAAJ>>.

⁶⁵ Aslı Çırakman, *From the Terror of the World to the Sick Man of Europe: European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth*, New York 2002, p. 156–160.

century, the propaganda of the past is taken seriously. The 2012 Polish-Italian movie “The Day of the Siege: September Eleven 1683” distorts the historical reality by moving the end date of the Second Siege of Vienna from September 12 to September 11, 1683, to forge a connection to 9/11 attacks and to imply a timeless conflict between Islam and Christianity. Because such stories are often more convincing than academic histories, the onus falls onto us academic historians to caution and challenge our audiences to think critically about the past and its reception.

Further Reading:

- Carina L. Johnson, *Cultural hierarchy in sixteenth-century Europe: the Ottomans and Mexicans*, Cambridge 2011.
- Larry Wolff, *The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and Operatic Emotions on the European Stage from the Siege of Vienna to the Age of Napoleon*, Stanford, CA, 2016.
- Daniel Waugh, *The Great Turkes Defiance Revisited*, in: *Slovene* 8 (2019), p. 162–187. In this article, Waugh revisits his 1978 monograph to expand upon its reception in 70s and 80s in the Soviet historical circles and comment on newer research findings.
- Ingrid Maier, “Ontsegh-brief van den Turckschen Keyser ...”: Ein fiktiver Brief des türkischen Sultans an den König von Polen in russischer Übersetzung (1621), in: Per Ambrosiani (ed.), *Jako blagopesnivaja ptica: Hyllningsskrift till Lars Steensland*, Stockholm 2006, p. 135–146.
- Mustafa Soykut (ed.), *Historical Image of the Turk in Europe, 15th Century to the Present: Political and Civilisational Aspects*, Piscataway, NJ, 2010. URL: <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463225483>.
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Merve Tekgürler “Cruel and Menacing Letter of Defiance”. A Study on the Perceptions of the Ottomans in Central Europe (1680s-1830s), in: *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte*, 2023, URL: <https://www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-98964>.

Anti-Osmanisches Pamphlet: „Schrecklicher und Ganz grausamer Absage-Brief“ (1683), [Faksimile und Transkript], in: *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte*, 2023, URL: <https://www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-78327>.