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*The notion of 'the Turk' in the eyes of Europe (XV-XVI centuries)*

*The Turks had provoked a great horror in Europeans during the Expansion Period of the Ottoman Empire that lasted until the 15th century. This horror was enhanced by the Turkish victories in Nicopolis, in 1396, in Varna, in 1444, in Kosovo, in 1448 and reached its peak in 1453 with the conquest of Constantinople by the Turkish army, under the leadership of Mehmet II. The article focuses on the “image of the Turk” in the period from the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 to the end of the 16th century which was characterized by fear and religious discourses. The image of the Turk as the enemy became an integral component of the world-view of many Europeans. It was disseminated and strengthened by sermons, pamphlets and other types of literature. In the 16th century about 2,500 publications about the Turks were spread around Europe (over a thousand of which were in German). In fact in the period of 1480 to 1610, twice as many books were published about the Turkish threat to Europe than about the discovery of the continents of the New World.*

Through the centuries Turkish threat have been a fear, a source of unrest and a subject of the study on the basis of these mentioned points for Europeans. From the mid-fifteenth century onwards, the dominant image of the Turk focused on the Ottomans as a power. That image was developed in particular in response to the landmark events of the Ottoman advance, the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the siege of Rhodes and capture of Otranto in 1480, the destruction of the Mamluk sultanate in 1516-1517 and the defeat of the Hungarians at Mohacs in 1526. Although, Christians were still terrified that Turks would conquer Europe and impose Islam, they also envied and admired Ottoman religious unity, administration and military. Western authors started to focus on the culture, religion and organization of the Ottoman Empire as an imminent threat to Europe [6,90].

The barbarization of the Turks was accompanied by attempts to locate them within an eschatological reading of events. As a process this was sanctioned at the highest level, for in the crusade bull which pope issued in response to the fall of Constantinople. The conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Turks was a shock, which can not be circumvented for all Western World [4,135]. This defeat was considered as the onset of anxiety for Westerners. Pope Nicholas V made a direct reference to Revelation 12:3 and the widespread identification of the Turks with its “great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on its heads”.

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Some exegetes identified the Turks as the *flagellum Dei*, and chosen agent of God's wrath, and sultans like Mehmed Conqueror as "Antichrist's forerunner. About the conquest of Constantinople Pope Pius II (1405-1464) had said these words: 'In the past we used to win a victory in foreign countries. However, anymore they shoot us in Europe, in our own homeland and even at our own home.'" [3,112]

In the 15th and 16th century, Papacy already was no longer an earthly and ethereally power. Lack of serious attempts against Turks despite the taxes collected and whereas the increase of taxes causes a spread of ideas that in Europe, people had being exploited and cheated by Pope. Under these circumstances, religious order was being questioned by society and especially reformation demands by theologians increased. In the result of Lutheran impact, a church was divided into two great enemy fronts or lines. Papacy enters into an effort to increase a value of churches in the European nations' eyes, works based on the propaganda tasks as well, tries to build a Common Christian Foreign Policy against the non-believers. The most effective manipulative ones for church are considered bells were rung against the Turkish threat, sang sermons against the Turks and the prayers against Ottomans. Bells were rung against the Turkish threat was called by Germans as "Turkish bells" [7,137]. The first time Turkish bells were rung by Pope Calixte III on 29 June 1456 Year, in order to remember Turkish threat to Austria and arresting of Mora by Turks. For this reason, Pope required bells were rung against the Turks one or more times in all churches at noon times and published "Türkenbull" on June 29, 1456. He called community for a prayer, repentance and sermon in a stimulating way. Besides, the target based on society sermon is to be told about "Future dangers from the devil's son Mehmed" [8,190]. However, in 1456 Pope Callixtus III wanted people to pray, repent and keep a fasting with an edict on the first Sunday of every month. After conquest of Istanbul for Western World, the main point of danger came to a head in 1529 when Turkish people reached to Vienna. During that period, Western world was shaken, Martin Luther emerging starts a war, which this kind of war was not, observed until that time against the Turks [9, 208].

In Luther's view of the world the mutual antagonism of pope and sultan was irrelevant: they were both agents of the devil. As he put it in "On the War Against the Turks", his, most considered reflection on the Ottoman threat, which was published in February 1529. In 1529, with the Ottoman threat to the Germanic lands at the forefront of his mind, Luther wrote, "Just as the pope is the Antichrist, so the Turk is very devil incarnate". He refers to some who were favorable to the Ottoman Empire "who actually want the Turk to come and rule, because they think that our German people are wild and uncivilized - indeed that they are half-devil and half-man". He further remarks that "although some praise Turk's government because he allows every one to believe what he will so long as he remains temporal lord, yet this reputation is not true, for he does not allow Christians to come together in public", certainly halfhearted condemnation at most [10, 156].

This appraisal came in 1529, even as Suleyman besieged Vienna, whose fall seemed imminent. Sultan Suleiman expanded the borders of the Ottoman Empire to its farthest, enriched its wealth to the highest and delivered the biggest progress in law, art, and architecture. Europeans both feared and admired the power of the Ottomans Turks during his reign and rightfully called him the “Grand Turk” [5,148].

Luther’s antiturk position had been initially shared by Erasmus. In his letter to Paul Volz Erasmus criticizes the crusade ideal by exposing the harshness of prevailing attitudes towards the Turks. Drawing on early Christian thought-not medieval accretions or crusade apologias- he asks what will become of the turks if Leo X’s proposed crusade succeeds. Christians should endeavor to convert the Turks, just as Christ bade his followers do with all unbelievers [3,116]. He echoed Nicholas Cusa’s optimistic view that the Turks were already “half-christian”. Most early Christians , however, saw the Turks and Islam in very different terms. In 1530, he wrote a short treatise entitled *De bello Turcico*, in which he suggested that Christians were a greater threat to their tarnished faith than an external enemy like the Turks[4,140].

Western writers were obsessed with the looming Turkish menace, so they often wrote about Ottoman military strength. Many writers concluded that the Ottoman Turks’ tremendous ability of warfare and military discipline were the main reasons behind their success and found these characteristics admirable. For example, Sebastian Munster, a German scholar and cosmographer, was one of the first authors to write about the military characteristics of the Ottoman Turks in his book, *Cosmographia*, published in 1544. According to Munster, although Turks were ‘cruel’ people, they were also to be admired in many respects, such as their ‘soldiership’. Munster writes, “Nothing is more marvelous about the Turk than their speed in action, constancy in danger and obedience towards their empire” He praised the Turkish army and described them as “honest, without indecency, given neither to sedition nor to rioting, they hope not for revelry, but merely to kill or be killed for the Empire” [2,119].

The military organization and martial discipline of the Turks were also underscored in *Short Treatise upon the Turkes Chronicles* (1546), which was translated by Peter Ashton into English from Paulo Giovio’s *Comentario de le cose de Turchi* (1532). In the book, the last section titled “The Array and Discipline of the Turkish Warfare” points out the military methods of the Turks and provides advice on how to use the Christian armies against them. At the time, Christian Europe did not have a standing army, but rather depended on emergency or volunteer recruits, who were mostly ill-trained and resentful, with poor discipline and with no unity. In contrast, the Ottoman Turks’ regular professional army, recruited from their subject populations, was regarded with awe and admiration due to its discipline and organization. Giovio underscores this lack of unity and discipline against the Turkish army and concludes that there might be hope to defeat the Turks only if the Christian princes are unified. He states: “if the Christian princes were so wholly of one mind and consent, that at the first rumour of the

Turks coming they would assemble and gather together power and strength of men able to resist and withstand him. But certes we can scant trust that this shall happen” [11, 157].

A thinker such as Jean Bodin could write in open admiration about Ottoman society: “The king of Turks who rules over a great part of Europe, safeguards the rites of religion as well as any prince in this world. Yet he contrains no one, but on the contrary permits everyone to live as his conscience dictates. What it more, even his seraglio at Pera he permits the practice of four diverse religions, that of the Jews, the Christian according to the Roman rite, and according to the Greek rite, and that of Islam” [7,178]. Bodin held the empire up as a model of religious toleration. Compared with other states as the Habsburgs, the French, the Venetian or the Russian this argument certainly holds, and it probably also is valid in comparison with those modern nation states that define citizenship exclusively in fabricated categories of ethnicity, race or religion.

In conclusion, we can say that, the Ottomans became the great warriors of Islam, creating a world empire that incorporated major Muslim centers like Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus, Mecca and Medina. They threatened the heart of Europe for almost two centuries. From the fifteenth to the seventeenth century Ottoman forces seemed invincible to European Christians [1,148]. Both internal and external threats to the existence Christendom created the need to define the “Turk” in such terms that the image of Turk may either be justifiable or demeaning, depending on the political, religious, or ideological allegiance. The historical texts, treatises, and essays reviewed so far show that Europeans had mixed feelings towards the Ottoman Turks during the 16th and 17th centuries. They admired and envied the success of the Ottoman administration, organization and the military discipline as well as the bravery and fortitude of the Turkish soldier. On the other hand, Turks were characterized as cruel, merciless, which is a continuation of the stereotypical Turkish image that was dominant in the preceding Western discourse.

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